UNDERSTANDING EXPERIENCES OF FOOD INSECURITY FOR LONE MOTHERS IN
HAMILTON, ONTARIO

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ABSTRACT

Food—where we obtain it, how we obtain it, and so forth—is just one of myriad considerations in everyday life. Considerations about food can be particularly salient for lone mothers, who face a set of challenges in supporting their families, including being the sole caregivers of their children. In examining a case study of Hamilton, Ontario, this research utilizes qualitative methods (interviews and mental maps) and a feminist geography lens to understand the complexity of food insecurity for lone mothers living in two neighbourhoods characterized by a low socio-economic status. Feminist geography offers a unique perspective for understanding food insecurity with its philosophy of improving women's lives and its story-telling and meaning-making methods. This thesis will explore qualitative themes from face-to-face interviews (n=7) and a focus group (n=1, 5 participants) that include: the distance and time taken to acquire food; loving and caring for one's child(ren); contextual considerations mothers have to weigh in order to choose food resources, the need for structural change; strategies mothers used to provide for their families; and feelings around being a lone mother. Together, these themes paint a rich and nuanced picture of food insecurity for lone mothers in Hamilton and they illuminate how and where food intersects with household functions and structural forces, such as social assistance. The findings also point to places where social change can take place to improve quality of life.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ABCD: Asset-based community development

AOP: Anti-oppressive practice

CBFSPs: Community-based food services and programs

GFB: Good Food Box

HCF: Hamilton Community Foundation

HRPR: Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction

IE: Institutional Ethnography

KI: Key informant

LICO: Low-income cut off

NDS: Neighbourhood Development Strategy

NFB: Nutritious Food Basket

OCB: Ontario Child Benefit

ODSP: Ontario Disability Support Program

OSAP: Ontario Student Assistance Program

OW: Ontario Works

PAR: Participatory Action Research

PGIS: Participatory Geographic Information Systems

QoL: Quality of Life

SA: Social assistance

SES: Socio-economic status

SPRC: Social Planning and Research Council

PREFACE

"I've never seen myself as much of a storyteller; I used to think
that stories were reserved for those with grand adventures, or that
stories were inherited as family heirlooms are. But I've begun to
see that storytelling is like casting a net, trammeling stories as if
they're stars, connecting the dots of our human constellation."

–Tings Chak, *Where the concrete desert blooms* (2010, p. 2)

I, like Tings, am only beginning to realize that I can be a storyteller, too. I was never good at English class because I didn't think I was creative enough to fabricate stories or even tell my own stories. But I have learned that there are always stories to be told and that research is much like story-telling. This thesis is about the intersecting stories of Hamiltonians and my own story, and our experiences of our city. Before I begin recounting the mothers' stories, I hope to tell some of my own story and reflect on the journey to writing my thesis.

This research has provided me with the opportunity to grow unlike any other experience in my life. I have lived in various countries and participated in grueling physical activity but nothing compares to my experience here in Hamilton. This was the most physically and psychologically challenging experience of my life. I uprooted myself from a place I had finally begun to call home and came to an unfamiliar place and country. Despite what people say, Canada and the U.S. are different. I had to begin learning cultural cues quickly—from small things like saying 'eh' and 'washroom' to understanding how the various levels of government functioned—so I didn't stick out. What surprised and confused me more is that Canada strikes me as a hybrid of the U.S. and the UK, so I have to remind myself where I am sometimes. But most of my learning came through others—I've learned about what it means to work towards a more just society, the implications of research, the intersections of research and advocacy, and most of all, what it means to see people for who they are rather than their labels. If someone had told me that I would have learned so much in just two years, I probably would have scoffed at her/him.

When I first arrived in Hamilton, I was bright-eyed and bushy-tailed, eager to begin a project about food and community. While still living in the Twin Cities, I was an avid and fervent local food enthusiast while also working as a campus-community coordinator who worked to diminish health disparities. Why wouldn't everyone want to always buy local? I didn't quite make the connection between the two until I began understanding the Hamilton Farmers' Market debacle, which began in the fall of 2010 but remains ongoing. The City of Hamilton was, and still is, working to make the Hamilton Farmers' Market a more upscale, artisanal place that emphasizes local food, a goal they strove to accomplish by pushing out current vendors who did

not fit the new profile and replacing them with vendors who did. This emphasis on local food is threatening the livelihoods of a large proportion of vendors, many of whom have families who have spent their whole careers in the market. Moreover, many of the vendors threatened with eviction are immigrants to Canada who built up their livelihoods in the Market. Without going into too much more detail, the Farmers' Market debacle challenged my militant devotion to local food. Somewhere in this conversation, local food was actually being used to inflict discursive and cultural violence, and I had to figure out where. What and where are the intersections between the Hamilton Farmers' Market experience and the mothers whom I interviewed?

But first I needed to recognize that it is my privilege to be doing this research! I can write a critical analysis of various structures and organizations with little fear of repercussion on my employment, livelihood, or funding so that I could make a contribution to a place that has contributed so much to me. Of course, now that I have come to the stage of promising various people copies of my thesis or community report, I am a slightly more wary of the fact that I do, in fact, spend a significant portion of the thesis critiquing their work. While I know that there will be no significant repercussions, I still feel a little unease at the possibility that some who gain access to my thesis may not react positively towards my writing. I continue to reflect upon how my focus is not on those individuals or organizations, but on telling the mothers' stories and connecting it to broader conversations in the literature and city to improve their lives.

The first time I had my privilege called out, and made the critical connection between research and activism, was during the focus group when the mothers called me to action. Jen talked about how she has been waiting 25 years for poverty and access to food to come to the forefront of policy but how the City continues to pay consultants thousands of dollars for reports that are never acted upon. She asked me as a young, unpaid student to use my position and research so that the mums' voices are heard. This call to action, not from a conference host, but from women who experience food insecurity, was surprising because I hadn't recognized the potential others see in my position, but it taught me that it *should* be an academic's responsibility to use her/his status and knowledge to make change. It is an academic's responsibility to not only engage with people who have power and resources to improve quality of life, but also to continue the conversation with the mothers.

However, I still find connecting and reconciling the conversations about and timelines of the mothers' everyday lives and the policy arena a challenge. I feel ridiculous for admitting this, but the first time I actually understood the reality of the mothers' experiences was not while writing research proposals of why my research was so important and contributing to the literature, not when I was talking about understanding women's everyday lives, and not even during the interviews themselves; it was when I was writing my 'Findings' section of my thesis, Chapter 4, after over a year and a half of research. What's wrong with me? I was completely immobilized by the fact that while I was writing up the stories of the participants, the mothers' realities and struggles in the immediate term did not change. I realized I was in a completely privileged position stressing out about writing thirty odd pages about their stories. Coming to the

realization of privilege—and not just regurgitating the literature I was swimming in—made me all the more angry and frustrated at myself for being an imposter and feeling like I engaged in feminist and anti-oppressive practices, when in actuality, it was all in my head.

I was sitting on my kitchen floor next to the guinea pig cage after a quick dinner of frozen pizza, furiously writing the last few paragraphs of my 'Findings' section, when I came to a quote from Jen, a participant. She was describing how hopeful she was about the future of the next generation, even if she was feeling quite the opposite about her life. I vividly remember her saying those lines during the interview and recall thinking how idealistic she was considering her accounts of her own struggles. At the time, I tried to understand where those feelings came from, but was unable to figure it out. But in that moment where I copied and pasted her quote into my 'Findings' section, I started to cry. After weeks of swimming in the data and drawing connections between different conversations we had, I finally understood where Jen was coming from. I was too busy being self-absorbed and focused in on my own little research world that I forgot about empathizing with the mothers. In that moment when the quote pasted into the document, I lost it. I felt guilty for my full stomach and felt my stupidity in stressing out about finishing the chapter, a task that seemed completely insignificant compared to the myriad challenges the mothers faced on a daily basis. My typing up the 'Findings' section did nothing to support mothers in the immediate future in buying the food that they wanted and needed for their families. To add insult to injury, my guinea pigs were avidly chomping away at their food and treats.

The dissonance between my research/writing timelines and the mothers' everyday lives was, and still remains, a significant point of tension for me. I originally wrote the 'Findings' section in the past tense, but I realized that, although our interview encounters were over, the stories the mothers recounted are not. The mothers continue to live their lives despite my finishing the section. The Hamilton chapter will continue and evolve even though my thesis is finished. The biggest disparity between research and community timelines is the pace at which each of them flows. While I conceptualize academic timelines as running a long distance race that is an enduring process with a few sprints, community timelines are less predictable. For example, when the Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board announced initiating a process to decide which high schools in the neighbourhoods of study to be shut down, I had to respond within the School Board's timeframe. They were not going to wait for my thesis to be completed, and will continue to move through their process beyond what I have recounted. Therefore, what I have written in these pages is a snapshot of events that are not discrete, but are continuous and ongoing.

In presenting my findings to different groups and writing up the research process, I have also found a tension in balancing the mothers' agency and constraints. While I want to challenge previous deficit-based writing on and current perceptions of residents of the lower city and emphasize mothers' resiliency, I also want to avoid giving people with power and resources excuses to continue to ignore the lower city by painting the mothers as having no challenges at

all. I have tried to achieve this by asking the mothers to continue conversations with me, but I was surprised to find that many indicated that they were not interested or did not respond to communication beyond the interview. Of course, this is not supposed to be a poor reflection on the mothers, but rather an observation about how sometimes people don't always want to be included, and that it became my responsibility to continue to work through the tension. Even after finishing the writing portion of my thesis, I still struggle with how to tell mothers' stories such that they are women who have assets and negotiate challenges, in particular when I am standing up in front of a group of people trying to convey my research findings and legitimize my research.

These are just a few of the thoughts that have been circulating in my head since beginning this research journey that I wanted to share, as they are often left out when we write about our research. We are so busy writing about our methodology and findings that we often overlook the messy and sticky parts of research that challenge us to grow and learn, not only as researchers but as people. These are stories in and of themselves that both intersect with and diverge from the mothers' stories. I wanted to share these stories in particular because they are about places along the way where I have learned. The themes of these stories will be constant conversations in my mind, and will continue to challenge me for the rest of my life.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Before I move on to the research proper, there are a few people I must acknowledge for their support, guidance, patience, and love. This section is for the people who have, and continue to listen to these points of tension that often swirl around in my head. I hope these words can begin to do justice to their support.

First, thank you to Dr. Allison Williams, my supervisor, for having the foresight to know how much I would learn from you, and for bringing me to Hamilton. Thank you for guiding me through one of the most rich and challenging experiences of my life. Your dedication to the academy and to scholarship has taught me so much.

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1. **CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION**

When the automatic doors at the grocery store slide open, I am met by the smell of freshly baked bread and a view of neatly piled produce. For me, the grocery store is a land of opportunity, a place where I am enticed into buying an assortment of food that wasn't originally on my list. After paying, I make my way back to the sliding doors with my spoils. In the split second before the doors open, I notice a couple of bins next to me overflowing with boxes of sugary cereals, chips, and canned goods. I have found the food bank donation bin. Upon closer inspection, there is a sign describing how customers' donations will help feed a hungry family. How I hate that phrase, 'feeding' a hungry family, as if they are animals to be thrown castoffs of food. As the doors slide open, my mind races: That's nice of people to donate. Urgh, how can people eat that stuff? Should I donate something? Despite these thoughts, I continue walking through the doors. On my way home, I cannot shake the thought of those donation boxes and the sign. Why do people need to donate food to a food bank in the first place? Why do people go to food banks? Why do people donate junk? Who goes to a food bank? Is it the image the sign presents, or is it someone else? What are the experiences of people who have utilized a food bank? What are the implications of having food banks on our society? What does it mean to have food banks in existence?

I have been pondering these questions for quite a while, although I cannot recall the exact moment at which the realization occurred that I should use these questions to guide my research. I have lived quite a life of privilege, never experiencing needing to go to a food bank and only observing experiences of poverty and food insecurity from afar. From childhood, like all good neoliberal citizens, I was taught to donate to charity when I could, including donating random canned goods during the holidays and collecting change for children's charities. I never met any

of the people at the receiving end of the donations; oh no. And even into high school, I thought

charity was an answer to poverty. However, in university I began asking all of those questions

that run through my head when I go to the grocery store, wondering why we live in a society

where charity is accepted as the main solution to poverty. I also became interested in hearing

people's stories, stories of the people at the receiving end of charity at food banks.

My research attempts to address part of this question by telling the story of lone

mothers'[1] experiences of providing for their families. I am particularly interested in looking at

how women provide food for their families because it is an integral part of life, and is

instrumental in caring for one's family. I find food a fascinating contextual lens through which to

examine human geography because it is one of many considerations in the web of everyday life.

When I think of food, I must consider how much time it takes to procure and prepare it, how

much money it takes to buy what I feel like eating, how much of my budget goes towards food,

whether I give up so-called luxury items so I can pay my rent, and so on and so forth. Food

intersects with our lives on many scales, from the biochemical reactions that occur after

ingesting food, to our society regulating and legislating who, what, where, and when food should

be grown, processed, transported, sold, and consumed. How does food intersect with these

mothers' lives? How do women personally experience the inability to provide food for their

children? What do the mothers perceive as the geopolitical and societal factors that prevent them

from providing for their families in the way that they wish? I am interested in understanding how

lone mothers experience these interactions with food.

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[1] As Power (2005b) discusses, the term 'lone mothers' is a term widely accepted in the literature. Although the mothers referred to themselves as "single moms", I will refer to them as 'lone mothers' throughout this thesis to be inclusive of divorced, separated, widowed, and never-married mothers. I will also sometimes just refer to them as 'the mothers'. However, in some sections, I use terms similar to 'female lone parent-headed households' instead of 'lone mothers' to establish continuity with statistical terminology employed by Statistics Canada.

1.1   Study rationale

Food insecurity is a critical concern throughout the world. In North America, food insecurity research is salient due to the current economic recession coinciding with a weakening of the social safety net. Food insecurity rates are higher than national averages for households with incomes below the federal and/or national poverty lines and for households headed by female lone parents in both Canada and the United States (Freedman & Bell, 2009; Tarasuk & Vogt, 2009). In 2004, the Canadian Community Health Survey (CCHS 2.2) examined income-related food security at the household level and found that 9.2% of the Canadian households were food insecure in the past twelve months (Tarasuk & Vogt, 2009). This phenomenon is not without precedent. During the recession of the 1980s, North America witnessed a proliferation of the charity-based or emergency food system as a result of the deinstitutionalization of social services (Poppendieck, 1999; Tarasuk, 2001; Tarasuk & Eakin, 2003). Nearly 30 years on, because the foundational causes of food insecurity are yet to be addressed, the emergency food system has become a part of the fabric of the foodscape of North America.

Traditional food insecurity research looks at food from a health and disease perspective, emphasizing the importance of studying food insecurity as a way to prevent obesity and other nutrition-related illnesses. Such perspectives fail to understand food insecurity as a social justice or human rights issue and to consider the experiences of food insecurity as a manifestation of poverty. Various scholars have called for a human rights-based approach to conceptualizing food insecurity in North America (Anderson, 2008; Chilton & Rose, 2009; Riches, 1999; Riches, 2002; Rideout et al., 2005); nonetheless, research methods for executing this approach have yet to be proposed. A human rights-based approach calls for the participation of people in civic life, the focus on the most vulnerable and understanding the causes of vulnerability, and changing

current conditions and policies so that the most vulnerable can improve their own quality of life (Chilton & Rose, 2009). A feminist geography perspective encompasses such a human rights-based approach.

In the context of this study, I use the term 'social justice'[2] as opposed to 'human rights' because I am interested in exploring individual experiences of food insecurity rather than a legislative interpretation of food insecurity. A feminist geography perspective lends itself to understanding food insecurity as a social justice issue, as feminist geographers are guided by the philosophy of improving the lives of women and other marginalized populations (Dixon & Jones, 2006). This philosophy is enacted through utilizing various methods that allow women to tell their stories and make meaning of their situation. Through the research process, participants and researchers uncover, understand, and challenge power and oppression (Dixon & Jones, 2006; Dyck, 2003; McDowell, 1999).

1.2   Research questions and objectives

The question that guides my research examines how the mothers navigate their neighbourhoods, city[3], community organizations, and structural constraints to provide for their families. I am guided by the research question,

> *"How do lone mothers living in two Hamilton neighbourhoods characterized by a low socio-economic status (SES) experience food insecurity?"*

In my attempt to understand food insecurity for the women who I interview, I have three research objectives:

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[2] See the Glossary for a definition of 'social justice'.
[3] I utilize *city* of Hamilton or 'the city' to mean the physical and/or social landscapes of the city and *City* of Hamilton or 'the City' to mean the municipal government or City Council.

1. to gain a deeper understanding of the everyday experiences of food insecurity for lone mothers;

2. to contribute to a conversation about how to improve overall quality of life in Hamilton;

3. and to provide recommendations to improve services, programs, and policy to achieve food security.

1.3   Reader's guide

This study consists of six chapters. In the remainder of Chapter 1, I will provide a brief overview of the literature related to food insecurity at the neighbourhood level. First, I will provide definitions of *food security* and *food insecurity* before reviewing the geographic and qualitative literature abount food insecurity in the Canadian context. Finally, I will review the literature surrounding women and care work, discussing the implications of gender role discourses on women's activities in the domestic and public spheres.

In chapter 2, I will be providing information about Hamilton's physical landscape, as well as the social landscape relevant to this research. I present Hamilton's physical landscape in order to provide a reader who is unfamiliar with Hamilton with a general idea of the layout of the city and how the layout influences mothers' journeys to acquire food. Then, I present Hamilton's social landscape relevant to the research to provide the reader with background on Hamilton as a whole and women in Hamilton in particular. Finally, I will describe the food-related initiatives and discourse currently unfolding in the city to understand how the mothers' lives and initiatives in the city may align or diverge, and to understand places of common ground from which to work.

Chapter 3 describes the feminist geography framework and case study research design employed to collect data. I will discuss how the neighbourhoods of study were selected, before

moving on to a discussion of feminist geography's contribution to food insecurity research and its connections to Participatory Action Research (PAR). Finally, I will outline the research methods used to collect the data presented in this study.

In chapter 4, I attempt to describe the main themes that emerge from my conversations with the mothers who participated in the research. Two characteristics are common to all of the mothers. These common characteristics are: (i) *distance and time taken to acquire food*; and (ii) *loving and caring for one's children*. Four main themes are likewise apparent: (i) *contextual factors*; (ii) *the need for structural change*; (iii) *strategies*; and (iv) *feelings around being a lone mother*.

The goal of chapter 5 is to connect the themes illustrated in the previous 'Findings' chapter with the literature and the social context of Hamilton. With respect to the literature, I discuss the implications and contributions of this research, as well as the points of tension. With respect to Hamilton, I wrestle with friction between what the mothers hope to see and what the City and community's food-related initiatives and discourse envision.

Finally, in chapter 6, I hope to summarize the findings, as well as provide specific policy and programmatic recommendations to improve food security and overall quality of life in Hamilton. I leave the reader with reflections about the study's limitations, directions for future research, and concluding thoughts.

1.4   Literature review

Before moving on to the study itself, it is necessary to elaborate on the study rationale by situating the research within various bodies of literature and illuminating current gaps in the research. Because food insecurity and feminist geography are such broad fields of study that potentially intersect in many different places, this literature review will only cover a selection of

research relevant to measuring, assessing, and understanding food insecurity at the neighbourhood or similar scale. At the conclusion of the literature review, the reader will have had the opportunity to develop a basic understanding of the following topics: food security, food deserts and geography's contribution to food insecurity research, qualitative methods, and women and care work.

1.4.1 Food security & food insecurity

Food insecurity is a vast field of study that has been examined by scholars in a range of disciplines, including nutrition, dietetics, agronomy, and political science. As factors such as climate change and resource scarcity continue to affect harvests and food prices, food insecurity research will only become more salient. To begin, it will be useful to briefly discuss the definitions[4] of the terms *food security* and *food insecurity* in the context of this paper. The 1996 World Food Summit defines *food security* as "a situation that exists when all people, at all times, 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" (as cited in Barrett, 2010, p. 825). Food security is comprised of different factors at different scales: individual factors, such as food preparation skills; social factors, such as gender and social cohesion; cultural factors, such as traditions; physical factors, such as access to food; and policy factors, such as school food policies (Power, 2005a).

Conversely, the term *food insecurity* can be defined as "evident in household members' concerns about adequacy of the household food supply and in adjustments to household food

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[4] It is important to consider that there are many other food-oriented ideals to work towards. The definition of *food security* offered by the World Food Summit has a distinct focus on the consumer and makes mention neither of producers nor of the complex system within which people eat. More inclusive goals exist that acknowledge the entire food system within which producers, vendors, food service workers, and consumers exist, including 'community food security' and 'food sovereignty' (Hamm & Bellows, 2003; La Via Campesina, 2011).

management, including reduced quality of food and increased unusual coping patterns" (United States Department of Agriculture, as cited in Holben, 2006, p. 447). The important terms to note in this definition are "concerns", "adjustments", and "unusual coping patterns", since these terms imply that some food is present, but households have little *choice*. I utilize the term *food insecurity* in the context of this research because it describes the mothers' experiences of the psychosocial anxiety of having a lower quality and decreased quantity of food and having to adjust in order to put food on the table. It is important to note that the mothers in this study are concerned with this anxiety and stress about needing to adjust and about the lack of choice, rather than experiencing chronic hunger and a complete lack of food in their households.

1.4.2   Food deserts & geography's contribution to food insecurity research

One finds a dearth of literature with respect to qualitative research in geography and food insecurity in the Canadian context. Geography's main contribution to the study of food insecurity is in the form of quantitative, Geographic Information Systems (GIS)-based, food deserts research. As GIS technology has become readily available, focus on the built environment and food deserts has become more common (see for example, Apparicio et al., 2007; Bertrand et al., 2007; Larsen & Gilliand, 2008; Smoyer-Tomic et al., 2006; Pouliot & Hamelin, 2008). From this body of research, it is not conclusive whether food deserts are inherent to Canadian cities. In general, studies in the Canadian context have concluded that food deserts do exist in certain neighbourhoods of some cities (e.g. London, Edmonton) and do not exist in other cities (e.g. Montréal). However, these differentiated results may in part be due to a lack of consensus over the definition of a food desert, as well as the lack of consistent measures—minimum distance, coverage, or buffers— used to define food deserts (Hendrickson et al., 2004; Apparicio et al., 2007; Larsen & Gilliand, 2008).

1.4.3   Qualitative methods in food security research

Although quantitative methods remain the dominant approach to measuring and assessing food insecurity, qualitative approaches have elaborated on the quantitative data by identifying the feelings and experiences of food insecurity (see for example Travers, 1996; Hamelin et al., 2002). The most consistent conclusion from qualitative studies is that poverty and food insecurity are constituted by far more than a quantified deprivation of financial resources or food. The experiences of poverty and food insecurity are embodied by the "psychosocial state of shame derived from understanding that one is left out, at the bottom, incompetent and not 'regular'" (Garbarino, as cited in McIntyre et al., 2003, p. 326). Moreover, Baker Collins (2005) concludes that these psychosocial aspects are central to what people experiencing poverty define as poverty. These aspects include feelings of powerlessness, voicelessness, exclusion, lack of freedom, lack of dignity, and poor treatment by both government institutions and society as a whole (Baker Collins, 2005; McIntyre et al., 2003; Power, 2005b). The psychological aspects are exacerbated by a concern about the impact of poverty on their children, as well as the impact of poverty on their relationship with their children (Power, 2005b).

However, psychosocial distress is not a common consideration amongst the food secure. Rock et al. (2009) utilizes Kraft Dinner (KD) as a metaphor to highlight the disparity between *perceptions* of poverty and food insecurity by food secure households and the *realities* of poverty and food insecurity experienced by food insecure households. In the study, food secure households perceived KD to be palatable, a complete and easy meal to prepare, and convenient and safe to store. On the other hand, for food insecure households, KD symbolized a "hunger killer of last resort", an incomplete meal, and monotony (ibid., p.172). Mothers experiencing food insecurity associated KD with feelings of depression and lack of appetite, and both mothers

and children associated KD with discomfort, distress, and financial hardship. This research

highlights the divergent meanings of KD based on whether households were food secure or food

insecure.

Based on the divergent meanings embodied by the KD example and prompted by the

weakening of the welfare state in North America, the societal response used to alleviate food

insecurity has been the institutionalization of charity- or community-based food services and

programs (CBFSPs)[5], such as food banks and hot meal programs. However, the disparity

between the perceptions and realities of food insecurity are still prevalent even within CBFSPs.

Hamelin et al.'s (2008) qualitative study in Québec City compared the food security needs of

households experiencing food insecurity with the perception of food security needs by

employees and volunteers at and donors to CBFSPs. As with Rock et al.'s (2009) study, the

authors found that people experiencing food insecurity had disparate views of food security

needs to those who were food secure. The highest need for people experiencing food insecurity

was food *quality*—variety, a balanced diet, and availability of non-expired foods—whereas

employees of CBFSPs believed the highest need was sufficient *quantity* of food, as the food

secure perceived utilization of services and programs as emergency measures to fill the stomach.

1.4.4   Women and care work

The final body of literature pertinent to this research concerns women and care work.

Food is a material symbol of both being able to provide basic needs and to nurture one's

children. However, food can also be a way through which to understand the extensive care work

involved in raising and caring for children. Embedding the provisioning of food within the

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[5] I use the term 'community-based food services and programs' (CBFSPs) to encompass the non-retail, formal or informal food services and programs in the neighbourhoods, such as food banks, school nutrition programs, and hot meal programs.

context of care work for the participants is crucial, because this understanding can reveal how the mothers experience, internalize, resist, and negotiate structural forces such as social policy and societal discourse. For example, how do the mothers experience societal expectations of what constitutes a 'good mother' within their material constraints? How does the provisioning of food, amongst other care work, help mothers to achieve or fail to achieve the status of a 'good mother'? It could be argued that the section above on qualitative research already illuminates the care work involved in providing for a family; however, I hope to specifically discuss how women's socially mandated role of caregiving is influenced by structural forces and subsequently played out at the everyday household level. This section is in no way an exhaustive review of the extensive literature about women and care work, but will specifically focus on why such an analysis is important for understanding food insecurity (for a more extensive discussion on this topic, see McDowell, 1999).

Dixon and Jones (2006) provide a useful framework through which to understand women and care work. They identify three interconnected types of feminist geographic research—*gender as difference*, *gender as a social relation*, and *gender as a social construction*. In this brief literature review, I want to focus my attention on the latter two forms of gender analyses, *gender as a social relation* and *gender as a social construction. Gender as a social relation* is a particularly useful lens to begin understanding how patriarchy—the systematized subjugation of women and children by both men and women—influences and directs the lives of women. Through patriarchy, normative assumptions that restrict women to the home and caregiving roles become a 'natural' part of the social order (Dixon & Jones, 2006; McDowell, 1999). Public and private spaces, such as work and home, become coded as male and female, spatially cementing the division of labour between men and women (McDowell, 1999). *Gender as a social*

construction is reciprocally related to *gender as a social relation* through its employment of discourse as a means to frame gender relations in a specific way (Dixon & Jones, 2006). Understanding where gender roles are socially constructed and how these roles play out in everyday life can illuminate not only how women's lives are constrained by discourse, but also how women have agency in their lives.

These understandings of gender are particularly salient for lone mothers. For the most part, rather than describing patriarchy through the individual relations between men and women, the lone mothers whom I interviewed describe patriarchy through their experiences with social structures and systems of oppression. These relations are based on a power imbalance and surveillance, both by social structures (e.g. social assistance and child protection agencies) and neighbours. Elsewhere in the literature, lone mothers describe living in constant fear that either their social assistance (SA) workers—representatives of the state—may cut assistance for not abiding by their extensive, and often times arbitrary, rules, or their neighbours may call Children's Aid on them for being inadequate mothers (Power, 2005b; McIntyre et al., 2003). For mothers who did not live in fear, they felt constantly judged as inadequate mothers by the general public and professionals, such as nutritionists, with whom they worked (Travers, 1996). However, these mothers were also implicated in perpetuating patriarchy when performing surveillance and judging other lone mothers in similar situations. When rationalizing their own actions, some lone mothers, depending on their own situation, would either criticize other lone mothers for working and being away from their children, or criticize them for being with their children and not working (Gurstein & Vilches, 2010; McIntyre et al., 2003; Power, 2005b; Weigt, 2006).

