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Low-Income Mothers and Their Pursuit of Food in a Rural Massachusetts County: A Qualitative Study from a Feminist Point of View

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**LOW-INCOME MOTHERS AND THEIR PURSUIT OF FOOD SECURITY:
A QUALITATIVE STUDY THROUGH A FEMINIST FRAMEWORK**

A Thesis Presented
By
ELISE C. GIFFORD

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ABSTRACT

LOW-INCOME MOTHERS AND THEIR PURSUIT OF FOOD SECURITY: A QUALITATIVE STUDY THROUGH A FEMINIST FRAMEWORK

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This study reintroduces the disciplines of feminism and planning with the hope that planners will incorporate aspects of feminist theory, which has historically been overlooked by traditional western planning, into practice and subsequently better serve their communities. In an effort to demonstrate how a feminist approach can be useful to planners, this qualitative study rooted in grounded theory aims to develop an accurate portrayal of the food insecurity of low-income mothers in a rural Massachusetts county. Through an analysis of 33 interviews from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA)-funded *Rural Families Speak* project, categories of hunger, participant attitudes and opinions of different types of food assistance, and breaking stereotypes emerged. From these categories, the theory of tradition and the norm shed light on the food situations of participants and illuminated the influence of social expectations and subsequent participant reactions to such. By delving deep into the interviews and gaining a more complete understanding of the experiences of participants, planners are better equipped to function as advocates. Further implications for planners are discussed.

Keywords: food security, feminism, planning, grounded theory, low-income mothers

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

EATING...

*is more than deciding
what and when to eat.*

FEEDING...

*is more than choosing food
and getting it into a child.*

EATING AND FEEDING...

*reflect people's histories,
their relationships with themselves
and with others.*

*Feeding a child is about the connection
between parent and child,*

*about trusting or controlling,
about providing or neglecting,
about accepting or rejecting.*

*Eating is about the connection
with our bodies
and with life itself.*

*Eating can be joyful,
full of zest and vitality.*

*Or it can be fearful,
bound by control and avoidance*

Ellyn Satter (2005).

1.1 Background

It may appear on the surface that low-income people should have plenty of food for themselves and their families with the existence of resources such as SNAP, WIC, the National School Lunch Program, and food pantries. However, the realities and obstacles of daily life make accessing these options more complex than one might expect from a primarily middle-class perspective. Those who may make such judgments have not likely experienced such impoverishment and can in no way relate to the experiences of these low-income individuals. For example, it is a common assumption that transferring food stamp (SNAP) benefits onto an EBT card erases the stigma associated with this type of assistance, but the cashier and the beneficiary still know, and profound shame still ensues. Many of us may assume low-income individuals are lazy and squander the few benefits they receive, while in reality many are simply trying to fulfill their role as parents and provide not just *enough* food to their children, but nutritious, quality food. This study is important for explaining this disconnect between what we as a society tend to expect from our low-income citizens and what they actually experience on a daily basis, and what planners and policymakers may have the capacity to do in support of food security.

1.2 Connection to Planning

According to Blumenberg et. al. (2007), “the rise of social planning made it possible to conceptualize women both as subjects of planning and as social actors within it” (114). However, women are often left out of the conversation in the field of planning, despite multiple feminist contributions to the field. Feminist theory has the potential to contribute to the field of planning in the following ways: by raising consciousness of gender as well as

other differences, by avoiding unsuitable expert/professional privilege, and by encouraging equitable citizen participation (Snyder 1995). As Rahder and O'Neill (1998) so eloquently put it, "Some of us also assume that familiarity with theories of feminist social change equips students with the potential to foster social change from within the planning profession" (247).

Furthermore, food security is an issue of equity in planning that is disproportionately experienced by women, especially when it comes to rural, low-income female heads-of-household. This thesis will aim to reintroduce the experiences and concerns of women into the academic and professional/policy realm of planning via an analysis of food security.

Beyond the professional field of planning itself, feminist theory is also severely underrepresented in planning education core curricula. Academic publications on the subjects of feminism, women, or gender are waning. In the 1990s, these made up 3-4% of papers presented to the Association of Collegiate Schools of Planning. In 2002 and 2003, the representation decreased to 1% (Rahder and Altilia 2004). Part of the problem may be that there is no journal that specifically addresses gender and planning, which poses a problem in a field based heavily in journal articles (Blumenberg et al 2007). Therefore, it is clear that there is currently a dire need for such publications in the field of planning.

1.3 Thesis Purpose

The purpose of this research is to reacquaint feminist theory with the field of planning and vice versa. Feminism has many tools and techniques that may be potentially useful to planners, though its values have to date been consistently overlooked or underappreciated. This thesis will try to show how feminist planning theory coupled with qualitative research methods can reveal accurate and useful knowledge for planners.

1.4 Research Questions

A multitude of core questions evolved throughout the research process, though I began with:

-Why has gender largely been excluded generally in the general consideration of equity in planning, and specifically in the realm of food security?

-In what ways and to what extent does gender status serve as a barrier to achieving and maintaining food security; and indicate structural barriers to food security?

-How do socially constructed gender roles/perceptions reinforce and perpetuate disparities that exist?

-What roles can planners play in ensuring food security while both cooperating with existing social and institutional networks and introducing and/or encouraging new organizations?

About halfway through the process while taking a qualitative research class, I gravitated towards more tangible questions in order to capture an accurate depiction of the personal experiences of rural female heads of household in regards to food (in)security:

-How do they perceive their own situation?

-How do rural female heads of household feel about their own situations in regards to level of food (in)security?

While keeping all of these questions in mind for the duration of this thesis, the most provocative question became:

-What do social and cultural traditions have to do with these women's relationships with food?

1.5 Goals and Objectives

The overarching goal of this thesis is to demonstrate how feminist thought can be integrally applied to the field of planning, subsequently changing the way planners consider the needs and wants of community members. This study does so via the following, more specific, goals:

1. Identify barriers that low-income mothers experience with regard to food security.
2. Address the relative neglect or disregard of the significance of gender disparities in planning policies.
3. Develop a practical approach for planners to address women's needs within the realm of food security.

These goals listed are met through meeting the following specific objectives:

1. Describe and analyze the current food security situation of low-income mothers in a rural Massachusetts county via the *Rural Families Speak* dataset.
2. Incorporate a more robust discussion of feminist theory as it relates to planning into both my literature review and analysis.
3. Offer recommendations for planning practitioners to better incorporate the experiences and concerns of women into strategies to achieve more sufficient food access as well as equitable attention to their needs in general.

1.6 Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Theoretically, I assume that planning scholars and professionals will be open to the feminist approach cited in this thesis. There are few existing tools, techniques, or databases

specifically relevant to the feminist category of planning, and even fewer relevant to feminist planning and the study of food systems. The goal of this study, in part, is to strengthen connections at different levels: planner knowledge of food security, food security and gender roles/relations, and the theoretical integration of planning and feminism.

In terms of logistical and technical limitations, IRB safeguards prevented unrestricted access to the interview data; my work with the data set was limited to a secure computer. While limited accessibility did not completely impede my research, I did not utilize the intended MAXQDA software to its greatest extent. MAXQDA was being utilized as a storage program, though it has the potential to be an extremely powerful qualitative tool. It is important to recognize this since it influenced the research process and the presentation of findings.

The relatively small number of participants included in this research may be considered a limitation, though this decision was made as a conscious delimitation. What I set aside in breadth, I gained in greater depth. It is not in line with feminist theory to attempt to over generalize the experiences of those being studied. Instead, this research attempts to demonstrate how a better understanding of a population can be achieved through qualitative methods. The sample size was kept intimate in order to capture the richness of the data, to pick up on nuances, and to highlight the complexity of the participants' situations.

1.7 Organization of Thesis

This thesis is organized into seven chapters. Chapter 2 reviews feminist literature as it relates to planning, establishing my approach. This is followed by a description of the study context (Chapter 3), an overview of my methodology (Chapter 4), a detailed account of

my findings with accompanying discussion (Chapter 5), and further analysis (Chapter 6).

This thesis concludes with a discussion of implications for planners in Chapter 7.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This two-part review of the literature makes comparisons between feminist planning and traditional planning, as well as connections between feminist theory and food security. It focuses on the insufficiency of dichotomous perspectives typically used in traditional planning and the need to accept ways of knowing other than that of solely scientific, technical, and expert. Applying feminist theory to food security provides a different rights-based perspective, one that planners may not have considered. The literature informs the research method through the choice of interviews as data so as to obtain a primary perspective, as well as the mode of analysis chosen: qualitative analysis and grounded theory.

2.1 Feminist Planning and Traditional Planning

2.1.1 “Women And...” Body of Literature

Women’s experiences are most often found in what has been deemed the “women and ...” body of work, which began in the 1980s (Snyder 1995, Sandercock and Forsyth 1992a). In 1992 Hooper wrote that although postmodern feminist critiques have engaged the field of planning, they “remain at the add-on stage, and theoretical reconstruction lags behind” (71). Hooper (1992) contends that although planning principles have evolved over the years, planning as a discipline has consistently fostered an atmosphere of exclusion of others, specifically of non-white and non-male individuals. Although the positions and experiences of others may not have been ignored outright, there has certainly been a failure to integrate the situations of women into planning theory and practice. A major flaw of

planning's evolution is that it "has been colored by the male palette, seen by an eye that reflects only a narrow band of the spectrum" (Hooper 1992, 66).

A strength of the "women and..." research is its breadth, and a weakness is its (lack of) depth. The research has focused on myriad aspects of planning such as land use, zoning, housing, economic development, transportation, and urban design, all of which had previously been studied without gender analysis (Snyder 1995). This variety of gender-infused planning-related avenues is certainly beneficial as a first step. A growing body of literature in planning that explicitly considers the experiences of women and uses a gendered lens in analysis is certainly a sign of improvement. However, when it comes to the depth of the research, the body of literature remains limited. Hendler (2005) points out that, "while feminist-informed literature on such things as housing can easily be found...locating material on the ethical ideals feminist planners would want to advocate is much more difficult" (53). This is one example of the adequate breadth/inadequate depth of the research. The more theoretical aspects of the feminist literature in planning are lacking.

Adding gendered experiences into preexisting research is valuable in that it results in greater awareness of gender as a legitimate lens of analysis. In fact, such research remains valuable to this day, since little headway has been made in integrating gendered analyses into planning theory. While it is important not to denigrate the headway that has been made thus far, the limited amount of recent publications on the subject has influenced this review of literature. Readers will notice that the bulk of feminist planning literature was conducted in the 1990s, and few breakthroughs have been made since, limiting the span of my review. On its face this thesis will contribute to the "women and..." body of literature with an ultimate

goal of exploring why in 2011 gender issues often remain afterthoughts and add-ons to existing studies rather than the central focus as Snyder in 1995.

2.1.2 Assumptions and Limitations of Traditional Western Planning Theory

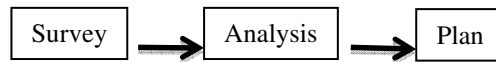
Despite the fairly recent growth of the “women and...” body of literature, the gender perspective has largely remained hidden throughout the history of planning. Planning’s roots in modernism took a universalizing approach which did little to celebrate variation and diversity of groups (Fainstein & Servon 2005). This focus on standardization and streamlining has persisted as a core component of the planning discipline.

The founding of the American City Planning Institute in 1917 prompted a focus on scientific and technical knowledge, which created planning experts and in turn resulted in the professionalization of planning. Harvey S. Perloff’s seminal publication, *Education for Planning: City, State, and Regional* (1957) defined planning as, “a rational and scientific discipline based in the social sciences” (Hooper 1992, 55). Perloff also established the scientific method of planning as, “a number of closely integrated steps, from the analysis of problems, the setting of broad objectives and the survey of available resources, to the establishment of specific operating targets, and through the various stages until results can be checked against the targets established and needed adjustments proposed” (Hooper 1992, 56). Efficiency became valued over meaningful social reform. “Public choice” was/is achieved by experts through these planning processes.

Caroline Moser (1993) highlights two traditional planning methodologies: the blueprint plan and the rational comprehensive planning. Developed in the 1890s, the

blueprint plan (see Figure 2.1) is rarely used anymore, deemed too authoritarian with its assumed consensus on values (one public interest.)

