The stories we tell about food: Understanding narratives of food environments and coping with loss of food access

by

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B.A., Washburn University, 2010
M.A., Kansas State University, 2012

AN ABSTRACT OF A DISSERTATION

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Abstract

This dissertation explores and analyzes narratives related to the food environment. Narrative data was collected from residents in Central Topeka, a neighborhood that relatively recently lost their neighborhood grocery store, a Dillon's (a division of Kroger). This store was an important source for healthy food access in addition to providing access to other vital resources like a post office and pharmacy. Many low-income residents in the U.S. live in areas with little access and availability of healthy foods. These areas are known in the literature as food deserts. The gist of the food desert argument is that full service, large food retailers like supermarkets, that offer fresh produce and other healthy foods on a regular basis, are generally located physically further away from poor neighborhoods. This is ironic because poorer consumers tend to need healthy food and other important resources close at-hand because they are less likely than higher income consumers to possess reliable transportation, and often work evenings, weekends, and other irregular hours characteristic of low-wage employment. Food environments are commonly assessed by counting the sources of food (e.g., food stores, restaurants, convenience stores) and using GIS software to illustrate their distribution within a geographic unit. However, there has been comparatively less effort to assess perceptions of food environments. This study advances the qualitative, ground-level efforts to understand food insecurity and food deserts by incorporating cultural, interactional literature and methodological techniques. The project shows that narratives related to the food system, like narratives related to other aspects of social life, express our values, and are part of our "cultural repertoire" or "tool kit" for deciding what we think, and how we behave (Swidler 1986; McMillan Lequieu 2015). Major themes that emerge from the interview data include "narratives of loss," social atomization, perceptions of disinvestment in Central Topeka, self-sufficiency, and lack of capital

which decreases agency around planning meals, getting to and from food stores, and shopping for food. Besides health and nutrition, the local food environment and nearby stores are integral to identity and feelings of community and inclusiveness in a low-income neighborhood. Accessible food stores like Dillon's are one last important source of agency and symbolic consumption for poor inner-city residents. The Dillon's closing was a disappointing shock that perpetuated and perhaps amplified a feeling of non-inclusiveness and resentment toward the city government, residents in different areas of the city, and Dillon's. There is a clear feeling among residents that exclusion and disinvestment in Central Topeka are simply "the way it is" and "the way it will always be." The closing chapters assess the impacts of this loss on residents' sense of agency, and the implications of this for future academic studies and applied research.

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Approved by:

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Dedication

Dedicated to my wife, Alison Miller.

Chapter 1 - Introduction: Hunger and "Food Insecurity" in the United States

"Food insecurity" is when a household reduces the quality, variety, or desirability of their diet. It can lead to disrupted eating patterns and reduced food intake (USDA-ERS 2016). Prior to the 1980s food insecurity was not part of the dominant discourse. Instead, "hunger" was the popular concept, and was defined and measured in clinical terms for the purpose of drawing conclusions about its incidence (Eisenger 1996: 218). It became clear that understanding the causes of hunger is more important because when someone is already exhibiting the symptoms of hunger, they might have already experienced irreversible damage (Allen 2004). Issues related to hunger and food insecurity have been with human societies since the beginning of time. However, contemporary approaches to food insecurity emerged during the world food crisis in the early 1970s. In response to unprecedented increases in staple food prices, the United Nations convened the World Food Conference in 1974. Food security was the dominant theme. As a result of this conference, food security became an explicit and central policy goal of most developing countries (Allen 2004). Food security, defined as "access by all people at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life" (USDA-ERS 2018) became the new discourse (Allen 2004).

Hunger and food insecurity have been enduring problems in U.S. society. The rate of food insecurity in the U.S. before the recession in 2007 was 11.1% (USDA-ERS 2018). In 2008 the rate had grown to 14.6%. Throughout the Obama administration, food insecurity rates made small yet steady declines. In 2014 the rate

was 14%, in 2015 12.7% (Coleman-Jensen et al. 2015). However, neoliberal tendencies have made food and food assistance more difficult for the poor to access. Neoliberalism is a political regime, a widespread governing ethos (Connell 2010; Parsons Leigh et al. 2018), and a social process "that consists of ideas and policies that have come together to create a pervasive ideology" (Parsons Leigh et al. 2018: 171). This ideology emphasizes free markets, deregulation, privatization, and individualism. Individuals are largely expected to be self-disciplined and self-reliant. The implementation of this ideology in the 1980s by the Reagan administration, around the same time as policy and academic discourse shifted from "hunger" to "food insecurity," led to reductions in "entitlements" and the dismantling of social services.

The dominant food insecurity discourse emphasizes self-reliance. People in poverty who experience food insecurity, the argument goes, should not be given too much of a "handout" lest they become dependent on assistance. There are many examples of this ideology. Recently, U.S. agriculture secretary Sonny Perdue echoed this perspective when defending a proposal by the Trump administration to cut aid for the poor:

> "We believe the purpose of our welfare system should help people to become independent rather than permanent dependency. We believe it does this. We think we are helping people to, again, move into the dignity of work and the respect of providing for their families" (NPR, April 1, 2019).

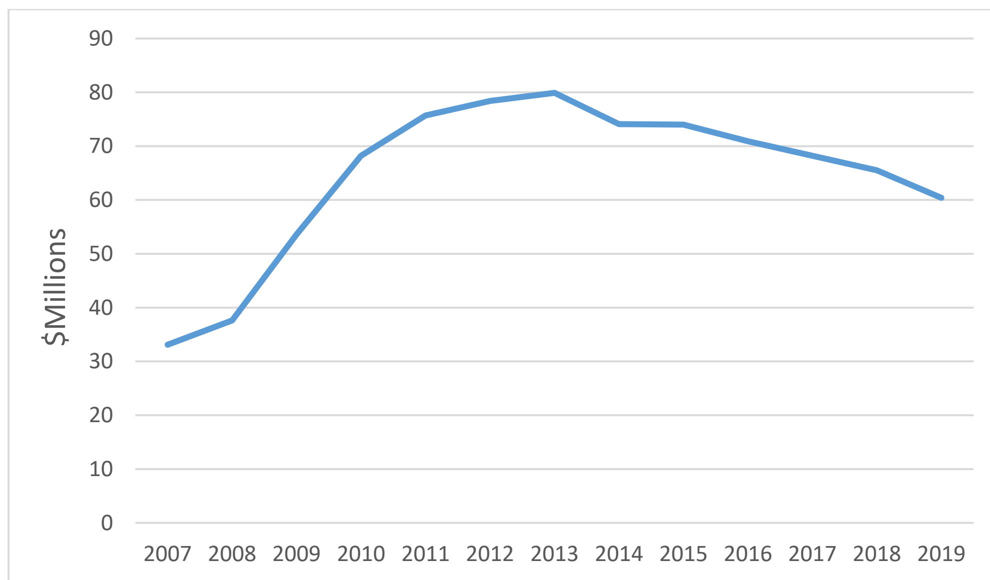
This represents an opposing view to past anti-hunger approaches that were based on entitlements and charity (Allen 2004).

Neoliberal tendencies, including food insecurity discourse, led to the need for more privately funded "emergency food" assistance programs like food banks and food pantries (Poppendieck 2000). This puts more pressure on faith-based and other types of food assistance providers (Winne 2008). In the mid-1990s the need for food and other assistance continued to grow largely because the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act of 1996

(PRWORA), commonly known as "welfare reform." This legislation "tore a gaping hole in the food stamp safety net" (Poppendieck 1998: 283). Food stamps (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP) were and continue to be the "foundation of America's national nutrition safety net" (USDA SNAP 2014). It is the largest of 15 domestic food and nutrition assistance programs administered by the Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). According to Poppendieck, SNAP represents the closest thing the U.S. has ever had to an income guarantee and PRWORA reform was the end of the "publicly funded unconditional right to food" (Poppendieck 1998: 284).

Private forms of food assistance have expanded (Osborne Daponte and Bade 2006) as funds have been gradually pulled away from public food assistance. In the first half of the Obama administration, during and immediately after the Great Recession of 2008, there was increased investment in SNAP. Funding rose from $33.1 million (2007) to $37.6 million (2008) and continued to rise until 2013 ($53.6 million in 2009, $68.2 million in 2010, $75.7 million in 2011, $78.4 million in 2012, and $79.9 million in 2013) (USDA Food and Nutrition Service, SNAP, 2017). However, by 2016, SNAP funding declined to $70.9 million (USDA Food and Nutrition Service 2017) and has continued to decline throughout the Trump administration (USDA Food and Nutrition Service 2020) (See Figure 1 below).

Figure 1: US SNAP Investment, 2007-2019



Source: USDA, FNS 2020

Today, reliance on private food assistance is higher than ever. Unfortunately, food banks and other private food assistance are band-aids that merely address the symptoms of larger social problems like inequality and poverty (Winne 2008). Some private organizations try to fund and otherwise support advocacy efforts to address the underlying issues of poverty and inequality while providing food at the same time (Poppendieck 1998). However, there are "certain inherent features of food banking (that) tend to limit its advocacy role" like the need to cooperate with the food industry and other powerful economic and political interests (Poppendieck 1998, p. 274; Winne 2008, p. 76-77).

Corporations and public agencies like the USDA make sizeable donations to food banks. These interests are often politically conservative, and they often perceive legislative efforts related to poverty, hunger, and inequality as politically "liberal." Food banks must often conceal advocacy efforts and/or frame such efforts in "human terms." For example, they will promote a hunger advocacy project by emphasizing that it helps thousands of poor kids eat lunch during the summer rather than emphasize the structural issues of inequality and poverty (Poppendieck

1998). Current understandings of and approaches to food insecurity make it very difficult if not impossible to address their underlying causes.

Sociologists, nutritionists, and other scholars have shown that healthy food[1] access is a structural phenomenon. Many low-income individuals in the U.S. live in "food deserts" or "populated urban areas where residents do not have access to an affordable and healthy diet" (Cummins and Macintyre 2002: 436). There is an association between "obesity and food quality, prices, and availability in a community" (Pampel et al. 2010:360). Also, diet-related poor health outcomes (e.g., overweight, obesity, diabetes, hypertension) tend to be stratified by race and income bracket (Nestle et al. 1998; Cummins and Macintyre 2006; Moore and Diez Roux 2006; Flora and Gillespie 2009; Schafft et al. 2009). Individuals residing in food deserts generally are economically disadvantaged, have poor nutrition as they are generally consuming cheaper and more filling foods, are more likely to be exposed to unhealthy behaviors, are more likely to develop diet-related poor health outcomes, and are geographically disadvantaged in terms of the number of food stores in their general area of residence (Guy and David 2004). At the same time, there is evidence that shows that social structure is not the primary determining factor for food-shopping decisions. Food insecure households have similar expenditures as higher income consumers at supermarkets and superstores despite the sacrifice in time and money (Ver Ploeg et al. 2017). This is partly because supermarkets and superstores are often "SNAP-authorized." However, with less investment in SNAP, central city stores disappearing, the burden of having to travel far away to supermarkets and superstores, and increasing reliance on the kindness and

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[1] For the purposes of this study, healthy foods are defined as fresh or frozen fruits and vegetables. Though there are other important healthy foods like whole grains and lean proteins, the presence of a minimal selection of fruits and vegetables typically indicates a full-service food store that offers the full range of foods necessary for a nutritious diet.

charity of neighbors, food pantries, food banks, and other alternative forms of food assistance, food access and health are disproportionately precarious among poor Americans.

Spatial and objective boundaries to food are well documented in the literature. Research on this topic tends to emphasize the disparity in physical distribution of healthy foods in poorer urban and rural communities. Part of the food insecurity problem is affordability – healthy foods are generally more expensive than highly processed foods that are abundantly available within poorer neighborhoods. To maximize profits, stores have located themselves away from "undesirable" neighborhoods because of the lack of spending power in the surrounding community.

There is some qualitative literature that focuses on how poor consumers perceive and cope with food insecurity. Chrobok (2015) argues that identity-related factors such as food preferences, ethnic identification, language, attitudes towards difference, and other important aspects of one's life circumstances (purchasing power, mobility, and location or length of residence) – not merely distance – coalesce to influence understandings of one's food retail environment and store patronage decisions. This suggests that food shoppers are not homogenous and not all retailers are equally attractive to all consumers. Food insecurity and healthy food accessibility have critical economic and spatiotemporal components. However, there are also critical *socio-cultural* components that help explain perceptions and behaviors within different social contexts. This includes the food environment.

This dissertation presents a socio-cultural, qualitative approach to food insecurity in the U.S. I ask questions related to how poor people perceive and talk about their food environment, and how narratives regarding the food environment express values and identity: What do food insecure Americans use to describe their food environment? What do their food environment

stories tell us about who they are and how they see themselves? What do their stories say about how they see the possibilities for change in the future, and how they see their own agency in fostering that change? What are the implications of this for addressing the problem of food insecurity in the U.S.?

One way for researchers to learn more about cultural and phenomenological elements of food insecurity is through a sociological analysis of narratives. Narratives are extremely important to all individuals because they help us perceive our surroundings and make and legitimize decisions. They can be very persistent, but sometimes are malleable. They express our values, they help us cope and innovate, as well as facilitate defiance, and resistance. Narratives are an important way that people produce and reproduce social knowledge and make sense of our places within the social world (Esterberg 2002). Storytelling, or actively sharing our narratives, "is the discursive form through which we translate our values into the motivation to act" (Ganz 2011: 280). Narrative sociology helps social scientists "better understand the dynamics of social process and social change" (Jacobs 1996: 1267). It is an approach that recognizes that objective, economic explanations for social phenomena, like healthy food accessibility, are not in and of themselves adequate for effectively understanding and addressing social problems on the ground in specific contexts.

Using this approach reveals the "structuration" (Giddens 1986) of food environments whereby structural inequalities related to race, class, and gender both shape and are shaped by daily practices. According to Giddens (1986), social structure can be very rigid but it is also malleable. It is not a deterministic force of nature. It is a social construction that not only acts upon individuals; individuals also act upon it. Individuals' emotional and socio-cultural

environments provide physical and social parameters within which options can be made in the process of navigating social structure.

My general methodological approach in this dissertation consists primarily of semi-structured interviews with residents of Central Park and Tennessee Town in Topeka, Kansas. Although there is a growing body of qualitative research that looks to better understand and improve food insecurity, and understand cultural aspects of the food environment, an interpretive approach is not often used to understand perceptions and narratives regarding the food environment. Applying this approach to food insecurity will uncover nuance about how residents living in food deserts perceive and understand their food environment, how they cope and adapt, what narratives have developed in relation to the food environment, how narratives are used to construct social identities, and how events like the closing of neighborhood grocery stores affect narrative constructions. These insights may also point to more effective ways to increase food insecurity in poor neighborhoods in Topeka and elsewhere.

This study builds on my master's research which provided a broad spatial analysis of food deserts in Topeka, Kansas. That research, particularly the maps used to present the data, highlighted several particular neighborhoods around Central Topeka where food availability was extremely low and poverty was relatively high. This dissertation focuses on one low-income neighborhood with low food access in Topeka, Census Tract #4. When I completed my thesis in 2012, food availability was already extremely low in this neighborhood. There was a Dillon's grocery store (a division of Kroger) located in this neighborhood until February of 2016. For many this represented one of few, if not the only, accessible sources of healthy food. With its closing, healthy food availability has deteriorated.