Patriarchy is both informed by and perpetuated through discourse. Throughout the

literature's accounts of their experiences, lone mothers negotiated and balanced two discourses: the mothering discourse, dictating a mother's natural role as a caregiver and nurturing figure, and the neoliberal 'active citizen' discourse, which defines citizenship as self-reliance fostered by working outside of the home so that one is able to participate through consumption (Weigt, 2006; Power, 2005b; McIntyre et al., 2003). Whether working or on SA, lone mothers were forced to simultaneously fulfill both the socially constructed 'mothering' role of caring and the 'fathering' role of providing materially within financial constraints. This providing role embodies the 'active citizen' discourse, rendering the 'mothering' role—and, subsequently, the 'mothering' discourse—incompatible with the 'active citizen' discourse. This incompatibility of role and discourse resulted in lone mothers feeling stressed and degraded by their inability to achieve either ideal. Instead of implicating structural forces and systems of oppression that contributed heavily to their material and financial constraints, many lone mothers provided the perfect neoliberal response, explaining that their own inability to cope was at the root of their problems (Weigt, 2006).

1.5   Chapter summary

In this chapter, I have provided the study rationale, my research question and objectives, definitions of food security and food insecurity, and an overview of the relevant literature to my research. In the next chapter I will be introducing Hamilton, its physical and social landscapes, as well as current events ongoing in the city that is pertinent to lone mothers and food insecurity.

2.   **Chapter 2: RESEARCH CONTEXT**

Understanding Hamilton as a place that both facilitates and constrains mothers' lives through, for example, geography, social context, and municipal policies, is vitally important to fully grasping the factors that contribute to food insecurity in the two neighbourhoods characterized by a low SES. Providing context also fulfills multiple roles in creating a case study and framing the mothers' lives in social justice, feminist, and PAR frameworks. Context is key in connecting food insecurity at an individual, everyday level to food insecurity at the social and geopolitical levels. In this section, I will provide background information pertaining to my research, including Hamilton, its female residents, and its foodscape, as well as the nature of SA in Ontario.

2.1   Hamilton

When I first drove into Hamilton, I noticed a stark contrast between the tree-covered Escarpment to the south, the beautiful lake to the north, and the steel mill chimneystacks along the shoreline of Hamilton Harbour. It makes sense that Hamilton has a slew of divergent nicknames, like "the Hammer" or "Steel City" in contrast to "the City of Waterfalls". In its heyday, Hamilton was the world's largest producer of steel, but has now experienced a drastic loss in the manufacturing sector. The city is currently trying to redefine its primary industries as healthcare and education, while simultaneously trying to reinvent itself as the site of a burgeoning arts scene. However, the neighbourhoods where my research takes place have not seen the investment from healthcare, education, or the arts, despite these neighbourhoods being disproportionately affected by the loss of manufacturing.

Hamilton's unique physical geography is important to consider when mothers describe their journeys to procure food. The city of Hamilton is divided through the middle by the

Escarpment, locally known as the "Mountain". As a newcomer to Hamilton, Hamiltonians would describe to me the crude socio-economic divide between residents living on the Mountain, who are characterized by a higher SES, and the residents living in the lower city[6], who are characterized by a low SES. The Mountain also tends to have the big box stores, such as *Walmart* and *Costco*. West Hamilton, where McMaster is located, is characterized by a higher SES, whereas Downtown Hamilton is stereotyped as having a large concentration of low-income residents, as well as the majority of the social services in the city.

Hamilton's physical and urban geography has implications for this study because of where social services are concentrated and where the cheaper superstores tend to be located in relation to the mothers in the lower city: to the west and to the south respectively. The Escarpment is a significant feature to note because transit lines in Hamilton tend to run predominantly east-west, only running north-south from Downtown. This lack of transit lines causes many mothers to have to make many transfers to travel long distances, imposing a significant temporal and financial burden.

2.1.1   Women of low socio-economic status in Hamilton

I write this section not as a way to portray low-income and/or lone mothers in Hamilton as victims, but to highlight both the specific social and economic challenges they face in supporting their families and the processes by which they remain food insecure. The concentration of female poverty in Hamilton is an important foundation from which to begin understanding how earning a lower income is related to higher rates of food insecurity and use of CBFSPs.

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[6] I would personally define the lower city as Downtown, as well as the area to the east of Downtown up to the Red Hill Valley Parkway. However, as with the neighbourhood boundaries, everyone seems to have a different definition of what area constitutes the 'lower city'.

As a result of economic restructuring away from a manufacturing-based economy in steel towards a knowledge-based economy in healthcare and education, the number of residents living below the Statistics Canada Low-income Cut off (LICO) has decreased in Hamilton (Mayo & Fraser, 2009). However, lone parent-headed households, lone female-headed households in particular, and children remain disproportionately affected by poverty. Furthermore, lone mothers' poverty is dependent on their children's ages; the younger the child, the higher the likelihood of living in poverty. According to the 2006 census, seven out of 10 lone mothers with children under age six lived in poverty (Mayo, 2010). In Hamilton, poverty is characterized by a stark geographic trend, where poverty is more highly concentrated in neighbourhoods where the robust manufacturing sector once existed (Mayo & Fraser, 2009). Figure 2 highlights the concentration of female poverty, defined as earning below the LICO, by neighbourhood planning units.

In 2006, poverty for lone mothers stood at 57%, in contrast to the municipal average of 18.1% and the male single parent-headed household rate of 30% (Mayo, 2010; Mayo et al., 2011). The lone mother and municipal poverty rates are above the Ontario provincial and Canadian national averages (HCF, 2010). Hamilton also has a higher than provincial and national average for the percentage of families headed by women (Mayo et al., 2011). As one response to these statistics, the City of Hamilton and CBFSPs have targeted food insecurity as an issue of city-wide concern (Richardson, 2009).

Because manufacturing is a traditionally male-dominated sector, women have not experienced the loss of employment that men have; however, as the Social Planning and Research Council (SPRC) of Hamilton has highlighted in their report titled *Women & Poverty*, women's incomes have become more important in supporting their families (Mayo, 2010). The rise in male unemployment impacts lone mothers in their ability to receive paternal child support. Furthermore, pay inequities still exist between men and women working in the same sectors, with the division of labour in Hamilton also impacting income inequity. Women tend to occupy lower paying, more precarious sectors of the economy, such as the service and clerical sectors (Mayo, 2010).
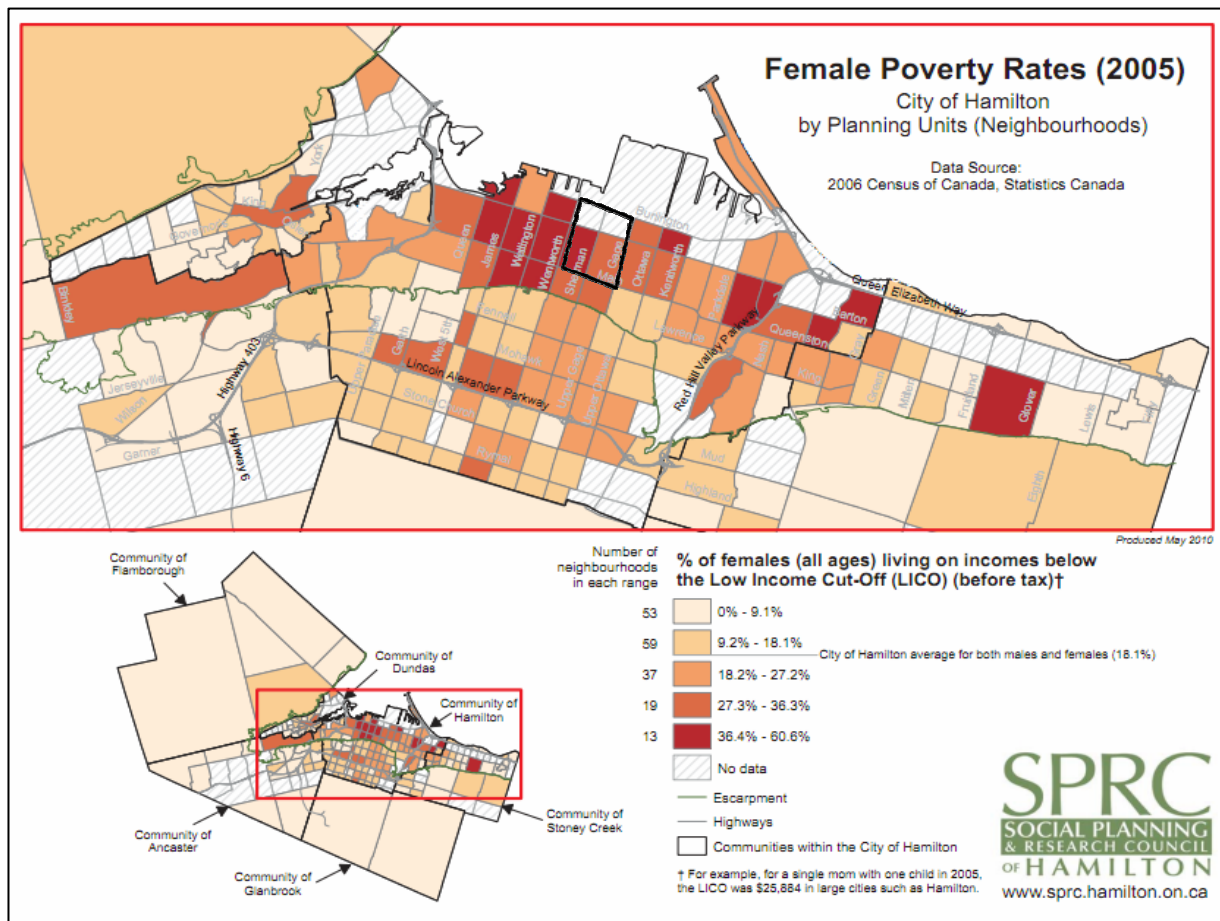
Figure 1: A map showing female poverty rates by neighbourhood in Hamilton (Mayo, 2010). Delineated in the box are the sampled neighbourhoods characterized by a low SES.

At the same time, women in Hamilton are twice as likely as men to do 15 hours or more of housework per week, and 70% of women report doing 15 or more hours of unpaid childcare per week. Women in Hamilton describe the lack of affordable childcare as one of the main barriers to full-time employment. The City of Hamilton has in place a childcare subsidy; however, in April 2011, nearly 900 families were on the waiting list (Mayo et al., 2011). It must be noted that, despite the statistics presented above that highlight gender differences in experiences of poverty, none of the initiatives described below has taken an explicitly gendered approach in their work.

2.1.2   The neighbourhoods of study

The neighbourhoods of study, as shown in Figures 1 and 2 are situated between Wentworth and Gage Streets (west to east), and between Main Street and the CN railroad tracks (south to north). This area includes the Stipley, Gibson, and Industrial B and C neighbourhoods. To further complicate understanding where neighbourhoods are located and how they are defined, different organizations have delineated different boundaries and have named their neighbourhoods in various ways. For example, the Hamilton Community Foundation (HCF, 2009) funds neighbourhood hubs, which are resident-led groups supported by community developers that work on various poverty-reduction strategies in specific areas of the city. They utilize the asset-based community development (ABCD) model to achieve their goals. The neighbourhoods of study coincide with the Cathy Wever and South Sherman hubs (Figure 2).

Hamilton's Neighbourhood Hubs
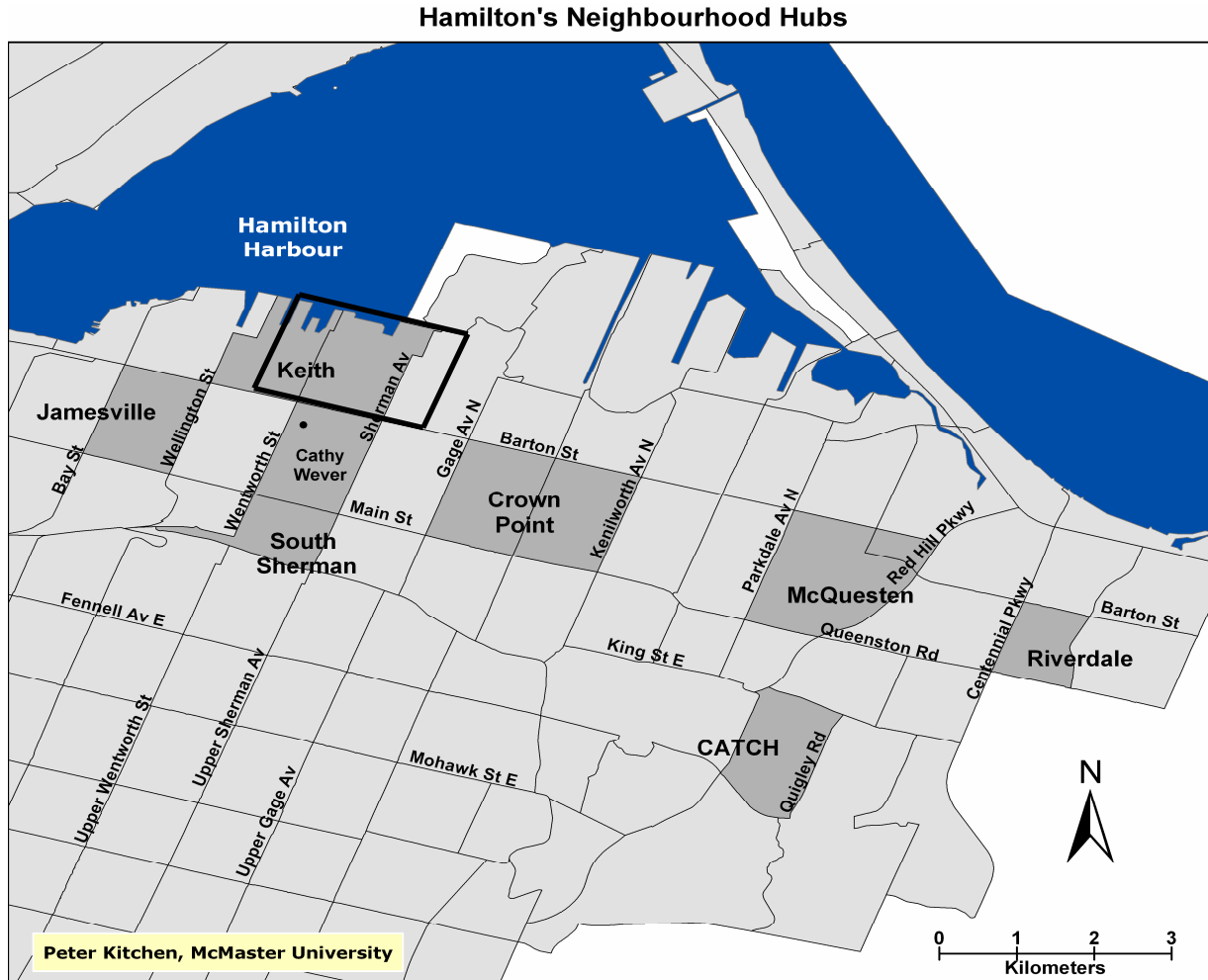
Figure 2: Map of the lower city of Hamilton, including the Hamilton Community Foundation (HCF) Hubs and the City of Hamilton's Neighbourhood Development Strategy (NDS) 'Stadium Precinct'. The neighbourhoods of study (and coincidentally the 'Stadium Precinct') are bounded by the black border.

In addition, the City of Hamilton also released its Neighbourhood Development Strategy (NDS) in May 2011 in which it has drawn boundaries that differ from both the official neighbourhoods and the hubs (Mayo et al., 2012). The NDS was released ahead of the upcoming 2015 Pan Am Games, where some of the events are set to take place in the neighbourhoods of study. One of the priority areas first in line for redevelopment is between Wentworth and Gage Avenues around the Ivor Wynne Stadium, known as the 'Stadium Precinct', which includes the all of the neighbourhoods of study.

Ultimately, through conversations with residents and other Hamiltonians, it seems that there is no one way of referring to a neighbourhood, nor is there one way to define the boundaries of a neighbourhood. In introducing the neighbourhoods of study in the first three chapters, I will use normative boundaries from Statistics Canada's census tracts and neighbourhood planning units to provide general context. Within the interviews I conducted, however, mothers were able to define their neighbourhoods how they perceived them.

2.1.2.1 The social landscape of the neighbourhoods of study

My first experience in the neighbourhoods of study was driving along Main and King Streets on my way to and from the Queen Elizabeth Way (QEW). After passing through Downtown and its hustle and bustle, this area seemed more residential and looked like it had seen better days. This was the epicenter of the former steel industry for which Hamilton was so famous, and some of the beautiful houses of former factory owners still remain as a sort of tribute to the past. But as I drove through, the majority of store fronts were empty and dilapidated, and few people seemed to be walking along the sidewalks. Later, in interviews, mothers who had lived in Hamilton most or all of their lives commented on the decline of storefronts and therefore sidewalk traffic on Barton Street. The only apparent life was from the cars speeding down the major thoroughfares. On first glance, the neighbourhoods had little drawing me towards them; however, upon walking around for the food resources map (Figure 3), it seemed that much of the life in the neighbourhoods existed inside schools, *Tim Hortons* coffee shops[7], churches, and homes. Reading *Code Red*, which had just been published upon my arrival, did even less to draw me to the neighbourhood.

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[7] *Tim Hortons* is an iconic Canadian franchise chain of coffee shops that originated in Hamilton on Ottawa Street. It is a particularly important part of the social fabric of Hamilton as people from all walks of life go there to socialize over coffee and doughnuts.

When I first arrived in Hamilton back in 2010, I was pulled into what seemed to be a tornado of conversation around *Code Red* (Buist, 2010). What was so important about *Code Red*? The Hamilton Spectator released part I of its *Code Red* series, highlighting the stark health disparities between neighbourhoods in Hamilton. Then, in 2011, the newspaper released part II of the series, focusing their analysis of health disparities on teen single mothers and low birth-weight babies (Buist & Pecoskie, 2011). The series even named the neighbourhoods where health outcomes were worst and displayed them on attractive, colourful maps that reinforced the spatiality of health disparities in Hamilton. These areas overlap with the neighbourhoods of study. In addition, the Mountain-lower city contrast that Hamiltonians had described to me upon arrival reappeared in map-form, with one neighbourhood in the lower city having a life expectancy that was 21 years less than a neighbourhood on the Mountain (Buist, 2010).

The *Code Red* series woke up a portion of the city who had previously put the disparities in their city to the back of their minds; however, the results were not anything new for people working in social services or living in the neighbourhoods, who already knew or experienced the findings on a day-to-day basis. Through conversations I had with those living and working in the neighbourhoods, I realized they did not appreciate another document that pointed the finger at all of the deficits that such statistics describe. They were looking for action to come out of these statistics, rather than simply more statistics. In fact, from conversations with people from outside of the neighbourhoods, I found that the *Code Red* series often seemed to only reinforce the already-entrenched perception that the '*Code Red* neighbourhoods' are lifeless places that continue to crumble and suffer from poverty, poor health outcomes, and general disinvestment.

The statistics paint a similar picture for the population of Hamilton more generally. The SPRC's *Social Landscape Report* shows that the number of female lone-parent-headed

households in Hamilton has increased by 23% in the decade between 1996 and 2006 (Mayo et al., 2011). The 2006 census tract profiles show that an average of 30% of households in the four census tracts included in this study are lone female parent-headed households[8] (Statistics Canada, 2010). I do not claim for a moment that these are not important statistics to have in one's toolkit when working towards decreasing health disparities and improving quality of life; rather, I merely highlight three points: (i) the shock-and-awe and deficit-based media attention on the topic, followed by subsequent lack of action; (ii) the lack of discussion about what makes these communities vibrant; and (iii) a complete disregard for the larger structural forces at play that create and recreate such stark health and social disparities. *Code Red* and the *Social Landscape Report* (2011) serve as indicators of some of the challenges lone mothers face in achieving food security and sustaining a livelihood for their families. The statistics show that residents of these neighbourhoods need supports and gathering places to break isolation and to achieve their full potential, while also pointing to the need for the general public to recognize the challenges of lone motherhood.

2.2   The foodscape and food discourse in Hamilton

Amidst the *Code Red* hype, a food movement was taking shape in Hamilton, one that painted a bright future for a local food system. This research comes at an interesting time in the evolution of Hamilton's food movement. It is serendipitously timely and sits within a somewhat

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[8] As stated previously, the neighbourhoods are defined differently by different residents and organizations. Statistics Canada has delineated these neighbourhoods as census tracts (CT) 0051.00, 0052.00, 0060.00, and 0061.00 in the Hamilton Census Metropolitan Area (CMA) 537. The average rate of female lone parent-headed households across the four CTs were calculated by taking the mean of the percentage of total households that were female lone parent-headed.

dichotomous foodscape and food discourse[9], where, on the one hand, poverty reduction-related efforts discuss food security as a necessary part of these efforts, while on the other hand, local food initiatives promote, as the name implies, local food, which by virtue of economies of scale, tends to be more expensive and therefore only sold to certain markets. Thus, local food, consciously or not, excludes large numbers of low-income residents in Hamilton. I do not see food security and local food initiatives as necessarily mutually exclusive, but in this context, I perceive them as such by the way they are presented in the overall food discourse. There are various food-related initiatives in the area, whether initiated by the City or by community groups. I hope to highlight some of them here as they intersect or diverge with the stories of the mothers who participated in this research. To begin, I will examine the foodscape of the neighbourhoods of study before moving on to municipal initiatives and concluding with a brief look at the emergency food system.

2.2.1   The foodscape of the neighbourhoods of study

Food resources are few and far between in the neighbourhoods of study. As seen in Figure 3, in terms of retail stores, the only grocery store within the official study boundaries is *Fresh Co.* at Barton Street and Gage Avenue. There are three other stores that are situated at the fringe of the study area: *No Frills* at Main and Tisdale Streets, *No Frills* at Main and King Streets, and *Food Basics* at Mary and Barton Streets. There are also numerous convenience

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[9] I distinguish *foodscape* from *food discourse* in that the *foodscape* is where "food, places and people are interconnected and how they interact," (Mikkelsen, 2011), whereas *food discourse* refers to the "empirically observable aspect of language's impact on, and constitution of, the social world" (Dittmer, 2010). Dixon & Jones (2006) further expand to describe discourse as "enabled and reproduced through language… but also through everyday social practices—from raising children to dancing—are also imbued with meaning and hence also signify something about the world" (p. 49). The foodscape can shape and reshape food discourse and vice versa.

stores[10] dotted throughout the neighbourhoods, which are not represented in the map to preserve clarity. The closest mall-like area to this neighbourhood is *Center Mall*, which was recently redeveloped to include a *Metro*, *Shoppers Drug Mart*, and *Canadian Tire*. These are all locations where mothers state they have bought some items of food on sale, although not on a regular basis because the non-sale prices are too high. Some mothers also comment negatively on the mall's redevelopment because it is so car-centric, and causes them to perceive it as a hazard to walk through the parking lots.
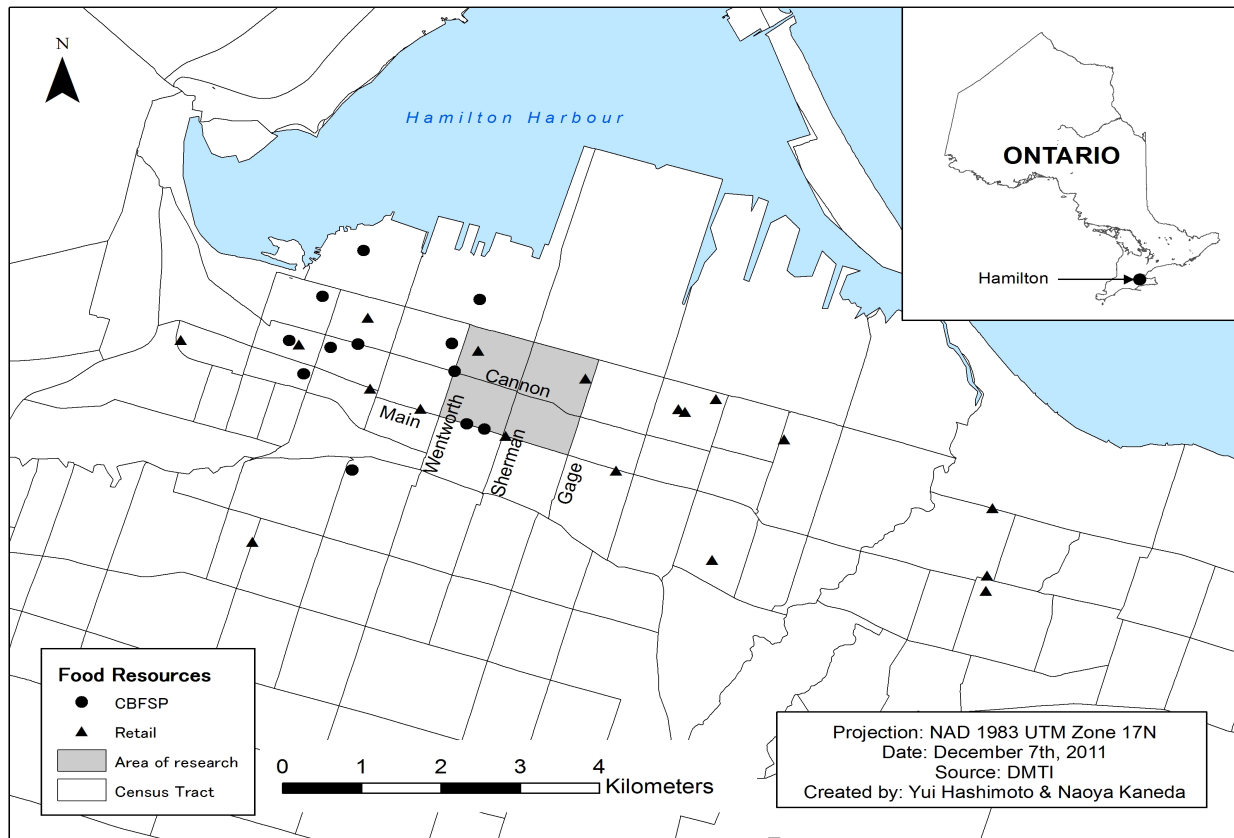
Figure 3: A food resources map comprised of food resources (retail food stores and community-based food services and programs) found on a neighbourhood walkabout and through mothers' responses during interviews.

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[10] I use the term 'convenience store' to encompass what mothers describe also as 'corner stores' and 'variety stores'.

There are also few CBFSPs, such as food banks and community kitchens, within the neighbourhoods. CBFSPs, if viewed as a spectrum, range from food banks on the emergency food side to skill-building initiatives, such as community kitchens on the capacity-building side. There seem to be few programs and services available to residents of the neighbourhoods of study. Currently, while only one food bank is in operation within the study boundaries, various other CBFSPs are springing up to try to create a more holistic approach to mitigating food insecurity for residents. For example, St. Giles Church (Main Street and Holton Avenue) is in the midst of starting a program, 'Downstairs Kitchen', which takes a three pronged approach to food in the neighbourhood, featuring a community dinner once a month for residents to socialize, a range of cooking classes for residents, and a catering service as paid job training, the latter of which is still in the planning stages (C. Hughes, personal communication, October 25, 2011).

2.2.2 Community Food Security Stakeholders' Committee & food policy in Hamilton

Starting at the municipal policy level, the City of Hamilton created the Community Food Security Stakeholders' Committee[11] (CFSSC), a committee comprised of both citizens and City representatives, in 2008 "to develop a food continuum policy and strategic action plan with community input," (Edwards & Parle, 2009, p. 1) which, as I saw from attending and observing meetings meant providing policy recommendations to City Council around issues of food. A coalition of the committee members is currently in the process of writing a Food Charter for the City of Hamilton. Through community consultations and a community-writing group, in which I participated, the coalition is attempting to write a Food Charter that will provide a vision for food policy in Hamilton that addresses some of the challenges of the current food system. Much of

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[11] The CFSSC is a committee within the City of Hamilton that is comprised of both City staff and citizens. It reports to the Board of Health and sits within Public Health Services.

this Food Charter conversation sits within the local food discourse, and, while in its language it attempts to draw connections between local, sustainable foods and food access for all residents, it only tacks on the call for a *just*[12] food system at the end of the charter (Community Food Security Stakeholder Committee, 2012). Furthermore, it is quite simple to draw the connections between local food and food access in one's mind—for example, by creating community gardens where residents can grow their own food—but the Charter fails to elaborate upon how such a process would occur within the current food system.

2.2.3   Food initiatives within the City

There are two food initiatives sponsored by the City of Hamilton that have implications for this research. They are both seeking to change the foodscape and the built environment in order to create better access to fresh foods. The first is the Healthy Corner Store initiative, where Public Health Services hopes to survey corner store owners to understand the barriers to carrying fresh produce and then use this information to help store owners achieve the goal of running a viable business and making fresh produce more available in neighbourhoods (Dawson, 2011). Then, at the beginning of 2012, the City also showed its interest in increasing the availability fresh food in the Downtown core with the Planning and Economic Development Department offering a $650,000 start-up incentive for any grocery store to open or for an existing store to improve such that it could offer healthier produce (MacLeod, 2012). Through conversations with those involved in the decision-making process, it seems many of the larger grocery stores feel it unviable to start up a new store with such minimal start-up costs. The results from the call for proposals are yet to be announced.