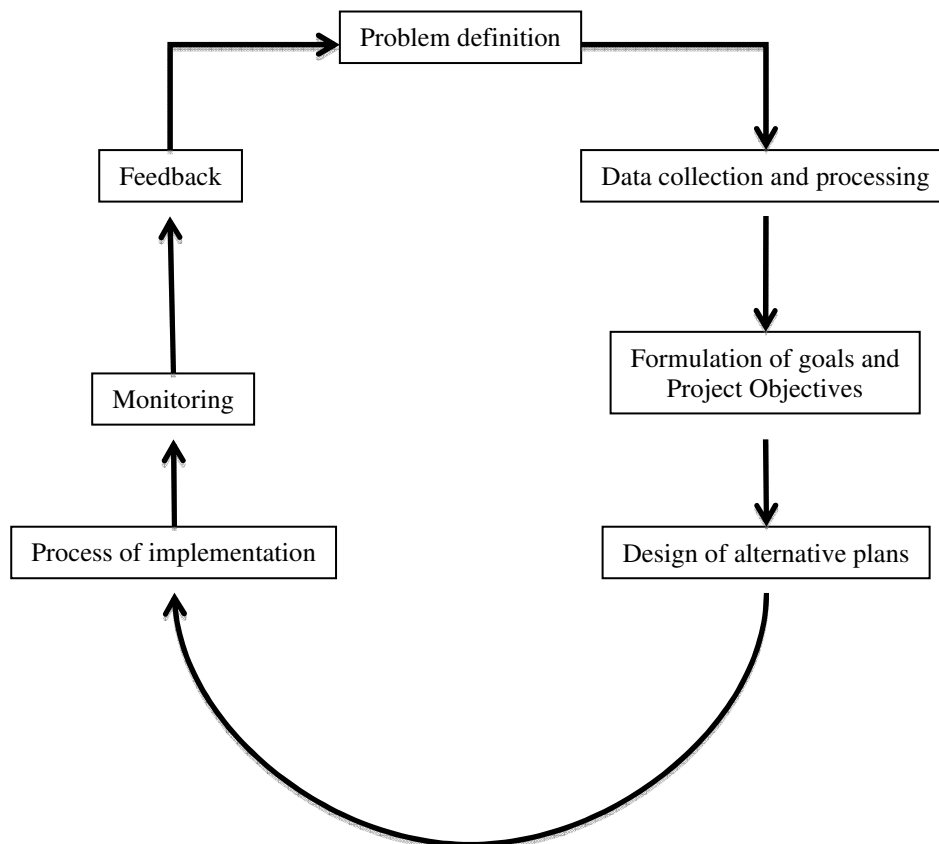
Figure 2.1: The Blueprint Plan



Source: (Moser 1993, 84)

The rational comprehensive plan (see Figure 2.2) is widely used to this day, although critics claim it lacks content and context (Moser 1993). The plan outlines procedures with no regard for the subject of analysis or its historical context.

Figure 2.2: The Rational Comprehensive Plan



Source: (Moser 1993, 85)

This plan, therefore, separates facts from values (Moser 1993). This planning process is based in positivist philosophy, which separates knowledge and politics, removes power relations from social problems, and distances the knower from that which is known (Hooper 1992).

Furthermore, Moser (1993) has outlined three generalized assumptions of Western planning theory:

(1) that the household consists of a nuclear family of husband, wife and two or three children;

(2) that the household functions as a socio-economic unit within which there is equal control over resources and power of decision-making between all adult members in matters influencing the household's livelihood;

(3) that within the household there is a clear division of labour based on gender.

The man of the family, as the 'breadwinner', is primarily involved in productive work outside the home, while the woman as the housewife and 'homemaker' takes overall responsibility for the reproductive and domestic work involved in the organization of the household (15-16).

These assumptions, although dated, provide historical context and remain relevant to this day. They demonstrate the theoretical constraints that have existed in planning throughout history. When a discipline is so limited in its conception of an integral unit of analysis, the household, one wonders how effective relevant policies and procedures can be. This normalization of the "man-headed nuclear family" (Moser 1987, 25) serves to marginalize the situations of female-headed households. If assumptions such as these are not confronted, they perpetuate inequality. Awareness of this tendency to marginalize female-headed

households leads one to ask questions that bring women and their distinctive needs into view (Abramovitz 1996).

2.1.3 Characteristics of Feminist Planning Theory

Penny Van Esterik (1999a) succinctly defines feminism as, “theories and actions that aim to end discrimination on the basis of gender, race, class, and ethnicity” (158). She reinforces this definition with four feminist principles: theory and practice are inseparable, the personal is political, diversity and differences are resources: there is no one truth, and nonoppositional nondualistic thinking is basic to theory (Van Esterik 1999a, 158). These core components will be described in more detail in the coming pages.

Sandercock and Forsyth (1992a) brought components of feminist methodology into planning, which originated from the work of sociologists:

- (1) to continuously and reflexively attend to the significance of gender and gender asymmetry as a basic feature of all social life, including the conduct of research;*
- (2) to accept the centrality of consciousness raising as a specific methodological tool and as a general orientation, or way of seeing;*
- (3) to challenge the norm of objectivity that assumes that the subject and object of research can be separated and that personal experiences are unscientific;*
- (4) to be concerned with the ethical implications of feminist research and recognition of the exploitation of women as objects of knowledge;*
- (5) to focus on the empowerment of women and transformation of patriarchal social institutions through research (52).*

From these facets, the following concepts will be addressed in greater depth in the coming sections: that feminist thought allows for a broader range of what constitutes valid knowledge, and that the current use of hierarchical dichotomies is insufficient.

By definition, feminist theorists oppose the dominant Western tradition. Hooper (1992) recounts that in *Transforming Knowledge* (1990), Elizabeth Minnich identified a root problem of patriarchal thought: that a particular group is taken to be the norm, the ideal. In other words, the flaw is the idea that the male experience is considered the only one of value or significance. Four subsequent conceptual errors that result in an incomplete picture include faulty generalization, circular reasoning, mystified concepts, and partial knowledge (Hooper 1992). This way of thinking is in essence, “discarding one-half of humanity’s experiences and interpretations of reality” (Hooper 1992, 52).

Barbara Hooper (1992) calls for an exploration of the “rich complexity of differences,” (72) which will result in the advancement of more complete knowledge and subsequent action. In other words, planning must confront and embrace the ambiguity of the human experience in order to be more effective in practical application. According to Hooper (1992), feminism provides a way to explore the following questions: “What is knowledge, who defines it, how does it relate to power?” (72). My own questions have been identified in the previous section and will be further reflected on in the conclusion of this thesis. Feminist theory is an encompassing, inclusive approach; concepts weave in and out and occur simultaneously, therefore it is unrealistic to separate the various concepts of the relevant literature as mutually exclusive.

2.1.4 Knowledge

Sandercock and Forsyth (1992b) suggest that the distinction between feminist theory and planning theory is one of epistemology. Feminist epistemology dates back to the early 1400s in France with *The Book of the City of Ladies* by Christine de Pizan. In this groundbreaking volume, Pizan denounced the construction of an objective knowledge and truth and held that women are not naturally males' subordinates (Hooper 1992).

Epistemological thinking centers around knowledge and asks the following questions: "who can be a 'knower', what tests beliefs must pass in order to be validated as knowledge, what kinds of things can be known, the nature of objectivity, the appropriate relationship between the researcher and his or her subjects, and what should be the purpose of the pursuit of knowledge?" (Hooper 1992, 45). Epistemological questions, which often remain unasked, help in confronting assumptions that are inherent in traditional planning theory, especially in terms of the concept of knowledge.

Feminist epistemological work, a response to the dominant positivist epistemology of planning, can be classified into three groups: feminist empiricism, feminist standpoint, and feminist postmodern theories (Snyder 1995; originally Sandra Harding's classification).

Feminist empiricism challenges positivist 'objectivity' and challenges the belief that social position corrupts science and invalidates research. It acknowledges the social context of research and the undeniable relationship that exists between subject and object. Unlike feminist empiricists, feminist standpoint theorists completely reject purportedly neutral 'scientific method'. Instead, they argue that the "identity of the knower inherently shapes the knowledge" (Snyder 1995, 94) and that recognition of this may even translate into a clearer, more 'grounded' view of reality.

Feminist postmodernists claim that, “there is no one ‘women’s’ viewpoint” (Snyder 1995, 95) and that universal knowledge is not possible, since all knowledge requires context. Reflexivity, the critical examination not just of those being studied, but also of the researcher, is a critical component of the research process. Feminist postmodernists also contend that, “by placing these concepts in opposition, we miss their linkages; by conceiving of each pair in a hierarchical relationship, we inappropriately privilege one half; and by creating a firm division, we exclude the possibility of an integrated whole or even of overlap” (Snyder 1995, 96). Feminist postmodernists dispute the concept of dichotomies, a discussion of which is forthcoming. These various standpoints, though different in content, challenge researchers to go beyond simply adding gender after the fact and to consider a feminist lens in addressing the core values, processes, and methodologies of planning (Snyder 1995).

Sandercock and Forsyth (1992b) extend the theoretical contributions of feminism to planning practice, specifically within the context of public participation. Feminist theory allows for non-traditional, subject-related ways of knowing, i.e. talking, listening, intuition, experiential knowledge, and symbolic forms such as art or music composition, all of which foster an innovative mode of communication that has the potential to reach broader audiences and expand representation. By rediscovering the legitimacy of such knowledge, planning can revive the inherent autobiographical and gendered nature of knowledge.

Sandercock and Forsyth (1992b) summarize this discussion of knowledge with the feminist-inspired concept of connected knowing:

Feminists argue for ‘connected knowing’, by which we mean something like ‘the head and the heart’, reason and passion, rationality and politics: in other words, an effort to transcend the dualisms and exclusions of positivist epistemology and to discuss the

politics of theory and method and the origins and implications of our theoretical hierarchies (46).

This statement offers a thematic transition from the discussion of knowledge bases to that of conceptual dichotomy.

2.1.5 Dichotomy

Though there has already been mention of the feminist objection to dichotomous concepts, concrete examples may help to more effectively illustrate this notion. Dating back to the late 1920s, feminists have challenged characteristics of industrial capitalism. At the heart of this debate were “the physical separation of household space from public space, and the economic separation of the domestic economy from the political economy” (Hooper 1992, 54). An opposition to dichotomous relationships is ingrained in feminist critiques of planning. Also consider the tendency of traditional planning to place knowledge and experience, theory and practice, and public and private in opposition. As previously cited, this type of organization only perpetuates divisions and fails to encourage connections.

2.1.5.1 Knowledge/Experience

Too often the lived experiences of the public are discounted due to the judgment that this form of knowledge is tainted by emotion and personal bias. The preference for ‘rational’ knowledge and objectivity is characteristic of traditional planning methods. Rahder and O’Neill (1998) contend that women have different ways of knowing, and this may contribute to their marginalized status in the field of planning. Feminist researcher, Snyder (1995) points out that, “in this framework, the public interest cannot be legitimately determined by the citizenry, but only by experts for them” (101). The result of this narrow view of what are

considered acceptable sources of knowledge is the misrepresentation and exclusion of marginalized citizens, those who should be the focus of planners. It goes against the goal of planning *with* populations, not just *for* them.

Hendler's (2005) discussion of professions and non-professions ties into the dichotomous aspect of knowledge. Planning is generally classified as a profession; professional work implies moral intent, is more highly valued, requires higher education, and is generally paternalistic. The feminist commentary of this well-regarded view of planning as a profession, as opposed to a non-profession, encompasses the concept of expert knowledge driving a wedge between the planner and his or her clients/constituencies.

2.1.5.2 Theory/Practice

Although many planners maintain ideals of equity, these are often lost in practice. Feminists call for the legitimizing of reflexivity, which poses a threat to planning, since planners are often encouraged to be the unbiased authority figure. However, "the lack of a consciously political framework for practice does not mean that practice is not political" (Snyder 1995, 99). Underlying values exist whether planners choose to acknowledge them or not. Feminist theorists argue that it is in the best interest of objectivity to confront the biases head-on. This realization of the reflexive nature of theory and practice would allow for planning theory and practice to better inform and condition one another (Snyder 1995).

2.1.5.3 Public/Private

The division of public and private realms is encoded in land-use planning. This historical separation has marginalized women's issues by confining the concerns of women

to the more closed-off private realm. Blumenberg et. al. (2007) elaborate that, “women’s primary responsibility for the household enables the spatial separation between home and workplace, and this separation, in turn, reinforced women’s subordinate roles to men” (113). Dolores Hayden (1980) further strengthened this argument by painting the following picture,

The male worker would return from his day in the factory or office to a private domestic environment, secluded from the tense world of work in an industrial city characterized by environmental pollution, social degradation, and personal alienation. He would enter a serene dwelling whose physical and emotional maintenance would be the duty of his wife. Thus the private suburban house was the stage set for the effective sexual division of labor (172).

Hayden’s description not only outlines the historical influence of public and private separation, but it also alludes to the implications this has on the current state of affairs for women planners and women’s issues in planning. At this point it is important to note the thirty-year span in relevant literature on feminist theory; so much has changed since 1980, but much is still the same.

Roy’s (2001) identification of “the public” as a central concept in planning further unpacks the dichotomous relationship of public/private. By considering this concept through a feminist lens, Roy (2001) challenges planners to identify privilege and exclusion, to not take the term for granted, and to “interrogate the social construction of the public” (118). This challenge is not meant to undermine planning’s concept of the public; “it is instead intended in a seemingly paradoxical spirit: that the constant questioning of the *ideal* of the public will strengthen the everyday *idea* of the public” (Roy 2001, 122). Roy suggests that there is fluidity to definitions of concepts and that putting one extreme against the other contributes neither to better understanding nor better practice.

Generally within traditional planning, citizen participation is based on pluralism, where diverse individuals voice their concerns, which are then synthesized into a resolution of differences. The feminist critique of pluralism is that differences should be celebrated (at least acknowledged) rather than combined. Allowing for a wider range of voices would help close the gap between the public and private realms (Snyder 1995).

2.1.6 Summary of Feminist and Traditional Planning

Incorporating gender into analysis of planning issues enables planners to expand the questions they ask and to subsequently take on a new perspective (Fainstein & Servon 2005). Although a pure feminist planning approach would likely be deemed controversial, a feminist viewpoint furthering a gendered perspective would bring planners beyond the limits of purely scientific and technical knowledge (Sandercock and Forsyth 1992a).

Hendler (2005) provides the arguably most complete vision with her synthesis of literature on feminist approaches to professional practice, planning practice in this instance, and lists tenets such as: “ending patriarchy; empowering individuals and groups; focusing on process; emphasizing diversity, interconnections and interdependencies; connecting theory and practice; and validating women’s ways of knowing” (56).