To identify research respondents, I used the U.S. Postal Service's Every Door Direct Mail (EDDM) service. At the EDDM website there is an online tool[2] for precisely selecting the route(s) one is interested in targeting with an EDDM mailing. This online tool provides additional data on selected postal routes like age range, average household income and average household size based on the most recent report of the U.S. Census Bureau. In Topeka, postal delivery routes are organized similarly to U.S. census tracts, but, they represent smaller areas of geographic space. I focused respondent recruitment efforts on the postal route closest to the former Dillon's location. This postal route is comprised partly of residents of the Central Park and Tennessee Town neighborhoods. The research methods are discussed in detail in chapter three.

This dissertation continues with a discussion of literature on the food environment, food deserts, and healthy food access as a structural phenomenon. This includes important critiques of the food desert literature. These critiques include how the term food desert can "obscure structural processes associated with the political economy of food production and distribution that gives rise to unequal food access and in turn casts impoverished communities as deficient without explicit recognition of the external, structural factors" (Miller et al. 2015: 344). The food desert argument can be perceived as advocating for a "one-size-fits-all" approach to food insecurity. It frequently frames access as an issue of spatial proximity to grocery stores. However, numerous other factors besides distance to stores influence understandings of the retail food environment and store patronage decisions. The literature review closes with a discussion of narrative sociology and its potential as an effective tool of understanding and addressing food insecurity. Next, chapter three discusses research methods and design, as well as theoretical

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[2] Location: https://eddm.usps.com/eddm/customer/routeSearch.action

orientations that inform this project. Chapter four discusses contextual data including demographic and historical data, field notes from my observations and interviews, and quotes from respondents. Utilizing interview data organized by theme, chapter five addresses the research question "what do food environment stories tell us about who residents are and how they see themselves?" By way of conclusion, chapter six presents interview data and analysis related to the final primary research questions: What narratives do food insecure Americans use to describe the food environment? and, What do their stories say about how they see the possibilities for change in the future?

Chapter 2 - Literature Review

This chapter begins with a review of literature on "food deserts." This includes discussion of healthy food access as a structural phenomenon, as well as critiques of the food desert concept. Following this, I present a synthesis of literature related to coping with food insecurity. This includes discussion of concrete and subjective barriers to accessing healthy food and food assistance. The chapter concludes with a discussion of narrative sociology and how this perspective can inform studies dealing with food insecurity, its causes, consequences, and how best to address it in different types of contexts.

Food Deserts

Overlapping themes from the literature on food deserts and segregation call attention to a fundamental concern held by policymakers and scholars - retail disinvestment in poor neighborhoods, particularly disinvestment in retail food stores. In poorer neighborhoods, healthy food is generally less available and accessible to residents. This implies that disinvestment in poor neighborhoods is at least partially to blame for the disproportionate rates of poor health and health related disease we see among low income individuals and households in the U.S.

Many poor people in the U.S. live in so-called food deserts or areas with little to no available and accessible "healthy" food. The term food desert originated in Scotland in the early 1990s and was first published by the U.K. government's Nutrition Task Force (Cummins and Macintyre 2002:436). It has since gained widespread use and conceptual salience in the United States (see Beaulac et al. 2009). Food deserts are "populated urban areas where residents do not have access to an affordable and healthy diet" (Cummins and Macintyre 2002:436; see also Beaulac et al. 2009, and Bader et al. 2010). Beaulac et al. (2009) argue that data are indeed

abundant and robust enough to conclude that "Americans living in low-income and minority areas tend to have poor access to healthy food" (A109).

Healthy Food Access as a Structural Phenomenon and Food Desert Critiques

The economic driving force of food production and distribution coupled with neo-liberal cultural attitudes and practices has led to a very "rationalized" distribution of healthy foods. "Healthy foods" and "healthy food availability" are mostly limited to fresh and/or frozen fruits and vegetables. Though there are other important healthy foods like whole grains, the presence of a minimal selection of fruits and vegetables indicates a full-service food store that offers the full variety of food necessary for a healthy subsistence (Miller 2012). Healthy foods are generally more expensive than highly processed foods that are abundantly available within poorer neighborhoods. In order to maximize profits, stores have located themselves away from "undesirable" neighborhoods because of the lack of spending power in the surrounding community and the low likelihood that consumers with more spending power will be willing to travel there. Social mechanisms that lead to neighborhood race and class segregation also contribute significantly to poor food environments within marginalized neighborhoods. Morland and Filomena (2007) and Franco et al. (2008) report that access to full-service retail food outlets offering fresh and frozen produce is better in predominantly white and higher income neighborhoods than in black, mixed race, and lower income neighborhoods. Within the relatively few supermarkets and grocery stores found in black, mixed race, and lower income neighborhoods in large cities the amount and variety of healthy foods was found to be significantly lower than in supermarkets and grocery stores in predominately white and higher income neighborhoods (Franco et al. 2008; Morland and Filomena 2007, Freedman and Bell 2009).

Not only are healthy foods *less* available but unhealthy highly processed foods are much *more* available in poor neighborhoods. Processed food is defined as "any raw agricultural commodity that has been subject to washing, cleaning, milling, cutting, chopping, heating, pasteurizing, blanching, cooking, canning, freezing, drying, dehydrating, mixing, packaging or other procedures that alter the food from its natural state" (Harguth: 2017). Some minimally process foods, like e.g., bagged and cut vegetables or roasted nuts, have a place in a healthy diet. However, heavily processed foods such as ready to eat chips and deli meat should be avoided when possible (Harguth: 2017). Oyo Kwate's (2008) analysis includes data from New York City and other urban contexts in "large, racially segregated cities such as Chicago, Boston, and Washington D.C." (p. 32). She finds that racial segregation leads to inequality in several important factors related to health: individual and neighborhood SES; educational opportunity; employment; housing quality; medical care (Williams and Collins, 2001); and disproportionate siting of hazardous land uses" (Wing et al. 2000, Downey 2003, Oyo Kwate 2008: 33). Obesity has risen steadily in the U.S. but, the highest rates occur among the most disadvantaged groups (Oyo Kwate 2008: 33). One factor in this is that most poor neighborhoods have a high fast-food density. The pathways that lead to increasing fast food density are: population characteristics (concentrated racial minorities, segregation, concentrated poverty), economic characteristics (retail environment, and labor conditions), physical infrastructure (zoning, neighborhood features), and social processes (neighborhood stigma, political power and community strength) (Oyo Kwate 2008). Segregation and these related pathways "creates an environment ripe for fast food." Many Blacks are physically concentrated and represent an increasingly large target for fast food companies and marketers (Oyo Kwate 2008: 35-36). Another factor is proximity to

convenience stores, which are less likely to carry a variety of healthy foods and more likely to carry energy-dense foods.

The gist of the food desert argument is that full service, large food retailers like supermarkets, that offer fresh produce and other healthy foods on a regular basis, are generally located physically further away from poor neighborhoods. This is ironic because poorer consumers tend to need healthy food and other important resources close at-hand because they are less likely than higher income consumers to possess reliable transportation, they have less funds to maintain reliable transportation, and often work evenings, weekends, and other irregular hours characteristic of low-wage employment. Through quantitative studies, researchers argue that structural factors largely influence consumer decisions. The argument goes, since poorer consumers have poorer access to healthy foods, they buy and consume unhealthy foods more frequently than affluent consumers

Thomas (2010) used Geographic Information Systems (GIS) to test the food desert argument in one urban, Midwestern neighborhood. He compared the distance from different types of food retailers to food secure and insecure households. Food secure and insecure households associated the same level of importance with distance on the decision to shop at various retailers. However, food insecure households are located slightly further from large food retailers, slightly closer to convenience stores, and they travel slightly further to their primary food retailer, but, the "differences between the two groups was relatively small" (Thomas 2010: 400). "Access-burdened" or "food desert" residents want to shop at SNAP-authorized supermarkets and superstores, and in fact do have similar expenditures as higher income consumers at these types of stores (Ver Ploeg et al. 2017). This evidence shows that structural factors alone do not explain food shopping decisions.

Analyzing data from the USDA's National Household Food Acquisition and Purchase Survey (FoodAPS) conducted from April 2012 to January 2013, Ver Ploeg et al. (2017) find that access-burdened households spend less at restaurants and eating places than sufficient-access households, and spend a slightly larger percentage of their food budget at convenience stores. The "food desert thesis" suggests that access-burdened households likely spend less at supermarkets and superstores because they have poor access to these stores, yet, this analysis shows that access-burdened households are "able to overcome their access barriers to shop at stores that typically carry a wide variety of healthful foods" (Ver Ploeg et al. 2017: 23). "Access burdened" consumers want to and do shop at supermarkets and superstores at similar rates as non-access-burdened consumers. However, they possess fewer resources to procure and maintain reliable transportation and travel longer distances to shop at supermarkets and superstores. Shopping at supermarkets and superstores is a more difficult task for access burdened consumers and represents a proportionally larger sacrifice in terms of time and money spent.

Food deserts and "food desertification" are issues of how social structures shape autonomy and choice. Neoliberal and free trade ideology foster a context in the U.S. where food, particularly healthy and nourishing food, is a privilege instead of a right (Anderson 2013: 114, 116). The routine aim of those subscribing to this ideology is "increasing the amount of food produced and distributing it through 'free trade,'" even though the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) has repeatedly emphasized that food security depends on access, utilization and stability of food supplies as much as availability" (Anderson 2014: 116).

Choice and autonomy are inextricably tied together with dignity in a capitalist consumer culture. Capitalist consumer cultures follow the traditions of liberal philosophy which espouses that individuals make choices within society that are personal, and individuals should be free to

do what they want and make their own decisions. With constrained choices, food desert residents are "impaired by the narrowed capability for choice" thus exacerbating existing class inequalities (Bedore 2014: 214). Individual subjective dignity and freedom is constrained by the power of global capitalist political economic relations, in this case especially by the globalization of food retailing and the economic rationalization of its distribution within neighborhoods. This is evident when looking at food deserts where choice and autonomy related to the material for biological subsistence (food) is constrained in one of the most affluent countries in the world. The food desert phenomenon "offers a novel way to critically and relationally evaluate the mundane geographies of daily life in a classed society. It is also an entry point for the study of capital's complex role in the promotion or violation of dignity through the urban geographies of acquiring food for oneself and one's family or household" (Bedore 2014: 209, 215).

Trade liberalization, neoliberalism, largely fragmented food-related social movements, and race and social class segregation all add up to a food environment that is difficult for the poor to navigate. Food environment and other types of research show that the systematic decline in health resulting from poor or low-quality food intake often stems from structural causes. Structural conditions extend beyond the control of individual consumers, particularly those on the margins. Social mechanisms that have led to segregated neighborhoods in the U.S., include "redlining," neighborhood disinvestment and the resulting decay of commercial and retail connections and infrastructure; "steerage;" "blockbusting;" and sub-prime lending (Massey and Denton 1993: 132-182; Pongracz 2004), and these actions result in numerous social disadvantages. Residential integration tends to reduce daily exposure to unhealthy behaviors (Cummins and Macintyre 2006; Pampel et al. 2010; Nettle 2011), provide more accessible and available healthy foods and stores that offer these products on a regular basis, offer better

protection from crime, and more and better-quality health services (Woldoff and Ovadia 2009: 70). Food deserts are perhaps the most important deleterious consequence of residential segregation because of the universal need for food and the implications that healthy food intake has for health.

There is a growing critique, particularly among food and community activists, of the term "food desert" for several different reasons. For one, the term "desert" can be stigmatizing and "several community-based organizations and food justice activists have indeed responded negatively to this terminology" (Packer and Guthman 2019: 245). Second, supermarkets are not necessarily the best resource for healthy foods. Independently owned, and smaller markets located in so-called food deserts "have been found to offer an array of healthy and culturally relevant food items at comparable price and quality" (Packer and Guthman 2019: 245). Many contemporary studies and reports on healthy food accessibility disregard "ethnic" grocery retailers and other types of food stores as legitimate sources of food (Chrobok 2015; Joassart-Marcelli et al. 2017). Most measurements of food deserts and food insecurity do not take into account ethnic markets because of racialization and stigma. This racialization and stigma often emerges in the literature and "in turn shape(s) public policy" and limits ethnic markets' "potential to become more effective spaces of community food security, especially in immigrant neighborhoods" (Joassart-Marcelli 2017: 1644). Ethnic markets are not given credit as contributing to "food access" by the USDA ERS. The term "ethnic market" does not appear at all in the forty-page document containing USDA's food access definitions (Food Access Research Atlas Documentation" https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/food-access-research-atlas/download-the-data/). This reflects a "white middle-class idea of healthful foods" and a focus on grocery stores, supermarkets, and natural food stores.

Another important critique of the food desert framing is that the term can "obscure the structural processes associated with the political economy of food production and distribution that gives rise to unequal food access and in turn casts impoverished communities as deficient without explicit recognition of the external, structural factors" (Miller et al. 2015: 344). The food desert argument can be perceived as advocating for a "one-size-fits-all" approach to food insecurity that implies simply adding more healthy food stores within poor neighborhoods will automatically lead to more positive and equal health outcomes. This body of research also frequently frames access as an issue of spatial proximity to grocery stores. With these criticisms in mind I decided to continue using the term here because it is the term policy makers are most familiar with. However, it is important to point out the possibly problematic aspects of the concept.

Chrobok (2015) draws on interview data from residents of the Humbermede neighborhood in Toronto, Canada and explores how food accessibility is perceived and experienced in a culturally diverse neighborhood where all grocery retailers are ethnic. He argues that identity-related factors such as food preferences, ethnic identification, language, attitudes towards difference, and other important aspects of one's life circumstances (purchasing power, mobility, and location or length of residence) – not merely distance – coalesce to influence understandings of one's food retail environment and store patronage decisions. In other words, there are other types of factors besides physical distance and social structure that determine how consumers perceive, understand, and navigate their food environments. These findings suggest that food shoppers are not homogenous, that all retailers are not equally attractive to all consumers, and that food accessibility has critical socio-cultural, economic, and spatiotemporal components.

A structural perspective on food environments is “often perpetuated unconsciously by nonprofits and middle-class residents who are blinded by the food desert metaphor and unable to envision solutions other than the binaries of upscale markets or alternative options” (Joassart-Marcelli 2017: 1656). Changing perceptions around small and ethnic markets could make it possible for more effective interventions to improve healthy food access in numerous locations around the U.S., especially where there are high numbers of immigrants and other ethnic minorities. These potential interventions include supporting ethnic markets and other types of non-conventional food businesses through a variety of assistance programs. Support could also come in the form of “small business loans, capacity and network building, technical assistance and training (particularly with storage and refrigeration), store remodeling, social marketing campaigns, cooking demonstrations, and community events” (Joassart-Marcelli 2017: 1657). These ideas have received some support, but in most food desert literature “corner stores” and “ethnic markets” continue to face “undifferentiated and sometimes unwarranted criticism as enablers of unhealthy diets in poor communities of color.” It may be time to reconsider these assumptions and conceptualize urban food environments in a more nuanced way that differentiates types of stores (e.g., corner stores versus ethnic markets) so other possibilities for increasing healthy food access are not ignored.

Symbolism and Food Environment Expectations

Like affluent consumers, poor residents also “placed a great deal of value on high-quality groceries. This was in part because of material benefits (such as health benefits), but also for their *symbolic value*” (Tach and Amorim: 829, my emphasis). Having numerous stores, nearby stores, or high-quality stores “offered residents opportunities for *symbolic consumption* – small purchases that allowed respondents to feel ‘middle class,’ at least for the moment – and also

boosted *neighborhood reputations*" (p. 829, my emphasis). Without stores in close-proximity, particularly "high-quality" stores, food desert residents are potentially missing out on material health benefits as well as symbolic social benefits that result from the ability to make small purchases in the spur of the moment, not to mention the reputational benefits that non-food desert neighborhoods seem to experience compared to their food desert counterparts.