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[12] See the Glossary for a definition of 'just' food and food justice.

2.2.4   Community-based food initiatives

Three community-based initiatives also exist within Hamilton that work towards facilitating access to affordable, healthy foods for residents who currently have poor access to food. The Good Food Box (GFB) is a fresh produce distribution program run through the non-profit organization Environment Hamilton. For $15, residents can purchase a box worth $25 or more. The program works by distributing the boxes once a month to different pick-up sites throughout the city, from which residents pick up their boxes. Although not tied to one place like grocery stores, the GFB is only available in places where an infrastructure exists to store food and collect money, and hence only about 13 sites exist in Hamilton. Only one site exists within the two neighbourhoods of study. The contents of the box are also not negotiable based on, for example, food preferences, dietary restrictions/needs, and cultural appropriateness of the food. Some of the mothers whom I interviewed mentioned having bought the GFB for a while but then stopping for various reasons, including those listed above.

With respect to children, through the organization Hamilton Partners in Nutrition (run through the SPRC), many schools throughout Hamilton are able to offer nutrition programs[13] for their students. The schools within the neighbourhoods of study are a part of this initiative. The HRPR (2012) has made universal school nutrition programs one of its top priorities, planning to shift these programs from a community-based initiative to a municipal initiative. Currently, school nutrition programs are only partially publicly funded through the province, with the majority of funding coming from grants and donations. However, although only partially funded by public money, school nutrition programs must follow strict guidelines from the Ontario

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[13] I use the term 'nutrition program' as opposed to 'breakfast program' because different schools offer different combinations of meals not limited to breakfast based on demand.

Ministry of Education. The Hamilton Partners in Nutrition mediates the divergence between the strict guidelines and the nutritional quality of food by helping schools order appropriate foods.

Finally, there is a movement in Hamilton to start food hubs, or what are referred to in the literature as 'community food centers'. This is a model of CBFSP that combines several individual CBFSPs like food banks, community gardens, and community kitchens into one place, creating a community space that welcomes all residents. The food hub stands in contrast with other CBFSPs because, rather than targeting CBFSPs at low-income residents and creating stigmatizing services, such as food banks, food hubs create a space to cultivate community through food. This food hub initiative is based on the community food center model of The Stop in Toronto.

2.2.5   Emergency food/Community-based food services & programs in Hamilton

The Emergency Food Strategic Planning Committee[14] in the City is also working to improve their services as demand for their services continues to increase. Their strategic plan involves bringing together the emergency food system to streamline the system so that "no one goes hungry" (Emergency Food Strategic Planning Committee, 2009). The strategic plan includes the intent to implement standards for emergency food, education to donors about the system, and advocacy that moves beyond food towards a living wage (ibid.). This group also conducted a study on the state of emergency food in Hamilton, first to create an inventory of the emergency food system in Hamilton and the services it provides, and then to understand emergency food users' experiences of the system by asking questions about their rationale for

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[14] The Emergency Food Strategic Planning Committee sits within the Community Services Department and reports to the Emergency and Community Services committee of City Council.

using food banks, what they would like to see, and other issues associated with food bank use, such as transportation. (Numan, 2011).

2.3   Social assistance in Hamilton

Without delving too deeply into the complex and intricate world of social assistance (SA), I hope to provide an overview of how SA converges with some of the themes of this research. In Ontario, there are two main forms of SA, Ontario Works (OW) and the Ontario Disabilities Support Program (ODSP). OW and ODSP are funded through the Ontario Ministry of Community and Social Services, but distributed at the municipal level. While I was conducting this research, the province commissioned a review of SA, consulting various communities across Ontario about how to improve SA. Their final report is due to be published in June 2012.

The Ministry of Community and Social Services views OW and ODSP as ways to mitigate the impacts of poverty on residents of Ontario. Whereas OW is seen as a short term measure to get people back on their feet and back to work, ODSP is seen as a supplementary form of assistance to disabled low-income residents to cover extra medical expenses and expenses related to mobility while helping recipients to find employment. In Hamilton, approximately 12% of its 505,000 people are recipients of either OW or ODSP (T. Cooper, personal communication, March 3, 2012). Many of the participants in this study are recipients of either OW or ODSP, and, on many occasions, mothers related their experiences as recipients of SA to their experiences of food insecurity.

My conversations with mothers relating SA to food insecurity are particularly pertinent, first because the City of Hamilton's Public Health Services released the Nutritious Food Basket[15] (NFB) based on SA rates and cost of living in Hamilton, and secondly, in January 2011, for the first time in approximately 20 years, the province embarked on a review of SA under the Ontario government's 2008 Poverty Reduction Strategy (Edwards & Johnson, 2011; Commission for the Review of Social Assistance in Ontario, 2012). The NFB report contributes to my research and the SA review in numerous ways, the most important of which is by highlighting the inadequacy of SA rates. According to the report, although lone parents on OW with two children will have a positive amount of funds remaining after paying rent and purchasing an NFB, they will spend 43% of their income on rent and 30% on a NFB (Edwards & Johnson, 2011). In contrast, median wage earners in Ontario with a family consisting of a couple with two children will only spend 16% of their income on rent and 12% on food. Through the contrast between lone parents and two-parent families, the financial burden on lone parents is apparent with lone parents spending a far greater proportion of their income on basic needs alone.

There are two specific points from the SA review that impact this research: the first is that this review pits those on OW and ODSP against low-wage earners, and the second is that the review fails to acknowledge current rates as inadequate. With the commissioners asking questions, such as "in a methodology for setting rates, what proportions would balance adequacy, fairness and incentives?" (CRSAO, 2012, p.30), they assume that all low-income Ontarians are able to work. In this question, the commissioners ask how they can provide high enough rates where people can subsist, fair enough rates to low-wage earners, and low enough rates that they

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[15] The Nutritious Food Basket (NFB) is a tool used to calculate the cost of 67 foods deemed "nutritious" by the Canada Food Guide. Although it may not take factors such as cultural appropriateness of food into consideration, the NFB is a useful tool to understand the cost of food in proportion to other expenses such as rent, and the proportion of income spent on food.

can incentivize people to go back to work. Nowhere in the documents published by the commissioners is there a recommendation to raise rates to livable levels. In fact, the commissioners' questions frame SA in a paternalistic and condescending way, as though SA recipients are undeserving, but should nonetheless feel grateful.

During these community consultations, many of the conversations referred to the inadequacy of current SA rates (S. Pennisi, personal communication, March 13, 2012). Current rates are arbitrarily set by the province and not tied to any evidence base, such as cost of living (T. Cooper, personal communication, March 13, 2012; HRPR, 2012). It is evident both from participating in conversations about the SA review and from conducting interviews that SA rates are heavily tied to recipients' ability to choose the foods necessary to maintain health. The commissioners' recommendations have the ability to continue to use SA as a surveillance tool that is unsupportive of mothers' desires to raise their children in the way they choose, as well as impede their ability to pursue the path that they choose. They do, however, also have the ability to recommend improving SA in ways recommended through the community consultations, including increasing rates and creating a more transparent and fair system.

2.4   Chapter summary

In this chapter, I have described some of the place-based context that intersects or diverges from the mothers' lives. The physical and social landscapes are important to highlight as they present some of the challenges mothers face in providing for the families. Examining the foodscape and food discourse allows us to compare and contrast the dominant voices in the city with the lone mother participants. In the following chapter, I will describe the methodology I employed to gather the data with which to do the comparing and contrasting.

3.   **CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY**

In the following chapter, I will be providing details regarding the way in which I collected data. I will first revisit the research question and objectives before commencing a discussion of the research design and the steps taken to collect data.

3.1   Study context

This study is a part of a larger study by my supervisor, Dr. Allison Williams, and post-doctoral fellow, Dr. Peter Kitchen, examining quality of life (QoL) in Hamilton. The first phase of this project involved a quantitative phone survey (*n*=1002) on various facets of QoL, such as sense of place, self-perceived health, and neighbourhood characteristics. The phone survey was implemented in three neighbourhood clusters defined by high, mixed, and low socio-economic statuses (SES) based on characteristics derived from the 2006 census of Canada[16]. Of the 1002 phone survey respondents, 297 of them lived in the cluster characterized by a low SES. This study specifically focused on that cluster (Figure 2, p. 19).

The phone survey that informed this study included one question regarding food, "*How do you rate the availability of reasonably priced fresh food (e.g. vegetables, fruit, and meat) in your neighbourhood?*" Upon conducting statistical analysis on this data with respect to gender, marital status, and neighbourhood cluster, I was not able to determine whether food availability was an issue of concern due to a small sample size. With this finding standing in contrast to food insecurity conversations occurring in Hamilton, I decided it more fruitful to take a completely qualitative approach. I hope the following chapters will refute this survey result and sufficiently describe the complex realities of food insecurity for lone mothers in Hamilton.

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[16] See Williams & Kitchen (2012) for the specific process of neighbourhood cluster selection.

3.2   Research question and objectives

For this research, I am interested in examining the question:

"*How do lone mothers living in two Hamilton neighbourhoods characterized by a low socio-economic status (SES) experience food insecurity?*"

In answering this question, I hope to achieve three objectives: (i) to gain a deeper understanding of the everyday experiences of food insecurity for lone mothers; (ii) to contribute to a broader conversation about how to improve overall quality of life in Hamilton; and (iii) to provide recommendations to improve CBFSPs and social policy to achieve food security.

3.3   Research design

In order to examine my research question, I utilized a case study design, guided by a qualitative approach. It was important for me to employ qualitative methods because so much of the literature focuses on quantitative and positivist ways of knowing and understanding neighbourhoods (e.g. GIS and food deserts). Positivist[17] methods include only using surveys that ask questions that pertain to the researcher's agenda, or relying strictly on GIS, which assumes a specific knowledge and interpretation of the landscape. More importantly, through using qualitative methods, I hope to demonstrate how spatiality—the urban geography of Hamilton—presents challenges to achieving food security for lone mothers in these two neighbourhoods.

3.3.1   The case study design

I chose a qualitative case study because my "focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within a real-life context" (Yin, 2009, p. 2). This context sits within a "bounded system" of time

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[17] See Glossary for a definition of 'positivism'.

and place (Creswell, 2007, p. 73). In this case, my focus is on the phenomenon of food insecurity between 2011 and 2012, with my case being lone mothers in two Hamilton neighbourhoods characterized by a low SES. Because I have chosen to understand a phenomenon by using one bounded case to illustrate the issue, this study constitutes an instrumental case study (Creswell, 2007). Particularly important to this study is to not only understand the process of working towards food security, but "to explore in-depth nuances of the phenomenon and the contextual influences on and explanations of that phenomenon," (Baxter, 2010, p. 81; Yin, 2009). To describe these nuances and contextual details provides what Baxter & Eyles (1997) call a "thick description" (p. 512).

3.3.2   Feminist geography

This research has been designed with feminist and PAR principles in mind. Despite varying definitions of what it means to be a feminist geographer and how to conduct feminist research, feminist geographers share the philosophy of improving the lives of women through uncovering, understanding, critiquing, and dismantling sources and dynamics of power and oppression as manifested through space, place, and across different scales (Dixon & Jones, 2006; Dyck, 2003; McDowell, 1999).

Part of improving women's lives begins with the philosophy that participants themselves are sites of knowledge, and therefore their knowledge is instrumental in improving their own lives (Dyck, 2003; Chilton & Rose, 2009). Feminist geographers conduct research to not only *understand* food insecurity from the perspective of participants, but to also realize the research participants' expert knowledge and agency within material constraints (Baker Collins, 2005). This process subverts the positivist assumption that scholarship is the site of knowledge

production, and instead acknowledges a 'local knowledge' (Baker Collins, 2005; Valentine, 2007). Allowing women to meaning-make and story-tell prevents the researcher from being able to construct women as victims (Gurstein & Vilches, 2010). Furthermore, rather than having the academy as the site that initiates change, change can be promoted through the use of PAR, which values participants' knowledge and position to improve their own lives.

The actual execution of a feminist framework necessitates constructing the research methods in a way that values the participants' knowledge production and meaning-making of their own experiences more than the researcher's conclusions. Feminist methods illuminate stories of experience, as opposed to solely relying on the positivist methods traditionally valued in medical geography (Dyck, 2003). Employing a feminist geography framework through qualitative and participatory research allows participants to describe their experiences as the intersection of complex social issues that quantitative methods alone fail to capture (Valentine, 2002; Jayaratne & Stewart, 2007).

The research methods must therefore simultaneously facilitate the participants meaning-making and capture the complexity of their experiences. These include their experiences of navigating the physical landscape (Gurstein & Vilches, 2010); the structural/social landscape (Gurstein & Vilches, 2010; Power, 2005b; McIntyre et al., 2003); the family (ibid.); and the body (Bell & Valentine, 1997; Hayes-Conroy & Hayes-Conroy, 2008; Power, 2005b). As Massey (as cited in McDowell, 1999, p. 4) states, understanding experiences allows us to uncover and find ways to challenge the boundaries of place—as defined by socio-spatial practices—which are maintained through power and exclusion. A consideration of multiple scales requires using multiple methods to capture rich and complex data.

Feminist methods allow the food secure to gain a holistic understanding of how to move

towards food security and social justice for all members of society. Gurstein and Vilches (2010) uncover power relations through their work with lone mothers in Vancouver by utilizing the concept of a 'just city'. They employ Lefebvre's conceptualization of the built environment as a manifestation of social relations, concluding that certain outcomes of this process—e.g. lack of affordable housing, location of childcare, and spatially disparate food sources—impinge on women's ability to be active citizens and achieve health, economic security, and social mobility. Simply put, the way in which the neoliberal city conceptualizes poverty for lone mothers as an economic issue, defined by a lack of financial resources, fails to consider the influence of the built environment on everyday experiences of poverty. This research asserts that the government does not take into consideration the great lengths to which lone mothers must navigate cities in order to attempt achieving government-defined active citizenship[18]. Gurstein and Vilches' (ibid.) 'just city' is not achievable without two conditions: first, the support from higher levels of government, and second, "an understanding of the concept of justice relevant to a city government's power and domain" (p. 422). A feminist geography perspective, through participatory methods such as open-ended interviews and photovoice, facilitates moving towards the 'just city' by uncovering where support is lacking from the government. Feminist methods provide an understanding of a city government's perceptions of justice as experienced by participants.

In conjunction with philosophy and methods, a methodology—"the theory of how a method is carried out" (Jayaratne & Stevens, 2007, p.48)—provides a rationale for and a perspective from which to conduct the research. An outcome of employing feminist, qualitative, and participatory methods is to uncover power relations and dynamics within the city from the

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[18] Gurstein & Vilches (2010), as well as other authors (see, for example, Power, 2005b; Ilcan et al., 2007) describing citizenship and neoliberalism, describe citizenship as being constituted by paid work outside of the home, consumption of goods, and relying minimally on the state.

perspectives of participants, rather than construing these relations and dynamics based on an assumption of perspectives. Historically, research in geography has employed an assumption of objectivity to claim that all researchers view the world from an omnipotent stance that rises above individuals' complexity. Employing a feminist methodology to improve women's lives goes one step further by problematizing the academy's white, male, patriarchal, colonial gaze on the world. Feminist methodology reflects upon the research process and challenges conventional research relationships and the historical roots of research through changing the site of knowledge production from the researcher to the participants (McDowell, 1999; Valentine, 2007). The concept of "situated and partial knowledge" works in opposition to the notion that research can produce value-free, positivist knowledge. Instead, only situated knowledge exists, a co-creation of knowledge and meaning that is produced within a specific context (Valentine, 2002). This context can be seen in what Valentine (2007) describes as "interlocking categories of experience" (p. 12), where one's identities work in conjunction with each other to shape one's knowledge and biases, as opposed to separating out each category of difference and ranking them. To understand how identities intersect, it is useful to look at Valentine's (2007) concept of the "geometries of oppression" (p. 13). It is hoped that the methods and methodology employed can highlight how these dynamic identities intersect, how unjust systems create oppression, and then illuminate how the mothers challenge such oppressions. Thus, rather than assigning meaning to the participants' various characteristics, we can understand how their many identities intersect to form their realities.

In recognition of situated and partial knowledge, the concept of positionality is vital to feminist methodology (Valentine, 2002). Positionality involves the researcher reflecting on her/his position in the research process to understand that researchers, too, approach the research

encounter with situated and partial knowledge. For example, unlike my participants, I have

never had children nor experienced lone motherhood; I can only work toward empathy and

understanding through our experiences together in the research process. Reflecting on this

positionality is particularly important if the goal of the research is to uncover and challenge the

power and privilege that has historically existed in the research process.

Furthermore, the research endeavour is a performance to be interpreted. Participants are

able to position the researcher based on personal characteristics, such as social status, speech,

and appearance. This has implications for the depth and richness of knowledge and meaning that

can be produced during research interactions, since identities influence what is safe to disclose

(Valentine, 2007). Participants positioning the researcher can also illuminate whether feminist

geography methods are effectively working to uncover and challenge power and privilege or

whether the methods continue to perpetuate the status quo and to render the research endeavour

positivist, patriarchal, and colonial.

3.3.3   Participatory Action Research (PAR)

In conjunction with feminist geography, I want to acknowledge the influence of PAR on

developing my research methods. Heavily influenced by feminist principles, PAR principles call

for, among other practices, reciprocity and reflexivity, or the "critical questioning of who

benefits from the research outcomes" (Pain, 2004, p. 653): whose voices are represented, whose

ethics are followed, and who is included in the academy (Kindon & Elwood, 2009). PAR

acknowledges that research and the university have both positive and negative impacts on the

community and that "the impacts of [the university's] decisions can be unpredictable and

problematic" (ibid., p.24). Feminist principles and PAR also share a desire to connect the local

and the everyday to the broader realm of the geopolitical and social (Cahill et al., 2007). Although this research is not a "true" PAR project where participants were able to form a research question or play a more active role in the research, I wish to acknowledge that many of the research principles I practice while conducting research—including reflexivity about power and benefit, as well as connecting the everyday to the structural—stem from PAR principles.

PAR also exhibits many similarities to the discipline of geography and case study research. As Pain (2004) points out, PAR is a natural fit for understanding how people relate to place and their environment, as well as understanding that the university—and I would argue the discipline—is situated within a geographic community: it is context-specific and prioritizes local knowledge situated within this context. The results of PAR, like case study research, are "situated, layered accounts" and a "thick description of place" (Pain, 2004, p. 653). Thus, PAR principles also overlap with what Baxter and Eyles (1997) describe as ways of making qualitative research more rigourous.

3.4   Ethics

Although I have hesitations with the ethics process and what it means to and how it protects participants, it is important to elaborate upon how I satisfied the academy's criteria for protecting research participants. Before proceeding with the study, I received ethics approval from the McMaster University Research Ethics Board (MREB; Appendix A). The following documents were accepted as a part of my ethics application: the participant recruitment flyer (Appendix D), the participant letter of information (Appendix B), the participant verbal letter of consent (Appendix C), and the interview schedule (Appendix F). As suggested by Crabtree & Miller (1999), before finalizing the participant interview schedule, I pilot-tested it with a woman

living outside of the neighbourhoods of study who has a deep knowledge of Hamilton's food security and poverty reduction conversations. She also happens to be in a similar situation to the participants and was able to assist me with any challenges with diction, flow, and the timing of the interview.

At the beginning of the interview process, mothers were informed of their rights as participants. Mothers were then given a $20 gift certificate to *Fresh Co*., a neighbourhood grocery store, as remuneration for their time and knowledge contributed to the study. I found that mothers greatly appreciated the utility of the gift card, referencing the connection to the research topic and how the gift card eased some tension in buying groceries for the week. I decided to provide remuneration at the beginning of the interview so that if mothers did want to act on their participant rights and terminate the interview, they would not feel coerced into participating only to receive the gift card.

The mothers were then read a confidentiality statement, stressing that although I would follow procedures to protect their confidentiality, anonymity could not be guaranteed (Appendix E). One of the ways in which I preserve their confidentiality is through using pseudonyms. The other is that I decided upon asking mothers for verbal consent. I did this for two reasons, the first being that I was unsure of mothers' level of comfort with literacy, and the second being that I wanted to provide an extra precaution in ensuring confidentiality in instances where participation in the study may unduly influence other aspects of the mothers' lives (e.g. divorce and/or custody battles, violence). I did, however, give mothers the option of being contacted towards the end of the research process to check over their transcript, to receive a community report, and/or to participate in a workshop. They were able to provide their contact information on the second

page of the consent form (Appendix C). Their names and contact information were never kept in the same document.

Mothers consented to having the interview or focus group digitally recorded for accuracy and then transcribed verbatim, and they were assured that the recordings would be kept in a safe location. Hard copies of transcripts did not contain any identifying information.

3.5 The data collection process

This section outlines the steps I took to collect my data. I write these steps sequentially; however, in reality, some steps overlapped with others. A case study design requires employing multiple sources of information to triangulate and confirm data (Baxter, 2010; Creswell, 2007). This study employed multiple qualitative methods in the data collection process, including face-to-face interviews, a focus group, key informant interviews, and document analysis. I shall engage with issues of rigour within each step.

I use 'we' in various places because my friend and colleague, Jeanette Eby, and I embarked on much of our research together, since our work derives from the same research context and unfolds in the same neighbourhoods. Jeanette and I began our research journey by familiarizing ourselves with the neighbourhoods and getting to know key informants (KIs) and residents. This process was vital for moving on to the subsequent research steps of interviewing lone mothers and KIs, and of sharing the research findings to both the mothers and KIs in an effort to move towards improving food security and quality of life in Hamilton.

3.5.1 Step 1: Neighbourhood food resources map

The first step involved gaining a better understanding of the neighbourhoods through creating a neighbourhood food resources map (Figure 3, p. 24). The process of creating this map

was invaluable in moving forward with the rest of the data collection. In order to create a "thick

description" of a process and to produce a case study, I needed to be immersed in the

neighbourhoods and understand the neighbourhoods as a functioning system. Also, being new to

Hamilton, I needed to learn where everything was located in order to be an effective researcher

and interviewer.

In getting to know the neighbourhoods more, it became apparent that gathering places[19],

places where people could gather for conversation, were few and far between. It seemed that

unless one was part of a group, it was difficult to gather just to socialize. Upon embarking on the

research endeavour, Jeanette and I happened upon the *Heart of the Hammer Café* at Sherman

Avenue and Main Street, which we identified as a place to be able to meet and interview

participants. However, the café unfortunately closed in September 2011. *Tim Hortons* on Cannon

Street and Sanford Avenue, as well as the Public Library on Barton Street, are popular gathering

places and interview locations of choice for some mothers. The lack of gathering places made for

a challenging recruitment process. We found that the schools were places where mothers went

with their children to socialize.

The process of creating the map was useful in many ways, including providing

opportunities to orient myself to the neighbourhoods' streets, gathering places, and schools, to

find potential interview locations, and to build relationships with potential KIs. I was also

interested in understanding the foodscape of the neighbourhood, such as where grocery stores

were located, as well as where, if anywhere, CBFSPs were located and what their role was in the

neighbourhoods. I used informal interviews, documents from different organizations, and

neighbourhood conversations as a part of my contextual information.

As with any research, there were unintended consequences of this context-gathering

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[19] See Glossary for a description of 'gathering places'.

exercise. The first consequence was spending more time than anticipated searching for appropriate KIs and then building relationships with them. During the map-making process, it became apparent to us that it was particularly important to build relationships with KIs, as both KIs and mothers described their neighbourhoods as over-researched but said that they never saw the benefits of the research findings. Jeanette and I introducing ourselves from McMaster was sometimes met with mixed sentiments, and with good reason. Many KIs we spoke with felt that researchers had previously taken advantage of them or residents for academic gain rather than to use research to improve QoL in the neighbourhoods. This meant that we spent more time than expected building trust with KIs and residents, frequenting neighbourhood meetings and participating in conversations around community issues, such as school closings. I do not mean to say that I participated because I *had* to in order to finish my research, but it meant that the relationship building piece—a piece that I have always believed essential to research—became all the more critical in achieving mutual trust and therefore collecting rigourous data.

We also ended up spending more time getting to know KIs and the neighbourhood because of the time of year we embarked on the recruitment phase of the research. We realized that the combination of the summer holidays and the lack of gathering places made it even more challenging to meet with KIs, and therefore participants. Through getting to know the neighbourhoods, we found that schools were key connections with mothers and they were mostly closed and unstaffed over the summer. This reiterated the fact that I needed to be mindful of mothers and KIs living in real-time, in contrast to my own academic timeline.

3.5.2   Step 2: Focus group and face-to-face interviews with lone mothers

After getting to know the neighbourhoods, I was ready to begin building upon this

knowledge with the mothers' stories. The goal of this step was to gather data from the

perspectives of lone mothers. I was interested in having mothers not only describe their

experiences with food insecurity but also visually represent them through mental maps. KIs that I

had met through the neighbourhood food resources map (Step 1) assisted me in recruiting

mothers. In fact, one KI recruited the lone mothers who participated in the focus group. If it were

not for the KIs acting as gatekeepers and directing participants to me, this research would not

have been possible, as I was unable to recruit any focus group participants in the initial stages of

recruitment via flyers in public and gathering places (Appendix D). The face-to-face interview

participants were recruited mainly through KIs, as well as through flyers posted in gathering

places, such as coffee shops and laundromats. Although these recruitment strategies constitute

convenience or opportunistic sampling—sampling based on self-selection—my main

consideration in the recruitment phase was building trust with mothers in the short span of one

interview so that they would feel comfortable sharing potentially sensitive information about

their lives (Baxter & Eyles, 1997). Table 1 displays some of the characteristics of the mothers

relevant to the research.

Name[1]	Age[2]	Number of children under 18	Length of time in the neighbourhood[3]	Car ownership	Income source(s)	Food bank usage	Social support networks[4]
Claire	Mid 40s	3	6-10 years	Yes	Casual work	Seldom	1
Belinda	Late 40s	1	1-5 years	Yes	ODSP	No	1
Charlotte	Early 30s	2 (expecting 3rd child)	1-5 years	No	ODSP	Yes	3
Lily	Mid 30s	2	1-5 years	No	OW and part-time work	Occasional	1
Jen	Early 60s	1	10+ years	No	OW	No	1
Tammy	Early 30s	2	1-5 years	No	Employed	No	2
Anna	Late 30s	3	1-5 years	No	OW	Yes	3
Rachel	Early 50s	1	10+ years	No	ODSP	Yes	1
Susan	Late 30s	4	10+ years	No	Part-time work	Yes	2
Jean	Late 50s	1	10+ years	No	Full-time work	No	2
Ellen	Early 20s	2	Less than 1 year	No	OW	No	3
Laura	Late 20s	3	1-5 years	No	OW	No	3

Table 1: A summary of some of the relevant characteristics of the mothers I interviewed.

[1] All names are pseudonyms.

[2] Ages are estimates.

[3] Length of time in the neighbourhood is an estimate based on our conversations.

[4] Social support networks are gauged approximately by how proximal and available they are to the mothers. Mothers with the lowest level of social support are ranked as 1 and have little to no social support that facilitates providing food for their families. Mothers ranked 2 have some form of social support, from friends who drive them to retail food outlets occasionally to sharing meals. Mothers ranked as 3 have easily accessible social support networks that split the cost of all of their food, share meals regularly, give financial support, as well as providing rides and childcare often.

I interviewed mothers if they identified as a lone mother and identified as living in the two neighbourhoods of study. They did not have to identify as using CBFSPs, as this helped to illuminate either why CBFSPs were not used, or if utilized, why some CBFSPs were preferred over others. When I recruited mothers, they were given the opportunity to choose to either participate in a focus group with other women (*n*=1, 5 participants)[20] or in a face-to-face interview (*n*=7). I offered two different interview formats because previous studies have illuminated the feelings of shame, guilt, stigma, and worry associated with experiencing food insecurity (Hamelin et al., 2002; McIntyre et al., 2003; Power, 2005b). However, I found that the focus group created what Cameron (2010) describes as a "synergistic effect" (p. 153), where mothers learned from and supported each other by discussing their feelings of powerlessness and frustration. They even explicitly stated that they had created a non-judgmental space. As the interviewer, it was an incredibly positive experience to facilitate and to witness the co-creation of knowledge and the sharing of local knowledge amongst the mothers as it unfolded before my eyes (Baker Collins, 2005; Valentine, 2007).