2.2 Feminist Planning and Food Security

2.2.1 Introduction

Up to this point, the conversation has been based solely on a comprehensive review of feminist planning literature, mainly to establish a baseline understanding of my theoretical approach. I propose that food security can be a vehicle through which planning transcends

dichotomous hierarchies, as well as a method of incorporating feminist thought into the planning discipline.

Penny Van Esterik (1999b) offers an explanation of the gendered nature of food security:

Women's special relationship with food is culturally constructed and not a natural division of labor. Women's identity and sense of self is often based on their ability to feed their families and others; food insecurity denies them this right. Thus the interpretation of food as a human right requires that food issues be analyzed from a gender perspective (225).

Despite the clarity of this narrative describing the connection, food and feminism within the context of the planning discipline is lacking a substantial supporting body of literature.

There is an aversion for many women scholars to participate in food studies for fear of reinforcing the association between food and the private, domestic realm (Procida 2004). Indeed, a great deal of effort has revolved around “setting straight the public record on women’s achievements” (Avakian and Haber 2005, 6), which has left few resources to explore the inherent connections between feminist thought, food security, and planning. In the preface of their compilation, *From Betty Crocker to Feminist Food Studies: Critical Perspectives on Women and Food*, Arlene Avakian and Barbara Haber (2005) further convey this aversion as they recount how a collection of cookbooks were to be excluded from the Schlesinger Library at Harvard University’s Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Studies. During the 1970s, cookbooks were seen as an element of women’s oppression, rather than as documents of women’s history. The field of food studies has since become more mainstream and is seen as a valuable way to study cultures and interpersonal relations, although much of

the food studies literature has disregarded gender, “despite women’s centrality to food practices” (Avakian and Haber, 2005 viii). Avakian and Haber (2005) believe that food offers a way to study the complex social identities of women and that scholars are currently “beginning to map the terrain of what we may now call feminist food studies” (Avakian & Haber, 2005 ix). Indeed, in the past decade, nearly twenty books on women and food have been published, along with numerous scholarly articles. The successful establishment of a body of literature on feminist food studies generates optimism for its integration into the planning discipline. The remainder of this chapter highlights opportunities for planners to incorporate feminist theory into their work on food security issues.

2.2.2 Dichotomy

The aforementioned concept of dichotomies most closely relates to gender-conscious considerations of food. According to Penny Van Esterik (1999b),

Focusing on food practices reminds us that ethnocentric oppositions, such as production and reproduction, public and private, and other such inappropriate dichotomies are a Western legacy of blinkered binary thinking. Food practices entail both productive and reproductive work, public and private spaces, and are part of both the formal and informal economy (230).

A dichotomized view of food has the effect of pushing women’s concerns into the background. As Bellows (2003) points out, food work, which globally is overwhelmingly performed by women, is “spatially segregated in the ‘private sphere,’” emphasizing the spatial component of marginalization (252). Kenney (2008) notes that in United States

households, the responsibility to feed the family lies with women, and this multifaceted duty includes shopping, cooking, serving, and cleaning up after the meal.

Carney (2010) argues that women are disproportionately affected by the global-industrial food system and experience subordination in various domains of food work. In this light, Wekerle (2004) addresses the dichotomy of local/global (as does Bellows (2003)) within the context of food systems and highlights the *glocal* movement that exists to bridge that division, as well as to validate local knowledge through “bottom-up” food initiatives. This is one example of how feminist influence can be seamlessly incorporated into food systems planning practice.

2.2.3 Food as a Human Right

According to Wekerle (2004), the food security movement began with a focus on emergency food services, although recently “there has been a transition to a focus on the right to food as a component of a more democratic and just society and, most recently, a reframing as food justice movements” (378). With this shift in focus, she proposes a terminology change from food security to food justice.

Van Esterik (1999b) suggests that in order to reintroduce gender into food security, consideration should be given to the differences among the right to be fed, the right to food, and the right to feed. She claims that the right to be fed is “passive and patronizing”, that the right to food draws “attention to food and nutrients as products”, and that the right to feed suggests “active agency” (228). It is this third right that best illuminates women’s potential relationship with food. However, there is some disagreement between Van Esterik’s proposed organization and that of Bellows (2003), whose research on food violences (hunger,

malnutrition, and poisoning) suggests that, “a right to food should protect the interests of both ‘eaters’ as a universal group and ‘feeders’ as a subset of them” (251).

While there may not be consensus on considering food as a human right, it remains an interesting way of looking at a phenomenon in need of further study. This is an example of how a feminist approach to planning challenges planners to consider the familiar (food security) in a different way.

2.2.4 Conclusion

The body of research on feminist planning and food is quite limited, though there are certainly some promising theories and findings presented in the existing literature. Two research examples from Canada closely relate in subject matter and method to this thesis. Tarasuk and Maclean (1990) conducted an ethnographic study of the food problems of low-income single mothers that resulted in a thick description (Geertz 1973) of situations and strategies, which was in line with the ethnographic pursuit of understanding the context of food-related decisions in low-income households. Additionally, research by Hamelin et al (2002) was conducted to gain a first hand understanding of household food insecurity in Quebec. A thick description was provided to “emphasize the dynamic nature of the experience” (119) and outlined manifestations and reactions to food security, highlighting the feeling of alienation. Although these examples demonstrate how qualitative methods can be used to more clearly understand people’s lived experiences, it seems that planners have yet to draw on feminist food research as a resource.

One particular obstacle lies in translating theory to practice, a dichotomy that is not in line with feminist theory, but poses a potential hurdle nonetheless. Based on central feminist

principles “and the myriad ways in which the food system is gendered,” Koc, Macrae, and Welsh (2000) have outlined a ten-point feminist food praxis (see Appendix A). Essentially, this model delineates what needs to be addressed in the area of feminist food research; it offers practical suggestions for action as well as a more theoretical contribution of expanding one’s mindsets about food systems, both of which can be easily and functionally applied to the field of planning.

CHAPTER 3

STUDY CONTEXT

3.1 Demographics

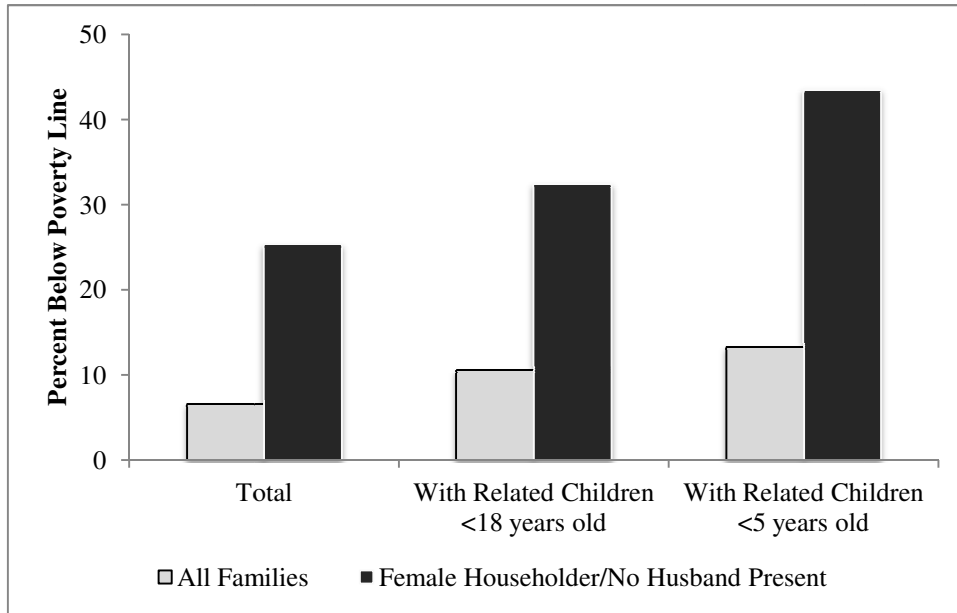
The rural county of study is located in the northern region of Western Massachusetts. It is comprised of 26 towns and is the most rural county in Massachusetts with 102 persons per square mile compared to 809.8 for Massachusetts as a whole (Quick Facts-US Census). The rural component is important to highlight since “rural residents, particularly low-income single mothers, are more likely to face issues such as unemployment, underemployment, and low wages making it more difficult for them to escape poverty and, as a result, food insecurity” (Mammen et al 2009, 152). Although this study’s insights are not especially place-based, it is important to recognize the underlying challenges that a rural setting may pose in regards to food security issues, availability of and/or access to services being paramount.

The data analyzed in this study came from the Rural Families Speak project, which is described in more detail in the following chapter. The interviews spanned from 1999-2002; the first wave took place from 1999-2000, the second wave took place from 2000-2001, and the third wave took place from 2001-2002. Therefore, the statistics in this chapter will reflect the time period of the interviews in order to provide a comparable context.

The county’s median household income of \$40,768 was among the bottom four in the state of Massachusetts in 2000, substantially below that of Massachusetts as a whole with a median household income of \$50,502 (American FactFinder 2000). In the county, 6.5% of all families had income in the past year below the poverty level (American FactFinder 2000); the poverty guideline set for a family of four in 2000 was an annual income of \$17,050

(Federal Register 2000). Figure 3.1 provides a visual comparison of the poverty rates in the county.

Figure 3.1: Percent Below Poverty Line by Family Type for a Rural Massachusetts County



Source: DP-3 Profile of Selected Economic Characteristics (U.S. Census 2000)

This graph clearly depicts that the economic situation for families with a female householder, no husband present is most dire.

3.2 Existing Social Services

There is clear evidence of poverty within the county, though fortunately, area organizations have established services that endeavor to address the needs of residents. The Survival Center is the food pantry referenced by most participants, though it should be noted that participants utilize more localized food pantries throughout the county on a regular basis, often times to circumvent the pantries' weekly or monthly limit to services. That being said, the Survival Center provides both food pantry and thrift store services; the thrift store helps to finance the food pantry. The food pantry is open Monday through Friday from

10AM to 1:30PM and is closed on holidays. To receive services from the Survival Center, individuals must provide a form of identification, proof of income, and proof of life expenses. If unable to provide this information, the staff will be of assistance and will not let anyone go hungry. The Survival Center website reports a steady increase in the need for assistance as the economy continues to struggle (franklinareasurvivalcenter.org).

The Center for Self-Reliance is another popular food pantry that operates out of two locations within the county. One location is open on Mondays from 11AM to 6PM and Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays from 11AM-5PM. The other location operates from 4PM to 5PM on the third Wednesday of every month. According to their website, over 3,200 people received more than 14 tons of free, nutritious food from the Centers for Self Reliance in 2010. This organization proclaims that the driving force behind its operation is the “universal belief that no one should go to bed hungry” (www.communityaction.us).

Access to services is a common issue for those low-income individuals who do not own an automobile. While one food pantry in the county is located in a metropolitan area, others are more remote. Where bus access is available, this form of transportation limits the amount of items participants can take home. The limited hours also hinder access, as the food pantries are mainly open during working hours; if a low-income individual is working, this may limit his or her access to this service. So although emergency food services exist in this Massachusetts county, it is important to realize the additional barriers to accessing them.

CHAPTER 4

METHODOLOGY

This study is rooted in grounded theory, which is a qualitative method involving the emergence of categories through data analysis. This chapter introduces the basics of grounded theory, describes the dataset, and concludes with a detailed description of my process and how I conducted this study.

4.1 A Brief Synopsis of Grounded Theory

Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss introduced the qualitative method of grounded theory in 1967 with their book, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research*. This influential publication identified the purpose of grounded theory: the generation of theory from data. Corbin and Strauss (2008) present another goal of grounded theory, which is to see the world from another point of view, i.e. the perspective of your chosen participants. Uncovering how people experience events is essential, though incomplete if unaccompanied by context (experiences do not happen in a social vacuum) and process (actions/interactions/emotions in response to events.)

Although grounded theory is not an exact science by any means, there are basic concepts that inform the research process. One begins not with a hypothesis, but with a research situation. Grounded theory does not test a hypothesis; it instead, “sets out to find what theory accounts for the research situation as it is” (Dick 2005, 3). The idea behind this method is that the theory already exists within the data. It is the researcher’s job to peel away the layers to reveal the structure that is inherent within the data.

After the researcher identifies the research situation and asks basic questions to initiate the process, he or she starts collecting data. Throughout data collection, the researcher compares interview to interview, or data to data (Dick 2005). This practice of constant comparison is unlike hypothesis-testing research in that analysis begins early and continues while data are still being collected. Instead of collecting data all at once, qualitative researchers use theoretical sampling as a technique. According to Corbin and Strauss (2008), theoretical sampling is,

a method of data collection based on concepts/themes derived from data. The purpose of theoretical sampling is to collect data from places, people, and events that will maximize opportunities to develop concepts in terms of their properties and dimensions, uncover variations, and identify relationships between concepts (143).

Corbin and Strauss go on to clarify that this method, “is responsive to the data rather than established before the research begins” (144). Grounded theory is a continuous, fluid methodology that constantly evolves from the data.

Once theory emerges through the constant comparison of data, the researcher progresses to compare data to theory. All the while, the researcher identifies categories and subcategories from the data, which is called coding. Additionally the researcher constantly writes memos, or notes to oneself, in order to keep track of questions and ideas (Dick 2005).

Corbin and Strauss (2008) offer specific strategies for conducting qualitative research. The strategies that I have chosen to adopt include: considering various meanings of a word, making constant comparisons, use of questioning, drawing upon personal experience, looking at language, looking at emotions that are expressed, and the flip flop technique,

which “consists of turning a concept ‘inside out’ or ‘upside down’ to obtain a different perspective on a phrase or word” (Corbin & Strauss 2008, 79). Often times, researchers use these techniques without noticing. Other times it is helpful to reference a list of established techniques to approach the data differently, especially in order to overcome lulls in the research process.

