

FOOD BANKS, FOOD DRIVES AND FOOD INSECURITY:  
THE SOCIAL CANSTRUCTION<sup>®</sup> OF HUNGER

FOOD BANKS, FOOD DRIVES AND FOOD INSECURITY:  
THE SOCIAL CANSTRUCTION<sup>®</sup> OF HUNGER

By IRIS DE ROUX-SMITH, B.A., B.S.W.

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AUTHOR: Iris De Roux-Smith, B.A., B.S.W. (Renison University College,  
University of Waterloo)

SUPERVISOR: Dr. Stephanie Baker Collins

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## ABSTRACT

Food banks have become an institutionalized response to helping individuals and families gain access to food as wages have stagnated, employment becomes more precarious, and social entitlements have dramatically declined over the years. Food banks were supposed to be a temporary stop gap measure in response to the recession of 1980. Thirty-three years later, food banks have proliferated across Canada in assisting a growing population in need of their services.

I present an analysis of how food bank suppliers use the concept of hunger in a fundraising campaign called Canstruction® to understand how it relates to people's perception of this social problem in our society. This qualitative research study uses discourse analysis to unpack the solicitation discourse used at Canstruction® events held in Waterloo and Toronto, Ontario in 2014. I have collected data from three different groups: persons who designed and installed their artwork at the Canstruction® Toronto event; persons who volunteer at a food bank; and people who have food insecurity experience.

The findings indicate a differentiated understanding of hunger within the solicitation discourse for each research group: Canstruction® participants, food bank volunteers, and persons with food insecurity experience. The Canstruction® participants' absorption of the solicitation discourse produced a limited understanding about hunger in our society. The food bank volunteer group agreed with the solicitation discourse but their images of hunger illustrated deeper criticisms of the event and food bank system. The participant group with food insecurity experience expressed the greatest amount of criticism against the food bank's solicitation discourse and their images of hunger reflected their psycho-social experience of living in poverty. Also, an overwhelming majority of research participants with food insecurity wanted a food bank system that was more responsive to their needs and that honoured human dignity.

My study on the social construction of hunger portrayed by food banks highlights how this knowledge is reinforced, reproduced and challenged through a food drive that creates packaged food items into artwork and from images described by research participants. These insights have the potential to shift the discourse away from the branding of hunger as a matter of charity and move towards discussing its fundamental causes: poverty and social inequality.

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## Introduction

On December 13, 2013 during a media scrum in Vancouver, James Moore, the Minister of Industry and the MP for Port Moody-Westwood-Port Coquitlam, British Columbia responded to a question from a local news reporter about British Columbia's high levels of poverty (Norman, 2013). He made headlines in response to the reporter's inquiry about children going to school hungry when he stated,

“Certainly we want to make sure that kids go to school full bellied, but is that always the government's job to be there to serve people their breakfast? Empowering families with more power and resources so that they can feed their own children is, I think, a good thing. Is it my job to feed my neighbour's child? I don't think so.” (Janus, 2013)

The quote illustrates a neoliberal view of the issue of poverty. This perspective opposes the welfare state and supports a completely free market unhindered by state involvement (McKenzie & Wharf, 2010). The quote demonstrates that “hungry children” are the responsibility of their parents and do not need a compassionate society to help look after them. In neoliberal discourse, “hunger” is not a societal problem but a problem that is individualized, and any meaningful solutions rest with the individual's participation in the marketplace.

Hunger is regularly spotlighted by the Canadian media and by food banks. Food banks have become an engrained social and cultural response to poverty, in particular the problem of hunger in a society that has an abundance of food available. Their growth in

Canada in the past 33 years in the fight against hunger has only lead to their institutionalization. They serve a growing marginalized population including the unemployed, social assistance recipients, and Canadians working in precarious and low-wage positions. Since the birth of the first food bank in the United States in 1967 in Phoenix, Arizona (Poppendieck, 1998) the numbers have grown at an exponential rate. Food banks were exported into Canada with the start of the first major recession since World War II in 1980. The language of hunger has been used by food banks to attract public attention in receiving funds, free food, and changes in social policy. There has been a wealth of studies about food banks in Canada and the US and their proliferation in the United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand, but there has been limited research about the discourse of hunger used by food banks.

### **Purpose & Rationale**

My research about food banks starts with my own professional experience in distributing emergency food. Being required to refuse individuals who requested more food than the rationed amount propelled me to critically examine my own values and perceptions of hunger. I did not believe I was protecting the system from potential abusers when refusing such requests; rather I had emotionally internalized the acute scarcity of food being delivered each week. I realized that I was reinforcing an unjust system which stored limited food supplies in order to feed more people with even less food. It opened my eyes to the day-to-day realities of the food bank system.

As a result of the food bank's institutionalization, their discourse of hunger has become well entrenched in our social world. My professional experience at the food bank

propelled me to critically think about the connection between the meagre amounts of food provided and how it relates to the food banks' semantic assertion in all of their publications and fundraising efforts that their services help those who are hungry. When I reviewed various food bank websites in Ontario and the Food Banks Canada website, some of the images and language used to portray the problem of hunger seemed out of place with the day-to-day realities of people accessing food banks. Images include happy and healthy children, variety and abundance of unspoiled fresh foods, and volunteers/staff collecting and organizing large amounts of food donations. The language used by some food banks includes: "So no one goes hungry" (Waterloo Region Food Bank, 2013) and "We can end hunger. Think about it" (Ontario Association of Food Banks, n.d.). I particularly found interesting the absence of terms such as food insecurity and food security in my review of food banks' websites, annual reports, and fundraising material. It caused me to wonder why food banks use 'hunger' and not food insecurity to describe this social problem. I came to understand that food insecurity involves a much broader socio-economic context that does not have the same emotive effect as the word hunger does. An effective marketing campaign creates a visceral connection with its target audience (Hastings, 2012). Most food banks promote food and cash donations as a means of ending hunger, a construct that the public can easily connect with, when in reality food donations are heavily rationed and much of the food has low nutritional value and is nearing the expiration dates. After working in a food bank, I realized that hunger is a semiotic site that socially constructs power and privilege.

**The Institutionalization of Food Banks & Hunger – a brief history**

Food banks in Canada emerged in the 1980s as a temporary response to assist people who were having difficulty affording food after the recession of 1980. The first food bank was established in Edmonton, Alberta in 1981 and in 33 years food banks have grown significantly to over 800 food banks and 3000 food programs across Canada (Food Banks Canada, n.d.-a). Food banks have now become an institutionalized response to hunger and the number of people whom they service has grown significantly over the years (Riches, 2002). A food bank is generally defined as a

“centralized warehouse or clearing house registered as a non-profit organization for the purpose of collecting, storing and distributing surplus food (donated/shared), free of charge, to front line agencies which provide supplementary food and meals to the hungry.”

(Riches, 1986, p. 16)

Service programs that provide food directly to the public are referred to as emergency food hamper programs or emergency food relief which receive donated food from a regional food bank. However the term food bank is often used interchangeably with a distribution service of donated food to those who are ‘needy’. While some engage in advocacy and public education, others focus primarily on feeding the hungry (Riches, 2002).

A majority of the food is donated by the food industry such as farms, food producers (i.e. bakeries, processing plants), and retailers (Tarasuk & Eakin, 2003). For example, eighty-three percent of the donated food at the Food Bank of Waterloo Region

came from the food industry in 2013 (Waterloo Region Food Bank, 2013). A majority of “this food is donated because it cannot be retailed due to manufacturing errors or damage during shipping, handling, and storage, or because the products are perishable and no longer of retail quality or nearing their expiry dates” (Tarasuk & Eakin, 2003, p. 1506). The food available at food banks is normally of low nutritional quality and provides a limited amount of food to food bank consumers throughout the year (Teron & Tarasuk, 1999).

### **Definitions of Hunger, Food Security and Food Insecurity**

In understanding the social problem of people not receiving enough to eat in a society with an abundance of food, we first need to identify that there are a few terms used to describe this social problem and how these terms are contextualized. The definition of hunger is viewed differently by various people and organizations. The word hunger is often associated with an uncomfortable feeling or pain in your stomach caused by the need for food which is a dictionary definition of the term (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). This definition of hunger is used by the Ontario Association of Food Banks (Ontario Association of Food Banks, n.d.) and was shared by 53.1% of respondents in a US survey assessing people’s perceptions of hunger (Nord, Finberg, & McLaughlin, 2009). Others define hunger under more severe physiological conditions such as a “prolonged involuntary lack of food, results in discomfort, illness, weakness or pain that goes beyond the usual uneasy sensation” (Nord et al., 2009, p. 21). The physiological perceptions of hunger are linked with individualized suffering.

Shifting the focus from hunger to food security encompasses a far wider scope in understanding economic, social and health implications. In 1943, a UN Conference on Food and Agriculture held in Hot Springs, Virginia used the term food security for the first time to recognize the global problem of malnutrition and low agricultural production due to the consequences of WWII (Committee on World Food Security, 2012). World leaders agreed that poverty was a central cause of hunger, and believed that longer term global economic growth and employment would reduce poverty and increase adequate nutrition (Committee on World Food Security, 2012). “Food and agricultural policies in the 1950s and 1960s continued to focus mainly on increasing productivity, production and marketing of major staples, principally wheat and rice” (Committee on World Food Security, 2012, p. 4). Prompted by an acute food crisis in the early 1980s, the emphasis of food security on the supply side of food production changed to include physical and economic access (Committee on World Food Security, 2012). Today, food security is defined as “when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life” (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 2006).

By the 1990s, food insecurity entered the lexicon as a substitute to hunger. Food insecurity was adopted by anti-hunger advocates and scholars to move hunger beyond a physiological condition to focus on issues of “social situation and psychological distress of people who do not have a reliable and secure source of food for themselves and their children” (Poppendieck, 1998, p. 79). Others have defined food insecurity as “the inability to consume an adequate quality or sufficient quantity of food in socially



acceptable ways, or the uncertainty that one will be able to do so” (Dowler & O’Connor, 2012, p. 45). Food insecurity within wealthy industrialized nations is not the result of diminished food supplies but a problem caused by insufficient wages (Riches, 2002) and diminished or failed entitlements to access food (Dowler & O’Connor, 2012). However, spikes in global food prices, as seen in the 2008 food crisis, caused by confluence of global issues such as the decline in grain production, higher energy prices, and increased demands from emerging markets (Mittal, 2009) greatly affect households experiencing or vulnerable to food insecurity in their ability to afford food.

### **The Scale of “Hunger” in Canada**

How hunger is measured provides different numbers as to how many people are affected and which demographic groups are most affected. Food Banks Canada compiles a national annual report called Hunger Count which is a statistical count of food bank usage across Canada. According to Hunger Count 2013, the number of people accessing emergency food services was gradually decreasing from 2003 to 2008. However, the Great Recession of 2009 saw the number peak at 872,379 people accessing emergency food services across Canada in a single-day count in March 2009 which represents a 23% rise from 2008 (Food Banks Canada, 2013). The Hunger Count 2013 report showed a slight decline to 833,098 persons accessing food emergency programs in a single-day count in March 2013.

The report also provides a demographic breakdown of food bank users as follows: 50% of households rely on social assistance as their sole means of support; 43% are single person households; 25% are single parent households; 16% percent receive

disability benefits; 11% are persons who self identify as Metis, First Nations or Inuit; and 11% are immigrants who arrived in Canada in the past 10 years (Food Banks Canada, 2013). However, the Hunger Count report captures only a small slice of the problem of food insecurity in Canada. Food Banks Canada data collection is based on a single-day count in March of each year rather than collecting data during different times of the year which would reflect different peaks and valleys of food bank usage over the course of a year. Also, persons who cannot afford to buy sufficient food may not access food banks due to conditions such as social stigma, eligibility criteria, or the food bank's inconvenient hours of operation or location.

A report called Food Insecurity in Canada 2012 published by the Canadian Institute of Health Research (CIHR) provides statistics of households facing food insecurity which is based on the Canadian Community Health Survey (CCHS), "a cross-sectional survey administered by Statistics Canada that collects health related information from about 60,000 Canadians per year" (Tarasuk, Dachner, Mitchell, & Research to Identify Policy Options to Reduce Food Insecurity (PROOF), 2014, p. 6). The report found 4 million people, including 1.15 million children, or nearly 13% of the Canadian population experienced some level of food insecurity in 2012, which is an increase from 3.9 million people, including 1.1 million children, or 12% of the population in 2011 (Tarasuk, Dachner, Mitchell, & Research to Identify Policy Options to Reduce Food Insecurity (PROOF), 2013; Tarasuk et al., 2014). This statistic amounts to 1 in 8 households who are food insecure (Tarasuk et al., 2014).

The report also breaks down food insecure households into different characteristics as the following: 62.2% relied on wages, salaries or were self-employed; 3% depend on Employment Insurance or Worker's Compensation benefits; 16.1% relied on social assistance as their sole support; 12.3% were seniors dependent on a pension benefit; 6.4% cited no income or other income source; 15.6% were children 18 years and younger (Tarasuk et al., 2014). There are some limitations to the data collected by Statistics Canada which include the exclusion of "full-time members of the Canadian Forces, those living on First Nations reserves or Crown Lands or in prisons or care facilities, and persons living in the Quebec health regions of Région du Nunavik and Région des Terres-Cries-de-la-Baie-James" (Tarasuk et al., 2014). The authors of the report stated the absence of on-reserve First Nations people and homeless people, who, even though they comprise a relatively small proportions of the total population in Canada have a higher prevalence of food insecurity, results in an underestimation of the stats in the CCHS (Tarasuk et al., 2014).

Paying attention to how the problem is framed as *the number of people not receiving enough to eat* is important in realizing the why the stats vary. Both Food Banks Canada and the CIHR use the concept of people who do not have enough food to eat but differentiate in terms of the content and the context of how the concept is utilized. Food Banks Canada define the content of not having enough to eat as people who forage for food relief and define the context as food relief within their membership of food banks across Canada. As a result, Food Banks Canada's numbers define 'hunger' as those who access a food bank to demonstrate that 833,098 individuals are in 'need' (2013). The

CIHR define the content as people who face some degree of psychological distress and physiological deprivation when there is not enough food to eat. The CIHR define the context as people who do not have economic access to food, which they label as food insecurity. As result, the Canadian Institute of Health's study found 4 million individuals face food insecurity (2014). Despite the differences in the number of people who are deemed to be hungry or food insecure, the fact remains that these numbers represent a significant social problem that food banks cannot possibly solve on their own. Food banks maintain their foothold as the institutional answer to solving hunger which allows governments to defer to their services as more social entitlements are cut or remain stagnant (Riches, 2011a); minimum wages keep people perennially poor; and allow the corporate food industry to be viewed as socially conscious community partners (Riches, 2011a).

### **My Epistemological Positioning**

I developed an epistemological framework based on my experiences of working in a food bank in contrast to the knowledge I held before I started working there. Previous to my experience, I did not question the narrative about hunger from food drives that publicized the need for canned food for people who were hungry in our community. I did not know how food banks worked but the image I had was they were helping people who needed food when they had nothing else to eat. My knowledge at that time was also based on my experience of having lived in on social assistance as a child of a single parent raising two children. The social assistance program I grew up with was very different from the advent of Mike Harris' *Common Sense Revolution* of deep cuts to the program in Ontario. My childhood memories about food during that time were sometimes peppered with some favourite meals from my mother's ethnic cuisine, but mostly consisted of the unrelenting monotony of red meat and some sort of starch. But we always had food in our fridge and in our pantry. Also, we always bought food from the grocery store or the farmer's market. In essence, I never felt hungry when we lived on social assistance. I did not even know that food banks existed until I reached high school in the late 1980s. My limited knowledge about hunger was constructed by my experience living in poverty and that hungry people could go to a food bank for help.

When I began working at a food bank as part of my social work placement, I felt the curtain was drawn back on the social problem of hunger. I gained a richer narrative about how food banks operate and about the people who use their services. My

knowledge after working in a food bank forever changed my understanding about hunger and helped me realize that hunger is socially constructed.

My epistemological positioning is based on the theoretical framework of social constructionism. Social constructionism does not house specific tenets that are shared by all writers of social constructionism (Burr, 1995; Lock & Strong, 2010). However, social constructionism is about the meanings people attribute to their social world which generates knowledge about reality. As Berger and Luckmann (1966) state “common sense ‘knowledge’...must be the central focus...It is precisely this ‘knowledge’ that constitutes the fabric of meanings without which no society could exist” (p. 15) (in Harris, 2010, p. 3). Knowledge is not an objective reality but is a subjective experience at the individual level.

The application of social constructionism varies among different disciplines such as education, psychology and social work (Holstein & Gubrium, 2008; Witkin, 2012). However, there are some commonalities that many disciplines share when using social constructionism. People are social actors and use language to convey meaning about the interactions with their environment and with each other (Lock & Strong, 2010). Given my experiences living overseas, it is highly problematic if you do not speak the language or if words that are borrowed from one language are used to convey different meanings in another language. As a result, meaning makes more sense to people when they share the same linguistic constructs. But even when language is commonly shared its meaning is differentiated through embedded socio-cultural processes that are specific to geography, time, and social strata. Also, social constructionism is the antithesis of essentialism which

is “the belief that some phenomenon has an essence or inherent nature that makes it what it is” (Harris, 2010, p. 10). This leads the social constructionist to consistently question people’s perceptions of reality and the existence of an absolute truth (Lock & Strong, 2010). Lastly, social constructionism does not present its analysis in a neutral space but provides a critical perspective about the social world and “invites a different action” from people (Burr, 1995, p. 3).

Social constructionism’s appeal for my research focus is its process of examining truth claimsmaking about social problems. The works of Best and Harris (2013) and Lowney (2008) bring to focus the social constructionist perspective about social problems. A social problem exists due to people’s decision to either make it a problem or not “by the way they react to things” (Best & Harris, 2013, p. 3). This is known as claimsmaking. However claimsmaking events are not random events.

