Expanding Food Justice: Gender, Race and Hunger in Toronto

by

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Graduate Department of Geography & Planning
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Abstract

Hunger is a significant issue in Toronto, particularly among racialized individuals and female lone-parent households. Canadian critical food scholarship generally attributes hunger among these marginalized groups to financial insecurity, disregarding the ways gender and race intersect with poverty. To challenge this pattern, I argue that a food justice framework can elucidate how intersecting systems of oppression impact the ability of marginalized communities to access food. Drawing from participant observation at The Stop, a leading food justice organization in Toronto, and interviews with staff members from various food security organizations, this project examines the utility of a food justice framework in understanding how gender and racial inequality shape the experiences of The Stop’s participants and analyzes how The Stop works to dismantle gender and racial injustices through food activism, and what barriers to this work exist. Doing so highlights the possibilities for re-framing how hunger is understood and addressed in Toronto.
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Chapter 1

1 Introduction

Empty kitchen cupboards are an alarming daily reality for many Torontonians. Although Toronto is ranked as one of the top four cities of opportunity in the world (PWC, 2016), hunger is a severe municipal issue. In 2014, 12.6% of Torontonians experienced some level of food insecurity, which is understood as the inability to access the amount of food needed to maintain good health (Tarasuk, Mitchell, & Dachner, 2016). Mounting poverty rates in the city have caused increasing rates of hunger (Saul & Curtis, 2013; Davis & Tarasuk, 1994; Daily Bread Food Bank, 2016, etc). Between the years 1981 and 2005, income inequality increased 31% in Toronto, even though the gap only grew 14% nationally during this time period (United Way, 2015). Accordingly, hunger is not the result of a lack of food in Toronto, but rather the high costs of housing, food, and other basic needs, as well as stagnating and low incomes (Daily Bread Food Bank, 2016). Although the rising costs of living in Toronto and declining incomes affect all low-income households, rates of food insecurity are disproportionately high among Indigenous persons, racialized minorities, newcomers, and female lone parent households (Toronto Public Health, 2010; Tarasuk et al., 2016).

The terms “hunger” and “food insecurity” are often used interchangeably. Davis & Tarasuk (1994) define hunger as “the inability to obtain sufficient, nutritious, personally acceptable food through normal food channels or the uncertainty that one will be able to do so” (1994, p. 51). Hunger specifically focuses on inadequate or insecure access to food due to insufficient income (Davis & Tarasuk, 1994). Food insecurity, on the other hand, is a broader
term than hunger, which encompasses concerns regarding food availability, accessibility, adequacy, acceptability, and agency (Centre for Studies in Food Security, n.d.). Although I use both terms in my project, I am focused on the issue of hunger. I assume that there is an ample supply of food in Canada, but low-income people do not have fair access to the food available. I therefore situate hunger within the complex landscapes of social and economic power.

My research project particularly illustrates how gender and racial inequities shape experiences of hunger. In 2014, 29.4% of African-Canadian households were food insecure (Tarasuk et al., 2016). This rate more than doubles the national average of household food insecurity. It is also recognized that approximately one-third of female-headed households with children are food insecure, indicating that this group has one of the highest rates of household food insecurity in Canada (Tarasuk et al., 2016). These rates are not surprising when compared to the demographics of poverty in Toronto, which indicate that racialized minorities and female lone parents are more likely to live in poverty (City of Toronto, 2015). Although many reports of hunger recognize that these marginalized households are particularly vulnerable to food insecurity in Canada (see Toronto Public Health, 2010; Tarasuk et al., 2016; UNHRC, 2012), these studies rarely address questions of gender and racial power.

A food justice framework provides a lens to understand the structural causes of food insecurity, particularly exposing the relationship between food insecurity and social hierarchies. Food justice literature situates uneven food access within the context of institutional racism and economic inequity (Ramírez, 2015; Figueroa, 2015; Alkon & Norgaard, 2009, e.g.). This literature is generally grounded in the United States and accordingly, there is little Canadian food justice literature. Instead, Canadian critical food scholars tend to discuss the correlation between income level and hunger, overlooking how gender and racial injustices intersect with poverty. My research project aims to understand how a food justice framework is useful in examining the
ways gender and racial inequities impact experiences of food insecurity. This project also explores strategies to challenge social injustices through food activism.

Research for this project was conducted at The Stop Community Food Centre (CFC), which is a leading food justice organization in Toronto. The Stop “strives to increase access to healthy food in a manner that maintains dignity, builds health and community, and challenges inequality” (The Stop, n.d.a). This agency endeavours to meet its goals through comprehensive programming, including community kitchens, community gardens, civic engagement, community advocacy, and social enterprise (see Appendix 3 for a full list of The Stop’s programs). “The Stop CFC addresses the short-term, immediate needs of individuals needing food, but also attempts to build the infrastructure for people to contribute to longer-term social and ecological change” (Levkoe & Wakefield, 2011, p. 258). Using food as a tool to engage community members, The Stop works to collaboratively build a stronger community and a healthier and more equitable food system. To explore the utility of The Stop’s food justice approach, my research objectives are twofold: 1) analyze the utility of a food justice framework in understanding how gender and racial inequality shape the experiences of The Stop’s participants and 2) examine how The Stop works to dismantle gender and racial injustices through food activism, and what barriers to this work exist.

In addition to a food justice framework, I also draw from intersectionality theory to analyze the relationship between gender, race, and hunger. Intersectionality theory reveals how systems of oppression, like gender, race, and poverty, intersect to shape lived experiences (Crenshaw, 1989; Collins, 2009). Although financial pressures from the high cost of living and low wages undoubtedly produce hunger in Toronto, certain individuals are more vulnerable to poverty because they lack privileges related to their gender, race, sexuality, citizenship status, age, and mental or physical health. Intersecting human differences influence how individuals
experience poverty and food insecurity. Accordingly, poverty is a complex social and economic phenomenon, which cannot simply be conflated with economic deprivation. By drawing on food justice literature and intersectionality theory, my research project examines the social and economic hierarchies shaping the daily lives of The Stop’s participants.

The Stop’s food justice approach is not common in Canada. The primary response to food insecurity has been the voluntary sector, particularly food banks and drop-in meal programs, which provide free meals or food packages to those in need. These programs provide temporary relief to hunger. Although charitable food programs are prominent in Toronto, Canadian critical food scholars question the ability of these programs to alleviate poverty and hunger among low-income individuals (Riches, 2002; Riches, 1986; Tarasuk & Eakin 2003; Tarasuk, Dachner, & Loopstra, 2014; Wakefield, Fleming, Klassen, & Skinner, 2012, e.g.). These critiques are further explored in the second chapter. Consequently, many food insecure Canadians cope with hunger by asking family members or friends for support, selling property, cashing in their Registered Retirement Savings Plan (RRSP) or other financial assets, or using credit cards, lines of credit, or payday lenders (Daily Bread Food Bank, 2016).

While this situation appears bleak, Toronto is considered to be one of the “pioneers of urban food strategies” (Morgan & Sonnino, 2010, p. 211). The municipal government has implemented a food strategy and a food policy council dedicated to increase access to healthy foods, inspiring cities across the world to undertake similar actions (Morgan & Sonnino, 2010). The Toronto Board of Health established the Toronto Food Policy Council in 1991 to advise the city on issues related to food security and to help Toronto build a health-focused food system (City of Toronto, n.d.) This council connects diverse actors in the food system, such as farmers, workers in the community sector, government officials, and business leaders, to tackle food insecurity issues. Toronto Public Health’s Food Strategy identifies six priority areas for action:
support food-friendly neighbourhoods, make food a centrepiece of Toronto’s new Green economy, eliminate hunger in Toronto, connect city and countryside through food, empower residents with food skills and information, and urge federal and provincial governments to establish health-focused food priorities (Toronto Public Health, 2010). While this strategy seeks to mobilize actors in Toronto to work towards a more health-focused and fair food system, there is still considerable work to be done, particularly to address food insecurity within the households of racially marginalized individuals and female lone-parent households.

The following chapter provides an overview of the predominant responses to hunger in Canada and food justice and intersectionality literature. The third chapter summarizes the methods and methodology used in this research project. The fourth chapter presents my findings from participant observation at The Stop Community Food Centre and semi-structured interviews with staff members from various anti-hunger organizations in Toronto. The final chapter provides a brief summary of my project and outlines the lessons learned from my research.
Chapter 2

2 Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

Despite the high rates of food insecurity among Indigenous peoples, racialized minorities, recent immigrants, and female lone-parent households in Toronto (Toronto Public Health, 2010; Tarasuk et al., 2016), there is limited food justice scholarship situated within a Canadian context. In 2014, 12.6% of Torontonians experienced some level of food insecurity (Tarasuk et al., 2016). These rates more than doubled among African-Canadian households and female lone-parent households (Tarasuk et al., 2016). Accordingly, it is important to draw attention to how gender and racial inequities impact the everyday lives of food insecure individuals in Toronto. Food justice scholarship – literature that analyzes the socio-structural causes of food insecurity among oppressed groups – provides a framework to understand how social and economic power structures influence who is vulnerable to food insecurity in Canada.

I begin this chapter by summarizing the dominant responses to hunger in Toronto and reviewing the main critiques of these programs. The second section provides an overview of food justice literature and outlines some of the tensions within this scholarship. The next section explains the main tenets of intersectionality theory. Lastly, I provide an overview of the limited food justice scholarship situated in a Canadian context and review critical food scholarship that draws attention to the vulnerability of low-income mothers and racialized newcomers to food insecurity in Canada.
2.2 Responses to Hunger in Toronto

Charitable food assistance programs like food banks and drop-in meal programs are the predominant responses to hunger in Canada. Drop-in meal programs provide free meals and snacks to impoverished individuals and are typically offered by faith-based organizations, drop-in centres, multiservice agencies, healthcare services, or homeless shelters (Tarasuk & Dachner, 2009). “Food banks are extra-governmental community organizations that collect donated foodstuffs and redistribute them to the ‘needy,’ working largely with volunteer labour and donated equipment and facilities” (Tarasuk & Eakin, 2003, p. 1506). Food producers, processors, and retailers donate the majority of food bank volume, which usually can no longer be offered for sale because these items are approaching their expiry dates, are damaged, or have manufacturing errors (mislabelled products, design glitches, etc.) (Tarasuk & Eakin, 2003; Davis & Tarasuk, 1994; Riches, 1986, Tarasuk & Davis, 1996; e.g.) Although food banks were originally considered a temporary solution to hunger, the need for food banks has never subsided (Riches, 2002; Riches, 1986; Tarasuk & Eakin 2003; Tarasuk, Dachner, & Loopstra, 2014; Tarasuk & Davis, 1996; Wakefield et al., 2012).

The first Canadian food bank opened in Edmonton in 1981 following the 1970s oil crisis, which caused stagnating economies, high inflation, and mass unemployment in Canada (Davis & Tarasuk, 1994; Riches, 2002). For the three decades prior to the oil crisis, unemployment rates had hovered around 5%. Unemployment rates rose to 12% in 1983 as a result of the economic recession (Gower, 1992). Although demand for social assistance increased in the 1980s, the federal government adopted a neoliberal approach to social policy during this time period (Carson, 2014; Wakefield et al., 2012; Riches, 2002). The federal government prioritized
reducing the fiscal deficit and revitalizing the private sector, inducing a significant decline in social spending (Carson, 2014; Riches, 2002). Heightened rates of unemployment and cuts in social spending put more people at risk of poverty and hunger.

The federal government continued to advance their neoliberal agenda following the economic recession. In the 1990s, the government revoked several critical welfare programs, which increased the vulnerability of many low-income Canadians to food insecurity.

Specifically, the federal government dismantled the 30-year-old Canadian Assistance Plan (CAP) in 1996. CAP was a federal cost-sharing program with provinces and territories intended to provide assistance to those in need (Riches, 2002; Rideout, Riches, Ostry, Buckingham, & MacRae, 2007; Carson, 2014; UNHRC, 2012; Rice & Prince, 2000). “While CAP did not explicitly establish a right to benefit, it did recognize food, clothing and shelter as basic human needs and held the provinces accountable for providing sufficient benefits to allow people to meet these basic needs” (Rideout et al., 2007, p. 569). To replace CAP, the Canadian government introduced the Canada Health and Social Transfer (CHST) program, which was a block-funding formula that gave provinces a sum of money to allocate to healthcare, post-secondary education, and social welfare. The CHST allows provinces to limit the amount of money spent on social welfare and allocate more resources to healthcare and post-secondary education (Riches, 2002; Rideout et al., 2007; Carson, 2007; UNHRC, 2012; Rice & Prince, 2000). Consequently, “the termination of CAP eroded the national standard of social assistance that had previously existed” (Carson, 2014, p. 8). Provinces, therefore, can differ significantly in the percentage of resources they allocate to social assistance and how social assistance is administered. Additionally, CHST no longer held provinces accountable to meet the basic need for food (Rideout et al., 2007). In 2003, the government altered the CHST and divided this funding into two distinct transfers – the Canadian Health Transfer and the Canadian Social
Provinces still retain the ability to allocate more resources to post-secondary education at the expense of social welfare.

These new policies have caused dramatic reductions in provincial social assistance spending. Overall, the total social program spending by the federal government gradually decreased after the abolition of CAP. Between the early 1990s and 2000, federal spending on social security programs and services declined from approximately 20% of Canada’s Gross Domestic Product to less than 12% - “the lowest share since the social security system was launched in the 1940s” (Rice & Prince, 2000, p. 134). Most provinces decreased spending on social assistance following the erosion of CAP. For example, Premier Mike Harris of Ontario cut social assistance benefits by 22% in 1995, a decision that continues to make it difficult for social assistance recipients in Ontario to meet their basic needs (Rice & Prince, 2000). He also tightened the eligibility requirements to receive social assistance so fewer people had access to these benefits (Rice & Prince, 2000). The federal government’s neoliberal restructuring has heightened the demand for charitable food assistance across Canada.

Many critical food scholars, however, have demonstrated that food banks and drop-in meal programs are inadequate solutions to hunger (Poppendieck, 1998; Riches, 2002; Wakefield, et al., 2012; Carson, 2014; Tarasuk, Dachner, & Loopstra, 2014; Tarasuk & Eakin, 2003; Davis & Tarasuk, 1994; Riches, 1986). Even large food banks like the Daily Bread Food Bank in Toronto are staunch opponents of a permanent emergency food system and actively campaign for the government to take responsibility in the fight against hunger (see Daily Bread Food Bank, 2016). Most critical food scholarship argues that charitable food assistance is a poor response to hunger for four main reasons.

Firstly, emergency food programs are ill equipped to meet the needs of clients (Tarasuk & Eakin, 2003). For instance, the reliance of food banks on donated foods forces many food
banks to restrict the frequency with which individuals can use the food bank and the amount given to those considered eligible (i.e. live in the catchment area), especially when supplies are running low (Loopstra & Tarasuk, 2015; Tarasuk, Dachner, & Loopstra, 2014). The food donated is often highly processed, non-nutritious, past the “best before” date, or given in very small quantities (Loopstra & Tarasuk, 2015; Tarasuk & Eakin, 2003). Tarasuk and Eakin (2003) therefore assert that the unpredictability and the poor quality of the food supplied to food banks is insufficient to satisfy clients’ needs.

Secondly, scholars contend that food banks and drop-ins are 'Band-Aid-type' solutions to food insecurity because these programs only provide temporary hunger relief, rather than address the structural causes of hunger (Davis & Tarasuk, 1994; Carson, 2014; Poppendieck, 1998). Accordingly, Carson (2014) states that many food banks have depoliticized food security since they have framed food donations as the solution to hunger, instead of advocating for political and social change.

Thirdly, food banks and drop-in programs perpetuate and even exaggerate the uneven power relationships between users and volunteers/staff members. Poppendieck (1998) argues that the greatest flaw of charitable food assistance system is that it humiliates the people using these services. In these programs, the roles between “givers” and “receivers” are clearly defined and distinct (Poppendieck, 1998). Poppendieck (1998) insists that these programs lack dignity because they are intrinsically suspicious and bureaucratic. For example, users may be means-tested to prove need or volunteers may be suspicious that clients are taking more than their share (Poppendieck, 1998). Poppendieck (1998) also suggests that these programs can be deeply impersonal since clients may be treated as numbers, rather than human beings. Consequently, shame is a common emotional response among food bank users (Poppendieck, 1998; Tarasuk & Beaton, 1999; Van der Horst, Pascucci, Bol, 2014). Van der Horst, Pascucci, & Bol (2014) argue
that shame is caused by three main factors: 1) the poor contents of food bank hampers, 2) undignified interactions between volunteers and users, and 3) a food bank user’s reminder of where they are positioned in the societal hierarchy each time they use a food bank. The power dynamics within charitable food programs are deeply ingrained.

Lastly, scholars argue that emergency food programs enable the federal and provincial governments to evade their obligation to address hunger (Poppendieck, 1998; Riches, 2002; Wakefield et al., 2012; Carson, 2014; Tarasuk, Dachner, & Loopstra, 2014; Tarasuk & Eakin, 2003; Davis & Tarasuk, 1994). Emergency food services are thus intrinsic to Canada’s shadow state. The shadow state is defined as “a para-state apparatus comprised of multiple voluntary sector organizations, administered outside of traditional democratic politics and charged with major collective service responsibilities previously shouldered by the public sector, yet remaining within the purview of state control” (Wolch, 1990, p.xvi). The government, therefore, has offloaded the responsibility of service delivery on non-profit organizations, even though the state still regulates social services (Trudeau, 2008). Consequently, the erosion of Canada’s social safety net has made food banks an “institutionalized second tier of Canada’s social welfare system” (Riches, 2002, p. 653). The combined trends of state cutbacks in welfare provisions and high rates of poverty have entrenched emergency food programs as a social security measure.