In addition to offering different interview formats, I also offered to meet the mothers in a location of their choice so that they felt comfortable. Example locations included *Tim Hortons*, an elementary school community room, and the *Freeway Coffeehouse*. It is often cited that researchers should interview participants on their "turf" for comfort; however, I found that convenience—for example, children were at daycare or school, or the interview location was close to their home—figured more prominently than comfort. The face-to-face interviews lasted between 23 and 70 minutes, and the focus group lasted 110 minutes. All of the interviews and the focus group were digitally recorded and I personally transcribed all of the recordings

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[20] The focus group began with 6 participants; however, one participant left the interview room permanently, thereby withdrawing from the interview.

verbatim. I interviewed mothers until I reached what Cameron (2010) calls "saturation" (p. 159), where no new information is gleaned from the interview process. I took notes of interview proceedings and personal reflections to aid in the transcription and analysis steps of the research.

I was interested in having mothers describe and create meaning out of their experiences, and so I employed a semi-structured interview schedule (Appendix F). The mothers were asked questions regarding their experiences with food insecurity and their use of CBFSPs. I wanted to focus on participants' understandings of the spatiality of food insecurity, such as access to transit, locations of CBFSPs (or a lack thereof), experiences of navigating the city, and journeys going to retail food outlets and CBFSPs. I also sought mothers' suggestions of how CBFSPs and social policy could be improved. Finally, mothers visually represented the spatiality of food insecurity by drawing mental maps of the constellation of retail food outlets and CBFSPs that comprise their routines of sustaining their families (n=11)[21]. Mothers in the focus group were asked to first draw individual mental maps and then to co-create a map as a group during a follow-up mapping session approximately a month later in the same location as where the focus group took place (n=4). The mothers participating in the follow-up focus group were a smaller section of the original focus group. Due to the size of the group mental map, it is not included in the thesis. Furthermore, the details provided in the follow-up focus group mapping session mirrored much of the face-to-face interview and mapping data, and served more as a tool for mothers to share knowledge with each other. Mental maps, also known as cognitive maps, help to highlight how different people perceive their environment differently based on identities, experience, and habit. These maps are "a tool for discovering fuller territorial information about contemporary populations" (Hayden, 1995, p. 27). In this case, mental maps can be used to

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[21]This number does not add up to the total number of participants (n=12) because one mother from the focus group was unable to return for the mental mapping portion of the interview. During the follow-up, we refreshed our memories of our previous conversations before moving on to mental mapping.

understand how lone mothers perceive and understand their neighbourhoods and foodscapes[22].

3.5.3   Step 3: Key informant (KI) interviews

As well as assisting in recruiting mothers for interviews, six of the KIs were asked to participate in face-to-face interviews. The intention of conducting KI interviews was three-fold: (i) to gain a lay of the land with respect to food security and the neighbourhoods; (ii) to pinpoint people to act upon the research findings; and (iii) to provide a means to achieve method triangulation with the previous step (Baxter & Eyles, 1997). Thus, as Gilchrist & Williams (1999) state, I had to purposefully sample KIs.

In this context, I chose KIs to be interviewed based on their 'expertise' on food insecurity or women's issues in the neighbourhoods or city as a whole, or as employees or volunteers at CBFSPs. It is KIs' interpretation of information, in this case food insecurity, that is critical, while also acknowledging that KIs do not necessarily represent the voices of the mothers I interviewed (Gilchrist & Williams, 1999). To maintain consistent themes of analysis, I asked KIs the same open-ended questions as the mothers (Appendix F). I also digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim all of the interviews as I did with Step 2. They were able to provide additional information about how to improve CBFSPs, as well as illuminate some of the structural challenges to achieving food security, such as lack of funding for organizations.

3.5.4   Step 4: Analysis

I utilized thematic content analysis in order to organize the large quantity of data gleaned from Steps 2 and 3. I chose to employ Hsieh & Shannon's (2005) definition of content analysis

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[22] Due to time constraints, I was unable to focus on analyzing the mental maps.

as a "research method for the subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns" (p. 1278). I chose this definition because it emphasizes the subjectivity inherent in interpreting the data, while maintaining a systematic method within subjective interpretation. Instead of coding using predetermined themes, I chose to look for what Crabtree & Miller (1999) call "emergent" (p. 151) themes. I looked for "emergent" themes in order for codes to fully represent the stories and experiences the mothers recounted (Creswell, 2007). Through thematic coding, I was able to glean two common characteristics and four macro themes described in Chapter 4.

I went through the process of analysis originally laid out by Burnard (1991), and later adapted by DeMiglio (2008). Burnard's (1991) process outlines a detailed 14-step method to analyzing and coding transcripts, which DeMiglio (2008) has collapsed into seven steps. I have further adapted these seven steps to reflect my research topic and methods:

1. After each face-to-face interview or the focus group, I made notes in my research journal about various details, including statements or stories that stood out, the overall energy of the interview, points to come back to in personal reflection or analysis, and what I learned from the experience.

2. Once the interviews were transcribed verbatim, I read through all of the transcripts multiple times in order to immerse myself in the data and to begin thinking about themes emerging from the data. I also took notes in the margins of sections or quotes that stood out to me that I wanted to return to later in the process.

3. I read the transcripts again, this time engaging in open coding, where I assigned all of the data under "freely generated" (Burnard, 1991, p. 462) themes. This included noting conversations irrelevant to the research themes so as to exclude it in the later stages of analysis.

4. I then put these themes on to separate sheets of paper to try and collapse similar themes together. I aimed to have between four and six macro themes at the end of this process.

5. I revisited the transcripts and coded them based on Stage 4. I underlined or highlighted statements in different colours associated with each of the macro themes. Simultaneously,

I filled in the sheets of paper from Stage 4 with some of the details from the transcripts in order to title macro and subthemes, as well as appropriately capture the multiple realities present within each theme. I then typed up these sheets of paper to serve as my codebook.

6. I read through the transcripts again to check the codebook against the transcripts. At this time, I also noted quotes that concisely and eloquently represented the macro and subthemes that could be used in the writing stage of the research.

7. Finally, I sent transcripts to the mothers who had indicated an interest in reading over their transcripts for accuracy (*n*=3). I had also highlighted potential quotes I considered using in writing and presenting the research so that mothers could comment on whether these quotes appropriately encompassed their experiences. This constitutes what Baxter and Eyles (1997) call "member checking" (p. 512). I was able to send them the transcripts through the information they had provided on their consent form.

Because I utilized the same interview schedule for KIs as for mothers, I engaged in the same process to analyze KI interview data; however, I only utilized KI interviews as a way to triangulate mothers' experiences and will not be discussed in the following section. I used KI interview data to triangulate the face-to-face interview and focus group data to confirm the mothers' experiences, as well as comprehend my understanding of the mothers' stories and their reasoning about their stories. The KI data is most directly referred to in Chapters 5 and 6, the discussion and conclusion.

3.5.5   Step 5: Sharing knowledge & action

Sharing knowledge is a key part of feminist geography and PAR practices and is essential to framing food insecurity as a social justice issue. The goal of this step, and my hope, is for the study outcomes to be utilized to improve CBFSPs, as well as begin a movement towards improving QoL through recommending changes to social policy. Recommendations can include incorporating a food budget into SA and the enforcement of paternal child support payments. Furthermore, from a methods standpoint, sharing knowledge with the mothers, KIs, other

stakeholders (e.g. CFSSC, Emergency Food Providers, etc.), and the academic community serves as a form of rigour by putting the research findings in dialogue with various conversations in Hamilton and within the academy. I plan on sharing knowledge through a community report, a community workshop, and a series of professional presentations. However, sharing knowledge has not been limited to discrete events, and I have been sharing knowledge at different times through other, more informal avenues, such as participating in writing the Food Charter and in informal conversations with community members. I hope that the philosophy and methods of this study can be employed in future food insecurity research that addresses the limitations of this particular study.

3.6   Chapter summary

In this chapter I have described the methods I used to collect my data. As the following chapter will illuminate, mothers have various knowledge, considerations, and strategies to decide on where and how to acquire food for their families. Many times, these places are not within what they define as their neighbourhoods, nor are they within the official neighbourhoods of study. Mothers are not overlooking food resources in the neighbourhood due to lack of knowledge, but because they are making intentional decisions based on multiple considerations.

4. CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

In this section, I attempt to produce a "thick description" of the diversity in mothers' experiences of food insecurity. As with any storytelling about complex issues, it has been a challenge to create a coding list of discrete themes, as well as a description of such varied—and yet, in some ways, similar—experiences. The quotes I present illustrate that the themes discussed in this chapter are heavily intertwined with each other as mothers describe various themes within one quote. The mothers' lives vary in the particular details, such as how they journey to food resources or how they choose what to buy, but their experiences with structural inequality—for example, inadequate incomes received from SA or from low-wage work—and their desire to care for and love their children are common themes we discussed.

This chapter will begin by describing the common characteristics of the mothers: (i) *distance and time taken to acquire food*, and (ii) *loving and caring for one's child(ren)*. Then I will move on to describing the four macro themes gleaned from the interviews: (i) *contextual considerations* mothers have to weigh in order to choose which food resources to utilize; (ii) the *need for structural change*; (iii) *strategies* mothers use to provide for their families; and (iv) *feelings around being a lone mother*.

Common characteristics	Distance and time taken to acquire food
	Loving and caring for one's child(ren)
Macro themes	Contextual factors
	Need for structural change
	Strategies
	Feelings around being a lone mother

Table 2: A summary of the common characteristics and macro themes presented in this chapter.

4.1   Common characteristics

In this section, I highlight two common characteristics of the mothers: *distance and time taken to acquire food* and *loving and caring for one's child(ren)*. These characteristics are separate from the macro themes because the mothers discuss varying experiences within the umbrella of the macro themes. They all, however, experience the following common characteristics.

4.1.1   Distance and time taken to acquire food

Although not explicitly mentioned in all conversations, it is readily apparent that mothers spend a large amount of time preparing for and then actually travelling long distances to acquire the food they desire for their families. It may seem counterintuitive for mothers who are already stressed with so many household functions to engage in such practices, but all of the mothers have some kind of intentionality behind their decisions. Often times, mothers are willing to go long distances to gain minimal savings; sometimes mothers admit even losing money on their net budget because of transportation costs incurred. Mothers rationalize their decisions to travel long distances and gain minimal savings as being for their children. Belinda, a focus group participant who has access to a car, describes her time-intensive process of choosing retail food outlets to go to:

> *I look for the sales and I go wherever the sales are. I may go to No Frills because it has five products on sale and then I'll go to Food Basics for the other five, Fresh Co. for the other five. It's time consuming and that, but I have to… like my daughter likes Alphaghetti, so, uh, if Alphaghetti is not on sale, I think it's a dollar 19, or a dollar 29 a can, so if I can find it somewhere for 59 cents half way across the city, I'm goin'! I'm gettin' it!*

Even mothers without cars describe following a similar process. Some mothers are more explicit than others in stating the time they take to prepare and travel. Others convey this

temporal investment indirectly through their discussion of all of the contextual factors they

consider (e.g. financial resources and quality of food available; see section 4.2, p. 60) and their

journeys to food resources. Rachel, an interviewee, comments on why she plans out her shopping

list and journey:

> *I really don't want to go over there if, uh, I don't know if there's something on sale or not because I don't just wander around the store aimlessly buying anything. I have a mission when I go.*

Mothers convey distance and time through not only the verbal component of the

interview, but also through the visual component in their mental maps. Mothers' mental maps

most poignantly convey the distance they travel, as well as the time spent travelling. Other

factors that contribute to the time-intensive process of food acquisition include travelling on foot

or by public transit and waiting in line at food banks. These other factors, which will be

elaborated upon later, are not necessarily common to all mothers, but help to determine which

food resources to utilize.

Figure 4 is an example of one of the mothers' mental maps. I chose this map in particular

because it was the most detailed and reflected the interview the best. It illustrates many of the

themes discussed across all of the interviews, including various CBFSPs[23], food retail outlets[24],

contextual considerations, and strategies. This mother also visually represents her journey to all

of the food resources[25] on foot and by city bus. The experience of piecing transportation methods

together is a common experience for the mothers, who for the most part do not have access to a

car. Nonetheless, mothers who have cars still travel long distances but are able to expedite their

journeys and increase their food carrying capacity.

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[23] Community-based food services and programs (CBFSPs) include the emergency food system (see Glossary), such as food banks, as well as capacity building initiatives like community kitchens. See Glossary for more information.
[24] Food retail outlets include any place where one exchanges money for food. These include grocery stores and convenience stores. See Glossary for more information.
[25] I use the term food resource to encompass both CBFSPs and food retail outlets.
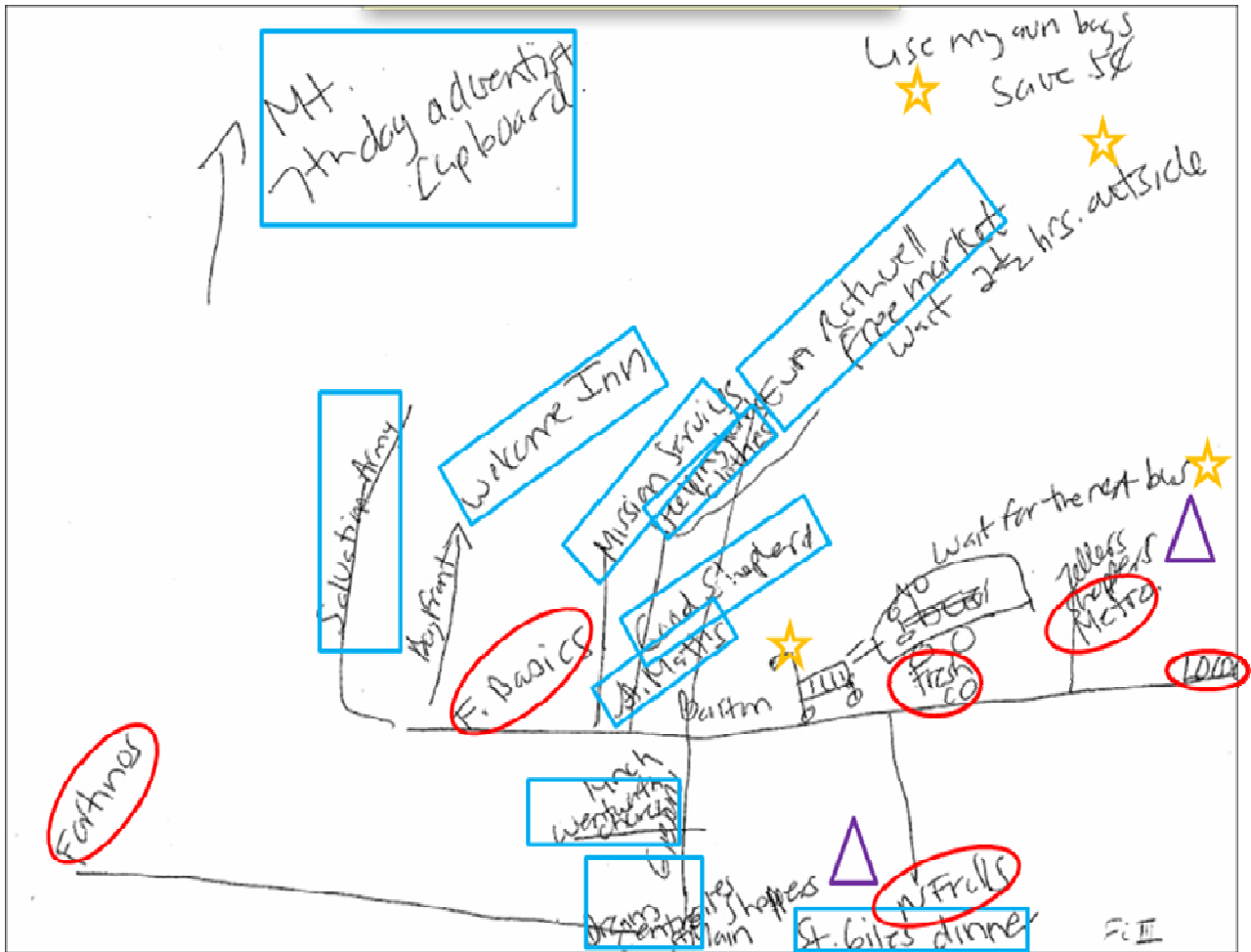
Figure 4: An example of a mental map drawn by one of the mothers. The light blue squares highlight community-based food services and programs (CBFSPs); red ovals highlight grocery stores; purple triangles highlight other retail stores that sell food; and yellow stars highlight contextual considerations and strategies.

4.1.2   Loving and caring for one's child(ren)

Some mothers are more explicit than others about the impetus to spend so much time preparing and travelling long distances to go to food resources: their children. Every decision they make around food, and their lives, stems from the desire to love and care for their children. I ask Susan, an interviewee, if she ever goes without food and she responds that she never has a complete lack of food in the house and attributes her survival to being a mother:

I go without, sometimes, you know, you crave certain things, and you want specific things and you can't have it. Yeah, that way I do, but I always make do. I always, like, even if it seems like we don't have anything, I dunno, maybe it's just being a mother, I always seem to come up with something.

This quote epitomizes the definition of food insecurity through Susan's concern for and adjustment of her household food supply. Many mothers describe engaging in two constant balancing acts to get through the month, which entail balancing extreme financial constraints with their children's desires, as well as balancing their children's dreams—and their role in cultivating those dreams—with their feelings of stress and frustration from existing in coping and survival mode.

Despite being in survival mode, mothers are selfless in diverting all of their emotional and physical energy, as well as financial resources, to provide for their children. There are numerous instances where mothers sacrifice a part of themselves, whether financially, materially, or emotionally, for the happiness of their children. Moreover, the driving force behind their self-sacrifice comes both from within themselves when thinking about the long-term, as well as from their children, where in the short-term mothers might sacrifice their budget, for example, to buy material goods that their children want. Often times, these goods are not food-based, but are heavily food-related because mothers divert money towards material goods and away from their food budget. Mothers feel they need to provide a good childhood for their children, a childhood materially similar to their peers and one of happiness shielded from the realities of living on a meager income. Lily, a focus group participant, describes sacrificing living in geared-to-income housing on the Mountain to live in the neighbourhoods of study so that her children would be happy in school:

So I would rather pay full market rent and have my children happy than be up on the Mountain paying geared-to-income, like, a third of what I… a quarter of what

I am paying now, and have happy kids…. But, like I said, I gave up, I gave up a lot to come down here, but the thing is, my kids are happy and to me, that's my priority. So if my kids are happy, they're happy, they're fed, I'm poor as anything, and I am miserable, but…

She is willing to sacrifice materially and emotionally so that her children are happy emotionally. However, sometimes the food budget is sacrificed for more tangible, material goods. Jean describes her desire to provide for her daughter through the purchase of clothing. She wants to make sure her daughter is not ridiculed for their lack of material wealth, even sacrificing the nutritional quality of food so that the façade of having material goods remains intact:

[To cope with shortage], I'd buy lower quality things. You know, uh, it's hard and I'd look for things that were on sale all the time… It was nerve-wracking, you know, because I always wanted her to have the best clothes and good things so she wouldn't have to feel ostracized and stuff like that. I'd pay more attention to the clothing as opposed to the lots of great food, you know?

In this quote, the stress of providing materially coincides with the need to provide quality basics. Jean also makes the connection between food and the emotional aspect of food insecurity, the anxiety and stress of balancing food with other household factors. Nonetheless, food budgets in and of themselves are often times inadequate in providing the most basic necessities like milk. Milk can be used as a metaphor for how mothers love and care for their children within financial constraints. There are no specific questions in the interview schedule about particular food items; however, mothers mention milk in various contexts to represent a food that seems to encompass the mothers' myriad experiences with food insecurity. It is apparent that milk is a highly valued food item to mothers, as it is perceived as a necessity for their children to grow and as a vital symbol of their home being a healthy place. During the focus group, Belinda and Lily illustrate what milk means to their families and their roles as mothers:

Belinda: *[Milk is] very, very important in my home. My daughter drinks a lot of milk, and if I can't get that from the food bank, then I still feel a little sad and degraded inside cuz I'm not, um, givin' her what she needs, you know.*

Lily: *I got two boys and they're growing boys… and they have milk at breakfast…, at lunch, at supper, and usually two or three glasses, which is a lot more than I had when I was little, so I am just thankful that they drink the milk, so I'll get it in abundance. I'll go poor before I stop getting them milk.*

Milk also symbolizes many of the challenges mothers face with respect to loving and caring for their families. It is seen as expensive, heavy, and a fresh item in high household demand that mothers often found difficult to maintain in supply. As Belinda illustrates above, milk symbolizes freshness in their households. Discussions of freshness come up mostly during conversations about the lack of fresh food available at food banks. It is an item that mothers want to see available at food banks because it is a necessity, but one that often constrains their ability to buy other food for their families. Milk is the only food item mothers are willing to buy from a convenience store, despite describing them as prohibitively expensive. The inability to keep up with household demand is a source of anxiety for mothers. Anna, one of the interviewees, speaks about once resorting to a Facebook page called "Recycle Kindness" to acquire milk when both she and her mother ran out of money and she needed milk for her children. For mothers who rely on the city bus and walking to purchase food, the sheer weight that milk adds to their groceries versus the household necessity and demand is a consideration they have to make.

However, despite extreme financial constraints, mothers find ways to treat their children through food. Many mothers speak of taking their children to *Tim Hortons* or *McDonald's* to enjoy a treat when they have some money left over at the end of the month. Ellen, an interviewee, describes trying to balance her food budget with wanting to treat her children:

I try to look through the flyers, and I'll try to, you know, see what's cheaper where, cuz being a single mom, I have to save money, so it's like if I want to take

them out places or let them have fun, then I have to save them money on certain things. Like I don't cheap them out or anything, but I like, like to look at the sales and stuff like that.

Other mothers describe how the places where they treat their children have changed over time. Anna describes the places on Barton Street where she likes to treat her children but how her foodscape has changed over time. Barton Street used to be a thriving street with many shops and lots of foot traffic, but now has many empty storefronts. She also recounts going to *Center Mall*, which sits just outside of the neighbourhoods of study, and is a popular place for neighbourhood residents to shop. It has recently been renovated and many residents, including some of the mothers, speak negatively about the renovation because it has been redesigned around car traffic, reducing physical accessibility and walkability. All of these changes to the neighbourhoods have had a negative impact on mothers' ability to provide for their children. Anna illustrates treating her children to a meal outside of home, but in the context of the lack of choices in the places to go:

> *...sometimes I've gone into Zellers restaurant or the food court [at Center Mall] to treat the kids to lunch or something. It's something to do if I don't want to walk home after I'm done here and I got the money, I'll be like, "Ok, let's go there" because they closed everything I used to do over here.*

Mothers are taking their children to fast food restaurants for lack of gathering places in the neighbourhood and for lack of affordable alternatives to fast food. Anna's point in particular draws the connections between food and social cohesion through gathering places, as well as the role of food in loving and caring for one's children.

4.2 Contextual factors

Building on the common characteristics, I now move on to describing the four macro

themes. As Ellen demonstrates above, in order to be able to provide treats for their children,

mothers have to take myriad factors into account when considering where to acquire food. These

contextual factors are contingent upon personal preferences of where to acquire food, whether

mothers have access to a car, whether they have social support networks, and whether or not they

utilize food banks. The contextual considerations can be further broken down into four

subthemes: spatial considerations, place-based considerations, knowledge, and temporal

considerations.

4.2.1 Spatial considerations

The first set of considerations mothers have to make are spatial, most basically deciding

where to acquire food: How much money do I have to spend? How will I get the food home?

What will my kids eat? What are the health needs of my family? The spatial considerations

dictate where to buy or acquire food. These considerations can be summarized to include income

and financial constraints, mode of transportation, and food preferences and restrictions.

Without a doubt, the top consideration for all mothers are the financial constraints placed

on them by a combination of inadequate SA rates and/or inadequate income, lack of child

support, and the prices of food. Both inadequate financial resources and the high price of food

contribute to the need to consider financial constraints to such a degree. It is evident in many of

the quotes presented throughout the chapter that considerations about financial resources are a

high priority.

However, although financial constraints are a heavy consideration, mothers also make it

clear that their considerations are not hierarchical, but a balancing act. They are not willing to

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completely sacrifice quality for cost-saving purposes. Meat, in particular, is an item that mothers are willing to spend more on and travel further distances for better quality at good prices. Ellen, an interviewee, describes her preference for travelling outside of her neighbourhood for meat because the quality of meat in her neighbourhood does not meet her standards:

> I only *go to Lococo's for my meat. I won't get it anywhere else. I won't get it anywhere else. Especially No Frills. I will not get meat from No Frills... oh it looks so weird! It just looks bad to me. No. And sometimes their fruit is like [grimace].*

Mode of transportation heavily influences whether mothers are able to engage in cost-saving practices like buying in bulk and stocking up on sale items. The majority of mothers do not own a car and they rely mostly on the city bus and walking to acquire all of their food. Most frequently, they shop in their neighbourhoods, but travel further afield for specialty items and to go to food banks. They describe being limited in the amount of food they can buy based not only on financial constraints, but also on physical restrictions like the amount they can carry.

Belinda's experiences of travelling across the city to buy Alphaghetti differ from mothers without cars in the quantity of goods she can carry and the distance she can travel. For some mothers, the transportation option is further limited to walking by the prohibitive cost of the bus ($2.55 per person for a ride with a two hour transfer), poor experiences with bus drivers, crowded buses, and inconvenient bus routes and schedules. Others simply choose walking because the food retail outlet they most frequent is in close proximity to their homes. Some mothers, however, have friends or family with cars who can, to varying degrees, give the mothers rides to food resources that are further afield.

I was surprised to find that mothers travel outside of their neighbourhoods to food retail outlets to not only to get better quality at a good price, but also to satisfy food preferences and accommodate dietary restrictions for family members. Food retail outlets outside of the

neighbourhoods of study have better variety and selection of products, and, as stated above through the example of meat, better quality. Mothers describe specialty items that family members desire for which they are willing to travel long distances because they are not available in the neighbourhood. Lily, a focus group participant, and one of the only mothers who felt comfortable Downtown, describes why she likes to go to the Hamilton Farmers' Market for specialty items:

> *I just go [to the Hamilton Farmers' Market] because I like Beach Road kielbasa. I can't just go to Food Basics to get Beach Road kielbasa from the deli, and my kids love that kielbasa… I mostly go for my garlics and my vegetables and um, like, shallots, like stuff that you can't get in the gro… regular grocery store. So that's why I go. To get the stuff I don't usually get a hold of…*

Within their extreme financial constraints, mothers want to acquire food that their families will actually eat, occasionally sacrificing nutritional quality so as to not result in financial or material waste when they throw out unwanted food items. Furthermore, for some mothers, dietary restrictions dictate where they can acquire food. Whether restrictions are based on illness or allergies, restricted diets mean that mothers often have to travel further to find required items because appropriate foods are not always available in their neighbourhoods.

4.2.2   Place-based considerations

Once spatial considerations have been made, and the food resources are decided upon, mothers then have to consider various factors related to the places where they would be acquiring food. Table 3 summarizes the considerations by type of food resource mothers acquire food. The columns are grouped by food resource type: food retail outlet and CBFSPs. They are in order (left to right) of most mentioned to least mentioned within each food resource type.

Within each column, the ranking of considerations are different for each mother depending on the accessibility of each resource to them (e.g. financial, social support networks).

Within food retail outlets, there are a few common considerations: price, quality, selection, and convenience. As I discuss above, price is the most important consideration in both going to a food retail outlet and choosing products within the outlet itself. Under the consideration of price, factors such as regular price, sales, and comparative price between store-brand and premium items have to be taken into account. But again, mothers want to balance quality and price. Mothers have many stories of buying poor quality food in food retail outlets, particularly in their neighbourhoods, resulting in wanting to travel outside of the neighbourhood. Quality is further defined in many ways—for example, unexpired, unblemished, and of good nutritional quality. Although mothers mention going to stores specifically for sale items, they describe their concerns with the quality of such items, since many stores put those items on sale because they are about to expire. In particular, fresh fruit and vegetables on sale are seen to be of poor quality because they are wilted and/or mouldy upon purchase or within a few days of purchase. Stores allow exchange of unacceptable items, but this process adds more time to acquiring food. Rachel describes buying sale items and then having to journey back to the store a few days later just to exchange rotten produce. Her journey is made more difficult and time-consuming by chronic illness and physical disability:

> … I went to the [grocery store] before, the raspberries sometimes or strawberries could be bad the next day… The only thing is with at least, um, these grocery stores, they'll take it back and give you another one,… but it's really annoying because you have to go back like within a day or two of it and that's a whole trip over there again, right? Like… if you were… it's a lot of time to go shopping this way. It's, for some people, it's a lot of bus fare, so if you're… if you see you're gonna save 20 cents on eggs, then if you spend three dollars… you know, 2.25 [sic], if your transfer doesn't run out on the bus ticket, you… it's not worth the time.