There comes a point in data collection where no new concepts emerge and nothing is added to established categories. This is the point of saturation- when the researcher reaches a point of diminishing returns (Dick 2005). Corbin and Strauss (2008) go beyond the definition of “no new data emerging” (143) and propose that it is the point when “all concepts are well defined and explained” (144). Once saturation is reached, theoretical sampling ends since the researcher knows that he/she has gathered a sufficient amount of data. The next phase is continued, more focused, analysis.

At the point of saturation, the researcher already has lists of categories, subcategories, and memos to begin the more rigorous phase of analysis. A core category will eventually emerge, which is a category found in higher frequency within the data and is connected to other identified categories (Dick 2005). Core categories have more explanatory power and provide the theory.

Although grounded theory is an extremely flexible method of qualitative research, Dick (2005) offers two requirements for evaluating the theory that emerged from the data:

- 1. It fits the situation; and that*
- 2. It works- that it helps the people in the situation to make sense of their experience and to manage the situation better.*

These suggested criteria remind us that the main goal of grounded theory is the generation of theory from data. The data drives the process, so it is appropriate that the product (theory) integrally relate back to the raw data.

4.2 Description of Data

The data set, *Rural Low-Income Families: Tracking Their Well-being and Functioning in the Context of Welfare Reform*, also referred to as *Rural Families Speak*, is a project funded by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) National Research Initiative Cooperative Grant Program.¹ This longitudinal project collected both quantitative and qualitative data from 524 rural low-income families in 30 counties across 17 states.

Those eligible to participate in the Rural Families Speak study were families with at least one child under the age of 13 and eligible to receive Food Stamps or WIC, although families did not necessarily have to be receiving these services. In terms of racial and ethnic diversity, researchers in each state recruited participants representative of the low-income rural population of that state (Bauer and Katras 2007).

Researchers conducted face-to-face interviews with the woman of the household. These interviews generally lasted two hours and were semi-structured, meaning although every participating state received the same core set of questions, researchers were allowed to add additional questions of personal interest (Bauer and Katras 2007).

Although 17 states participated in the Rural Families Speak project, my interest was limited to a single rural county in Massachusetts. There were 26 participants of which I selected 11 to conduct a detailed analysis. Participants were recruited via flyers and through

¹ P.I. for Massachusetts is Sheila Mammen, Ph.D., Associate Professor, Department of Resource Economics, UMASS Amherst

local WIC agencies, Housing Authority, Welfare to Employment program, food pantries, survival centers, and parent centers. Once selected, interviews were either conducted in the participants' homes or at the University of Massachusetts campus. In regards to racial/ethnic composition of Massachusetts participants, 73.1% of the mothers interviewed were Non-Hispanic White, 11.5% Hispanic/Latina and 15.4% self-identified as multi-racial. The average age of participants was 30.27 years (Katrass et al 2002).

According to the USDA Food Security Module, 26.9% of participants were considered food insecure with hunger, 50% were food insecure without hunger, 11.5% were marginally food secure, and 11.5% were food secure. The reader should keep these statistics in mind, as the concept of hunger will be explored in detail in the coming analysis (Katrass et al 2002). Mammen et al (2009) conducted research on food insecurity using the same dataset and included data from the same Massachusetts county. They discovered a paradox where “the states that appear the most food insecure in this study are among the more food secure nationally and those that seem to be food secure in this study are far more food insecure nationally” (Mammen et al 2009, 158). In other words, residents of the more prosperous states, Massachusetts included, experienced greater food insecurity than those who lived in less prosperous states. These findings reinforce the rationale behind continuing research on food insecurity and challenge assumptions about where food insecurity happens and who experiences it.

4.3 Study Approach

Although Glaser and Strauss are the founders of this particular method, my own experience in qualitative research and grounded theory has been with Corbin and Strauss'

Basics of Qualitative Research 3ed. (2008), so I accordingly follow the latter more closely. I chose not to model my research after a previously established framework. Instead, my process was heavily influenced by an in-depth study of Corbin and Strauss' (2008) text.

Since I did not collect my own data, I adapted the theoretical sampling technique to fit the database. I knew that I wanted to include only those participants who participated in all three waves of interviews, so that was an initial delimitation. I began my process with two interviews and kept adding until I ended up with the eleven participants and thirty-three interviews included in this study. Although I did not include all participants that completed all three waves of interviews, I had reached the point of saturation where no new concepts or trends were emerging, so I knew I had sufficient data with which to work.

I chose to include only those participants that completed all three waves of interviews because I wanted to capture as complete a situation as possible. By reading three different interviews from the same participant, I felt that I was able to more fully understand the women's circumstances. I also expected to notice trends/patterns emerge across the waves based on different variables. Although this time-sensitive focus did not materialize, it still provides the basis for other significant insights.

While selecting my data, I performed initial coding during my first read-through of the interviews. The goal of this step was to begin to get to know the data, as well as to identify subject matters within the interviews in order to make future analysis easier. These subject-matter codes are shown in Figure 4.1.

Figure 4.1: Code System

Things of Importance [0]
Personal Life [20]
Life navigation [29]
Parenting Statements [39]
Food Statements [140]
Neutral [4]
Negative [24]
Positive [16]
Assistance Statements [48]
Answers [0]
Answer Food Access [387]
Negative [49]
Neutral [14]
Positive [35]
Answer Money Stretching [21]
Answer Welfare [68]
Answer No Employment [35]
Answer Parent Assistance [18]
Answer Typical Day [91]
Answer Personal Life [30]
Answer Health [67]
Answer Assistance Received [120]
Answer Parenting [60]
Answer Hypotheticals [22]
Answer Priorities [32]
Answer Life Satisfaction [27]

It is important to note that I did not code based on the questions being asked; instead, I coded based on the content of the answer. For example, if the interviewer asked a question about the participant's typical day, and the participant's response related to food in any way, I coded it as being food-related. No detail was too small. I also divided the interview segments into questions and answers; I separated out the answers to be sure I was only using the participants' exact responses. After the initial reading of interviews and subject coding, I coded the frequency of each word in the interviews. This step is arduous but valuable; my subsequent immersion into the interviews allowed me to become close to the data rather quickly. While coding, a procedure done entirely in the MAXQDA program, I recorded memos to keep track of my thoughts during the process.

MAXQDA has the potential to be an extremely powerful analytical tool with its lexical search and visual output capabilities. However, since the confidentiality restrictions on the data set limited my access, I did not use MAXQDA as I had originally planned. Instead of recording all of my memos within the program, I kept a notebook for brainstorming, though refer to Table 4.1 for examples of memos I did record in MAXQDA.

Table 4.1: Examples of MAXQDA Memos

Memo Title	Memo Text
Food Comes First	SUCH an important phrase. Basis for much of my research.
Parent Child Relationship	I am struck by how each of these women really do put their children first. They are the driving force behind their lives. The children's best interest is always kept in mind- not selfish parents at all.
MY FOOD STAMPS	MY FOOD STAMPS This phrase in itself encapsulates the intersections i am looking at. MY represents possession, ownership, territory. FOOD is the topic here, the vehicle through which these women act. STAMPS represent public assistance, or one type at least.
Role Model	Learned from her mom certain techniques for making money go farther
priorities	this response seems off to me- not seeing the big picture- lack of motivation

I was authorized to print out Max Maps, which retained the confidentiality of the participants while allowing me to perform analysis at home. The One-Case Model in Figure 4.2 is an example of how coded data segments from two codes (Food Statements and Food Access) are arranged in a Max Map from a single interview. The Code-Subcode-Segments Max Map pictured in Figure 4.3 shows an alternative way of organizing coded data. Here, I subdivided the Food Access code into positive, negative, and neutral statements. This map illustrates that subdivision.

Figure 4.2: One Case Model Max Map

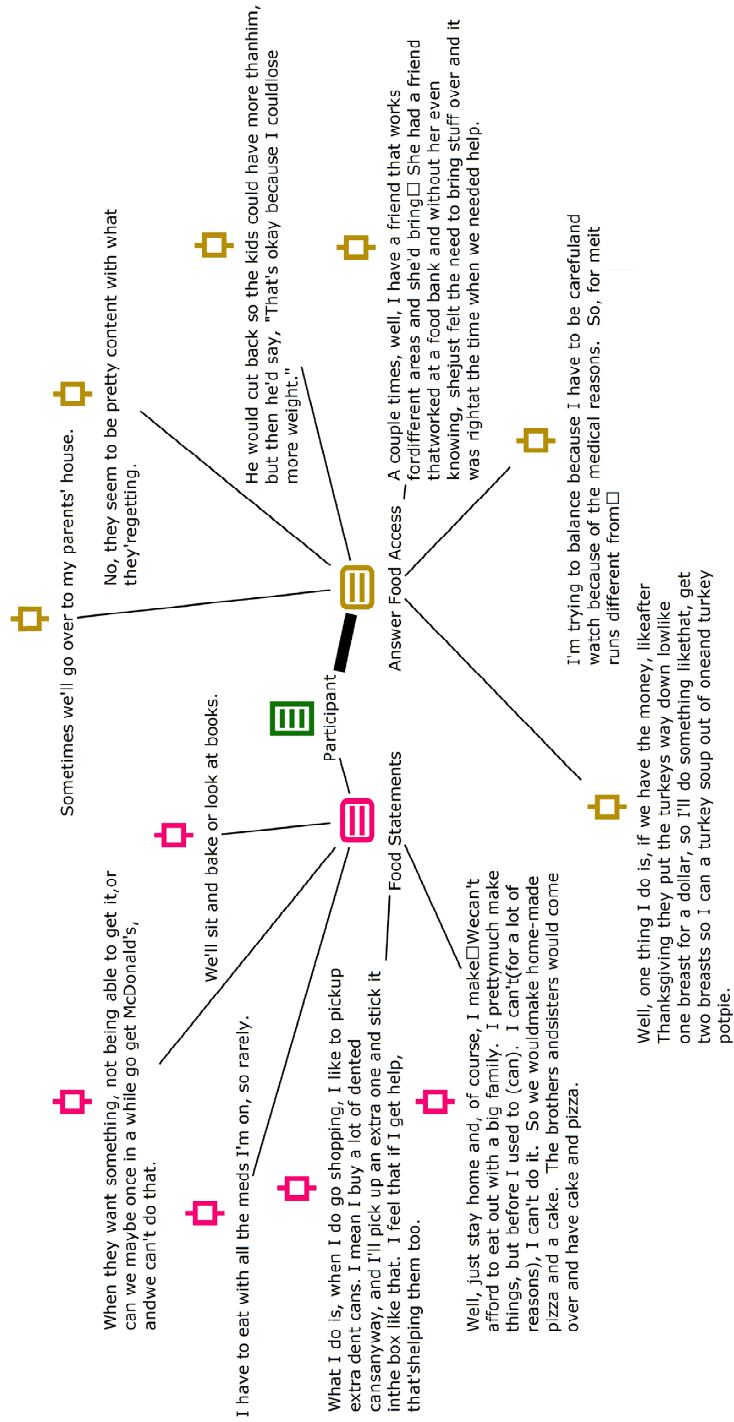
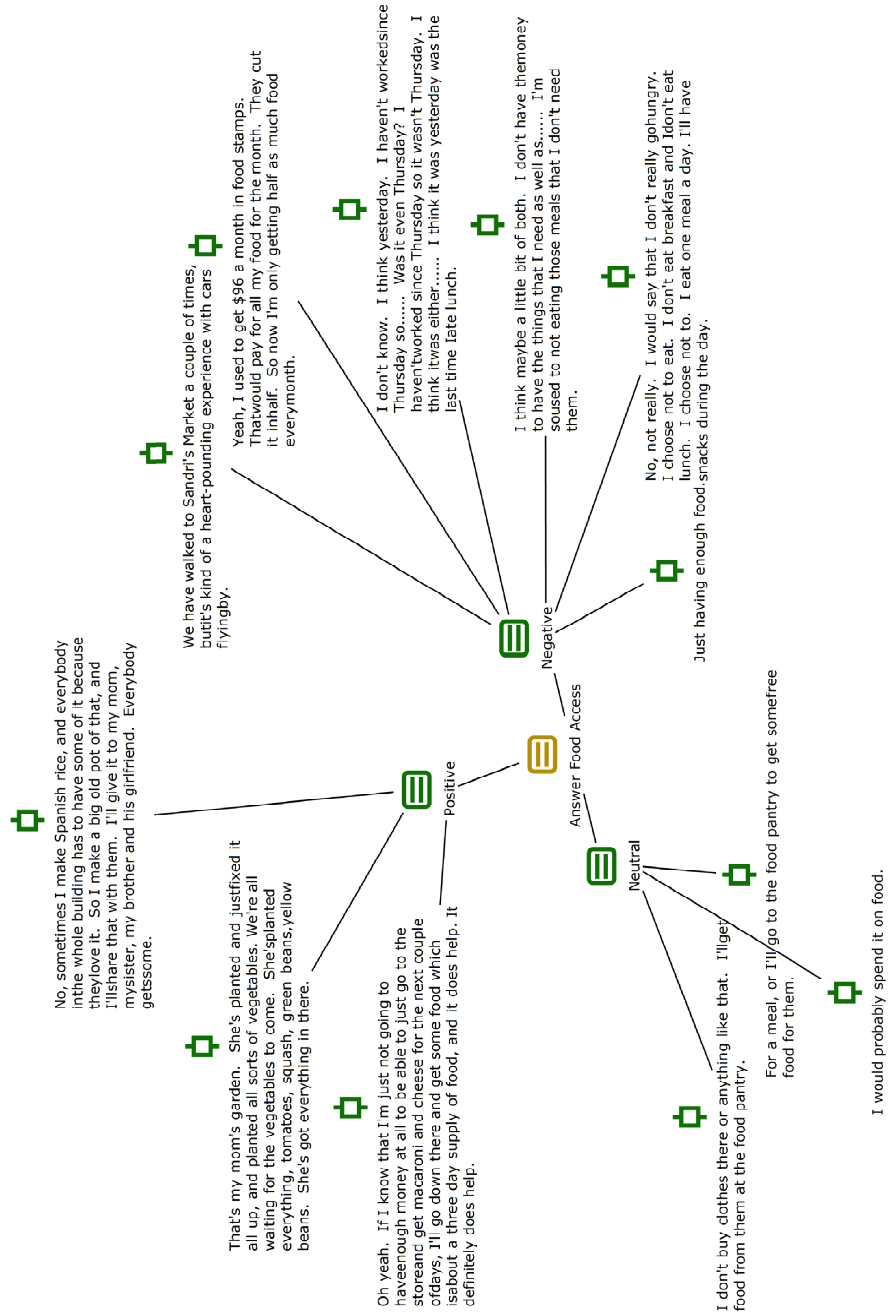


Figure 4.3: Code-Subcode-Segments Max Map



I eventually turned these printouts into spreadsheets as a way of sorting the data into categories and fine-tuned some of them to be included in the following report of findings.