This section has outlined some of the main critiques of emergency food programs. Although this literature provides valuable analyses of charitable food assistance, most of it does not address how gender and racial inequality also shape experiences of hunger. The following section provides an overview of food justice literature, which situates food insecurity within the context of institutionalized racism and economic inequity.
2.3 Food Justice

A food justice framework offers a lens to understand the uneven social and economic systems shaping food insecurity and suggests ways to challenge inequality. However, there is “a great deal of playing fast and loose with what is called food justice” (Cadieux and Slocum 2015, p. 2). To clarify the broad use of the term food justice, Bradley & Herrera (2016) propose two main interpretations, “original” and “moralist.” The “original” conception of food justice exposes the inequalities embedded in the food system and challenges racism, exploitation, and oppression through food activism. This interpretation acknowledges “the multiple ways that racial and economic inequalities are embedded within the production, distribution, and consumption of food” (Alkon & Mares, 2012, p. 348). This framework does not place blame on individuals for their inability to access adequate food, but rather analyzes how injustices are embedded in social, economic, and political systems. “Original” food justice proponents advocate for community food initiatives operated by low-income individuals or people of colour, which increase access to food in marginalized communities. The second interpretation of food justice, which Bradley & Herrera (2016) refer to as the “moralist” approach, illuminates the environmental and health consequences of the current food system and asserts that everyone should have access to healthy food. This latter conception of food justice generally excludes analyses of the power relations within food systems and community food initiatives (Bradley & Herrera, 2016).

My research project uses an “original” food justice lens to consider how ingrained systems of oppression influence the vulnerability of The Stop’s participants to food insecurity. There is a great deal of food justice literature highlighting the exploitation of people of colour within the food industry and describing production-oriented food justice initiatives to challenge
inequities. While this work is important, my review of food justice literature will specifically focus on issues of hunger in urban centres, exploring the nexus of race, class, and food insecurity.

“Original” food justice literature is grounded in history. This literature analyzes how historical systems of oppression impact hunger and food activism within marginalized communities in the contemporary era (see Norgaard, Reed, & Van Horn, 2011; Ramírez, 2015; Figueroa, 2015; Slocum & Cadieux, 2015; Alkon & Norgaard, 2009; Alkon & Mares, 2012; Slocum, 2006; Rudolph & MacLachlin, 2013; Passidomo, 2014; e.g.) For example, Ramírez (2015) situates community food initiatives in the Central District of Seattle within the historical context of the plantation. “The plantation complex set the parameters of the African American experience for centuries, working to control black labor by violently suppressing independent thought and collective action” (Ramírez, 2015, p. 750). In response to the intergenerational trauma from slavery and sharecropping, a group of African-American residents from the Central District began a farm to assist community members develop liberating relationships with agriculture. Concurrently, this organization creates job opportunities for African-Americans and establishes Black food spaces in Seattle, which challenges ongoing processes of gentrification in the Central District that are disposessing African-American residents (Ramírez, 2015). Food justice scholarship, therefore, provides an opportunity to understand how historical systems of injustice shape contemporary experiences of hunger and food activism within oppressed communities.

Certain food justice scholars suggest that food activism grounded in the experiences of the oppressed can also foster healing among marginalized people (Ramírez, 2015; Figueroa, 2015; Slocum & Cadieux, 2015). The development of the current food system caused trauma in the lives of many racialized labourers who were slaves and indigenous peoples whose land was
stolen and therefore, certain food justice initiatives provide opportunities for oppressed people to heal (Slocum & Cadieux, 2015). For instance, Figueroa (2015) discusses an African-American food justice organization in Chicago that works to strengthen the local African-American community. This group organizes a collective buying system in an African-American neighbourhood, which increases access to healthy foods within this community. African-Americans have used collective buying practices since the end of slavery to circumvent relations of dependency on white employers and to build solidarity within African-American communities (Figueroa, 2015). Figueroa (2015) argues that collective buying strategies have helped the African-American community in Chicago cope with growing economic inequality and racial oppression. Figueroa (2015) thus grounds this food justice initiative within the histories of slavery and sharecropping in the United States and the particular experiences of the African-American community in Chicago. This initiative provides opportunities for African-Americans to heal from racial violence while simultaneously challenging inequality (Figueroa, 2015).

Due to a focus on inequality and power, “original” food justice scholars critique the simple goal of “inclusion” within some community food activities. “Moralist” food justice activists often advocate for everyone to participate in community food activities. Bradley & Herrera (2016) caution, “Implicit in this belief is the assumption that with access, people make the right, or moral, food choices” (2016, pg. 101). “Original” food justice literature, however, argues that there is a need to move beyond the simple goal of inclusion. Goals of inclusion are ineffective in dismantling the uneven social power relations shaping food insecurity (Ramírez, 2015; Kepkiewicz et al., 2015). For example, Ramírez, (2015) discusses the problems with “inclusion” when referring to a community garden project organized by a group of white food activists in the Central District of Seattle. This group created community gardens on empty plots of land in a predominantly African-American neighbourhood. Although this group encouraged
African-American neighbours to use the gardens, few did. Ramírez (2015) argues that community participation was low because the white activists did not recognize how their project contributed to processes of gentrification in the neighbourhood. Gentrification had pushed many African-American residents out of the Central District, replacing them with wealthier white individuals. This group of white activists understood certain plots of land as “empty;” however, these plots used to be the homes and businesses of African-American community members.

Although the community gardens were “inclusive” projects, the group failed to consider how their project supported ongoing processes of African-American displacement. Hence, goals of inclusion do not dismantle systemic inequities (Ramírez 2015). Moreover, a focus on inclusion may even perpetuate privilege rather than challenge the inequities shaping uneven food access (Kepkiewicz et al., 2015). In attempting to include marginalized groups, privileged food activists often define who needs assistance and how they need help (Kepkiewicz et al., 2015). These projects are also delivered with a “missionary zeal,” which strengthens white cultural norms and structures (Guthman, 2008, p. 436). “Original” food justice scholars encourage scholars and activists to question their complicity in reproducing systems of oppression (Ramírez 2015; Kepkiewicz et al., 2015).

Reflexivity is therefore an essential component of “original” food justice scholarship and activism. “Reflexivity is not a set of values, but a process by which people pursue goals while acknowledging the imperfection of their actions” (Dupuis, Harrison & Goodman, 2011, p. 297). This process can assist community food organizations meet their goals to challenge inequality by ensuring organizational activities do not unintentionally perpetuate unequal power relations. Reflexivity allows food justice scholars and activists to identify gaps between goals and action, and strategy and capacity. The process of reflexivity encourages scholars to question their
assumptions and refrain from producing literature that reinforces structures of oppression (Slocum & Cadieux, 2015).

In my research project, I embrace the original interpretation of food justice, which places access to adequate food within the “contexts of institutional racism, racial formation, and racialized geographies” (Alkon & Norgaard, 2009, p. 28). I build on food justice literature in two main ways. Firstly, I situate food justice scholarship within the historical, economic, and social context of Canada’s largest city. As demonstrated in the examples in this section, most food justice activism and scholarship is rooted in the United States. Secondly, I contribute to food justice literature by analyzing how both racial and gendered power relationships shape access to food. Most food justice scholarship exclusively focuses on the intersections of race and class, ignoring analyses of gender. The feminist scholarship I draw upon is discussed in the following section.

2.4 Intersectionality

Intersectionality theory analyzes the relationships between systems of oppression and has its roots in black feminist traditions. Kimberle Crenshaw, an African-American woman, is credited for first conceptualizing intersectionality in the late 20th century. Crenshaw (1989) argued Black women were marginalized and excluded from feminist theory, which originated from the experiences of white women, and from anti-racist theory, which drew from male perspectives and experiences. Specifically, Crenshaw (1989) examined how the US legal system interpreted discrimination by analyzing several legal cases of discrimination made by African-American women claimants. She contended that discrimination was perceived by actors within the legal
system on a “single categorical analysis,” which consequently created a “distorted analysis of racism and sexism because the operative conceptions of race and sex become grounded in experiences that actually represent only a subset of a much more complex phenomenon” (Crenshaw, 1989, p. 140). Singular interpretations of discrimination inhibited African-American women from arguing compound sex and racial discrimination claims. For example, she references a case from the 1960s where five African-American women brought a suit against General Motors (GM), claiming GM’s seniority-based layoff system discriminated against African-American women. However, the women lost the case because the court had not found evidence of sex discrimination because some women – although white – were not laid off. Therefore, Crenshaw insisted that the legal system found African-Americans simultaneously too similar and too different. Indeed, African-American women experience discrimination in ways similar to and different from white women and African-American men since they can encounter both racial and sex discrimination. However, sometimes “they experience discrimination as Black women – not the sum of race and sex discrimination, but as Black women” (Crenshaw, 1989, p. 149). The particular experiences, histories, and subjectivities of African-American women thus constitute a specific form of discrimination.

Intersectionality theory is a product of black feminism. Black feminist scholars argued gender and race are interlocking identities that mutually produce inequities and therefore, these identities cannot be understood in isolation from one another (Collins, 2009; Crenshaw, 1989; Gillman, 2007, etc). Gender and race are both organizing principles of social institutions, social practices, and historical processes (Mollet & Faria, 2013; Glenn, 1999). Mollett & Faria (2013) suggest that race gives meaning to social struggles by elucidating human differences. I insist that gender also provides meaning to social struggles.
While intersectionality was firstly conceptualized to understand the interconnectedness of gender, race, and class, particularly among African-American women, feminist geographers have explored how other social identities intersect. For example, Livermon (2014) analyzes the intersections of blackness, sexuality, class, and gender in the nightlife of post-Apartheid South Africa. Additionally, Valentine (2007) examines how deafness, sexuality, and gender shape how a deaf woman is included and excluded within social life. While I focus on the nexus of gender, race, and hunger in my research project, it is important to note that other social identities like sexuality, mental and physical health, and age also impact experiences of food insecurity and poverty.

Intersectionality theory is embedded in feminist theory. Feminist literature is extremely diverse and there are many complex debates within the literature, which I will not delve into in this review. For the purposes of this research project, I am most interested in feminist explanations of the dynamic processes constructing socio-structural inequities. Particularly, I draw on the definition of feminism put forth by hooks (2000), who describes it as “a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression” (cited in hooks, 2000, p. 1). She argues that individuals must understand sexism in order to comprehend feminism. hooks (2000) contends that the mainstream white supremacist capitalist patriarchal society continually works to weaken feminism and its efforts to challenge systemic oppression. Accordingly, she advocates for women to continually reflect on how their advancement might come at the expense of exploited and subordinated women, who are often racialized (hooks, 2000). Drawing on hooks (2000), I advocate for a greater feminist consciousness in which individuals consider how sexism and racism operate in everyday life and how our own actions and interpretations are complicit in these processes.
2.5 Food Justice in Canada?

As discussed previously, my research project contributes to the small body of food justice literature situated within a Canadian context. Most Canadian critical food scholarship highlights the correlation between income level and hunger, but does not explore how an individual’s income intersects with gender and racial inequality. Canada’s gender and racial landscapes vary significantly from our neighbour to the south, so it is important to explore how these landscapes influence food insecurity in Canada. This section provides an overview of food justice literature grounded in a Canadian context and summarizes literature discussing food insecurity among racialized individuals and female lone-parent households in Canada.

There is limited literature analyzing food justice from a Canadian perspective, particularly scholarship that situates food insecurity within the context of institutional racism. Most Canadian food justice literature discusses food citizenship. Food citizenship “emerges from people's active participation in shaping the food system, rather than by accepting the system as passive consumers” (Welsh & MacRae, 1998, p. 238). Levkoe (2006) explains that the food justice movement is trying to build a food democracy in which all individuals have the skills and knowledge to participate in their communities and become change-makers. Food citizenship literature draws attention to the corporate control of the current food system, arguing the current food system transforms citizens into consumers with no power to make choices (Levkoe, 2006; Welsh & MacRae, 1998). This literature insists that citizens have rights and responsibilities beyond consumption (Welsh & MacRae, 1998). Food citizenship initiatives involve community members in the processes of creating change and working to “re-skill” citizens (Welsh & MacRae, 1998, p. 248). Welsh & MacRae (1998) argue the corporate-controlled food system,
with its emphasis on further-processing and convenience and its powerful marketing forces, has assumed control over food-related knowledge and skills, leading to reduced levels of these capacities in the general population.

Therefore, food citizenship initiatives work to teach the skills needed for food-related practices (cooking, farming, gardening, etc.), help individuals understand food and social systems, and gain knowledge of how to navigate these systems (Welsh & MacRae, 1998). Community activities that build food citizenship are part of broader social movements that aim to create transformative change (Baker, 2004). Food citizenship is a crucial element of food justice, but this literature largely excludes explicit discussions of the role of racial and gender inequality in shaping urban food insecurity.

Canadian food scholars also advocate for a rights-based approach to food security. “The right to adequate food is realized when every man, woman and child, alone or in community with others, have physical and economic access at all times to adequate food or means for its procurement” (United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 1999, p. 3). Canada has ratified numerous international human rights accords that acknowledge the right to food, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966), the Convention on the Rights of Child (1989), the World Declaration on Nutrition (1992), the Rome Declaration on World Food Security and World Food Summit Plan of Action (1996), and the Code of Conduct on the Human Right to Adequate Food (1997). “The language and tone of these agreements signifies that Canada has agreed to work within an international human rights framework and has an obligation to take steps to respect and fulfill such right” (Rideout et al., 2007, p. 567). Domestically, under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, Rideout et al. (2007) argue that the right to food can be interpreted as legally binding. Section 7 of the Charter states that every Canadian has the right
to life, liberty, and security of the person and Section 15 guarantees the right to equality before and under the law. However, case law in Canada has not explicitly recognized the right to food (UNHRC, 2012). The Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, an expert appointed by the United Nations Human Rights Council to examine the state of food insecurity in Canada, contended that the federal government has a strong track record of guaranteeing political and civil rights, but has failed to protect economic, social, and cultural rights (UNHRC, 2012). Canadian courts have not yet determined that the right to food is justiciable and therefore, governments in Canada are not legally required to respect, protect, and fulfill the right to food (Rideout et al., 2007). Unfortunately, as Riches (2011) argues, “a right is only a right if it can be claimed” (2011, p. 273). Although Canadian nationalism is deeply tied to the discourse of human rights (Rideout et al., 2007), there are no constitutional or legal protections for the right to food in Canada.

Scholars who advocate for a rights-based approach to food security campaign for the right to food to become justiciable. Accordingly, Riches (2002) contends that a rights-based approach reframes the conversation around food poverty. The right to food discourse suggests that addressing hunger is the responsibility of the government, not charitable organizations. Riches (2002) maintains that more supportive social policies in Canada will reduce rates of hunger. The Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food insisted that Canada’s inadequate income support programs fail to meet the nation’s obligation to fulfill the right to food as outlined in many international agreements and the Charter of Rights and Freedoms (UNHRC, 2012). The Special Rapporteur’s report recommended that provincial governments should raise the minimum wage to a living wage and that the federal government should create a national housing policy so those experiencing poverty do not sacrifice food in order to pay rent. Furthermore, the Special Rapporteur suggested the federal government must regulate cash
transfers in the Canadian Social Transfer Program to prevent further decreases in provincial spending on social assistance (UNHRC, 2012). Scholars advocating for the right to food insist that the federal government comply with their obligations to respect, protect and fulfill the right to food and therefore, campaign for a stronger social safety net (Rideout et al., 2007; Riches, 2002; Riches, 2011).

There is also growing scholarship analyzing food insecurity within marginalized communities in Canada. Analyses of gender and racial power, however, are uncommon within the majority of this scholarship. Although this literature highlights the vulnerability of low-income mothers and racialized persons to hunger, issues of systemic racism and patriarchy are often overlooked. For instance, in most Canadian critical food scholarship there is a great deal of literature describing the challenges female lone-parent households experience accessing adequate food in Canada (see Glanville & McIntyre, 2006; Tarasuk & Beaton, 1999; Tarasuk, 2001; McIntyre, Tarasuk, & Li, 2007; Tarasuk, McIntyre, & Li, 2007; McIntyre, Glanville, Officer, Raine, & Dayle, 2002; McIntyre, Glanville, Raine, Dayle, Anderson, & Battaglia, 2003; Papan & Chow, 2015). Many of these scholars contend that inadequate financial resources are the primary reason for food insecurity among low-income women (Glanville & McIntyre, 2006; Tarasuk & Beaton, 1999; Tarasuk, 2001; McIntyre, Tarasuk, & Li, 2007; Tarasuk, McIntyre, & Li, 2007; McIntyre et al., 2003; Papan & Chow, 2015). Due to competing expenditures on a limited income, many mother-led households experience food shortages before their next income infusion (Tarasuk, 2001; Tarasuk, McIntyre, & Li, 2007), forcing them to use food banks and other charitable programs to help meet their food needs (Tarasuk, 2001; McIntyre et al., 2002; McIntyre et al., 2003; McIntyre, Tarasuk, & Li, 2007; Papan & Clow, 2015). Many impoverished women are reliant on social assistance or minimum wage jobs, which fail to provide sufficient income to afford a healthy diet (McIntyre, Tarasuk, & Li, 2007; Tarasuk,
McIntyre, & Li, 2007; Papan & Chow, 2015). Thus, a great deal of this scholarship illuminates the poor nutrition of low-income mothers (see Glanville & McIntyre, 2006; Tarasuk & Beaton, 1999; Tarasuk, 2001; McIntyre, Tarasuk, & Li, 2007; Tarasuk, McIntyre, & Li, 2007; McIntyre et al., 2003).

Since most of this literature frames financial insecurity as the primary reason for hunger and malnutrition, these scholars advocate for solutions that reduce financial pressures on mother-led households like increased government support payments (McIntyre et al., 2003; Tarasuk, 2001; Papan & Clow, 2015), programs that counterbalance the costs of essential goods (like subsidized housing) (Tarasuk, 2001), and programs that subsidize the costs of basic health foods (Engler-Stringer, Stringer, & Haines, 2011; McIntyre et al., 2003). All of these recommendations seek to lessen the financial pressures on low-income mother-led families to assist them access ample healthy food.