For claims to be effective they have to resonate with a wide number of people to make the claim stick as widely held knowledge. Best and Harris (2013) list the problematizing process as: i) notice a situation; ii) interpret it as a problem; and iii) tell others about it. Lowney (2008) identifies in more detail the process where problems have the greatest impact in becoming a site of truth and have minimal, if any, challengers. The problem-making process begins with an appeal to society’s moral imperative to hopefully change these troubling social conditions (Lowney, 2008). Claimsmakers construct a diagnostic frame that discusses the problem as “facts and figures” which will appeal to people’s intellectual side (Lowney, 2008). Having the facts presented as empirical evidence resonates with modern society’s proclivity for scientific thought. Along with

presenting “the problem”, claimsmakers also present “the solution” or else, if the problem cannot be solved, who would care (Lowney, 2008). Lastly, social problems are not here today and gone tomorrow. Social problems always exist and depend on multitude of things such as new ‘scientific’ discoveries or rebranding an old problem into something new. Essentially, social problems take on different trajectories over the course of human history (Best & Harris, 2013).

One of the most important aspects of social constructionism that reverberates with my feminist standpoint is social constructionism’s capacity to raises people’s consciousness. My experience working at a food bank certainly raised my consciousness of the “behind the scenes” operations and experiences of the food bank system. Now, I cannot look at food drives or marketing materials from a food bank without scrutinizing the language and the images used. My empathy for people who face food insecurity exists at different level of awareness than before.

Social constructionism raises people’s consciousness in two ways. One way is at a macro level. It urges us to deal with our entire experience and the world we live in as socially constructed (Hacking, 1999). The second way is at a micro level which involves shedding light on what claimsmakers say about a particular set of knowledge (Hacking, 1999). The intent of my research project is to raise people’s consciousness about hunger.

The social constructionist’s point of view also affects her or his level of analysis. Hacking (1999) describes different “gradations of constructionist commitment” (p. 19). In this context, how I view myself as a social constructionist depends on my political spectrum. At one end of the spectrum is the social constructionist who views that the



claim is inevitable due to ongoing historical processes, which Hacking (1999) labels as the historical and the least egregious perspective. At the other end of the spectrum is the “revolutionary constructionist” who tries to change the social processes that created the social construction in the first place (Hacking, 1999, p. 20). Given these two opposing spectrums, I would say my political leanings have me pegged as a “rebellious constructionist” who views the claim as wrong and needing change (Hacking, 1999, p. 20).

## **Literature Review**

The literature available about the role of food in society widely encompasses many disciplines such as history, sociology, philosophy, and health sciences. This research project delves into the social construction of hunger perceived by three research groups: people who designed and installed their artwork at the Canstruction® Toronto event, food bank volunteers, and persons with food insecurity experience. The research is based on the solicitation discourse used for a food drive event called Canstruction® that invites the public to construct representative artwork from non-perishable food items. The literature review relevant to my research project discusses the institutional role food banks play in our society. The literature review will consist of three sections: 1) Food banks – how they help communities; 2) Food banks – major criticisms; and 3) Hunger as discourse.

### **Food Banks – How They Help Communities**

#### **Improved nutrition.**

Food banks arguably provide a vital service in both rural and urban communities. Many food banks develop new programs that provide healthy foods to food bank consumers (Campbell, Ross, & Webb, 2013; Martin, Shuckrow, O'Rourke, & Schmitz, 2012; Remley, Kaiser, & Osso, 2013; Shimada, Ross, Campbell, & Webb, 2013). Food banks in many regions of the United States are introducing nutritious and fresh food. One such innovation is the collection and distribution of fresh produce directly from food growers, such as the California Association of Food Banks' *Farm to Family Program* and California Emergency Foodlink's *Donate Don't Dump* program (MkNelly, Bartholow, Garner, & Nishio, 2009). Some food banks in California have "mobile pantries and

mobile produce distributions that take food, including fresh fruits and vegetables, to where the people who need that food are located” (MkNelly et al., 2009, p. 1).

Food banks have also developed programs that increase healthy and nutritious food by changing their policies and distribution model. One study found that when a food bank changed its policy and pantry model into a consumer choice model that promoted nutritional guidelines set out by MyPlate Food Groups (USDA), it had significant success in its implementation due to its collaborative approach with all stakeholders including food bank consumers and volunteers (Remley et al., 2013).

Banning unhealthy food has been another topic of research at food banks (Martin et al., 2012; MkNelly et al., 2009; Shimada et al., 2013). Freshplace is an innovative food bank model in Connecticut which only stocked fresh produce, fresh dairy and fresh meat, used a consumer choice system, and provided supportive services such as case management to enable participants become self-sufficient (Martin et al., 2012). The Freshplace study conducted a randomized control group study between participants who used a ‘traditional’ food bank and those who used Freshplace and found statistically significant improvements in food security scores, increased self-sufficiency scores, and increased consumption of fresh foods (Martin et al., 2012). Other food banks have banned soda pop from their distribution to food bank consumers to increase the nutritional quality of donated food items (MkNelly et al., 2009). Another study proposed providing incentives to industry food suppliers to donate healthier food by eliminating or removing tax deductions for unhealthy food (Shimada et al., 2013). Studies have demonstrated

some positive outcomes when some food banks make great strides to increase fresh food as much as possible to help consumers have healthier food options.

**Environmental sustainability.**

Some researchers and advocates claim that food banks contribute to environmental sustainability by preventing the waste of edible foods, utilizing innovative composting technology, and participating in local food production to reduce our carbon footprint in the transportation of food (Schneider, 2013; Slipchinsky & Alexander, 2008). Second Harvest, in Toronto, Ontario received the prestigious Green Toronto Award in 2005 for Environmental Leadership by diverting food from landfills that saved the city approximately \$300,000 annually (Thang, 2008).

Some food banks identify with environmental sustainability through the practice of gleaning. Gleaning is the practice of removing produce from the field after the farmer has already removed a majority of the produce but leaves behind some because it does not meet with particular esthetic standards or is preventing an over-supply of the crop which would depress its price in the marketplace (Boelte, 2010). Some studies have asserted that gleaning is an environmental practice because it prevents the waste of edible food (Boelte, 2010; Kirbyson, 2005). Also, gleaning connects urban citizens with the land hence creating a stronger bond with the environment around us (Boelte, 2010; Kirbyson, 2005).

Some studies on environmental projects undertaken by a food bank have been about reducing greenhouse emissions by promoting sustainable local agriculture such as community gardens (Kirbyson, 2005) or partnering with small scale farms in purchasing

produce which reduces transportation routes that food would normally travel to market (Fernando & Earle, 2011). A Toronto organization called *Not Far From the Tree* mobilizes a team of volunteers to pick fruit from homeowners who cannot keep up with the abundance of produce their fruit tree(s) produce (Not Far From the Tree, n.d.). Volunteers offer 1/3 of their harvest to the homeowner, 1/3 is shared among the volunteers, and 1/3 is delivered by bicycle to local food banks, shelters, and community kitchens (Not Far From the Tree, n.d.).

Other environmental programs that food banks promote are the diversion of electronic waste from landfills to recycling depots. A program called *thINK Food / Food for Phones* is a fundraising tool developed by Food Banks Canada in 2001 to raise cash and food donations that engaged the public to donate their cell phones and printer ink cartridges (Kirbyson, 2005). Used cell phones and ink cartridges are packaged into specialty labelled bags designated as a charitable cause for Food Banks Canada (Waterloo Region Food Bank, 2005). The specialty labeled bags are collected and sold to e-waste recycling companies which food banks receive approximately \$2 for each item (Waterloo Region Food Bank, 2005). Food banks provide opportunities for environmental sustainability by reducing waste to landfills and by reducing our carbon foot print through local food production practices.

### **Volunteerism.**

Food banks serve as a remarkable space for engaging communities in channeling philanthropic and altruistic values in ‘giving back’ to one’s community. Kirbyson’s book *Recipes for Success* (2005) demonstrates countless projects where communities have

banded together in developing new approaches to decrease food insecurity in a movement away from ‘traditional’ food banks and towards programs that bring dignity, social justice, sustainable food systems and improve the health and well-being of all communities. One activist group that is incorporating a more political shift in understanding the root causes of hunger is Freedom 90. The group is comprised of food bank and emergency meal program volunteers demanding urgent action by the Ontario government to end poverty and make food banks and emergency meal programs a thing of the past (Freedom 90, n.d.).

Food banks provide an accessible outlet for people to engage in a number of activities such as organizing a food drive, donating a canned item from their own pantry, or spending a few hours a week organizing food items at a food bank warehouse (Poppendieck, 1998; Riches, 1986; Webber, 1992). Poppendieck (1998) found in her ethnographic study that food banks offered a kinder and gentler form of help that increases people’s compassion. For many volunteers working at a food bank provides social connectivity and camaraderie with others with similar ideological underpinnings (Poppendieck, 1998). Volunteerism fits well with food banks because it provides many opportunities for people to build community project/programs and provide a sense of social connectivity between those who volunteer and with food bank consumers.

### **More than just food.**

The food banking system evolved over the decades in providing services beyond the provision of food hampers. Some now provide educational programming, employment and training services, and others have emerged as community food centres.

Some studies have shown when food banks offer nutrition programming, such as cooking classes or handing out recipe cards, food bank consumers have an increased awareness that improves their nutritional intake of healthier foods (Cotugna & Dobbe Beebe, 2002; Keller-Olaman, Edwards, & Elliott, 2005; MKNelly et al., 2009).

One report examined food banks in Saskatchewan which have “become labour force intermediaries in an effort help to fill job vacancies created by chronic labour and skills shortages” (Weimar, 2009). Weimar’s (2009) report cited a study commissioned by Human Resources & Social Development Canada (HRSDC) in assessing this possible niche for food banks to assist and improve labour market participation of food bank consumers and concluded “the community-based approach is better suited for altering cyclical patterns around poverty and unemployment” (Weimar, 2009, p. 8). With additional provincial funding food banks are a “natural one-stop-agency of the future to assist its client with life’s basic essentials including life skills and job training” (Weimar, 2009, p. 8).

A food bank in Toronto called The Stop transformed itself from a traditional food bank handing out meagre amounts of food of low nutritional quality into a Community Food Centre (CFC) (Saul & Curtis, 2013). CFCs originated in the US and aim to improve food security from within a broader context of transforming an inequitable and unsustainable food system (Fisher, 2013). The Stop not only implemented nutritional education, community gardening, and a community kitchen but they also bring together community members in consciousness raising workshops and carry out activities that bring political attention to poverty and social inequality (Saul & Curtis, 2013).

## **Food Banks – Major Criticisms**

Some researchers argue, then, that the food bank system provides a needed service for households balancing competing financial constraints. Also, the proliferation of food banking has attracted a great deal of criticisms. In this section of the literature review, the following criticisms will be discussed: i) the inefficiency of the food bank system; ii); the quantity and quality of food donations iii) the disassociation of client need; and iv) the provision of a ‘moral safety valve’ from meaningful governmental action.

### **Inefficiencies of the food bank system.**

One of the major criticisms of the food bank system is that it parallels a private food system without any of the commercial efficiencies built into the system. The collection, storage, and distribution of food supplies from a charity model framework has resulted in a supply chain that is unstable and inconsistent, coupled with shortages in labour (Poppendieck, 1998; Riches, 1986; Tarasuk & Eakin, 2003, 2005; Warshawsky, 2010). Food banks are largely dependent on donations from government agencies (in the USA), food industries and from individual donations (Poppendieck, 1998; Tarasuk & Eakin, 2003; Warshawsky, 2010). The impact of an unpredictable food supplies results in the rationing of food to food bank consumers (Tarasuk & Eakin, 2003). In Tarasuk and Eakin’s (2003) study, the rationing process is based on “whatever food was on hand to ensure that it lasted for the hours of operation” while “the selection of food deteriorated during the intervals between deliveries of food donations” (p. 1511). The distribution practice at most food banks, even during times of extreme rationing, is guided by the principle that anyone who was deemed eligible for a food hamper should be given



something (Tarasuk & Eakin, 2003). As donors from food manufacturers and grocery distribution become more effective in reducing the cost of production overruns, packaging mistakes and 'just-in-time' consumer deliveries, the amount of donations to food banks will dry up (Popielarski & Cotugna, 2010; Poppendieck, 1998). Also, during difficult economic conditions individual contributions to the food bank system declines as households conserve their financial resources. Ironically as the need for food banks increases at the same time when households find themselves with less to give as their income becomes more precarious (Poppendieck, 1998). The rationing of food at food banks is a direct function of a charity model that is unpredictable and insufficient.

Food banks do not have sufficient financial and labour resources to expand their services and are highly vulnerable to government and donor cuts (Wie & Giebler, 2013). Warshawsky (2010) studied user fees for members accessing centralized food bank warehouses in Chicago in their effort to stabilize funding. Researchers found user fees create a high degree of influence over accountability, performance evaluations and a corporate culture especially in the removal of 'non-performing' food bank members (Warshawsky, 2010). The negative results for some food bank members was the compromising of their fundamental mission for anti-hunger advocacy and an added financial burden for members who were once able to obtain food donations free of charge (Warshawsky, 2010). Stronger food bank members benefitted more from greater access to financial and community resources whereas smaller and weaker members faced increased marginalization from the system (Warshawsky, 2010).

Some food banks have found they do not have the time or resources to advocate for policy change or look for new funding sources as they focus more of their energies on the growing demand for emergency food (Wakefield, Fleming, Klassen, & Skinner, 2012). Paid staff function as coordinators but a majority of labour needed to collect and distribute donated food is performed by volunteers (Poppendieck, 1998; Tarasuk & Eakin, 2005). Dependence on volunteers means a continuous turnover and insufficient volunteers on days they are needed the most (Poppendieck, 1998). Food banks face significant challenges in maintaining the services they provide and face greater hurdles as the need for their services grow while financial supports and availability of labour become more precarious.

### **Quantity & quality of food donations.**

The quantity and quality of food donations does not often meet basic nutritional requirements or meet the relevant food needs of an individual or family (Campbell, Hudson, Webb, & Crawford, 2011; Holben, 2012; Loopstra & Tarasuk, 2012; Poppendieck, 1998; Riches, 1986; Teron & Tarasuk, 1999; J. A. Weber, 2006). Teron & Tarasuk's (1999) study found that one third of food bank recipients received less than a three day supply of food and food hamper size was inversely correlated with family size. The study also found 78.8% of the 85 hampers assessed contained a least one damaged or outdated item and over half of those surveyed had discarded food that they felt was unsafe to consume (Teron & Tarasuk, 1999, p. 383). Respondents of another study (Loopstra & Tarasuk, 2012) often described the food they received from the food bank as "junk food" or insufficient for persons with dietary restrictions (p. 505). A study of food

bank clients' food preferences by Campbell et al (2011) found there was a significance preference for fresh fruit and vegetables over canned produce. The study also found there was a significant demand for fresh dairy, eggs, and meat which remained generally unmet by food banks (Campbell et al., 2011). These findings are further supported by a recent focus group study of food bank consumers in Guelph, Ontario who felt their nutritional and dietary needs for a healthy life were largely unmet by emergency food programs in their community (University of Guelph - Institute for Community Engaged Scholarship, 2013). The quantity and quality of food at food banks is hampered by unpredictable food supplies.

#### **Disassociation of client need.**

The perception of need from food bank stakeholders and the clientele they serve further exacerbates the problem of inefficiency, quality and quantity within the system. Many food bank suppliers believe that providing basic food supplies was a sufficient service that met the immediate needs in an emergency situation (A.-M. Hamelin, Mercier, & Bédard, 2011; Tarasuk & Eakin, 2003; Verpy, Smith, & Reicks, 2003). In the Guelph, Ontario survey of food bank recipients, researchers found that clients were stigmatized by the harsh eligibility criteria (i.e. income verification), their inability to choose food items, and their problematic access to hamper programs that were difficult to reach due to inconvenient hours and their remote location from public transportation (University of Guelph - Institute for Community Engaged Scholarship, 2013). Tarasuk & Eakin (2003) concluded that due to the erratic nature of donated food supplies, food banks must use distribution practices that maintained their operations rather than meet the actual needs of

their clients. Therefore, the provision of food is nothing more than a symbolic gesture (Tarasuk & Eakin, 2003). Food bank volunteers and their stakeholders expected clients “to respect the food bank’s efforts, recognize the constraints under which they operated and, in keeping with the spirit of charitable giving, accept any gesture of food assistance with gratitude” (Tarasuk & Eakin, 2003, p. 1512).

The core values about food assistance also set up the belief that clients who requested more than the allotted amount were labelled ‘abusers of the system’ (Tarasuk & Eakin, 2003). Verpy et al (2003) conducted a comparison study between the perceived needs of clients from the donors’ perspective and from the clients themselves. The study found donors exhibited the following helping behaviours:

1. Contributing food was the right thing to do to solve hunger problems in the community.
2. Donors purchase specific food for donation or donated from their own pantry and preferred to provide meal-based items only during the holiday season.
3. Donors did not seriously consider nutrition when deciding which foods to donate.
4. Donors were unaware of the need for culturally appropriate food.
5. Donors believed clients needed to receive additional information about nutrition, recipes and protein sources (Verpy et al., 2003).

In another study about stakeholders’, including front line workers’ perceived needs of food bank clients, many respondents held certain prejudices about low-income and food-

insecure households based on neoliberal values of blaming the individual for their circumstances (Hamelin, Mercier, & Bédard, 2008). In summary, a critical analysis concludes that food banks exist to help people access donated food, but are not able to meet the needs and preferences of food bank consumers due to logistical and financial constraints and values based on charity and neoliberalism.

**Moral safety valve.**

Poppendieck (1998) originated the idea that food banks function as a ‘moral safety valve’ for people and governments from making meaningful change. Poppendieck (1998) asserted that food banks provide relief from the “discomfort that people feel when confronted with evidence of privatization and suffering amid the general comfort and abundance, thus reducing the pressure for more fundamental change” (p. 26-27). Some studies found food bank stakeholders believed that they were a credible body to advocate on behalf of people using their services but stopped short in becoming an agent of change because their primary focus is food provision and because external boundaries such as governmental laws limit lobbying efforts of non-profits (Lambie-Mumford, 2013; Wakefield et al., 2012). Freire (1973) calls this type of practice *assistencialism* in which policies or social assistance attack the symptoms but not their root causes (in Maurer & Sobal, 1995, p. 223). Riches (2002, 2011a, 2011b) argues the corporatization of charity, in which food banks are heavily dependent on the food industry, acts as a major obstacle to making hunger and poverty a political issue. Others argue that hunger must be a human rights issue (Dowler & O’Connor, 2012; Riches, 2002). When food security is framed under a human rights framework, it provides a mechanism for analyzing and renaming

‘problems’ as ‘violations’ which potentially engages people and government bodies with hunger as something that should not be tolerated (Dowler & O’Connor, 2012).