Sometimes, mothers arrive at the store to find that the shelves are empty and will not be restocked, wasting their time and a trip to the store. Most of the time mothers settle for the local food retail outlets over hunting for sales. They only sacrifice their budget to go to convenience stores in times of desperation, such as needing milk for their children's breakfast. As with the grocery stores in the neighbourhood, however, mothers have concerns about the quality of food sold at convenience stores, including the nutritional quality and the expiration dates on food items. Interestingly, the mothers emphasize that they would prefer to shop at convenience stores if they sold more fresh products, had better prices, and had better quality control because their proximity makes shopping at them more convenient than walking to the grocery store.

	Most to least accessed →		Most to least accessed →	
Food retail outlet			**Community-based food services and programs (CBFSPs)**	
<u>Grocery stores</u>	**<u>Corner/variety/ convenience store</u>**	**<u>Other stores (Shoppers, etc.)</u>**	**<u>Food banks</u>**	**<u>Other CBFSPs (meal programs, community kitchens)</u>**
Sales: quality, availability, nutritional quality, perishability	Price = EXPENSIVE	Convenience/ happened to be there	Feelings	Nutritional quality available
Comparative price	Proximity to home and convenience	Essential food items	Quantity of food given	Variety/monotony of food
Quality	Selection of produce/fresh	Sales	Choice/food preferences/ restrictions	Inconsistent food selection
Specialty items/selection & variety	Quality/safety of food		Quality : rotten, nutritional quality, mystery items	
Rush hours			One month rule	
Hours of operation			Days and hours of operation	
			Time of the year: holidays	
			Long wait times	
			"Specialty" items: milk and meat	
			Monotony of food	
			Inconsistent food selection	
			Environment: accessibility, people who utilize	

Most to least discussed place-based considerations (left vertical axis label, arrow pointing down)

Table 3: Food resources and corresponding contextual considerations in general descending order of importance

With respect to food banks, it is necessary to understand how mothers decide whether or not to utilize them. Food banks are by far the most frequently discussed CBFSPs. Choosing whether or not to use a food bank seems to be an extremely emotional process, and this emotional process is the biggest consideration when deciding whether to go. Most mothers utilize food banks with varying frequency, but a few of the mothers are adamant about not using food banks. Belinda explains that although there are times in which she could utilize a food bank, what she sees as the emotional degradation and the guilt of taking from others outweighs her need:

> It's not that I haven't needed a food bank, there are times that I have, but I would just suffer or I would try to depend on my family or something because I find it a little bit degrading standing in the food, uh, bank line… And then they ask you questions and you have to tell them what you're on and you have to show your cheque stub and ya, I just find it so degrading that I'd just rather not. So, for someone like myself, if I could get a voucher or a grocery card, I'd feel better about that than standing in a food bank, and then I always think, you know, there are people who are worse than myself because I only have one child, so I don't want to take from them, so I'll figure something out. Right? And leave the food banks for people with lots of children.

In particular during the focus group, mothers mention a system like a gift card as being a more dignified way of receiving food assistance. There are also other rationales for refusing to utilize a food bank. When I ask her about whether there were enough CBFSPs, Laura replies that her neighbourhood lacks them, but she also explains why she elects to not utilize a food bank:

> I don't think there's [sic] enough of them. My sister uses them and a couple of her friends have. I don't think there's enough, and they're far in between. So, but I don't use them because I'm already getting free money from the government, right, Ontario Works? So I don't feel that I should use that, too. I don't think it's right.

Laura, like Belinda, describes her decision as taking from someone. Nonetheless, mothers who do choose to utilize food banks also have emotions to contend with, justifying their actions.

Anna illustrates how her emotions used to prevent her from utilizing food banks, but that she now goes for the sake of her children:

> *Now, I guess back in the day, my pride used to stop me from going to the food bank, but when you really do need the help, you set that pride aside and say, "I don't care if people look at me, I am here for my children, not for me, for my children," and that kind of makes you feel a little bit better knowing that you're doing something right. But otherwise, sometimes you're like, "don't look at me," you know? That's the way you feel. I think almost everybody feels that way.*

Once mothers contend with these emotions, there are various considerations they make in choosing which particular food bank they utilize. Except for at the fringe of the neighbourhoods of study, food banks do not exist in the neighbourhoods, requiring mothers to travel Downtown, an area that most mothers prefer to avoid (Figure 3, p. 55). It surprised me that few mothers mention other types of CBFSPs, such as free meal programs, community kitchens, and community gardens; however, perhaps this lack of discussion stems from such resources either not existing in the neighbourhoods or not yet being well established.

With respect to food banks, there are a few constraints imposed on mothers that dictate which food banks they can go to, including the 'one month rule'[26], the days and hours of operation, and the criteria that need to be met in order to utilize services. A further constraint is the preference to avoid certain food banks. Some mothers are steadfast about avoiding some food banks after having poor experiences at them. When mothers choose food banks, a large consideration is weighing the quantity of food received against its quality. Sometimes they choose to frequent specific food banks less if the food given out is known to be of poor quality (whether it was of poor nutritional quality, spoiled/rotten, or a mystery item that lacked a label

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[26] The 'one month rule' instituted by the emergency food providers in the city says that people utilizing food banks can only access the same food bank once every 30 days. Therefore if 'Jamie Smith' went to food bank x this month, s/he could not return until 30 days later. This system is enforced by providers through an integrated online system. People utilizing food banks are given a card telling them when they can next return.

and/or an expiration date). But despite being discerning, many mothers are forced to either throw out various quantities of food they receive because it is rotten or give it away because it is not a food they eat.

In conjunction with being under financial and emotional duress, choosing to go to a food bank entails a degree of uncertainty. First of all, with a few exceptions, mothers are unable to choose specific food items and the quantities of food items they desire. They are also unable to predict the selection and the quantity of food available at their chosen food bank(s), which adds to the stress of needing to utilize a food bank. The quantity and selection of food available at the food bank is contingent on the donations that food bank receives and the demand at since the previous delivery of donations. However, one factor that remains consistent is that food bank donations tend to be monotonous, consisting of the same canned goods, dried goods, other non-perishables, and low nutritional quality snacks. If not monotonous, donations consist of products that mothers are unsure of how to use. To add to their duress, sometimes mothers show up to food banks to be told that there is no food left to be given out or that only low nutritional quality foods remain. This uncertainty coupled with the poor quality of food makes for a stressful, frustrating, and time-consuming experience.

4.2.3   Knowledge

Part of the mothers' intentionality in choosing specific food resources comes from their knowledge of their foodscape. It includes knowledge about both the physical environment, including where to acquire certain food items, as well as the social norms around food, including knowledge of healthy eating.

Mothers have extensive knowledge of the prices of food items because cost is such an important consideration when choosing where to acquire food. They know both items' regular prices and sale prices so that they can determine where to buy food, and whether or not to buy items. Mothers often choose to buy items because they are on sale, and not necessarily because they are the most desired items. Claire, an interviewee, describes how she chooses produce based on price, and not necessarily on household preferences:

> *Like one of my daughters likes pears but if they're above 99 cents a pound, then it's sort of prohibitive so I don't. Cucumbers, same thing. So, what I will choose is generally based on the price it is, because if cucumbers are 1.29 each this week, I'll think, "alright, I'll skip the cucumbers for broccoli or something else that's on sale" and when cucumbers do go on sale, then we'll eat them that week. So it's… a lot of it is price driven cuz I don't have a lot of money to spend on things.*

Mothers also have knowledge of the relative prices of food items. This is apparent in two ways: observing the increase in prices over time and noticing the difference in price between tiers of products, i.e. store-brand versus name-brand versus premium (e.g. organic, local). On a number of occasions, mothers mention that they have noticed the increase in prices over the years. Consequently, they have had to downgrade from name-brand products to store-brand products. For the most part, they acknowledge that they wish name-brand and premium items were financially accessible to them, but price is such an important consideration that mothers do not even consider premium items. For them, there is no way in which they could afford premium items, such as organic or local produce. They did, however, consider certain specialty items that they are willing to treat their families to, for example, fish and meat.

When money is in extremely short supply, some of the mothers harness their knowledge of the emergency food system to acquire food for their families. Again, although most of the mothers utilize food banks, there are a few who elect not to go for various reasons. They

therefore have little or no knowledge of how to gain entry into the system or how it functions. The mothers who elect to utilize food banks utilize them with varying frequency, but all have extensive knowledge of the system. This includes knowledge of their days and hours of operation, their rules, and the criteria that need to be met in order to utilize services. This knowledge also serves as knowledge of the constraints the emergency food system places on people who utilize their services. They describe hearing of the recent changes to the system whereby the system integrated electronically to better streamline its services. Mothers, however, interpret this change to be a more efficient way of enforcing the 'one month rule', as well as imposing more restrictions on people who are already disproportionately affected by economic decline and who already lack choices in the way they acquired food. The mothers use this knowledge with their preferences to choose which food banks to utilize.

Whether to access a food bank or a food retail outlet, mothers need an extensive knowledge of the geography of the city. They know where food retail outlets and CBFSPs are located by street name, which helped me become more acquainted with the food resources they utilize, as well as understand their journeys better. Their knowledge of Hamilton also extends to areas in which they either do not feel safe or areas they avoid. Many of the mothers describe Downtown as an area that they, for various reasons, want to avoid. They perceive Downtown negatively because it is busy with car traffic, because they consider it unsafe, or because it is inaccessible by their ways of travelling on foot or by bus.

Finally, contrary to the general public perception that people of low-income lack an understanding of healthy eating and cooking, mothers exhibit extensive knowledge of good nutrition. Some mothers demonstrate their knowledge about healthy eating by discussing serving a certain number of food groups for their children and basing their diets on Health Canada's

Food Guide. I did not administer a nutrition test, but, from our conversations, they acknowledge that they need to increase the amount of fresh fruits and vegetables in their families' diets. Furthermore, mothers have knowledge of how to cook various meals, but feel they do not have the tools to expand their skills and knowledge to encompass a greater variety of foods into their meals. They describe extreme financial constraints as preventing them from acting on their knowledge, and not a lack of understanding about nutrition or availability of healthy foods. Laura describes choosing cereals based on price rather than nutritional value because of her financial constraints:

> *It would be cheaper to buy Froot Loops® than it would be to buy the other, the other kind my kids like, the one that has the fruits in it. Like it's Wheat and Fruit and everything, they really like that, but it's like five bucks versus three bucks [for the Froot Loops®]. Sometimes we'll go and get the other one, but yeah, sometimes we'll do the Froot Loops® instead because it's cheaper.*

Her quote also incorporates her need to balance nutrition, preference, and cost. Although Laura understands that the higher nutrition cereal is healthier and is the preferred cereal of her children, she is often unable to afford it. Similarly, financial constraints also prevent mothers from taking their children out for healthier treats because there is a lack of availability of affordable, healthy treats in the neighbourhood.

4.2.4   Temporal considerations

Finally, mothers have to think about various temporal scales when deciding from which food resources to acquire food. They can be summarized as: time of the year, time of the week and day, and time of the month. Although these temporal considerations are ordered by the extent to which they are discussed, mothers' particular situations dictate which timeframe they have to consider the most. Some mothers describe having to consider time of the year because

special occasions, holidays like Thanksgiving and Christmas, and the beginning of the school year apply pressure to their already constrained budgets. It forces them into making longer-term financial decisions because of the need to rearrange the budget to include gifts, larger meals, and school supplies. Mothers often do not have the financial resources to purchase most of these extras or to financially plan in the long-term. More often than not, it means looking to food banks for assistance with holiday food baskets and school supplies.

For some mothers, the most important temporal consideration is planning the weekly shopping trip and the time of week and day to go out. Taking their children out on shopping trips is quite stressful for some mothers, particularly mothers without social support networks. Whether or not their children go with them often dictates when to go shopping. Mothers think about how busy the store will be, how busy public transit will be, food resource hours, and how frequently public transit runs. Mothers who have social support networks have some relief in having the ability to diminish the consideration of, for example, how busy public transit will be and how frequently it runs.

For other mothers, time of the month proves to be the main consideration they make. When SA and/or employment cheques come through dictate whether or not they are able to go to food resources, as well as which food resources mothers access. For example, when money comes through, mothers are able to go out and buy more food, and perhaps buy in bulk, but in the last few days leading up to their cheques coming through, mothers are either unable to go to stores at all or make the decision to go to a food bank.

4.3   The need for structural change

The second macro theme gleaned from the data analysis was the need for structural

change. It is clear that the constant, everyday act of balancing myriad contextual factors directly

informs the ways mothers want to see their lives improve. Most describe needing structural

change on various scales—neighbourhood, municipal, and provincial—in order to improve their

families' QoL. I am, however, surprised by the amount of time, as well as the extent and depth to

which we talked about the structural change they want to see. Perhaps I am surprised because I

had set up my interview schedule to prioritize understanding the mothers' everyday experiences.

I had conceptualized the aspect of the interview that examines structural change as a secondary

priority to pique the curiosity of people with power and resources in the city. I asked questions

about how food retail outlets, programs, and services could improve, as well as questions geared

towards understanding the conditions in their lives that need to improve to achieve food security.

Mothers illustrate various ways in which they want to see their lives improve so they can provide

for their children in the way they desire. Most of these changes are not directly food-based, but

rather food-related, and include: financial resources, educating the public about their everyday

lives, and improving retail food outlets and CBFSPs.

4.3.1   Financial resources

Since financial resources and price are such prominent contextual considerations, it is not

surprising that we had conversations about improving mothers' financial resources. Most

basically, mothers require an increase in their income, whether from SA or from working, as well

as receiving all of the income they were entitled to.

4.3.1.1 Social assistance

When asked about which conditions in their lives need to improve for mothers to be able to work towards food security, changing SA was the most common response. The current form of SA is not allowing them to improve their families' QoL by, for example, saving for their and/or their children's futures due to low SA rates and low asset allowances. To further limit mothers, clawbacks have been instituted whereby if mothers receive more than one income, the lesser amount is deducted dollar per dollar from their SA allowance. Take, for example, a mother on OW who also receives the Ontario Child Benefit (OCB). Because the OCB is a dollar amount per child, the clawback measure deducts the OCB amount from the OW amount dollar per dollar. The clawbacks punish mothers by reducing the income on which to support their families rather than incentivizing going back to school or work.

Most basically, improvements to SA entail increasing rates to livable standards. Currently the rates are set arbitrarily and only cover basic living costs for survival (T. Cooper, personal communication, March 13, 2012). Mothers want to see an increase in SA rates such that they are able to afford the food they desire and need, as well as cover the cost of childcare. Mothers feel that, because childcare is not incorporated into SA rates, they spend a substantial portion of their income on childcare. Belinda illustrates a chicken-or-egg situation where parents are confronted with the dilemma of whether it is more cost-effective to work a low-wage job and pay for childcare or to just stay at home and care for one's own children:

> *And like… and daycare, too, like, you know, if you don't have a career or nothing and you gotta take a job at McDonald's or something, it's great now minimum wage has now gone up to $10.25, that's fantastic, but when it was in the seven dollar range and that, you know, I go to work at McDonald's or something for seven dollars an hour and it's costing me four to five dollars an hour for my babysitter, so I'm going to work technically for two to three [dollars] an hour. It ain't even worth it. I might as well stay at home and look after my own child, you know?*

Mothers not only want to see adequacy in SA rates, but also want to see it become more flexible and understanding of where mothers are coming from. If mothers are required to reveal the minutest details about their lives, then they want to see the system become equally transparent and easy to navigate. The desire for transparency stems from mothers feeling that the rules for SA keep changing without notice, which impedes their ability to budget into the future. Tammy describes SA placing her in a dire situation when going back to school:

> *I was on OW, registered to go to school, applied for OSAP [Ontario Student Assistance Program] and was approved. My OSAP wasn't going to come to me until the end of November. I started school… Mid-October? Closer to the beginning. The day I started, they cut me off the system [OW], and my worker told me, "You're smart enough to go back to school. You should've been smart enough to put money aside to help you until your OSAP came in… So here I am, a single mom, going October and November with no income. None. They push you and push you and push you to go back to school to better yourself… and so I do and then they leave me hanging for two months.*

They desire a system that is empathetic to mothers' varying situations while being supportive of their efforts to improve their lives. They want workers within the system to serve more as advocates than rule-enforcers. Mothers define support as emotional support to have the courage to work towards their goals, as well as educational and/or employment guidance on the variety of options open to them. Some mothers, however, want flexibility in terms of being able to stay at home to care for their children and/or wanting flexibility for health concerns or disabilities they must contend with before entering the workforce. They feel like the system thrusts them into situations that do not fit their trajectory for themselves. Mothers see SA and supportive services like social housing as rigid entities designed to keep recipients reliant on the system, despite messaging by different levels of government marketing SA as a short term measure meant to lift recipients out of poverty. Mothers want a flexible, transparent system that supports them in getting off the system. Lily aptly describes how she perceives SA after it

thwarted her desires on multiple occasions to return to school and how her experiences make her feel:

> *The system, the problem, in my opinion, the system is not designed to help you. It is designed to make you, um, dependent on it and keep you dependent on it and that's not helpful… It's not designed to let you save, like you're supposed to be putting this $500 in your kids' RSP [Retirement Savings Plan]. Oh yeah, do that! We'll match you. Yeah, sure. Where the heck am I getting that money from? How am I supposed to skimp and save if I'm living pay cheque to bloody pay cheque, plus I'm on bloody welfare… Like, it's a vicious, vicious circle, and, and then you actually look back and stand in your shoes and go, "Ok! How am I supposed to make myself feel good today?"*

4.3.1.2 Income

For the few mothers who work, it is readily apparent that they are in a similar situation to the mothers on SA. They, too, earn an inadequate income. Belinda's quote from the previous section highlights the tension between moving from SA to low -wage work, and the implicit barriers put in place by SA to get off the system. The mothers who work have similar challenges to mothers on SA and encounter many of the same decision-making processes. The working mothers want to see and feel that their hard work benefits their families in the immediate future by being able to put food on the table, and in the long term by having enough money to save for the future. They want a livable wage. Saving is often not possible because they have to spend their pay cheques paying bills and buying necessities. Consequently, both mothers on SA and mothers earning minimum wage want budgeting support to make their dollar go even further while working towards a livable wage. "How are we supposed to know how to budget if we've never grown up with anything?" they asked rhetorically.

4.3.1.3 Childcare

All mothers, working or on SA, want to see childcare improve. The lack of affordable, flexible, trustworthy childcare in close proximity to their homes is impeding their ability to provide for their families, go back to school, or enter the workforce. Childcare is seen as prohibitively expensive and is hard to find in their neighbourhoods. If it can be found, mothers are skeptical of its trustworthiness. In addition, mothers are finding it challenging to place multiple children at the same daycare due to lack of space or age restrictions. Mothers end up having to travel long distances outside of their neighbourhoods to find suitable childcare. Charlotte and Tammy illustrate this point when they recount various barriers they encounter to getting their children into childcare:

> Charlotte: … *I had to wait a couple of months [to get my son picked up for daycare], so I lived in this area and I had to go all the way to the Red Hill area by two buses to drop him off at a certain time… It took about four or five months before they finally got him a spot on the van to pick him up. So it was really difficult because I had to get my daughter on the school bus here and then I had to rush all the way to Red Hill by taking two buses so I was running around like crazy.*

> Tammy: … *when I was starting school, I had to look for childcare. A subsidy was going to pay for it. But I didn't want to separate my kids and I would have no choice. I would've had to go ten minutes that way for my son and ten minutes that way for my daughter and then half an hour that way to get to school. I didn't want to do that. Luckily I found another neighbour… who watched my children for free over the summer. But even to put them in the after-school program at their school, it's $115 a week.*

4.3.1.4 Child support

For lone mothers, paying for childcare and raising children is a particularly challenging task because their one income supports the whole family. All of the mothers I interviewed have little or no child support from the fathers, even when there is paternal involvement in the

children's lives. Mothers, therefore, want to see child support payments be enforced so that they

receive all of the money they are entitled to. They also want to see the clawbacks of child

support from SA removed so that mothers are able to receive the full amount of both forms of

income. Anna describes her frustrations with the clawbacks of child support and the inadequate

amount of money she is left with to provide for her children:

> *I think it sucks that OW takes dollar per dollar for child support when that should
> be going to your children. And they take it dollar per dollar so my cheque is like
> 500 bucks. What's* that *supposed to do? That don't (sic) even cover my rent.*

A few mothers go as far as suggesting that, as well as providing child support, fathers—

and men in general—need to be more involved with raising children and that male self-esteem

needs to be addressed at various ages. When asked how to improve CBFSPs, Ellen responds that

both mothers and fathers need to learn how to cook for their kids, and how this learning process

can help integrate fathers more into their children's lives: "*Have more community things to teach*

mothers and fathers, even single fathers, people how to cook, for sure."

4.3.2   Educate the public about lone mothers' everyday realities

Mothers believe that one of the ways to improve their QoL is to have researchers educate

the public about their everyday lives. They feel that public discourse and the beliefs held by

decision-makers are not reflective of people who have "walked in their shoes" or have empathy

for their situation. This theme is particularly well illustrated during the focus group, where Jen

describes that the mothers could easily imagine what life was like with plentiful resources but

decision-makers could not imagine the mothers' resource-scarce lives:

> *I just want to say that I have spoken in front of politicians, and, uh, people,
> service providers and the truth of the matter is that they're not, they've never
> experienced it. And, um, it's hard for them to understand. It's certainly something*

that they walk away from every evening and they're heading in directions that you've never necessarily experienced where they've got two or three cars, or they've got their kids educated, where they've got the fabulous homes and vacations… it's like talking to walls in a lot of ways, uh, because they haven't experienced it. And from the viewpoint of the other direction with the limitedness, you can imagine *their life, you know, but they can't imagine yours.*

To change public discourse, mothers want researchers to take their findings to educate the public and lobby the government. They feel as if their voices are ignored and powerless to make change, and that having researchers as allies would give credibility to their voices. At the same time, they describe that, all too often, researchers come into the neighbourhoods and extract their knowledge with the neighbourhoods never seeing any benefit. A KI highlights the fact that she often does not allow researchers into her neighbourhood because of previous negative experiences with them. Researchers are swooping into the neighbourhood, only to pull out and publish papers at the researchers' gain:

> *Our neighbourhood has been researched enough. Use that research and do something to help. What are you doing with that research? You're promoting yourself… That's why I allowed you to come because you're not… I thought [your research] could really benefit this neighbourhood, but very, very often, this neighbourhood is being researched for the benefit of the person who is researching.*

This justifiable mistrust of researchers extends to decision-makers, in particular, those in politics. During the interviews, I asked mothers: "if we were sitting around a table with people with power and resources, what would you say to them?" During the focus group, I was surprised to hear one of the quietest participants, Tammy, respond with such clarity and purpose. Her suggestion then led into a conversation about the inadequacy of SA rates:

> Tammy: *I think somebody should take, just for a month, take [decision-makers'] cars away, take the credit cards away… take their suits away...*

> Lily: *Put them in our shoes.*

Tammy: … *just for a month, put them in a Downtown apartment and give them…*
Charlotte: … *on a limited income…*

Tammy: … *give them what an OW recipient would get and say, "you make it work. Here's your bills, these are your kids, there's your dog, and that's what you have to do." And see how they make it work.*

The participants then calculate the budget for the meager income for a single recipient of OW. Even after only taking basic necessities into account, such as rent, food, and transportation, there is no money left at the end of the month. "How is anyone to find a job if there is no money left over to buy work appropriate clothes?" they ask. How are they to enjoy life at holidays if there is not even enough money to buy the basics? They come back to what they would like to see politicians do, and conclude that they have little faith in them:

Belinda: *But nobody would do it.*

Lily: *But, but, put it around a, a holiday, when, when you have a birthday coming up, when you have a Christmas….Thanksgiving coming up, when you have something big that you have to do with your family, and things are going to be stretched tight. Because every month, it's something else.*

Throughout the interviews, mothers allude to having little faith in the possibility of the dominant discourse changing to acknowledge their struggles for survival. Some mothers did not even respond to my questions with structural changes, as if they will never be able to change their situation. They constantly internalize that their neighbourhoods have little value to people with power and resources, except for the Ivor Wynne Stadium, which continues to be used by City Hall as leverage to bring more investments to Hamilton. Mothers feel that when the rest of the city views their neighbourhoods as poor, decaying, and lifeless, both as a result of *Code Red* and in general conversation, they are not able to feel proud of their neighbourhoods. To them, the dominant discourse actually impedes their ability to advocate for and to create the change in their neighbourhoods that they desire because the City and service providers just throw band aids at

them rather than supporting a long-term solution. Rachel explains that she wants to see long-term

solutions come from *Code Red*, not just more charity:

> *…the Code Red articles are blah, blah, blah, bad, shorter life expectancy, all these bad things, and nothing, we want to have a neighbourhood where good things are going on. And you need to help people to help themselves. You know, not bailing people out, but giving them the tools.*

Jen goes further and calls out policymakers as completely reliant on the churches and

community-based organizations to provide for Hamiltonians: "*The City has been relying on the*

good spirit of churches, and, you know, communities that are very, um, working together to look

after this story, when it's really the City's story." She goes on to acknowledge the mothers' own

role in advocating for themselves, as well as to call me to task to also push policymakers to live

up to their words:

> *... we need to call then to task. [Former Mayor] Eisenberger… he said there would be a universal lunch or breakfast program in the city. It hasn't materialized, so, like, we have obligations to keep on them about things. But coming from your direction, that's great because you're coming to where the needs are, and we need your total involvement in, um, making them listen to these studies, you know? You're doing it for your school purposes but on, uh, a secondary level, the City didn't pay ten thousand dollars for this study.*

4.3.3   Improving community-based programs and services

At the same time, mothers see community-based programs and services, not only

community-based *food* services and programs, as instrumental in supporting them in improving

QoL while fighting for structural change. It is interesting to see that few mothers mention food

banks as a supportive service in the long-term. Mothers feel these programs and services should

be available to all, and not just those in dire situations, like women living in shelters. Because

mothers exhibit a range of knowledge about different types of community-based programs and

services that they want to see, it is more fruitful to describe the characteristics of such programs and services. Mothers want to see programs and services that are: (i) accessible; (ii) empathetic, non-shaming, and non-patronizing; and (iii) supportive and holistic.

First and foremost, mothers see accessibility of services as the top priority. Accessibility of services entails a whole host of meanings, but most importantly they need to be free or low-cost and in a central location that is walkable. Currently, there are few programs and services located in the neighbourhoods of study, although some are taking shape. Even the mothers with cars would prefer to have programs and services in close proximity to their homes where they can easily walk. Accessibility also means that services and programming need to be during times that accommodate different school hours and work schedules, and would need to provide childcare if children are not at school. Once mothers participate in programs and services, the language used would need to be accessible. This does not mean patronizingly dumbing down language, but utilizing language that mothers can identify with. For example, refraining from terms such as "food security", which are meaningless to the mothers, or avoiding terms like "local" and "organic" as these are terms for products that are either not currently financially accessible to mothers or are movements that do not seem inclusive of the mothers' situations.

Language is one way in which programs and services can also be empathetic to their situation, as well as non-shaming and non-patronizing. Mothers want to see programs and services that acknowledge mothers' different types of knowledge and assets, and help build on and deepen these skills. Furthermore, they desire such services and programs because they are tired of being painted as poor, impoverished, and lacking any skills. For example, during the focus group, mothers describe wanting a space to come together to build community and friendships by cooking with other mothers and sharing recipes, culinary knowledge, and

strategies to build on skills they already possess. The best way to create empathetic services and

programs is for these projects to be created by and for the neighbourhoods. Claire illustrates a

problem with existing services in the neighbourhood:

> *It becomes difficult when you talk about service providers because, again, there's just such a huge discrepancy between what a provider is and thinks of a neighbourhood, and what a neighbourhood actually needs. And so the closer we can get those two yakking with each other so that it's not so much of a them-us kind of thing, the better it will be.*

Some mothers even see such programs and services as a segue into building employment

skills and to create new jobs in the neighbourhood. For example, some mothers describe wanting

to see a co-op or catering service in their neighbourhood that can be staffed by residents.

Programs and services can be empathetic by being supportive and having a holistic view

of mothers and residents. They want to see programs and services that meet them where they are,

rather than dictating how they should be. Most of all, they want spaces in which they can be

supported and be supportive of others to build self-esteem and to learn from one another.