While financial insecurity certainly exacerbates hunger, much of this scholarship disregards why women in particular are more susceptible to poverty and food insecurity than men. In Canada, 33.5% of female lone-parent households are food insecure; yet, these rates fall to 14.7% in male lone-parent households (Tarasuk et al., 2016), insinuating that systemic gender inequity influences vulnerability to food insecurity. In Toronto specifically, 37% of female lone-parent households live in poverty (City of Toronto, 2015). Canadian women tend to be concentrated in lower-wage occupations and industries (Canadian Women’s Foundation, 2015), and occupy only one in four senior manager positions in Canada (Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives in Canada, 2014). A significant gender wage gap also exists in Canada: depending on how the wage gap is calculated, women earn 66.7–87 cents to every dollar earned by men (Canadian Women’s Foundation, 2015). Women who are recent immigrants, indigenous, or have disabilities are even further disadvantaged (Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, 2014).
Consequently, there needs to be greater attention to gendered power dynamics in Canadian food literature.

Furthermore, women across Canada assume disproportionate responsibilities for unpaid domestic and caregiving work. Women in Canada perform almost double the amount of unpaid care work as men (Statistics Canada, 2010). Despite the increase in the number of hours of wage labour performed by Canadian women in the past 20 years, their hours of domestic labour have changed little (Lambert & McInturff, 2016). Canadian women are three times more likely than men to engage in part-time wage labour and nineteen times more likely to cite “caring for children” as the reason for doing so (Lambert & McInturff, 2016, p. 3). Women also tend to be overrepresented in careers with flexible hours, like teaching or nursing, to accommodate childcare responsibilities (Lambert & McInturff, 2016). Consequently, “the nature of women’s unpaid work has a powerful impact on their access to paid work and worsens inequality by limiting the time women have to participate in economic, political and social activities” (Lambert & McInturff, 2016). Many women engage in both paid and unpaid work, resulting in a “double burden.” Considering the disproportionate responsibility women assume for unpaid care work, it is difficult for low-income women to escape from the cycle of poverty.

Additionally, scholars have drawn attention to the vulnerability of recent racialized immigrants to food insecurity (Pitt, Sherman, & Macdonald, 2015; Rush et al., 2007; Vahabi et al., 2011; Burgess, 2016; Lessa & Rocha, 2012; Rodriguez et al, 2016). Vahabi & Damba (2013) argue that recent immigrants – those who have moved to Canada within the last five years – face four main barriers to achieve food security: financial insecurity, language difficulties that restrict work opportunities, inability to meet cultural food preferences, and limited knowledge of community food resources and social services. Despite increasing education levels among immigrants, the number of immigrants who are impoverished in Toronto grew 125% between
1981 and 2001 (The Colour of Poverty, 2007). High poverty rates among recent immigrants are generally due to reliance on social assistance, unemployment, underemployment, and/or the high costs of housing in urban centres (Vahabi et al., 2011; Vahabi & Damba, 2013; Lessa & Rocha 2012; Pitt, Sherman, & Macdonald, 2015; Burgess, 2016). Many scholars thus insist that the primary reason for food insecurity among this group is inadequate financial resources (Pitt, Sherman, & Macdonald, 2015; Rush et al., 2007; Vahabi et al, 2011; Burgess, 2016; Vahabi & Damba, 2013; Lessa & Rocha, 2012; Rodríguez et al., 2012). Secondly, some scholars maintain that language barriers may also undermine the food security of newcomers because it is difficult to secure employment without speaking one of Canada’s official languages (Vahabi & Damba, 2013). Immigrants also face challenges accessing culturally appropriate foods, which heightens their vulnerability to food insecurity (Rodríguez et al., 2016; Vahabi & Damba, 2013).

According to the World Food Summit 1996 definition of food security, individuals are only considered food secure when they can access foods traditional to their cultures (FAO, 1996). Lastly, scholars demonstrate that newcomers experience disproportionate rates of food insecurity due to their limited knowledge of community food programs and social services (Vahabi & Dambi, 2013; Mares, 2013).

Most of this literature concludes with recommendations of how to reduce food insecurity among recent racialized immigrants. Some suggestions are community-oriented, such as asking retail food outlets to carry the food choices of their local communities, initiating community gardens where immigrants can grow preferred vegetables and herbs, and organizing “pop-up” markets where vendors can sell goods that cater to local immigrant communities (Rodríguez et al., 2016). Rush et al. (2007) also advise that food banks carry healthier options to decrease rates of food insecurity and poor nutrition among recent immigrants. Vahabi & Damba (2013) also advocate for more participatory food programs like community kitchens to reduce social
isolation among immigrants and provide opportunities for immigrants to exchange valuable information regarding local food bank hours, the location of ethnic food stores, or welfare entitlements (Vahabi & Damba, 2013). Scholars also recommend structural solutions to decrease poverty among immigrants, such as raising current social assistance rates (Burgess, 2016), developing a reformed federal income structure to better support working adults (Vahabi et al., 2011), creating more subsidized housing units and public rent subsidies (Vahabi & Damba, 2013; Vahabi et al., 2011), increasing the number of subsidized English-language classes available in workplaces and communities with high populations of immigrants (Vahabi et al., 2011; Vahabi & Damba, 2013), and more programs that link qualified immigrants with skilled job opportunities (Lessa & Rocha, 2012; Vahabi et al., 2011). By lessening financial insecurity within immigrant households and assisting recent immigrants find adequate work, these scholars suggest that food insecurity rates among newcomers would decrease.

While the literature concerning the vulnerability of recent racialized immigrants to food insecurity provides an in-depth analysis of how the challenges of immigration exacerbate food insecurity, this focus ignores the high rates of hunger among Canadian-born racialized persons and issues of racism in Canada. Canadian-born racially marginalized people also experience disproportionate rates of food insecurity. In 2013, 29.8% of Latin-American households and 28.5% of African-Canadian households were food insecure (Tarasuk, Mitchell & Dachner, 2015). These households include both recent immigrants and Canadian-born citizens. All people of colour in Canada, whether they are foreign-born or not, are more likely to experience poverty. In the 2006 Census, the national poverty rate in Canada was 11%; however, the poverty rate was 22% among people of colour (National Council of Welfare, 2009).

Despite Toronto’s identity as a proudly multicultural city (City of Toronto, 2012), the income gap between racialized and non-racialized individuals is significant. In 2015, 46% of
recent immigrants, 37% of Indigenous peoples, and 33% of racialized minorities lived in poverty in Toronto (City of Toronto, 2015). The poverty rates among these marginalized groups were higher than the municipal average. In 2015, 20% of adults and 25% of children lived in poverty (City of Toronto, 2015). The disproportionate number of racialized minorities living in poverty is caused by the relegation of racially marginalized people to low-paying jobs and industries, like remediation services, administrative support, warehousing, or working as janitorial staff. These jobs tend to be insecure and have few or no benefits (Block & Galabuzi, 2011; Bernhardt, 2015). Since people of colour are concentrated in low-wage industries and have restricted employment mobility, racially marginalized Canadians earn on average 81.4 cents for every dollar paid to white Canadians (Block & Galabuzi, 2011). Food insecurity is therefore not only caused by the challenges of immigration, but also racist institutions and social structures in Canada.

Although scholars have explored the challenges female lone-parents and recent racialized immigrants experience in Canada, this literature exclusively focuses on income level and/or the challenges of immigration, but has failed to situate these vulnerabilities in the context of systemic racism and patriarchy. While food justice scholarship has flourished in urban centres in the United States, examples of food justice literature and activism in Canada are limited, especially scholars and activists employing the “original” interpretation of food justice.

There are challenges in regard to raising awareness of gender and racial injustices in Canada. Canada is often celebrated as a nation that values human rights (Rideout et al., 2007) and is distinguished for its multicultural identity. In 1971, the federal government adopted multiculturalism as an official policy, which states that the government will respect the diverse customs, languages, and religions of people residing in Canada. This policy followed a large wave of immigration from the Global South. While seemingly positive, multicultural policies largely silence discussions of racial inequity and therefore, perpetuate racial injustices within
social structures and institutions (Thobani, 2007; Baldwin, Cameron & Kobayashi, 2011; Arat-Koç, 2010; Bannerji, 1996). In a multicultural society, racial tolerance often poses as racial justice (Baldwin et al., 2011). Furthermore, multiculturalism constructs racial difference as purely cultural and consequently, racial struggles are “displaced and erased in the name of ‘ethnic culture’” (Bannerji, 1996, p. 124). The conflation of culture and race repudiates the existence of racism in Canada. Accordingly, Backhouse (1999) suggests that a sense of “racelessness” pervades Canadian society. Since Canada is commonly juxtaposed with Britain and America – nations considered imbued with racial conflict and violent imperial histories – Canada appears to have a “raceless” history (Backhouse, 1999).

Since conversations about race have been a “taboo” in Canada since the adoption of multiculturalism policies (Gibb & Wittman, 2013, p. 3) and Canada is celebrated as a nation that values human rights (Rideout et al., 2007), it is difficult to draw attention to issues of systemic racism, patriarchy, and hunger. A food justice framework can help illuminate how gender and racial power relations shape access to food in Canada. Moreover, food justice activism can challenge gender and racial inequities.

My research project uses an “original food justice” lens to understand how social hierarchies shape the experiences of The Stop’s community members. I also explore how The Stop works to dismantle gender and racial inequities and which barriers to this work exist. Since The Stop is a high profile actor in the Canadian food movement, there has been considerable research on the agency (see Levkoe & Wakefield, 2011; Levkoe, 2011; Scharf, Levkoe, & Saul, 2010; Levkoe, 2006; Levkoe, 2003). Yet, most of this research specifically focuses on the CFC model and analyzes how this model works to create a participatory, sustainable, and democratic food system, particularly examining how this model overcomes the failings of typical emergency
food programs. The CFC model is explained in detail in the next chapter. My project therefore builds on existing research by exploring The Stop’s work to address gender and racial inequities.

2.6 Summary

This chapter has explored the predominant responses to hunger in Toronto and provided an overview of the main critiques of emergency food programs. I also reviewed food justice literature in the United States, particularly highlighting the key tenets of “original” food justice literature. Following this, I outlined the history and integral elements of intersectionality theory. I then summarized the limited food justice literature situated in a Canadian context and described how the connections between food insecurity, gender, and race are generally discussed within Canadian critical food scholarship. This chapter also stated my main contributions to food justice literature; 1) employ an intersectional lens to understand how gender and race shape hunger and, 2) undertake a food justice study from a Canadian perspective. The following chapter summarizes the methods and methodology of this research project.
Chapter 3

3 Methods and Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This research uses ethnographic methods to examine the utility of a food justice framework in understanding how gender and racial inequality shape the experiences of The Stop’s participants, and how The Stop works to dismantle gender and racial injustice through food activism. The primary field research for this project was conducted between July-September 2016 in Toronto, Ontario. This chapter is divided into four sections. The first provides an overview of The Stop CFC and describes why I selected The Stop as the primary site of my fieldwork. The second section offers justification for my use of participant observation and semi-structured interviews. The next section summarizes my data analysis process, and the final section describes why ethnography is useful in answering my research questions.

3.2 The Stop Community Food Centre

Field research for this project primarily took place at The Stop CFC. Over the past forty years, The Stop has developed an innovative approach to fight inequality and hunger in Toronto. The Stop was founded as a food bank in St. Stephens-in-the-Fields Church near Toronto’s Kensington Market in the 1970s. However, Father Russell, founder of the food bank, noticed that directly handing out food to those in need by no means eradicated poverty in the community.
The agency thus began to diversify its programming by engaging in social and political advocacy while simultaneously operating emergency food programs (Community Food Centres Canada, n.d.a). The Stop also moved to their current location in the Davenport West neighbourhood of Toronto, a racially diverse area with above-average rates of unemployment and low household incomes (Levkoe & Wakefield, 2011). In 2001, The Stop officially became a CFC – the first of its kind. A CFC offers diverse programming in one space to “create multiple points of entry and encourage synergy, collaboration and cross-pollination” (Community Food Centres Canada, n.d.,b). Accordingly, a participant might come to The Stop to access the food bank, but become involved in advocacy programs, community kitchens, receive support from housing or family support workers, or access free clinics that provide vital services to community members. The Stop’s varied programs and services reduce social isolation among participants, create opportunities for civic engagement, teach participants new skills, and increase access to healthy food in a low-income community (Scharf, Levkoe, & Saul, 2010; Levkoe & Wakefield, 2011). Through this model, “The Stop strives to increase access to healthy food in a manner that maintains dignity, builds health and community, and challenges inequality” (The Stop Community Food Centre, n.d.a) The CFC model has since been adopted by different food organizations across Canada.

The Davenport West Neighbourhood of Toronto is one of the Toronto’s most diverse areas. This neighbourhood also has high rates of unemployment and low-income households (City of Toronto, 2011). Davenport West is located in between numerous areas that are in the process of gentrification, particularly Bloordale and the Junction (see Figure 2).
Many of The Stop’s community members, therefore, face challenges related to the repercussions of gentrification, such as rising rent costs that may ultimately force many individuals to leave the neighbourhood. These issues shape a great deal of the work of The Stop’s Community Advocates, which I elaborate on in the fourth chapter.

In addition to the Davenport West location, The Stop also operates urban agriculture programs and a weekly farmer’s market and café at a second location in Toronto – The Artscape Wychwood Barns. These Barns are located in the affluent Bracondale Hill neighbourhood of Toronto – an upper-middle class neighbourhood with tree-lined streets and large houses (see Figure 3).
The Stop has developed the support of a privileged population in Toronto by creating an enterprise that appeals to individuals living in Bracondale Hill, which helps fund their programs and services at the Davenport location. For a full list of The Stop’s programs, please see Appendix 3.

I chose The Stop as a field research site for three main reasons. Firstly, The Stop has created a holistic model to address poverty, food insecurity, and community building. The agency uses food as a tool to challenge inequality and bring community members together, which differs from traditional charitable food assistance programs that only provide temporary hunger relief to those in need. Since The Stop is an “innovative and important actor within the regional, national, and potentially global food movement” (Levkoe & Wakefield, 2011, p. 264), I was interested in exploring how a leading food activist organization addresses racial and gender inequities in their work. Secondly, by conducting participant observation at The Stop, I was able
to analyze the utility of a food justice framework in understanding how social power relations influence the experiences of food insecure individuals. Lastly, I had volunteered in the Drop-In of The Stop for ten months prior to conducting research, so I was familiar with the site, staff, volunteers, and participants. My experience at The Stop as a volunteer allowed for greater preparedness in the field. Mike & Crang (2007) argue against the “read-then-do-then-write model” (2007, p. 2) in which researchers firstly read literature on their topic, secondly go into the field to conduct research, and lastly return to write up their findings. They contend that this structure fails to prepare researchers for any unexpected twists that arise during fieldwork. Following their suggestion, I prepared my research project while volunteering at The Stop, reducing many of the unknown elements of fieldwork.

3.3 Participant Observation, Semi-Structured Interviews, and Recruitment

Before engaging in ethnographic fieldwork, ethics clearance was obtained from the University of Toronto’s Social Science, Humanities and Education Research Ethics Board. Each interview participant received a consent letter detailing the intentions of my research project, their freedom to withdraw at any point without consequence, and their freedom to maintain name or organizational anonymity (Appendix 1). This letter also asked for research participants to consent to having their interviews audio-recorded. I also provided a letter of consent to the Community Programs Manager at The Stop (Appendix 2), which explained my intentions to conduct participant observation in the Drop-In and Food Bank. The Community Programs Manager and I agreed that all participants at The Stop would be anonymous in my research
project to mitigate risk within an underprivileged community.

I employed ethnographic methods, particularly participant observation and semi-structured interviews, to analyze the utility of a food justice framework in challenging gender and racial inequities at The Stop. Ethnography “provides uniquely privileged opportunities to enter into and to share the everyday lives of…people. It provides [researchers] with the challenge of transforming that social world into texts and other forms of representation that analyze and reconstruct those distinctive lives and actions” (Atkinson, 2015, p. 3). Similar to other ethnographers (see Crang & Cook, 2007; Atkinson, 2015), I argue that participant observation is a necessary strategy when conducting ethnographic research. Participant observation is the most effective way that researchers can understand how everyday lives are understood and experienced by study participants (Crang & Cook, 2007). I conducted participant observation for 8 weeks in July and August 2016 in The Stop's Drop-In and Food Bank programs. I volunteered every day in these programs, engaging in many conversations with participants over meals, coffee breaks, and while serving food. Both programs rely on a large number of volunteers, so community members generally perceived me as a volunteer, unless we had previously discussed my research project. Throughout participant observation, I observed who used the services, and how staff, volunteers, and participants discussed food programming, hunger, and social inequality.

I wrote detailed field notes at the end of each day, which described my daily activities, notable conversations and occurrences, and my emotional responses to certain conversations and events. I would excuse myself throughout the day to make jottings, which assisted in triggering my memory when writing notes. Following Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw (1995)’s suggestions, I strived to refrain from imposing outside categories within my field notes. For example, they argue if a researcher calls a classroom “noisy” or “chaotic,” this researcher is reinforcing
perceived norms about classrooms (Emerson et al., 1995). My field notes thus were largely descriptive of what I heard and saw during the day, and recounted how the staff team, volunteers, and community members told me they perceived certain events or conversations. These notes also included memos, which allow ethnographers to “question our experiences and assumptions, pay attention to processes, respond to our embodied and emotional presences, consider the material and visual cultures that constitute what is being studied, scrutinize various relationships with research fields and partners, and elaborate on our insights” (Watson & Till, 2010, p. 128). In these memos, I began making connections between my field notes, data from semi-structured interviews, and literature regarding food insecurity. Data from participant observation were essential to answer my first research question. I analyzed my field notes through a food justice lens. I therefore situated stories of struggle to access food or acts of discrimination within the context of systemic social and economic inequality. The anecdotes from participant observation I include in my findings chapter are the clearest examples of the challenges some of The Stop’s participants experience or attitudes held by some community members.