### **Hunger as Discourse**

As mentioned in the introduction, the social problem of hunger is largely constructed by two dominant narratives: *hunger* as a physiological condition related to a lack of food or *food security* which stresses physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets dietary and cultural needs for a healthy life. The problem of people not having enough to eat is constructed in two ways: as a discourse of hunger or a discourse of food insecurity. Food banks predominantly use hunger in their fundraising campaigns and policy briefs (Food Banks Canada, 2013; Waterloo Region Food Bank, 2013), while public health experts in the United States and Canada use the term food security or food insecurity to address higher rates of poor health, such as diabetes and obesity, found in populations of low socio-economic status (Mikkonen & Raphael, 2010; Troy, Miller, & Olson, 2011). These two narratives are often convoluted with other narratives from either personal experience at the individual level (Knezevic, Hunter, Watt, Williams, & Anderson, 2014; Nord et al., 2009) or from a post-modern perspective that does not view hunger or food security as an objective experience but as an subjective reality (Dayle & McIntyre, 2003; Maxwell, 1996).

The discourse of hunger is comprised of two constructs: a physiological condition in which there is some level of deprivation and a socio-economic condition which hinders the ability to obtain sufficient and nourishing food (Allen, 2007). Hunger is viewed as a morally abhorrent circumstance by all of the world’s religions, which make reference to

the obligation to alleviate suffering by feeding the hungry (Poppendieck, 1998). However, “people’s experience of hunger and poverty is directly related to the societies in which they live and the standards of living which are customarily enjoyed” (Riches, 1997, p. 10).

Poppendieck (1998), however, argues that being hungry is a visceral construct that can be understood by babies and it is this dominant biological imperative that strongly connects people to the power of food and the condition of hunger. Of all the social problems we face in the world, hunger has the greatest appeal because “imagining people without food makes us intensely uncomfortable, and that providing food for people who lack it is intensely satisfying” (Poppendieck, 1998, p. 41). Hunger can even be parsed into smaller components involving the body which are: malnutrition, under-nutrition, and over nutrition (Gibson, 2012). Malnutrition occurs when the body does not receive an adequate or optimal supply of nutrients in either a chronic state, in which the body is in a protracted or prolonged crisis, or in an acute state where the body suddenly does not receive needed nutrients without warning such as a poor harvest or a weather related disaster (Gibson, 2012). Under-nutrition was “historically associated with overall caloric (energy) intake” but it also includes micronutrients (vitamins and minerals) which are also likely to be deficient (Gibson, 2012, p. 51). Over nutrition occurs in populations that are overweight or obese which is also occurring in developing countries (Gibson, 2012). Over nutrition, which is not solely about an over consumption of calories but also the nutritional quality of these calories, has recently been the subject of popular discourse with books such as *The Omnivore’s Dilemma* (Pollan, 2006) and *The End of Food* (Roberts, 2008).

While there is critique of the discourse of hunger, the shift towards using terms related to food insecurity as seen by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) in an attempt to better measure hunger have run aground with some anti-hunger advocates. Allen (2007) wrote “[h]unger is a very politically sensitive word...[f]ood *insecurity*, on the other hand, sounds less urgent, less important, less shameful and less embarrassing”(p. 22). Allen (2007) contends the shift by the USDA to use the term ‘very low food security’ serves a political agenda to diminish the experiences of those who are hungry and to give the public an impression that hunger no longer exists. Hunger as a physiological and socio-economic condition attributed to poverty is a construct that is generally understood as a condition of deprivation but its meaning is still multidimensional.

The discourse of hunger used by food banks is constructed to focus on generating donations from corporate and individual donors to assist households who access their services for food relief. Hunger is confined to the physiological condition of individual suffering and is less about the social, economic and political reasons that bring families and individuals to access food relief programs offered by food banks (Riches,1986; Riches, 2011; Poppendieck, 1998). According to Graham Riches (2011) altruistic actions that food banks provide “reinforce public attitudes that hunger is an individual or family problem and a matter for charity, rather than a structural or human-rights issue” (p. 771). Riches (2011) purports even further that media outlets such as the state funded Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) partake in the social construction of hunger as a problem for charities in sponsoring food drives during the holiday seasons, which gives



tacit public support in dealing with hunger as a matter for charity and not an issue requiring political action. The donation of cans as the preferred choice over monetary donations sets the stage for hunger as an individualized condition. Poppendieck (1998) states that even though cash donations would allow food banks to purchase foods that more readily meet the needs of their clients, donations of actual food, non-perishable of course, is preferred because it serves a symbolic function of sharing an overabundance of resources that directly meets with a highly identifiable need - food. Providing food rather than money sets up the “medium is the message” in the public’s perception of hunger (Poppendieck, 1998, p. 37).

Many food banks use a common set of rhetorical strategies to contextualize their message about hunger. Retzinger (2012) studied food bank websites in the United States and identified the following strategies:

1. Offering statistics on each demographic group using their services (families, children, seniors, etc.) coupled with first person accounts from representative food bank clients’
2. Emphasizing the food itself rather than its recipients such as the tonnage of food collected or the number of meals prepared
3. Identify the reasons why hunger exists – poverty and the failure of public policies
4. A greater emphasis on immediate aid needed than long-term solutions

Retzinger (2012) writes that hunger relief programs both international and domestic “focus on individuals [which] serves both to tug at emotions and encourage a belief that despite the enormity of the problem, lives can be saved and conditions improved” (p. 28). One of the limitations of Retzinger’s (2012) study is the focus on food bank websites which provide more information to the public about the problem of hunger, whereas food drive events (the basis of my research study) do not usually provide in depth information to the public. Another dimension to the food banks’ hunger discourse is their use of the term emergency (Poppendieck, 1998). When food banks distribute food as a response to an emergency “we associate the term with things we can do nothing to prevent and little to avoid...more pervasively, perhaps an emergency justifies, indeed dictates, adjusting one’s expectations” (Poppendieck, 1998, p. 96-97). The food banks’ narrative about hunger is a relatable concept for the public because it provides a strong emotive connection to those who use food banks.

Studies using discourse analysis on the perceptions of hunger and food security reveal how power constructs relationships that reinforce social inequality. The study of Rock et al (2009) on a popular food product known as Kraft Dinner® found participants’ perceptions of the food product constructs inequality between those who are food secure and food insecure even though both groups consume the same product. The food secure group perceive Kraft Dinner® as an affordable comfort food product and an appropriate food bank donation due to this emotional and fiscal association (Rock, McIntyre, & Rondeau, 2009). Food insecure households deemed Kraft Dinner® with discomfort

because it was a food item of last resort and is often prepared with no milk or butter/margarine (Rock et al., 2009).

The societal discourse on child hunger is another site in which power relations of inequality are sustained. Dayle & McIntyre (2003) used Foucauldian theoretical concepts in their study of a children's feeding program in Atlantic Canada. Dayle & McIntyre (2003) investigated how knowledge is constructed about children and hunger and how this knowledge advances the interests of a particular group or ideology. The researchers found how the feeding programs were designed and delivered labeled children deemed hungry as people who were unable to learn; in need of understanding nutritional values; prone to negative psycho-social behaviours; and poor (Dayle & McIntyre, 2003). The feeding programs problematized children as being dysfunctional intellectually, morally, behaviourally, and economically (Dayle & McIntyre, 2003). Their study concluded that the feeding programs constructed children who were hungry as a societal problem, which if not corrected, would lead to undesirable adult citizens dependent on the state (Dayle & McIntyre, 2003).

Another study that challenged key aspects of the discourse of hunger was undertaken at the Nova Scotia Participatory Food Costing Project (NSPFCP). A discourse analysis in understanding the political, economic and social context of food insecurity was undertaken with participants who experienced food insecurity and were part of the NSPFCP (Knezevic et al., 2014). The study found the systemic marginalization of persons experiencing food insecurity had led participants to internalize the neoliberal discourse of individual responsibility and self-blame and ultimately to feelings of

powerlessness (Knezevic et al., 2014). However, the participants' "[i]nvolvement in the project allowed them to rethink the social, political and economic conditions of their predicament and reconstruct the way they thought and talked about it" (Knezevic et al., 2014, p. 237). Not only did participants challenge the legitimacy of the neoliberal discourse but inwardly saw their experiences as matters of social justice (Knezevic et al., 2014).

## **Methodology**

My research project is about understanding how the knowledge of hunger is constructed in food drives sponsored by food banks. I used an event called Canstruction<sup>®</sup> which is a food drive that invites the public, predominantly private businesses in engineering, construction and design, to create objects made from packaged food items to be displayed in a public venue. The displays from the Canstruction<sup>®</sup> event are dismantled and the food items are donated to a regional food bank that distributes donated food to affiliated food relief centres in the community. I used a critical methodological approach to uncover how the visuals displayed at the Canstruction<sup>®</sup> event in Waterloo, Ontario transmit knowledge about hunger. I recruited a variety of perspectives from different groups of people to see how visuals from the Canstruction<sup>®</sup> event shaped people's understanding about hunger. I recruited participants from three different groups: people involved in designing and building their art installation at the Canstruction<sup>®</sup> Toronto event; food bank volunteers; and persons with food insecurity experience.

I used two different data collection methods which included focus groups with the Canstruction<sup>®</sup> participants and the participants with food insecurity experience. My second data collection method included interviews with several food bank volunteers. Focus groups sessions and interviews were audio recorded and transcribed for analysis. However, due to technical difficulties in the focus group session with participants with food insecurity experience, I was not able to obtain an audio recording. I compensated this technical glitch by taking detailed notes of participants' ideas.

In this section I will present the following items: my research approval from McMaster Research Ethics Board (MREB); participant confidentiality protocols; and the methodology used to analyze the data collected from participants. I also provide a description of two methodologies which are critical visual research approach and discourse analysis. In addition, I will describe Canstruction<sup>®</sup> which is a major public food drive event held in cities across the world. I will also explain the process I used to collect visuals from the Canstruction<sup>®</sup> event in Waterloo, Ontario and how they were shown to research participants. I will also outline my recruitment of participant groups and how data was collected from these groups. In the last segment of this section I will describe my analytical framework which includes my major research questions and what steps I used to analyze the data.

### **Research Approval from the MREB**

My research proposal to the MREB described the rationale of my research inquiry. In my rationale, I provided some background information about the institutionalization of the food bank system in Canada and the use of the term hunger in the solicitation for donations. I illustrated my interest in this topic as a result of my professional experience distributing emergency food and how my experience brought me to question the semantics asserted by the food bank system. The stated the purpose of my study was comparing different perspectives about hunger mediated by a food drive event called Canstruction<sup>®</sup>.

In the description of the participant groups, I listed three different participant groups under the following characteristics: food secure, food insecure, and food bank insiders. I

provided the number of participants I anticipated for each groups and their salient participant characteristics. For the food secure group, I characterized the participants under the definition of food security as “when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life” (Tarasuk et al., 2013, p. 5). Participants for the food secure group were recruited from the designers involved in the Canstruction® Toronto event. I anticipated a sample size of 5-8 participants for the food secure group.

For the food insecure group, I characterized the participants under the definition of food insecurity which is “the inability to acquire or consume an adequate diet quality or sufficient quantity of food in socially acceptable ways, or the uncertainty that one will be able to do so” (Dieticians of Canada, n.d.). I recruited participants for the food insecure group who access an emergency food hamper service, community kitchen, or family outreach services. I anticipated a sample size of 5-8 participants for the food insecure group.

For the participant group identified as food bank insiders, I categorized the participants as volunteers at a food bank distribution centre who have first-hand knowledge of how a food bank operates and knowledge about food bank consumers. I recruited participants under this category from three emergency food distribution programs in Kitchener and Waterloo, Ontario. I anticipated a sample size of 5-8 participants in the food bank insiders’ group.

The collection of data took place from March 2014 to Jun 2014. How participants were recruited and the methods used to collect data from each participant group are described in more detail in the Recruitment of Participants section located on page 50.

I identified a few psycho-social risks for each participant group as the following:

1. Feelings of worry when talking about their experience in a focus group session and/or with the researcher during interviews.
2. Loss of privacy among participants in a focus group session.
3. Assistance in accessing food relief resources (food insecure group).

In managing these risks, I have developed a listing of supportive services for research participants.

I provided to the MREB the following supporting documents:

1. Recruitment poster for the Food Insecure Group (Appendix A)
2. Recruitment Email for the Food Secure Group (Appendix B)
3. Telephone Recruitment Script to Director of Community Outreach Services (Appendix C)
4. Recruitment Email to Family Outreach Workers & Emergency Food Relief Programs (Appendix D)
5. Recruitment Post Card – Food Bank Volunteers (Appendix E)
6. Letter of Information & Consent – Food Secure Group (Appendix F)
7. Letter of Information & Consent – Food Insecure Group (Appendix G)
8. Letter of Information & Consent – Food Bank Volunteers (Appendix H)
9. Focus Group Question Guide – Food Secure Group (Appendix I)



10. Focus Group Question Guide – Food Insecure Group (Appendix J)

11. Semi-Structured Interview Question Guide – Food Bank Volunteers  
(Appendix K)

I received ethics clearance certificate from the MREB on February 13, 2014. I received another ethics clearance certificate from the MREB on June 3 for my third amendment to recruit research participants who volunteer at a food bank.

### **Confidentiality Protocols**

Research participants divulged their first names during the focus group sessions and in the semi-structured interviews. To ensure the confidentiality of research participants in discussing the results of my research, I shortened their first names into two letter initials. Shortening the participants' names into two letter initials was done to ensure participants from the volunteer food bank group and food insecure group were not easily identifiable in my thesis. I shortened participants' names into two letter initials for the following reasons: the small population size of Kitchener and Waterloo; and the food bank volunteers were from the same non-profit organization. I shortened the participants' names from the food secure group, designers involved in the Canstruction® Toronto event, to present consistency in how the data is presented in my thesis.

### **Critical Visual Research Approach**

My research project is an investigative analysis of a creative visual space that is produced by persons who may not be deemed artists in a traditional sense of the term. The installations are made of packaged food items that have been constructed into visual representations of recognizable objects that hold meaning within the theme of ending

hunger established by food banks. When I first saw these installations at a shopping mall in Waterloo, Ontario I was in awe of the ingenuity it took to build some of these structures (i.e. moving mechanical parts). I also felt the event was an interesting way of collecting non-perishable food for the food bank that was entertaining for the viewing public.

After I worked at a food bank and saw these installations again, my perspective about what I saw radically changed. I came to see this event as visual representations of knowledge in which there was a convergence of different constructs: community in action, problem solving, human suffering, wealth, and social identity. I realized that these objects were not benign but their message obscured the experience of poverty in our society.

I used these art installations as a medium for understanding how knowledge is constructed, conveyed and consumed. I used my experience as a spectator of art exhibits at art galleries as a starting point in constructing an approach that captures part of interchange that occurs between the spectator, the art itself, and the artists' own intentions. The interchange entails an embodiment of knowledge of how we see the world and how it serves as a symbolic dimension of social life (Wagner, 2011). This knowledge can be inferred from what people say, what they do, and the materials they work with (Wagner, 2011). Through interviews and image-making strategies, visual research methods can play an important role in helping to construct such inferences from the subject's points of view (Wagner, 2011).

Images take on meaning within three sites: production, the image itself, and the audience (Rose, 2012). My research project mainly focuses on the production of art and how the audience interprets the subject matter that is symbolically represented; hunger. I am interested in understanding how the artist/designer uses technology, composition, economic processes, social/political identity, and their own purposeful meaning-making in creating artwork (Rose, 2012). Some of these processes may occur consciously or unconsciously from the designer's perspective.

From the audience's point of view, I am interested in how people understand the meaning of artwork in how meanings are "renegotiated, or even rejected, by particular audiences" (Rose, 2012, p. 30). I am particularly interested in how the audience's social identity influences their viewing experience (Rose, 2012).

There are a wide number of approaches that use art and other visuals as a research method. I am using a combination of three approaches which are visual images in research, arts-based research and critical visual methodologies. Visual images in research is an analysis of images that are constantly subject to reconstructions and reinterpretations as "a dynamic product of our interaction with the world" that gives us meaning about ourselves and the world we live in (S. Weber, 2008, p. 43).

Arts-based research is defined as a "radically, politically grounded statement about social justice and control over the production and dissemination of knowledge" (Finley, 2008, p. 3). Arts-based research lends itself to my research of how knowledge from a group of people and organizations that occupy larger spheres of political-social influence shape artistic interpretations about hunger. Also, my research does not involve

participants from marginalized communities representing their knowledge in an art form but I do ask participants, not involved in the charity event, to critique the visual representations and to describe their visual representation of hunger.

The third approach is Roses' (2012) critical visual methodology in understanding how images have social effects. How images look but also how they are looked at generates social effects, such as the visual portrayal of motherhood. How the image presents women as mothers involves the composition of colour, pose, and lighting that depict a prescribed identity. How the image of motherhood is viewed changes with different audience members who bring their own social identity into the experience of looking. These social effects relate to social differences such as class, race, and gender and how these images serve as potential sites of resistance (Rose, 2012).

### **Discourse Analysis**

Discourse analysis is a broad methodological approach that is used differently by scholars in various fields (Schiffrin, Tannen, & Hamilton, 2001). When the term is limited to discourse, its meaning refers to "a particular knowledge about the world which shapes how the world is understood and how things are done in it" (Rose, 2012, p. 190). The term discourse analysis is a method that applies different ways of uncovering knowledge produced through language (Schiffrin et al., 2001). Language is an aggregate of meanings that have associations with one another and are inextricably linked with how society functions (Taylor, 2013). Discourse analysis is also the intersection of language and "a broader range of social practice that includes non-linguistic and nonspecific instances of language" (Schiffrin et al., 2001, p. 1).