Residents' feelings about their local food environment and resulting coping strategies varied depending on the neighborhood and residents' expectations. Individuals in neighborhoods where there had been no store in recent memory were fatalistic and accepting of not having stores nearby. Residents in the neighborhood where a grocery store had recently closed had more negative perceptions and complained about lacking amenities more vigorously than their more fatalistic counterparts in long-time food deserts (Tach and Amorim 2015: 829). These findings suggest "there can be important differences between seemingly similar 'food desert' neighborhoods, particularly in terms of the institutionalization and awareness of non-supermarket food resources." Not all "underserved neighborhoods are underserved for the same reasons – "local efforts to promote access may be more successful if they are informed by the distinct barriers at play in a targeted neighborhood" (Tach and Amorim 2015: 829-830). Residents' feelings and narratives regarding the food environment will vary based on where they live and their expectations. Understanding these types of narratives can help inform efforts to effectively improve healthy food access.

Zenk et al. (2011) briefly explore and describe the perceived barriers that predominately black women must overcome when shopping for food, and, the proactive strategies and tactics used to cope with "unsupportive food environments" (p. 288). They do this through an analysis of in-depth interview data with thirty women aged 21 to 45 with a child less than 18 years old.

Women were recruited from a community health center in Chicago. Women like this, who face restricted neighborhood food environments, identify multiple environmental barriers – material, economic, and social interactional, to obtain healthy food (Zenk et al. 2011: 290).

Through ethnographic research in three low-income and predominately Latino communities in Santa Barbara County, California, Carney (2012) looks at the wider implications of the "gender-specific repercussions of economic recession and food insecurity, and subsequent implications for the coping strategies of households" (p. 187). The ability to feed families and to ensure household food security may provide a source of power "that the global-industrial food system undermines, as simultaneously women are subordinated through these reproductive activities and other domains of food work" (Van Esterik 1999; Allen and Sachs 2007; Rae 2008; Carney 2012: 187). In other words, women do a disproportionate amount of household labor which is a source of power and control. However, women are forced to derive power from work that re-inscribes traditional gender roles and perpetuates their subordination. These are paradoxical and oppressive conditions to navigate for poor minority women trying to support themselves and their families.

The bundle of unfavorable social, economic, environmental, and political circumstances many low-income urban dwelling Latinos endure contributes to an overall feeling of helplessness and vulnerability. The diversity of narratives provided by low-income households "reflects a form of citizenship that appears compromised by a host of variables perceived to exist outside the realm of local control" (Carney 2012: 197). Overall, all women endure unequal gender status. Women who are food insecure especially feel the effects of this inequality because they are often responsible for all aspects of food purchasing and prep, they sacrifice meals for children more often, and shoulder most of the stress related to food prep and shortage (Carney 2012: 196-197).

Narrative Sociology

Narratives are powerful and help individuals make and legitimize decisions, even if those decisions appear to be non-rational to outsiders. Although there is a growing body of qualitative research that looks to better understand and improve food insecurity, an interpretive approach is not often used to understand shopping decisions and food choice. However, it has been used to explain a variety of other behaviors. In this section I review sociological literature on narratives and look mainly at how narratives shape and legitimize social processes, social change, and poor individuals' *housing* decisions. I present this review with an eye toward considering how these approaches and findings can be applied to uncovering and explaining the meanings that individuals attach to coping with food insecurity. This project is primarily concerned with continuing other qualitative, ground-level efforts to understand food insecurity and food deserts by incorporating cultural, interactional literature and methodological techniques to reach a better understanding of how these social problems work, and how to more effectively address them.

Narrative sociology can "help social scientists to better understand the dynamics of social process and social change" (Jacobs 1996: 1267). It is a tool to understand how social structure shapes individual identities and how significant events affect narrative constructions. Jacobs (1996) investigates these questions by analyzing narratives related to the Rodney King beating in two different newspapers serving two different but overlapping demographics: the *Los Angeles Times* (the most widely read and significant newspaper for the LA metro community) and the *Los Angles Sentinel* (significant African American newspaper, most readers also read the *Los Angeles Times*). He shows that the cultural construction of social problems in civil society occur in multiple pieces of media that are "connected to different communities of discourse." The Rodney King crisis "was socially constructed as several different problems in several different

public spheres" (Jacobs 1996: 1266). For example, in the *Los Angeles Times* the beating was presented as the beginning of a narrative of crisis and panic. In the *Los Angeles Sentinel* the beating was framed within an ongoing narrative about civil rights and police brutality (Jacobs 1996: 1266). Also, the meaning of the beating changed. Meanings and outcomes "depend on the *interaction* between events and their narrative understandings" (Jacobs 1996: 1267). "The Rodney King crisis was socially constructed as several different problems in several different public spheres" (p. 1266). Also, the meaning of the beating changed over time in both newspapers as new events were added to the various narrative constructions. Both "meanings and outcomes depend on the *interaction* between events and their narrative understandings" (Jacobs 1996: 1267).

Rosen (2017) takes a cultural approach to understand *residential choice* that argues that poor individuals' residential decisions are shaped by:

- Narrative accommodation – when narratives "bulge and stretch to accommodate new experiences" (p. 288)
- Narrative stasis – when narratives become stable, until,
- Narrative rupture – when stable narratives are disrupted and unveiled as illusions. The behavior legitimized by the narrative, in this case deciding to remain in a precarious housing situation, no longer makes sense and a new course of action is taken (p. 288).

This cultural approach is contrasted by "preference and constraint" which says that residential decisions are the product of personal preferences circumscribed by structural factors (Rosen 2017: 272). In other words, preference and constraint emphasizes how social structure shapes behavior whereas the cultural approach emphasizes how choices and behaviors are negotiated through "the stories we tell" and interpertation. Like all other social phenomena, there is not one theoretical orientation that is adequate to explain food purchase and consumption. Qualitative

researchers like Geertz (1973), Duneier (1999), McDermott (2006), Menjívar (2011), and many others show that the "social sphere is not separate from the economic or political sphere" (Menjívar 2011: 228). Focusing on working class whites' and blacks' racial attitudes and behaviors, McDermott (2006) finds that someone's perception of their race and SES position and how others see them are inextricably linked to key historical characteristics of particular locations related to economy and politics (p. 37). This is because "the social is where the private and public, and the economic and political, converge to blur artificial demarcations" (Menjívar 2011: 228).

The preference and constraint approach is inadequate to explain residential choice or food insecurity and how it is understood and dealt with. As food desert critiques suggest, individuals living in poor neighborhoods are not homogenous. Like residential preferences, food choices are not static and uniform across social groups (Rosen 2017: 272). Chrobrok (2015) argues that identity-related factors like food preferences, ethnic identification, cultural background, language, attitudes towards difference, and other important aspects of one's life circumstances - purchasing power, mobility, and location or length of residence – not merely distance – coalesce to influence individuals' understanding of their food environment, and food shopping decisions. Ver Ploeg et al. (2017) argue that "access-burdened households" make sacrifices to overcome distance barriers to supermarkets and superstores. In other words, there is significant evidence that structural factors alone cannot explain food shopping behaviors.

People can and will "endure all sorts of uncomfortable conditions as long as they have a working understanding of how to manage them" (p. 289). For example, one of Rosen's respondents believed the neighborhood provided a feeling of community and safety and had no plans to leave. One day her house was broken into while her neighbors looked on. They did not

recognize the robbers as intruders. She thought she knew her neighbors better and vice versa. The comforting narrative that legitimized an objectively undesirable neighborhood was ruptured. Remaining in the "precarious housing situation no longer made sense" and she moved out (Rosen 2017: 289). Significant constraints, such as financial limitations, the logistics of moving, housing discrimination, and landlord practices "perpetuate instability by impairing a poor household's ability to move to a suitable home. But these reasons alone cannot explain why and when many low-income families move to, stay in, or move back into poor and violent neighborhoods" (Rosen 2017: 288). Narratives are powerful. They are persistent and malleable. They provide comfort, stability, and meaning, and, they adapt to changes in the social world that render the original narrative irrelevant or ineffective.

Swidler's (1986) view of culture as a "tool kit" posits that individual actors "select different elements of the cultural repertoire for constructing lines of action" (McMillan Lequieu 2015: 44). Strategies of action are cultural products, and culture is constraining because of the "high costs of cultural retooling to adopt new patterns of action" (Swidler 1986: 284). Cultural repertoires limit the available range of strategies of action (Swidler 1986: 284). McMillan Lequeieu (2015) expands on Swidler's (1986) relatively stable view of culture as a tool kit. Through analysis of interview data collected from farm-owners in Southeast Wisconsin (Dodge County) McMillan Lequeieu finds culture and the narratives associated with it do not derive from a stable tool kit. The farmers negotiate their traditional German heritage (emotional, legacy-driven commitments) by working hard to "update their patrimonial narratives to account for the past and the present" (McMillan Lequieu: 49, 56). The present brings with it "concerns over the demographic, economic, and development pressures." Farmers are aging, and rural land prices have steadily increased around the country. The incentives for retiring farmers to sell their

land and give up the family farm are high because prices are up. At the same time, staying in the farming business can be a serious financial risk. Despite this, most interviewees "remained steadfast in their preference for intrafamily continuity and pursued creative options for achieving such succession" (McMillan Lequieu: 49). They reevaluated and updated their cultural tool kits to accommodate a desire that may seem non-rational to outsiders - a desire to keep the family farm in the family despite a potentially significant financial pay-off for selling, and the possible financial and emotional stress future generations involved with the farm could endure as the result of obliging patrimonial narratives. In other words, narratives are powerful and shaped these farmers' behaviors despite structural economic pressures.

Narratives are our stories. They express our values. They are part of our "cultural repertoire" or "tool kit" for deciding what we think, and how we behave (Swidler 1986; McMillan Lequieu 2015). Subconscious interactions, and interactions with other individuals, help us humans make sense of our circumstances and find a socially and culturally acceptable way forward. We now turn from this background information and literature review to further discussion of theory, data collection and analysis methods, and research design in chapter three.

Chapter 3 - Theory, Methods, and Research Design

Theoretical Approach

As public health efforts are developed to address increasing rates of obesity and food insecurity, understanding the "person-environment" interaction in access-burdened areas is particularly important. One of the challenges of this research is understanding "food contexts" or "food environments." Food environments are commonly assessed by counting the sources of food (e.g., food stores, restaurants, convenience stores) and using GIS software to illustrate their distribution within a geographic unit. However, there has been comparatively less effort to assess perceptions of food environments. This is important because, as Freedman and Bell (2009) and Ver Ploeg et al. (2017) find, residents' perceptions were accurate regarding the "objective" food environment. In other words, their perceptions largely matched reality and, overall, they had an accurate perception of poor food access. Residents' perceptions of the food environment are important shapers of purchasing patterns (Freedman and Bell 2009: 827). Access-burdened households recognize that nutritious food is not available near their household and make sacrifices that more affluent households do not endure to shop at stores that carry a variety of nutritious foods. For example, access-burdened households use more free time to shop for food because of reliance on public transportation and rides from friends and family.

Interpretative methodological and theoretical approaches focus on interaction, on how people interpret, understand, and make sense and meaning in their social worlds, and are based on the fundamental idea that "all social reality is constructed, or created, by social actors" (Esterberg 2002: 15). Interpretative approaches are related closely to the symbolic interaction theoretical tradition. This perspective has three basics premises: that humans "act toward things based on the meanings those things have for them," "the meanings of things rise out of social

interaction" and "meanings are created (and changed) through a process of interpretation" (Esterberg 2002: 15). There is "no social reality apart from how individuals construct it" so the main research task in these types of studies is to interpret those constructions (Esterberg 2002: 16). Applying this approach to food insecurity will uncover nuance about the food environment and how residents interact with it in several ways. For one, this approach will illustrate the how residents living in food deserts perceive and understand their food environment. Two, we will learn how they cope and adapt and what types of narratives have developed in relation to the food environment in this type of context. Related to this, the interpretive approach used here will show how narratives are used to construct social identities, how residents construct the moral economy of food, and how events like the closing of neighborhood grocery stores might affect narrative constructions. Finally, using this approach here will reveal the "structuration" (Giddens 1986) of these environments whereby structural inequalities related to race, class, and gender both shape and are shaped by daily practices.

Giddens's structuration perspective sees social structure as malleable, not as a force of nature that inherently compels particular behaviors in certain situations. Structure does not only act upon individuals - individuals also act upon it. Individuals have the ability to exercise agency, but, their emotional, social and cultural environments provide physical and social parameters within which options can be made in the process of navigating the social world. Individuals create the structures that surround them in their everyday interactions, but, the way in which individuals navigate (subjectively) the structural (objective) world is influenced by structure. Giddens terms this the "duality of structure" (Giddens 1979).

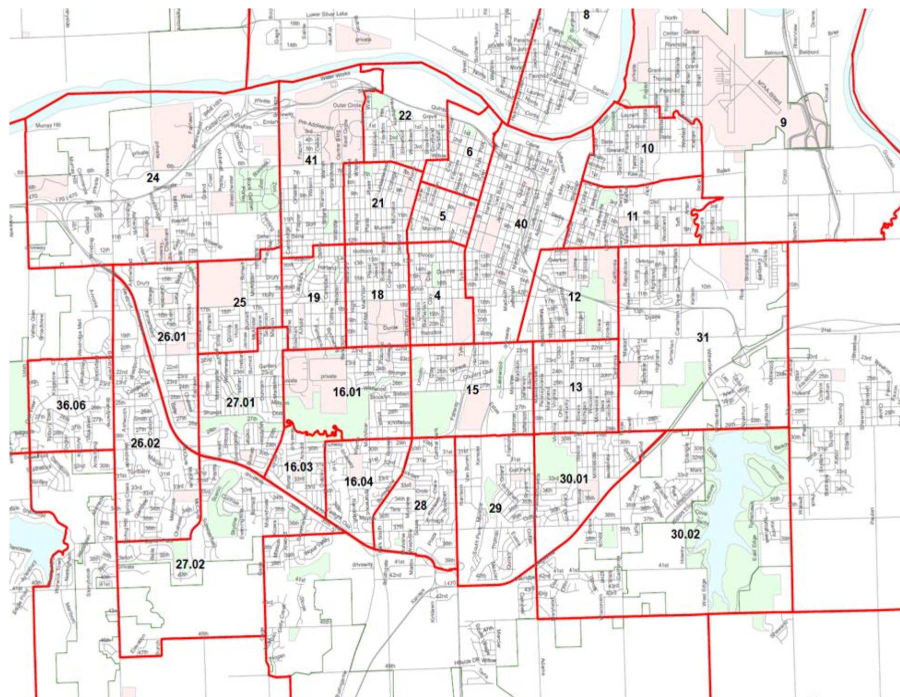
Qualitative researchers like Geertz (1973), Duneier (1999), McDermott (2006), Menjívar (2011), and many others show that the "social sphere is not separate from the economic or

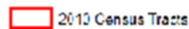
political sphere" (Menjívar, p. 228). Focusing on working class whites' and blacks' racial attitudes and behaviors, McDermott (2006) finds that someone's perception of their race and SES position and how others see them are inextricably linked to key historical characteristics of particular locations related to economy, and politics (p. 37). This is because "the social is where the private and public, and the economic and political, converge to blur artificial demarcations" (Menjívar 2011: 228). It is through the dynamic influences between historical, political, and economic context and interaction that social structure is legitimated and reproduced thus pointing to the powerful influence that structure has over agency and vice versa. If social problems are to be legitimately understood, then an understanding of how interactions work in particular contexts must be reached. The local meanings of interactions as well as how they connect to social structure are key pieces of information for understanding the social world at-large.