To complement participant observation, I also conducted eight semi-structured interviews with staff members belonging to anti-hunger organizations in Toronto. All interviews occurred in the offices of informants, with the exception of one taking place in a car as the informant and I drove to do errands for The Stop. At The Stop, I interviewed the Community Services Supervisor, the Community Advocacy Coordinator, the Community Cooking Coordinator, and the Drop-In Coordinator. These staff members were selected because they could provide information about The Stop’s core meal and advocacy programs. I also met with the Food Recovery Manager at Second Harvest, the Chair of Thorncliffe Park Women’s Committee (TPWC), the Director of Research & Communication of a large Food Bank in Toronto, and the Director of Policy and Research of a national anti-hunger organization (the latter two informants
chose to maintain name and organizational anonymity). Second Harvest operates a large food rescue program in Toronto, which rescues surplus food from large food distributors and retailers in the GTA and delivers these donations to community agencies across Toronto. Most of these food donations would have been disposed of otherwise. The Stop receives food donations from Second Harvest, which are mainly distributed in their Food Bank. TPWC is composed of women living in the Thorncliffe Neighbourhood of Toronto – a populous and low-income area where many racially diverse newcomers live. TPWC endeavours to revitalize a central park in their neighbourhood, increase food security through community gardens, build community, and empower women to become community change-makers.

Each informant brought a unique perspective to my research project. Informants from Second Harvest, The Stop, the large food bank in Toronto, and the national anti-hunger agency represent some of the leading voices on issues of Canadian food insecurity. It was interesting to learn how these organizations perceived the high rates of food insecurity among female lone parent households and racially marginalized communities in Toronto, and if/how these agencies addressed gender and racial injustice in their work. TPWC is a small grassroots initiative led by mostly female first-generation immigrants. Accordingly, my interview with the Founder and Co-Chair of TPWC provided an alternative perspective on issues related to food insecurity from the larger and more established organizations. Interviews lasted between 30-60 minutes and addressed the agencies’ mission statements, organizational activities, the gendered and racialized patterns of food insecurity, and the challenges organizations experience when working toward their goals. All interviews were audio-recorded and I later transcribed them.
3.4 Data Analysis

I used open coding to analyze all interview transcriptions and field notes. Open coding derives themes from the data, which differs from *a priori* coding in which researchers create codes beforehand. Throughout the open coding process, researchers refrain from allowing their own ideas to influence the development of codes, and instead let the data speak for itself (Blair, 2015). Although complete impartiality is impossible, I attempted to be conscious of my bias and pre-established ideas. Open coding allows for the discovery of new insights and connections within field notes and interview transcriptions.

I began coding by firstly rereading all primary materials. I then read one line at a time, focusing on “the meaning and intent of each statement” (Mike & Crang, 2007, p. 137). I wrote down possible themes in the margin of the text, developing a list of codes emerging from the data. I also used the following questions to assist with theme development:

1. “What are the people doing? What are they trying to accomplish?
2. How exactly do they do this? What specific means/strategies do they use?
3. How do members talk about, characterize and understand what is going on? What assumptions are they making?
4. What do I see going on here? What did I learn from these notes? Why did I include them?
5. How is what is going on here similar to, or different from, other incidents or events recorded elsewhere in the field notes?
6. What is the broader impact or significance of this incident or event? What is it a case of?” (Emerson et al., 1995, p 177).

These questions refer to the process of fieldwork (i.e. what is happening and how is it happening) rather than asking why these events are happening (Emerson et al., 1995), which are questions typically reserved for the discussion section of academic articles and theses.

After the open coding process, I had a lengthy list of codes. Following Mike & Crang (2007), I carefully analyzed all codes, eliminated codes that were duplicates, and created sub-
sections for themes that were too expansive. Once I had a more concise list of themes, I colour-coded these themes in the primary materials. I then cut up all data according to the themes and attached the cut-up notes to separate pieces of Bristol board (one per theme). Subsequently, I examined the relationships between the data and organized all cut-up data into sub-sections of the dominant theme. On these boards, I also created integrative memos, which elaborated on ideas, made connections to other themes, and developed theoretical connections between field notes and conceptual categories (Emerson et al., 1995). In these memos, I paid close attention to whether and how informants made connections between social and economic power relations and food insecurity. I also observed the ways participants at The Stop interpreted their experiences during the conversations I had with them. I closely analyzed if and how interview informants or The Stop’s participants discussed the ways inequalities intersect.

3.5 Why Ethnography?

Ethnographic methods were invaluable to this research project because they exposed how everyday interactions and events (re)produced structures of social organization. Moreover, “Ethnographic observations of, and interactions with, others highlight how bodies interact, meld, and constitute social spaces, and thereby create inclusions and exclusions” (Watson & Till, 2010, p. 122). Accordingly, ethnographic methods illustrate the linkages between macro and microstructures of social life and the relations of power embedded in everyday activities and spaces (Herbert, 2000, p. 555). Ethnographic fieldwork at The Stop exposed how structures of social inequity are recreated and challenged throughout daily activities and conversations. I observed incidents of racism and sexism in the space, listened to stories from marginalized
individuals describing their struggles to access adequate food, and learned how The Stop’s team addresses racial and gender injustices. Throughout the course of each day, there were consistent tensions within the space between efforts to challenge inequality and comments or incidents that perpetuated various oppressions.

I was particularly attentive to racialized and gendered dynamics when analyzing my data from participant observation and interviews. Emerson et al. (1995) suggest the following ways for ethnographers to observe how social differences shape everyday life; they recommend paying close attention to when research participants explicitly mention gender, race, or class and how they understand and experience their social position. Secondly, Emerson et al. (1995) maintain that researchers should observe the ways these categories are socially constructed in everyday life. They insist that ethnographers also must recognize how gender, race, and class shape the research process. Finally, Emerson & al. (1995) emphasize that participants might refuse to discuss race or gender and therefore, researchers need to respect the boundaries of all research participants. Most importantly, researchers must refrain from making assumptions about how these categories influenced community members’ understandings and everyday experiences (Emerson et al., 1995). Gender and race are dynamic social categories, resulting in interesting observations of the ways these power relations manifest and are challenged in everyday life at The Stop.

Ethnographic methods also encourage self-reflection throughout the research process. Through the practice of participant observation, ethnographers put themselves into the field and therefore, do not strive for “objectivity.” Ethnographers often describe their personal emotions and reflections in their field notes and consider how their positionality influences the research process. Yet, there is a debate within ethnography about how much “self” the researcher should include. For instance, Watson & Till (2010) argue, “While many authors call attention to their
positionality, the focus remains on the researcher her/himself, in terms of individual choices, rather than about how these choices are situated within particular disciplinary histories and debates” (2010, p. 130). Researchers thus must ask why they are being perceived in a certain way by participants, moving beyond a narrow focus on the researcher. Atkinson (2015) contends that recent ethnographic literature has frequently included drawn-out descriptions of personal experiences (either of the informant or themselves) at the expense of deeper analyses of social processes influencing these experiences. He suggests:

> We have lost sight of the multiple ways in which social conduct is patterned through routine and ritualized method of conduct. We forget that cultural domains display codes of organization and of signification. We overlook the many ways in which experience itself is constructed by and through socially shared, culturally prescribed forms (Atkinson, 2015, p. 13)

A focus on social organization does not imply that experiences are insignificant, they certainly are. Rather, Atkinson (2015) suggests that descriptions of experiences must be situated within the context of social organization, social action, and cultural forms of representation. In addition to being reflexive, I attempted to situate the power dynamics of my research project within established social structures.

For instance, I closely observed how my position as a white female graduate student influenced my interactions with participants at The Stop and examined how power dynamics such as this are situated within broader fields of gender and racial power. To do so, I specifically drew upon Faria & Mollett (2016)’s understanding of critical feminist reflexivity, which challenges fixed interpretations of racial power within the research process. Particularly, they critique the simplistic binaries certain scholars have created between white/other and oppressed/oppressor. Critical feminist reflexivity destabilizes race, “rendering it ‘unnatural’ and brought into being through embodied, intimate acts” (Faria & Mollett, 2016, p. 80). Faria & Mollett (2016), therefore, understand whiteness as a structural advantage, shaped by the histories
and cultural practices of a certain space. This methodology helps explore how whiteness is produced and performed in the field. In my research project, I analyze how race and gender are encoded in the everyday life at The Stop and how these codes influence the research process.

Ethnography thus clearly draws attention to power dynamics influencing research processes. Watson & Till (2010) advocate for the decolonization of ethnography, which “means to consider a research process of collaboration rather than appropriation” (2010, p. 132). They insist that not all written research results will have value to the participants of a research project and therefore, ethnographers must listen to community members and discover how they can assist the community. Accordingly, I took multiple actions to ensure my research was beneficial to participants. Throughout participant observation, I was able to fill volunteer shortages at The Stop, which occurred frequently in the summer because many volunteers were on vacation. These shortages slowed down service in the Drop-In and Food Bank. The staff team thus regularly thanked me for volunteering every day and helping fill these gaps. Secondly, I had long conversations with many of The Stop’s community members over the course of my field research. Many community members experience social isolation due to poverty, recent immigration, and/or mental health challenges and therefore, many participants told me that they appreciated the opportunities to speak with me. I also offered to share my research results with The Stop’s staff team and all interview informants. In addition to creating useful research projects for all parties involved, researchers must mitigate risk to research participants. A call to decolonize ethnography is also a call for social change (Watson & Till, 2010). Social change necessitates listening to the voices of community members, especially those with less social and economic power, and creating mutually beneficial research initiatives.
3.6 Summary

This chapter has outlined why I selected The Stop as my research site and why I chose ethnographic methods. I have also explained how I collected and analyzed data. The final section described the utility of ethnographic approaches in revealing how social structures of power influence everyday activities and interactions at The Stop, and how researchers can challenge inequities through the research process. The following chapter presents the results of my field research.
Chapter 4

4 Findings

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings from my fieldwork. Specifically, I present the results of participant observation in the Drop-In and Food Bank of The Stop and semi-structured interviews with key staff members of The Stop, Second Harvest, Thorncliffe Park Women’s Committee, a large food bank in Toronto, and a national anti-hunger organization (the latter two informants requested institutional anonymity). This chapter begins by presenting findings that discuss how gender and racial inequality shape the experiences of The Stop’s participants. In the following sections, I illustrate four programs and strategies that The Stop uses to dismantle injustices: targeted programming, promoting diversity, anti-oppression action and education, and participant empowerment. All strategies aim to transform asymmetrical power relations embedded in Canadian institutions and social life. This chapter closes with a discussion of the barriers The Stop faces in integrating anti-oppression practice into their programs and services.

4.2 Everyday Experiences of Gender and Racial Inequality at The Stop

This section explores the utility of a food justice framework in understanding how social inequities shape the experiences of The Stop’s participants. Throughout participant observation, I witnessed how social inequalities create specific challenges for low-income and racialized
women to access food. For example, an elderly Chinese woman regularly brought her two grandchildren to the Drop-In for breakfast during the summer. The girls were 7 and 9 years old. Her grandchildren told me that their grandmother took care of them during their summer vacation because their father worked outside of the home. Many of the other participants at The Stop would give this woman some of their meal like their toast, yogurt, or their portion of the leftovers, which are distributed after breakfast is served. This woman gratefully accepted the generosity of her fellow community members and packaged this food to take home. This woman spoke very little English – often her grandchildren would translate for her. Therefore, this woman experienced particular difficulties accessing food related to her responsibilities for childcare, low income, and limited English skills.

A conversation during fieldwork further illustrated how gender influences the experiences of The Stop’s participants. One afternoon, I chatted with an older Italian man, who is a regular participant in the Drop-In. He told me that he emigrated to Canada from Italy when he was five years old and has always lived in Little Italy – a neighbourhood in Toronto where Italian immigrants primarily between the 1920s and 1950s (Little Italy College St, n.d.) I asked if he makes a lot of Italian food at home. He laughed, shook his head, and replied, “My wife does.” He said that he only comes to The Stop when his wife is at work and cannot prepare his meals. I asked him if he wants to learn to cook and he responded by laughing. His wife thus carries disproportionate responsibilities for unpaid domestic work. The following chapter will further discuss the “double burden” many women experience and how it contributes to the greater marginalization of women in Canada.

Moreover, I observed numerous incidents where males in the Drop-In would harass women, making this space feel unsafe for some women. As a young female volunteer in the Drop-In, I personally experienced several occasions when men treated me in a degrading
manner. For instance, on a rainy day, a man entered the Drop-In space soaking wet and asked me if I could dry him off. On another occasion, a male participant indicated that he could not hear me and asked me to move closer. As I did, he pulled me forward and put his arms around me. I am not the only woman who faced this disrespectful treatment from some of the men in the Drop-In. I particularly noticed how certain male participants would make these unnerving remarks to young female volunteers. Consequently, one young female volunteer, likely in her early twenties, refused to serve meals to participants. During meal times, half of the Drop-In volunteers serve meals to participants and the other half plate the meals at the counter. This young volunteer always requested that she plate meals because she felt uncomfortable serving. Although I noticed that many male participants made inappropriate remarks towards young female volunteers, I assume female participants at The Stop are also vulnerable to experiencing harassment. Staff members at The Stop worry that these inappropriate comments and actions will deter women from using the service, affecting their access to food.

Furthermore, a food justice framework helps understand the challenges faced by The Stop’s new immigrant population. Many of The Stop’s participants who emigrated from Latin America told me about their challenges finding adequate work in Canada. For example, Alejandro* a Mexican man in his thirties, told me that he emigrated from Southern Mexico to Canada a few years ago. He moved in with a friend who worked in a remote village north of Quebec City, where no one spoke Spanish and he did not speak French. His friend worked long hours, so he said it was extremely isolating to live in this community where he did not know anyone. He also could not find work in Quebec because of the language barriers. He moved to Toronto where he knew a few more people, but has since continually struggled to find work. He tells me that he is very sensitive about his English skills, which he believes prohibit him from securing employment. His challenges finding work are common among recent immigrants who
speak limited English. Drawing from his own experience of emigrating from Colombia, the Community Cooking Coordinator says that it was difficult to secure employment in Toronto because of competition with native English speakers. He explains:

> It’s not a grammar issue, it’s a conversation issue. People may understand grammar, but they cannot communicate. They cannot fight…to compete in equal conditions for a job. So what I see is people who are willing to work… But the competition is extremely high with native English speakers… So, they have the skills, they have the knowledge but at the time, they are in competition for a position (H. Silva, interview, September 26, 2016).

Despite the fact that many immigrants are highly skilled and educated, he argues that language is a significant barrier to success in Canada with regard to securing employment.

In addition to language barriers, racial discrimination in the labour market also inhibits the success of racialized immigrants. When asked why many recent immigrants use food banks, a representative from a national anti-hunger organization explained that many new immigrants experience employment discrimination, like having their job applications bypassed because they do not have an Anglo-sounding name. Furthermore, the Founder and Co-Chair of the Thorncliffe Park Women’s Committee argues that many new immigrants from the Global South are unemployed or underemployed because their credentials are not recognized in Canada. She explains that many new immigrants in her community are highly educated and qualified, but they are forced to accept jobs far below their skill level because their credentials are not recognized.

Even within a progressive organization like The Stop, racist comments and actions occur. For example, one afternoon I took a coffee break to talk to Angela*, an older white female participant I had not met before. The Drop-In Assistant told me that she used to be a regular participant, but she has not come to the Drop-In for a while. I began to engage in small talk with Angela. Unprompted, Angela asked if I knew that the Canadian government accepted thousands of Syrian refugees into the country. Rhetorically, she questioned why did “we” take in Syrian refugees when there is a long wait-list for Toronto Community Housing – a large public
subsidized housing provider. This woman contended that Syrian refugees constantly ask for more money from their Canadian sponsors, while continuing to have more children. Angela told me that she read a newspaper article detailing how Syrian refugees are grateful to be in Canada. She argued that they are not actually grateful because if they were, they would not complain that men and women are swimming in pools together. She said, “Some people just never try to assimilate.” She then expressed that immigrants in general say they want to come to Canada to learn English, but this does not make sense because “they” can learn English in their own countries. Her comments demonstrate a great deal of resentment towards racialized immigrants in Canada. Much of this information is untrue, but represents an established discriminatory narrative about immigrants in Canada. Racially marginalized individuals unfortunately have to deal with these racist stereotypes and discrimination in their everyday lives, which may make them feel unsafe in some community food spaces. This point is further elaborated on in the following chapter.

4.3 Targeted Programming

The Stop’s staff team recognizes that participants experience hunger and poverty differently depending on their gender, race, mental and physical health, age, and citizenship status. The agency, therefore, has developed targeted programs to address the expansive needs of participants, resisting universal approaches to food insecurity. These programs generally originated from conversations between the staff team and community members in which participants indicated gaps in services. This section explains some of these targeted programs and addresses why they are valuable to participants.
The Men’s Cooking Group is a community kitchen open to adult men, many of whom are regular participants in the Drop-In. The Community Cooking Coordinator discloses that this community kitchen materialized after realizing that many men using the Drop-In at The Stop lacked the skills needed to make themselves healthy meals. For instance, in the previous section, I shared the story of the older Italian man who comes to The Stop when his wife is out. Men’s Cooking Group serves not only this older generation of men, but also younger men who want to learn how to cook. In addition to teaching vital cooking skills and breaking traditional gender roles, “the idea of Men’s Program …is to create a space for [men] to exchange ideas, thoughts, and express their concerns, worries” (H. Silva, interview, September 26, 2016). The Community Cooking Coordinator states that some men may not feel comfortable discussing certain issues in front of women, such as substance abuse or custody challenges. The Men’s Cooking Group provides participants with a space to discuss common challenges and build friendships.