I am utilizing a social constructionist approach to discourse analysis. The social constructionist approach is focused on the way in which discourses ensure that certain social phenomena are created, reproduced, normalized and become that “reality” (Phillips & Hardy, 2002). Another potential layer of discourse analysis focuses on language as carriers of action in which people do things with words such as explain, blame, and present (Nikander, 2008). A third layer of discourse analysis within the constructionist approach is a focus on the rhetorical organization of language (Nikander, 2008). Rhetorical orientation is how talk and text is oriented or taken into account “culturally available opposing” arguments (Nikander, 2008, p. 416).

Discourse analysis is most commonly used to understand how knowledge is organized, carried and reproduced through language and through particular institutional practices (Muncie, 2006 in Harding, 2013). I am interested in language as verbal expressions of ideas that illustrate social phenomena and the meanings attributed to these social practices and how this is constructed as knowledge. Interpretive structuralism, a subset of discourse analysis within the social constructionist paradigm, relies on insiders’ interpretation of social context and the discourse that serves as its basis (Phillips & Hardy, 2002).

Harding (2013) provides a structured approach for the first-time user of discourse analysis in the following steps:

1. Read the transcripts
2. Identify themes in the data
3. Identify the language that is used to construct each theme

4. Identify commonalities in the use of language in relation to each theme (p. 140)

Harding's (2013) step by step approach works well in analyzing transcribed data and its simplified approach makes discourse analysis less intimidating.

### **What is Canstruction®?**

Canstruction® is a food bank fundraising event where architects, designers, and engineers are invited to design and build artwork from packaged food items.

Canstruction® was started in 1992 by Cheri Melillo and her colleagues from the Society for Design Administration. They hosted their first official Canstruction® competition in 1993 in New York City (Canstruction, n.d.). The purpose of Canstruction® is “to unite the design, engineering and construction industry through a unique and fun medium that would provide canned food to hunger relief organizations” (Canstruction, n.d.).

Design teams fundraise the money needed to purchase packaged food items for their design project. There are some basic rules in the competition in which the venue may constrict the size of artwork. Also, the structure must be mechanically sound using packaged food items for support as much as possible. Canstruction® has grown into an international competition with competitors from Canada, Hong Kong, Australia and the United States who compete for titles such as best use of labels, structural ingenuity, and most cans used. Canadian cities involved in this competition include Toronto, Kitchener-Waterloo, Moncton, Vancouver, Edmonton and Quebec City.

### **Collecting Visuals from Canstruction® Events**

For this research project, two Canstruction® events were selected from Waterloo and Toronto, Ontario held in 2014. Canstruction® Waterloo was hosted at a shopping mall in an affluent area from March 16-27 which displayed 11 installations from a wide variety of project teams that included private companies, post-secondary student associations in engineering and architecture, and a few non-profit organizations. Canstruction® Toronto was hosted at the TD Centre in the financial district from May 25-31 and displayed 19 installations that included private companies, post-secondary student associations in engineering and architecture, and one non-profit organization.

I took pictures from Canstruction® Waterloo and developed the images into photographs. One photo showed the entire object while other photos showed up close images of the packaged food items used to construct it. I taped these pictures onto white Bristol board with each board focusing on just one of the 11 objects. I also included the textual write-up that accompanied each installation as well. These images were shown to two groups of participants: food bank volunteers and the food insecure group.

At the Canstruction® Toronto event, I took a picture of the sailboat constructed by the participants who were from the focus group that designed and installed their object at the Canstruction® site. This image was recorded to see what the project looked like from the Toronto team.

### **Recruitment of Participants**

To collect different perspectives of the food bank's hunger discourse, I recruited participants from three different areas relevant to food banks:

1. Persons involved in the design and installation of their own Canstruction<sup>®</sup> project hosted in either Waterloo or Toronto, Ontario in the spring of 2014.
2. Persons who volunteer or have volunteered at a food bank.
3. Persons who have first-hand experience with food insecurity.

**Group 1: Canstruction<sup>®</sup> participants.**

I went through the Canstruction<sup>®</sup> Toronto website to view last year's listing of corporations who participated in the event and noticed my former employer was listed. An engineer whom I knew at the company put me in contact of the Project Team Lead for the 2014 event. I spoke with the Project Team Lead and was invited to conduct my focus group session at one of their weekly project team meetings (See Appendix B). The team had 15 members involved from their two largest offices in Mississauga, Ontario. The focus session was held on May 28<sup>th</sup>, 2014 and six male engineers approximately between the ages of 25-30 were in attendance and received refreshments during the session.

Persons who participate in the Canstruction<sup>®</sup> events are typically employees of private corporations, and in the case of Toronto, a majority of participants are employed by engineering, architectural and construction companies with a minor portion of participants who are students from engineering and architectural programs from post-secondary institutions in the Greater Toronto Area.

Participants were asked to attend a focus groups session held at one of their office buildings in Mississauga. I reviewed the Letter of Information & Consent with the participants and answered any questions they had about my research project (See



Appendix F). I used the focus group method because it was an efficient way of collecting data from participants working at one company who were already meeting on a weekly basis for the purposes of the Canstruction® Toronto event, and they were able to provide the meeting space at their offices. This method was selected to ascertain the following knowledge:

- To uncover the creativity process used to design the object
- To see how the participants relate their project to the purpose of the event
- To determine what the participants may know about hunger

I asked several questions about their artwork (See Appendix I). The session was audio recorded to be transcribed for the purposes of analysis.

**Group 2: food bank volunteers.**

I developed a promotional postcard that was handed out at three emergency food hamper facilities in the Kitchener-Waterloo area (See Appendix E). Volunteers typically organize, package and distribute rationed food to persons in hampers (through a well-defined system of who receives what type of foods and the amount of food allowed to each household). Volunteers have an inside perspective of what actually happens at a food bank. Volunteers at an emergency food distribution centre are comprised of the following segments of the population:

1. Students – high school, college & university; they typically are at a food bank as part of their educational requirements.
2. Retired Persons – who have the time and interest in volunteering at a food bank.

3. Adults – who have an interest in volunteering due to their church-affiliation or previous experience in working with vulnerable people.
4. Mandated Adults – persons who have been mandated by the courts to complete community service hours as part of their judicial sentencing.
5. Persons in low income segments of society – they volunteer at a food bank to attain greater access to food supplies because their time is remunerated with food from the centre.

I recruited in total 7 participants and conducted one-on-one interviews at various locations, such as local community centres and at their home. Each participant was remunerated with a \$25 gift card in appreciation of their time.

Out of the 7 participants, I knew many of them from my previous student placement experience and some of the participants I got to know a little better through casual discussions before and after the interview. The volunteer group of participants have been identified in the following categories: 2 volunteers are retired and regularly receive food hampers to supplement their food supplies; 1 volunteer is a single parent on social assistance and regularly receives food hampers to supplement their food supplies; 2 volunteers are university students; 1 volunteer is retired; and 1 participant was a former volunteer and now works for the food hamper program.

I met participants for a 45 minute semi-structured interview session. I reviewed the Letter of Information & Consent with each participant and answered any questions they had about my research project (See Appendix H). The first 5-7 minutes was spent explaining how Canstruction® projects are produced and their purpose. I then had

participants review all the photos taken from the Canstruction® Waterloo event and informed them that I would ask some questions about what they thought about the photos. After participants looked at the photos, I asked participants several questions about their ideas and feelings (See Appendix K). Each interview was audio recorded to be transcribed for the purposes of analysis.

**Group 3: persons with food insecurity experience.**

I developed a recruitment flyer that was distributed to two different community service areas involved with food relief (See Appendix A).

***Method 1 - community family outreach program of waterloo region.***

I contacted the Director of the Community Family Outreach Program of Waterloo Region via the telephone and requested that she email my email recruitment script and recruitment flyer to all the community centres that have a Family Outreach Worker and requested the Family Outreach Worker post the flyer at community bulletin board in their centre (See Appendix C).

***Method 2 - emergency food hamper centres & drop-in meal centres.***

I contacted via email the program manager of various centres and requested him/her to post a recruitment flyer on their community bulletin board (See Appendix D).

I did not pre-screen participants to ensure that some had personal experience with food insecurity. Since my recruitment flyer was posted at venues that supplied food relief of some type (i.e. grocery gift card, food hampers or a hot meal) it is highly probable they have experienced food insecurity. I successfully recruited 11 participants for my focus

group and each person received a \$25 gift card and refreshments in appreciation of their time.

Participants were asked to participate in a focus group session to discuss what they thought about the pictures they saw from the Canstruction<sup>®</sup> Waterloo event as it related to their experiences with food insecurity and what they may know about using a food bank. I reviewed with participants the Letter of Information & Consent and answered any questions they had about my research project (See Appendix G). I conducted a member check to see how many of the participants had personal experience with food insecurity. I provided each participant a slip of paper with the following question:

Have you or your household experienced any of the following situations either currently or in the past:

- a) Worry about running out of food and/or limit food selection because a lack of money;
- b) Compromise in quality and/or quantity of food due to lack of money for food;
- c) Miss meals, reduced food intake and at the most extreme go day(s) without food.

Participants could anonymously respond with yes, no, or rather not say. The slips of paper was then folded in half by the participants and placed in a large manila envelope that I walked around to collect responses. Of the 11 participants, 10 responded with yes and one responded with rather not say.

In the focus group session, I had participants take some time to look at the various photos taken from the Canstruction® Waterloo event. Afterwards, I asked several key questions (See Appendix J).

Due to technical difficulties, I was not able to audio record the focus group session. I took detailed notes that summarized what most people said. However, I was not able to identify particular ideas with a particular speaker every time or transcribe what was said exactly.

### **Analytical Framework**

My research goal is shedding light on a discourse about hunger that has been taken for granted as the problem in which I ask the following two questions:

1. In what ways do food banks solicitation discourses shape the public's knowledge about hunger?
2. How does knowledge from food bank volunteers and persons with food insecurity experience compare and either challenges and/or conforms to the food banks' hunger discourse?

I developed a synopsis of how hunger is portrayed on three food bank websites: Food Banks Canada, Food Bank of Waterloo Region and The Daily Bread Food Bank. I took note of phrases and words that were repeatedly used to encourage donations from the public. These words and phrases include the following: community; fighting hunger; one CAN at a time; helping neighbours; so no one goes hungry; please help fill our shelves; sharing; your generous donation; (x amount of money) provides (x amount of meals); and

help those who truly need. I used these words to shape a discourse used by food bank suppliers and compared it with words and phrases used by the participant groups.

I analyzed the transcripts within the three study groups: the Canstruction<sup>®</sup> designers, food bank volunteers and persons with lived experience. Following Harding's (2013) step by step process, I read over the transcripts from each participant group. I looked for some general themes that emerged from the transcripts. I also highlighted words and phrases that repeated throughout the text or knowledge claims relevant to the theme. I added a fifth step to Harding's (2013) step by step process. I generated 2-3 questions based on the themes that I observed in the data.

For the Canstruction designers I developed the following questions:

1. How do the participants frame hunger?
2. What does the Canstruction<sup>®</sup> event mean to them?
3. How do participants perceive their relationship with people receiving food relief?

For food bank volunteers I asked the following questions:

1. In what ways does the food bank's discourse about community become exemplified in the food bank volunteers?
2. What constructs of hunger did participants identify with or reject in the images they saw?
3. How do the participants' visual representations of hunger coincide or challenge those from the Canstruction<sup>®</sup> Waterloo site?

For persons with food insecurity experience, I formed the following queries:

1. What constructs of hunger did participants identify with or reject in the images they saw?
2. How do the participants' visual representations of hunger coincide or challenge those from the Canstruction® Waterloo site?

## Results

### Group 1: Canstruction® Participants

#### How do the participants frame hunger?

Participants saw the design of their project in relation to the theme of ending hunger and constructed an image that would best represent this theme. Participants were focused on the problem of providing food for the food bank and their design process reflected how they could do this as cheaply as possible while maintaining a high level of ingenuity in the selection of packaged items. One participant, KS, stated the three most important factors in the design process was the size, the labelling and the cost.

The object the group chose was a sail boat with a mural depicting a sunset behind it (See Figure 1). They entitled their installation as “Set Sail to Hunger”.

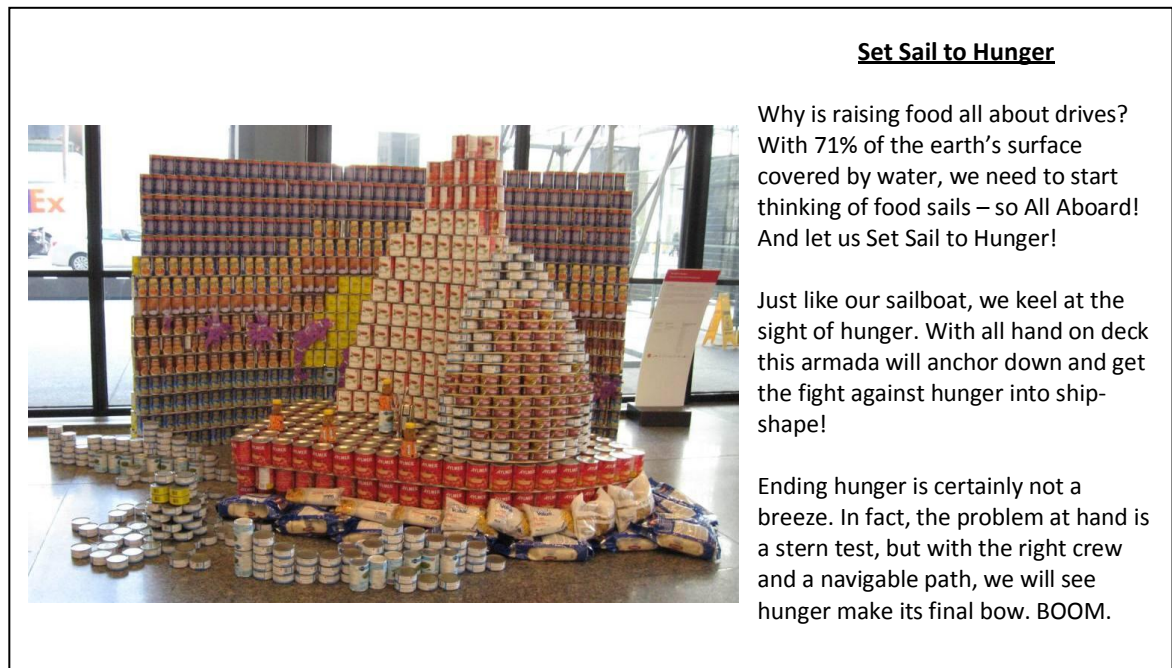


Figure 1. Set Sail to Hunger from Canstruction Toronto, May 2014



However, when asked how this object served as a metaphor for hunger not many participants were able to provide a definitive answer. Participants provided some possible interpretations. CS said, “There’s something like relaxing and comfortable about a sail boat and the sunset...living the dream type thing.” EV said, “We’re providing a boat to navigate the seas of hunger...not drown in the difficult world we live in...and that’s what I thought up just now.” It seems the participants were more focused in how to create the object and less focussed on what their object would mean.

Participants were aware of some constructs related to hunger and the limitations of a food drive in addressing these constructs. One of the participants, CS, made a distinction that hunger rests in two spheres: visible and non-visible and that hunger is not “as an obvious issue here as in other places.” This statement infers that hunger is invisible in our society as opposed to global populations in which hunger has visible physical characteristics. When asked what enough food meant to the participants, some of them described psychological distress such as not worrying about how to obtain your next meal and “not ever having to stress about it”. Other participants described having accessibility and having a variety of food as important issues.

Participants acknowledged that food banks may not be able to address some of these issues effectively if they receive “thousands of cans of anchovies” or “how useful does the Daily Bread Food Bank find cranberries.” KS recognized that “some of this stuff might not be the healthiest but it’s the best [for the design].” Even though participants recognized some of the limitations of the food drive in meeting the needs of food bank

consumers they were dismissed as a minor setback and elevated the importance of providing any kind of food. KS stated:

“We might only give them tuna cans and tomatoes this year... which we’re still providing food but there’s not much diversity because you’re quite limited by choice in terms of cost and labels and can size... I guess if we had a bigger budget we’d be able to do better but that’s probably one of the downfalls...it’s not a downfall because we’re still providing 2000 cans but the diversity is not there.”

The importance of food items over the dietary needs of food bank consumers is reinforced by the competitiveness of the fundraising campaign. Participants deemed the prospect of winning titles important in the design process. Participants selected Best Use of Labels as the main criteria in their design and dismissed the possibility of winning Best Meal because “we’re not going to be in a nutrition magazine for providing people Alphaghetti and green beans, right?” as stated by KS. Participants adhered to this goal of providing food items and set aside their own personal knowledge of food as having little relevance to the intent of the campaign.

Group members related their understanding of hunger as a problem that could be addressed through acts of generosity and could be solved through altruism. The Canstruction® event served as an opportunity to share resources from those who have the means to obtain food to people who are not able to do so themselves. Phrases participants used include: “sharing what you have...benefits you have in life with people who are less fortunate”, “giving back”, and “we’re helping out.” Participants saw collective action

from the community as a solution to hunger. Collectivity was also transferrable from the corporate environment to the social context of charity. EV states:

“I’m just...uhm...made some parallels to be drawn between collaboration between disciplines in engineers because we work together to reach a common goal whereas with this you’re working together to make sure everybody has enough to live the basic needs of life.”

These statements expressed by participants reinforce the theme used by food banks that collective acts of kindness can alleviate hunger. None of the participants expressed conditions of poverty as the root cause of hunger. Rather they viewed food banks as a worthy cause because people’s circumstances were not attributed to lack of moral character but to bad luck. EV states, “Cause there’s a bit of luck to get to where you are and some people are downtrodden not because of what they’ve done but because of things that happened in their life that’s out of their control so it’s worth helping out.” This statement illustrates how research participants sympathized with food bank consumers who are affected by some issues related to poverty, such as job loss or poor health. But research participants do not go as far as identifying larger systemic issues such as low wages or diminished entitlements that keep people in conditions of poverty.