It should be made clear that at that point of printing out the Max Maps, I made the decision to focus exclusively on the food-related discourse i.e. Food Statements (important food-related situations and comments) and Food Access (the act of procuring food) codes only. This was done due to time constraints, as well as to remain focused on the issue of food security.

Once I separated out the food-related interview segments, I coded more from there, this time by hand. Based on my reading of the interviews to that point, I summarized the responses into a master spreadsheet with the following headings:

- Reports of hunger
- Reports trouble paying for food
- Types of food assistance
- Coping methods
- Nutritional consideration
- Mention of fast food/eating out
- Personal gardens
- Specific meals/foods mentioned
- Mention the food/health connection
- Reading between the lines examples
- My perceptions.

From this spreadsheet, I identified more meaningful categories:

- Food pantry

- Public food assistance
- Alternative food procurement techniques
- Health/nutrition
- Fast food/eating out
- Personal gardens
- Reports of hunger/examples of not eating.

As further described below, these categories are those that shaped my findings and will be discussed in detail in Chapter 5.

Throughout my analytical process, I used a variety of techniques to bring out the theory buried in the data. I paid close attention to repetition of phrases, feelings and actions (going without food for example) since I wanted to accurately portray the experiences of the low-income mothers who participated in this study. I also picked up on silences, or things that I expected to see that were missing from the interviews (personal gardens for example.) I identified important topics, such as the variety of food procurement methods, and investigated how the participants reacted to related questions. I also identified underlying trends that were not necessarily obvious in the data (such as the breaking stereotypes discussion in Chapter 5.) This shows how different approaches and techniques help reveal different findings.

Grounded theory is certainly a valuable qualitative methodology in itself, although within the context of this particular study, it has also served the purpose of being compatible with feminist theory in terms of reflexivity, validation of knowledge beyond the expert, and rejecting dichotomous thinking. Fontana and Prokos (2007) warn that “common platitudes proclaim that data speak for themselves, and that the researcher is neutral, unbiased, and

‘invisible’” (72) and advise on the importance of recognizing the researcher’s role in the interpreting process. A specific example of reflexivity is the frequent use of memos in grounded theory, which encourages the researcher to reflect on the research process; this is an embedded opportunity to identify one’s own assumptions. Relating personal experiences to the data is encouraged in grounded theory, and feminist theory accepts this technique, which is consistent with feminism’s advocacy of a wide range of knowers beyond professional “expert” knowledge. The choice of interviews as the data medium is in sync with both grounded theory and feminist theory since it allows the participants to speak on their own behalf. Finally, grounded theory calls for the complete formation of categories and sub-categories, ranging the entire spectrum of possibilities; the goal is a complete, well-rounded account of the situation at hand. Black and white, two dimensional, dichotomous thinking is not compatible with grounded theory. These are just a few examples of how feminist theory has shaped the methodology of this study, the results of which will be discussed further in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The categories of hunger, participant attitudes toward food assistance, and breaking stereotypes each emerged throughout the qualitative process. It is remarkable to see how simple questions reveal profound findings and even more complex questions. Together, these categories provide a well-rounded depiction of low-income mothers and their pursuit to provide food for their families in a rural Massachusetts county. In a conscious effort to stay true to the data, I have included direct quotations from the interviews. I strove to provide a detailed description of the women's experiences, but to also interpret the data to promote action through policy and to be transparent in how I arrived at my interpretations.

5.1 Hunger

Hunger quickly emerged as a category, as it was a concept that kept spurring questions and subsequently allowed me to better understand the experiences of the participants, specifically when it came to providing for their families. I realized that a question as simple as *what is hunger?* is really quite complex, and it became the inspiration behind this section. Specifically, this question revealed that a dichotomous approach is not always sufficient to encapsulate lived experiences. Furthermore, it facilitated my discovery that it is commonplace for participants to go without food, despite their avoidance of admitting to experiencing hunger.

5.1.1 What is Hunger?

This question, *what is hunger?* is potentially relevant to all humans. Hunger does not discriminate; everyone has the potential to experience this feeling. Initial brainstorming led to the following questions:

-Is there one standard authoritative definition of hunger?

-How does one's personal history influence the idea of hunger?

-How do different people experience and respond to hunger?

Merriam-Webster provides the most basic of explanations and defines hunger as,

A craving or urgent need for food or a specific nutrient, an uneasy sensation occasioned by the lack of food, a weakened condition brought about by prolonged lack of food, a strong desire, craving (www.merriam-webster.com).

This definition is insufficient since it primarily addresses the physical aspect of hunger, overlooking the emotional and social component. The *experience* of being hungry is often overlooked; the constant struggle to obtain food, for example, takes an emotional toll. Looking at hunger purely as an outsider does not capture the range of how it is actually experienced by individuals and within families and communities.

Since the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) funded the Rural Families Speak project, it is appropriate to consider the agency's definitions of hunger. Before 2006, the USDA distinguished between *food (in)security with hunger* and *food (in)security without hunger*, the former representing a heightened version of the latter. At that point in time, the USDA's operational definition of hunger was, "the uneasy or painful sensation caused by lack of food" (Nord and Prell 2007).

Based on recommendations by the Committee on National Statistics (CNSTAT), in 2006 the USDA changed its language to reflect the important distinction between food

insecurity and hunger. According to CNSTAT, food insecurity “is a household-level economic and social condition of limited or uncertain access to adequate food” while hunger, “should refer to a potential consequence of food insecurity that, because of prolonged, involuntary lack of food, results in discomfort, illness, weakness, or pain that goes beyond the unusual uneasy situation” (Nord and Coleman-Jensen 2010). The personal, emotional aspect missing in the Merriam–Webster definition is accounted for in the CNSTAT definition of food insecurity, while hunger remains primarily a physical sensation. CNSTAT further reported that more in-depth information regarding the personal experiences at the household level are required to get a more complete understanding of hunger, as opposed to food insecurity (Nord and Coleman-Jensen 2010); CNSTAT’s recommendation is consistent with feminist theory with its recognition of the significance of lived experiences, going beyond statistics and evaluator impressions.

While these established definitions of hunger are helpful in contextualizing the research question, they are insufficient if research is to progress in accordance with feminist theory which rejects the notion that “experts” are the only ones with legitimate knowledge. It is important to include and value the knowledge of those actually experiencing a phenomenon first-hand. The following discussion reflects this stance, drawing on the women’s own experiences and words to identify patterns.

5.1.2 Difficulty Paying for Food vs. Hunger: A Look at Dichotomous Data

Participants were asked if their families had had difficulty paying for food in the past year, as well as if anyone in the household had experienced hunger in the past year. See Table 5.1 for a comparison of responses. Responses to having trouble paying for food were

evenly split between “yes” and “no”, while responses to experiencing hunger were dramatically skewed towards “no”. On the face of this more quantitative comparison, it may appear simply that there is an absence of hunger. However, the following discussion will shed more light on this concept. This comparison helped reveal that there is an apparent difference between the two concepts, trouble paying for food and hunger, with hunger being the concept associated with stigma. Looking for patterns beyond the overt answers, in this case the realization that participants seem less comfortable admitting to hunger than admitting to having trouble paying for food despite the presence of hunger, leads to a more comprehensive understanding of the participants’ experiences with food.

Table 5.1: Participants Respond to Having Trouble Paying for Food or Experiencing Hunger

	Yes	No	Sometimes	N/A
In the past year, has there been a time when you had trouble paying for food?	18	13	1	1
Have you or members of your household ever gone hungry?	6	22	2	3

5.1.3 Going Without: A Contradiction of Qualitative and Quantitative Data

Despite the fact that 2/3 of participants denied the presence of hunger in their households, every participant at some point in the three year interview process provided examples of going without food. Whether participants responded “yes” or “no” to either the question about household hunger or the question about having trouble paying for food, this pattern of not eating remained constant. Although participants may not have admitted outright to having trouble paying for food or experiencing hunger in their household, there is overwhelming evidence of hunger throughout these interviews.

Going without food was a consistent pattern present in the interviews, and the reasons participants gave for doing so varied. Table 5.2 categorizes four major explanations participants gave for going without food: for the benefit of their child(ren), oversight/forgetting to eat, choosing not to eat, and not eating as a habit/normal occurrence.

Table 5.2: Reasons (and possible Rationalizations) Participants Went Without Food From Participants Reporting No Hunger

Reason	Quotations	
Children	“I starve before my kid does.”	“I try not to buy a lot of food for myself.”
Oversight	“I don’t think I had lunch, but the kids weren’t home. I think that was just an oversight.”	“Again, the kids weren’t here. I don’t think I ate.”
Choice	“I choose not to eat. I don’t eat breakfast and I don’t eat lunch. I choose not to. I eat one meal a day. I’ll have snacks during the day.”	“It depends if I feel like eating because I got to unwind.”
Habit	“It’s just a habit really of not eating breakfast.”	“I eat sporadically really. I have always eaten like that. It’s nothing out of the ordinary for me to skip a meal because I have always been like that.”

This raises the question of whether these reasons are accurate or if the women are rationalizing their hunger. Keep in mind that these are illustrative examples; Table 5.2 is not an exhaustive list by any means, as some explanations did not lend well to quotation form.

Tables 5.1 and 5.2 provide a clear depiction of the contradiction between quantitative and qualitative data that is present in the interviews. While in Table 5.1, participant reports

reflected a general absence of hunger, Table 5.2 presents qualitative evidence that going without food is a stark reality for most, if not all, participants. Clearly, the dichotomous approach of utilizing exclusively yes/no questions is not sufficient. It is not until one extracts and analyzes the qualitative data that a more complete situation is uncovered. The quotations providing examples of participants not eating were found throughout the transcripts, not necessarily in reference to a direct question about eating habits.

5.1.4 Hunger Discussion

The juxtaposition of both quantitative and qualitative data on hunger provides a more accurate glimpse into the world of these women, one that would not be as compelling without both forms of data. Looking at the yes/no answers by themselves simply reveals part of the story. These results are far more meaningful after digging deeper and realizing that there is an undeniable theme of participants going without food, which emerged through the qualitative process. Inevitably, more questions present themselves for future research, such as:

-Are participants trying to deny or minimize the presence of hunger in their households?

-What does and does not constitute 'hunger' to each participant?

-In what ways and to what extent do participants consider it acceptable to go without food?

-Are participants rationalizing going without food with the four explanations given?

5.2 Women's Opinions of/Attitudes Towards Different Types of Food Assistance

The second pattern that emerged began with a question regarding participant food procurement: *how do participants provide food for their households?* I separated the procurement methods from the interviews into three different categories: public assistance (food stamps, WIC, school lunch program), private assistance (food pantries), and alternative methods (maximizing spending power, planning ahead, and culinary knowledge.) Both the tone and type of responses changed depending on which type of food procurement method I addressed. After considering each category in-depth on its own and then comparing against each other, it became clear that participants held very different opinions and attitudes regarding each procurement method. This component also validates participants' lived experiences as a legitimate source of knowledge. Here, the participants' voices come through and inform the analysis, a practice consistent with feminist theory.

5.2.1 Public Assistance

In this section, public assistance is used as an umbrella term to collectively refer to food stamps, WIC, and the federal school lunch program. The Food Stamp Program, currently referred to as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), is administered by USDA, provides beneficiaries with an EBT card to make food purchases. To obtain food stamps, individuals must submit an application to determine if they meet the strict eligibility requirements. The number of people in one's household, income, and resources (cash, bank accounts, etc.) are all factors in determining eligibility. If one is eligible, the amount of assistance is calculated and put on the EBT card each month.

Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), “provides Federal grants to States for supplemental foods, health care referrals, and nutrition education for low-income pregnant, breastfeeding, and non-breastfeeding postpartum women, and to infants and children up to age five who are found to be at nutritional risk” (www.fns.usda.gov/fns). If an individual is found to qualify for WIC, she receives a WIC food package that dictates the items eligible for purchase.