Building self-esteem can occur in various aspects of their lives, such as budgeting and cooking.

They believe that having multiple programs and services in one location that facilitate and

cultivate mothers' various roles would be most effective and convenient. Jen reminds us that

they also want programs and services that are fun and not just about survival.

4.3.4   Retail food outlets

Similar to the community-based programs and services suggestions, it is most fruitful if I

describe characteristics of retail food outlets that mothers want to see rather than a spectrum of

retail food outlets they describe. Mothers, again, have varying depths of knowledge about the

different types of outlets available, from *Walmart* to corner fruit and vegetable markets to farmers' markets.

Since balancing price and quality is so important, mothers want to see more retail food outlets in their neighbourhoods that could achieve this balance, particularly with respect to produce and meat. There are not enough food retail outlets like grocery stores or farmers' markets in the neighbourhoods, and the outlets that do exist have good prices but often sacrifice quality to achieve lower prices. Mothers suggest that some of the outlets outside of their neighbourhoods that they perceive as managing this balance could come to the neighbourhood, such as *Walmart* and *Lococo's*. Having more retail food outlets in their neighbourhoods would make the area more convenient and walkable, diminishing the time taken and distance travelled to acquire quality, affordable food. However, mothers also suggest changing the store layout to be more family-friendly. Mothers describe struggling to navigate their way around the retail food outlets with strollers, buggies, and shopping carts. Laura and I discuss the retail food outlets around her neighbourhood and how there does not seem to be one she considers 'good'. I ask her what constitutes a good store for her, and layout comes out as important:

> *One that's going to have fresh food. Um, there needs to be more space. Like with the aisles, for example. My [stroller] is a double [stroller] where it sits in the front. There's not a whole lot of aisle space, especially if someone else is coming up, and I push a cart behind me, so we're like a train so it makes it even worse.*

4.4 Strategies

However, while food retail outlets remain as they are, mothers have to employ various strategies to put food on the table. The third macro theme that emerged from the data analysis was the strategies mothers used to provide for their families. These strategies can be divided into three categories: planning and budgeting, social support networks, and coping with shortage.

Because they prioritize their extreme financial constraints and the price of food, mothers spend much time planning and budgeting how they are going to spend their money. How they actually end up spending it depends on whether their children go with them to the store and whether other bills and household functions take priority. Various tools are employed in order to facilitate planning and budgeting. Weekly flyers from grocery stores are the most commonly used tools. Flyers help mothers scan stores across the city for sale items, and serve as tools in price-matching. I, and some of the other participants, learned from some of the mothers that some stores participate in price matching, whereby if you find, for example, raspberries on sale at store A for less than store B, you can take the flyer from store A into store B and get the item for store A's price. Price matching allows mothers to marginally reduce the distance travelled. To carry all of their flyer-based purchases home, they utilize the stroller, shopping buggy, or wagon. If they have space or help from their children, they are able to buy more sale items found in the flyers in bulk.

Social support networks assist the mothers in various ways, for example by giving them rides to maximize purchasing in bulk. Mothers have varying degrees of support from these networks, from weekly rides to the store to just occasional rides to *Costco*. The most common ways in which social support networks assist mothers are by either offering rides to stores that are further afield or by providing childcare while they go to retail food outlets or the food bank. Mothers take advantage of social support networks to expedite their shopping trips while increasing the distance travelled and increasing the amount and weight of food they can take home. Social support networks serve as informal childcare while mothers travel to food retail outlets or to food banks to avoid exposing their children to the reality of their situation. Being able to rely on social support networks means that mothers can expedite their trips, lower the

cost of travelling to food resources, and better stick to their budgets. Mothers appreciate childcare in particular when going to a food bank to avoid exposing their children to the reality of their situations. Lily, after describing relying on her parents for informal childcare, describes why she chooses not to take her children with her to the food bank:

> *But if I have to go to a food bank, I don't take the kids. I, sorry, it's a, it's a, I can't make my kids sit in line, just like Belinda was saying, sitting in the, it's degrading, sitting in line waiting and your kids ask questions and, "Mum, what are we doing here?" "Well, we're getting groceries." "Well, don't you have to pay?" "Well, no, you don't have to." You know, it's the whole rigmarole and it's just like, "You know what? I'm not comfortable talking about that at this stage in your life." You know, um, so if I have to go to a food bank, I don't take my kids.*

Social support networks also support mothers in other informal ways, such as sharing food, borrowing money, and spreading the word about programs and services available to mothers. A few mothers have friends with whom they split their food purchases and cooking duties to alleviate some of their stress. Tammy describes this synergy with one of her friends:

> *I have a girlfriend and we split on something we could both use [from Costco]… and we pretty much eat together every night. I will cook the potatoes, and she will cook the meat and then we'll switch and it's…. we're both together all the time. If I have no milk, she's got the milk. If she has no bread, I've got the bread. It's a constant sharing.*

Thus, in describing their ideal types of programs and services, mothers want spaces where they can expand their social support networks, spaces where they can tell each other about different strategies they use to get through the month, while also providing emotional support for each other. The focus group seems to have become such a space. At one point Lily comforts Belinda by saying that no one in the group is judging her and that she is not alone. Later on in the conversation, Belinda worries about her financial situation for the month, and Jen offers some information about a program by the City that will pay one's hydro bill once a year. The mothers' encouragement serves as a support and a reprieve. Conversely, mothers without social support

networks describe struggling to make it through the month financially and emotionally. Jean describes coming to Canada and having no social supports while raising her daughter, which impacts her ability to work, as well as her emotional wellbeing:

> *So [my social worker] told me I can't work when I want to work! So that was…*
> *and I had no family here either, keep in mind, you know, and maybe it would've*
> *been different if I had my family. I was a little bit lost, I think, looking back in*
> *retrospect. Lost and needed guidance.*

When mothers divert some of their food budget towards paying bills or purchasing other household necessities, or when they simply run out of money, they need strategies to cope with shortage. When I ask about whether they go without food, mothers respond that they always have some food in the house, even if it is of poor nutritional quality or monotonous. They make sure their children never go without food. They stretch food, eat the basics like soup, and go without favourite food items until they can be purchased again. The mothers who elect to utilize food banks use them as a last resort, and, in fact, many of them utilize food banks infrequently, only going at holidays and under other extenuating circumstances.

4.5   Feelings around being a lone mother

The fourth and final macro theme is the feelings that the mothers experience. Coping materially and financially and always having to plan takes an emotional toll on mothers. Mothers internalize the constant messaging from sources like the different levels of government and the media to such an extent that they are constantly comparing themselves to what they perceive as the image of the perfect 'good mother'. They constantly feel like they fall short of the mark and this contributes heavily to the negative feelings they have about themselves. They all have different ways of coping with their balancing act, but they all exhibit dissonant and antithetical

feelings. On the one hand, mothers are in a constant coping and survival mode, feeling stressed, frustrated, and embarrassed while trying—and, in many cases, believing they have failed—to be 'good mothers'. On the other hand, mothers are compassionate, grateful, and humble towards their neighbours and others who work to support them. And most of all, they are hopeful and confident in their children's ability to succeed and to live a life different to their own. Jen, the most politically active and oldest of all of the participants, illustrates this most avidly when she talks about her own "…[voice] going into thin air", but how:

> *… we don't want to walk this path, we don't want our children to walk the same path. We want the future to be bright and beautiful. Um, and it sounds whimsical for me to say that, but it's so incredibly possible that, but we have to have it happen, you know, in this generation.*

However, for the most part, we discuss the constant and complex set of negative feelings that they experience. Not only do mothers feel that they are coping and surviving financially and materially, but also emotionally. All of them rationalize their decisions as being for the sake of their children regardless of their own feelings. Mothers describe that they are doing the best with what they have in order to survive. Lily and Susan illustrate the need to survive despite the obstacles in their way:

> Lily: *And, it's, what, what do you do? You, you want to better yourself [to get off social assistance] and then you get kicked in the shins, you know? What do you do? You survive.*

> Susan: *You actually have to plan [trips to the food bank] because the time you spend to actually get the food is, it's kind of annoying [because I have to take a half day off from work], but you gotta do what you gotta do to survive, right?*

Unlike many of the other mothers, however, Susan and a minority of others have also just accepted that coping and surviving are an inevitable part of everyday life and that nothing can change their situation. When I ask her about specific challenges she thinks lone mothers face

and how the challenges can be diminished, she responds as if she has to overcome the challenges

herself without supports at the structural level:

> *Yeah, I mean I think coping and dealing with it and having to, you know always*
> *plan ahead. And to, you know, budget your money, and it's hard to budget when*
> *you have four kids and they want this and that and, you know, you feel obligated*
> *to get it for them…*

Susan's explanation also highlights some of the facets of their lives that lead mothers to

be stressed and frustrated. Their extreme financial and material constraints, as well as constantly

calculating their budgets, leave them feeling as though they are unable to fulfill their duties as

'good mothers'. Food, and nutritional messaging, seems to epitomize their stress and frustration

because they feel as if they are bad mothers for not providing what they know to be the healthiest

food. The general public and professionals, however, often perceive mothers' decision-making to

be due to a lack of knowledge, and subsequently create more messaging and education reflecting

these perceptions. The fact that the mothers rely on charity, in the form of food banks, and SA to

be able to receive substandard food also contributes to their frustration at themselves and their

inability to be 'good mothers'. For mothers who did not and/or could not work, the messaging

from the provincial government about SA and the general public's perception that SA recipients

are not contributing members of society creates a sense of panic amongst mothers, leading them

to feel that they have to always be justifying their choices.

Because of this unbalanced relationship with the charitable sector and the state, mothers

feel ashamed to ask for what is rightfully theirs. They feel embarrassed and frustrated at

themselves for even having the idea of asking. Anna experienced a situation where her OW

cheque once increased in value when she went from being in a partnership to being a lone

mother. OW had put too much on her cheque one month and subsequently deducted the

overpayment from the next month's cheque without notifying her. She called her SA worker to

rectify the situation by asking for the full amount for the month so she could pay her rent: *"They say, 'Take it out of your Baby Bonus. Pay your rent that way.' And then they go, they look at you and go, 'Do you have a problem with that?' And you're just like… yup."*

Utilizing food banks has a similar effect where a proportion of mothers that utilize food banks feel that it is not right or dignified that they have to lay out their entire lives to receive SA and charity to only then be given substandard means to live by. Some are willing to accept the tradeoff between their privacy and assistance, while others believe it unfair. Both groups, however, feel that they have little choice in the matter if they are going to survive. On the one hand, Rachel feels a total lack of dignity from the charitable sector and feels like they do not provide her with an appropriate response when given substandard products:

> *So, and if you say anything, well, they say, "Volunteers, well, they're just volunteers, and they didn't notice and that," but it's not, you have to go through all these hoops of proving you're worthy of getting these dented cans, you know? Like, are we not, worth more than that?*

On the other hand, Lily is willing to endure household audits and is extremely grateful because she is getting a financial break to live in subsidized housing. The audits are so extreme that we even joke about City Housing knowing about the type of toothpaste and toilet paper she uses:

> *They took inventory of everything, and you know what? I'm, on the one hand, you're letting me pay, you're letting me live in a $900 a month, uh, house for $150, you can have whatever information you bloody well want. That's my attitude towards it.*

Lily's quote is also indicative of the mothers' compassion, gratitude, and humility they feel for people who support them in the pursuit of improving QoL for their families. Perhaps as a coping mechanism, mothers first and foremost understand that they are not alone and that others are struggling more than they are. Belinda and Laura's reasoning behind refusing to use a food

bank illustrates this understanding. At the same time, mothers who utilize food banks are grateful

to the general public for donating. When I ask Claire about whether she has ever experienced

poor treatment at a food bank, she responds:

> *I've never felt like I've been treated badly. It's always a, like, whatever I'm getting, I'm grateful that, you know, someone has had the foresight, the time, the money, the resources that they've provided something that I can have so I never sort of look at it and say, "well why are you giving me this?"… So for me it's always this sort of humility that I feel in being able to access food for free, but I know that there are people, there are places in the world where there is no option at all.*

Mothers also acknowledge that the price of food is as such because retail food outlets and

farmers alike need to make a profit and earn a living. At the same time they perceive the lack of

retail food outlets in their neighbourhood to mean that these neighbourhoods are not worthy of

investment. Through the example of the Hamilton Farmers' Market, Jen highlights a key tension

between affordability of food for consumers and the livelihoods of producers. In some ways, the

mothers and farmers are in similar positions of food insecurity:

> *… the situation is I would love to shop at the [Hamilton] farmers' market… but necessarily, I, you know, financially it is not the best place for me to shop because I overspend… [and] sometimes feel it's prohibitive at certain parts of the month to go to the market…. I'm not saying it's way too expensive when you consider that the farmers are coming in, and, you know, they have to earn their portion.*

The emotional rollercoaster mothers experience, albeit to varying degrees, takes a toll on

them, their self esteem, and their ability to dream of a better future for themselves. On the one

hand mothers are hopeful, compassionate, grateful, and humble, and on the other hand they are

stressed, frustrated, ashamed, and embarrassed. The societal messaging of not being good

enough also impacts mothers as they feel a lack of courage in pursuing their desired career path,

whether it was staying at home with their children, going back to school, or entering the

workforce. When asked which conditions in her life need to improve for her to acquire the food

that she needs, Ellen names the courage to pursue her career goals:

> *…Parents wanna, obviously, a lot of parents want to better themselves, but some people either don't have the will to push themselves or don't have the courage, you know? Maybe make it so that it doesn't seem so scary for moms to go get a part-time job… Make it so that, I dunno, so that parents, mothers especially, but fathers, too, but like parents feel more comfortable doing something with their lives to better their kids… Some people, parents get overwhelmed or whatever and maybe make it comfortable for them…. Personally what I'm saying, I'd like to have more courage to go back to school.*

Jean illustrates that other people can either help cultivate or further erode any courage

that mothers already have. She talks about how her daughter gave her the courage to go back to

school and obtain employment, but that until her daughter spurred her on, she lacked self-esteem:

> *…[Going back to school] was thanks to my daughter who said, "Mum, you can do it, you can do it." You know, cuz sometimes I think when you're poor, you have a whole different attitude about yourself. You, you lose your self-esteem, and you feel that people look down on you, and, uh, you know, even though you do the best that you can… I think how you perceive yourself and how you perceive others, and how the most important thing is how people perceive you. And that can really make or break you.*

Mothers discuss feeling overwhelmed by the uncharted territory of applying and

registering for school, or applying for employment or retraining. But contrary to some of the

stereotypes that depict lone mothers as welfare queens, they are willing and excited to learn more

about food and the skills necessary to succeed in their desired career. Laura is the only mother

who mentions that she is about to enter college or retraining in the near future. She describes her

trepidation and excitement at her prospects:

> *I don't know how it all works! You know, I want to do something with business but there's [sic] SO many business [courses] that are out there, it's like which one do I pick? And then you need this, this, and this in order to get the diploma. And it's like 3000 bucks… but yeah, I want to try to do something and maybe go for*

September cuz my daughter will be in school… So I was excited when I got the [course catalogue]. Now I just have to see what happens and see how daycare and all that stuff will work out. And then I was told I could apply and try for the OSAP thing. So I just don't know how that'll work out. It's still new, but yeah, I'm hoping here!

These antithetical feelings that mothers experience help identify some of the emotional barriers that exist for mothers to improve QoL for their families, as well as some of the ways supportive services can improve to facilitate mothers moving forward with their lives.

4.6   Concluding thoughts

I hope this chapter has described some of the complex and intertwined factors that influence, enable, and constrain the mothers' everyday lives, as well as the importance of listening to and understanding multiple realities. The next chapter will discuss these findings in relation to the literature and Hamilton to elucidate some points of departure and ways forward.

5.   CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

5.1   Findings and the literature

Analyzing the mothers' testimonies of their everyday experiences sparked many connections to the literature about experiences of food insecurity, poverty, and motherhood, as well as intersections with current events in Hamilton about improving QoL through community development, the local food scene, and SA reform. I want to begin by connecting the mothers' stories with the literature to highlight places where this research is situated and contributes, as well as suggest gaps in the literature to be filled by future research. In this section, I will discuss the role of geography in telling stories. Finally, I will examine the mothers and Hamilton in the context of the shadow state.

5.1.1   Findings and the role of geography in re-complicating positivist research and public discourse

In listening to the mothers recount their journeys to acquire food, I argue that the food desert is an over-simplified concept that results in obscuring complex social processes and multi-pronged solutions. However, from a public policy perspective, what makes the food desert so attractive to the public and policymakers is that not only is the concept simple, but the solution is equally simple: increase access to food by building more grocery stores. In the context of this research, researchers, the public, and policymakers have distilled complex social processes that produce and reproduce food insecurity into food deserts, or what Cummins and McIntyre (2002) have termed 'factoids', "assumptions or speculations reported and repeated so often that they are popularly considered true; they are simulated or imagined facts" (p. 436).

Most food desert research only looks at distances to grocery stores, and not the constellation of places where people acquire food (e.g. convenience stores, gas stations, farmers' markets). After hearing stories of the mothers I interviewed, such research makes me wonder:

what about all of the food resources the mothers utilize? Do mothers believe they live in a food desert? What is a food desert to the mothers? What about the contextual challenges of procuring financial resources and actually travelling to food resources? On a structural level, we are making policy decisions based on concepts that are easy to grasp rather than what people experience. On a societal level, we are making judgments about people's lifestyles without considering the contextual and place-based factors that may influence food insecurity and related outcomes. I hope that this research can serve as one of many testimonies to move us towards re-complicating positivist research, including much of food desert research, which can in turn create a more nuanced public discourse. Without re-complicating research and discourse, we continue to reinvent the wheel of blaming various categories of people, including lone mothers.

That being said, I am not trying to convey that the food desert concept is a completely flawed and useless one, but rather that decisions and judgments are repeatedly being based on over-simplified concepts rather than on a rich understanding of social processes. The irony of the food desert is that although policy is formed around this 'factoid', the solution to a food desert is, in fact, non-political, perhaps providing an explanation for its popularity in increasingly neoliberal times. The concept of the food desert, and in particular the associated solution of building more grocery stores and making food more affordable, actually obscures the structural forces that produce and reproduce food insecurity. More broadly, the food desert concept can actually help to entrench structural inequality because structural forces are not implicated in this non-political solution. Building grocery stores alone does not eliminate food insecurity, as factors such as affordability and quality are not addressed. As Cummins and McIntyre (2002) point out, it is not that food deserts are necessarily predicated upon shoddy research, but that simplicity is not a solid enough foundation on which to build policy.

I want to spend a significant proportion of the discussion on food deserts because I have struggled with not only the positivism in food desert research, but the disparity between this body of literature and the experiences of the mothers whom I interviewed. The starkest disparity is with respect to fast food restaurants. The first characteristic of a food desert is a lack of grocery stores, and the second is the high concentration of convenience stores and fast food chains. While research shows that people choose to consume food that is in close proximity to them, I found that the mothers have an alternative response to why they frequent fast food chains (Furey et al., 2001; Laska et al., 2010). Mothers describe taking their children to neighbourhood fast food chains to buy treats because these treats are what they can access and provide within their extreme financial constraints. It is not for a lack of knowledge about healthy eating, nor for a lack of alternative meals. These stories lead me to two conclusions about the flaws of food desert research; the first being that, without conversations with the mothers, I would have never learned that they use fast food as a treat. The second conclusion is that I would not have understood that neighbourhood decline and the closing of gathering places lead the mothers to have few alternatives but to take their children to fast food chains when they want to offer their children a treat or to socialize.

Geographers have the ability to contribute immensely to these studies by facilitating an understanding of the impact of microenvironments—like the home and the neighbourhood—on residents, and vice versa, while connecting microenvironments to larger structural forces. In terms of contribution to the spatial geographic literature, mothers describe utilizing social support networks to travel long distances outside of their neighbourhood in order to acquire food. Most studies relating to the qualitative understandings of food insecurity do not mention the influence of place. In describing how and why they travel long distances, mothers in this study

illuminate two key nuances that the food desert concept lacks, while simultaneously illustrating the richness that qualitative research can provide. Mothers have to travel long distances in order to balance price and quality that is lacking in their neighbourhood, while at the same time balancing other contextual considerations, such as their budgets and whether or not their children would be present. This balancing act shows that a monolithic typology of the "food insecure mother" is a fallacy. Building on this, geographers can contribute by understanding people's journeys and experiences of transit and neighbourhoods while acquiring food, as well as by understanding the complex decision-making process that contributes to travelling.

5.1.2   Findings in relation to qualitative research about experiences of food insecurity

Qualitative research is a useful method to understand the complex and intersecting factors that contribute to social phenomena from the perspective of those who experience them. Many studies relating to lone mothers experiencing poverty cite food insecurity as a pervasive part of their lives. Nonetheless, many of the findings presented here are related to previous studies. Many of the experiences the mothers describe relate to the literature around being a lone mother and to the literature relating experiences of poverty and food insecurity.

Band aid solutions, public and professional discourse, together with SA and/or minimum wage contribute to myriad feelings around being a lone mother, as well as the need for emotional coping strategies. Many studies pertaining to feelings around experiencing poverty and the need to access food banks describe the negative feelings of stress, anxiety, powerlessness, lack of dignity, and guilt (Hamelin et al., 2002; McIntyre et al., 2003; Power, 2005b); however, the mothers I interviewed illustrate that perhaps what contributes most to these negative feelings is managing the rollercoaster of intersecting positive and negative feelings while trying to maintain

composure in front of their children. Their positive feelings about the hope for their children, the compassion and gratitude they feel towards those who support them, and their own ability to improve their QoL serve as the counterweights to their negative feelings. The positive feelings, in particular their love for their children, help them get through the day. These positive feelings are cultivated and maintained through social support networks, since those mothers without social support describe more challenges to igniting the positive feelings within themselves (Ahluwalia et al., 1998; Hamelin et al., 2011).

The feelings around being a lone mother also present us with no one typology of lone mothers who experience food insecurity. Different mothers rationalize their situation with different feelings, as highlighted in the difference in feelings between Rachel and Lily about asking for what is rightfully theirs. Rachel feels a lack of dignity when she receives substandard products from a food bank, whereas Lily is willing to jump through any hoops because she is receiving subsidized housing from the government. Furthermore, the mothers all have different ways of strategizing about what is best for their households: some choose to work low-wage jobs while others choose to take care of their children; some have social support networks that facilitate survival while others do not; and some choose to utilize food banks, while others opt out. This lack of a single typology and recognition of multiple realities suggests that both policymakers and CBFSPs must be wary of creating and implementing policy, services, and programming based on a single typology of those who experience food insecurity and poverty.

Building on the existing literature, the mothers' insights contribute in a number of ways to gaps in the research, including how to improve CBFSPs. Mothers describe characteristics of CBFSPs, and community-based programs and services in general, that act as a kind of social support network that facilitates cultivating and maintaining positive feelings amidst hardship.

They want to be able to have social support networks, whether through CBFSPs or otherwise, based more on mutuality and friendship rather than on dependence and need. Although many mothers have social supports networks that facilitate acquiring food through offering rides and childcare, mothers also want to be able to have these networks to foster a sense of community and to break the isolation of being a lone mother. Building this sense of community extends beyond CBFSPs and into having more neighbourhood gathering places in which to socialize.

5.1.3   Findings, feminist geography, & PAR

In conjunction with qualitative research, feminist methodologies add another lens and layer of richness to exploring experiences of food insecurity. The mothers eloquently articulate their experiences with how their identities dictate the places and spaces they navigate, as well as connecting the micro-environment of the household and the neighbourhood to the macro scale of the city and the province. I would like to take this time to discuss how feminist geography and PAR principles can be strengthened by drawing on two other bodies of literature: institutional ethnography (IE) and anti-oppressive practice (AOP).

IE, a feminist and sociological method of inquiry coined by Dorothy E. Smith in the 1980s, can deepen the thick description of the mothers lives by explaining how government, institutional, professional, and organizational texts and discourses can shape everyday experiences (DeVault, 2006). IE "reveal[s] the organizing power of texts, making visible just how activities in local settings are coordinated and managed extralocally" (ibid., p. 295). Through the conversations that I had with the mothers, I found that many of the conditions and aspects of their lives—for example, SA, child support, and employment, as well as some of the feelings of guilt and shame—stem from sources outside of the mothers' control. IE views

professionals as the intersection between the mothers' lives and discourse. Teachers, health care providers, and social workers are all professionals that work under a specific discourse and also wield this discourse through "conceptual practices of power" to place value on and judge lone mothers (Smith, 1990).

However, IE does not stop at mothers describing processes of power and oppression, but also points to specific structural changes, as opposed to blaming and then attempting to 'fix' lone mothers. Thus, IE can be used to understand food insecurity for lone mothers, specifically as it relates to mothers mixed internalization of various types of messaging. Why do mothers resist some messages, for example around employment, while they internalize others, such as what constitutes a good mother? IE focuses not "on describing or explaining people's behavior, but instead [on] illuminating for people how they are embedded in social relations and how they participate in those relations without their explicit knowledge" (Weigt, 2006, p. 334). IE works to uncover the everyday activities that are embedded in social relations and that create and recreate oppression, such as unpaid or invisible work. Through such an understanding, both researchers and participants can work towards dismantling oppressive social frameworks.

This study contributes a consideration of the implications of various forms of messaging that characterize lone mothers as unworthy and a drain on society. McIntyre et al. (2003) describe the lone mother participants in their study as "thwart[ing] the patriarchy of the state and its oppressive poverty assistance policies" (p. 327) by coping; however, I would argue that the mothers' everyday processes are more complex than simply thwarting the state. Mothers describe undermining the neoliberal state apparatus that seeks to erode their entitlements and their participation in society, while at the same time internalizing some of these messages. Exactly which messages mothers internalize depends on the individual. As with the other

balancing acts they engage in, mothers are constantly negotiating messaging, as if picking their battles regarding which messages to devote energy to thwarting. At some points, mothers illustrate undermining the state by choosing how to provide for their families rather than returning to work as mandated by SA, while at the same time feeling guilt, shame, and embarrassment at their inability to provide and care for their children in the way a 'good mother' should.

In discussing methodologies that confront oppressive social and research frameworks, I want to draw connections between feminist geography, PAR, and AOP, most often employed in social work research and practice. AOP has been employed in social work as a way to reflect on how both professional practice and research have the ability to produce and reproduce oppression (Strier, 2007). AOP exhibits many similarities to PAR and feminist methodologies, as it specifically focuses on the "systemic study of oppression and the development of knowledge that supports peoples' actions to achieve freedom from oppression" (ibid., p. 4). AOP overlaps with feminist methodologies and PAR in its focus on emphasizing the participatory and emancipatory potential of the research process, as well as acknowledging the source and ownership of 'expert' knowledge as belonging to the participants rather than the researcher. Furthermore, AOP recognizes the importance of reflexivity and positionality in the research process for beginning to understand and dismantle sources of power and privilege inherent in research (Rutman et al., 2005). However, AOP is able to challenge feminist methodologies and PAR into connecting not only participatory research methods to emancipatory professional or research practice, but to move towards embodying AOP in everyday life.

5.1.4   Findings and the shadow state

Although at the back of my mind while initiating this research, it became apparent that the concept of the shadow state has been an integral aspect of conversation throughout my interviews with mothers and KIs, embodied by our discussions of the role of CBFSPs, community development, and SA. I hope to take some time to briefly discuss the implications of the shadow state on this research, realizing that I do not fully do justice to the extensive body of literature regarding the shadow state in relation to food (see, for example, Poppendieck, 1999) or SA (Wolch and Dinh, 2001). I feel it important to tie my findings with the shadow state literature as it helps to elaborate on the context within which potential structural change and community organizing sit. Moreover, discussing the shadow state reveals processes that have implications for women, as well as the tensions and challenges that exist in working towards structural change.

The shadow state can be most basically described as the unloading of state responsibilities, such as social services delivery and community development, onto a growing non-governmental, voluntary sector, referred to in this thesis as community-based (food) programs and services (Lake & Newman, 2002; Trudeau, 2008). The shadow state was first conceptualized in the late 1980s during the global recession, which coincided with the diminution of the welfare state and the rise of the neoliberal state. The shadow state can be summarized as the neoliberal state dictating its definition of citizenship through the provision, or the erosion, of entitlements, and an emphasis on individualism. The shadow state, as a tool of the neoliberal state, is constituted by "a patchwork assemblage of programmatic efforts held together by the work of thought and that consist of various political rationalities and practices of rule which aim to manage social conduct" (Ilcan et al., 2007, p. 77-78). The shadow state achieves this management of conduct by sending specific messages about what constitutes participation

and worthiness of citizenship. Ilcan et al. (2007) and Fyfe and Milligan (2003) highlight one of the tensions of the shadow state between recognizing the assets of communities and the need to leverage social capital, while realizing that the state divests its responsibility onto the voluntary sector. Although the government divests itself of providing the services directly, it, to varying degrees, funds this flourishing non-profit sector. Here lies an ironic simultaneous erosion of entitlements, such as SA, coupled with increased state control on everyday life through the funding of the non-profit sector. The non-profit sector is, therefore, an instrument of the state, with the state using the non-profit sector, who provide services, to govern civil society through dictating what it will fund.