Research Context

The neighborhood under investigation is broadly defined as census tract number four by the U.S. Census Bureau and is bordered by Lane and Tyler streets on the west and east, and 12th and 22nd streets on the north and south. This area includes the Central Park, Tennessee Town, Historic Holiday Park, and Chesney Park neighborhoods. Figure 2 below shows how census tracts in Topeka are organized. Tract number four is located near the middle of this map.

Figure 2: City of Topeka Census Tracts





Source: City of Topeka

Census tracts serve as a proxy for “neighborhoods.” The borders of tracts are somewhat arbitrary. However, they are convenient for “neighborhood”-level analyses, and, certainly serve as an adequate proxy for the geo-spatial area most convenient for residents to navigate. Census tracts contain 3,000 – 4,000 people and are designed “to be relatively homogeneous units with respect to population characteristics, economic status, and living conditions” (U.S. Census Bureau 2019).

Dillon’s, a division of the Kroger Company and full-service grocery store in Topeka, Kansas, had a location in the Central Park neighborhood from the early 1980s until February of 2016. This, for one, makes the Central Park neighborhood and surrounding area an ideal study site. Relatively little is known about the meanings that low income residents associate with the food system through the course of coping with food insecurity. Interview data from this context

will shed light on this issue, as well as examine how the closing of a store, and loss of conveniently available healthy foods, might shape residents' perceptions and narratives regarding the food environment.

The Central Park area is named after the 15-acre park at the center of the neighborhood. In the early 1900s it was a major visitor destination. During the 1920s, a period of significant rural to urban migration, many former single-family homes were converted to rental apartments to accommodate rising demand for housing nearby the central business district. These migration trends, and the sprouting of new suburban areas by the 1950s, "made the Central Park neighborhood less attractive to own a home, and thus many residents began to move to newer areas of the City" (Central Park Neighborhood Plan: 2019). The neighborhood and park "became neglected and misused, which made many residents displeased with the City" (Central Park Neighborhood Plan: 2019). This triggered efforts to build more recreational uses within the park. However, on June 8, 1966, a tornado sliced through Topeka and "left an indelible impression that drastically altered the character of Central Park once again" (Central Park Neighborhood Plan: 2019).

During interviews[3] several older residents mentioned the major changes that have occurred in the neighborhood since the tornado of 1966. Discussion of the 1966 tornado was unsolicited. I was vaguely aware of this particularly devastating tornado but did not ask any interview questions explicitly related to it. In June of 1966, an F5 tornado (F5 is the top of the Fujita Intensity Scale, with winds estimated at over 250 mph) cut a path across the city limits of Topeka. The tornado formed southwest of Topeka at about 7:00 pm and

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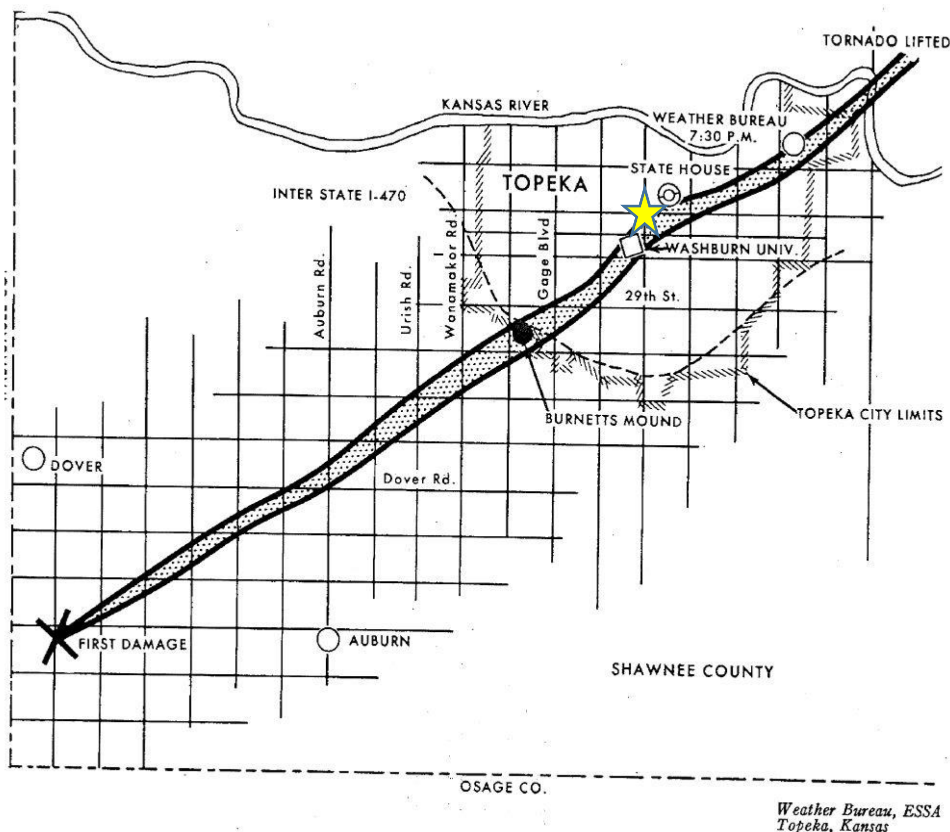
[3] All interview respondents are referred to by pseudonyms.

"cut a 22 mile long path, at times a half a mile wide, across the heart of the city…Every building on the Washburn University campus was either destroyed or heavily damaged…about 800 homes were completely destroyed with nearly 3,000 damaged. Even the state Capitol dome sustained damage from the flying debris, as did many downtown buildings" (National Weather Service, 1966 Topeka Tornado, https://www.weather.gov/top/1966TopekaTornado).

The yellow star in Figure 3 indicates the approximate location here Central Topeka and Tennessee Town are currently located.

Figure 3: 1966 Topeka Tornado Path



Source: Central Park Neighborhood Plan: 2008.

The tornado of 1966 was a turning point for Central Park and the city of Topeka. In many parts of the city, power and utilities were out for weeks, and hundreds were left homeless. Many

students at Washburn University were forced to attend classes in trailers for the next few years (Kansas Historical Society, Topeka Tornado 1966). As predicted, many homeowners were reluctant to rebuild their homes. Within a period of five to six years

> "blocks of storm damaged single-family houses were replaced with a shopping center along Lane Street…The urgency to rebuild "outweighed the many long-term impacts of the new developments and collectively changed the social and physical 'face' of the neighborhood" (Central Park Neighborhood Plan: 2008).

Today, Central Park is predominately occupied by renters (70%, Central Park Neighborhood Plan: 2019). The population of 2,345 is about half white, a little over a quarter black, with 18.5% of residents reporting Hispanic origin. Household median income is only about half of the median income for Topeka as a whole. In Central Park, the percent of families in poverty, and percent of families with a child under eighteen in poverty, is about 11% and 18% higher respectively than Topeka as a whole (see Table 1).

Table 1: Central Park and Topeka Demographics, 2010

	Central Park 2010		Topeka 2010	
Population	2,345		127,473	
White	1,261	53.8%	102,696	80.6%
Black	633	27.0%	17,918	14.1%
Other Race	126	5.4%	13,732	10.8%
Hispanic Origin	433	18.5%	17,023	13.4%
Median Age	28.3		35.7	
Household Median Income	$19,740		$40,342	
Below Poverty Level				
Percent of Families	33.0%		21.9%	
Percent w/ Child < 18	29.6%		11.9%	

Source: US Census Bureau 2010.

Social contexts in flux and "new social worlds" provided the justification for foundational research that emerged during times of unprecedented growth of "urban immigrant Chicago" – the Chicago school. "In recent decades, there has been a continual succession of new social problems that have justified waves of ethnographic research…AIDS, crack cocaine, and an explosion in homelessness" (Katz 1997: 411). Neighborhoods have arguably become more segregated. There is no doubt that they are more segregated than in the early 20th century.

Smaller urban contexts like Central Topeka have not been immune to growing social problems in centrally located urban neighborhoods. Many of these problems have increased in part because of the suburbanization of U.S. society. Suburbanization or "suburban sprawl" is the result of numerous policies that "conspired powerfully to encourage urban dispersal" (Duany et al. 2000: 7). At one time, town planning in the U.S. was "considered a humanistic discipline based upon history, aesthetics, and culture" (Duany et al. 2000: 11). Now it is a "technical

profession based on numbers" (Duany et al. 2000: 11). Suburban sprawl is easier to account for because there are fewer intersecting streets and basically only one way to get places. This makes it easier to enumerate traffic when city planners want to know, for example, the number of cars taking a particular route. Traditional neighborhoods, in contrast, have a street network and mixed-use zones where one can find homes and businesses side by side (or above and/or below each other) (Duany 2000: 16-17).

Two of the most influential policies that encouraged urban dispersal were the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) and the Veterans Administration (VA) loan programs instituted directly after World War II (WWII). Basically, what these programs did was provide mortgages for over 11 million homes, specifically new single-family suburban constructions (Duany 2000). This discouraged the renovation of older housing stocks while at the same time encouraging contractors to turn their back on building more traditional style row houses, mixed-used buildings, and other types of urban housing. At the same time a 41,000 mile interstate program, as well as federal and local subsidies for road improvement and the neglect of mass transit, made automotive commuting more affordable and convenient for average citizens. Automobile use became a "prerequisite to social viability" (Duany 2000: 14), and social viability certainly includes access to nutritious foods. Many "mom and pop" and corner stores that did offer some nutritious food access in the city have disappeared and been replaced with convenience and liquor stores. With increasing automobile use, large suburban food stores require large parking lots surrounding their buildings. Their large parking lots set them away from the street and discourages foot and bicycle traffic. Other types of transportation are also discouraged from suburbanized food stores' distance from low income neighborhoods.

Food environments within U.S. neighborhoods have been changing and represent a context in flux. These contexts have experienced important changes in recent decades. Many used to be thriving neighborhoods with numerous food options within walking distance. These changing thus relatively ill-understood contexts have been described in a largely deductive, quantitative, and summary fashion. What is missing is knowledge regarding the interactional mechanisms that are connected to food deserts and food insecurity in the U.S. that have resulted from these structural changes, and, how interactional and structural elements of these contexts might be connected.

Smaller urban contexts like Topeka (population 127,473, U.S. Census 2010) are largely missing from research on food deserts and food insecurity. This study builds on my master's thesis research which provided a broad spatial analysis of food deserts in Topeka. The maps produced by that research highlighted several neighborhoods around Central Topeka where food availability was extremely low and poverty was relatively high, particularly in census tract four. This is also a neighborhood where a disproportionate number of black and low-income residents live (Miller et al. 2015). This neighborhood has been considered a "food desert," low income low access (LILA) area (USDA Food Access Research Atlas), or an area "characterized by poor access to healthy and affordable food" (Beaulac et al. 2009: A105, emphasis in original).

Figure 4 below illustrates how black incomes, and full-service retail food stores (or "healthy food" availability) have been distributed in Topeka. Blacks are a relatively large minority in the city but still make up a small percentage of the overall population at about 14%. There are no predominately black neighborhoods (e.g., 50% or more black households) so "mixed race" tracts are outlined in red. Mixed race tracts are located in the middle and to the east of the city center and have the highest concentration of black households, from 20-37%. In

Figure 4 “FoodAvl” refers to healthy food availability and is measured by adding the number of full-service retail grocery outlets to the number of stores in all adjacent tracts. The hash-marks and dot-patterns in each tract represent median household income. The lowest one third (dots) have a median household income from $0 - $33,022.67, the middle (hash-marks) $33,023 - $48,705, and the highest one third (cross hash marks) $48,706 - $150,455. Citywide, 68.5% of black households and 41.5% of white households fall within the low category, 11.4% of black households and 16.4% of white households fall within the middle category, and 20.1% of black households and 42.1% of white households fall within the high category. The blue arrow points to census tract number four.

Figure 4: Black Income and Availability Distribution Shawnee County, Kansas

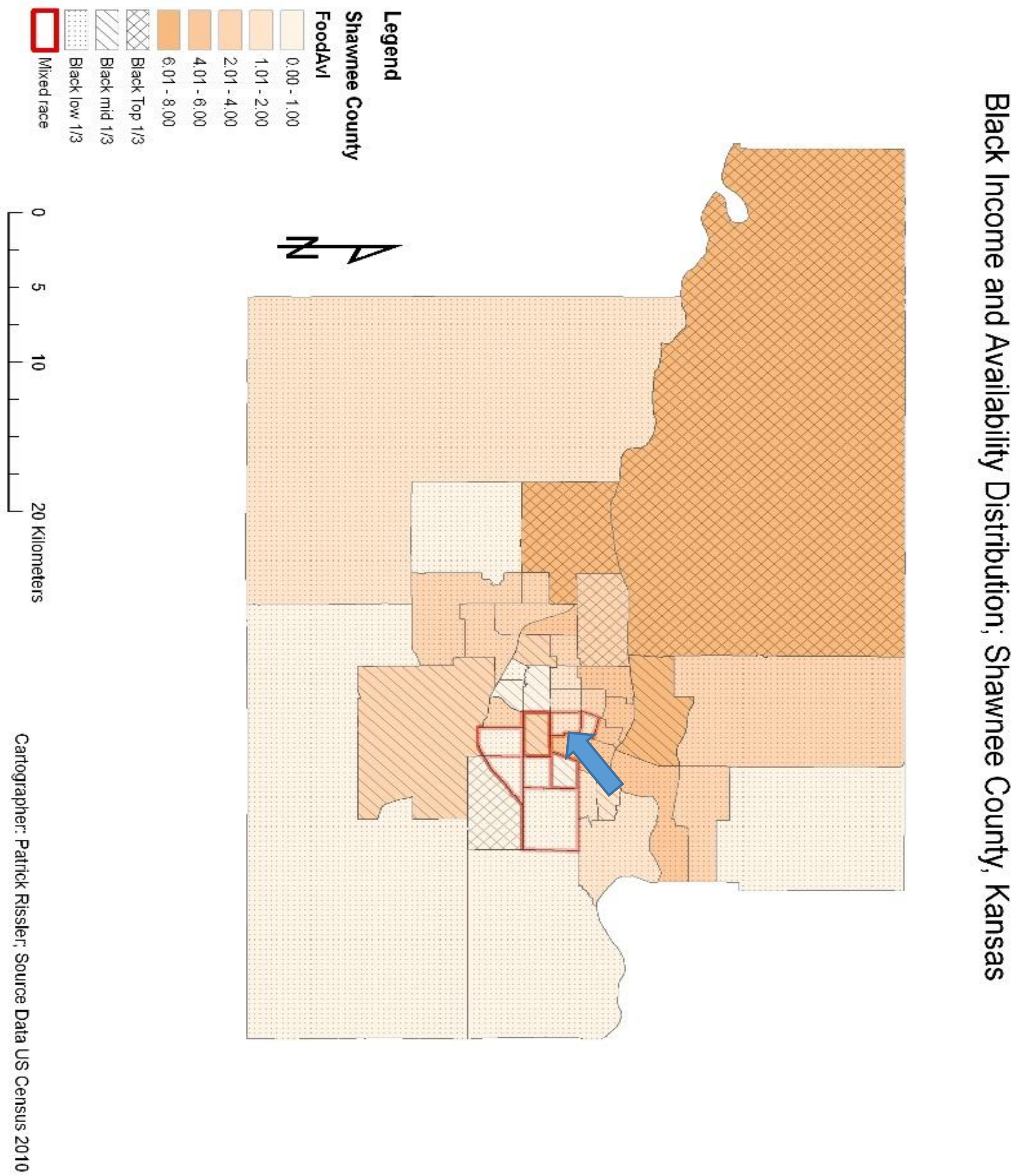


Figure 4 shows that food stores that offer healthy food are generally located outside of the mixed-race cluster of tracts and are most heavily concentrated in neighborhoods to the west and north. This map was produced before the Dillon's closing in tract number four. At this time

food availability was already extremely low. Presumably, food availability is worse in census tract number four now that the store closed, and, it is important to note the potential negative side-effects of this store's closing on adjacent neighborhoods as well where the black population is relatively high and income and food availability are also extremely low.