The National School Lunch Program makes lunches available to children from low-income families at no or at a reduced cost. The federal government reimburses the schools for these lunches, and in turn, the schools must meet federal lunch guidelines. While this is by no means an exhaustive explanation of these public assistance food programs, the descriptions are meant to orient the reader to an extent. For further information and statistics on eligibility and use, please consult the USDA’s Food and Nutrition website, www.usda.gov.

The volatility of the public assistance food procurement method became clear throughout this analysis. All eleven participants utilized some form of assistance, although the degree, frequency, and method of food procurement varied among participants, and even across years for the same participant. It proved impossible to do justice to this concept by summarizing statistics, since the varying responses across years are what reveal the volatility. For instance, only four of the eleven participants reported consistent usage answers across the three years of interviews for Food Stamps, WIC, and the School Lunch Program (Table 5.3). This illustrates a degree of uncertainty when it comes to food procurement, even with the more structured public assistance programs. The challenge of obtaining information on and

applying for these programs adds another level of complexity to this situation. As will be shown, these factors set the stage for profoundly negative opinions of such programs.

Table 5.3: Participant Use of Public Food Assistance Programs Across Three Years

Interview	Food Stamps	WIC	School Lunch Program
1-1	Yes	Yes	No
1-2	No	Yes	No
1-3	No	Yes	No
2-1	Yes	Yes	No
2-2	Yes	Yes	Yes
2-3	Yes	No	Yes
3-1	Yes	No	Yes
3-2	Yes	No	Yes
3-3	Yes	No	Yes
4-1	Yes	Yes	No
4-2	Yes	Yes	Yes
4-3	Yes	Yes	No
5-1	Yes	Yes	No
5-2	Yes	Yes	N/A
5-3	Yes	Yes	Yes
6-1	No	Yes	Yes
6-2	No	Yes	Yes
6-3	No	Yes	Yes
7-1	No	Yes	Yes
7-2	Yes	No	Yes
7-3	Yes	No	Yes
8-1	Yes	Yes	Yes
8-2	No	Yes	Yes
8-3	No	Yes	No
9-1	No	No	Yes
9-2	No	No	Yes
9-3	No	No	Yes
10-1	No	No	Yes
10-2	Yes	Yes	No
10-3	No	No	Yes
11-1	No	Yes	Yes
11-2	No	Yes	Yes
11-3	No	Yes	Yes

While attitudes and opinions varied depending on which food procurement method was being addressed, the clearest and strongest reactions were most apparent in participant dialogue regarding public assistance programs. Three different types of reactions to public

assistance emerged from the interviews: level of convenience, accounts of using that form of assistance, as well as comments on the amount of assistance received (see Table 5.4 below for selected examples of each.)

Table 5.4: Participant Reactions to Public Assistance

Convenience	"Food Stamps, they gave me the run around there. I can't get ahold of them."	The paperwork for Food Stamps is "a whole day event."
Usage	"Grocery store is a pain in the butt... I hate using Food Stamps at the grocery store... you definitely get some looks."	"I won't go down to our local grocery store and use [WIC] because usually the cashiers are very rude to you when you are using them...the whole attitude changes."
Amount	"A whole \$10 in Food Stamps. That's what I'm eligible for. I make a joke of it, but it really disgusts me because it's crazy. What am I going to do with \$10 a month?"	"I have some Food Stamps, but \$27 a month for four kids wasn't worth keeping, using the card and going to get certified with all the paperwork. I gave it up a few months ago. They can have the \$27."

There is a very deep, complicated relationship that exists between these participants and the public food assistance that they utilize. This finding challenges research claiming that the implementation of the electronic benefit transfer (EBT) card to make food stamp purchases dissolves associated stigma. There is palpable resentment and shame in the participants' language when they speak about forms of public assistance. This is certainly an

interesting and unexpected combination of emotions to exist simultaneously; here is where the complexity and the discomfort of the participants' situations begin to reveal themselves.

5.2.2 Private Assistance

Local food pantries were the most prevalent food procurement method; only two participants did not make use of this type of assistance. After isolating the food pantry responses, it became clear that there was a common theme; participants all provided short responses and deemphasized their usage of this food procurement method. Since the vast majority of participants were talking about one particular form of food assistance in a similar way, it was clear that there was something of significance to be uncovered. Here I addressed the overwhelming participant utilization of *understatements* or *qualifiers* when referring to food pantries.

You will remember that with the previous food procurement method of public food assistance, participants were extremely vocal and critical. Within this context of private assistance, however, participants appear to be much more timid, unclear, and avoidant in their responses. There are no feelings of resentment evident in these portions of the interviews as there were in reference to public food assistance, but shame persists. However with food pantry discourse, the shame is not discussed outright; it appears more concealed and oblique.

When asked about the frequency of their food pantry use, participants overwhelmingly tended to respond with phrases such as: *I think, I don't know, maybe, probably, if*, etc. (Table 5.5).

Table 5.5: Typical Food Pantry Understatements

"I think three, maybe four [times in the last year.] Not that often, but I definitely have been there three times I know."
"I went to the food pantry, or I had to. I don't know. I just managed."
"I didn't even intend to go. I took a friend, and while I was there I figured I could use some things."

In linguistics, this rhetorical strategy is called an understatement, which “represent[s] as less than is the case” (www.merriam-webster.com). This device is also referred to as a qualifier, which is “a word or word group that limits or modifies the meaning of another word or word group” (www.merriam-webster.com). These words and phrases are employed to deemphasize a situation and/or to put up a rhetorical barrier. If only one or two responses used understatements, it would not be an important diagnostic factor, however, understatements were a persistent theme throughout the food pantry discourse. These findings confirm that personal feelings of embarrassment and shame are barriers when it comes to food security and subsequently should not be dismissed, as there are potential policy implications.

5.2.2 Alternative Modes of Food Procurement

In addition to the public and private food assistance programs, most participants needed to employ further strategies to provide food for their households. The purpose of this section is to capture the wide variety of alternative methods used, as well as to depict how knowledgeable and self-sufficient these participants truly are. While there were no strong reactions linked to these alternative methods per se, it certainly became clear how much time

and effort the participants allocated towards food procurement, beyond the commonly known resources of public and private assistance. This is an invaluable discovery in that by looking beneath the surface and giving legitimacy to participants' lived experiences, much can be learned about their situations, and only then can they sufficiently and effectively be addressed.

The most consistently reported alternative mode of food procurement was the help of family and friends. This assistance presented itself in the form of gifts of food, being fed by family members or friends, pooling resources to produce a meal, or gifts of money to specifically purchase food items. Beyond this assistance from their support systems, the participants only had themselves to rely on. Table 5.6 summarizes the countless ways that participants single-handedly strove to make ends meet.

Table 5.6: What Makes the Participants Knowledgeable

Skill	Examples
Maximize spending power	Coupons, sales, Dollar Store, Wal-Mart, dented cans, old food, generic brands
Planning ahead	Schedule shopping trips, plan meals as far as two weeks in advance, bulk purchases, scheduled meetings that serve food (Alcoholics Anonymous, Head Start)
Culinary knowledge	Cooking from scratch, stretching meals, reusing items such as cooking oils

These are all very proactive strategies. However, being this savvy is often not enough. Providing food is indeed a “*labor of love.*” Even with the individual-level tactics listed here, along with support from family and friends, combined with the public and public assistance programs, these families are still struggling to meet their basic needs.

5.2.3 Opinions/Attitudes Discussion

Through their interviews, participants’ attitudes and opinions noticeably varied by food procurement method. With public food assistance, participants were openly critical, while private food assistance discussions yielded much more reserved responses. Public food assistance responses were explicit and private food assistance responses were implicit. Despite the differences in discourse, there was evidence of shame when participants spoke of each food procurement method.

This difference in opinions and attitudes towards food procurement methods complements existing research on perception of assistance. Beth Osborne Daponte (2000) did a quantitative study based in Allegheny County, PA examining use of food stamps versus food pantries. She found a preference for food stamps among the nonelderly and a preference for food pantries among the elderly. Daponte (2000) theorized that the elderly prefer food pantries because of the informality of the system and that “receiving food from the pantries seems to be perceived as receiving a little help... in tight times” (81). Here is where the two sets of findings deviate somewhat, however. In this study, it is not evident that participants felt less shame when using a food pantry versus food stamps; shame persisted throughout both dialogues, albeit in different ways. Perhaps the purely quantitative nature of Daponte’s analysis was insufficient for providing explanatory details. Or, since

Daponte incorporated age of participants into her analysis, perhaps the two studies are not comparable, although the findings certainly complement one another.

Participants use a wide spectrum of techniques, and combinations thereof, to provide food for their households. The description provided here, especially the discussion of alternative methods of food procurement, emphasizes how hard these women work to put food on the table. Self-reliance is paramount, although it is a trait that perhaps many people would challenge, since assumptions about low-income mothers taking unfair advantage of “the system” are prevalent in contemporary society. Confronting assumptions is a tenet of feminist theory, and one that will be addressed next.

5.3 Breaking Stereotypes

A final pattern that emerged from the interviews was that of breaking stereotypes. The image of low-income mothers as lazy, irresponsible, and scheming is a common typecast, identified by Reid and Tom (2006):

The dominant discourse of poverty portrays poor women on welfare as having bad habits and inadequate self-control that drain resources and undermine social coherence. Poverty and welfare dependency are seen as consequences of bad decision making. Dependency is framed as harmful, and effort, employment, and self-sufficiency are applauded. Adults who are not employed shoulder heavy burdens of self-justification (403).

The purpose of this section is for the participants’ interviews to debunk this stereotype.

Here, one participant’s story will be described in detail in order to convey the level of knowledge and resourcefulness that exists among these participants. Additional stories will also be provided in an attempt to capitalize on the positive side of the interviews and to identify existing strengths. While it is important to highlight positive aspects where they

exist, it is also necessary to anticipate potential critiques of one's research; this section serves both purposes.

4.3.1 Important Stories for Breaking Stereotypes

It is my expectation that some readers may question the integrity of the participants due to common stereotypes of low-income individuals. In response to this assumption and in addition to the knowledgeable individual-level characteristics indicated in the discussion of alternative modes of food procurement, it should be noted that these participants also have a strong sense of priorities when it comes to providing basic needs for their households. The well-being of their children is paramount, as has been illustrated by the examples of participants going without food so that their children may have more to eat. There is a "food comes first" mantra present throughout the interviews, whether it was explicitly stated, as was done by two participants, or it was present as an implied priority, as was the case in many other interviews.

There was no evidence of participants squandering their income/assistance stipends on unessential luxuries. In fact, some participants reported on their food priorities:

- *Food over cable television*
- *Food over housing*
- *Food over rent*
- *Rent, electricity, then food.*

These explicitly stated examples of priorities show the importance placed on food procurement by four different participants, presented in no particular order. While each participant had a different way of expressing how she prioritized her needs, the takeaway

message is that the goal is to provide the essentials first, which addresses the misconception that many individuals who receive assistance do so to take advantage of others.

5.3.2 One Participant's Story

I selected one woman as a representative of the group of participants to legitimize their own lived experiences as valid sources of knowledge. This practice of enabling participants to speak for themselves is consistent with feminist theory. Participant 10 placed more explicit emphasis on the health/food connection than other participants while capturing the essence of the majority of interviews through the prioritization of food, as well as putting one's children above all else. Participant 10's responses are of particular interest since she went further than others in her analysis of her own and others' situations.

In year one, Participant 10 and her two children were living with her boyfriend who paid both the rent and the utility bills. This resulted in a great deal of freedom when it came to food purchases. She had recently made a change from "the average American diet I guess you could call it" to "a health food diet, no refined sugar or refined flour..." While she listed foods such as tofu burgers, tofu hot dogs, soy milk, and goat cheese in her interview, she also made the point that, "I try to get things that look like whatever everybody else is eating, because the kids like that," which is an issue that will resurface later on in this study. Participant 10 repeatedly emphasized the influence food has on one's health, as well as the financial repercussions:

I found out that the doctor bills cost more than buying food...once I straightened our diet out, we both were in much better shape.

Participant 10 also articulated the impact food has on one's quality of life:

Part of the reason why food is such an important thing to me is that because I discovered that if I don't take good care of myself, I can't do anything.

She not only recognized the role that food plays in her own life and her children's lives, but she expands this wisdom to others on assistance:

One of things that I just thought of that I would like to mention is that the welfare system should place a lot more emphasis on food. They put you in a situation where you can only buy the cheapest, crummiest food. I've done a considerable amount of studying about how it's related to nutrition. It has a staggering effect, not only people's physical health as you think of it in term of physical illness such as catching colds or getting diabetes or things like that, it also has an impact on how people behave. For example, the Southland Juvenile Detention Home did a study. They tried reducing the amount of sugar in children's diet that were kept there, and the incidence in misbehavior and refusal to obey orders went down sixty percent, just by reducing the amount of sugar in their diet. Most of the foods that are cheapest are the ones that have a lot of sugar in them, that are made from white flour. It's unhealthy, and I think that if people were able to buy healthier food and if there as some kind of a program set up where by people would have to or would be able to at least be able to buy healthier things, whole grain things, stuff with no sugar in it. It would probably have the effect of making more people, enabling more people to get off of welfare and go back to work.

The food/health connection is certainly undeniable to experts (Barker and Pader 2011), although the important point to emphasize here is that a participant, a low-income mother who relies on food assistance, identifies that connection.

Years two and three proved to be more challenging for Participant 10 who reported having left her boyfriend to escape his abuse. Despite the change in her circumstances, she continued to value quality foods; her consideration of nutrition was not situational. Despite her efforts, Participant 10 was unable to provide the quality of foods she knew was important for her own and her children's health:

Sometimes I don't have enough money left to have fresh vegetables, which is really important to me.