The shadow state and neoliberalism have grave implications for women, as the mothers I have interviewed illustrate. Under this model, citizenship is extended to those who can individually provide for themselves and their families through their own actions, reflecting the idealized Protestant work ethic of 'pulling yourself up by your bootstraps' (Ilcan et al., 2007). Following this definition of citizenship, women have the agency to solve their own problems by improving themselves individually. Equality for women is achieved when they adopt what has traditionally been seen as masculine forms of paid work outside of the home. Under neoliberal governance, women who are unable to provide for themselves are undeserving of freedom and the right to participate (Power, 2005b). Instead, they are to be governed through disciplinary methods such that they will one day be able to exercise their freedom. Through the non-profit sector, the shadow state is a way in which the neoliberal state governs women, sending a message about what they deserve (ibid.). The mothers I interviewed are, therefore, bearing a double burden of being told by the state that they must be industrious and self-reliant while having their entitlements eroded.

One manifestation of the mothers' entitlements being eroded is the rise and subsequent institutionalization of food banks and the emergency food system. The shadow state obscures hunger and food security from public debate by providing a non-political façade of a solution. Food banks provide the neoliberal state with a justification to depoliticize hunger and food insecurity, drawing conversations away from how to dismantle systemic oppression and instead projecting the struggles of citizens as a non-political matter to be solved through charity (Raine et al., 2003). The shadow state is not automatically a negative entity, as the emergency food system supports people when they are in a crisis. The system can also potentially be a part of a comprehensive strategy for lone mothers and other families experiencing poverty to achieve food security. However, what matters is the way in which these organizations and systems conceptualize and implement their strategies in light of the need to move from a charity model to a social justice-based model. Raine et al. (2003) describe a social justice model as one that "supports recipients/families and [CBFSP] operators in their own analyses of the root causes of food insecurity" (p. 166).

5.2   Mothers in relation to Hamilton

In this section, I hope to illuminate some of the ways in which the City of Hamilton and the province of Ontario are implicated in creating and recreating inequality in their cities. I am also interested in discussing the mothers' stories in relation to some of the Hamilton-based conversations around improving QoL and local food. I begin with discussing the Hamilton-based conversations and move to the broader, provincial-level conversations at the end of the section.

5.2.1 Mothers and Hamilton's move towards improving quality of life

From what the mothers recount, they have yet to experience any of the benefits of the community development initiatives discussed in Chapter 2. In fact, it is only apparent in one interview that any of the mothers know about the City of Hamilton's NDS, and a few know about and/or participate in the HCF neighbourhood hubs. It seems that, for the most part, the mothers feel as though the City and other institutions from outside of their neighbourhoods care little about their neighbourhoods, except for the economic gain from the redevelopment of Ivor Wynn Stadium through the Pan Am Games. This apparent lack of interest occurs despite efforts by the City and the HCF to employ the ABCD model, which seeks to develop community from within through cultivating residents' assets (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993). ABCD views external entities like social services as the reason why neighbourhoods and communities have crumbled. The disconnect between the mothers' stories and the intentions of the City and other institutions as a result of the ABCD model warrants discussion.

The ABCD model builds a strong case for communities that have historically been overrun with service providers; however, ABCD must be put into practice in conjunction with critical reflection about the relationship between residents, neighbourhoods, and structural forces. Ignoring connections with structural forces paints community as an overly idealized, monolithic entity that reinforces neoliberal conceptions of citizenship and participation. Although McKnight (1995) alludes to connections between community and structural forces, his hyperbolic and overly simplistic commentary on community as good and social services as bad and his terse recommendations of policy change do a disservice to the communities. I do not see effective structural change flowing from choosing community over social services.

Because of the loose connections drawn between community and structural forces, I wonder whether the ABCD model is the most just way to improve QoL. While I agree with the

idea that community has been commodified and overrun with services, with both the quantity and quality of social services distributed unevenly, is removing them entirely the most just response? The way McKnight (1995) describes how communities need to look to the past and return back to their former glory assumes an idealized and monolithic conception of a community devoid of disagreement. The model conveniently forgets about the racism, classism, and sexism, amongst other 'isms', that have subjugated the vast proportion of people throughout millennia. I believe whole-heartedly in recognizing communities' assets, but not at the expense of the structural change that needs to occur to improve QoL.

I am particularly wary of ABCD because, as with the shadow state, I would argue that the ABCD model also ironically plays into the neoliberal state's conceptions of autonomy, self-sufficiency, and self-governance as prerequisites for citizenship and participation. The model's focus on recognizing assets and improving community from within fulfills many neoliberal tenets of achieving citizenship. After all, the neoliberal "citizen-subject" constitutes "an assemblage of morality and economic rationality who acts in socially appropriate ways, not because of force or coercion but because their choices align with their 'community interests'" (Ilcan et al., 2007, p.80). I believe in the power of local knowledge and community, because improvements made without community input is problematic and potentially harmful. However, it is vital that practitioners of ABCD take local knowledge and community input to draw explicit and specific connections between the community and structural levels to implicate broader structural forces. Social change cannot flow from communities alone. There needs to be a better representation of 'community' voice at the structural level (e.g. municipal initiatives) and a deeper connection drawn between structural forces and micro environments in community-based work.

5.2.2 Mothers and local food discourse in Hamilton: challenges to reconciling ways forward

The need for stronger 'community' voice at the structural level is well illustrated in the lack of coherence between the mothers' stories and the local food discourse in Hamilton. In this section, I would like to connect some of the discussions I had with mothers to the food discourse in Hamilton, and call attention to places where the two discussions diverge. I will first discuss the major point of tension between the mothers' responses and the local food discourse, namely the mothers' desire to see big-box stores come to their neighbourhoods. This point of tension challenges me to reflect on the immediate need to alleviate daily stress with the long-term goal of social change. I will then move on to a discussion of the difference between mothers' recommendations and the broader local food discourse in Hamilton, and some of the challenges in moving forward.

The point of contention appears when the mothers were asked how retail food outlets could be improved. Most of the mothers describe wanting to see a *Walmart* or *Lococo's* brought to their neighbourhoods so that a store balancing price and quality for meat and produce would exist in their neighbourhoods. This presents me with a dilemma: should I put forth the mothers' recommendation, or should I undermine it because of my opposition to *Walmart's* discriminatory employment practices, of which the mothers would bear the disproportionate consequences? Mothers want to see one of these stores come to the neighbourhood because they sell a better selection of higher quality food at lower prices. There exists the argument that at least *Walmart* is selling local produce, even if we cannot be sure of what that means. The mothers' desire for *Walmart* is indicative to me of the structural inequalities mothers' experience. We have created a system where we create jobs through big-box stores like *Walmart*, albeit precarious, low-wage jobs without benefits, while also coercing the very people who would most likely be employed

by *Walmart* into needing to buy from *Walmart*. This process then cements the store into the neighbourhood fabric. My intention is not to convey that mothers lack an understanding about the social system within which they sit, but rather that mothers' desire to have a *Walmart* presents points of tension internally for me in terms of doing research "with" and not "on" people, as well as a tension between doing research for structural change versus as a band-aid, a short-term solution to alleviate some of the mothers' immediate daily challenges. I am still debating about if and how *Walmart* and the Hamilton local food discourse can be reconciled.

One alternative and the antithesis to bringing *Walmart* to the lower city is local food; however, I am not convinced that local food, as advocated for in Hamilton, is the answer or antidote to food insecurity and to corporations like *Walmart*. My observation about the local food conversation in Hamilton can be reduced to exclusionary practices in which what I will refer to as local food activists, as well as foodies and locavores, engage. This does not mean that local food, like school nutrition programs, cannot be part of a comprehensive strategy to eliminate food insecurity, but practitioners of the local food movement must be more reflexive of their actions if they are going to make the transformative and empancipatory change they envision.

I want to problematize the local food movement because it utilizes consumption as a way to transform the current food system to create a more just and sustainable (however those terms may be defined) foodscape and discourse. Consumption is a highly constrained and stressful act for the mothers. On a larger scale, consumption as a way to make change is a deeply flawed logic that plays into neoliberal notions of equating participation and citizenship with consumption.

Guthman (2007) critiques authors like Michael Pollan[27] and Mark Bittman[28] who live by the mantra "voting with your fork" (Pollan, 2006b) as a way to make social change. The act of voting is not predicated upon consumption but upon a process of citizenship. By invoking the "voting" metaphor, local food activists like Pollan and Bittman conflate consumption with the politics of citizenship and participation. Although I was once one of those people who invested all of my beliefs into such a model, after learning about the intersections of neoliberalism and consumption, I no longer believe that "voting with your fork" is an appropriate alternative to our current food system. "Voting with [my] fork" means that I get to consume local food while the mothers whom I interviewed can consume only what they can afford; through simply "voting with [my] fork", I divert attention away from food as a means to either create or dismantle structural inequality; through simply "voting with [my] fork, I perpetuate inequality between the mothers and me.

Furthermore, as illustrated in the two points of tension above, I, like Guthman (2008), observe a "disjunction between what alternative food activists do and what food desert residents seem to want" (p. 443). The very terms 'alternative food', 'local food', and other such synonyms reinforce exclusion and stigmatization, whether in practice or through discourse by imposing a universality about local food; a universal assumption that everyone should want local food. Moreover, those who do not have access to quality and affordable grocery stores are not allowed to experience what we take for granted: having the choice of shopping at a retail food outlet like *Walmart* (Guthman, 2008). For women and children who are already nutritionally compromised, implicitly forcing them to consume local foods that are not within their regular food choices or

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[27] Michael Pollan is an American writer, journalist, and professor of journalism at University of California Berkeley. He is best known for writing *Omnivore's dilemma: A natural history of four meals* (2006a) and for his advocacy for local food systems.

[28] Mark Bittman is an American journalist and author. He is best known for his writing in *The New York Times* about cooking and dining, as well as his op-ed columns advocating for a healthier food system.

budget seeks to further entrench a lack of choice within already constrained households. McIntyre et al. (2007) identify commonly consumed nutritious foods deemed acceptable by participants. These nutritious foods tended to be unavailable locally or were not available seasonally. Therefore, what Guthman (2008) terms the "missionary practices" (p. 433) of local food activists serve to exclude, whether intentionally or not, those struggling to make ends meet.

These dreams of a local food utopia reflect the desires of those who are shaping and instituting local food initiatives rather than the visions of the communities they are intended to serve. In Hamilton, local food initiatives do not come from within neighbourhoods or communities, but rather from institutions like the City. Thus, I challenge people who identify themselves as local food activists, foodies, and locavores to be more cognizant and reflexive about their own practices and the implications of their practices through the messages they might convey.

I will illustrate these abstractions about local food through the tangible example of helping to write the Food Charter for Hamilton. The goal of the charter is to provide the City of Hamilton with guiding principles about how to approach future municipal food-based legislation; however, through my observations of the Charter-writing process, the Charter seems more a vehicle to promote and institutionalize the "missionary practices" of local food. There are a number of reasons for my conclusions, which I will elaborate on below.

To begin, a subcommittee of the CFSSC tasked with writing the Food Charter, now referred to as the Food Charter group, engaged in consultations with different stakeholders. The consultations were divided up by stakeholder (e.g. producer, distributor, consumer, etc.) and held throughout Hamilton at various times of the day. During the consultations, we were given sheets

to provide additional comments. These sheets were where the Food Charter group recruited participants interested in helping to write the Charter.

Next, the writers of the Food Charter group took the recommendations from the consultations, albeit limited by their process, and gathered the recruited participants at City Hall to begin drafting the Charter. Through the gathering at City Hall, people with low levels of literacy, people without access to the internet, people with English language barriers, people without access to transportation and childcare, and so on were excluded. However, the most interesting of the exclusionary Food Charter-writing processes was the amount of formal education one needed to be at the table and contribute. It was not an explicit prerequisite to have a base level of education, but one needed a certain amount of academic knowledge in order to contribute and justify one's opinion. It did not, however, seem like other ways of knowing, such as lived experiences of food insecurity, were particularly accepted. With a table full of people steeped in the objective, value-free, local food-nutrition-public health discourse that views all residents as having the same resources and dictates the universality and inherent goodness of local food as essential knowledge to be promoted through 'education', there was no use in trying to challenge their ideas. My being around the table and sharing my opinion necessitated that I possess a breadth of knowledge in academic literature about food security, chronic health conditions, and food justice, as well as a deep understanding of my own beliefs about justice and community. In no way am I trying to insinuate that people who are less educated than me somehow know less than me; I merely use the Food Charter example as a way to explain the "missionary practices" of local food, and that, whether we like it or not, the language we use and the processes by which we gather information can ultimately exclude those who are already silenced.

I hope the reader does not conclude that I believe local food to be an inherently negative or exclusionary concept; on the contrary, there are examples across North America that illustrate just food systems in historically marginalized communities that are being achieved through the production and consumption of local food. I, myself, consume local when I can, but that is my privilege to be able to do so. I acknowledge that local food in and of itself, stripped of all of its social implications and values, has many positive outcomes, such as lowering one's carbon footprint, building community, and supporting the local economy. But the local food movement also has the ability to create another form of discursive and material inequality through such a basic necessity as food, by perpetuating oppressions, such as racism and classism, which still remain rampant in our society. As Guthman (2007) so eloquently concludes, alternative food practitioners, local food activists, foodies, and locavores, need to be aware and more reflexive of their own power and privilege, as well as the types of discourse and practices they wish to portray and perpetuate. Changing the conversation in Hamilton away from 'factoids' like food deserts and "monoculture" conversations about local food means having many voices at the table, and using AOP to critically appraise what practices we as a community and the City of Hamilton invoke that systematically oppress those whose voices are often silenced. Having many voices at the table does not mean having tokens who represent assumed, monolithic categories of people, but rather gathering people with different opinions who are genuinely included in the dialogue for a richer and better-informed decision-making process. As it stands currently, local food is being wielded in Hamilton, albeit unconsciously or blindly, as a form of oppression.

In order for the City and other institutions to more effectively implement an inclusion strategy and become more reflexive in their actions, they may draw on AOP, a framework often associated with social work practice. AOP, as described earlier in the context of community

development and as employed in social work, "aims to change the structure and procedures of service delivery through macro-systemic changes at the legal and political level" (Strier, 2007, p. 858). AOP facilitates an understanding of how groups with power and resources can reflect on their micro-level processes and connect them to structural, macro-level processes. In the example of the Food Charter, the Food Charter group needed to become aware of the structural and policy implications of their work on the City and residents as a whole. Through conceptualizing food as a means to understand social inequality, AOP can illuminate the various practices within an institution that perpetuate various forms of oppression. Employing an AOP in the writing of the Food Charter requires reflection about the practices that oppress and create oppression (e.g. the consultation process), as well as the discourses that inform such practices (e.g. the language utilized in writing the Charter).

5.2.3 Mothers and broader structural change: social assistance, income, and child support

As the mothers describe, food is connected to many facets of their lives. In response to the question about improving food security, mothers state that financial resources are the most important factor. Without addressing structural factors, food insecurity will remain a pervasive part of the social fabric. Currently, SA rates are set arbitrarily, and therefore, rates seem to be a reflection of how much the province and society values SA recipients. SA is then another form of, and arguably a reflection of, public and professional discourse that shames and erodes recipients into submission. Mothers, nonetheless, are wanting not only adequate SA rates or livable wages, but a more transparent, easy-to-use, and empathetic system; however, whether such a system will ever be implemented remains to be seen. As I write this chapter, the Commission on Social Assistance is writing their final report, describing their recommendations

to the provincial government on how to change the system. From documents discussing the findings from their community consultations, it does not seem likely that the mothers' recommendations will come to fruition (CRSAO, 2012). Furthermore, the Liberal government has announced that it will be freezing SA rates as a part of their austerity budget.

Despite the Liberal government's decision and the direction the Commission on Social Assistance has taken throughout the consultation process, the Commission still needs to reject the normative and neoliberal "workfare" concept that employment is the only way out of poverty for all families, as well as the view that programs and services that increase workforce participation constitute entitlements (Ilcan et al., 2007). These types of programs, no doubt, force women into precarious and low-wage employment. Providing additional employment services without other supportive services such as childcare prevents women from realizing their goals. Additionally, through "workfare" policies the state continues to ignore mothers' unpaid labour as a contribution to civil society, entrenching their dependency on others (ibid.). A one-size-fits all "welfare time-use" model—where recipients are limited in both their length of time as recipients, as well as the frequency with which they can receive assistance rather than utilization based on need—lacks a recognition of recipients' different circumstances and reasons for receiving assistance. This conception of SA also assumes that people do not want to work, when in reality there are other myriad barriers, such as mental health issues, financial barriers, and family life, which prevent people from entering the workforce. Mothers emphasize that being on SA is a source of embarrassment and shame, and that the system has been created to keep them there rather than to support them in their efforts to transition off of SA (e.g. cutting off SA before employment or educational supports become available).

Moreover, while paternal child support remains unenforced, and while child support is clawed back by SA, lone mothers will be unable to fully support their families. Mothers see both SA and child support as punitive systems that, rather than supporting them in achieving their goals, keep them dependent and unable to fulfill the role of 'good mother'. Inadequate SA, unenforced paternal child support, and a lack of childcare are all messages to women that they are not worthy of participation. Jen aptly ties together the goal of the City and the Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction—"to be the best place in Canada to raise a child…" (HSPI, 2010, p. 2)—with larger structural issues in her life: "So Hamilton is one of the major, um, proponents of, of the best place to raise a child. Then it has to be the best place to raise a *family* [emphasis added]." She says this in response to the lack of understanding between those who create and administer services and programs and those who are recipients of and participants in programs and services. She illustrates that while the City and community organizations focus only on working with children without supporting their parents, especially their mothers, Hamilton will never become the best place to raise a child.

5.3   Chapter summary

This chapter has discussed the connections between the mothers' stories, various bodies of literature, and current events in Hamilton, illuminating points of tension between the mothers' stories, the literature, and the city, as well as highlighting places where we need more critical reflection on our practices. The following chapter will build upon these conversations to make specific policy and research recommendations to improve upon what already exists.

6. **CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION**

Although the research component of the project is complete, much work must still be done to achieve improvements to QoL. In this section, I hope to conclude with how food can be used as a lens to understand how to create the most favourable city through policy, program, and research changes. I begin with the concept of food as a way to understand everyday life in order to summarize my findings. I then move on to perhaps the most important way to view food, which entails using food as a way to understand inequality. I use food as a way to understand citizenship, inclusion, and participation to recommend that the City strengthen its implementation of its *Inclusion Lens* and institute AOP. Finally, I look at food as a way to understand community and support. I conclude the chapter with future research and final thoughts.

6.1 **Food as a way to understand everyday life**

Food is an integral part of life; in addition to water, it is one of our most basic needs. However, food can also be a way to understand higher order needs and complex social phenomena, such as income, caring, and community and friendship. The mothers' stories paint a complex picture, and although they vary in their specific details, resonate with each other. In this section I will be summarizing the findings of the research.

While writing up my findings, I realized that mothers' experiences could be summarized as balancing acts. Mothers spend a lot of time preparing and travelling long distances to balance price and quality, as well as to acquire specialty items and satisfy dietary needs. They go to these lengths in order to love and care for their children. However, the places where they go to acquire food are contingent on various factors, which, again, they have to balance.

The most important contextual factors are spatial—deciding where to acquire food—and financial. How much money they have available for food and the high price of food are important in dictating which food resources they can go to, and if they need to go to a food bank. Once these decisions have been made, they also have to be balanced with factors related to the places where they would be acquiring food. What are the sales like? Are they going to be busy? In considering going to a food bank, there are also a set of decisions that have to be made, most importantly feelings around rationalizing whether or not to use food banks.

Mothers also balance various temporal scales, whether in terms of choosing which food resource to go to—for example, utilizing a food bank during the holidays—or when to go to a particular food resource. They have to keep in mind larger structural forces that dictate much of their lives. It is no surprise, then, that the mothers want to see the structures that distribute their financial resources reformed. For example, mothers see educating the public about their everyday lives as an integral part of increasing rates of SA. Although they have little faith in decision-makers and the public discourse changing, they still see it as their responsibility to call people—including academics—out on their misconceptions.

Finally, arguably the largest and most demanding balancing acts are emotional. Each mother has different ways of coping with her feelings of stress, but all of them have to balance positive and negative feelings. Balancing their own negative feelings of coping and surviving with their positive feelings of compassion for others and hope for their children's futures takes a toll on them, but their desire to love and care for their children takes precedence. Mothers are further challenged by the balance between the emotional and the material. With their extreme financial constraints, mothers describe being unable to provide materially for their children in the way that they want, which exerts even more stress and anxiety on mothers. Balancing these

feelings with the more practical, everyday routine of providing for their children makes for an uphill battle, which mothers often do not feel they can win. The mothers' stories paint a picture of tightrope walkers, balancing so many factors on their shoulders throughout their daily routines; however, their resilience in their desire to provide for their children and their hope for a brighter future for their children inspires me to move the research forward towards tangible policy changes at various levels of government, which will be presented below.

6.2 Food as a way to understand inequality

> *"I think structures of inequality must necessarily be addressed so that others may eat well."*
>
> -Julie Guthman (2007, p. 263)

Guthman's quote above encompasses what I have learned from the mothers about the connection between food and inequality. Food is not only an individual choice; it is heavily influenced by structural forces outside of our control. Without dismantling oppression and addressing structural inequality, food will remain a way to perpetuate oppression. Although my research focuses on understanding food insecurity, the mothers make it quite clear that food is heavily related to other aspects of their lives, namely the structural ones. I hope to highlight some of the mothers' recommendations in this section.

During our conversations, we spent the majority of the time talking about their extreme financial constraints. Since the majority of mothers are on SA, most of the recommendations to improve their financial situation come from reforming SA. The first recommendation, in line with the HRPR (2012), is to tie SA rates to an evidence base. The fact that rates are set arbitrarily sends a message to recipients that they are worth the amount on their cheque. The lack of

evidence in guiding SA rates is yet another way the neoliberal state governs the freedom of those who are not yet worthy of citizenship and participation.

Mothers are not only suggesting that rates change; they also want to see a change in the system itself. As Lily and Tammy recount, the system seems to be made to keep recipients dependent upon it. Part of the dependence, the mothers said, comes from their experience with their SA worker. Some mothers are lucky and have SA workers who support the mothers every way they are able to, while other workers act more like referees who prioritize enforcement of SA policies over actually assisting the mothers. The mothers want to see the system become more transparent, empathetic, and supportive. This is perhaps where the Liberal government at the provincial level, rather than freezing rates and ignoring SA, could work on reforming the system to become more streamlined, efficient, and supportive so that salaries for the bureaucracy could instead be funneled into livable rates. This could be done by having the system mandate that SA workers operate in a supportive role rather than a policing role, or having social assistance work with other systems to become more streamlined (e.g. OSAP).

For the few mothers who are employed, a livable wage (see Glossary) is paramount. As with the mothers on SA, their income earned is not adequate in even meeting basic needs. In December, 2011, the SPRC released a report titled *Working and still poor? It doesn't add up!*, calculating that a living wage in Hamilton is $14.95 per hour, compared with the provincial minimum wage of $10.25 per hour (Pike & Mayo, 2011). Larger institutions and businesses that employ low-wage workers must sign on in order for the initiative to have a larger impact on Hamiltonians. Thinking back to my conversations with the mothers, the following have been identified as the key large-scale players who must embrace the idea of a living wage to improve quality of life in Hamilton: McMaster University, the City of Hamilton, Mohawk College, the

Hamilton Wentworth District School Board, and *Tim Hortons*. The HRPR has initiated conversation with the public sector (e.g. the City of Hamilton and McMaster University) about implementing a living wage strategy, and are developing a plan to engage with the private sector (e.g. *Tim Hortons*) to have as many participating institutions as possible (T. Cooper, personal communication, May 23, 2012).

Research is one way in which to inform these policy decisions by illuminating intersecting forms of oppression. However, mothers and some KIs feel that research and academia actually play a part in misinforming the public discourse about mothers' everyday lives. Furthermore, they feel the research benefits the researchers rather than the neighbourhoods in which they conduct their research. This means that social research must be conducted with intentionality and framed in particular ways that seek to uncover, understand, and dismantle oppression, and not to reinforce it. Researchers' responsibilities do not end with conducting research; they end with participating in a dialogue. We need to be more intentional about sharing our knowledge with various groups—and not just institutions and organizations, but community groups and participants— whether they are for or against the research outcomes and to inspire and foster dialogue. Our role may not be to organize or to lobby the government, but surely we are obliged to provide the knowledge necessary for all parties to have an informed conversation.

This presents researchers, including myself, with a few points from which to work. Researchers must fight to preserve data sources, and standing up against the federal government's movement to undercut and dismantle sources of national data like the long form census, the National Council of Welfare, and Status of Women Canada (Baker Collins, 2012). Furthermore, institutions supporting research, mainly universities, must make and embody commitments to support and facilitate community-based and socially relevant research. President

Deane's (2011) *Forward with Integrity* letter has built momentum at McMaster that moves us towards a deepened engagement with the community, broadly defined. I hope to see McMaster engage in a long-term and fruitful discussion, both on-campus and in Hamilton, on how to most effectively foster community-university relationships, and to work harder at repairing and rejuvenating some of the relationships with communities who perceive McMaster as being an exploitative and distant part of the city. To accomplish these goals, it is important for McMaster to not only engage with community institutions and organizations, but also with less formal groups and individuals deemed "hard to reach" in the city. Including all of these voices in decision-making processes leads us into understanding food as a way to understand citizenship, inclusion, and participation.

As I finish writing, the United Nations (UN) special rapporteur on the right to food, Olivier De Schutter provides us with the opportunity to reflect on food as a way to understand inequality, as well as pointing to ways in which food can be used to understand citizenship, inclusion, and participation. He has just finished a mission to Canada and has deeply criticized the state of food insecurity in the country (Schmidt, 2012). Among the many recommendations in his *End-of-Mission Statement*, De Schutter (2012) has called for a national food strategy that is created through participatory processes that include the voices of various stakeholders, such as farmers, industry, and citizens. De Schutter's call for a national food strategy provides the opportunity to foster dialogue about food as a way to understand inequality, as well as to create a space to enact citizenship and participation through including many voices in writing a national food strategy.

6.3   Food as a way to understand citizenship, inclusion, and participation

"Not everyone can afford to eat high quality food in
America, and that is shameful; however, those of us who
can, should."

-Michael Pollan, *Omnivore's Dilemma* (2006a, p. 184)

I am ashamed to admit that I overlooked this quote while reading *Omnivore's Dilemma* (2006a). I am ashamed because it summarizes exactly what I think much of the local food movement has taken up as its mantra, and is something that I do not condone: differential citizenship (Lake & Newman, 2002). I interpret this quote as a casual dismissal of those marginalized from local food in favour of a discussion of why those who can already participate should participate. I hope to illustrate a few recommendations to change discourse and work towards a more just and inclusive food system and civil society.