The most popular targeted program at The Stop is Sabor Latino – a Spanish-speaking community kitchen that predominantly caters to The Stop’s large Latin American community. The Community Cooking Coordinator reveals that community kitchens generally have 9 to 11 participants; however, Sabor Latino routinely attracts over 40 participants. He explains that many people who participate in Sabor Latino came to Canada as refugees and they miss their cultures, families, traditions, and the ability to easily communicate with others. “So, Sabor Latino creates a space for them to feel at home and recreates a Latin environment” (H. Silva, interview, September 26, 2016). This program provides an opportunity for people of Latin American descent to celebrate Latin culture by speaking Spanish together, cooking South American meals, and listening to Latin music.

Sabor Latino was developed to support the considerable number of Latin American immigrants that visit The Stop, many of whom have faced numerous challenges integrating into
Canadian society. As discussed previously, many recent immigrants from the Global South struggle after immigrating to Canada. Although many immigrants are highly skilled and educated, the Community Cooking Coordinator argues that language is a significant barrier to success in Canada in regard to securing employment. Language barriers may also inhibit new immigrants from accessing supportive services. In the second chapter, I noted that Vahabi & Dambi (2013) advocate for programs that facilitate the sharing of knowledge among immigrants. The Community Cooking Coordinator emphasizes that Sabor Latino provides an opportunity for participants to exchange information about immigrant settlement services, schools and childcare, or medical care, which is difficult information to access if newcomers do not speak English. Sabor Latino creates a space for The Stop’s large Latin American community to form supportive networks and help each other through the challenges of immigration.

Sabor Latino and Men’s Cooking Group are only two examples of programs at The Stop that cater to the needs of particular marginalized communities. The Stop offers a great deal of targeted programming; the pre- and post-natal nutrition and support program named Healthy Beginnings\(^1\), Community Family Support which supports families with young children, and the Global Roots Garden Program that devotes garden plots to particular ethnic communities with large populations in Toronto. The latter program brings together seniors and youth from each ethnic community to cultivate a garden and foster an inter-generational exchange of knowledge. The Stop, therefore, recognizes that everyone experiences poverty differently depending on their social location and their programs must reflect this.

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\(^1\) Healthy Beginnings is funded by Health Canada through the Public Health Agency of Canada's Prenatal Child Nutrition Program (CPNP) funding (The Stop, n.d.h) The Stop’s designation as a CPNP site demonstrates that The Stop it is a well-established and creditable centre with the trust of Health Canada.
The Stop’s leadership team acknowledges that there is a difference between inclusive programming and accessible programming. For instance, the Community Advocacy Coordinator asserts that the Drop-In, although it provides meals to all, is not actually accessible to all individuals:

For instance, [in the Drop-In], we see a lot of men, single men, who are homeless or living in rooming houses who are on their own. They’re poor, they’re men. Social services have traditionally been set up to serve those types of people. They’ve been set up as soup kitchens and Salvation Army [meal programs]… that kind of model to serve individual men. We still see a lot of men around. Women we see sometimes less because they have different patterns, right? They have different needs and different dangers in society. So they may not be as visible to us…For example, a woman will be less likely to be sleeping on the street…more likely to be finding someone to stay with like couch-surfing. And then, most likely, more in danger of being abused or living in an abusive situation in order to stay off the street. Um, but that means we don’t see them as much because they’re hidden away or they don’t come out to Drop-In programs like this. So, we’ve had to [begin the] Healthy Beginnings Program (The Stop’s women & children program) (M. Woodnutt, September 2, 2016).

Staff members realize that many female participants may be hesitant to use the Drop-In because of the large male presence. As the Community Advocacy Coordinator mentioned, meal programs were originally designed to meet the needs of single men. Drop-in meal programs and boarding houses proliferated during the Great Depression as unemployment rates multiplied and men needed support meeting their basic needs (Gray, 1966; Special Despatch to The Globe, 1930). Meal programs specifically served single men because most men lacked cooking skills since kitchen work was considered to be the responsibility of women. While these programs dwindled after the Great Depression, they never disappeared. Although The Stop’s Drop-In program is available to men and women, the Drop-In continues to be a male-dominated space. In reaction to this trend, The Stop has developed a separate program for women and children to better support female participants (see Appendix 3 for a summary of The Stop’s programs). The Stop therefore does not merely aim for their programs to be inclusive, but also to engage community members.
in ways they feel comfortable. The Stop’s programs also endeavour to serve the diverse needs of their community.

The Stop, however, is not the only organization in Toronto that strives to meet the needs of diverse community members. Thorncliffe Park Women’s Committee (TPWC) endeavours to empower women in the Thorncliffe Park neighbourhood of Toronto through the fight to revitalize the central community park. Thorncliffe Park is a densely populated neighbourhood in Toronto in which thousands of residents live in high-rise apartment buildings in a small area. Thorncliffe Park is a landing site for many new immigrants. Seventy-one percent of Thorncliffe Park residents speak a non-official language (not English or French) as their mother tongue. Most residents have ethnic origins from East India, Pakistan, the Philippines, and Afghanistan. Due to the challenges of immigration, there are high rates of poverty and unemployment in this community (City of Toronto, 2011). Since 2008, TPWC has instituted community gardens, market nights, and enhancements to R.V. Burgess Park like benches, a water fountain, picnic tables, and upgraded playground equipment. One of the founders and Co-Chair of Thorncliffe Park explains why TPWC specifically is comprised of women:

The reason why we targeted women was, when we started, we realized there was no activity for the women here in Thorncliffe… So, that is what we thought we should be focusing more on… because a lot of times, it happens that the attention is not given to the women and we take it for granted. “Oh she is born to do this, to do this and to do this”… We started the market for the vision to support these women, to bring these women out and to build this facility and to build their language skills, and just have time for themselves. Just five hours a week for themselves. Because the priority always for women is their husbands, their kids, their houses. She doesn’t you know have time for herself… These women started developing interest in what they want to do and they really enjoyed what they were doing and then they had made these Friday nights as a time for themselves (S. Ali, interview, September 14, 2016).

TPWC, therefore, challenges patriarchal gender roles by creating opportunities to empower women to make positive changes in their communities, outside of their homes. By challenging
gender inequities in these community level initiatives, the women of TPWC are working towards social justice in Thorncliffe Park.

4.4 Enhancing Diversity of Staff and Volunteers

The Stop has hired a diverse team of staff and volunteers to encourage community members from all social locations to participate in programs. The Drop-In Coordinator explains how representative hiring has enhanced the diversity of participants at The Stop:

When I started [13 years ago], it was really a man’s space. And, I think throughout our years, we’re really appreciating the fact that representation really helps…in terms of supporting and actually connecting with community members. [After hiring women] in this space, things started to diversify a little bit more. We got a few more female volunteers and more female staff…We definitely have a lot more female participants” (S. Francis, interview, August 23, 2016).

Employing a heterogeneous staff team has diversified volunteers and participants. Community members tend to be more comfortable participating in programs if there are other participants, volunteers, or staff members with whom they can identify (in regard to gender, race, age, etc.) The Drop-In Coordinator articulates that The Stop has made concerted efforts to hire a diverse staff team so volunteers and participants from all social locations feel more secure when participating in programs.

The Drop-In Coordinator also maintains that a volunteer and staff team who speaks a plethora of languages will attract an ethnically diverse clientele. She argues that an ethnically diverse staff and volunteer team will remove language barriers for some participants, encouraging participation of recent immigrants in The Stop’s programs. The Drop in Coordinator explains, “When you come into a strange place, you automatically go to certain things that you connect with. Right? …Especially when English is not your first language” (S. Francis, August
23, 2016). For instance, I observed how The Stop’s diverse staff and volunteer team enhanced the experiences of some participants using the Food Bank. Participants receive some choice in choosing their Food Bank hampers at The Stop, rather than simply obtaining a prepared hamper of food. Explaining the choices to participants, however, is difficult if there is a language barrier. Over the course of my field research, there were numerous participants that came to the Food Bank who spoke limited English. On July 21, 2016 in my field notes I wrote:

At the Food Bank, I noticed most of the participants I served today spoke limited English. One participant even greeted me in Spanish and I had to show him most items before he made his selection since he did not know the English words for most food items… One participant I served from Moscow seemed very apologetic he could not communicate with me fully in English and I had to show him some items. He asked me to repeat the English words for some items so he could learn them (field notes, July 21, 2016).

Food Bank volunteers, however, were usually able to find a volunteer or staff member from the Drop-In or front office that spoke the language of participants if no Food Bank volunteers could. For instance, an Arabic family, who had recently immigrated to Canada, came to use the Food Bank in August 2016. They spoke no English, but one of the volunteers from another program area was fluent in Arabic and assisted them. The heterogeneous volunteer and staff team improved the experiences of many people accessing The Stop’s services, particularly recent immigrants.

A strategy to enhance diversity, however, will not independently work to expose and challenge uneven racial power dynamics - a main goal of “original” food justice initiatives. Diversity initiatives thus must be combined with direct anti-racism work. This point is further explored in the following chapter.

4.5 Anti-Racism and Anti-Oppression Education and Action
The Stop leadership firmly believes in integrating anti-oppression practice into all programs and services. To ensure that this process is successful, staff members at The Stop organized the Anti-Racism and Anti-Oppression (ARAO) committee to address oppression within The Stop’s work environment. The Drop-In Coordinator, one of the founders of the Committee, reveals that many important issues concerning oppression in the workplace were overlooked in her early years at The Stop (beginning in 2003). “The Stop blossomed quite a bit in a short space of time, but then along with that some policies and practice pieces [were overlooked]” (S. Francis, interview, August 23, 2016). Therefore, the ARAO uses a reflexive approach to analyze organizational activities, particularly examining how these activities may perpetuate systems of oppression. The Community Advocacy Coordinator asserted that having ongoing conversations about The Stop’s goals and actions is crucial because figuring out how to do work that challenges inequality is difficult.

The ARAO has made a few key changes since this committee’s inception. Members of the ARAO worked to change the guest speakers providing skill development and anti-oppression workshops for the staff team. The Drop-In Coordinator stated:

...The people we are bringing into our organization to help us move forward tend to be of a specific persuasion all the time. Right? You’re not seeing a lot of diversity in those areas. …The staff really put a point forward to say, ‘no we need to start diversifying’….These [trainings] will look different, you know, depending on perspective (S. Francis, interview, August 23, 2016).

The Drop-In Coordinator explains that many of the former leaders of these trainings had racial or gender privilege. Subsequently, members of the Committee fought for the leaders of skill development and anti-oppression workshops to be more diverse to ensure varied perspectives are represented. This shift also encouraged an attitude change in the organization regarding who is able to perform skill-development workshops. The Committee also made all bathrooms at The Stop gender-neutral, both in the front office and in program areas, to ensure that participants and
staff members do not experience discrimination when using the bathroom. In the program areas, both bathrooms are single-occupant spaces, so there was little objection from community members.

Advocacy programs at The Stop also employ an anti-oppression framework. The three advocacy programs at the agency are The Community Action Training, the Community Advocate Office, and the Bread & Bricks Social Justice Group (see Appendix 3 for a summary of The Stop’s programs). The Training is the foundation of the advocacy programs, since the training sessions prepare community members to become Community Advocates or Bread & Bricks members. The Community Action Training consists of a 12-week course that discusses the root causes of poverty and inequality, and considers ways to create change. Generally, participants of these trainings access services at The Stop or live in community housing or Rent-Geared-to-Income housing in West Toronto. The sessions are discussion-based, covering topics like anti-oppression, food insecurity, personal transformation, communication skills, system analysis, and campaign planning. The training concludes with an action component in which participants have the opportunity to put their new skills to use. One past advocacy group, for instance, organized the Connect Café in the Drop-In space to reduce social isolation among participants. At this event, there were many activities to facilitate engagement between participants: arts and crafts, a table to engage in political discussions, and a workshop to learn how to connect with people over the Internet.

The Community Action Training draws explicit attention to the root causes of oppression from an intersectional framework. In the 12-week course, there is one anti-oppression session, which the Community Advocacy Coordinator says permeates through the rest of the sessions. This session discusses the root causes of oppression, how oppression operates, and ways to combat inequality as an advocacy group. The Community Advocacy Coordinator explains that
he teaches the concept of intersectionality in this session (if not already known to participants) to encourage participants to consider “how our own identity interacts with other peoples’ identities and...how parts of our own identities interact with themselves” (M. Woodnutt, interview, September 2, 2016). In the session concerning intersectionality, the Advocacy Coordinator says, “we have as much of a robust conversation around gender as possible and gender is just one of many identities that come up, so like it can often be about race, it can often be about ability or mental health” (M. Woodnutt, interview, September 2, 2016). He reveals that some participants struggle to grasp the concept of intersectionality, but ultimately, most of them continue to consider their social location in relation to others after the training ends:

And [intersectionality] is a concept that eight months later after having completed the training, folks are still saying, ‘I don’t get this intersectionality thing.’ [Following the training, however, one male participant explained to me], ‘I’m a guy so maybe the woman that I was working with was intimidated by me or felt strange so she didn’t want to talk to me about it.’ Meanwhile, they say they don’t know intersectionality (M. Woodnutt, September 2, 2016).

Clearly, the participant the Community Advocacy Coordinator is referring to has started to think about how his identity interacts with the identities of others since completing the training, even if he does not yet realize.

The staff team at The Stop also addresses issues of oppression in programs in ad hoc ways. The Drop-In Coordinator and Community Services Supervisor emphasize the importance of enforcing respect policies within programs to combat discrimination. The Drop-In is a male-dominated space and staff members want to ensure women using the service or female volunteers are comfortable. Acknowledging that some male participants treat women in a disrespectful manner, like I discussed at the beginning of this chapter, The Drop-In Coordinator explains:
When we hear certain “jokes” (uses air quotes) take place in the [drop-in], we don’t want to walk away from it. We will address it. And, we’ll let people know why it’s not okay to have these “jokes” (S. Francis, interview, August 23, 2016).

The Community Services Supervisor insists that the conversations between staff members and participants regarding inappropriate remarks are not meant to make people feel guilty. These conversations are “not about making people feel bad, but providing them with a little more information. Making them have a second thought about what they’ve said to someone…sometimes people have never been called on anything” (R. Cherian, interview, September 26, 2016). Engaging in conversations about respect and oppression with participants is an informal method of education used at The Stop as part of their anti-oppression practice.

I observed an instructive conversation take place in the Drop-In after a participant made a derogatory remark to a staff member. Sherene*, a white female participant likely in her fifties or sixties, was upset because participants were not sorting their waste into the appropriate recycling, compost, and garbage bins. Sherene requested that the Relief Worker, who was of South American decent, stand at the garbage station and ensure participants dispose of their waste properly. The Relief Worker responded that she was not able to do so because she had other tasks to complete, and the participant replied that she was “uneducated,” arguing that she did not understand the importance of recycling because of where she was from (South America). Other staff members notified the Community Services Manager about the comment. This Manager then pulled the participant aside to have a conversation with her about why her comments were discriminatory. The purpose of these conversations is to help make the space safe for every community member.

The Stop’s staff team assumes responsibility to challenge the discriminatory biases of some participants. The Community Services Supervisor explains:
There is still a lot of institutionalized racism that is preventing people from achieving and thriving in the world and in Canada. There’s a lot of denial and white guilt. And what needs to happen is people need to stop feeling guilty and people need to acknowledge what you’re seeing in front of your face and to make sure that our biases are being challenged, all of us...[Institutional racism] impacts education and access to jobs, [which] then affects your future (R. Cherian, interview, September 26, 2016).

The goal to challenge biases aligns with The Stop’s mission statement, which affirms that the organization strives to “challenge inequality” (The Stop, n.d.) Data collected from participant observation and semi-structured interviews with staff members indicates that The Stop’s team connects institutional systems of oppression to everyday acts of discrimination. Consequently, each time the staff team has instructive conversations with participants, they are working to challenge biases perpetuating social inequities.

### 4.6 Participant Empowerment

A food justice approach endeavours to empower community members through food activism. Accordingly, The Stop has instituted numerous changes to reduce the stigma and powerlessness associated with emergency food programs. Firstly, no participants line up to receive food from the Food Bank or Drop-In. The Community Services Supervisor maintains that lines are undignified. Therefore, volunteers serve meals to participants in the Drop-In, and Food Bank users receive a number and are called to the counter when it is their turn. This system allows participants to sit down and have coffee while waiting to use the Food Bank or for their meal in the Drop-In. The Stop also provides participants with as much high quality food as possible. Most food banks and drop-ins rely on donated food, which is often highly processed, past its expiry date, and unhealthy (Tarasuk & Eakin, 2003; Loopstra & Tarasuk, 2015). New users to
The Stop’s Food Bank were often quite surprised about the quality of food available. For instance, on August 18, 2016 in my field notes I wrote:

I served a man who is new to the Food Bank. He was amazed at how much food he was able to get and was excited when I was able to give him ground beef, fresh milk and a lot of produce. He kept saying, “This is amazing!” He told me he cannot believe he did not know about The Stop (field notes, Thursday August 18, 2016).

Revenues from The Stop’s social enterprise, donations, and fundraising events permit The Stop to purchase produce, milk, eggs, and grains so participants are able to access healthy options in the Food Bank.

Furthermore, a great deal of the food in the Drop-In and Food Bank is sourced from local organic farms. The Community Services Supervisor at The Stop argues, “The highly-processed junk food that is given to food banks is a very…classist way to run a program. Everyone has a right to really good quality food that is healthy, that’s not going to make them sick” (R. Cherian, interview, September 26, 2016). She insists that providing participants with healthy and nourishing food is essential to dignified service. Through these methods, The Stop seeks to eliminate the stigma associated with emergency food services.