Still, she persevered. Although organic foods were out of reach for the most part, Participant 10 made it clear that she would still buy healthy foods at the grocery store when possible.

Here are additional participant statements that further defy the stereotype that low-income mothers are incompetent when it comes to nutrition:

I purchase things that are not only within my price range...but things that are healthy. I don't buy junk (Participant 4).

I have a heart problem and high blood pressure problems. I have to watch the fat and salt intake (Participant 11).

These quotations illustrate additional relationships with food, i.e. the refusal/reluctance to purchase "junk" food, as well as strict dietary restrictions.

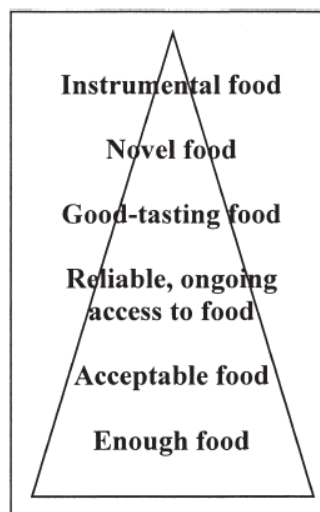
Participant 10, while representing the underlying views of many other participants, provided a unique look at the situation of low-income mothers and their mission to provide food for their households. She defied the stereotype that all low-income mothers do not know about nutrition, as well as the notion that low-income mothers should take what they can get when it comes to feeding their families. Although other participants varied in their confidence when it came to nutritional awareness, the point is that nutrition is not just a

luxury for the upper class. In fact, nutrition is in some cases a lifeline and may prove to be an escape from dependency for many low-income individuals. As Participant 10 noted in her comment on medical bills, it is necessary to consider the big picture and identify the root of the problem.

5.3.3 Breaking Stereotypes Discussion

This theme of breaking stereotypes confronts how low-income mothers are generally perceived. Instead of stereotypically squandering away their money, many participants meticulously prioritized their basic needs as a means of survival. Instead of stereotypically paying no mind to nutrition, there was evidence of participants yearning to procure healthy food items, yet either not succeeding or constantly struggling to do so. Ellyn Satter's (2007) Hierarchy of Food Needs (Figure 5.1), an application of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs to food management, exemplifies commonly held assumptions within the realm of research about low-income individuals and food procurement.

Figure 5.1: Hierarchy of Food Needs Laden with Assumptions



Source: (Ellyn Satter 2007)

Satter (2007) introduces the pyramid by explaining that, “needs at each level must be satisfied before those at the next higher level can be experienced and addressed” (S187). The foundation of the hierarchy is having *enough food*, and this is the rung to which Satter (2007) would assign the participants of this study since she describes that here, “[individuals] are driven by hunger and anxiety about getting enough to eat.” Satter’s (2007) points are reasonable until she elaborates on the foundation of *enough food* with the blatant assumption that, “nutritional value is not a priority guiding food selection” (S187). Many of the participants in this study have voiced otherwise, as have past researchers. McLaughlin et al’s (2003) research on at-home food preparation among low-income food-insecure women also documents the skill and resourcefulness of low-income families. This hierarchy is loaded with assumptions, and examining it more closely and critically is certainly an opportunity for further research.

Assumptions are an unavoidable part of doing research; everyone has preconceived notions about certain issues. Disregarding one’s assumptions for the sake of producing an objective, scientific product does not erase those assumptions. In fact, it may hinder one’s analysis in that certain questions will undoubtedly be avoided and subsequently the topic will not be fully explored. As a feminist researcher, I recognize and address the reflexive nature of the process. Additionally, it is useful to anticipate others’ assumptions, which proved to be inspirational for this section. I am aware of the negative stereotypes of low-income individuals. As was illustrated in my discussion of public food assistance, participants are shamefully aware of their own situations. In order to overcome such assumptions, they must be explicitly uncovered and confronted.

5.4 Findings and Discussion Conclusion

Three questions generated the findings presented here:

- (1) What is hunger?
- (2) How do participants provide food for their households?
- (3) How do stereotypes of low-income women compare with their own perspective?

The women in this study clearly work hard to combine different food procurement methods to provide food for their households. There is no doubt that this is a constant, time-consuming, and laborious process. Compounding the physical act of providing food, there is a persistent feeling of shame in these women's everyday lives. I believe that this shame stems from an internalization of tradition and the norm, a concept that will be explored in the following analysis.

CHAPTER 6

ANALYSIS

The goals of grounded theory require the researcher to go beyond descriptive categories in an attempt to aid the subjects of the research to better understand and manage their situations. At the theory generating level, researchers strive to explain the categories that have emerged through the research process. This chapter does this with an explanation of tradition and the norm; it explores the effect social expectations have on the situations of low-income mothers experiencing food insecurity.

6.1 Tradition and the Norm

Ideas regarding “tradition” and “the norm” gradually emerged from the data as higher-level concepts with explanatory power, unifying the themes of hunger, attitudes, and breaking stereotypes. As stated in the introductory chapter, one research question that materialized during the research process was:

-What does tradition have to do with these women’s relationships with food?

With this question in mind, participant statements such as,

-We always sit down and eat as a family (Participant 2) and,

-We make dinner together (Participant 3),

stood out as significant. They reflect the common practice of families connecting through daily meals, a tradition in our society, if not always a reality. Within each interview, there is a constant struggle to obtain the food to provide a meal for their families with the goal of both physical and emotional nourishment as well as performing the act of upholding tradition.

Modern society inundates individuals with expectations and traditions centered on eating, a basic requirement of humanity's survival. One poignant example of the societal influence on our relationship with food is Norman Rockwell's renowned work, *Freedom From Want* (1943) shown in Figure 6.1.

Figure 6.1: Freedom From Want



Source: Norman Rockwell (1943)

Rockwell's work provides a visual depiction of tradition and food: family gathering together, abundant food, stable socioeconomic status, smiles and enjoyment. No one in his image will go hungry today. This is the expectation, the prescribed normal, and what many people relate to with familiarity.

However, this is not the case for the participants included in this study and their families. Many participants used the ability to provide food for their households as a

measuring stick for success. If they were able to provide sufficient food, they were proud; it was considered an accomplishment:

-I'm proud that I'm able to do whatever I have to do, and deal with the system and the services to keep a roof over her head and food in her mouth (Participant 3).

-We can actually put food on our table every night and feed ourselves (Participant 7).

Others who were not able to provide adequate food set the goal of being able to do so someday:

I'm getting there. I will be able to feed two people someday (Participant 1).

There is a palpable sense of guilt in the interviews of the latter category. It became clear after gathering and examining the data that the participants often feel they have failed as parents. They have internalized the tradition illustrated in the Rockwell painting, but cannot comply with it, and therefore are failures in their own eyes.

Further support for this perceived failure is participant statements about going out to eat. Table 6.1 illustrates the guilt participants often feel for not being able to afford to take their children out to eat in a restaurant. Specifically, the participants mention inexpensive fast food chains. This point puts the situation of the participants into perspective; they cannot afford to buy their children food from a dollar menu. Setting aside the poor nutritional value of fast food, it is clear that the participants are trying to live up to a perceived norm. Culturally, going out to eat is a form of diversion. Advertisements cater to children who appeal to their parents for the fast food. If the parent cannot fulfill this ingrained desire, he/she often feels like a failure.

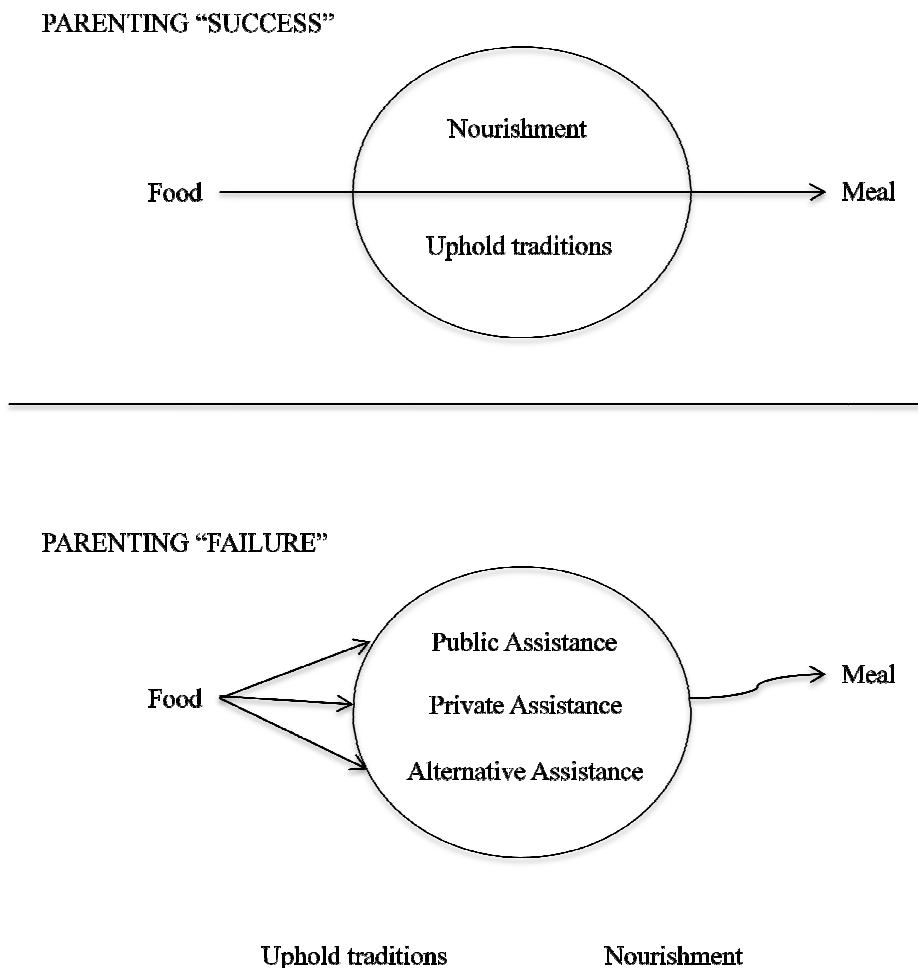
Table 6.1: Going Out to Eat: Participants' Feelings of Failure

<p>"He [son] wants McDonalds sometimes and I just can't."</p>	<p>"Once in a great while [go out to McDonalds], but not very often. Not even with four of them, it's too expensive."</p>
<p>"And not being able to take her [daughter] out to eat because my family does that a lot with their kids, and I can't."</p>	<p>"We can't afford to eat out with a big family...when they want something, not being able to get it, or can we maybe once in a while go get McDonalds, and we can't do that."</p>

This sense of failure raised the question: *What is considered successful parenting?*

Figure 6.2 is a visual representation of parenting success and failures, informed by the data.

Figure 6.2: Parenting “Success” vs. Parenting “Failure”

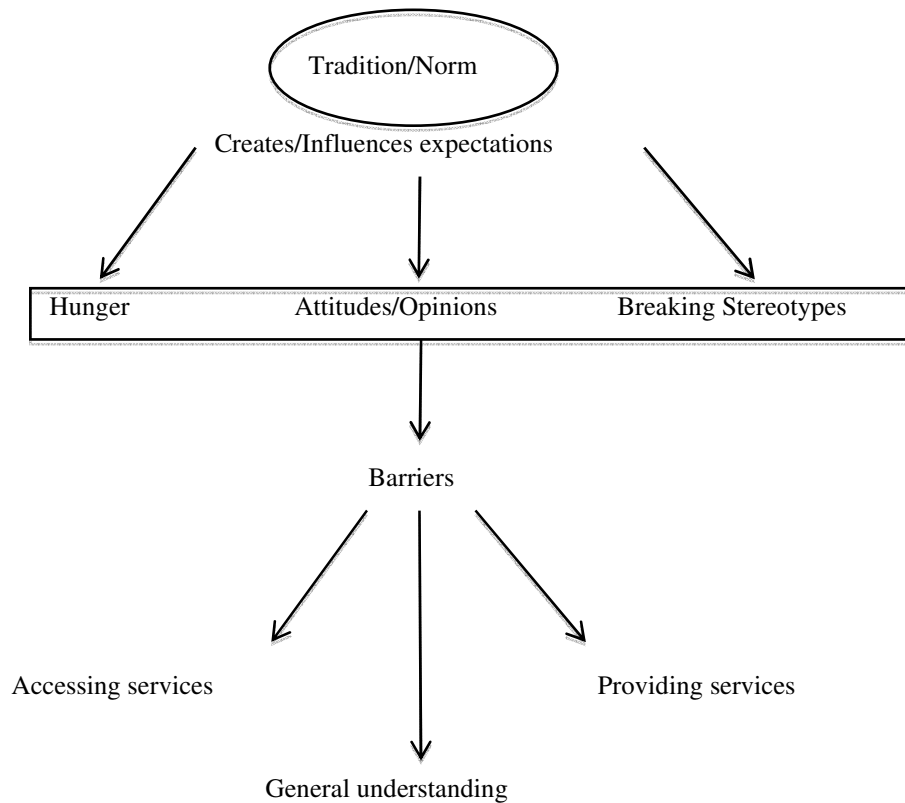


The participants experience a lack of sovereignty since neither the quantity nor the quality of meals presented to their children is in their direct control. The “successful” illustration does not require assistance of any kind to procure food and turn it into a meal for the household. With this uninterrupted connection, parents expect to provide nourishment and uphold traditions. Indeed, Van Esterik (1999a) maintains that “women, through the everyday routines of family meals, are the transmitters of cultural codes pertaining to food and eating” (157). On the other hand, the “failure” illustration does not consist of a direct connection from food to meals. To obtain food, parents (mothers in this case) must rely on various types of assistance (public, private, or alternative) to provide meals, distancing them from “the norm” and perceived success. It appears that, due to this interruption in the direct connection between food and meals, middle and upper-middle class individuals assume that the indicators of the “success” illustration (upholding tradition and providing nourishment) are no longer present.