### **What does the Canstruction® event mean to them?**

Participants viewed the Canstruction® event as a marketing tool for their corporation and for the Daily Bread Food Bank. The participants stated the following marketing opportunities from the Canstruction® event as:

1. Promoting the company name
2. Promoting the Daily Bread Food Bank in their fundraising efforts
3. To show off their engineering design capabilities

The appeal of Canstruction® as a marketing tool is relevant to its ability to attract a wide audience. The event is hosted in a high traffic area of downtown Toronto, hosts a website that shows the companies' installations from year to year, garners media attention, and culminates in an award gala. Canstruction® is a charitable event that is utilized as a marketing tool for its ability to attract the public's attention.

Another significant benefit is the psycho-social benefit provided to participants. Focus group member reiterated time and time again how much fun they have in this project. KS best sums up this finding when he said,

“We get satisfaction out of this as well because a) we're helping out and b) we get to have fun while we're doing it. So I think that's probably the upside of it. It's not really like too stressful or strenuous on us or anything because it's all a bit of fun at the end of the day...So it's like win-win for everyone.”

The participants' consistent repetition of the 'fun' factor was also coupled with the word 'cool' to signify the uniqueness of this charity event. The word cool was used to in the following phrases: “really cool event”, “pretty cool designs”, and “pretty cool spin.” Participants felt the charity event was distinct from other charity events because it used their engineering skills in a novel way. Canstruction® has a significant positive psycho-social appeal for participants who confine their experiences to the event itself. I would

argue that this event acts as bubble or buffer from the negative aspects of the social problem of hunger.

**How do participants perceive their relationship with people receiving food relief?**

Participants realized towards the end of the focus group session how little they knew about hunger in Toronto. When asked the question “What would you say to Premier Kathleen Wynn about the problem of hunger?” participants resorted to the fun aspects of the project and admitted to being solely focused on the challenge of building an interesting object and donating as many cans as possible. Participants stated, in hind-sight of the focus group discussion, that they were disconnected from the issues behind hunger. KS poignantly states:

“You realize that you really haven’t thought about a lot of the stuff you’re actually getting involved with...you kind of focusing on we have to build something out of cans but you don’t really think about why you’re doing it.”

Interestingly, their questions about gaining knowledge on the issue of hunger were focused on knowing how their donations help the food bank’s objectives. For instance, EV said, “We know we’re providing a bunch of cans...we don’t know...say this is 15% of the cans that they get all year or what sort of percentages are actually helping.” CS adds, “If there were stats that were saying this many cans can feed this many people for so long...I think...uhm...that would be one thing that I’d be interested in.” Their interest in getting to know how their donations help the food bank is focused on defining their success as the extent to which they had helped the food bank.

Participants reflected on their disconnection from why hunger exists in our society. Some comments included: “some of the questions you asked were really enlightening for me”; “it’s sort of good to bring that back into focus...to think about it a bit more than we have otherwise have done”; and “all we’re doing is kinda glorifying the supply which is good because it gets there...but really what’s important is the distribution”. Participants did not consider those ‘in need’ during the project or gave much consideration about why people are hungry.

Another finding about the perceived relationship between their role as donors and the recipients of food aid that came to light was the feature of control. Participants distinguished control in two ways in two different settings. Participants expressed a lack of control over the distribution of food to people ‘in need’. ML states: “We don’t really view the actual distribution end of things...we’re done at that point...it’s outside of the scope of what we’re actually thinking about.” KS reinforces this thought when he said, “But really what’s important is the distribution from the Daily Bread Food Bank which is out of our control.” These comments illustrate that participants felt that they had a limited role in how they could help people ‘in need’. Construction participants felt that their only sphere of influence was confined to providing canned food items to the food bank.

In a different context, the issue of control was expressed as having control over the kind of charity they were providing to food bank consumers. KS delivered a profound testament to the issue of control within the confines of charity. He said,

“It’s not necessarily just like blind charity...we’re raising money  
but we get to choose what we want to do with money and we know

what is being done with the money we've raised. Ultimately, the Daily Bread Food Bank wants food and that is what we're giving them...we're providing to the charity and not just writing them a blank check."

This finding about the participants' control over the help provided illustrates a point of view that favours charitable giving relevant to the needs of the donor rather than the needs of the recipient.

### **Group 2: Food Bank Volunteers**

#### **In what ways does the food bank's discourse about community become exemplified in food bank volunteers?**

The food bank uses community as part of their discourse about hunger in our society. Food banks emphasize community as a transactional relationship between people with resources sharing some of these resources with people who need food. A majority of food bank volunteers shared the point of view of communities helping one another by transferring resources but also described this relationship as egalitarian. Some participants used phrases such as "friendship"; "regardless of your background, race or where you're from"; and "who are we to judge anybody else." A pair of participants also saw community among volunteers at the food bank. In my discussion with the two participants they said the following:

MD: And I met a lot of wonderful people working here

Iris: So you develop a sense of belonging?

MD: Yes, definitely.

MR: Yes.

MD: Like a family...another family other than your own.

However one participant, GD challenged this discourse about community. The participant is an immigrant to Canada and stated, “Here the neighbours are not really open in this country.” In my discussion with GD, she felt that in her home country people had an open door to visitors and there was no need to make an appointment. She felt people in Canada were more isolated and wanted to be isolated and that in her home country people have more warmth towards one another. GD’s perspective as an immigrant contrasts greatly the views of most of the participants about community as a place where people helped one another and could be seen as equals.

Food banks also use “hungry neighbours” as an impetus for people to become involved in their charity drives. Only 2 out of the 7 participants actually challenged this assertion. RN said, “...we care about our neighbours but when I look more deeply into it...I start thinking then why is my neighbour hungry?” Another participant, GD said, “Person in Canada cannot be hunger. Cannot! That’s fact!” The two participants showed that identifying people who are hungry as our neighbours places the problem into a one dimensional construct. Later in my interview with RN, she said, “...it [Canstruction®] raises the issue of hunger...brings it to our community but at the same time it over simplifies it.” GD’s perspective was starker in which she said, “In my country...you either have money or you don’t...so...you’re either having food or you’re dead...there’s no middle.” GD contextualizes hunger in Canada as an unfounded reality when compared with people from her country of origin. GD believes people living in Canada have access



to resources, such as food banks, hence they are not hungry. GD also talks about how helping your neighbour is about being compassionate but not developing a close relationship with your neighbour. GD said, “Here the people might sound cold but they will donate \$5 to the food bank...there [country of origin] they’re warm but they don’t donate.” Both RN and GD contested the construct of “hungry neighbours” but from different perspectives; RN saw it as an oversimplification of the problem while GD felt hunger did not exist in Canada because the availability of resources such as food banks when compared to her country of origin where people could potentially die from hunger because no such assistance is available.

**What constructs of hunger did participants identify with or reject in the images they saw?**

Participants were more drawn to the images than the accompanied text about the art installation. Participants spoke about the images and did not notice or scantily made reference to the accompanied text. Out of the 11 images shown, a majority of participants liked the airplane the most (see Figure 2).

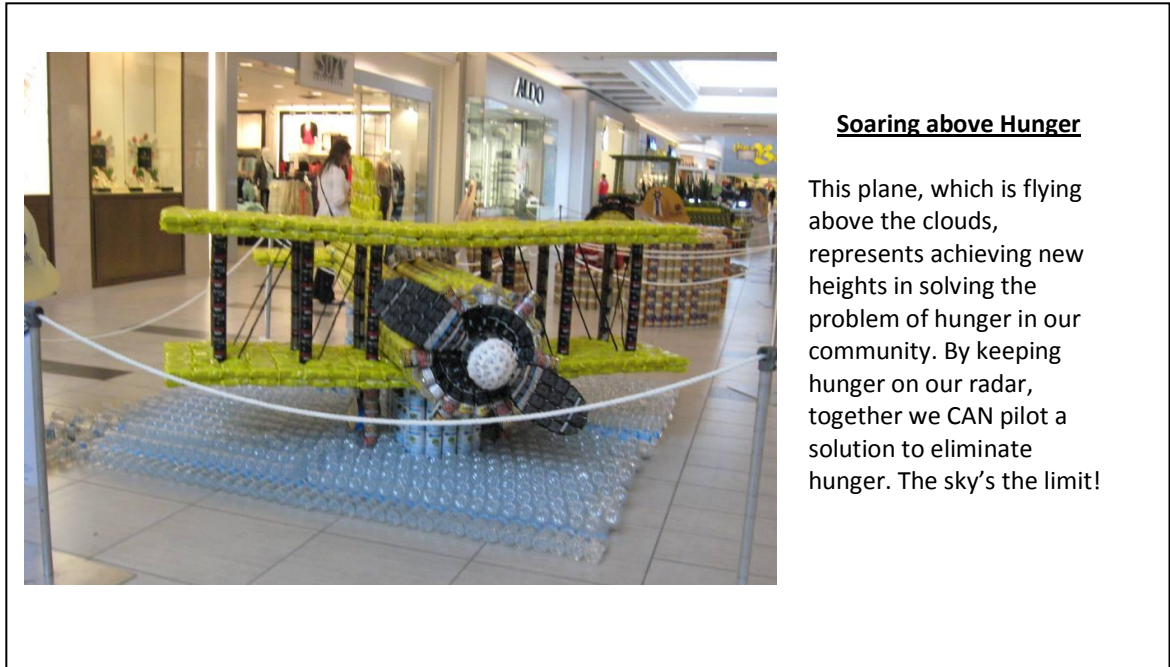


Figure 2. Airplane from Canstruction® Waterloo, March 2014.

Participants were more drawn to the ingenuity of the object than the metaphor it represented. Participants used the following words to describe what they saw as:

“artistry”, “fascinating”, “very creative”, “so neat”, “no mistakes”, “futuristic”, “very detailed”, “extremely hard to do”, “like a piece of art”, and “very well thought out.”

When asked about the plane’s representation of hunger, many participants felt the plane showed how food is transported to remote areas, particularly Northern Canada and Africa.

One interviewee completely agreed with the designers’ written text. WD said, “I would love to see the world and the community is soar through that prospect where it no longer exists.” The airplane captivated the participants’ interest because of the intricacy of the object and less about its metaphor for hunger.

The images interviewees liked the least were due to two elements: the design quality and its poor symbolism of hunger. Participants disliked the birthday cake the most (see Figure 3) with other objects receiving some negative attention.



Figure 3. Birthday Cake from Canstruction® Waterloo, March 2014

Participants felt that the birthday cake was not well colour coordinated or did not project itself as an easily identifiable object without the aid of the text description. One participant thought the cake had little ingenuity or creativity involved in comparison to other objects. When asked about the cake's metaphor for hunger, one participant saw it as completely ludicrous. SH states, "...when you're starving I think a birthday cake is kinda the last thing on your mind." However, participants disputed other metaphors used to describe hunger. Since the Canstruction® event was held at the same time of the Winter Olympics, there were some objects depicting Olympic themes. SH felt some of these images pushed a political agenda of conservatism as part of the nationalism imbued in the

Olympics. The negative opinions about some of the objects were mainly concerned with aesthetics with a minor emphasis on its relevancy to hunger.

Just over half of the volunteers had positive responses about the Canstruction® Waterloo event. Participants described the fundraising campaign as a great idea and saw it as a tangible demonstration of communities coming together to demonstrate their talents and their efforts in supporting the food bank. WD affirmed the idea that communities banding together can solve hunger when she said, “The message of hunger is that...with everyone pulling together I think it can honestly be eliminated.” Another volunteer, MR thought the event showed people’s compassion when she said, “...people that are working that can’t afford to give are willing to give up either their time or their money to help.” The participants who thought this was a great event also thought the food items shown were relevant to the needs of food bank consumers. Volunteers thought the designers provided a good variety of items and items that had a great deal of utility such as beans.

Only two volunteers challenged what they saw from the Canstruction® Waterloo event and expressed that there was a disconnection from the realities of people who face hunger. RN said,

“It makes the issue of hunger very simple like you give a can...  
you do something...it’s something you can deal with and leaves in  
the hands of people. Whereas hunger is more profound. There are  
more layers to it.”

Another volunteer felt the disconnection resided at a deep emotional level. When asked what hunger looked like SH said,

“I don’t think you can capture that. It’s a feeling...it’s not something...when you look at food...don’t get this sensation of...like these don’t come across to me as like ‘I really need this’...it’s almost a nothingness when you’re hungry ‘cause you’re empty and these don’t show emptiness.”

Both of these participants were also critical of the types of food used to create the objects. RN said, “Most of them are not healthy. Lots of sodium. It’s something I wouldn’t feed my family on a daily basis.” SH critiqued how some of the food items, such as Mr. Noodle instant ramen, were detrimental for people with health problems such as diabetes and people with cancer because of their high sodium content. SH added that she wished there was more variety of food used to build the installations particularly children’s snacks which are items that “really light up their face.”

**How does the participants’ visual representation of hunger coincide or challenge with those from the Canstruction® Waterloo site?**

In order to provide context for the volunteer’s images of hunger, it is important to list the objects shown at the Canstruction® Waterloo to make a comparison with two sets of images. Objects shown at Canstruction® Waterloo consisted of modes of transportation, sports, and spaces where people or animals would gather together. The objects displayed were:

1. Green farming tractor – resembles a John Deere brand

2. Birthday cake
3. Family of ducks
4. Hockey goalie
5. Minions (from the cartoon Despicable Me) standing around the Olympic rings
6. Airplane
7. Home Hardware delivery truck
8. Snow plow
9. Camp fire
10. Sports field
11. A bridge over a river (a bridge that resembles a well-known bridge over the Grand River in Kitchener)

In contrast to the images used at Canstruction<sup>®</sup>, participants described images of hunger that portrayed deprivation, isolation, and social inequality. The images volunteers described are the following:

1. A new born baby with a box of milk nearby but is not able to reach it (GD)
2. A fire using cold colours instead because hunger is a feeling and it's a dark place (SH)
3. A child sitting quietly withdrawn saying nothing (RN)
4. An overweight sleepy and listless person lying down (BT)
5. An empty bowl (MR)
6. Three different food hampers representing different economic classes; someone barely eating would have an apple and bottle of water in their

hamper; someone that is middle class would have more food in their hamper; someone who is doing very well would have a hamper overflowing with food (WD)

The implication of these images described by the food bank research participants and how it contrasts with the images from the Canstruction® event is discussed in the final section of my thesis.

### **Group 3: Persons with Food Insecurity Experience**

#### **What constructs of hunger did participants identify with or reject in the images they saw?**

Participants with food insecurity experience were more critical of the Canstruction® Waterloo event than the food bank volunteers and the Canstruction® participants, but some members also felt that the event was a creative way of channeling people's time and energy for a good cause. One participant stated the event showed the public how money is spent in support of a food drive. Another member felt that the event helps people feel engaged and proud of their charitable efforts. Other participants were impressed with the quantity of food and the ingenuity in creating the objects. One member felt the food bank really does help people and that this event just showed people's generosity in helping others.

However, there were criticisms about the event that reflected some members' experiences in accessing a food bank program. One member commented that the food at the event looked pristine but the reality of what a person receives at the food bank is food that is damaged and expired. Other people expressed the view that the event does little to

improve the lives of people experiencing hunger because it is time limited and when it is over people will forget about the problem of hunger. One participant named CH was vehemently against the entire event and how it reflected society's views of the problem of hunger. He was the only participant who critically rejected the food bank system and how it reflects the view of poverty in our society. CH questioned why we have food drives when food is a human right. He went on to question why people are not being fed and thought Canstruction<sup>®</sup> was part of the social engineering of how people viewed those living in poverty. The issue of access to food was raised a couple of times during the group discussion and members wondered how they could access the food being shown at the event.

Group members also discussed the short-comings of the food bank system and how this event did not reflect those realities. One of the dominant themes that emerged was the participants' anger over the distribution of expired and poor quality food items from the food bank system. Group members felt that being given expired food made them feel less equal and was demeaning to them. Many research participants exchanged their experiences of items they have received that they threw away or left behind at the food hamper centre because it had surpassed its best before date, was expired, or was inedible fresh produce. One participant commented that she had gone to the food bank a number of times in a month and received what she felt was decent quality food but then was dismayed in subsequent visits at receiving expired food and having to throw out most of it when she got home.



Participants heatedly discussed their dehumanizing and demoralizing experiences at different food distribution sites in the city. Sentiments expressed included having to line up outside during inclement weather; not being able to choose their own food items; having to search out other food relief centres in an effort to obtain more food resources during the year. Other participants vented about how the food relief centres were not warm or welcoming spaces.

When participants were asked the question “what would you say to the Region of Waterloo Food Bank board of directors”, overwhelmingly many participants wanted their voice included in how the food bank system operated. Research participants felt the food bank system was not meeting their needs. Ideas presented were the following: distributing household items such detergent and shampoo; more food relief sites and greater access to them; and allowing people to choose food items to suit their own needs. Some participants wanted food banks to be more responsive to their cultural diversity and differences in family structures. Other recommendations included working with people in meeting their food needs *everyday* not just the rationed amounts provided.

**How does the participants’ visual representation of hunger coincide or challenge with those from the Canstruction® Waterloo site?**

Participants with food insecurity experience provided images of deprivation, marginalization and social inequality similar to the ones described by food bank volunteers. Also, participants expressed images of uncertainty and exploitation. The images participants described are:

1. An empty stomach

2. A person on the ground with a wall of people whose backs are turned away to represent hierarchy
3. An image of a single mom with two kids wondering where to go for food
4. An image of starving Africans and an image of money next to it to show that it is a business
5. Use all the white cans and make it into an empty fridge
6. An image of a student not knowing what their future will be
7. A huge dumpster with big locks on it and people standing around it looking at it
8. A picture of a person before they experience hunger and a picture of the same person going through hunger next to it

The images described by the participants with food insecurity experience are a significant contrast to the images portrayed at the Canstruction Waterloo event. The implication of these images described by the food bank research participants and the participants with food insecurity experience is discussed below.