First of all, the City of Hamilton must take its Community Engagement Framework and *Inclusion Lens* (see Figure 5; HSPI, 2010) seriously if it is to successfully and justly revitalize the city, not only aesthetically or economically, but socially. The Human Services Planning Initiative's (HSPI, p. 31) definition of inclusivity even identifies participation as paramount:

> *... generating the feeling and reality of belonging…. The HSPI is committed to*
> *taking deliberate steps in any policies, processes and practices to welcome,*
> *accept and value all individuals, understand and reverse exclusionary practices,*
> *and create opportunities for people from marginalized groups to participate in*
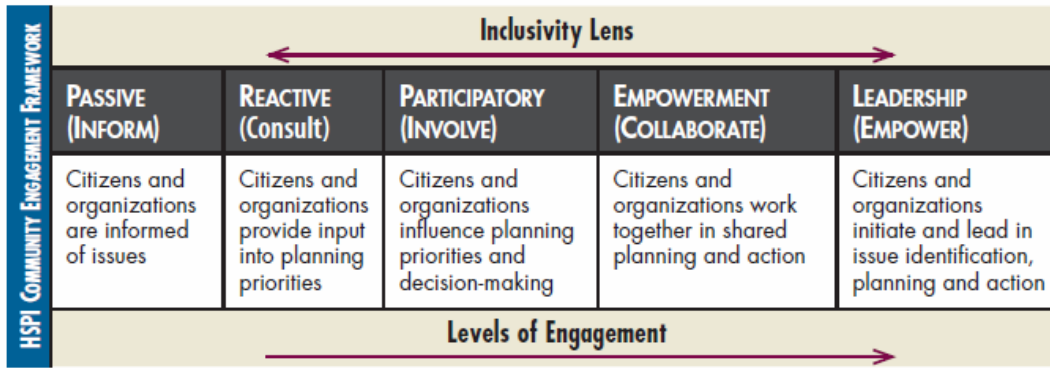> *the planning and delivery of human services.*

Figure 5: City of Hamilton and Human Services Planning Initiative (HSPI)'s Community Engagement Framework and *Inclusion Lens.*

To revitalize Hamilton socially, more voices need to be included and *heard*. The City and other institutions must be the ones to work harder at initiating conversations and going to different communities' tables, not the other way around. Moreover, inclusion and participation cannot just be a procedure to tick off a checklist; it necessarily must be a messy and time-intensive *process*. An example of this lack of inclusion and failure to employ the *Inclusion Lens* is school closures in the neighbourhood. Such decisions by people with power and resources only reinforce lower city residents' perception that they do not belong and are not included or valued in the greater Hamilton dialogue.

Perhaps bridging the goals of the *Inclusion Lens* with an AOP will produce a more effective professional discourse, which engages with residents to understand better strategies to achieve food security, for example. What I learned from writing the Food Charter is that the *Inclusion Lens* coupled with AOP would have produced a far more participatory and rich discussion about what it means to write a Food Charter and who is included in the document itself. AOP will facilitate professional disciplines to connect their knowledge with critical practice, which will hopefully result in more supportive discourses.

Professional discourse heavily informs public discourse, as it is the role of professional disciplines like public health and nutrition to disseminate technical knowledge to the public.

However, a far more daunting and challenging task is to provide direct and tangible recommendations for how to change public discourse, as public discourse is a ubiquitous and amorphous entity without an easily discernible source. Nonetheless, in wanting researchers to facilitate an avenue through which to participate and have a voice, the mothers make a good point: the responsibility of researchers and professionals alike is not only to dismantle the ivory and office towers and to collect stories and information, but to also inform and be in dialogue with public discourse. When I think of public discourse around food, I think of food deserts and Jamie Oliver's Food Revolution, which do wonders to instill panic and urgency in the public. Both are also simultaneously informed by and critiqued by academic and public discourses. I always seem to see the panic in the public eye and never seem to see nuanced academic responses like Slocum et al's (2011) critique of Jamie Oliver's Food Revolution in the public discourse. Perhaps professional and academic discourses need to be more intentional about disseminating technical knowledge, as well as participating in the dialogue about the implications and technicalities of such knowledge.

6.4   Food as a way to understand community and support

Mothers also see food as an integral part of participation in community life. Food and community take different forms for mothers but these forms have the common characteristics of cultivating community through food and having spaces in which to gather in community. Food is a way for mothers to talk about the lack of gathering places for them and their children, as well as the types of community-based programs and services that would assist them in achieving their goals and food security. However, our conversations also provide various recommendations for how CBFSPs and social services' philosophies of practice could change to align more with community goals and desires rather than merely helping people in the immediate term.

The neighbourhoods where the mothers live are in the midst of working towards planning and implementing new CBFSPs, which provides the opportunity to incorporate these recommendations. New CBFSPs would be more successful in achieving neighbourhood goals if they include the voices of targeted groups in the planning and implementation processes. Existing CBFSPs would also benefit from dialogue with community members in efforts to direct services and programs to community desires. Mothers do not want to see more food banks; however, they see community-based programs and services as providing assistance in building social support networks and developing new food-related skills, such as cooking, sharing recipes, and budgeting. These types of programs and services do not have to be limited to lone mothers, but should be open to all residents of an area, thereby helping to build inclusive community.

Furthermore, mothers want to see those who are currently service providers as facilitators rather than teachers or leaders. They feel the same with food; food is a facilitator, but not the main reason for their participation. This point is best made during the focus group, where the group describes a mothers' program in which they participate. The mothers initially came together to coordinate their children's school nutrition program, and continue to do so, but the main focus of their group has come to be as a support system for each other and a venue to share advice with each other. The service provider in this case has taken on a facilitator role, checking in with mothers and providing technical knowledge around different topics relevant to parenting when they arise, but not overseeing or surveying the mothers' actions and conversations.

Mothers want to build their sense of place, belonging, and community through food, and not just be given food. They want facilitators to be allies and supports in the journey to improving their families' QoL. Through building community, they want to build the courage to

advocate for themselves, whether through returning to school or work, or through becoming

more politically active.

6.5   Future research & limitations

I have focused on exploring and recounting stories of mothers from specific

neighbourhoods of Hamilton, which has illuminated new questions that address the limitations of

my research and provides many points of departure for future research. Throughout the writing

and knowledge-sharing process, I have been wondering whether the experiences of the mothers I

interviewed are mirrored elsewhere in Hamilton, since it has a unique geography that includes

the Escarpment, and encompasses urban, suburban, and rural areas. There is also evidence to

suggest that other neighourhoods in the city face other challenges to food security (see, for

example, Semogas et al., 2011). Does the difference in geography change the journeys and

contextual considerations for mothers, and do their stories differ? Understanding the stories from

different areas of the city may reveal differences in challenges to food security, as well as ways

to achieve food security.

Furthermore, I did not examine how identifying as a visible minority, Aboriginal, or

newcomer affects food security. Hamilton has the third highest rate of Aboriginals and persons

born outside of Canada in Ontario, albeit a lower ranking in the rate of newcomers, which

highlights the importance of understanding how the availability and accessibility of culturally

appropriate foods can affect food security (Mayo et al., 2011). How do geography and the urban

environment affect journeys to accessing culturally appropriate foods? Aboriginal peoples also

have access to various culturally-specific programs and services. Do the distribution of these

programs and services and the programs and services themselves change the experience of food insecurity in any way?

In thinking about feminist approaches to research, future projects could focus on intersectionality and how intersecting identities influence food insecurity. For example, although my research did not intentionally gather stories of disabled women's experiences of food insecurity, a fair number of the mother I spoke to were recipients of ODSP. My research was unable to specifically focus on the particular physical and mental health challenges these women faced in achieving food security, and how experiences of being ODSP recipients intersected with their experiences of disability and food insecurity. As the future direction of SA in Ontario remains unknown, future study research could focus on conducting a longitudinal study that mirrors Gurstein et al.'s (2011) work on understanding the impacts of welfare restructuring on Vancouver lone mothers and their experiences of food insecurity and SA overtime to uncover the impacts of provincial policy change at the micro level.

6.6   Final thoughts

I acknowledge that this is essentially where my work ends. I will be departing from Hamilton at the end of the summer and will no longer be able to fully participate in and contribute to Hamilton's journey forward. As someone who believes deeply in the principles of PAR, and in the importance of sustainability of moving research projects into political action, the thought of my departure has been the source of much guilt and anxiety. I attempt to rationalize my feelings by saying that an academic's role is not necessarily one of leading organizing and lobbying initiatives, but one of facilitating them through providing evidence. I hope this thesis,

associated presentations and documents, and my discussions with various people have at least planted some seeds for future actions.

Furthermore, I wish I were able to document the conclusions of the knowledge-sharing aspect of the project in this thesis, but, alas, one of the challenges of community-based research is the disparity between academic and community timelines. Nonetheless, I hope I have taken this opportunity to provide some parting reflections about my experiences and learning, as well as my hopes for the future. I have high hopes for Hamilton; it is such a dynamic city with so much passion and the strongest sense of pride of anywhere I have ever lived. Hamilton is at a fork in the road, not just with respect to food, but with respect to cityhood as a whole. With different institutions and groups like McMaster, the City of Hamilton, community organizations, neighbourhood groups, and citizen groups pushing to work more collaboratively, Hamilton has the potential to reinvent itself as a more equitable city that leads the way in food justice, social justice, and gender equity in Canada and North America more broadly. Of course, being at a fork in the road, there exists the potential to further entrench inequality, injustice, and oppression through a lack of inclusion, participation, and reflexivity. I hope I have been able to illuminate some of the ways in which to change current initiatives in order to choose the road that creates the most favourable city for all Hamiltonians.

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GLOSSARY

***Asset-based community development (ABCD) model*:** A model of community development proposed by Kretzmann and McKnight (1993) that emphasizes the assets of community as the way to develop communities, as opposed to the implementation of outside programs and services. Proponents of ABCD believe that programs and services have taken over communities and have, in fact, weakened the informal social support systems that formerly existed. Through recognizing and acting upon community assets and divesting themselves of social services, proponents of ABCD believe that communities can once again thrive.

***Community-based food services and programs (CBFSPs)*:** Any non-governmental (although could be government-funded) service or program that provides a service or program around food. A CBFSP could be an emergency food initiative, such as a food bank, or a capacity building initiative, such as a community kitchen. A CBFSP can also exist at various scales; for example, it could be within a large non-profit institution or be a neighbourhood scale grassroots initiative out of a church basement.

***Emergency food (system)*:** A part of CBFSPs, the emergency food system includes the immediate and charitable relief to hunger. The system includes food banks for the most part, soup kitchens, and free meal/out-of-the-cold programs. Its resurgence coincides with the devolution of the social safety net in the 1980s and the system continues to expand with the current economic crisis. For a more in depth discussion on the emergency food system, see Poppendieck (1999).

***Food justice*:** According to Just Food (2010), a non-profit organization based in New York City, food justice is defined as: "communities exercising their right to grow, sell, and eat [food that is] fresh, nutritious, affordable, culturally appropriate, and grown locally with care for the well-being of the land, worker, and animals." D-Town Farmers based in Detroit have also added that those most marginalized by the dominant system need to "lead the movement to provide food for the members of their community" (White, 2010, p.204, as cited in Alkon & Agyeman, 2011, p.5). Gottlieb and Joshi (2010, p.6) have devoted a whole book to the topic of food justice, defining it as "… ensuring that the risks and benefits of where, what, and how food is produced, transported and distributed, and accessed and eaten are shared fairly."

Foodscape: The food landscape within which one sits. One's foodscape incorporates the physical environment where food resources, such as grocery stores, CBFSPs, convenience stores, restaurants, and so forth exist, as well as the social environment where knowledge and culture inform how we see the physical environment.

***Food resources*:** Any place where one can acquire food, whether through the exchange of money for goods, through being given food, or through the exchange of labour for food. I use this term to include any place where one can acquire food, from grocery stores to a food bank.

Gathering places: A term used by my colleague and friend, Jeanette Eby, to describe places where people gather to socialize that are outside of home and work. These places differ from public places because they may be places where one has to pay in order to be there. Examples of gathering places include coffee shops, parks, community centers, and schools.

Living wage: The Canadian Center for Policy Alternatives defines a living wage as enabling a household to: feed, clothe, and provide shelter for their family; promote healthy child development; participate in activities that are an ordinary part of life in the community; and avoid the chronic stress of living in poverty (Pike & Mayo, 2011). The Living Wage is currently an initiative at the municipal level. See www.livingwagehamilton.ca for a more in depth discussion about the calculation and more details of what is included in the living wage.

Low-income cut off: Statistics Canada's measurement and most commonly reported measure of poverty in Canada. In the City of Hamilton, the LICO for a single person is calculated to be $20,778 before taxes. Please see Mayo & Fraser (2009) for more information on the calculation of the LICO and LICO for the City of Hamilton.

Positivism: A line of philosophical thought whose proponents believe in scientific knowledge as the only form of authentic knowledge. The truth is discovered through the scientific method, and observation is verified or falsified through statistics. Positivist thought is seen to be free of social values, as well as metaphysical thought (Barnes, 2009).

Retail food outlet: This term refers to all places where money is exchanged for food items. They can include: grocery stores, convenience stores, other stores selling food items (e.g. *Shoppers Drug Mart* and *Zellers*), and farmers' markets.

Social assistance: Income assistance provided by the province and administered by municipalities. In Ontario, the two main forms of social assistance are Ontario Works (OW) and Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP). In the text, when I mention social assistance, I am referring to OW and ODSP, and other forms of government support mothers may receive, such as the Ontario Child Benefit. Mothers referred to it as "the system", and so in places it may be referred to as such.

Social justice: A heavily used term with many definitions. Within geography, Harvey (2009) has written about *Social Justice in the City*, defining it as the equal spatial and social distribution of what he terms "income" or resources. I would argue that on top of equitable distribution of resources, social justice also encompasses feelings of belonging and inclusion that result in participation in civic life, as well as feeling valued by one's society.

APPENDIX A: ETHICS CERTIFICATE

QuickTime™ and a
decompressor
are needed to see this picture.

APPENDIX B: PARTICIPANT LETTER OF INFORMATION

McMaster University

School of Geography and Earth Sciences

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Letter of Information: Key Informants

Title of the study: "Determining characteristics of *food security* needs for lone mothers in low socio-economic neighbourhoods"

Principle Investigator:

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Please read/listen to this information form carefully. If you have any questions, please ask the facilitator.

Purpose of the study:
The purpose of this study is to learn more about low-income lone mothers in Hamilton's experiences with food insecurity, community-based food services and programs, and *food security* needs (e.g. affordable fresh food, housing, stable income, increase in social assistance). My goal is to learn more about the different challenges faced by lone mothers in low-income neighbourhoods to obtain fresh, affordable, personally acceptable food through retail stores (for example: grocery stores, variety stores) and community-based food services and programs (for example: food banks, meal programs). The ultimate goal of this study is to use this information to create a list of ways that community-based food services and programs can be improved specifically within these neighbourhoods, as well as in the City of Hamilton in general, to better meet family *food security* needs.

Procedure:
If you volunteer to participate, I will interview you and ask you to respond to a series of questions about community-based food services and programs, challenges that users of programs and services face, as well as you/your organization's challenge in operating such services and programs. You will then be asked to suggest ways in which programs and services in the neighbourhood, as well as in the City of Hamilton in general, could be improved. *I will be audiotaping the interview* and it is expected to last 1 hour.

Potential risks:
The risks associated with participating in this study are no greater than risks you encounter in everyday life. You may experience some discomfort sharing information as you may feel that others may be able to discern your response. However, you are not required to answer any questions that you do not wish to answer. You are asked to only share what you are comfortable sharing in a public setting.

You will have the opportunity to request a copy of the transcript of this focus group or a summary to check its accuracy through the information you can provide in the consent form.

Potential benefits:
The results from this study will help inform community-based food programs and services on how to improve to better meet the needs of lone mothers in the neighbourhood, and perhaps the residents of the City of Hamilton.

Remuneration for participation:
Key informants will receive no remuneration for participating in the study.

Confidentiality:
This conversation is completely confidential. Upon agreeing to participate, you will be signing a Letter of Consent that guarantees this. Only myself, my supervisor (Dr. Allison Williams) and other focus group participants will know of your participation. Your name and any identifiable information will not be discussed with anyone, nor published. Your privacy will be respected. Any information you provide during the study will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in my office and only I will have access to it. This includes the audio-recording of the interview and the notes taken during the focus group. The information will be destroyed after the study is completed.

If you volunteer to participate, you will have the opportunity to request to be called by another name during the interview.

Again, you will have the opportunity to request a transcript or a summary of the focus group to check its accuracy. At this stage, you will also have the opportunity to remove any statements that you do not want used in future documents.

Participation and Withdrawal:

Your participation in this study is <u>voluntary</u>. Below are some of the steps taken if a participant withdraws:

- If you choose to withdraw prior to signing the consent form, I will terminate the interview.
- If you choose to withdraw a comment you made during the interview you may tell me so during the interview, or after it has finished, either in person or via telephone or email.
- You may choose not to answer any questions during the interview by letting me know you would like to pass during that part of the discussion, and also letting me know when you would like to rejoin the discussion.
- You may choose to withdraw entirely from the study during the interview, or any point afterwards, by either telling me in person at or during the interview, or by telephone or email after.

If you choose to withdraw, any information collected about you up to this point will be destroyed (including letter of consent and any responses to questions) and will not be used in the future.

Study debriefing:
If you choose to participate, you will have the option of obtaining a copy of the research summary or attending a community presentation of the research results (depending on demand) in the Letter of Consent.

Rights of Research Participants:
You may withdraw your consent at any time during the study without any penalty. If you have any questions or concerns about this study, please feel free to contact me (905.525.9140, ext. 28617).

This study has been reviewed by the McMaster University Research Ethics Board and received ethics clearance. If you have concerns or questions about your rights as a participant or about the way the study is conducted, please contact:
McMaster Research Ethics Secretariat
Telephone: 905-525-9140 ext. 23142
c/o Office of Research Services
Email: ethicsoffice@mcmaster.ca

APPENDIX C: VERBAL LETTER OF CONSENT

McMaster University

School of Geography and Earth Sciences	1280 Main Street West Hamilton, Ontario, Canada L8S 4K1

Letter of Information: Key Informants

Title of the study: "Determining characteristics of *food security* needs for lone mothers in low socio-economic neighbourhoods"

Principle Investigator: Yui Hashimoto
                                                          School of Geography and Earth Sciences
                                                          McMaster University
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Co-Investigator: Dr. Allison Williams (Faculty Supervisor)
                                                          School of Geography and Earth Sciences
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                                                          awill@mcmaster.ca

Please read/listen to this information form carefully. If you have any questions, please ask the facilitator.

Purpose of the study:
The purpose of this study is to learn more about low-income lone mothers in Hamilton's experiences with food insecurity, community-based food services and programs, and *food security* needs (e.g. affordable fresh food, housing, stable income, increase in social assistance). My goal is to learn more about the different challenges faced by lone mothers in low-income neighbourhoods to obtain fresh, affordable, personally acceptable food through retail stores (for example: grocery stores, variety stores) and community-based food services and programs (for example: food banks, meal programs). The ultimate goal of this study is to use this information to create a list of ways that community-based food services and programs can be improved specifically within these neighbourhoods, as well as in the City of Hamilton in general, to better meet family *food security* needs.

Procedure:
If you volunteer to participate, I will interview you and ask you to respond to a series of questions about community-based food services and programs, challenges that users of programs and services face, as well as you/your organization's challenge in operating such services and programs. You will then be asked to suggest ways in which programs and services in the neighbourhood, as well as in the City of Hamilton in general, could be improved. *I will be audiotaping the interview* and it is expected to last 1 hour.

Potential risks:
The risks associated with participating in this study are no greater than risks you encounter in everyday life. You may experience some discomfort sharing information as you may feel that others may be able to discern your response. However, you are not required to answer any questions that you do not wish to answer. You are asked to only share what you are comfortable sharing in a public setting.

You will have the opportunity to request a copy of the transcript of this focus group or a summary to check its accuracy through the information you can provide in the consent form.

Potential benefits:
The results from this study will help inform community-based food programs and services on how to improve to better meet the needs of lone mothers in the neighbourhood, and perhaps the residents of the City of Hamilton.

Remuneration for participation:
Key informants will receive no remuneration for participating in the study.

Confidentiality:
This conversation is completely confidential. Upon agreeing to participate, you will be signing a Letter of Consent that guarantees this. Only myself, my supervisor (Dr. Allison Williams) and other focus group participants will know of your participation. Your name and any identifiable information will not be discussed with anyone, nor published. Your privacy will be respected. Any information you provide during the study will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in my office and only I will have access to it. This includes the audio-recording of the interview and the notes taken during the focus group. The information will be destroyed after the study is completed.

If you volunteer to participate, you will have the opportunity to request to be called by another name during the interview.

Again, you will have the opportunity to request a transcript or a summary of the focus group to check its accuracy. At this stage, you will also have the opportunity to remove any statements that you do not want used in future documents.

Participation and Withdrawal:

Your participation in this study is <u>voluntary</u>. Below are some of the steps taken if a participant withdraws:

- If you choose to withdraw prior to signing the consent form, I will terminate the interview.
- If you choose to withdraw a comment you made during the interview you may tell me so during the interview, or after it has finished, either in person or via telephone or email.
- You may choose not to answer any questions during the interview by letting me know you would like to pass during that part of the discussion, and also letting me know when you would like to rejoin the discussion.
- You may choose to withdraw entirely from the study during the interview, or any point afterwards, by either telling me in person at or during the interview, or by telephone or email after.

If you choose to withdraw, any information collected about you up to this point will be destroyed (including letter of consent and any responses to questions) and will not be used in the future.

Study debriefing:
If you choose to participate, you will have the option of obtaining a copy of the research summary or attending a community presentation of the research results (depending on demand) in the Letter of Consent.

Rights of Research Participants:
You may withdraw your consent at any time during the study without any penalty. If you have any questions or concerns about this study, please feel free to contact me (905.525.9140, ext. 28617).

This study has been reviewed by the McMaster University Research Ethics Board and received ethics clearance. If you have concerns or questions about your rights as a participant or about the way the study is conducted, please contact:

<div align="center">
McMaster Research Ethics Secretariat
Telephone: 905-525-9140 ext. 23142
c/o Office of Research Services
Email: ethicsoffice@mcmaster.ca
</div>

APPENDIX D: PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT FLYER

Are you a single mother interested in improving access to food?

We are looking for participants to take part in a study about neighbourhood access to food and community-based food services and programs.

You will have the option to participate in **either** a focus group with other single mothers from the neighbourhood or an individual interview.

Your participation will involve **up to two** focus groups/face-to-face interviews for approximately an hour to an hour and a half each.

In appreciation for your time, you will receive a **$20 grocery card** and on-site childcare for your participation in the focus group/interview.

For more information about the study or to volunteer for this study, please contact:

Yui Hashimoto
School of Geography and Earth Sciences
905.645.4592
E-mail: hashimy@mcmaster.ca

This study has been reviewed by and received ethics clearance from the McMaster Research Ethics Board.

McMaster University

APPENDIX E: CONFIDENTIALITY STATEMENT

Confidentiality script

Protocol title: Understanding food insecurity for lone mothers in low socio-economic neighbourhoods

Researcher: Yui Hashimoto, School of Geography and Earth Sciences, McMaster University, hashimy@mcmaster.ca, 905.525.9140, ext 28617

So, welcome to the focus group/face-to-face interview. Before we begin, I would like to discuss confidentiality.

I would like you to know that today's conversation will remain completely confidential. I am audio-recording the conversation for accuracy. All audio-recordings will be kept in a locked cabinet within a locked office. Consenting to participate in this study includes consenting to having the discussion audio-recorded. We will be verbally consenting before we begin. If you prefer, at this time, you may wish to identify yourself by another name to be used during the focus group.

Any questions so far?

During the conversation, you may see me jotting down a few notes. These are notes to myself about specific items I would like to go back and address at a later stage.

Audio-tapes will be transcribed word for word. The electronic file of these transcripts will be kept on a password protected computer, and will not contain any personal information. In the letter of consent, you will have the option to see a copy of the transcript or a summary to check for accuracy.

The goal of this conversation is to discuss different ways in which community-based food programs and services (food banks, school meal programs, free meal programs) can be improved to allow people in this neighbourhood to obtain fresh, affordable, personally acceptable food. We may use some of the specific comments from the discussion in write-ups of the results; however, neither your real name nor your name in the discussion will be used in these write-ups. I also realize that some of the comments you make in the discussion may identify you. To this extent, I will do my best to remove any comments that may reveal your identity in the final write-ups.

Having said this, we cannot guarantee that other participants will honour this request. Because of this, please limit your comments to ones that you would be comfortable making in other public settings. You may choose to not answer a question or not participate in any part of the conversation that makes you uncomfortable. You will also have the option of removing any comments from the conversation at any time, during or after the focus group, in person or via telephone or e-mail.

Any questions?

After the completion of the study, only unidentifiable information, such as interview transcripts, will be stored in a secure location.

With this knowledge, I will now read/pass out the Letter of Consent. Please listen/read carefully and then you will be asked to verbally consent. Agreeing to participate through verbal consent or a signature marks that you have consented to participate as explained in the Letter of Information.

Whether during the discussion or after via telephone or email, please do not hesitate to ask if you have questions or concerns about confidentiality. You may also chose not to participate in any part of the focus group discussion you feel uncomfortable. As a participant, it is your right to withdraw at any time with no penalty. Also, if you realize that there is information you would like to share with me, but do not feel comfortable in the group setting, feel free to get in touch and share your responses.

APPENDIX F: PARTICIPANT AND KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

<u>Focus group/face-to-face interview guide</u>
<u>Availability</u>

This set of questions is about the amount of fresh produce, meat, and dairy is available in your neighbourhood.

1. Where do you normally get your food (e.g: grocery store, variety store, food bank, etc.)?

    - Probe: Does it depend on the time of month?

    - Probe: how do you choose where to shop/obtain food?

2. Do you think that reasonably priced, fresh food (e.g. vegetables, fruit, and meat) is available in your neighbourhood at retail and/or community location?

    - Probe: Which one do you think has better availability?

3. What sorts of programs and services are available in the neighbourhood? They can be ones that you use or don't use.

    - Probe: Is fresh food available at these places? For example, are fresh fruit and vegetables available at a food bank; are fresh fruit and vegetables used at a community kitchen; is there a fresh food option (fruit, carrots, etc.)?

    - Probe: so you have to travel to other neighbourhoods?

    - Probe: Why do you think your neighbourhood doesn't have any services or programs?

4. What sorts of food-related places would you like to see in your neighbourhood?

    - Probe: do you have any ideas for the types of programs and services that you would be interested in participating in, or having in the neighbourhood for your neighbours?

<u>Accessibility</u>

This next set of questions is about your routine of buying or getting food.

5. Let's say you're about to go get food right after this focus group. Can you describe for me your routine of how you buy or get food?

- Probe: how do you get there? Is it an affordable option? What is your access to transit like?
- Probe: are the hours good at the places you go to?
- Probe: does it depend on the time of the month?

6. Is it difficult to get to wherever you're going to get the food? For example, are there lots of busy streets to cross, a lack of bus lines, or personal safety?

7. When you're at the store, what are the biggest considerations that you have? For example, quality, quantity, organic, local, price, etc.
   - Probe: are local, organic, Fair Trade, etc. considerations that you make?

8. Are there specific times when it is difficult to afford food?
   - Probe: what are some of the ways that you cope with a shortage of food?
   - Probe: are these services easy to reach and use when you need them? Are you given fair treatment?

9. Do you think that service providers understand the residents of the neighbourhood, especially single mums?

Acceptability & Adequacy

This set of questions is about how acceptable the food you buy or get is in relation to your standards.

10. Does the food you buy at regular retail stores (e.g. grocery stores, variety stores), for the most part, meet your standards in terms of quality, quantity, and safety?
    - Probe: what are some of the concerns that you have?

11. From these retail locations, are you able to choose all of the foods you and your children want to eat? For example, if you're a vegetarian, if you have a special diet, etc.
    - Probe: what sorts of foods are lacking? What would you like to see?

12. Does the food you get from community-based services and programs, for the most part, meet your standards in terms of quality, quantity, and safety?

- Probe: what are some of the concerns that you have (health, etc.)?

- Probe: is this because the food is not acceptable?

- Probe: if you get things that you've never cooked with, what do you do?

13. From these services and programs, are you able to choose all of the foods you and your children want to eat?

- Probe: what sorts of foods are lacking?

- Probe: what happens to foods that you don't want/can't eat?

Action

14. Can you suggest some ways in which retail stores can improve?

15. What are the greater conditions in your life that need to improve for you to be able buy the food that you and your children want and need?

16. Can you suggest some of the ways in which community services and programs can improve? Remember, your responses are confidential and will no way change your relationship with programs, services, staff, and organizations.

17. If you were sitting around a table of people with power and resources, what would you tell them about your life?

18. Are there any other issues about food you would like to add that we haven't already discussed?

Mapping

Now that we've talked a bit about how you get food and some of the challenges, I'd like to work with you on drawing these on paper. Remember, there are no right or wrong answers; I'm just interested in learning the challenges you face in getting food for your family. In this exercise, I am particularly interested in understanding physical challenges; for example, how many blocks do you have to travel to the grocery store or community-based food programs and services? are there lots of busy streets to cross without crosswalks, or do you have adequate access to HSR lines/taxis? Are there lots of speeding cars that make it dangerous to walk on the sidewalk? Do you feel unsafe

walking in certain areas, etc.? Are there organizations that you like to go to and ones you don't like to go to? Why?

We're going to take the first 5 minutes to sit individually and draw our maps, like we discussed before. Note down any thoughts you have on your journey, however small or obscure. Then we're going to come together to build a larger map together. I really want to emphasize that there are no right or wrong answers.