Methods and Data

Within census tract number four I conducted semi-structured interviews with residents. Semi-structured interviews are less rigid than structured interviews. The goal is to "explore a topic more openly and to allow interviewees to express their opinions and ideas in their own words" (Esterberg 2002:87). They follow a basic interview schedule and basic ideas about what the interview should cover. However, to really understand interviewees' perspectives, the interviewer allows the respondent's responses to shape the order and structure of the interview. In other words, each "interview is tailored to the research participant" (Esterberg 2002: 87).

Narrative Analysis

Narratives or "stories" are one way that people produce and reproduce social knowledge and "try to make sense of our places in the social world" (Esterberg 2002: 181). They allow us to "communicate the emotional content of our values," however, narratives do not just involve talking 'about' values; rather, narratives embody and communicate those values. It is through the shared experience of our values that we can engage with others; motivate one another to act; and find the courage to take risks, explore possibility, and face the challenges we must face" (Ganz 2011: 288).

Storytelling "is the discursive form through which we translate our values into the motivation to act" (Ganz 2011: 280). Our identity and values are expressed through our narratives. It is "how we interact with each other about values – how we share experiences with

each other, counsel each other, comfort each other, and inspire each other to action" (Ganz 2011: 282). Narratives generally have a beginning, middle, and end. They generally consist of three basic elements: 1) plot, 2) character and 3) moral. Basically, a "character" or individual is faced with a challenge. As a result, a choice is made, and that choice leads to an outcome and a moral at the end. There is usually some kind of plot or action. Stories are often but not always told chronologically. People largely tell stories about how we manage our emotions when dealing with the unexpected, what we are going to do about uncertain events, how to interact with people, and "how to be courageous, keep our cool, and trust our imagination" (Ganz 2011: 281-288). To answer "why" questions "not simply why we think we *ought* to act, but rather why we *must* act, what moves us, our motivation, our values" it is necessary then to turn to the analysis of the stories we tell.

Narrative analysis assumes that "language conveys meaning and that how a story is told is as important as what is said" (Esterberg 2002: 181-182). Narrative analysis provides techniques for focusing on the structures of stories and "looking at stories as a whole" (Esterberg 2002: 88). Stories generally have a logic to them and are constructed around "choice points" or "moments when we faced a challenge, made a choice, experienced an outcome, and learned a moral. We communicate values that motivate us by selecting from among those choice points" (Ganz 2011: 283).

Narratives are often communicated through the elements of abstract, orientation, complication, evaluation, results, and coda (Esterberg 2002: 184-185). This is basically the process an individual goes through when communicating values through narratives: readying the listener for a story (abstract), providing background information (orientation), describing a problem or action (complication) then concluding and reflecting on the situation through

evaluation. Finally, the story ends with a coda. This is a basic model for narratives but they do not all follow this structure. Researchers use other literary techniques in these cases. One alternative to chronological analysis is to organize transcripts that do not follow a clear chronological order into poem stanzas. This can provide more insights into respondents' life stories than more traditional methods (Esterberg 2002: 187). However, in this project, participants' stories largely followed the traditional form of asbstract, orientation, complication, evaluation, results, and coda. So, interview transcripts were analyzed in their original chronological form.

Although individuals have their own stories, "communities, movements, organizations, and nations weave collective stories out of distinct threads" (Ganz 2011: 285). The *individual* threads of those alive at the time crossed the day we all saw planes crash into the Twin Towers on September 11, 2001. *Collective stories* are the "story of us" – the identity of "us" as a community, state, nation, etcetera. The "Story of Us brings forward the values that move us as a community" (Ganz 2011: 285). Community stories, or collective stories, are about challenges that we have faced, why we stood up to them – "our values and our shared goals – and how we overcame them are woven throughout our political beliefs and religious traditions" (Ganz: 285). Rosen (2017) draws on Swidler's influential reconceptualization of how culture shapes action to explain residential choices of the majority black low-income neighborhood of Park Heights in Northwest Baltimore, Maryland (Rosen 2017: 277). She finds that "families make active decisions about when and where to move. The concept of narrative can augment our understanding of these decisions, which are shaped by the meaning a person makes of her neighborhood environment, and take the form of a story that explains how she understand her experiences and her place within the neighborhood" (2017: 288). Previous literature on low

income housing choices “largely ignore(s) newer models of culture, treating residential preferences as hierarchical, static, and uniform across social groups” (Rosen 2017: 272).

This same argument could be applied to healthy food choice: previous research and literature largely ignores models of culture and treats food choice as basically uniform across social groups. The food desert thesis posits that healthy food access and availability is systematically unequal, i.e., healthy foods are generally more expensive and unavailable compared to processed foods which are abundantly available within poorer neighborhoods. This view assumes that low income consumers’ food shopping decisions are completely shaped by social structure. In other words, food prices and transportation costs determine that low income consumers will strictly shop within their neighborhood or as close as possible regardless of the (low) quality food that is available there. This negates the role of narratives, interpretation, agency, and cultural and class norms. Ver Ploeg et al. (2017), using nationally representative sample data from USDA’s National Household Food Acquisition and Purchase Survey (FoodAPS) conducted from April 2012 to January 2013, and, Wilde et al. (2017), show that “access-burdened” households spend less at restaurants and eating out than “sufficient-access households,” and spend a slightly larger percentage of their food budget at convenience stores. Access-burdened households are “able to overcome their access barriers to shop at stores that typically carry a wide variety of healthful foods” (Ver Ploeg et al. 2017: 23). In other words, low income consumers spend only slightly more than more affluent consumers at convenience stores, spend less at restaurants, and prefer to make whatever sacrifice necessary, despite numerous other daily hardships, to shop outside of their neighborhood where there is a wider variety of healthy food available.

The cultural model used by Swidler (1986) and other examples discussed above suggest that culture is fluid and dynamic and that people have agency in how they use it" (Swidler 1986, Rosen 2017: 274)**.** Narratives expand our understanding of behaviors and the meanings attached to them. Emphasizing the quotidian or every-day, mundane aspects of actors' lives (Becker 2001: 61) lends insight into how concepts are to be constructed and re-constructed throughout the research process. By not "inventing the viewpoint of the actor" (Becker 2001: 60) we can better understand action, interaction, reason, and motive thus refine theoretical perspectives with meaningful concepts that reflect the "real," truly salient, empirically significant story (Weiss 1994, p. 13).

Turning to their perspectives and stories will guide further interactions with respondents and "lends a moral force to the enterprise" of research and writing (Narayan 2012: 41). The silenced are lent a voice. Interaction is taken seriously "as a social fact that is patterned, real, and important" (Eliasoph 1998: 20-21). Interactions shape how individuals cope with poverty and resource shortages (Stack 1974; Desmond 2016). For this project, to get at authentic and concrete information, I arrived at each interview prepared with an interview schedule, but also prepared to improvise within it (Terkel with Parker 2006: 127). Narayan (2012) advises researchers to describe the physical place, as well as social setting, in detail. Set the scene – start with a wide angle and move into close-up descriptions (Narayan 2012: 37). By proceeding in this fashion, I can present a more complete picture. The reader is allowed to see the wide context of the social situation and smaller details within it that contribute to the appearance and description of the wide angle and observe how places change from one time to another (Narayan 2012: 39). Places are rarely static. In fact, it is the contexts and situations that are changing and "in flux" that can be of most interest to social researchers.

I worked to develop a conversation with respondents, not a questioning. I wanted research participants to freely express their viewpoints and not feel intimidated or influenced by me (the interviewer) (Terkel with Parker 2006: 124). The respondent should be able to "talk about what they want to talk about in the way they want to talk about it, or not talk about it, the way they want to stay silent about it" (Terkel with Parker 2006: 125). I avoided conversation-truncating yes or no questions and kept conversations going by asking strategically open-ended questions that most of the time elicited open-ended responses and subjective elaboration by the respondent.

Researchers can elicit information from project participants without prompting them to tell stories. However, a simple back and forth question and answer session will probably not elicit narratives. Weiss (1994), Esterberg (2002) and Terkel with Parker (2006) give clear examples and comparisons between non-story telling interview questions/prompts and responses, and questions/prompts and responses that encourage and include the essential elements of a story or narrative. For example, if a researcher is interested in eliciting narratives about students' experiences with parking on campus, they will want to use the prompt "Tell me about your experiences parking on campus" rather than asking individual questions, for example, "do you ever park your car on campus?" or "What do you think about the parking problem on campus?"

The narrative analyst must also consider cultural resources and social context. They shape stories thus they shape how and what social knowledge is reproduced, and they shape how individuals make sense of their places in the social world. At the same time, two interviewees could possess very similar cultural resources but use them in different ways to describe the same situation depending on their individual perspective. Narratives are expressions of individuals. At

the same time, “stories are not wholly individual or the property of the storyteller. They are the products of social interaction” (Esterberg 2002: 192).

Reflexivity, Data Validity and Reliability

A large part of conducting effective interviews is explicitly acknowledging and dealing with various social interactional limitations that result from a form of data collection that is reliant upon alert and “objective” yet “casual” social interaction. These interactional limitations and possible shortcomings of interview data include:

1) Guiding respondents toward particular answers,

2) Running into “dead end” responses that fail to elicit any meaningful information,

3) The feelings of the respondent(s) at the time of the interview that can result from idiosyncratic feelings and/or the context in which the interview takes place,

4) Dealing with the academic’s concern to generalize from interviews and sometimes concealing the uniqueness of their respondents (Terkel with Parker 2006),

5) Possibly “hidden” emotional meanings (Anderson and Jack 2016),

6) Dealing with the interplay “between the [respondent’s as well as the interviewer’s] self and its multiple components” (Bozzoli 2016:163) and

7) Considering how the respondent negotiates between different linguistic and cultural identities and how this might determine the quantity and quality of data that can be gathered by interviewing a particular population (Burton 2016).

All qualitative researchers must deal with these possible limitations and shortcomings in some capacity. All information that is produced from interviews is deeply rooted and influenced by the context and manner which the data is collected.

By encouraging and alertly maintaining a *research partnership* the researcher can "control" for several concerns with qualitative inquiry in general, like issues of validity, awkward question wording, knowing how long to interview, and how much to rely on interview guides. By focusing efforts on developing rapport and a feeling of collaboration, the interviewer will be able to limit potential negative repercussions stemming from these and other concerns and will be able to focus on the important details that emerge while conducting interviews. It is also important to remember that the interviewer should never become evaluative, not even approvingly (Weiss 1994: 128). The interviewer is a *work partner* and not a therapist or friend (Weiss 1994: 128).

Producing valid information is only possible through a truly collaborative interview experience. In other words, the interviewer should make it very clear from the beginning that "the interviewer and the respondent will work together to produce information useful to the research project" (Weiss 1994: 65). Weiss (1994) advises social researchers to attempt to know the respondent through the interview unlike journalists who read up on respondents before an interview "the better to confound the respondents' efforts to dissemble." Developing a partnership and getting to know the respondent *through* the interview contributes to building rapport and trust. This approach encourages a conversational interview style that is casual, non-interrogating, and non-questioning (Terkel and Parker 2006). This creates a research context that encourages concrete specific details to emerge opposed to generalized "headlines" that rigid, fixed-item questionnaires tend to produce.

A major obstacle to obtaining valid and reliable data in the field revolves around "reactivity." Reactivity refers to respondent reactions caused by the researcher. From a strictly positivist mind-set this can seem like an insurmountable obstacle in terms of building systematic

and generalizable theory. Taking the experimental method as the most quintessential “scientific” and “objective” method, the unavoidable fact that agents’ behaviors are to a certain extent unpredictable and certainly uncontrollable, would make reactivity seem to be a crucial weakness of qualitative inductive research designs.

But, no individual agent, regardless of who they are interacting with or the context, behaves completely “naturally,” honestly, or authentically at all time. Every individual is dishonest in some way or another in their daily interactions. Different social positions between researchers and respondents can have a serious impact on the interactions that take place and the data that is produced (Duneier 1999: 354). The key is to identify reactivity and to deal with it as explicitly as possible. Qualitative researchers are literally swimming in data while in the phase of data collection. If a participant observer is successful, they become a part of the social situation. If reactivity is explicitly acknowledged and held in check, the researcher’s effect on actors and actor’s effects on researchers can be monitored, altered, or stopped by severing connection(s) to the field. Quantitative researchers may also imagine themselves as being engulfed in data. The difference is, the data surrounding qualitative researchers is raw, “farm fresh” so to speak. It is there in the field, available for the picking, its patina embodying and holding the potential to show the researcher just how a social situation shaped it to appear as it does at the time of observation.

Locating the self within its group allows the researcher to turn a “descriptive and analytic eye on one’s own experience as shaped by larger structures and processes” (Narayan 2012: 95). The researcher should think “reflexively.” This means “to think about who you are and what your beliefs are about the social world” (Esterberg 2002: 9). There is a “great tangle of possible storylines” that could possibly connect the researcher with the materials being written about

(Narayan 2012: 96). Writing and thinking about the self informs the writer of what details on the self will be appropriate to include to connect with the situation and its actors and generate the most accurate and useful insights. The researcher should make their worldview and paradigms explicit because the "choices researchers make about paradigms shape the research strategies they think they should use" and these choices "reflect the training, sensibilities, and beliefs of researchers" (Esterberg 2002: 9).

"Thick description," originally coined by Clifford Geertz (1973) is a concept that has stuck not only in anthropology but also qualitative sociological research. It involves becoming knowledgeable within a social context in order to uncover "stratified hierarchy(ies) of meaningful structures in terms of which twitches, winks, fake-winks, parodies, rehearsals of parodies are produced, perceived, and interpreted" (Geertz 1973: 7). It is a technique to uncover meanings that are hidden from everyone except members of a particular social group. Social contexts, especially unfamiliar ones, are complicated and can be extremely daunting to navigate and make sense of. Even consciously experiencing a "familiar" social situation can prove difficult to describe and interpret when a critical eye is put toward the situation. To overcome this possible difficulty, I took field notes while observing and interacting in the field. I limited the amount of notetaking I did during interviews and relied on a tape recorder and subsequent transcriptions to capture important details. Before and after interviews I took descriptive field notes to capture the look and overall feeling of the context.

However, during interviews, I limited field notes to very select details such as phone numbers, addresses, and other details that are immediately useful to me while I am in the field. I typed the field notes as soon as possible after leaving the field. Discussion and analysis of transcripts and interview data began as soon as possible. A quantitative fixed-item survey or

questionnaire would have been less time-consuming to implement. However, these methods can obscure and generalize respondent experiences while the "real," truly salient, empirically significant accounts are what really matter (Weiss 1994: 8, 13, 63-65). Interpretive studies involve building concepts and theory from the ground up with empirical data. In certain situations, like those that are not yet very well understood, fixed-item quantitative-style questionnaires oftentimes do not capture what is truly important to the respondent. Instead, they tend to grab at headlines but miss the "real," truly salient, empirically significant story (Weiss 1994: 13). Drawing on the cultural tradition of sociology, and Rosen's (2017) and others' arguments that important decisions are influenced by more than structural constraints, here I endeavor to understand how culture as narrative operates among poor, food insecure residents of Topeka in their efforts to cope with and understand their food environment.