## **Discussion**

### **Recapping Covered Ground**

The literature review about food banks draws on three branches of research: how food banks help communities; major criticisms about food banks; and the investigation of hunger as discourse. These three areas of research coalesce providing a foundation in understanding how food banks have constructed their own narrative about hunger.

#### **Food banks help people.**

The food bank system helps people access food items free of charge. Food banks provide help to those in ‘need’ by developing additional programs and services that promote a healthy and nutritious lifestyle. Some of these programs include: community gardens, mobile delivery of fresh produce and animal protein, and the exclusion of unhealthy items such as soda pop from their distribution system. Also, environmental sustainability is another aspect food banks use to promote their positive role in the community. Food banks prevent the waste of edible food from reaching landfills or glean from farmer’s field’s food that would have been left to rot. They also support local agriculture in an effort to reduce their carbon footprint in the transportation of food.

The food banks’ positive impact extends beyond the collection of food items and includes their ability to harness people’s generosity in working together to help those in ‘need’. Food banks provide a myriad of activities for people to help those experiencing hunger. These activities include food drives, volunteering at a food bank and giving direct financial support. Also, volunteerism is further epitomized within food banks because

they provide a social outlet in developing camaraderie with others who have similar ideological values.

Food banks are also progressive institutions in providing services that try to alleviate some of the negative impacts of poverty. Food banks across Canada are implementing educational programming about eating and cooking nutritious food. Food banks are partnering with employers in becoming an intermediary employment agent for individuals looking for work. Some food banks are adopting alternative approaches that provide increased dignity for food bank consumers such as a consumer-choice model. Other food banks have moved towards a more politicized approach to reducing poverty and social inequality.

**Food banks promote charity.**

The food bank system uses hunger within a context of benevolence to convey the importance of food banking services. Benevolence is an ideal that is fundamental to food drives as a necessary condition for the public's support in their efforts to end hunger. Compassion and generosity are emotional constructs which help the public to easily identify with the need and importance of the food bank system. Food banks' humble beginnings in the basement of churches and ad-hoc community programming have given way to large centralized distribution networks and a dominant voice in the media. However, research has shown that charity within the food bank system has two fundamental flaws; first, it does not resolve the central challenges that food banks face in their operations; and second, charity has a tendency of minimizing meaningful

governmental action when the problem appears to be addressed by a compassionate public.

Food banks parallel a private food system but are highly inefficient in providing food to those in 'need'. Food banks have a supply chain that is unstable, inconsistent and highly labour intensive. Food banks depend on food donations and volunteers as primary inputs for the system. The food banks' dependence on charitable inputs causes the rationing of food supplies, limited operating hours, and the provision of any food item at hand. Also, food banks are highly susceptible to donor cuts and will scale back their services to accommodate a drop in financial supports or food donations.

The quality and quantity of food donations has been the focus of several research studies in Canada and in the United States. Valerie Tarasuk's research (Loopstra & Tarasuk, 2012; Tarasuk & Eakin, 2003; Teron & Tarasuk, 1999) serves as a testament to persistently low grade quality and quantity of food distributed by food banks. Studies on food bank consumers found their needs for fresh produce and animal proteins were largely unmet by emergency food hamper programs.

Another fundamental construct that is part of the food bank system is the use of the term hunger is the perceived needs of food bank consumers. Studies have demonstrated divergence between food bank consumers' needs and what food bank suppliers believe is needed. Food bank suppliers believe the provision of any food items in an emergency fulfills the needs of the food bank consumer. Food bank consumers, however, feel stigmatized by: eligibility measurements; the inability to choose their own food; and the

inconvenient hours and location of food bank centres. Tarasuk & Easkin's (2003) study concluded the provision of food is nothing more than a symbolic gesture.

Food banks provide a 'moral safety valve' (Poppendieck, 1998) for people and governments from making significant political change in tackling the root cause of hunger; poverty and social inequality. Food banks uphold their own assertion of advocating on behalf of their constituents but stop short of becoming an agent of political change because of the following factors: i) the corporatization of food banks; ii) their primary focus in attaining food; iii) legal limitations imposed over lobbying efforts of non-profits; iv) the absence of food as a human rights issue.

**Food banks exclusively use a discourse of hunger.**

Food banks do not prominently feature food insecurity or food security as terms in their construction of hunger. These terms are largely absent in their fundraising campaigns and their websites. The Food bank's construction of hunger aligns itself as a physiological and socio-economic condition attributed to poverty. However, research literature has shown that hunger occupies several contexts of meaning. In one context, hunger can be seen as a morally abhorrent circumstance. In another context, hunger can be viewed as a relevant experience according to the standards of living found in different societies. Others have contextualized hunger as conditions of either malnutrition, under-nutrition or over nutrition. Others have rejected the use of food insecurity because the term depoliticizes and diminishes the problem and the term hunger is a much more powerful descriptor of people who are not able to feed themselves.

Critics of the food bank sector discourse of hunger have stated that the term focuses on individual suffering and does little to shed light on the root causes. Even the donation of food over cash is preferred because it serves a symbolic function of sharing food in response to an identifiable need. The rhetorical strategies used by food banks include the following tactics: statistics coupled with quotes from representative food bank consumers; emphasis on food items; provide the reasons why hunger exists; and an emphasis on immediate aid than long-term solutions (Retzinger, 2012). The prominent use of the term emergency to describe the condition that bring people to a food bank allows the public to interpret the problem as something we can do very little to prevent or avoid (Poppendieck, 1998).

Studies that have used discourse analysis in the construction of hunger have uncovered how this discourse shapes social inequality. One example includes the popular food product Kraft Dinner<sup>®</sup>. Persons who have no previous experience with food insecurity associated Kraft Dinner<sup>®</sup> as a comfort food while people who experience food insecurity saw Kraft Dinner<sup>®</sup> as a source of discomfort (Rock et al., 2009). Another study used Foucauldian discourse analysis that looked at children's school meal programs in Atlantic Canada as a means of regulating children's undesirable behaviour (Dayle & McIntyre, 2003). Another discourse analysis study had found participants with food insecurity experience challenged the neoliberal discourse that blamed them for their inability to feed their families and saw their experience as a matter of social justice (Knezevic et al., 2014).

**Literature review summary.**

The literature review demonstrates that food banks put forward a particular narrative about hunger. First, the narrative comes from a social service institution that presents a positive impact on how their services help communities who are ‘in need’ and encourages communities to galvanize together in an effort of good will. Second, the food bank’s narrative about hunger is about providing charity. Third, food banks’ exclusive use of the term hunger presents a physiological condition of deprivation attributed to poverty when hunger holds many different meanings.

**Conclusions from the Canstruction® Study****The social construction of hunger by Canstruction® participants.**

My study of the social construction of hunger portrayed by food banks illustrates how this construction is reinforced, reproduced and challenged through artwork made from packaged food items and from images described by research participants. In answering my first question, the data showed that the solicitation discourse of food banks does impact the public’s understanding about hunger. The Canstruction® event frames the problem of hunger in four ways: i) hunger is more closely associated with food banks than with people who face food insecurity; ii) hunger is detached from larger social issues; iii) charity offers moral relief and personal fulfillment; iv) hunger divides communities into an “us” and “them” relationship

***A discourse of hunger is strongly associated with food banks.***

The Canstruction® event reframed hunger as distant from people experiencing deprivation and positioned hunger as a supply problem experienced by food banks. Food



banks do not produce food, grow food, and do not have enough money to buy food that would meet consumer demand. Food banks depend on charitable donations which are unreliable and insufficient. The Canstruction® event demonstrates that food banks focus their message on increasing food supplies and use the problem of high demand as a marketing strategy to appeal to the general public for donations. Canstruction® research participants exemplified the food bank's supply problem by focusing on the provision of food items and dismissed their own knowledge of the psychological distress that is associated with hunger. They also dismissed some of the practical problems that occur in the food bank system such as the donation of unhealthy food items or food items that may be incompatible to meal preparation as irrelevant to the food drive campaign. Also, the research participants were most interested in the extent to which their donations helped the food bank's supply problem rather than knowing how their charitable effort directly helped those 'in need'. The data also showed that research participants did not consider how their project could serve as a metaphor for hunger but rather how it could showcase their creativity in supplying food items. Canstruction® research participants were engaged with the food bank's central goal of replenishing food supplies and did not use Canstruction® to represent their views about hunger.

The food bank's solicitation discourse in providing 'poor food' to 'poor people' was reproduced by the Canstruction® participants. The research participants' focus on purchasing a large quantity of food while saving on cost as much as possible reproduces the message that cheap food is good enough for people who could not afford any other food. The desire to provide better food was referred to by the research participants but

was deemed unattainable because not enough money could be raised. What is interesting is their experience of financial constraints to purchase better food parallels the experience of people facing food insecurity. Research participants were replicating the struggles of people who are not able to afford better food. Low quality and monotonous food is not only the message that Canstruction® participants reproduced but also replicated the experience of people facing food insecurity.

The results of this study demonstrate that the emphasis on food items as a means of ending hunger renders the psycho-social needs of the food bank consumer invisible. The food bank's emphasis on food items as the goal strips away food from any meaningful context that involves cooking, eating and feeding as social interactions that can derive pleasure, community belonging and physical well-being. The Canstruction® participants did not associate their food items' utility beyond a caloric input required to sustain life. Food is surrounded by social cultural meaning and is typified at various national, regional, and ethnic levels. However, the food banks' discourse about hunger is absent of the richness that food provides people's lives as a source of tradition, nostalgia, health, cultural identity, and a basis for human relationships (Van Esterik, 1999).

***Hunger's detachment from larger social issues.***

The Canstruction® event does not delve into the root causes of hunger but labels food bank consumers as neighbours who need help. When segments of the population who experience food insecurity are deemed neighbours who need help, it synthesizes this human condition as individual actors in distress. The Canstruction® research participants absorbed this message of individuals in distress when they attributed the cause of hunger

to unfortunate and unforeseeable circumstances experienced by individuals. The research participants' attitude about hunger plays into the food bank's marketing narrative of neighbours helping neighbours which constructs the helping process as a relationship between individual actors.

The food drive's focus on food items as the solution to hunger was accepted by a majority of the Canstruction® research participants. Not only did research participants attribute the source of hunger as a person's bad luck, but they were not able to think of possible solutions outside of food donations that could help people facing hunger. Canstruction® research participants were surprised by their own lack of knowledge about hunger and felt the focus group session helped them start to think more deeply about the issue. However, their depth of understanding was limited to knowing how their donations impacted the food bank system. The Canstruction® event extricates people facing hunger from larger social issues.

***Charity offers moral relief & personal fulfillment.***

The Canstruction® event sustains the same message that originates with all food drives; collective acts of kindness can alleviate hunger. Canstruction® research participants shared the idea that community action in the fight against hunger is based on sharing part of one's wealth with people who do not have enough resources. Participants used expressions of generosity such as "sharing what you have", "giving back" and "helping out". Also, research participants viewed professional collaboration from the corporate environment as easily aligned with the Canstruction® event which diverts their expertise into charity.

However, this transference of professional collaboration into charity work was mainly possible because of the nature of the Canstruction<sup>®</sup> event. Canstruction<sup>®</sup> is an event that appeals to the corporate community because it offers a team building outlet for their employees and provides high profile advertising. Canstruction<sup>®</sup> participants consistently repeated how much have fun they have with their work colleagues. Also, it is a novel activity that has a significant appeal to designers and engineers to use their professional talents creatively. Canstruction<sup>®</sup> is an inexpensive marketing tool because it is an event that occupies a very large and very busy public space; attracts media attention; and celebrates accomplishments with awards. Poppendieck (1998) refers to this convergence of social interactions and marketing as the “halo effect” (p. 150-151). Poppendieck (1998) states the “halo effect” is a composite of the following factors:

1. “[F]eeding the hungry is an activity that is widely thought as [a] good” moral construct (p. 150)
2. “[F]eeding the hungry offers the possibility of virtue by association” (p. 151)
3. “Emergency food has become the accepted icon for caring about hungry people” (p. 151)
4. Provides “cause-related marketing” that promote private companies as socially conscious corporate citizens (p. 165)

The charity aspect of the Canstruction<sup>®</sup> event fulfills people’s desire to alleviate their personal discomfort with hunger in our society in way that is highly accessible for them. Research participants took for granted that their work served a social good and

expressed ease with channelling their talents and energy into the project. Poppendieck (1998) labels this effect as a “moral bargain” (p. 47). A moral bargain is defined as “the general ease of involvement with emergency food and the high degree of gratification it provides” (Poppendieck, 1998, p. 47). The Canstruction® event uses hunger as a moral imperative to draw people into committing their time and energy for a project that has a high and immediate payoff of success and feelings of good citizenry.

***The discourse of hunger encourages an “us” and “them” relationship.***

The food bank’s solicitation discourse constructs hunger as personal troubles and not public issues. This was demonstrated by the research participants’ disconnection from the issues behind hunger and their understanding that philanthropy was a sufficient means of combating hunger. But underneath these views also reside core beliefs and values that distinguished two groups of people: those who donate food as “us”; and those who receive donated food as “them”. These values are based on a social contract that does not offer solidarity but rather reinforces the notion that social problems include social difference and social difference can be ameliorated not eradicated. Research participants exemplified this social contract in two ways in how they perceived the help they were providing to the food bank.

First, research participants believed they had a limited role in helping people who faced hunger. The solicitation discourses powerfully sets up the public agenda, frames the debate, and silences challenging narratives such as healthy food. The charity event positioned food donors as having agency in providing a service to those receiving their gifts. Donors are not constructed as political agents of change, but rather agents of help.

Canstruction<sup>®</sup> does not question the existence of hunger but “normalizes destitution and legitimates personal generosity as a response to major social and economic dislocation” (Poppendieck, 1998, p. 5).

Second, research participants believed help should be provided on their terms. The solicitation discourse contributes the kind of help that should be provided and how it will be delivered from “us” to “them”. The solicitation discourse of providing assistance on its own terms further marginalizes people facing food insecurity. It also acts as an extension of a neoliberal discourse that demonizes the poor as suspect and returns them to Victorian labels of deserving and undeserving.

Social differences of “us” and “them” are further reinforced by a discourse that does not incorporate the voices of those who face hunger in the charity event. People facing hunger were not invited to construct their own image of hunger or become members of groups from various corporations involved in the event. Also, people who face food insecurity were not invited to present their experience of hunger at the event or to Canstruction<sup>®</sup> groups.

The construct of sharing used in the event preserves the social status of both groups. The charity event did not ask people to share what they already had but rather fundraise excess resources that they did not want. The event preserved the social status and material comforts of those donating food items and reinforcing their identity as employees of a socially conscious corporation. The discourse frames hunger as people needing help not people experiencing social inequality. Poppendieck (1998) explains how this process generates an “us” and “them” dichotomy:

“[W]e give to people who are not like us, and as inequality increases, the poor appear less and less like the comfortable. They seem more different because their lives are more different. The growing inequality feeds the trend toward charity, but the proliferation of charity feeds our appetite, or at least our tolerance, for inequality as well” (p. 306-307).

Engaging privileged groups to question social inequality would mean they would have to assess their social status and relinquish control over their privileged standing in order to create a socially just society. The hunger discourse frames social responsibility in setting a table that is rickety, sparse, and close by the garbage dump for those who cannot feed themselves while those who donate food items have a seat at a harvest table covered in abundance inside an inviting restaurant.

**The social construction of hunger by food bank volunteers & persons with food insecurity experience.**

In answering my second research question, food bank volunteers and persons with food insecurity experience both conform with and challenge the food banks' hunger discourse in accordance to each person's social identity such as age, political affinity, and life experiences. The research data from these two groups lead to the following conclusions: i) images described from both groups about their knowledge of hunger were similar to one another and remarkably different from the images displayed at the Canstruction® event; ii) a majority of food bank volunteers repressed their criticisms and conformed to the food bank's discourse; iii) a majority of persons with food insecurity

experience did not assert their human right to food but experienced violations of their human right to dignity iv) persons with food insecurity experienced wanted a food bank system that included their voice.

***Images of hunger represented the effects of poverty & social inequality.***

Research participants from the food bank and food insecure groups described images of hunger that portrayed deprivation, marginalization and social inequality. In addition, persons with food insecurity experience also described images of uncertainty and exploitation. These images are a significant contrast to images that were displayed at the Canstruction® Waterloo event which showed innocuous images that were cute, innovative and required a textual description of how these images related to the theme of ending hunger. There was an emotional discrepancy when considering the images displayed at the Canstruction® Waterloo event and those described by research participants. The images at the Canstruction® Waterloo event conveyed positive and inspirational emotions about ending hunger whereas the research participants from the food bank and food insecure groups described negative emotions related to living in poverty.

Also, many of the metaphors of hunger imagined by the research participants included images of how poverty impacts people's physical and psycho-social well-being. The depiction of people rather than objects as metaphors for hunger highlights the humanity of poverty. Some research participants' portrayal of food items in their images were related to power differences manifested by social inequality. In contrast, food items



at the Canstruction® Waterloo site were shown as powerful tools, such as modes of transportation, in combating hunger.

The social location of the images described by research participants and the ones shown at the Canstruction® event illustrate a dislocation between the interests of those who do not have access to food and those with resources to donate food. I would say this is an incredible testament to the polarizing effect the discourse of hunger has on mainstream society. The interests of those who donate food are entrenched in the ideals of good, compassionate, and generous citizens. Also, these self-interests as described earlier are guided by feelings of being good citizens and the willingness to work with persons from similar professional and socio-economic social locations. The interests of the volunteers and people facing food insecurity are located in the struggles that people endure when living in poverty. Perhaps the different understandings of hunger are evidence of a society that does not see itself as interdependent but as two societies with different interests (Poppendick, 1998).

***Food bank volunteers conform to and challenge the food bank discourse.***

My interviews with the food bank volunteers showed that they shared the same values perpetuated by food banks, such as neighbours helping neighbours. A majority of food bank research participants did not challenge the types of food used to construct objects at the Canstruction® event. Also, they were only critical of objects that had poor design qualities in their appearance and with some objects that did not serve a strong metaphor for ending hunger. Only two research participants were critical of the food

items being unhealthy. Overall, research participants from the food bank felt the event was a great idea in getting the public interested with helping those ‘in need’.