This stigma, however, has been deeply internalized by participants. For instance, while volunteering at the Food Bank, I overheard a volunteer apologize to a participant for the lack of choices of canned goods that day, which are donated by large food rescue organizations. The participant replied, “Beggars can’t be choosers.” The volunteer quickly retorted that he was not a beggar and that he should not call himself one. He shrugged his shoulders, not seeming to believe what she said. On another occasion, I asked a participant if he ate fish before serving him trout pie for lunch. He responded, “When you’re hungry, you can’t be picky.” Despite The Stop’s efforts to reduce stigma within emergency food programming, some individuals who have chronically lived in poverty have internalized the stereotype that users of emergency food
programs are beggars. Therefore, The Stop’s staff team continues to look for new ways to dismantle the stigma that participants experience.

One strategy The Stop uses to eliminate the clear divisions between “givers” and “receivers” typical in many charitable food agencies is encouraging participants to volunteer in their programs. The Community Services Supervisor suggests that it is less stigmatizing to access services at The Stop than other charitable food agencies since many of The Stop’s volunteers are low-income individuals who receive support from the agency.

We highly value volunteers who use our service because there is nothing like receiving a service from someone who [also] received that service. There’s no comparison in how that would make someone feel – to learn that the person giving you that food actually got a hamper in the food bank the day before (R. Cherian, interview, September 26, 2016).

Accordingly, there are shared experiences of poverty and marginalization among many volunteers and participants, which transforms the uneven power dynamics between volunteers and users common in emergency food programs.

The Stop’s leadership also seeks to empower participants by encouraging community participation in the development of programs and services. The Drop-In Coordinator explains:

End-users should be helping to actually develop what’s happening, right? Quite often it’s about, “oh there’s a problem happening up top!” Right? And the people up top find nifty solutions to the problems people down below are facing. It’s like, “here you go. We did it. Now just use that service.” And there are all sorts of crevices and holes. If you take [the solutions] from the end-users and then work that way up, there’s possibilities of having a lot less gaps and actually meeting the needs of the people that you are providing this service to (S. Francis, Drop-In Coordinator, August 23, 2016).

The Drop-In Coordinator specifically was referring to a research project The Stop conducted.

The Drop-In Coordinator and a small research team spoke with regular female participants of the Drop-In to ask for their feedback on the program and solicit recommendations. Participants indicated that they had interest in prototyping some new programs in the Drop-In. Following this project, The Stop introduced sewing and quilting workshops, which appealed to the older women
using the service. Many of The Stop’s other programs and services were developed through collaboration with community members as well, ensuring that The Stop’s programs cater to their community. The Drop-In Coordinator hopes that these new workshops will attract more female participants to the Drop-In.

Furthermore, The Stop’s Community Advocate Office supports participants in becoming change-makers in their communities. This office is a peer-run project in which community members are trained to support their peers by providing information and referrals. The Community Advocacy Coordinator describes the Advocate Office:

We train folks who live in the community, who are also dealing with poverty and marginalization, to learn skills to be able to run an information and referral office. So, in that office we provide referrals. We provide supportive counselling. We provide information, phone numbers… We do advocacy work to be able to connect [participants] with resources that they otherwise have difficulty [accessing], due to a number of barriers. Usually, the way the [social service] system is set up is to gate keep resources – making [low-income people] go through very arduous very complex processes in order to access [vital resources]. So, when folks are dealing with mental health issues, the challenges of being hungry, the challenges of living in poverty or living on the street, abusive scenarios, very chaotic environments, etc., it [becomes] incredibly difficult to follow these very complicated bureaucratic processes in order to access very simple, miniscule, and usually inadequate benefits…The advocates do their best to try to help navigate peoples’ way through that (M. Woodnutt, interview, September 2, 2016).

The one-on-one advocate program provides opportunities for participants to help each other through the challenges of poverty and builds supportive networks within the community.

Overall, The Stop aims to reduce the social divisions between volunteers, participants, and staff members and empower community members. In reference to The Stop’s approach, the Community Services Supervisor says:

We don’t think anyone who is giving out a food bank hamper is better than the person receiving it. We think there are basic commonalities among human beings and that’s what we’re really trying to connect…A big part of what we want to do is build community, make people feel like they are no different than people who don’t live in poverty, that there are a lot of commonalities among people (R. Cherian, interview, September 26, 2016).
As described above, The Stop has designed a response to food insecurity that empowers community members and challenges social and economic inequities. Specifically, The Stop provides participants with dignified experiences, encourages participants to volunteer and be involved in program design, and empowers participants to become change-makers in their communities.

### 4.7 Barriers

Although The Stop incorporates anti-oppression practice into their programs, staff members recognize that the agency could do more to fight injustices. For instance, when asked how issues of race and racism shape The Stop’s work, the Drop-In Coordinator replied, “well, I think it definitely has a lot more shaping to do” (S. Francis, interview, August 23, 2016). She explains that undoing oppression is a process, not an action. This process needs to be prioritized in all of The Stop’s work. She argues, “I think [if] we keep our eye on the prize and keep these priorities at a forefront, we will continue to improve… I think we have a pretty good starting line, but still a lot of work to do” (S. Francis, interview, August 23, 2016). There are challenges, however, in maintaining anti-oppression as the priority in organizational activities.

Emergency food programs consume a great deal of staff capacity, funding, and donor attention, at the expense of justice-oriented work. The Community Advocacy Coordinator at The Stop discloses:

Poverty is…very low on peoples’ radar and that is partly contributed to by the charity model of addressing the issue, which in my opinion takes up a lot of space. So, if someone does care about poverty issues and wants to dedicate energy and time towards it, the traditional narrative is that you give a little bit of money and then it solves the problem, or at least it solves it to a very small degree. It gets one person a meal or something. And of course the problem is so much bigger than that, the problem is much more root than that (M. Woodnutt, interview, September 2, 2016).
He contends that food banks and drop-in programs will never solve poverty, but they consume a significant portion of the narrative concerning hunger. These programs need considerable resources to operate. The Drop-In program, for instance, requires many volunteers to prepare and serve meals, clean up, and distribute leftovers. Even though The Stop refuses to expand the Drop-In or Food Bank since they are not solutions to hunger, there is still an “insatiable demand” for these programs in Toronto (I. Gibbons, interview, September 21, 2016). Due to the significant staff and volunteer resources needed to serve two meals per day at The Stop, the Drop-In Coordinator contends that there are missed opportunities to have important conversations with participants, organize social justice workshops, or conduct research that could improve programming to reduce marginalization.

In addition to the demands of operating emergency food services, the crises participants experience in their daily lives also curtail long-term advocacy work. Participants who seek assistance from the Community Advocate Office at The Stop are frequently experiencing issues like landlord evictions, criminal charges, or difficulties accessing Ontario Works or Ontario Disability Support Program benefits. Assisting community members cope with the everyday challenges of poverty limits effort towards long-term social justice initiatives. In describing the constraints of the Advocacy Office, the Community Advocacy Coordinator explains:

We are constantly putting out fires in peoples’ lives and that’s what a lot of the advocacy work here is…But, if we weren’t doing that, then we could dedicate so much more of our energy towards the work that we want to do, which is engaging people, connecting them, and providing them platforms like the community kitchens and community gardening, or the Bread & Bricks group. [These programs help] people find meaning and create meaning in their communities, connect to one another, and find ways of working across difference. And, find ways of finding commonality and working to create a stronger community that they want to see. That work is really inhibited by the constant crises that are going on in people’s lives (M. Woodnutt, interview, September 2, 2016).
Many community members experience daily emergencies due to inadequate access to food, shelter, and other basic needs and therefore it is difficult to prioritize long-lasting advocacy work.

Furthermore, due to budget constraints at The Stop, the Community Advocacy Coordinator discloses that the agency has not been able to adequately fund community engagement programs. Over the course of my fieldwork at The Stop, there were lay-offs because the agency needed to consolidate certain programs and positions for financial reasons. Since 2013, The Stop’s annual revenues have been declining. In 2013, The Stop’s annual revenue was $4,528,269, but this dropped to $3,767,377 in 2016. The Stop has experienced reductions in the revenue raised from donations, government funding, and food donations. Since emergency food programs consume a great deal of resources to operate, community engagement initiatives often suffer the most from constrained funding. The Community Advocacy Coordinator clarifies:

And then from an organizational point of view, it’s really hard to fund this work. So, The Stop is undergoing major budget restraints right now and for years we haven’t been able to fund the engagement side of community action… I think partly because of that charity model approach, right? Putting energy towards a more justice model is an investment that does not seem to be valuable in our society (M. Woodnutt, interview, September 2, 2016).

Community engagement programs need to be consistent to be effective, and an austere funding environment and a lack of support for justice work makes constancy next to impossible.

Moreover, engaging in conversations about oppression in Canada is challenging. The Drop-In Coordinator at The Stop asserts that even individuals who are seen as progressive, whether in the government or in non-profit organizations, can be hesitant to bring attention to racial and gender inequality. She expresses:

It is not always the easiest sell to speak about issues of race, and gender, and oppression and all this. But, this is what makes people’s realities what they are, what makes their experiences different. If we don’t understand how people are experiencing things differently, and what might be a drawback for one person may not be the same drawback
for another, well then we’re not really going to fill in those gaps (S. Francis, interview, August, 23, 2016).

This statement raises questions as to why it is difficult for community food organizations to prioritize justice-oriented work. The following chapter explores this question in greater depth.

4.8 Summary

This chapter has explored the utility of a food justice framework in understanding how gender and racial inequality shape the experiences of The Stop’s participants. Some female participants of The Stop assume disproportionate responsibilities for unpaid care work in their families, impacting their experiences of food insecurity. Women also may encounter harassment in the space, which could deter them from using The Stop’s services. Moreover, recent racialized immigrants who use The Stop face particular challenges securing adequate work in Toronto, increasing their vulnerability to food insecurity. I also witnessed several incidents of racial discrimination in the Drop-In, which may dissuade racialized individuals from using these services.

In this chapter, I have also illustrated how The Stop works to challenge systemic gender and racial injustices within the organization and described which barriers to this work exist. Specifically, The Stop has created programs that cater to specific community needs, enhanced diversity in staffing, engaged in direct anti-oppression education and action, and endeavoured to increase community participation in their programs. While The Stop in many ways is a leader in the Canadian food justice movement, there are barriers impeding the agency’s efforts, such as the ingrained charitable approach to hunger relief, limited funding, and a lack of external support for justice-oriented work.
The following chapter will elaborate on how The Stop participants’ experiences of gender and racial inequality are situated in the broader context of systemic racism and patriarchy and how these systems of oppression impact food insecurity. Drawing from the findings outlined in this chapter and food justice literature, I analyze the utility of a food justice framework in understanding and challenging gender and racial inequities. I also explore the limitations of this thesis and discuss several lessons learned from this research project.
Chapter 5

5 Discussion, Lessons Learned & Conclusion

5.1 Summary of Key Findings

The objectives of this research project were twofold: 1) analyze the utility of a food justice framework in understanding how gender and racial inequality shape the experiences of The Stop’s participants, and 2) examine how The Stop works to dismantle gender and racial injustices through food activism, and what barriers to this work exist.

Firstly, findings from participant observation at The Stop demonstrated that many participants experience gender and racial oppression within The Stop’s spaces and in their everyday lives outside of The Stop. The disproportionate responsibility for care work that many women assume poses particular challenges, shaping their experiences of food insecurity. Many women turn to emergency food programs for assistance, but they may experience discrimination in the space, impacting their access to these services. Additionally, recent racialized immigrants face challenges securing employment, most notably discrimination in the labour market and a lack of recognition of their work and education credentials in Canada. Accordingly, many recent racialized immigrants are vulnerable to food insecurity, forcing many to use emergency food services. However, racial discrimination is common in these spaces, even in progressive organizations like The Stop. These experiences need to be situated within the broader fields of gender and racial power, which I will discuss in this chapter.
Findings from participant observation at The Stop Community Food Centre and semi-structured interviews with key staff members of The Stop, Second Harvest, Thorncliffe Park Women’s Committee, a large Food Bank in Toronto, and a national anti-hunger organization (the latter two informants chose to maintain name and institutional anonymity) also indicated that emergency responses to hunger fail to meet the needs of users. Consequently, there is a need for innovative strategies to address food insecurity in Toronto that challenge social and economic inequalities. In this project, I explored the ways The Stop uses a food justice approach to combat gender and racial injustice through food activism. The Stop’s four main programs and strategies to dismantle injustices are targeted programming, promoting diversity in staff and volunteer teams, anti-oppression action and education, and participant empowerment. Using these strategies simultaneously, The Stop addresses the needs of their diverse participants, encourages individuals from all social locations to use their services, challenges manifestations of discrimination within the space, and empowers participants to become involved in the process to create transformative social change.

Yet, there are barriers to food justice activism. Firstly, emergency food programs consume a significant portion of the narrative concerning hunger in Toronto, diverting attention and resources from social justice initiatives. Emergency food programs reinforce an individualized understanding of hunger, which describes hunger in terms of physical needs (Carson, 2014). The root causes of hunger, therefore, remain ignored and unaddressed. Secondly, the many crises occurring in the lives of participants inhibit long-term advocacy work to dismantle gender, racial, and income inequity. It is difficult for community members or The Stop’s staff team to work towards systemic change when many participants are experiencing severe instability and daily emergencies. Thirdly, an austere funding environment within the community services field has led to constrained budgets, significantly impacting the funding of
The Stop’s community engagement and advocacy programs. Finally, it is extremely difficult to engage in conversations about gender and racial inequity in Canada. My research project seeks to draw attention to and support for Canadian food justice initiatives that strive to dismantle structures of social inequity. Food justice projects work towards a more equitable food system in which all people can access adequate food, regardless of income or social differences. Before I discuss the main contributions of this research project, I will first outline some limitations.

5.2 Limitations

There are a few limitations with this research project. Firstly, I did not conduct interviews with participants at The Stop. I decided to focus on how The Stop addresses gender and racial inequity as an institution, rather than solely explore how racial and gender inequity shape the lives of participants. My research project focused on navigating the social and economic structures shaping hunger in Canada, not the life histories of participants. The Stop is one of the few anti-hunger organizations in Canada embracing an intersectional and food justice approach. Considering The Stop’s position as a leader in the Canadian food movement, I wanted to highlight how The Stop fights gender and racial inequities within their programs and within Canadian institutions. In future research, however, it would be interesting to thoroughly explore how the intersections of gender, race, and food insecurity influence the everyday lives of participants and how participants perceive The Stop’s efforts to address uneven social power relations. This type of project would answer Bradley & Herrera’s (2016) call to feature the voices of the oppressed in food justice literature.
My positionality as a white female graduate student also influenced my research findings. For example, my social position limited me from participating in some of The Stop’s programs, such as Sabor Latino and Men’s Cooking Group. Accordingly, my knowledge of these programs is second-hand. My positionality may have also shaped how race and gender were produced and performed in my everyday encounters with participants, volunteers, and staff members at The Stop. My race, gender, sexuality, age, and other identities likely influenced my conversations with various interview informants and participants and volunteers at The Stop. Additionally, my close relationship with many of The Stop’s staff members may have impacted my interactions with participants. I had been a regular volunteer at The Stop for ten months prior to conducting research and I knew certain members of the staff team fairly well. Participants rarely made negative comments to me about The Stop’s services, which could have been due to my affiliation with the organization.

Additionally, the timeframe for my field research was relatively short and therefore, the limited data places constraints on the validity of my findings and the representativeness of my population sample. My field research data was also unique to Toronto, which is a distinct city within Canada. Toronto is a landing site for many immigrants and is one of the most ethnically diverse cities in the world (City of Toronto, 2012). Toronto is also the most populous city in Canada and has significant income disparity (United Way, 2015). The distinctiveness of my research site may limit the applicability of my findings on other urban jurisdictions.

Moreover, due to the research constraints of a Master’s project, I was unable to consider food insecurity among Indigenous peoples in Toronto. When starting this Master’s project, my research supervisor and I did not have access to a group of Indigenous peoples that would like to participate in this research project. I also believed that two years was an insufficient amount of time to gain ethics clearance to conduct research in an Indigenous community and build trust
with community members. I doubted that I would be able to comprehend and convey the complexities of indigenous food insecurity within this time period. Understanding how gender, racism, and colonialism shape food insecurity is an important area for future research.

5.3 Contributions to Food Justice Literature

Even considering these limitations, my research project contributes important findings to food justice scholarship. My project draws from food justice literature and intersectionality theory to analyze how gender and racial inequities impact the experiences of a low-income community in Toronto. Additionally, this project contributes to the lack of “original” food justice research in a Canadian context.

5.3.1 Gender, Race, and the Everyday Lives of The Stop’s Participants

As demonstrated in the review of food justice literature in Chapter Two, food justice scholars predominantly analyze how food access is impacted by unjust economic and racial systems. My research builds on this literature by also considering how gender intersects with race and income-level to shape food insecurity. Gender and race are interlocking identities, which cannot be understood in isolation from one another (Collins, 2009; Crenshaw, 1989; Gillman, 2007, e.g.). Understanding hunger through an intersectional lens allows scholars to comprehend how intersecting systems of oppression impact food access among marginalized individuals.

A food justice framework contextualizes the challenges individuals experience accessing food within the fields of gender and racial power. For instance, the Chinese grandmother at The
Stop experienced particular difficulties accessing food related to her gender, race, and income-level. She spoke little English, creating barriers to navigate the social service system in Canada (Vahabi & Damba, 2013). She also was responsible for caring for her two young grandchildren every day throughout their summer holiday. As stated in the discussion section, women perform on average double the amount of hours of unpaid care work as men in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2010). Lastly, this woman was living in poverty and consequently, she fed the girls breakfast each day in the Drop-In of The Stop and collected leftovers for later. Gender, race, and economic insecurity, therefore, played a large role in her experience of hunger. A food justice framework illuminates the structures of power shaping her everyday life.