Sampling

I initially identified research participants using the U.S. Postal Service's (USPS) Every Door Direct Mail (EDDM) service. EDDM is traditionally used by small businesses to advertise sales, new locations, menus, and offer coupons. EDDM mailings are required to follow one of several specific size formats. The mailings for this project were designed as 6.5 by 11-inch flyers. This was a good service to use for this project for a couple reasons: 1) I did not have any contacts with residents in the area when the project began and EDDM allowed me to contact every address in a specific geographic area, and 2) EDDM is relatively affordable. The letter provides a concise description of the project and includes my email and phone number for scheduling an interview. An example of the flyer, the postage (front) and main message (back) sides, are included in Appendix A.

At the EDDM website at usps.com there is an online tool for precisely selecting the route(s) one is interested in targeting with an EDDM mailing.[4] This online tool provides additional data on selected postal routes like age range, average household income and average household size based on the most recent report of the U.S. Census Bureau. In Topeka, postal delivery routes are organized similarly to U.S. census tracts, but, they represent smaller areas of geographic space. Tract four contains two full and one partial mail carrier route: one on the north end of the tract (primarily in the Central Park and Tennessee Town neighborhoods, where the former Dillon's store was located), one in the middle of the tract, and part of a third postal route intersects with the southwestern corner of tract four. I omitted the mail carrier route that partially intersects with the tract in the southwest corner for a couple reasons. One, this delivery route is the furthest physically from where the Dillon's store in the northern mail carrier route was located. Also, according to census data reported through the U.S. Postal Service EDDM online tool, this mail carrier route has an average household income of $40,120. This is much higher than the average household incomes of the north and centrally located mail carrier routes: $26,480, and $25,550. This means residents in the southwestern postal route have likely been better equipped to cope with the Dillon's closing than residents living within the north and central mail carrier routes. This study is focused on how low income individuals and households cope with, perceive and understand their food environment, what narratives they use tell us about the relationship between social structure and individual level interpretation, and the implications of all of this to addressing the problem of food insecurity. I also omitted the other postal route so I could focus interview recruitment on individuals and households in the postal route located closest to the former Dillon's location. On July 30th, 2019 I sent a recruitment letter to each

[4] Location: https://eddm.usps.com/eddm/customer/routeSearch.action

address within the north end of the tract, primarily in the Central Park and Tennessee Town neighborhoods where the former Dillon's store was located.

Research Timeline

I returned 727 copies of the letter to the post office on July 26, 2019. The letters were delivered to all addresses as soon as possible after. By July 31st, I received calls, texts, and emails from seven residents. The responses continued to trickle in, I scheduled times to meet with residents, and conducted the first interview on August 12, 2019. Interviews continued through October 2019.

After conducting the initial interviews and gaining more familiarity with the neighborhood, residents, and their perspectives, I organized a second wave of interview recruitment. This involved following up with phone calls to family members and acquaintances of the few interviewees who volunteered information to me. I had formal and informal discussions with the presidents and vice presidents of Neighborhood Improvement Associations (NIAs) for the Central Park and Tennessee Town neighborhoods, attended the Aaron Douglas Art fair (ADAF) (held annually in the Central Park neighborhood directly adjacent to the former Dillon's location) where I made several contacts. I conducted one formal interview and had several informal conversations at the art fair. I also contacted Doorstep Inc. of Topeka[5] to informally discuss my project with an employee. After the second wave of interview recruitment, conducting the majority of interviews, and proceeding with the initial data analysis, it was clear that I had reached saturation.

[5] Doorstep provides "short-term emergency aid to individuals in need and provide(s) information on services to promote long-term self-sufficiency for our clients." It is located just north of the Central Park neighborhood with Tennessee Town. https://doorsteptopeka.org/about-us/.

In all I conducted 25 in-depth semi-structured interviews. Interviews were recorded with a hand-held digital recorder and transcriptions were produced by a student assistant using the Express Scribe Transcription Pro software. I then themed the printed transcripts by hand, and re-coded the initial themes into broader categories. Table 2 illustrates the demographic make-up of the resident sample compared to Central Park overall.

Table 2: Resident Sample Compared to Central Park Population

	Sample	**C. Park Population**
Female	60%	48%
Male	40%	52%
Median Age	55*	28.3
White	71.4%	53.8%
Black	14.3%	27.0%
Other Race	4.8%	5.4%
Hispanic Origin	14.3%	18.5%

Source: U.S. Census 2010
* = Estimate

In addition to residents, NIA members, and other community members, I interviewed two additional experts on healthy food access and social relations in Topeka. The purpose of these interviews was to verify and supplement resident accounts with information from experts and academics familiar with Topeka and Central Park in particular. One was a PhD student at Kansas State University (KSU) who was also involved with the Kansas Healthy Food Initiative (KHFI). KHFI helps provide technical assistance and funding for low-income, under-served communities to help improve their access to healthy food in a retail environment. This usually translates to assisting grocery stores. Their work with the Rural Grocery Initiative (RGI) at KSU makes them

a "connector" between stores in need and programs at KSU, funders, and other resources to help revitalize grocery stores, and bring in new stores. KHFI attended several meetings with the Central Topeka Grocery Oasis (CTGO) group formed in Topeka as a response to the Central Topeka Dillon's closing. KHFI assisted CTGO by providing examples of what other communities had done in response to losing a store, providing success stories from other communities that have improved food access, and linked them to resources to help answer the questions of what type of food store they want and need. KHFI also linked CTGO with the small business development center and other partners. With the assistance of KHFI, The Grocery Oasis group was able to procure a grant from the Kansas Health Foundation (KHF) to fund a feasibility study commissioned to determine if bringing a full-service grocery store back to the area was viable or not (Yarborough 2020). The feasibility study, conducted by Dakota Worldwide Corporation, determined that "central Topeka can support a grocery store of 7,500 to 10,000 square feet" according to one member of the CTGO (Yarborough 2020).

I also interviewed a Professor at a university in Missouri. She grew up and lived in east Topeka and is familiar with Central Topeka and issues that low-income residents of the area face. She was on the Topeka city council in the early 2000s representing district number three. District three tends to have a higher crime rate and lower healthy food availability. She has been part of multiple social groups dedicated to helping the underserved around district number three and Central Topeka. She echoed several themes that arose during interviews with residents.

Data Limitations

As we can see in Table 2 above, despite multiple different efforts to increase the diversity of respondents, the demographics of the resulting sample do not match up with the population of Central Park. The sample is clearly older, whiter, and more likely to be female compared to the

population. Younger working people are traditionally a difficult population to reach because they are busy with work and/or in need of childcare. One discussion prompt near the end of the interview schedule asked if respondents knew anyone else who lived in the neighborhood, particularly those with a different point of view, who might be interested in talking with me. This yielded a surprisingly small number of contacts. As I discuss further in this and later chapters, most respondents kept to themselves and were not familiar with their neighbors. There are probably a few reasons for this: 1) many respondents are elderly, 2) they lack mobility around the neighborhood because of physical condition and/or injury (in addition to not needing to move around the neighborhood since Dillon's has closed), and 3) respondents possibly feel alienated from younger families who have moved in during recent decades so they avoid maintaining contact with their neighbors.

Analysis Plan

The goal is to gather accurate, valid, and reliable data about the context (field notes), execute the interviews, then do the bulk of analyses. During the interviewing/data collection process I gathered authentic narratives regarding: 1) How residents of Central Park and Tennessee Town perceive and understand the food environment, and, 2) Overarching narratives that have developed in regards to the food environment and losing the neighborhood Dillon's store (the one source of nutritious food access within a reasonable walking distance). The work "moving from description to explanation will be a matter of exploiting the care that was put into description in the first place" (Katz 2001b, 465) and is discussed in subsequent chapters.

Interview transcriptions were themed and summarized by hand after the literature review was largely finished and theoretical perspectives on this case began to develop. These themes and summaries were then re-coded.

There are numerous other questions a researcher must ask themselves while analyzing and coding interactional data: 1) What is going on? 2) What are people doing? 3) What are people saying? 4) What do these actions and statements *take for granted*? 5) How do structure and context serve to support, maintain, impede or change these actions and statements (Charmaz 1992)? Process-related questions to ask of transcription data include: 1) What process is at issue here? 2) Under which conditions does this process develop? 3) How does the research participant(s) think, feel, and act while involved in this process? 4) When, why and how does the process change? and, 5) What are the consequences of the process?

Chapter four will provide more personal information about me and how it relates to Central Topeka and food insecurity, more background on Central Topeka and Topeka more generally to set the contextual stage for analyzing interview data, and describe and analyze overarching narratives that emerge from interview data in regards to the Dillon's closing. Chapter five takes a close look at the research question "What do food environment stories tell us about who residents are and how they see themselves?" and, by way of conclusion, chapter six looks at the central narratives that respondents use to talk about their food environment, and, what their stories might say about how they see the possibilities for change in the future. How do they see their own agency in fostering change? What implications do these findings have for addressing the problem of food insecurity in the U.S.?

Chapter 4 - Contextual Interview Data and Analysis

Reactivity

The narrative and data analysis, presented later in this chapter and throughout the rest of the dissertation, are accompanied by excerpts from my field notes, written during and directly after interviews and observations took place. This chapter focuses on my background, data reactivity, and resident respondent narratives in response to the Central Park neighborhood Dillon's closing.

An important part of producing valid data and maximizing the transparency of qualitative data analyses involves addressing reactivity. Daniels (1999) advises others to document personal experiences, actors' reactions and emotions, and personal sensitivities. Talking openly and explicitly about where you come from as a researcher and including these details in the final write-up and publication allows the reader to question you (Mendoza 2008: 44). This can help make clear how the researcher might be affecting actor's behaviors and/or interviewees' responses. It might be impossible to recognize important symbols and other significant markers in the field until a certain level of comfort and familiarity is established. In "Homegirls" (2008), Mendoza nearly abandons her research site because she has trouble "getting in" and begins to seriously doubt her original working hypothesis dealing with the dynamics between high school Latina gangs. Remaining steadfast and finally identifying a significant sign in the form of bathroom graffiti, Mendoza (2008) subsequently uncovers dynamics between and within gangs that she would have never had the ability to hypothesize about without explicit self-reflection and self-disclosure. Actors behave within webs of collective action whether they are around a researcher or not. By consciously reflecting on personal feelings and taking rigorous field notes

as close to their time in the field as possible, researchers can begin to untangle these webs of collective action. There is no precise recipe, though there are general strategies.

I come to this research as a White man who grew up in Topeka for 12 years. I lived in Topeka all through my primary and secondary school years, from first grade through twelfth grade. I also lived in Topeka through most of my undergraduate career. I grew up mainly in Southwest Topeka and for the most part enjoyed a middle-class lifestyle. I had what I needed and took many things for granted that poorer families may consider a luxury: I always had access to nutritious (and non-nutritious) food, I had good teachers and attended well-funded schools, I had access to organized sports and other enriching programs. However, the first place I vividly recall living in Topeka as a child was in the Montara neighborhood south of Topeka from about 1990 to 1993. The Montara neighborhood was originally developed as housing for the nearby Forbes Air Force base. Over time, the approximately 1,000-unit community has become privately owned. Many of the units are owned by Montara Leasing and rented to tenants, and around half are owner-occupied. My dad had just completed his law degree at Washburn Law School and was a new attorney with few connections and relatively little social capital.

Over the years, he built a private law practice that afforded our family a relatively privileged middle-class life. We moved away from our rented duplex in Montara to a house my parents purchased in Southwest Topeka. It was so much more spacious than our duplex in Montara, it had a fenced backyard, and a basement. It was luxury to my younger sister and me. I attended Allen County Community College and Washburn University while living in Topeka. I moved into an apartment located at 12th and Polk Street with my then-girlfriend. There are two large high-rise buildings for impoverished elderly people called "Polk Plaza" and "Tyler Towers" located within about a block away, and the Central Topeka neighborhood that is the

focus of this study is located just a few miles to the west and south. Many residents of Polk Plaza and Tyler Towers were reliant upon the close physical access to the neighborhood Dillon's before it closed.

We also lived at 4th and Clay Street, within two blocks of the Sumner school. The Sumner school was all-white in the early 1900s. In 1950, Linda Brown's father Oliver had become frustrated they had to walk 21 blocks to Monroe Elementary when the Sumner school was a mere seven blocks from their residence at 511 First Street. In an unforeseen turn of events, Oliver Brown's name would appear as the plaintiff in the historic *Brown v. Board of Education* case (Kluger 2004: 408). The reasons Oliver Brown stopped at Sumner School that Fall morning in 1950 do not matter. What matters is that he did, and he attempted to register young Linda in defiance of the segregation rule. He was refused, and, under the "forceful guidance" (Kluger 2004: 410) of social activist Esther Brown and pressure from the NAACP, Oliver Brown became the key litigant in the Supreme Court case that would prove to be one of the most important events in the black civil rights movement in the U.S.

Despite this and other efforts for equal rights and justice for all in the U.S., race as well as class segregation remain serious problems that manifest through laissez-faire, social-structural mechanisms (Bobo et al. 1997). Also, connections between social class and structural inequalities have been uncovered by researchers (e.g., MacLeod 1987) and show that in many situations even individuals who possess a racial "advantage" face systematic, structural inequalities. The point here is that these inequalities have not abated since the Brown v. Board decision of 1954. USD 501, Topeka's largest school district then and now, is still segregated by race and class and has only within the last several decades enacted a desegregation plan (Fisher 2011).

Although I was raised in relative affluence and benefit from white privilege, it became clear through my personal experience, and then through academic studies in sociology, that structural social mechanisms still operate to limit the rights and privileges of marginal citizens in Kansas and across the U.S. Physical and social isolation results in limited availability and access to social resources, food being among the most important because it is universally needed for the most basic biological survival. Through the process of growing up and making my way through college, I experienced a less-privileged, impoverished lifestyle. This is part of what drew me in to a career in sociology, seeing first-hand how privilege and life chances are largely out of our own hands. The opportunity and tools to pursue education and upward mobility are not common resources to possess for individuals and families living in poor neighborhoods. What our parents start with, their race/ethnicity and other ascribed characteristics, the decisions they make, their education, what types of jobs they get and the amount of income and wealth they can produce strongly influence individual lives and life chances in the modern, starkly unequal U.S. society. In sum, my experiences as an affluent youngster, and, financially struggling college student from Topeka, motivate and inform this research.

Interviews and Observations: Narratives in response to Dillon's Closing

In addition to private residences, coffee shops, restaurants, parks, and community centers, I did observations and conducted several impromptu semi-structured interviews at the Aaron Douglas Art Fair (ADAF). The ADAF is a popular annual tradition that, according to other interviewees, news reports, and the art fair's website, has steadily grown during its fourteen years in existence. However, I have not heard anything about the art fair on the local WIBW 13 news. Overall, advertising seems somewhat lacking for the event. Besides flyers at a couple coffee shops in Topeka, I have not heard much about the art fair.

The ADAF was inspired by the completion of the Aaron Douglas mural in 2006 and has been an annual event since. The mural and art fair is located at 12th and Lane in Topeka, directly adjacent to the building that once housed Dillon's (now the site of a "Grace Med" family clinic) next to the small corner park that houses the Aaron Douglas mural and permanent placards. The Aaron Douglas mural was adapted from a print from Douglas's series titled "Slavery Through Reconstruction." Its production was overseen by Kansas artist David Lowenstein with the help of Stan Herd and was executed by local high school and college students as well as neighbors of the Tennessee Town neighborhood in Topeka.