However, the images research participants described showed a very different narrative. The narrative that emerged from research participants’ descriptive images conveyed the negative psychological, physical and social effects of poverty and social inequality. Participants described images that were about social marginalization, obesity, physical deprivation, and economic disparity. The images participants described were not at all similar to the ones they liked from the Canstruction event. The images of hunger the food bank volunteers constructed suggest a far more critical point of view of the food bank discourse and the Canstruction® event. It seems the research participants are experiencing an unconscious conflict between the charitable works the food banking system provides to the community and recognizing that their charitable efforts do not address the root causes of hunger.

***Persons with food insecurity want human dignity.***

Although the research participants with food insecurity were critical of the Canstruction® event, this critique did not extend to the same level as the participants who volunteer at a food bank. Only one participant questioned the existence of food banks and the need to recognize food as a human right. But the majority of participants with food insecurity experience vehemently expressed that they wanted to be treated with dignity. Participants wanted food banks in their community to provide food that did not stigmatize them as second class citizens. They did not want expired food, or food past its best before date, or inedible fresh produce. Essentially participants wanted to receive the same kind

of food that is accessible to the general public at a grocery store. Research participants also felt that food banks create dehumanizing and demoralizing experiences for people accessing their services. For people who are food secure, the food bank system provides a charitable expression of altruism, love, empathy, while persons experiencing food insecurity view food banks as a source of shame and social stigma (Wakefield et al., 2012).

***Persons with food insecurity want to have a voice in the food bank system.***

The majority of research participants also wanted to have their voice and needs included in the food bank system. Research participants with food insecurity experience expressed a desire to make the system better for them. Even though many research participants with food insecurity experience challenged the discourse of hunger, they still viewed charity as an invaluable social good. Research participants' description of what would be more effective assistance from the food bank system such as creating more food relief centres and greater access to them. Participants did not challenge the existence of food banks but wanted food banks to be more responsive to their needs. It appears that research participants were focused in the continuation of addressing the symptoms of poverty and not the root causes. In a way the discourse of hunger retained its ability to redirect people's attention away from developing fundamental solutions to poverty.

## **Broader Implications of the Food Bank Hunger Discourse**

### **Food Banks**

There is a significant disparity in the messages that food banks promote through their food drives and their beliefs about food. One of the startling discoveries I made during the research process was that Food Banks Canada, the national association for all its member agencies, does include on its website a statement about food being a human right. The statement was found under their *Ethical Foodbanking Code* which is policy memorandum that food bank members must abide by in their association with Food Banks Canada. The preface to the Ethical Foodbanking Code states the following:

“Food Banks Canada, its Members (provincial associations), Affiliate Member food banks, and associated agencies believe that everyone in Canada has the right to physical and economic access, at all times, to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food which meets their dietary needs and food preferences.”

(Food Banks Canada, n.d. <http://www.foodbankscanada.ca/About-Us/Organization/Food-Banking-Code-of-Ethics.aspx>)

The preface was followed by nine ethical principles which included the recognition “that food banks are not a viable long-term response to hunger, and devote part of their activities to reducing the need for food assistance” (Food Banks Canada, n.d.). These statements serve as a witness to the fundamental need to address how hunger is framed in the public discourse by food banks. Food banks do not adhere to these ethical principles in their messages as it would challenge their operational practices and their fundraising

efforts. Food banks solicitation discourse is less about food as a human right and the political will to end poverty and more about sustaining the food bank system.

### **Social Policy**

Charity is not a solution to poverty and social inequality in Canada. Food banks are a charitable response to a deeply rooted and growing social problem. Food banks face this charity conundrum of providing help but that help alone being insufficient as a solution to hunger. “Charity creates a relationship of power and dependence rather than of equality and respect” (Webber, 1992, p. 84). At best charity is able to provide relief to many communities but “handouts come at a price, and that price is dignity” (Webber, 1992, p. 85). Poppendieck (1998) eloquently states in her concluding chapter that food banks are trapped in a vicious cycle. Poppendieck (1998) makes the case that “fundraising requires emergency food providers to stress their own efficiency” such as how far a dollar contributed will go in their program, which deems their services as more efficient than public programs (p. 302). Even though food banks profess they are not a substitute for public services, the implicit message is “the volunteer sector can do it cheaper” (Poppendieck, 1998, p. 302). Food banks have to stress their success and achievements and use highly suggestive marketing tools, such as celebrity endorsement or novel food drives, as a “good way” to help (Poppendieck, 1998). Food bank marketing detracts the public from the complex issues underlying hunger and does not hold governments accountable in their responsibilities for people (Poppendieck, 1998).

### **Research Limitations**

My research project mainly focused on the images produced by the Canstruction® Waterloo event in unpacking the solicitation discourse used by food banks. However, the objects at the Canstruction® Toronto event portrayed more nuanced metaphors of hunger that included race, sexual orientation, and poverty. It is possible that some participants from the Canstruction® Toronto event were more purposeful in portraying an image of hunger that was related to social inequality. Also, there may have been Canstruction® participants who were more informed about hunger and may have provided a broader context to how the solicitation discourse from food banks shaped their understanding of the problem.

Another group whose participation may have added another dimension to the discourse of hunger portrayed at the Canstruction® event would have been members of the public at the event site. The event was designed to be shown at a publicly accessible site which would have drawn in people from different socio-economic identities. The event was meant for public consumption and my research study did not examine how the general public viewed the Canstruction® event.

### **Further Research Opportunities**

I originally thought of my research as a Community Based Participatory Action Research approach. I envisioned a comparative analysis of images produced by Canstruction® participants and images produced and shown by persons with food insecurity experience. Showing images created by people experiencing food insecurity could serve as a catalyst towards problem identification, engagement, dialogic research planning, participation as process, solidarity, generation of people's knowledge, relationship reflexivity, empowerment, ownership, accountability, and action for change (Elliot, 2011). A richer narrative about hunger as it relates to poverty and social inequality is needed in understanding the complexities of this issue. Visuals can serve as powerful testaments of people's experiences and their knowledge of social problems.

Another research opportunity regarding the Canstruction® event that could be further explored is a content analysis of the objects themselves. I noticed there seems to be a pattern to how objects were represented, designed, and written about in the accompanying text to each object. Also, some Canstruction events store images from previous years on their website archives. There may be narrative being constructed that is consist with social/geographic/historical contexts as it relates to the theme of ending hunger.

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## Appendix A Recruitment poster for the Food Insecure Group



# Participants Needed

### Arts-Based Research Study About Access to Affordable & Nutritious Food

Interested in participating in a study on how hunger is viewed by  
the public?

As a participant in this study, you would be asked to participate in a focus group  
for 1 session (1.5 hrs)

**The study runs on Saturday March 22, 2014 at 1PM**

In appreciation for your time, you will receive a \$25 gift card.  
Light refreshments will be provided for the focus group session.  
Bus tickets or parking reimbursement fees will be provided.

For more information about this study, please contact:

**Iris De Roux-Smith**  
McMaster University, School of Social Work

519-239-8042  
Email: [derouxij@mcmaster.ca](mailto:derouxij@mcmaster.ca)

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



Inspiring Innovation and Discovery

Research Study  
(519) 239-8042

Research Study  
(519) 239-8042

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(519) 239-8042

**Appendix B Recruitment Email for the Food Secure Group**

To: insert email address

From: derouxij@mcmaster.ca

Subject: Arts-Based Interpretations of Food Security Research Study

Dear \_\_\_\_\_:

As per our conversation on (insert date) about my research study, I am recruiting research participants who are involved in designing and building art installations at the Canstruction Toronto being held at the TD Centre on May 26-31, 2014.

I am interested in conducting an Arts-Based Research Study in Food Security in how hunger is viewed by the public. As a participant in this study, you would be asked to participate in a focus group for 1 session on a date and time convenient for your group.

Light refreshments will be provided for the focus group session.

I have included a Letter of Information to be passed on to other members of the Canstruction design/installation team at your organization.

If there are any questions, or additional information requested, please feel free to contact via email or on my cell phone at 519-239-8042.

In addition, this study has been reviewed and cleared by the McMaster Research Ethics Board. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a participant or about the way the study is being conducted you may contact:

McMaster Research Ethics Board Secretariat  
Telephone: (905) 525-9140 ext. 23142  
Gilmour Hall – Room 305 (ROADS)  
E-mail: ethicsoffice@mcmaster.ca

Regards,

Iris De Roux-Smith  
MSW candidate  
School of Social Work, McMaster University

**Appendix C      Telephone Recruitment Script to Director of Community Outreach Services**

Student Researcher:

Iris De Roux-Smith, School of Social Work, Faculty of Social Science

Research Project Title:

Art-based Interpretations of Food Insecurity

Hello, my name is Iris, we met once or twice at Community Outreach Worker meetings in 2013 when I was a social work student with the House of Friendship.

I am now a graduate student in the School of Social Work at McMaster University

I am conducting a research project on art-based interpretations of food insecurity as my thesis topic

I am recruiting participants who experience food insecurity to learn about their thoughts and feelings about the Canstruction event hosted by the Region of Waterloo Food Bank at Conestoga Mall in March.

Participants will also be asked to create their own artwork of their interpretation of food insecurity to be displayed in a public venue.

I would like to request your assistance in emailing my recruitment email and attached flyers to the Community Outreach Workers in Waterloo region. I would like the outreach workers to post my flyer at their community centre.

If Yes:

Thank you for forwarding my recruitment email and flyer to your organization's team members.

Do you have any questions?

If you think of any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me by phone at 519-239-8042 or email which is derouxij@mcmaster.ca

If No:

Thank you for your time and I look forward to seeing you again.

**Appendix D      Recruitment Email to Family Outreach Workers & Emergency Food Relief Programs**

To: insert email addresses

From: derouxij@mcmaster.ca

Subject: Participants Needed for an Art-based Research Study

Dear Community Service Provider:

My name is Iris De Roux-Smith and I am a graduate student at the School of Social Work, McMaster University. I am recruiting participants to take part in my research study regarding Art-based Interpretations of Food Insecurity.

I would like to request your assistance in posting my recruitment flyer at a location in your centre where community members view community notices and special event postings.

Participants will be involved in a Community-based Participatory Action Research that invites persons experiencing food insecurity to provide their thoughts and feelings about how hunger and food insecurity is portrayed and addressed by the emergency food system. The study asks participants to also create their own artwork to represent what food insecurity means to them that will be displayed in a public venue as decided by the research participants.

Participants will be provided with bus tickets, refreshments and a \$25 gift card of their choice.

If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact me via email or on my cell phone at 519-239-8042.

In addition, this study has been reviewed and cleared by the McMaster Research Ethics Board. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a participant or about the way the study is being conducted you may contact:

McMaster Research Ethics Board Secretariat  
Telephone: (905) 525-9140 ext. 23142  
Gilmour Hall – Room 305 (ROADS)  
E-mail: ethicsoffice@mcmaster.ca

Your assistance is appreciated.

Kind regards,  
Iris De Roux-Smith  
MSW Candidate  
School of Social Work, McMaster University

**Appendix E Recruitment Post Card – Food Bank Volunteers**

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Research Participants Needed for a Study about Food Bank Fundraising</b></p> <p>As a participant in this study, you would be asked to participate in an interview for 45 minutes</p> <p>The interview can take place at a location that is mutually agreed. Sample questions include: Describe what you like most and least about the artwork used in the campaign? What sort of images would you use to portray hunger in our community?</p> <p>The study ends on <b>Saturday June 21, 2014</b></p> <p>In appreciation for your time, you will receive a <b><u>\$25 Walmart gift card</u></b>, and bus tickets or parking reimbursement fees.</p> <p>For more information about this study, please contact:</p> <p>Iris De Roux-Smith 519-239-8042 Email: <a href="mailto:derouxij@mcmaster.ca">derouxij@mcmaster.ca</a></p> <p><b>This study has been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance through the McMaster University Research Ethics Board.</b></p>	 <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Feeding the Community</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>McMaster University</b></p>  <p style="text-align: center;">Inspiring Innovation and Discovery</p>
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**Appendix F Letter of Information & Consent – Food Secure Group***Inspiring Innovation and Discovery***LETTER OF INFORMATION - FSG**

Study about Art-based Interpretations of Food Insecurity

**Investigator:**

**Student Investigator:** Iris De Roux-Smith  
School of Social Work, Department of Social Sciences  
McMaster University  
Hamilton, Ontario, Canada  
**(519) 239-8042**  
E-mail: derouxij@mcmaster.ca

**Faculty Supervisor:** Dr. Stephanie Baker Collins  
Associate Professor  
School of Social Work, Department of Social Sciences  
McMaster University,  
Hamilton, Ontario, Canada  
**(905) 525-9140 Ext. 23779**  
Email: sbcollins@mcmaster.ca

***Purpose of the Study***

---

The purpose of this study is to get a better understanding of how individuals think about hunger and food insecurity by looking at their interpretations of artwork from a fundraising event.

***Procedures Involved in the Research***

---

You will be asked to participate in a focus group session with others involved in creating art installations for the Canstruction 2014 event in Toronto in which you will describe your planned artwork idea, discuss and answer questions about what hunger and food security means to you.

I will take pictures of the artwork at the Canstruction 2014 event in Toronto before its demolition. I will not take pictures of any members of the design/installation team on the day the artwork is installed or taken down.

The focus group session will take place at a location that is most convenient for participants. The date for the session will be held after participants have decided on their art design. The date is flexible to a weekday or a Saturday that is most convenient for participants. The focus group discussion will last 45-60 minutes.

I will be recording the audio portion of the focus group using a computer tablet. I will also be taking some notes during our discussions.

### ***Potential Harms, Risks or Discomforts***

---

The risks involved in participating in this study are minimal. You may feel uncomfortable with the discussion that may bring up issues that you may have worried about or feel strongly about. There may be some worry about how others will react to what you say in the discussion.

You do not need to answer questions that you do not want to answer or that makes you feel uncomfortable.

I will provide a list of supportive services if you require further assistance.

### ***Potential Benefits***

---

While this study may not benefit you directly, but your participation in this research will increase knowledge on how people understand the issue of hunger and food insecurity.

### ***Confidentiality***

---

I will not be using your name or any other identifying information in anything you write. However, it is possible that your identity may be recognizable in the references you make or stories you tell and you would need to keep this in mind during the group discussion.

I will be asking everyone in the focus group to respect the privacy of the discussion and its participants. However, I cannot guarantee that everyone will do so and they should keep this in mind through the discussion.

The data collected from the focus group discussion will be secured in the following ways:

- Electronic copies of audio and typed transcription of the focus group discussion will be password protected on a desktop computer
- Hand written notes taken during the focus group discussion will be secured in a locked filing cabinet

I will be the only person accessing the research data and I will destroy the data once you have completed my degree and published my findings.

### ***Participation and Withdrawal***

---

Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you decide to be part of the study, you can withdraw from the focus group for whatever reason, even after signing the consent form or part-way through the study or up until approximately June 2014. However, after June 2014 I will have started to write up results from this study and cannot remove your data.

If you decide to withdraw, there will be no consequences to you. In case of withdrawal, I will do my best not to use what you have said in contribution to the group discussion, but focus groups are sometimes difficult to distinguish who is speaking.

### *Information about the Study Results*

---

I expect to have this study completed by approximately August 2014. If you would like a brief summary of the results, please let me know how you would like it sent to you.

### *Questions about the Study*

---

If you have questions or need more information about the study itself, please contact me at:

[derouxij@mcmaster.ca](mailto:derouxij@mcmaster.ca)

or at

518-239-8042 (Cell)

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 Research Office for Administrative Development and Support

E-mail: [ethicsoffice@mcmaster.ca](mailto:ethicsoffice@mcmaster.ca)

---

### **CONSENT**

- I have read the information presented in the information letter about a study being conducted by **Iris De Roux-Smith**, of McMaster University.
- I have had the opportunity to ask questions about my involvement in this study and to receive additional details I requested.
- I understand that if I agree to participate in this study, I may withdraw from the study at any time or up until approximately June 2014
- I have been given a copy of this form.
- I agree to participate in the study and to have the focus group audio-recorded.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Participant (Printed) \_\_\_\_\_

In addition to participating in this study, would you like to receive a summary of the study's results?

Yes \_\_\_\_\_

Please send them to this email address \_\_\_\_\_

Or to this mailing address: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

No \_\_\_\_\_

**Appendix G Letter of Information & Consent – Food Insecure Group****LETTER OF INFORMATION - FIG****Study about Art-based Interpretations of Food Insecurity****Investigator:**

**Student Investigator:** Iris De Roux-Smith  
School of Social Work, Department of Social Sciences  
McMaster University  
Hamilton, Ontario, Canada  
**(519) 239-8042**  
E-mail: derouxij@mcmaster.ca

**Faculty Supervisor:** Dr. Stephanie Baker Collins  
Associate Professor  
School of Social Work, Department of Social Sciences  
McMaster University,  
Hamilton, Ontario, Canada  
**(905) 525-9140 Ext. 23779**  
Email: sbcollins@mcmaster.ca

***Purpose of the Study***

---

The purpose of this study is to get a better understanding of how individuals think about hunger and food security/insecurity by looking at artwork from a fundraising event.

***Procedures Involved in the Research***

---

You will be asked to participate in a focus group session with others in which you will view pictures of artwork taken from the Canstruction 2014 event, discuss and answer questions about what hunger and food insecurity means to you.

The focus group session will take place at Downtown Kitchener Community Centre (35B Weber St. West, Kitchener). The date for the session is Saturday, March 22, 2014 at 1 PM. The focus group discussion will last 90 minutes.

I will be recording the audio portion of the focus group using a computer tablet. I will have a research assistant present to help me administer the logistics of the session and will be taking notes. I will also be taking some notes during our discussions.

### *Potential Harms, Risks or Discomforts*

---

The risks involved in participating in this study are minimal. You may feel uncomfortable with the discussion that may bring up issues that you may have worried about or feel strongly about. There may be some worry about how others will reaction to what you say in the discussion.

You do not need to answer questions that you do not want to answer or that makes you feel uncomfortable.