A food justice framework illustrates how patriarchal gender roles influence the ways women experience hunger. For instance, the Italian man at The Stop told me he eats at The Stop when his wife is working and cannot cook for him. This man appeared to assume domestic labour is his wife’s domain. His wife thus works a “double day” as she performs a great deal of unpaid care work and engages in wage labour. From conversations I had with this man at The Stop, I learned that his family is living in poverty. The division of labour in his family impacts their experiences of food insecurity. He needs to use the Drop-In when his wife is at work and she carries disproportionate responsibilities for work, both paid and unpaid. As discussed in the second chapter, the amount of unpaid care that many women perform has a significant impact on their access to acceptable paid work. Women are more likely to work part-time or engage in work with more flexible hours (Lambert & McInturff, 2016). The assumed responsibility that many women carry for this unpaid care work continually reproduces inequality by limiting their ability to engage in acceptable economic, social, and political activities.

Due to the challenges women experience accessing food, particularly lone female parents, many low-income women rely on charitable food assistance. There are barriers,
however, for women to access these services. Many women at The Stop appeared to prefer the
Food Bank to the Drop-In since the Food Bank serves equal numbers of men and women. The
Food Bank is a space where women appeared to feel safe. Food Bank participants, however, can
only receive food once per month. The Drop-In, therefore, acts as a supplement to this program.
As I stated previously, the Drop-In is a male-dominated space. Meal programs have been
traditionally set up to serve single men and there has not been a strong demographic shift since
these programs began in Canada. I attribute the limited number of female participants in the
Drop-In to the harassment female participants may experience in the space. Speaking from
personal experience, it was often difficult to be a woman in the Drop-In as many men made
inappropriate comments based on my appearance. Although the staff team attempts to stop this
type of behaviour and educate participants on why their comments are discriminatory, the staff
team cannot listen to every conversation in the Drop-In. Discriminatory comments and actions
may prevent women from accessing emergency meal programs if they do not feel safe.

The Stop’s team recognizes this issue and is trying to make this space more welcoming
and safer for women. For instance, The Stop’s Drop-In Coordinator conducted an ethnographic
research project regarding low female participation rates in the Drop-In with a small research
group. Following this project, the Coordinator explained that they are piloting a few workshops
in the Drop-In, which female participants advocated for. She also mentioned that The Stop might
look into female-only drop-in hours in the future, which some other community service
organizations offer. Without efforts to make some emergency food programs safer for women, it
may impact the ability of women to access food assistance.

Racialized newcomers also face particular challenges accessing food related to their
social position in Canada. Many Canadian critical food security scholars have studied the
vulnerability of racialized newcomers to food insecurity (Pitt, Sherman, & Macdonald, 2015;
Rush et al., 2007; Vahabi and Damba, 2013; Vahabi et al., 2011; Burgess, 2016; Lessa & Rocha, 2012; Rodriguez et al, 2016). Vahabi & Damba (2013) suggest that there are four main barriers undermining the food security of recent immigrants: financial insecurity, language difficulties that restrict work opportunities, inability to meet cultural food preferences, and limited knowledge of community food resources and social services (Vahabi & Damba, 2013). Data from interviews and participant observation confirmed these challenges. For example, the Community Cooking Coordinator argued that Sabor Latino participants want to work and are highly skilled, but they cannot find a job due to language barriers.

Much of this literature, however, fails to discuss institutional racism. Rather than analyzing racial exclusions within the workforce and every day life, this literature focuses on cultural barriers (Bernhardt, 2015). Canadian-born racialized persons also experience higher rates of poverty and food insecurity in Toronto (City of Toronto, 2015; Tarasuk et al., 2016; Bernhardt, 2015; Block & Galbuzi, 2011). As discussed in chapter two, 46% of recent immigrants, 37% of Indigenous peoples, and 33% of racialized minorities lived in poverty in Toronto (City of Toronto, 2015), which is significantly higher than the average poverty rate in the city. These high poverty rates are partially due to the relegation of racially marginalized people to lower paying jobs and industries, which are often precarious and have few benefits (Block & Galabuzi, 2011; Bernhardt, 2015). The relegation of racially marginalized people to these industries makes it difficult to escape from the cycles of poverty and hunger. Data from interviews also demonstrates how racial discrimination undermines the success of racialized newcomers in Canada. For example, a representative from a national anti-hunger organization explained that many new immigrants experience employment discrimination, like having their job applications bypassed because they do not have an Anglo-sounding name. Additionally, education and work credentials that immigrants obtained in countries in the Global South are
often not recognized in Canada (Colour of Poverty, 2007; Daily Bread Food Bank, 2016), forcing these individuals to take jobs far below their skill level. This lack of recognition poses a significant barrier for new immigrants to thrive in Canada. These challenges demonstrate a need for greater attention to how food insecurity is situated within the contexts of institutional racism in Canadian food scholarship and for more food activist organizations to fight racial inequality in their work.

In addition to racism in the labour market, racial discrimination was prevalent at The Stop. For instance, common racist tropes were evident in my conversation with Angela in the Drop-In. She proclaimed that immigrants steal social services from “Canadians”, change “Canadian values,” and are uneducated. She also drew upon a classic Malthusian trope when she stated that Syrian refugees are procreating at a fast rate since they have arrived in Canada. Although these tropes are unfounded, they are part of a common narrative concerning racialized immigrants in Canada. Angela also used an “us” versus “them” discourse, implying that she does not accept racialized immigrants as Canadian. This discourse assumes newcomers are fundamentally different from “Canadians.” Moreover, she appeared to blame immigrants for her experiences of food insecurity. For example, she asked why the Canadian government accepted thousands of Syrian refugees when there was already a long wait-list for subsidized housing. Although she is quite right that social services in Toronto are strained and fail to meet the needs of all who use them, she placed blame on immigrants rather than the Canadian Government.

Food insecurity is a structural issue, which cannot be placed on any one particular group of people. A food justice framework provides a way to understand the structural causes of food insecurity.

Accordingly, a food justice lens illustrates how gender and race impact how The Stop’s participants experience food insecurity. Patriarchal and racist structures of power influence how
women and racially marginalized individuals are able to participate in society and the labour market. Due to the challenges experienced by female lone-parent households and racially marginalized people, these groups have disproportionate rates of poverty in Canada. Gender and racial discrimination also influence how safe participants feel at The Stop. If participants experience harassment or discrimination based on their gender or race, they may not wish to continue using these services, impacting their access to food.

It is also important to analyze how my positionality shaped this conversation with Angela. I am a fair-skinned woman with blonde hair and neither my parents nor I were immigrants to Canada. She must have perceived a sense of solidarity because of our similar skin colours and citizenship status and therefore, she assumed a shared resentment of Syrian refugees. I argue that Angela’s comments regarding Syrian refugees demonstrate a desire to position herself as superior to these individuals and maintain her structural advantage assigned by racialization. Although she lives in poverty like many Syrian refugees, she seems to consider herself as more deserving of Ontario’s social entitlements. I contend that she drew clear differences between her and I and Syrian refugees as a strategy to protect the relative privilege of white Canadian-born citizens.

Whiteness, however, is not fixed to certain bodies. “…Whiteness is never simply about white bodies or ‘cultures.’ Rather whiteness is a structural advantage signifying ‘success, modernity and wealth’” (Faria & Mollett, 2016, p. 88). Drawing from critical feminist reflexivity (Faria & Mollett, 2016), it is imperative to consider the ways whiteness is performed and produced in certain spaces. Faria & Mollett (2016) contend that critical feminist reflexivity can assist researchers analyze the emotional reactions to our bodies, exposing the racial landscapes in the field. As a white researcher, I was not always in a position of privilege at The Stop. There were many incidents where male participants (both racially marginalized and white) made me
feel unsafe after making inappropriate comments or touching me without consent. For instance, the Latino man that asked me to dry him off on a rainy day performed his whiteness by treating me in a disrespectful manner because of my gender. In another example, The Stop’s Relief Worker of South American descent held power in many ways at The Stop. She was employed in a space where many people struggled to secure work. She also had the ability to enforce rules in the Drop-In. Although she was a racialized female, she held power in the Drop-In. Her privilege, however, was not fixed. For instance, Sherene treated this Relief Worker in a degrading manner because she did not attend school in the Global North and Sherene consequently stated that she was uneducated. The Relief Worker, while privileged in many ways at The Stop, was vulnerable to facing racial discrimination. Whiteness and racialization, therefore, are dynamic processes, which materialize differently depending on the encounter. The following section discusses the strategies The Stop uses to combat gender and racial injustices.

5.3.2 Challenging Gender and Racial Inequality through Food Justice Activism

The Stop’s leadership team recognizes that people experience poverty and hunger in multifarious ways and accordingly, it is essential to move beyond universal programming to meet the needs of as many participants as possible. Emergency food programs generally employ a universal approach. For example, food banks typically welcome all individuals living in the food bank’s catchment area and provide the same service to each user. While these programs are inclusive to everyone no matter their gender, race, sexuality, or age, they do not meet the needs of all users. For instance, immigrants have expressed concern with the lack of culturally appropriate foods available at food banks (Vahabi & Damba, 2013). Therefore, The Stop has created a diverse
array of programs that respect the differences among participants, such as Sabor Latino or Men’s Cooking Group.

Accordingly, The Stop’s leadership team acknowledges that they need to move beyond goals of inclusion in order to dismantle the uneven power relations influencing food insecurity. As discussed in the second chapter, a focus on inclusion may perpetuate privilege rather than challenge the inequities shaping uneven food access (Kepkiewicz et al., 2015). Rather than endeavouring to simply build inclusive programs, The Stop seeks to create acceptable and just programs. Specifically, The Drop-In Coordinator has reached out to female participants to learn how they can make the Drop-In space feel safer and more welcoming for women, addressing the uneven power dynamics in the space. Furthermore, trained community members operate the Community Advocate Office at The Stop. The Community Advocate Office empowers community members to become change-makers in their communities, challenging the power dynamics in traditional charitable food programs where participants generally do not have the opportunity to be in a position of power. The Stop’s food justice approach seeks to challenge uneven power dynamics both within their programs and in the everyday lives of participants.

Moreover, some of The Stop’s programs attempt to transform the biases of certain participants. For example, Men’s Cooking Group teaches men vital cooking skills, which opposes traditional gender roles. Many of the older men who are regular participants of The Stop’s Drop-In never expected to need cooking skills since they have always relied on their mothers and wives. For instance, the older Italian man who I spoke with in the Drop-In voiced that he only comes to The Stop when his wife is out and cannot cook for him. The Men’s Cooking Group, therefore, explicitly challenges traditional gender norms by celebrating men getting together to cook. Men’s Cooking Group normalizes men performing domestic responsibilities, which may confront the patriarchal biases of some participants.
My knowledge of Men’s Cooking Group and Sabor Latino, however, are second-hand. As a white female researcher who speaks little Spanish, these were not spaces where I was invited. I learned about the dynamics of these programs from the Community Cooking Coordinator, who leads both programs. Although I assume that Men’s Cooking Group is a space where the Community Cooking Coordinator encourages men to cook and challenges the patriarchal biases of some male participants, I never had the opportunity to observe this program. Similarly, I presume Sabor Latino allows Latin American community members to exchange needed information and celebrates Latin culture; however, I never participated in this program because of my social position.

Consequently, there are inherent tensions between The Stop’s intersectional approach to food security and their targeted programs. The Stop’s leadership team clearly understood identity through an intersectional framework in their interviews; yet, the agency has created certain programs based on reductive conceptions of identity. For example, Men’s Cooking Group is open to all male participants at The Stop. The program is framed as a cooking group for “men,” which does not appear to consider the diversity of male participants in relation to age, employment status, education, country of origin, mental and physical health, sexuality, e.g. Although the leader of this program likely recognizes the heterogeneity of clients in Men’s Cooking Group and attends to their various needs, the premise of this community kitchen appears to conflict with an intersectional approach to food insecurity.

There are also some limitations related to The Stop’s representative hiring practices. The agency has made significant efforts to hire a diverse staff and volunteer team in regard to race, gender, sexuality, income-level, and ethnicity. The Drop-In Coordinator spoke highly of these efforts, explaining that these policies have helped attract a diverse group of participants to The Stop. She maintained that participants tend to feel at ease in programs if they see someone who
looks like them or someone who speaks their native language. Although enhancing diversity in staffing is important, representative hiring does not independently undo racism. Efforts to promote diversity can divert attention from transformative anti-racism work. Slocum (2006) argues that whiteness within the food movement is often understood as a problem of diversity, rather than a manifestation of racism. Therefore, many organizations simply aim to increase diversity to “solve” issues of whiteness within the alternative food movement. Slocum (2006) contends that enhancing diversity will not undo racism. She insists, “Anti-racism must be actively practiced or racism in an organization’s work context may remain unacknowledged” (2006, p. 335). The Stop needs to continue to pay attention to their anti-racism policies and ensure that representative hiring continues to be pursued alongside direct anti-racism work.

A key component of The Stop’s anti-oppression work is organizational reflexivity. The Stop’s staff team practices reflexivity, particularly observing if they are meeting their goal to challenge inequality or if they are perpetuating or (re)producing social inequities in their initiatives. Levkoe and Wakefield (2011) suggest that an asset of The Stop is the “ability to be reflexive about its own activities and recognize and respond to criticism” (2011, p. 264). The Stop’s staff team continues to have conversations with participants about their programs and solicits feedback. Reflexivity encourages staff members to consider if their actions and intentions are anti-oppressive, or if they are perpetuating the status quo.

The Stop, however, faces many barriers engaging in social justice work alongside the provision of emergency food programs. Key stakeholder interviews indicated that the charity model of food provision will never solve hunger and poverty, but this model is deeply entrenched in Canadian society. As previously discussed, the Community Advocacy Coordinator at The Stop explained that if Canadians do care about poverty issues, the traditional narrative is that they should give a little bit of money or food to an anti-poverty organization, which would
buy a person a meal. This narrative consumes a great deal of space in mainstream discourses of hunger and poverty, even though these types of actions do not address the root causes of hunger (Poppendieck, 1998; Davis & Tarasuk, 1994; Carson, 2014). Although many innovative food organizations like The Stop make efforts to educate individuals about the failings of the emergency food system, it is challenging to fight these approaches because of their long histories in Canada.

Even The Stop, a prominent food justice organization in Toronto and a vocal opponent of the emergency food system, continues to offer a food bank and drop-in meal program. Due to the daily crises many of their participants experience accessing food, The Stop’s leadership team has made a choice to continue to meet the daily food needs of participants while simultaneously working towards systemic change. Consequently, their efforts to provide hunger relief to community members divert resources and attention from justice-oriented initiatives and advocacy work. Despite The Stop’s efforts to advocate for new strategies to fight hunger and poverty, they cannot escape from offering emergency food services because of the need in their community.

Another barrier The Stop faces in regard to social justice activism is the difficult nature of this work. Social justice activism requires committed advocacy and demands those with privilege to relinquish some power to create more equitable institutions and social structures. Due to the limited support for social justice activism, The Stop has not been able to adequately fund their community engagement and advocacy work in recent years. There needs to be a greater commitment to social justice action in order to create transformative social and economic changes in Toronto.

Issues of oppression are also widely silenced in Canada, creating barriers to social justice activism. The Drop-In Coordinator maintained that it is not an easy “sell” to speak about issues
of race, gender, and poverty. Since 1971, Canada has embraced the identity of a multicultural country, which has made conversations regarding race and racism “taboo” (Gibb & Wittman, 2013, p. 3). Consequently, multicultural policies silence discussions of racial inequality and perpetuate injustices within social structures and institutions (Thobani, 2007; Baldwin et al, 2011; Arat-Koç, 2010; Bannerji, 1996). Furthermore, Canada represents itself as a nation that values human rights (Rideout et al., 2007), creating obstacles to discuss gender inequality in Canada. The Stop continually challenges these national narratives by drawing attention to the experiences of oppressed community members and fighting for equality. The next section states several lessons learned from this research project that relate to the process to build more equitable social and economic systems in Canada.

5.4 Lessons Learned

In this research project, I learned three key lessons related to intersectionality, reflexivity, and community-level activism. Firstly, intersectionality theory is important to understand the experiences of food insecure individuals. All social identities intersect to shape an individual’s experience of poverty. Poverty in Toronto affects an individual’s health, food security, housing stability, and access to transit and needed services (City of Toronto, 2015). I call for more food justice scholars to unpack the relationship between gender, race, and food insecurity, and move beyond the exclusive focus on racial and economic inequality in food justice literature. Moreover, community food organizations must understand the intersections of gender, race, and poverty, and create programs that challenge these inequities and support the diverse needs of participants. Intersectionality is critical for understanding the nuances of poverty and hunger in Canada.
Next, reflexivity is critical to social justice literature and activism. Bradley & Herrera (2016) critique food justice scholars and activists that acknowledge the existence of racism and oppression, but fail to reflect on how their own practices re-produce oppression. It is important for food scholars to consider how their research practices and publications may reproduce structures of oppression. This practice can also assist community food organizations work towards challenging inequality by ensuring organizational activities do not unintentionally perpetuate unequal power relations. This work involves continuing consideration of the extent to which the programs and services conducted by the organization meet their intended goals. I also encourage agencies to be open to learning from community members and changing programs as issues arise. The Stop’s leadership team insists that regular conversations must happen with community members to ensure that their programs meet community needs and help transform the lives of community members.

Lastly, community food justice organizations demonstrate significant potential to create transformative change. Most Canadian critical food scholarship exclusively focuses on policy recommendations to improve Canada’s social safety net and disregards the potential of community food justice organizations. For instance, literature regarding the vulnerability of low-income mothers and racialized immigrants to food insecurity advocates for systemic remedies to reduce food insecurity among these groups, such as increased social assistance payments and minimum wage rates (McIntyre et al., 2003; Tarasuk, 2001; Papan & Clow, 2015; Burgess, 2016), more subsidized housing (Tarasuk, 2001; Vahabi & Damba, 2013; Vahabi et al., 2011), government programs that subsidize the costs of health foods (Engler-Stringer, Stringer, & Haines, 2011; McIntyre et al., 2003), and the development of a new income support system in Canada (Vahabi et al., 2011). These scholars thus recommend that the federal government introduce policies that considerably redistribute wealth among Canadians to lessen national
poverty rates. While these policies are important, community-level organizations also play an important role in combating poverty. Progressive community-level organizations can better the everyday lives of marginalized individuals, help them cope with poverty, and fight gender and racial injustices. Community-level actors like The Stop also have the potential to become important voices in the fight against poverty, racism, and gender inequality. I argue that community food justice initiatives can have an impact greater than their immediate community, which will help build more equitable food and social systems and transform uneven social power relations.