Norms and traditions, in this case meals emphasizing family connection, are upheld by society, but the participants are in various ways breaking with this framework and getting by in a different way. Reid and Tom (2006) explain that, “ ‘Others’ are stereotyped and kept on the margins or excluded altogether from the social fabric. They are culturally branded with having insufficient willpower and knowledge to conform” (405). Figure 6.3 illustrates how traditions and norms, if left as unchallenged assumptions, influence societal expectations and in turn put up barriers to understanding, as well as providing and accessing necessary services. This diagram reinforces the impression of shame that participants experienced in the hunger category, highlights how traditions and norms shaped their

attitudes and opinions towards services, and indicates the source of the stereotypes that were critiqued in the previous chapter.

Figure 6.3: Identified Categorical Relationships



This study has documented the extensive time and energy participants dedicate towards food procurement. Struggling to provide food for their families is not necessarily an indication of poor family connection and dedication. This idea of standing apart from the “rest” of society and being “different” albeit not by one’s own choosing, contributes to the embarrassment that the participants feel so deeply. Acknowledging participants’ reaction to traditions and norms associated with food would be an important first step enabling planning and policy adjustments to be made accordingly, which will be discussed in the concluding chapter.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

This study was first inspired by a personal realization that the unique experiences of women, especially women of disadvantaged socio-economic status, were not being adequately addressed in the planning field. I believed that feminist thought would fit well with the planning profession, especially relative to equity issues, based on initial contact with historical and theoretical literature, though there was relatively little empirical research to support my supposition. So began a yearlong journey into the theoretical realm of feminism and planning as well as the tangible realm of low-income women and their families' experiences with food. I started with the simple desire to better understand the situations of these women, with the hopes of also practically applying feminist theory to the field of planning. The results highlight the complexity of women's relationship with food: the constant struggle to obtain it, the shame from having to resort to various types of assistance, the sense of having failed as parents. Food provides more than physical nourishment; it contributes to one's identity both as a woman and as a mother. There is more to their circumstances than meets the eye at first glance. These women do not necessarily want to admit to their struggles. However, it is these women and their families who stand to benefit most from effective planning policies and programs. Therefore, planners committed to social justice must endeavor to gain a more complete understanding of their public's needs, wants, and values if they are to improve their quality of life.

Through this research process, I have broadly satisfied the goals and objectives defined at the onset of this study. Using an in-depth analysis of low-income women's interviews, I identified barriers to food security while emphasizing the experiences of women

and bringing their concerns to the forefront within a planning context. However, as is the case with all successful research projects, more questions have emerged along the way. For instance, there is great potential for further research on the health of low-income individuals and the role of nutritious food. While there is undeniable evidence of underlying chronic mental and physical health issues among participants, I identified this as a topic for future research since the focus of this study was exclusively dedicated to documenting and understanding the food-related experiences of the participants. Such further research would contribute immensely to the public health aspect of planning. Furthermore, more research informed by firsthand knowledge of community experiences should be conducted within the planning discipline. This would legitimize subsequent program and policy recommendations made by planners. This suggestion furthers the component of public participation by considering and assessing the public's opinions in an alternative, more robust way.

7.1 Implications for Planning and Policy

Planners need to resist their long-established role of traditional expert and recognize the feminist value of legitimizing firsthand knowledge, i.e. knowledge from those their policies aim to assist in more than a superficial or lip-service manner. No one understands critical aspects of the issues better than those actually experiencing them, so their opinions should be valued as a vital resource that contributes to a more complete understanding. Only then will planners be able to implement policies that truly address the needs of the public. This study has demonstrated how powerful and complex food discourse can be, as well as the importance for planners of going beyond face value to uncover a more accurate version of the situation at hand. The following suggestions for planners are rooted in the feminist ideals

embedded in this study and subsequently allow for a more informed and proactive approach to planning for food-insecure populations.

7.1.1 Advocacy and Empowerment

Overall, this study provides a guide for advocacy planning. Planners should look at food issues as an opportunity to reach out and respond to low-income individuals. As illustrated in this study, food is an extremely personal issue. It carries with it a lot of assumptions about those struggling to obtain access, and many low-income individuals react to this by hiding their circumstances. This reaction does nothing to improve their own situations or that of their families. It is up to social and community planners in particular to be aware of this issue and to approach it in a sensitive manner.

Keeping in mind what has emerged throughout this research process, planners should avoid the assumption that low-income women do not have the knowledge and capacity to address best interests of their families. More specifically, the data revealed that the common stereotype that low-income women lack nutritional education or that they lack the desire to provide quality food for their families is not necessarily accurate. Consider Eicher-Miller et al's (2009) research on whether nutrition education influences a positive change in the food security or food insufficiency level of participants. While there was noted improvement in the participants' food situations after participating in nutrition education classes, a more profound finding was the relationships that formed through these classes. According to Eicher-Miller et al (2009), the nutrition classes fostered "a nonjudgmental and trusting relationship with the participant, thus providing an environment where the participant is honest about areas needing attention and is open to suggestions for change" (166). I am sure

that these classes on nutrition provided valuable and useful knowledge to the low-income women participating, but more importantly, nutrition provided a platform through which trust was built. It was within this context that the women felt comfortable admitting to areas of weakness and became more open to assistance, which is a point planners should take note of.

Planners need to be mindful not to force their own expectations and values on their communities; instead, community members themselves should inform programs and policies, similarly to how data informs the research process in grounded theory. To accomplish this, planners can be explicit and ask community members what they identify as issues and suggestions for solutions. Broadening the knowledge base in this way will empower community members, and plans will be more comprehensive and will better address the needs of specific communities.

Another potential advocacy opportunity for planners is to foster environments in which multiple generations can live. Enabling parents, children, and grandchildren to live in close proximity to one another would strengthen support networks within communities. Within the context of this study, participants specifically relied on their mothers as an additional food source; either their mothers would provide groceries or meals to participants. These support networks have the potential to uphold cultural and family traditions and to pass on nutritional knowledge and culinary skills, subsequently improving the food situations of those involved and perhaps decreasing reliance on assistance. By picking up on this nuance within the interviews, I identified an existing strength that planners can advance through targeted housing programs, for instance. Building on existing strengths within a community helps to both alleviate the sense of imposition at times associated with planning practices, and to empower community members.

7.1.2 Shift the Focus From Reactive to Proactive Strategies

The current food assistance situation is mainly reactive in nature. Existing programs act as short-term fixes to a long-term, persistent problem of food insecurity and hunger. I am by no means suggesting that current food assistance measures be expunged. Rather, through my research, I have identified an area in which planners could and should play a more proactive role.

Campbell (2004) provides a comprehensive outline of food system stakeholders, including their values, sources of power, goals, etc. According to Campbell, the emergency food movement, which is pertinent to this study, addresses the values of food as entitlement, social welfare, and poverty alleviation. The goal of this movement, while commendable, is simply getting food to low-income consumers and does not address the issue of dependency. Campbell reinforces the perspective that the current state of affairs falls short and planners can change that.

Moving from the reactive emergency food movement towards the more proactive strategies of an alternative food system and creating food citizens is an opportunity for planners. These structural changes in the food system set more long-term goals such as promoting public health and building community food resources and access, both at the individual and household level. Table 7.1 presents selected portions of Campbell's findings as they relate to this study.

Table 7.1: Guide for a More Proactive Approach for Planners Addressing Food Insecurity

	Values	Sources of Power	Focus
Alternative Food System	-Food as an individual and community right -Social equity/justice	-Bottom-up controls -Strong social networks -Self-reliance/empowerment -Coalition building	-Improve individual health through food access -Self-reliance -Individual and community empowerment -Connect food producers and eaters
Food Citizens	-Food as an individual and community right -Participatory/food democracy	-Community organizing -Local activism	-Build community food resources -Individual and public health -Place-based seasonal food consumption -Direct connection of producers and eaters

Source: (Campbell 2004, 343-344)

Instead of accepting the status quo, it is the job of planners to recognize opportunities for change. One such opportunity is to promote shopping at local farmer’s markets. Fresh fruits and vegetables were often left out of participants’ meals due to budgetary restrictions. By advocating for the use of SNAP and WIC funds at farmer’s markets, planners would facilitate the purchase of healthy, quality foods, while also supporting local agriculture and fulfilling participants’ voiced desires to provide nutritious options for their families. To ensure even greater access for low-income residents, communities can organize to fund double food stamp programs at farmer’s markets where users of SNAP can purchase even more nutritious foods with their assistance dollars. Planners should take on these facilitating measures to approach food insecurity and hunger head on within their communities, fulfilling the community’s self-identified needs.

Another opportunity is personal gardens, which were absent from the dialogue in these interviews, although the silence is what brought the topic to my attention. No participants had personal vegetable gardens. However, two participants’ parents did have such gardens, and the participants mentioned specific items such as green beans, tomatoes,

squash, and yellow beans. This should be identified as a potential planning initiative, since low-income mothers, such as the participants in this study, are likely pressed for both time and resources. Issues such as personal barriers (time, knowledge, money), zoning regulations, and apartment complex policies all need to be researched and addressed. By encouraging programs that would enable low-income families to participate in personal gardening, planners would be drawing on both the sources of power and the areas of focus from Table 7.1. Personal vegetable gardens emerged as an underutilized programming opportunity through which planners could facilitate both parent and child involvement.

A final proactive suggestion for planners is to promote low-income population involvement in Community Supported Agriculture (CSA). In this alternative food system, community members purchase a share of a local farm and receive weekly fresh produce in return. This system certainly benefits local agriculture, but it also presents an opportunity for low-income mothers to gain knowledge and experience with a variety of produce. The sense of community in CSAs is also present in community gardens where community members gather, interact, and build social capital around food, specifically regarding food production and nutrition education. It is clear that there are a variety of creative, proactive ways in which planners can promote local food security, beyond the purely reactive emergency food system.

When undertaking plans such as those provided in this chapter, planners need to keep in mind the critical issue of access. By constantly asking oneself *who does not have access to this program/policy*, planners will gain deeper insight and improve implementation, specifically in terms of where and when to schedule programs. Will it be convenient for

those community members the program aims to serve to attend? What potential barriers would prevent them from attending? Access issues should constantly be on planners' minds.

It is important not to lose sight of the overarching goal to better serve the needs of one's community as a planner. By considering different perspectives, such as feminist theory and the lived experiences of community members, planners can begin to identify and challenge their own assumptions and subsequently overcome them and implement programs and policies more tailored to the needs of the community.

APPENDIX

FEMINIST FOOD PRACTICE

(Van Esterik 1999a, p.160-161)

1. Feminist food practice builds on gender-sensitive assumptions about women as gatekeepers of the food system and mediators between food produced and food consumed. But women's association with food, feeding others, and cooking is culturally constructed and not a "natural" division of labour. Nurturing skills are acquired by those who nurture others most often, with the exception of breastfeeding, the paradigmatic act of nurture.
2. The core of a feminist food-practice model is the need to eliminate hunger and ensure sufficient food to sustain and reproduce gendered bodies. Political forces control people's access to food by permitting corporate interests to profit from delocalization by encouraging food hegemony. Feminist food practice thus requires an examination of women's power in relation to the food system.
3. A feminist food-practice model is nonreductionist, combining materialist and symbolic explanations of behaviour. Components of the food system — economic conditions, ecological context, or cultural categories — are not ranked so that one has primacy over the others but are considered parts of an integrated whole within a particular social, historical, and spatial system.
4. A practice model takes the perspective of the social actor or the social collectivity and examines the relation between agency and structure. The system acts on the individual and the individual acts on the system, providing both micro and macro perspectives on the food system.

5. Food praxis explains both change and continuity. Change may emerge from individuals acting out of habitual routines, producing intended and unintended results that change habitus (or dispositions), which in turn change material conditions and interpretations of those conditions. Continuity results from the stability of routines of food production, processing, preparation, and consumption.
6. Food praxis defines the temporal organization of these routines for food procurement or production, preparation, distribution, consumption, and waste disposal. Cooking, feeding, and eating are high-periodicity tasks that are nonpostponable and occur with a high frequency. Breast-feeding and complementary feeding of babies are significant examples of this.
7. Cooking, feeding others, and eating are simultaneously sources of pleasure and a burden, and they blur the work-leisure divide. The tasks may be carried out by people exhibiting a wide range of skills. Yet, these activities may still be nurturing, if they are performed with warmth and affection. Thus, a model of feminist food praxis considers the way an act is performed, not simply the act itself.
8. Cooking, feeding others, and eating are body-based acts that create relationships between people. Most are reciprocal, in that they benefit both the giver and the receiver of food. Food praxis focuses on food sharing, intimacy, commensality, nurturing, and reciprocal exchange. These are, therefore, deeply implicated in cultural constructions of the body and are emotionally loaded (for example, feeding the elderly and the very young).
9. Praxis theory is broadly reflexive, encouraging critical reflection on how "our" food choices affect "other" food systems. Scientific work does not proceed independently of the subjectivity of the analyst in feminist food praxis.

10. A feminist food-praxis model assumes that knowledge can be used to improve the quality of human life, as well as human diets; it is thus a potential guide to advocacy action.

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