I will provide a list of supportive services if you require further assistance.

### *Potential Benefits*

---

While this study may not benefit you directly, but your participation in this research will increase knowledge on how people understand the issue of hunger and food insecurity.

### *Payment or Reimbursement*

---

At the beginning of the focus group session, you will receive a **\$25 gift card**. You may select a gift card from one of the following retailers: Tim Horton's, Walmart, Target, or Fresh Co.

Your parking fees will be reimbursed to you at the beginning of the focus group session. If you withdraw from the session before its completion, you can keep the parking fees provided to you.

Bus tickets will be provided to you at the beginning of the focus group session. If you withdraw from the session before its completion, you can keep the bus tickets.

### *Confidentiality*

---

I will not be using your name or any other identifying information in anything you write. However, it is possible that your identity may be recognizable in the references you make or stories you tell and you would need to keep this in mind during the group discussion.

I will be asking everyone in the focus group to respect the privacy of the discussion and its participants. However, I cannot guarantee that everyone will do so and they should keep this in mind through the discussion.

The data collected from the focus group discussion will be secured in the following ways:

- Electronic copies of audio and typed transcription of the focus group discussion will be password protected on a desktop computer
- Hand written notes taken during the focus group discussion will be secured in a locked filing cabinet

I will be the only person accessing the research data and I will destroy the data once you have I completed my degree and published my findings.

### *Participation and Withdrawal*

---

Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you decide to be part of the study, you can withdraw from the focus group for whatever reason, even after signing the consent form or part-way through the study or up until approximately April 2014. However, after April 2014 I will have started to write up results from this study and cannot remove your data.

If you decide to withdraw, there will be no consequences to you. In case of withdrawal, I will do my best not to use what you have said in contribution to the group discussion, but focus groups are sometimes difficult to distinguish who is speaking.

### *Information about the Study Results*

---

I expect to have this study completed by approximately August 2014. If you would like a brief summary of the results, please let me know how you would like it sent to you.

### *Questions about the Study*

---

If you have questions or need more information about the study itself, please contact me at:

[derouxij@mcmaster.ca](mailto:derouxij@mcmaster.ca)

or at

518-239-8042 (Cell)

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 Research Office for Administrative Development and Support

E-mail: [ethicsoffice@mcmaster.ca](mailto:ethicsoffice@mcmaster.ca)

---

### **CONSENT**

- I have read the information presented in the information letter about a study being conducted by **Iris De Roux-Smith**, of McMaster University.
- I have had the opportunity to ask questions about my involvement in this study and to receive additional details I requested.
- I understand that if I agree to participate in this study, I may withdraw from the study at any time or up until approximately April 2014
- I have been given a copy of this form.
- I agree to participate in the study and to have the focus group audio-recorded.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Participant (Printed) \_\_\_\_\_

In addition to participating in this study, would you like to receive a summary of the study's results?

Yes \_\_\_\_\_

Please send them to this email address \_\_\_\_\_

Or to this mailing address: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

No \_\_\_\_\_



**Appendix H Letter of Information & Consent – Food Bank Volunteers**

LETTER OF INFORMATION – Volunteers

Study about Art-based Interpretations of Food Insecurity

**Investigator:**

**Student Investigator:** Iris De Roux-Smith  
School of Social Work, Department of Social Sciences  
McMaster University  
Hamilton, Ontario, Canada  
**(519) 239-8042**  
E-mail: derouxij@mcmaster.ca

**Faculty Supervisor:** Dr. Stephanie Baker Collins  
Associate Professor  
School of Social Work, Department of Social Sciences  
McMaster University,  
Hamilton, Ontario, Canada  
**(905) 525-9140 Ext. 23779**  
Email: sbcollins@mcmaster.ca

***Purpose of the Study***

---

The purpose of this study is to get a better understanding of how individuals think about hunger and food security/insecurity by looking at artwork from a fundraising event.

***Procedures Involved in the Research***

---

You will be asked to participate in an interview in which you will view pictures of artwork taken from the Canstruction 2014 event, discuss and answer questions about what hunger and food insecurity means to you.

The interview will last 45 minutes and will take place at a location most convenient to you such as your home or at a meeting room such as your local Community Centre, or a public library in Kitchener or Waterloo. The date of the interview will take place that is mutually agreed.

With your permission, I will be recording the audio portion of the interview using a computer tablet and taking some hand written notes.

Some questions include:

- Tell me your thoughts about this fundraising campaign – how is the message of hunger relayed to the public?
- If you had an opportunity to create a visual of what you think hunger looks like, what would that be?

### ***Potential Harms, Risks or Discomforts***

---

The risks involved in participating in this study are minimal. The questions I ask may raise issues that you feel strongly about. You may also worry about how others might react to what you say.

You do not need to answer questions that you would prefer to skip and are free to end the interview at any time.

I will discuss how your privacy will be protected below.

### ***Potential Benefits***

---

While this study may not benefit you directly, but your participation in this research will increase knowledge on how people understand the issue of hunger and food insecurity.

### ***Payment or Reimbursement***

---

At the beginning of the interview, you will receive a **\$25 Walmart Gift Card** in appreciation of your time.

If the interview takes place off-site, your parking fees will be reimbursed to you at the beginning of the interview. Bus tickets will also be provided at the start of the interview. If you withdraw from the session before its completion, you can keep the gift card and parking fees, or bus tickets provided to you.

### ***Confidentiality***

---

You are participating in this study confidentially. I will not be using your name or any other identifying information in anything I write. However, we are often identifiable in the stories we tell and references we make. Please keep this in mind through the interview.

The data collected from the interview will be secured in the following ways:

- Electronic copies of audio and typed transcription of the interview will be password protected on a desktop computer.

I will be the only person accessing the research data and I will destroy the data once I have completed my degree and published my findings.

### ***Participation and Withdrawal***

---

Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you know me, please do not feel pressured to participate. There are others that I will be able to interview for my study. If you decide to be part of the study, you can

withdraw from the interview for whatever reason, even after signing the consent form or part-way through the interview or up until approximately June 30, 2014. However, after June 30, 2014 I will have started to write up results from this study and cannot remove your data.

If you decide to withdraw, there will be no consequences to you. In case of withdrawal, I will not use what you have said our interview session and any data you have provided will be destroyed unless you indicate otherwise.

### *Information about the Study Results*

---

I expect to have this study completed by approximately August 2014. If you would like a brief summary of the results, please let me know how you would like it sent to you.

### *Questions about the Study*

---

If you have questions or need more information about the study itself, please contact me at:

[derouxij@mcmaster.ca](mailto:derouxij@mcmaster.ca)

or at

518-239-8042 (Cell)

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 Research Office for Administrative Development and Support  
E-mail: [ethicsoffice@mcmaster.ca](mailto:ethicsoffice@mcmaster.ca)

---

## **CONSENT**

- I have read the information presented in the information letter about a study being conducted by **Iris De Roux-Smith**, of McMaster University.
- I have had the opportunity to ask questions about my involvement in this study and to receive additional details I requested.
- I understand that if I agree to participate in this study, I may withdraw from the study at any time or up until approximately June 2014
- I have been given a copy of this form.
- I agree to participate in the study and to have the interview audio-recorded.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Participant (Printed) \_\_\_\_\_

In addition to participating in this study, would you like to receive a summary of the study's results?

Yes \_\_\_\_\_

Please send them to this email address \_\_\_\_\_

Or to this mailing address: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

No \_\_\_\_\_

**Appendix I      Focus Group Question Guide – Food Secure Group****FOCUS GROUP QUESTION GUIDE – FOOD SECURE GROUP**

Study about Art-based Interpretations of Food Insecurity

**1. INTRODUCTION AND INSTRUCTIONS:**

Hello, my name is Iris. Thank you for agreeing to participate in this focus group meeting. Just to remind everyone, I'm looking at opinions about how individuals think about hunger and food security by looking at their interpretations of artwork from a fundraising event called Canstruction held in Waterloo this year.

I have in these envelopes money to reimburse you parking fees or bus tickets if you used public transit to come to this session. Please let me know if you drove or took the bus to arrive here.

[POINT OUT REFRESHMENTS if available, NAME TAGS if used – people should use their first name or pseudonym only].

In a minute, we will all introduce ourselves – first names only. But first, I would like to walk you through the consent form that is in front of you.

[FOR FACILITATOR: REVIEW INFORMED CONSENT FORM AND ANSWER ANY QUESTIONS ABOUT IT. COLLECT SIGNED CONSENT FORMS AND ENSURE THAT PARTICIPANTS HAVE A COPY OF THE LETTER OF INFORMATION TO TAKE WITH THEM]

Confidentiality: [READ ALOUD]

Before we begin our discussion of art-based interpretations of hunger and food security, I want to spend a few moments talking about confidentiality and to go over some basic ground rules for our focus group discussion today:

Everyone's views are welcomed and important.

- The information which we will collect today will be attributable (connected or associated) to you as a group.
- We will not identify quotes or ideas any one person of this group. Because of the nature of small communities or groups, it is possible that people could link participants in this room to quotes in the report. This is why we need to talk about confidentiality.
- We are assuming that when we learn about one another's views, they remain confidential. In a small community (group) like this, people are identifiable to some degree by their views and opinions.
- Having said this, and having made these requests, you know that we cannot guarantee that the request will be honoured by everyone in the room.
- So we are asking you to make only those comments that you would be comfortable making in a public setting; and to hold back making comments that you would not say publicly.

- Anything heard in the room should stay in the room.
- All voices are to be heard, so I will step in if too many people are speaking at once or to make sure that everyone has a chance to speak.
- I may also step in if I feel the conversation is straying off topic.
- After the discussion, I will invite you to fill in an anonymous “post-workgroup information sheet” ( If appropriate) to us help generally describe the kind of people who were part of the group today.
- You can expect this discussion group to last about 90 minutes.

#### Use of Digital Audio Recorder [If applicable]

- As you will recall, this focus/discussion group will be recorded to increase accuracy and to reduce the chance of misinterpreting what anyone says.
- All digital audio and transcripts will be kept under lock and key by the researcher.
- Names will be removed from transcripts. Participants will have coded numbers attached to their name which only I will know.
- Only I and my thesis supervisor will have access to transcripts (with personal names removed) of this focus group.
- For transcription purposes, I might remind you to say your first name for the first few times you speak so that when I’m transcribing the audio I can get used to recognizing your voice. That will ensure we assign the correct code to each person’s answers. I will give you a gentle reminder.
- I’ll also ask that when using abbreviations or acronyms, you say the full name at least once to aid transcription.
- We may also use a “flip chart” to write down key points during the focus group and take notes.

[AT THIS POINT, GROUP MEMBERS CAN QUICKLY INTRODUCE THEMSELVES –remind them that it is ‘first names only’.]

[HAND OUT ANY MATERIALS TO THE PARTICIPANTS WILL NEED DURING THE FOCUS GROUP INCLUDING PENS OR SCRAP PAPER & PICTURES OF THE ARTWORK FROM THE CANSTRUCTION 2014 EVENT].

## 2. INTERVIEW

- Focus group discussion begins with the facilitator asking the first question.
- Open up discussion for general responses of participants to each question.
- Interview questions:

#### Opening Question:

1. Please give us your first name, and tell us one thing that you made you want to participate in this study?

#### Introductory Question:

2. What comes to mind when you hear the phrase “sharing food with neighbours who are hungry”?

#### Transition Question:

3. What does enough food mean to you or your family?

Key Questions:

4. Can you tell me what you know about the Canstruction event and why you participated in the event?
5. Could you tell me what were your team's thoughts in designing your Canstruction art installation?
6. What do you think the art conveys about hunger? (Original question 7 removed altogether)

Ending Question:

7. Suppose you had the opportunity to talk with Provincial Premier Kathleen Wynne about the problem of hunger in Ontario, what would you tell her?
- Is there anything we forgot or something important that we should know about your thoughts about the Canstruction event or your views about hunger and food security?

Wrap-up:

- Remind participants that "what is said in the room should stay in the room".
- Thank the participants.

**Appendix J      Focus Group Question Guide – Food Insecure Group****FOCUS GROUP QUESTION GUIDE – FOOD INSECURE GROUP****Study about Art-based Interpretations of Food Insecurity****1. INTRODUCTION AND INSTRUCTIONS:**

Hello, my name is Iris. Thank you for agreeing to participate in this focus group meeting. Just to remind everyone, I'm looking at opinions about how individuals think about hunger and food security by looking at their interpretations of artwork from a fundraising event called Canstruction held in Waterloo this year.

I have in these envelopes money to reimburse you parking fees or bus tickets if you used public transit to come to this session. Please let me know if you drove or took the bus to arrive here.

I have here gift cards from four different retailers. Please choose a card that you prefer from the table.

[POINT OUT REFRESHMENTS if available, NAME TAGS if used – people should use their first name or pseudonym only].

In a minute, we will all introduce ourselves – first names only. But first, I would like to walk you through the consent form that is in front of you.

[FOR FACILITATOR: REVIEW INFORMED CONSENT FORM AND ANSWER ANY QUESTIONS ABOUT IT. COLLECT SIGNED CONSENT FORMS AND ENSURE THAT PARTICIPANTS HAVE A COPY OF THE LETTER OF INFORMATION TO TAKE WITH THEM]

Confidentiality: [READ ALOUD]

Before we begin our discussion of art-based interpretations of hunger and food security, I want to spend a few moments talking about confidentiality and to go over some basic ground rules for our focus group discussion today:

Everyone's views are welcomed and important.

- The information which we will collect today will be attributable (connected or associated) to you as a group.
- We will not identify quotes or ideas any one person of this group. Because of the nature of small communities or groups, it is possible that people could link participants in this room to quotes in the report. This is why we need to talk about confidentiality.
- We are assuming that when we learn about one another's views, they remain confidential. In a small community (group) like this, people are identifiable to some degree by their views and opinions.



- Having said this, and having made these requests, you know that we cannot guarantee that the request will be honoured by everyone in the room.
- So we are asking you to make only those comments that you would be comfortable making in a public setting; and to hold back making comments that you would not say publicly.
- Anything heard in the room should stay in the room.
- All voices are to be heard, so I will step in if too many people are speaking at once or to make sure that everyone has a chance to speak.
- I may also step in if I feel the conversation is straying off topic.
- After the discussion, I will invite you to fill in an anonymous “post-workgroup information sheet” ( If appropriate) to us help generally describe the kind of people who were part of the group today.
- You can expect this discussion group to last about 90 minutes.

Use of Digital Audio Recorder [If applicable]

- As you will recall, this focus/discussion group will be recorded to increase accuracy and to reduce the chance of misinterpreting what anyone says.
- All digital audio and transcripts will be kept under lock and key by the researcher.
- Names will be removed from transcripts. Participants will have coded numbers attached to their name which only I will know.
- Only I and my thesis supervisor will have access to transcripts (with personal names removed) of this focus group.
- For transcription purposes, I might remind you to say your first name for the first few times you speak so that when I’m transcribing the audio I can get used to recognizing your voice. That will ensure we assign the correct code to each person’s answers. I will give you a gentle reminder.
- I’ll also ask that when using abbreviations or acronyms, you say the full name at least once to aid transcription.
- We may also use a “flip chart” to write down key points during the focus group and take notes.

[AT THIS POINT, GROUP MEMBERS CAN QUICKLY INTRODUCE THEMSELVES –remind them that it is ‘first names only’.]

[HAND OUT ANY MATERIALS TO THE PARTICIPANTS WILL NEED DURING THE FOCUS GROUP INCLUDING PENS OR SCRAP PAPER & PICTURES OF THE ARTWORK FROM THE CANSTRUCTION 2014 EVENT].

## 2. INTERVIEW

- Focus group discussion begins with the facilitator asking the first question.
- Open up discussion for general responses of participants to each question.
- Interview questions:

**Opening Question:**

1. Please give us your first name, and tell us one thing that made you want to participate in this study?

**Introductory Question:**

2. What are your first impressions of the Canstruction event we saw today?

**Transition Question:**

3. What comes to mind when you hear the phrase "sharing food with neighbours who are hungry"?

**Key Questions:**

4. Tell me what do you know about the Canstruction event and what does it hope to achieve?
5. Taking a closer look at a few art installations from the event, what do you think the message this sculpture is conveying to the public?
6. What do you think the art at the events conveys about hunger to people who need food?
7. If you had the opportunity to create artwork representing your experiences, what would it look like?

**Ending Questions:**

8. If you had a few minutes to talk with the Board of Directors of the Waterloo Region Food Bank, what would you say?
- Is there anything we forgot or something important that we should know about your thoughts about the Canstruction event or your views about hunger and food security?

**Wrap-up:**

- Remind participants that "what is said in the room should stay in the room".
- Thank the participants.

**Appendix K      Semi-Structured Interview Question Guide – Food Bank Volunteers**

Art-based Interpretations of Food Insecurity  
Iris De Roux-Smith, (Master of Social Work student)  
(School of Social Work – McMaster University)

**Information about these interview questions:** I am interested in learning about how you interpret artwork created for the Canstruction fundraising event that was held at Conestoga Shopping mall in Waterloo, ON. Interviews will be one-to-one and will be open-ended (not just “yes or no” answers). Because of this, the exact wording may change a little. Sometimes I will use other short questions to make sure I understand what you told me or if I need more information when we are talking such as: *“So, you are saying that ...?”*, to get more information (*“Please tell me more?”*), or to learn what you think or feel about something (*“Why do you think that is...?”*).

- 1) Please tell me what comes to mind when you hear the phrase:

With one can of food as a catalyst for change, One Can® to represent the building block of change, Canstruction proves that small acts of kindness improve the lives of people in need.

- 2) Let’s look at these pictures of artwork taken from the Canstruction event. Pick out 1 or 2 pictures that you like and then 1 or 2 pictures of ones you don’t like. What is it about these images that you like and dislike?
- 3) What do you think about the food that is used in the artwork?
- 4) Tell me your thoughts about this fundraising campaign – how is the message of hunger relayed to the public?
- 5) If you had an opportunity to create a visual of what you think hunger looks like, what would that be?
- 6) Is there something important we forgot? Is there anything else you think I need to know about food banks and/or hunger in our society?

END