5.5 Conclusion

Although there are many challenges to fighting inequality, The Stop is not shying away from attempting to address the root causes of oppression. The Stop uses food as a tool to draw attention to the social and economic issues driving hunger and poverty, which include gender and racial inequities. The magnitude of systemic social inequity is overwhelming for many community food agencies (Slocum & Cadieux, 2015; Slocum, 2006); yet, The Stop is committed to campaigning for social justice.

Understanding the disproportionate rates of food insecurity in Canada necessitates an acknowledgement of the power asymmetries embedded in Canadian social and economic systems. Most of the aforementioned literature regarding food insecurity among low-income mothers and recent racialized immigrants attributes food insecurity to an inadequate social safety net and a lack of policies and programs that help immigrants and low-income mothers succeed in Canada. Consequently, there is little attention drawn to gender and racial power relations. A food
justice lens provides a framework for analyzing how hunger is caused by entrenched systems of oppression and imagines strategies to dismantle injustices through food activism. Although food justice literature in the United States mainly highlights the intersections of race and class, this framework can easily be utilized to analyze how systemic gender inequities impact food insecurity as well.

Toronto is already a hub of food activism, which creates a strong base to engage in further food justice scholarship and action. Together, scholars and activists in Toronto can learn the nuanced ways gender, race, and hunger intersect, and imagine strategies to challenge injustices.
References


City of Toronto. (n.d.) Toronto Food Policy Council. Retrieved from https://www1.toronto.ca/wps/portal/contentonly?vgnextoid=993b044e17e32410VgnVCM10 000071d60f89RCRD.


Appendix 1: Letter of Consent – Interviews

[Date]

Dear [Name],

This letter is an invitation to participate in a research project I am conducting as part of my Master’s degree in the Department of Geography & Planning at the University of Toronto under the supervision of Professor Mollett. I would like to provide you with more information about this project and what your involvement would entail if you decide to take part.

My project explores the high rates of hunger among racialized minorities, female-headed households, and First Nations communities in Canada. To understand why these groups are disproportionately food insecure, my project analyzes patterns and discussions of hunger in Canada since the beginning of the 20th century to discover whether and how gender and race have shaped experiences of hunger.

In this study, I am interested in how different anti-hunger organizations and government agencies represent, address, and attend to hunger. I believe that because you are actively involved in anti-hunger programming, you are best suited to speak to various topics, such as the mission of your organization, its programs, challenges, and future goals.

Participation in this study is voluntary. It will involve an interview of approximately 40-60 in length to take place in a mutually agreed upon location. You may decline to answer any of the interview questions if you so wish. Further, you may decide to withdraw from this project at any time without any negative consequences by advising the researcher. With your permission, the interview will be audio recorded to facilitate collection of information, and later personally
transcribed for analysis. Shortly after the interview has been completed, I will send you a copy of the transcript to give you an opportunity to confirm the accuracy of our conversation and to add or clarify any points that you had made. If you wish, a pseudonym will be used for your name and employer organization in the thesis and publications resulting from this research. With your permission, quotations may be used. Data collected during this study will be retained until publication is complete. Only my research supervisor and myself will have access to these files. There are no known or anticipated risks to you as a participant in this project.

If you have any questions regarding this project, or would like additional information to assist you in reaching a decision about participation, please contact me at 416-697-5730 or by email at staceymurie@gmail.com. You may also contact my MA supervisor, Dr. Sharlene Mollett at the University of Toronto. Her email address is: sharlene.mollett@utoronto.

I would like to assure you that this project has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the University of Toronto Research Ethics Board.

I will provide you with access to my final thesis and a summary of findings upon completion (April 2017 expected). I hope that the results of my project will be of benefit to your organization.

I very much look forward to speaking with you and thank you in advance for your assistance in this project.

Yours Sincerely,

Stacey Murie

CONSENT FORM
By signing this consent form, you are not waiving your legal rights or releasing the investigator(s) or involved institution(s) from their legal and professional responsibilities.

I have read the information presented in the information letter about a study being conducted by Stacey Murie of the Department of Geography & Planning at the University of Toronto. I have had the opportunity to ask any questions related to this study, to receive satisfactory answers to my questions, and any additional details I wanted.

I am aware that I have the option of allowing my interview to be audio recorded to ensure an accurate recording of my responses.

I am also aware that excerpts from the interview may be included in the thesis and/or publications to come from this research, with the option of a pseudonym being used if requested.

I was informed that I may withdraw my consent at any time without penalty by advising the researcher.

With full knowledge of all foregoing, I agree, of my own free will, to participate in this study.

☐ YES  ☐ NO

I agree to have my interview audio recorded.

☐ YES  ☐ NO

I agree to have my name used in the thesis and publications that result from this research (if no is selected, a pseudonym will be used.)

☐ YES  ☐ NO
I agree to have Second Harvest’s name used in the thesis and publications that result from this research. (if no is selected, a pseudonym will be used.)

☐ YES  ☐ NO

Participant Name: ____________________________ (Please print)

Participant Signature: ____________________________

Date: ____________________________
Appendix 2: Letter of Consent – Participant Observation at The Stop

[Date]

Dear [name of Community Programs Manager],

This letter is an invitation to participate in a research project I am conducting as part of my Master’s degree in the Department of Geography & Planning at the University of Toronto under the supervision of Professor Mollett. I would like to provide you with more information about this project and what your involvement would entail if you decide to take part.

My project explores the high rates of hunger among racialized minorities, female-headed households, and First Nations communities in Canada. To understand why these groups are disproportionately food insecure, my project analyzes patterns and discussions of hunger in Canada since the Great Depression to discover whether and how gender and race have shaped experiences of hunger.

In this study, I am interested in how different anti-hunger organizations and government agencies represent, address, and attend to hunger. While volunteering at The Stop Community Food Centre, I am asking for permission to conduct participant observation. I would like to conduct participant observation and volunteer in the Drop-In, the Food Bank, and the Good Food Market. Through participant observation, I hope to observe the demographics of program users, the types of services offered, and how staff, volunteers, and participants discuss the selected food program and hunger.
Participation in this study is voluntary. I will not include any identifying information of program participants in my field notes. If you wish, a pseudonym will be used for the name of your organization in the thesis and publications resulting from this research. The Stop may decide to withdraw from this project at any time without any negative consequences by advising the researcher. Field notes will be recorded following each volunteer shift and all data collected during this study will be saved on an encrypted flashdrive. This data will be retained until publication is complete. Only my research supervisor and myself will have access to these files. There are no known or anticipated risks to your organization or program participants in this project. I would like to conduct participant observation from the beginning of July 2016 to the end of September 2016.

If you have any questions regarding this project, or would like additional information to assist you in reaching a decision about participation, please contact me at 416-697-5730 or by email at staceymurie@gmail.com. You may also contact my MA supervisor, Dr. Sharlene Mollett at the University of Toronto. Her email address is: sharlene.mollett@utoronto.

I would like to assure you that this project has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the University of Toronto Research Ethics Board.

I will provide your organization with access to my final thesis and a summary of findings upon completion (April 2017 expected). I hope that the results of my project will be of benefit to The Stop.

I very much look forward to speaking with you and thank you in advance for your consideration.

Yours Sincerely,

Stacey Murie

CONSENT FORM
By signing this consent form, you are not waiving your legal rights or releasing the investigator(s) or involved institution(s) from their legal and professional responsibilities.

______________________________________________________________________

I have read the information presented in the information letter about a study being conducted by Stacey Murie of the Department of Department of Geography & Planning at the University of Toronto. I have had the opportunity to ask any questions related to this study, to receive satisfactory answers to my questions, and any additional details I wanted.

I was informed that my organization may withdraw consent at any time without penalty by advising the researcher.

With full knowledge of all foregoing, I agree, Stacey Murie may conduct participant observation at The Stop Community Food Centre.

☐ YES  ☐ NO

I agree to have the name of the organization I work for used in the thesis and publications that result from this research (if no is selected, a pseudonym will be used.)

☐ YES  ☐ NO

Participant Name: ____________________________ (Please print)

Participant Organization: ____________________________ (Please print)

Participant Signature: ____________________________
Witness Name: ________________________________ (Please print)

Witness Signature: ______________________________

Date: ______________________________
Appendix 3: List of The Stop’s Programs

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*all information below was taken from The Stop’s website

1. Community Action Program
1a) Community Advocate Office

“The Community Advocacy Office is a peer-run project where members of our community provide information, referrals, and general assistance to fellow community members. All services are strictly confidential.

The Community Advocacy Office can help with:

- Income Supports (OW & ODSP)
- Housing
- Legal Issues
- Accessing Health Care
- Immigration, Refugee & Settlement Services
- Clothing, Furniture, etc.

Hours: 1884 Davenport; Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays, Fridays, from 11AM to 3PM” (The Stop Community Food Centre, n.d.b).

1b) Community Action Training

“Community Action Training is a two-part course, each part comprising six weekly sessions, focusing on both individual and systemic action. Community members discuss the root causes of poverty and inequality, and about ways to take action in response” (The Stop Community Food Centre, n.d.b).

1c) Bread & Bricks Davenport West Social Justice Group

“Bread & Bricks began at The Stop and is now a community-led group that builds the capacity of community members to become effective change-makers, and takes action on issues of poverty and other social, political, environmental, and economic injustices” (The Stop Community Food Centre, n.d.b).
2. Community Kitchens

“Community cooking at The Stop brings people together to learn, cook, and share nutritious, culturally-diverse, and inexpensive meals. We offer a range of cooking groups, all designed to build food skills, reduce social isolation, and increase access to healthy food, while connecting people to other resources, including health, legal, and settlement services” (The Stop Community Food Centre, n.d.c).

2a) Men’s Cooking Group

“The Men’s Cooking Group is a community kitchen that provides a warm, inclusive space where men of all ages and skill levels can connect with food and each other. Each week, group members prepare a meal and learn about knife skills, kitchen safety, meat-handling, budgeting, and planning healthy meals.

Hours: 1884 Davenport Road; Mondays; 2:30PM to 5:30PM” (The Stop Community Food Centre, n.d.c).

2b) Sabor Latino
“Sabor Latino is a community kitchen that brings together people with a shared interest in the cultures and cuisines of Latin America. Music, traditional dancing, and storytelling add a unique cultural dimension to the program.

The meal preparation and conversation takes place in Spanish, but participants with all levels of proficiency in the Spanish language are welcome.

Hours: 1884 Davenport Road; 1st and 3rd Thursday of each month; 3:30PM to 7:30PM” (The Stop Community Food Centre, n.d.c).

3. Drop-In

“The Stop’s Drop-in is a safe and welcoming place where anyone, regardless of where they live, can enjoy nutritious food, meet others, and access information on social issues and community resources. Every month, meals highlight a seasonal vegetable – our Food of the Month – which is also featured in Food Bank hampers.

The Drop-in also offers services in partnership with other agencies, including a weekly ID clinic, housing and legal services, settlement services, and dietetic counseling. We also offer workshops on tenants’ and employment rights, movie screenings and arts & crafts, and demonstrations on how to make low-cost, healthy, and delicious meals.

Hours: 1884 Davenport Road; Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays, Fridays; 9AM to 3PM. Breakfast served from 9AM to 10AM; lunch served from 12PM to 1PM” (The Stop Community Food Centre, n.d.d).

4. Food Bank

“Our Food Bank provides a three-day supply of food, once per month, to individuals and families who live in The Stop’s catchment area (north of Bloor, south of St. Clair West, west of
Dovercourt, east of Runnymede). Identification verifying name and address is required to register with the Food Bank.

Through creative partnerships and the generous support of our donors, our Food Bank hampers feature fresh produce, milk, eggs, and whole grains. Every month, hampers highlight a seasonal vegetable – our Food of the Month – and give tips and examples on how to use and prepare it through food demonstrations and recipes.

Hours: 1884 Davenport Road; Mondays, Thursdays, Fridays; 11AM to 3PM” (The Stop Community Food Centre, n.d.e).

5. Healthy Beginnings and Family Support

5a) Healthy Beginnings

“Healthy Beginnings is a weekly pre- and post-natal nutrition and support program for pregnant women living in the catchment area (north of Bloor, south of Rowntree, west of Yonge, and east of Jane).

Healthy Beginnings offers information, education, and support through group workshops as well as opportunities to talk individually with the team of nurses, dieticians, settlement workers, counsellor/therapist, early years, and family support workers. In addition, the program provides a healthy lunch, food hamper, food vouchers, and free childcare in a caring and welcoming environment.

Healthy Beginnings is a Canada Prenatal Nutrition Program supported by The Public Health Agency of Canada…

Hours: Wednesdays, 10AM to 1PM (lunch at 12PM)
*program can be joined at any stage of pregnancy and participants can stay six (6) months post-natally*” (The Stop Community Food Centre, n.d.h).

5b) Beyond Healthy Beginnings

“A program to support the social, emotional, and physical health and well-being of families.

**FOOD FAMILY FUN at The Stop**

A program for parents in the community to connect with each other over good food.

Location: 1884 Davenport Road

Hours: Wednesdays, 1PM to 3PM (resuming Wednesday, April 5th)

*parents are welcome from all backgrounds with young children; childcare available for registered participants*

**Community Family Support**

The Family Support Program provides support for families with young children and focuses on building community connections.

Family Support Workers provide individual support for parents in order to increase access to community resources and promote the health and well-being of the whole family.

Location: 1884 Davenport Road

Hours: Wednesdays, 1PM to 2PM, and Thursdays, 9:30AM to 11AM

*families are welcome from all backgrounds with young children” (The Stop Community Food Centre, n.d.h).*
6. Markets and Bake Ovens

6a) The Stop’s Farmers’ Market at Artscape Wychwood Barns

“Visit The Stop’s Farmers’ Market every Saturday from 8AM to 12:30PM at the historic Artscape Wychwood Barns at St. Clair & Christie. Featuring local, sustainable, organic, and artisanal products and great music, the market has become a neighbourhood meeting place, attracting more than 1,500 people each week and providing an important source of income for local farmers. (Plus, our Farmers’ Market is open YEAR-ROUND, so you can look forward to visiting us at Wychwood Barns in the fall and winter months, too!)

The Stop’s Market Cafe is open during the same hours as the Farmers’ Market and serves healthy and delicious breakfasts, soups, sandwiches, and desserts. Look for it in The Stop’s Green Barn (Barn 4) every Saturday!

Hours: Wychwood Barns, 601 Christie St.; 8AM to 12:30PM” (The Stop Community Food Centre, n.d.i).

6b) The Stop’s Good Food Market

“Our weekly, affordable fresh food market brings neighbours together and creates a bustling, friendly public space.

Hours: 1884 Davenport Road; Tuesdays, from 11AM to 3PM” (The Stop Community Food Centre, n.d.i).

7. Urban Agriculture Programs

“Our urban agriculture programs are anchored at The Stop’s Green Barn at Artscape Wychwood Barns (601 Christie Street).

These include community gardens, a greenhouse & compost demonstration, a sheltered garden, and our Global Roots Garden at The Stop’s Green Barn.
Gardening at our 8,000-square foot community garden at Earlscourt Park is not just about growing healthy food – it’s about building skills, confidence, connections, and sparking conversations about where and how food is produced.

We partner with the Sagatay program from Na-Me-Res (Native Men’s Residence) to animate the garden at Hillcrest Park, which includes the Mashkikii;aki’ing (Medicine Earth) Medicine Wheel Garden. This partnership provides the men of the Apaenmowineen (Having Confidence in Oneself) program the opportunity to share teachings and learn more about plant medicine, gardening, and healthy living.

All of these sites yield over 4,000lbs of fresh, organic produce for our programs every year, and engage community members of all ages in learning how to use environmentally-friendly methods to grow fresh, local produce year-round” (The Stop Community Food Centre, n.d.j).

7a) Greenhouse & Compost Demonstration Centre

“The Stop’s Green Barn at Artscape Wychwood Barns is a heritage building, redesigned to Gold LEED environmental standards.

The Green Barn houses a 3,000-square-foot state-of-the-art greenhouse in which we grow a variety of produce. The food we grow year-round is split between our programs, our volunteers, and our Food Bank.

Our compost demonstration centre produces much-needed compost for our greenhouse. Large composting units and vermicomposting bins serve a triple purpose – to divert food waste from landfill and turn it into a rich growing medium for greenhouse plants, and to teach the value and methods of composting to visitors. The worms in the composting bins are popular with kids and are great ambassadors for the world of biodiversity” (The Stop Community Food Centre, n.d.g).

7b) Global Roots Garden

“The eight Global Roots plots at The Stop’s Green Barn are each devoted to particular ethnic communities with large populations in Toronto – Chinese, Tibetan, South Asian, Somali, Italian, Latin American, Polish, and Filipino.
Each plot grows a diverse range of vegetables and herbs, and is tended by seniors and youth, many of whom were connected to us through our partnership with Culturelink, a newcomer settlement group. Gardeners meet once a week to tend the plots, socialize, and cook food. Bringing together seniors, many of whom were food producers in their native countries, with youth who don’t necessarily have any experience gardening makes for an important – and fun – inter-generational exchange of knowledge” (The Stop Community Food Centre, n.d.f).

8. **Youth Engagement**

“The Stop remains committed to providing opportunities for children and youth to grow, cook, and share healthy food, and to understand sustainable food systems and the root causes of hunger and poverty from a social justice perspective.

We are working to engage children and youth across all of our food access and community-building programs” (The Stop Community Food Centre, n.d.k).