Photo 1: Aaron Douglas mural, 12th and Lane, Topeka, Kansas

Source: Travel Kansas website; https://www.travelks.com/listing/aaron-douglas-mural/27930/

The art fair was created to "provide a one-day classic art fair environment to showcase diverse and emerging artists, to celebrate community and to continue the legacy of world-renowned Topeka-born artist Aaron Douglas.[6] The fair is fully organized by a dynamic, all

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[6] Aaron Douglas was born in Topeka and attended Topeka High School. He attended college in Nebraska, taught in Kansas City, then went to New York City in the 1920s and studied with Weinhold Reiss. He became a leading visual artist in the "Harlem Renaissance" or "New Negro" movement. His work was published in several notable magazines such as The Crisis, Opportunity, and Vanity Fair. In 1934 he was commissioned by the 135th street branch of the New York Public Library through to paint the series of murals called "Aspects of Negro Life."

volunteer-run board and assisting community volunteers. Admission and all activities are free" (art fair website: https://www.aarondouglasartfair.com/).

After my initial walk-around at the fair,[7] I go to buy lunch from one of the two food vendors I saw near the fair entrance. There are two groups of people grilling hamburgers, hot dogs, and bratwursts. I go to the line that is shortest (there are at least 5 or so people waiting for food at the other place) and order and pay for a bratwurst and chips with cash. A young girl about 13 years old gives me my food and change. She says they are from Lane street church, located directly across the street from where we are currently standing. However, they (her and the group she is with presumably) do not live in the area they only attend the church located across the street from the fair on Lane street.

I proceed to the next grilling station which is manned by about four or five middle aged Black men. I start to chat with one of the men sitting behind the booth/tables. I ask if they are part of American Legion (b/c the symbol on their poster/tarp and hats looks like the American Legion symbol to me). He says "no," that they are part of the Masonic temple of Kansas located in Topeka. He is elderly, much older than the others. I tell him a little about my project and who I am. He points over to another man working at the booth and indicates that he would be a good person to talk to. This person turns out to be Harry, a long-time resident. He said he moved into

[7] The day of the fair, September 28, 2019, it is a wet, misty, and humid day. Booths are arranged in lines on either side of the grassy makeshift fairgrounds. There are about sixteen booths with artists and their work on one side, and about 12 on the other. Most of the artists seem pretty quiet and to themselves although the art fair had been going on for about 3 hours by that point (I arrived at about 12:30 or so, the fair ran from 10:00am to 5:00pm, so many artists had presumably already been there for about 3 hours or more). In the middle was a kids' tent with tables, paper, paints, and rock painting. The artists in the booths surrounding the kid's tent range from a few young students, to the featured artist who fashions guitars and banjos out of cigar boxes, tennis rackets, and other unusual items. The grass of the field where the fair takes place is thick and un-mowed. That, in combination with the moisture from rain during the past couple of days (it is currently overcast and misty) makes it a wet soggy affair. There is a large puddle of standing water near where I enter the fair.

his place directly across the street from the art fair in 1960. He claims to be one of only a few "original residents of the area."

While we talk, he expresses shock and disappointment that the police haven't driven by or had any sort of presence at the art fair (It's not right!"). It is true that during the afternoon I attend the art fair there are no police officers present at any time, and, I do not observe any police cars drive through the busy intersections adjacent to the fair grounds. When I tell Harry about my project, he echoes the complaints of other residents that there is no nearby grocery store, and that it is a unique time in that there has always been a food market or grocery store in the neighborhood since he moved in during 1960. Fourteen out of twenty resident respondents (14/20, 70%) had lived in the neighborhood long enough to see how the food environment has changed over one or more decades.

Mrs. Courtright is an elderly respondent who has lived in the neighborhood for almost 60 years (since about 1960). She lives in a house built around 1899. It is in very good condition with fresh white paint, maintained roof, and a manicured lawn. It has a front porch and fence around the front yard characteristic of many other houses in this area. There is a house across the street with boarded windows and doors. It is common in this neighborhood to see one house in decent condition directly adjacent to abandoned houses with boarded up windows and doors. Mrs. Courtright invites me inside and I sit on a couch in a neat and well-organized living room. She is at least 70 years old, white. She sits across and diagonal from me in a small recliner chair. She is a wealth of knowledge on the happenings in the neighborhood. She attested to the significance of the 1966 tornado to Topeka, particularly in the Central Park neighborhood:

> **Mrs. Courtright:** Things changed after the tornado in '66. It went from just a nice neighborhood, neighbor houses. After the tornado, things got destroyed and it changed into a lot of apartments. Instead of homeowners, there were a lot of apartments.

Regarding the food environment in the Central Park neighborhood:

Mrs. Courtright: When we moved here, if you look out the window there, at the house on the corner, there's a big empty lot here, there was a house there and there was a mom and pop store, just a little one. They sold quite a bit of stuff. I think they even had meat. Eventually, that turned into a ceramics shop. Eventually the house that was there got torn down.

Me: So that's how it is now, there's just a lot over there?

Mrs. Courtright: Yeah. But I think back in the day, I don't know if you know about Central Park, there were two ponds there, and people used to go over there on Sundays all the time, back in the day. They'd stop at that little store, I've heard. Then there was Murray's, down on the corner of 17th Street. It was two brothers and their wives, who were sisters, ran it. It was a very nice little store. A lot of neighborhoods went there. Then there was Dibble's, up here where the old Dillon's was. It was a family, nice bigger store. That's where most everybody went when we moved here. Eventually then it turned into a Dillon's. I think that's when all the big stores started coming in and affecting the little mom and pop shops.

Another respondent, Tiana, approximately 55 years old and Black, lives in a house that is relatively freshly painted white and light blue and appears in good repair from the outside. There are black faux shudders on the sides of the tall windows on the first and second stories. Overall, the other houses around this vicinity do not appear to be in as good of repair as Tiana’s. One nearby house hardly has any paint. The paint that is left is dry and peeling off. There is a large old abandoned church-like building just three doors down. The front door is boarded, but there is a rough hole in the approximate shape and size of a doggy door which smaller animals have clearly used to get into the building.

I walk through the gate and up to Tiana's front door and knock. Her daughter-in-law answers the door and gets Tiana's attention for me. The daughter-in-law watches the day-care kids while Tiana and I talk on the front porch. I find out she is also a "back-up" for Tiana when she needs to work at her other job or leave the house to run errands. I peek inside the house and see at least seven or so kids in the living room playing. Tiana meets me at the front door and suggests we talk on the front porch.

We both sit on an outdoor couch on her front porch. It is a typical, hot and humid summer day in Northeast Kansas. The temperature is in the 90s, but the humidity is not nearly as overbearing as usual. I started to get fairly hot and sweaty about twenty minutes into the interview (the interview lasted over an hour). But, the porch was shady, and, an occasional breeze helped to cool me down. It is surprisingly comfortable to sit and chat on this front porch on such a hot day. As we talk, several handymen/workers file in and out of the front door. They are repairing a ceiling fan that broke and fell within the last few days.

Tiana has worked at Blue Cross Blue Shield (BCBS) (insurance company located in Central Topeka) in the past. Currently, she runs a child-care business out of her home. This includes overnight service for those who need it. She also works nights at a business located at Forbes Field after 11:00pm (Forbes Field is the site of an Air National Guard base, as well as several privately-owned businesses). Her husband died a few years ago. Her daughter-in-law and elderly mother help her with her child-care business when she needs it. She has lived in the Central Park neighborhood for 30 years. She discussed history of other grocery stores in the area that have closed over the years. She paints a picture of a Central Park neighborhood that was ideal in the past:

> **Tiana:** There was even a market that you'd have to be my age or older to know. But we used to have an even smaller mom and pop grocery store. It was actually almost like

> something out of a little storybook. It was called Morgan's Grocery, and it was right over by Blue Cross and Blue Shield. They had a fresh deli in there where they actually cut the meat and the cheese, they did that. They had fresh produce. You could go in there and buy apples and bananas, potatoes and oranges and your onions, and lettuce and everything. And they were all set up, I remember I used to love going in there because I worked at Blue Cross Blue Shield, they had the old wooden crates that would be stacked up. They would have your produce, and you could go in there. A lot of people at the time from Blue Cross Blue Shield would go in there and buy things for dinner. Because you could buy your fresh produce and stuff there. They would have like green beans and snap peas, stuff in season. Cantaloupe and all kinda stuff. It was just a little bitty old mom and pop grocery store. That guy ran that grocery store, him and his wife, I think until they retired. Now, I'll tell you. If you go back up that way, and you're coming down, not Huntoon but 11th street or 12th street, it's 12th street… If you go that way from Blue Cross Blue Shield and you're coming back west, it's 808 Salon, it's a hair salon now. Do you know where the Holliday Cafe is? (**Me:** Mm Hmm). Right next door, where that 808 Hair Salon is, where it was. It was just the coolest little grocery store. So there were options, once upon a time, in this neighborhood...

Tiana confirms that there used to be a wide variety of fresh produce available locally and conveniently accessible to Central park residents. She expresses nostalgia for the old neighborhood while perhaps romanticizing the way things used to be. Central Park was not always a food desert. There were mom and pop stores like Murray's and Morgan's, and a market called Dibbles from at least the 1960s to the mid-1970s to early 1980s. The Central Park Dillon's opened in 1982, and, before long, it was the primary food store in the area. It became a neighborhood staple that half of my resident respondents felt a sense of community toward. Respondents used phrases like "our Dillon's" and "we lost the Dillon's" when talking about it. The reality and consequences of Dillon's closing and knowing that the neighborhood has traditionally always had accessible food, leads to "narratives of loss" among most residents.

Denise is a middle-aged white woman. Her small house is located directly adjacent to the old Dillon's location. She has three children: the oldest son has moved out, an older teenage son that lives in the house (not present for the interview), and a teenage daughter who lives in the house and who is present and participates during the interview and discussion. They own at least one dog, a large pit bull that is very friendly. They keep the dog in the kitchen with a gate between the kitchen and main living room where we meet. Denise is injured, one of her legs is completely wrapped in a cast and elevated on a large cushiony ottoman, her toes stick out the end of the cast. She is lounging in a large, padded recliner. I sit across from her on a couch. I discover through the course of our conversation that her leg is not the only injury she has dealt with recently. She has also had a back injury. Her speech is slow, she contemplates my questions for a minute before she answers. She sometimes forgets facts and other details and becomes a little frustrated when she cannot remember. Her daughter filled in details and provided additional commentary at numerous points. Her daughter disagrees with one or two responses her mother gives. One disagreement of note, Denise indicates they are not food insecure, but, her daughter corrects her and indicates their household does in fact exhibit some symptoms of food insecurity (e.g., they cut meals because they were not sure if they would have enough money for more later). Denise does not work but her husband is currently gone at his job.

Denise and her daughter spoke fondly about the old Dillon's. They had mostly positive things to say. They recalled that other shoppers and workers were friendly. They knew the manager "Bob the manager" and indicated he was always friendly and helpful. Denise and her daughter felt important because they had a relationship with the manager. When the Dillon's was still open the neighborhood was basically an ideal food environment:

Me: So what would an ideal food environment look like to you?

Denise: That's a hard question. I want my Dillon's back. It would be convenient if I had a Dillon's in my backyard, so that I could go shopping.

Teenager: Just having a grocery store nearby. It saved not just time, but money. That Dillon's saved us a lot of money. Now it's gone.

Me: So that close proximity, being able to walk, not having to drive. You could drive if you want, if you're getting a lot of stuff, but yeah.

Denise: Yeah we used to have a wagon that we took over there.

Teenager: Especially not even just for us, but everyone else in the neighborhood.

Me: So if you had control, and you could change things, you would put the Dillon's right back.

Denise: Click, yep. Back to Dillon's. With Bob as the manager.

Teenager: Everyone was always so nice. I loved going there.

Denise: We had a very friendly staff. Then it was shut down. It was crazy.

Teenager: Always well stocked. Even at my store,[8] that Dillon's easily blew us out of the water.

Denise and her daughter clearly miss the convenience and sense of community the Dillon's provided.

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[8] Referring to the Walmart where she is currently employed.

Another respondent, Geraldo, a middle-aged Hispanic man with tattoos on his arms, chest, neck, and face, was explicit in his assessment: “The low-income people need a grocery store.” Geraldo has fresh cuts and scabs on his face. One of his ears is severely lacerated. He has recently had stitches. When we parted ways, he indicated he needed to go to the doctor to get shots. During our discussion he reiterates over and over the importance of community and offering recreational opportunities to the youth in the area:

> **Geraldo:** The reason there's so much killings and violence in this neighborhood lately, there's nothing to do here. Besides fight with each other. There's nothing to do here. I mean yeah, they got a park and a track, but where's the swimming pool at?
> Put you a swimming pool right over there, man. Throw a fence around it, put a lifeguard in there, and away you go. You know? Because the kids have no entertainment man, so they're always trying to find something to do. So robbing and selling drugs and fighting, that's all they know how to do, because that's all that we have here in Central Park. That's it. Look around man, what do you see here? Do you see anything here?

Geraldo has ideas to improve the neighborhood, and, improve food access:

> **Geraldo:** …but I can’t ever get nobody to fuckin listen to me, about nothin’ man. They're like look at this guy, he's got tear drops (tattoos under his eye), you know, what are we gonna do with this dude? You know, maybe you should just listen.
>
> …there's a building right on the other side of the liquor store. I talked to them, and I told them I wanted to run a three-bay crock pot, where I made burritos out of. Just sell some burritos and chips and soda, whatever, you know. I got a lady out here in South Topeka, and she has a lot of equipment. I used to work for her, that's who I used to work for. She showed me everything that she knew. I was thinking that, see cuz those buildings, if we can get the restaurant building opened up, it has vents in it. But that's how come I was thinking about running the crock pots, because they don't create a bunch of grease and steam, you know what I mean?

Me: True, just keeping the stuff warm.

Geraldo: Yeah, all you're doing is keeping it warm. Or, see I've also thought about getting a four bay heater, pour some water in it, with a deep pan, and then you put a little shallow pan in there. And you make a bunch of pre-rolled burritos and just leave them out right there, like that so people can come and see. We have nothing to eat in this neighborhood…

He was adamant about wanting to start a business selling food in the neighborhood, and maybe even combining a food business with a thrift store business:

Geraldo: The food environment in the neighborhood is not really good. Because you have to go to the gas station or the liquor store, and all you're buying is high-priced burritos and high-priced chips, and high-priced soups, everything's high-priced. We need...there's a building, like I told you over there, if we opened up, if we could get either the restaurant open, or we could get one of the buildings, we could arrange it to where we could work. Somebody just put a thrift store in there, so they're gonna start making money. They put a thrift store right there. So you figure...now this is what I'm looking at, the long picture. I'm looking at thrift store business, food business.

…what I'm trying to express to you, is that there is nothing in this neighborhood. There is nothing. There ain't shit here. The only thing they got is a liquor store here. And that's where everybody goes. They just go to the liquor store, fuck it. I ain't got nothin to eat or drink, so i'm gonna go to the liquor store, get a bag of chips, and get me a couple of brews, you know. And I mean, that's kinda really what fucks up the neighborhood. Because if you don't have no other resources, what else are you gonna use?

You know man, we could do something with this neighborhood. Let's get everybody off the street, you know?

What are we doing, we gonna get something going, man?

Geraldo confirms the lack of available food in the neighborhood, and, expresses the importance of community engagement. But, he feels like because of his physical appearance and social class standing he is not able to effectively express his ideas to the "right" kind of people who can help him make community-wide change a reality.

Part of the sense of community surrounding the old Dillon's was the fact that Dillon's was a full-service grocery store that not only offered affordable healthy foods, but also contained a bank, post office, and a pharmacy. According to Ramona, an elderly white respondent, it "was a blow when that closed. You could bam bam have three things done in one place at one time, you know? That was real convenient."

Shoppers and employees would visit with one another and catch up on current events. According to Margie, a 67 year-old white woman who lives in Central Park, there is no other place like that in Topeka, where one can shop for food and feel a sense of community and belonging, except for at the downtown Saturday farmer's market which occurs during the spring through fall in a large parking lot. However, other than Margie, no one spoke of the farmer's market as "our" market or associated any feelings of identity or community with it. In fact, only a handful of other respondents even mentioned the downtown farmers market. This is not surprising since farmer's markets are generally more expensive than grocery and other food stores. Farmer's markets also tend to have limited hours of operation that are generally difficult for the poor to access because of the irregular hours inherent in low-wage employment. The downtown Topeka Farmer's Market is no exception, and is only open on Saturdays during the season, from early morning to early afternoon.

Food shoppers are not homogenous and do not all blindly follow economics when making daily decisions about buying and eating food. Economics and spatiotemporal elements

are important to consider when assessing food insecurity, but food insecurity and food accessibility also have critical socio-cultural components. Identity-related factors like food preferences, ethnicity, cultural background, and language coalesce with purchasing power, mobility, location, length of residence, *and distance from stores that offer healthy food* to influence individuals' understanding of their food environment, and food shopping decisions.

Several respondents indicated that they moved to the area partly because there was a grocery store within close, walking proximity. Ramon, a middle-aged Hispanic man who lives close to the Topeka and Shawnee County Public Library (TSCPL) at 10th and Washburn Avenue, has struggled with homelessness and addiction in the past. He moved to Topeka about a year or so before the Central Park Dillon's closed. He was homeless at the time and received assistance from the Topeka Rescue Mission. The assistance from the Mission was appreciated, however, he felt as if religion was forced on him. He repeatedly expressed appreciation for their assistance but did not appreciate having to act like someone he was not and attend prayers in order to receive assistance. Ramon is very knowledgeable about the various food pantries and food banks around town. He gives me printouts with information on all the food pantries and other assistance around town. He thought when he first moved from Lawrence to Central Topeka, close to downtown, it would be easy to get around, to get food and other resources because things were close together and the Central Park Dillon's was close by, not yet closed. There was not any reason to think they would close in the near future.

Geraldo expresses a similar sentiment, combined with some resentment that the old Dillon's building is now occupied by Grace Med.[9] His response is tinged with paranoia regarding a perceived government conspiracy:

> **Geraldo:** You figure if you live right here and there's a grocery store around the corner, hey I can carry that. I'll take my baby stroller and put the shit in there, wheel it home you know what I mean? But the thing is, is that they took, they've been taking everything away from them. All they're putting is…they put Med Grace in there, something like that. Grace Med. and the thing about it is, is that all they're doing, what they did, is they took our food away, and then made a way for the government to make money. That's exactly what they did. Grace Med is all about cards and all that shit."[10]

Back at the ADAF, after talking with Harry and others, I arrive at Anna's vendor table. She is selling root beer floats and ice cream. A large white canopy provides her shade and a barrier from the rain. She is here every year making root beer floats and selling other snacks. She remembers going into the Dillon's in the past, within fifty yards or so, to buy more ice cream if she ran out during the fair. She indicates she is with the Chesney Park Neighborhood Improvement Association (NIA). Anna is retired. Besides participating in the Chesney Park NIA, she is also part of the Central Topeka Grocery Oasis (CTGO) group. At the time, she could not recall names or provide contact information, but she was my first connection and exposure to the CTGO group. I later learn that the CTGO group procured a $12,500 grant from the KHF. This money was used to commission a study to determine the viability of bringing a full-service

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[9] Grace Med is a Christian-based clinic that provides comprehensive, integrated healthcare "encompassing the spiritual, emotional and physical needs of individuals and families in the communities we serve" (Grace Med website). Several respondents expressed resentment that the old site of Dillon's is now used for a service not nearly in as much demand as accessible healthy food. There are two hospitals within one to two miles of the Central Park neighborhood. There are numerous other health clinics and doctor's offices around the area as well.

[10] I interpret this, in combination with the previous sentence saying "they took our food away, and then made a way for the government to make money" to mean that the Dillon's, which primarily benefitted poor people, was removed in order to insert Grace Med, which primarily benefits the government/people that do not live in the neighborhood.

grocery store back to the area. According to the study, "central Topeka can support a grocery store of 7,500 to 10,000 square feet" (Yarborough 2020).

Narratives of Loss

This narratives in this chapter tell a story of loss. Things use to be better here, especially in the past when there were multiple options for accessing food in and nearby the neighborhood. Having these options gave residents a sense of community and dignity. Maybe more importantly, Dillon's provided the neighborhood a sense of agency, even in the face of an unforgiving social structure that cast Central Park as "low class" and the Central Park Dillon's as the "ghetto Dillon's." Despite how others in the city may have perceived the neighborhood, Dillon's provided the ability to access healthy foods. It allowed residents to make choices about the foods they bought. With a bank, postal service, pharmacy, and other services common to modern-day grocery stores, Dillon's also lent agency to numerous other aspects of residents' lives. Without Dillon's, as we will see in the next chapters, agency regarding the food environment is practically non-existent for the majority of residents. Residents are just trying to survive, forget about the social benefits of symbolic consumption that result from the ability to make small purchases at the spur of the moment. Agency and symbolic consumption are largely replaced with "the scramble" to access food. This is accompanied by elevated levels of stress and anxiety. In addition, accurate or not, residents feel like Dillon's was taken away from them. They were powerless to stop its closing and are left to deal with the consequences. This shows how city disinvestment in one of its communities, whether real or perceived, can lead to a very real sense of rejection and exclusion among residents.

We now turn to chapter five which looks at specific interview data themes. These themes relate to what food environment stories tell us about residents' values and identities, how the city

handled the Dillon’s closing, and the perception that Central Topeka is being deprived of investment from the city.

Chapter 5 - What do food environment stories tell us about who residents are and how they see themselves?

Qualitative researchers have to think interactionally and structurally. Eventually, the "grounded theory researcher must engage in coding (that) results in the detailed codes connecting *specific* conditions with *specific* interactions, strategies, and consequences" (Strauss 1987[1991]: 78). This chapter presents interview data and the specific codes developed through data analysis. The chapter describes and analyzes interview data themes organized according to the research question that revolves around what food environment stories tell us about who respondents are, and, how they see themselves. Specific themes discussed in this chapter revolve around social atomization narratives and the construction of values and identity, reactions to the Dillon's closing, disinvestment in Central Topeka, and a sense of self-sufficiency even among lower income residents. By way of conclusion, chapter six addresses the last two questions: What narratives do food insecure Americans use to describe the food environment? and, What do their stories say about how they see the possibilities for change in the future?

"I'm kind of in my own world here" (Debra): Social Atomization

When asked if they knew other individuals or families in the neighborhood I could talk with regarding this project, several respondents expressed that they keep to themselves and they do not know many other individuals or families in the neighborhood. Debra said she is "kind of in my own little world here" and does not know people with food shortages in the neighborhood, but, she did have students in poverty when she was a teacher. Debra is an approximately 60 year-old white woman. She retired from teaching primary school two years ago. She says she primarily worked in "at-risk" schools. She owns her own apartment in a building that leases to people who are over 55 years old. However, we meet in her boyfriend's apartment across the

hall. Outside, the building is a well-kept, off-white brick building. Across the street is an abandoned brick apartment building that has windows and doors with boards nailed across them.

Me: How would you say the city of Topeka handled it (the Dillon's closing)?

Debra: I'm kind of in my own little world here, I have to say, I don't know Michael. And I don't get local news anymore cuz I cut my cable off. But I have to just speculate that people were unhappy.

Me: Yeah, from what I've been hearing, people that live around here are unhappy.

Debra: What are we gonna do?

Me: You see less people walking around, you really haven't heard much of a community reaction, or city reaction?

Debra: No, I haven't.

Me: Ok. How would you say the food assistance community in Topeka handled it, did anything change?

Debra: I have to say again, I don't know. That's a really, it'd be interesting to see about our food banks and such, what changes they saw. I'm just in my little world here.

Ramona "doesn't really associate with a lot of people" and Rochelle does not really know the neighbors but chats with everybody "as they walk by, you know we talk about the weather or whatever, I used to talk to a lot of people when they'd walk up to Dillon's." Rochelle is one of only three resident interviewees who chose to meet somewhere other than their home. Respondents were generally open to allowing me into their home to chat. Rochelle chose to meet me at P.T.'s coffee shop on 17th and Washburn. She has lived at the same house for 32 years.

Her current, second husband does most of their shopping. She says she usually makes a list and gives it to her husband and he does the shopping. They do not cook much because it is "just the two of them." She is very small, and frail (no more than 5 feet tall, 100 pounds), and very alert and communicative.

> **Rochelle:** Our youngest just left home, so it's just the two of us, and we don't eat much. We don't cook much.
>
> **Me:** Is that just because it's just the two of you?
>
> **Rochelle:** Yeah, just the two of us. That's not really a grocery thing, that was just, as you get older you don't eat as much. He's got his cereal, I've got my cereal.
>
> …I think a lot of people deal with food shortages. I can't tell you exactly who they are. I was gonna call you about the neighborhood night out thing, but I don't think Central Park did anything. I didn't hear anything. They usually have music and a few things in the park for that, I don't know if we just didn't sign up or what.
>
> **Me:** Ok. So you don't really have much contact with other people in the neighborhood?
>
> **Rochelle:** I talk to everybody as they walk by, you know we talk about the weather or whatever. I used to talk to a lot of people when they'd walk up to Dillon's.
>
> **Me:** So that's probably something that's changed since the Dillon's has closed, less people coming by, talking.
>
> **Rochelle:** You know, people have asked how we get along in our house, in our neighborhood. You know, just talk to everybody. I'm polite to them, interested in who they are and what they are, and it goes a long way. I used to go sit in the park with a bunch of homeless. They'd pass my phone around. Probably not a good idea, but...

According to Barry: "…it's not the same as it was 60 years ago, or 50 years ago, when I was growing up. You just don't have the same type of interaction with your neighbors." Barry is white, in his early 60s, slightly tall and skinny build, with gray and white hair and a trimmed beard. He wears a t-shirt, shorts, and flip-flops. He is an articulate and confident respondent. He has lived in Holiday Park area for about 32 years. The Historic Holiday Park is a small neighborhood that is at least one block east and a few blocks south of where most of my other interviewees had lived. It appears different from other areas around Central Park, closer to the old Dillon's location where most of my interviews took place. There are more cars parked in the street, and I do not see any houses with boarded up windows and or doors within sight while standing in the middle of the neighborhood on a hot summer afternoon. Some of the houses have larger lots and yards, but others have smaller yards more like the houses in Central Park. Holiday Park is in the center of the neighborhood and it is surrounded by a black metal fence. There are benches and a fountain in the middle of the grass, and a playground. The park is in good upkeep and repair overall.

Narratives and the expression of values and identity

Reactions to Dillon's closing

Most resident respondents (60%) said the Dillon's closing made neighborhood residents angry and sad. Although she does not know many people in the neighborhood, June claims all she has heard are complaints about the Dillon's closing. June lives in one of the more maintained houses in the area. It is an old house with tan colored bricks and faux maroon shutters on the windows. There is a red brick apartment building next door, and other old houses around. Her lawn is well manicured and freshly mowed. Inside, we talk at a large solid wood table. June is very insightful about Dillon's and the city in general. She has lived in the house for about 18

years. She has worked several middle-class paying jobs through her life, at places like BCBS insurance company, and Santa Fe railroad. She used to shop at the Central Park Dillon's but would also shop at other Dillon's stores in Topeka because she always had a car and could get around.

Other residents echo June's sentiment, that there was nothing but complaints regarding the Central Park Dillon's closing. According to Shawn:

> **Shawn:** I think the community was pretty frustrated. Tennessee Town was really, cuz that was a Dibble's before it was a Dillon's. It'd been there for years, and it was kind of, it was a community store. And people expect it to be there. It had been there 30-40 years before they came. Then all of a sudden, they don't have a place to go shop. And a lot of people went there. Dr. Menninger, he, a lot of people went to Dillon's. It wasn't just poor people who went there. All socioeconomic people went there.

Shawn is an elderly black man who has lived in the neighborhood since the 1960s. He is the vice president of the Central Park NIA. The president, Derek, arrives a couple minutes late to the interview with his wife. She and Shawn have a short exchange and Shawn tells her she should start coming to Central Park NIA meetings.

We meet in a conference room in the Central Park Community Center. The room is austere. There are no pictures on the white brick walls. The table is a long conference-style table with eight chairs situated around it, three on each long side and one on each short side. The chairs have wheels, are padded, with arm rests, however, the fabric of the chairs is torn, they have obviously been in use for a long time. There is a wall-unit heater which Shawn and I turn on before Derek arrives. The carpeting is thin, threadbare, obviously very old and visibly very worn. Shawn started off the interview sitting back away from the conference table. As the interview progresses, he becomes more passionate with his responses and scoots closer to the

table. By the end of the interview he is not sitting back away from the table but sitting very close and hovering over it. Shawn and Derek echo many of the same sentiments as other respondents, including the anger, disappointment, and betrayal associated with losing the Central Park Dillon’s:

> **Shawn:** It was always in the air that they were gonna close, but it wasn't very clear when it was gonna close. The reasons they used for closing it wasn't very clear. As far as I'm concerned, they were making money, and they were training a lot of people. They wanted to say because of stealing and whatever, but I question that.
>
> **Derek:** I remember them saying the reason that they closed was because they weren't making a profit, because there was so much shoplifting in that store. But I'm sure there's things they could've done to correct that, they always had the Securitas security guards there. But you wouldn't think that they'd be stealing so much stuff out of there, that if it was that blatant, something could've, you know they should've been working on other issues. But like Shawn was saying, it was always that rumor, because every other Dillon's in town was getting remodeled and fixed up, and this was the only one that unfortunately, it didn't have any of the good stuff in it, the Chinese kitchen, or the sushi, the deli.
>
> **Shawn:** And they had room to expand too, and they chose not to.
>
> **Me:** So, around the time they closed, they were refurbishing the other Dillon's around town?
>
> **Shawn:** They weren't refurbishing, they were nicer Dillon's in the first place. I'll give you an example, that one out there on 29th street, Brookwood.[11] It wasn't any better than our Dillon's was, but it's still there. And it's smaller.

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[11] Shopping center/strip mall in Topeka.

Derek: How come they didn't close that one down? Just to give you an example. It's a socioeconomic thing. I'm just pointing out reality. I don't wanna get hung up, but I'm just giving you some examples. They didn't close that down, and it's been there quite a while. and it's small, too.

The interview concludes and I walk out the front doors of the Central Park Community Center with Derek and Shawn. Derek and his wife get into his older green Ford Ranger (compact pick-up truck). He starts it and drives away. The muffler is either missing or has a hole. The little truck is very loud. Shawn gets into his older model Ford Focus and drives away. Before they get into their cars Derek asks Shawn: “Did you get a new car?” Shawn’s response: “Haha I can’t afford a new car!”

The following is a list of additional typical responses regarding community reaction to the Dillon’s closing:

- **Tiana:** [The community reaction was] Piss poor. Because, honestly, they wouldn't have done this except any place but here. They wouldn't have done this.

- **Donald:**[12] (People have been upset) because a lot of people were thinking now how am I gonna get to the grocery store? How am I gonna get my things home? It's not fair, it's not right. It's gonna hurt me, it's going to hurt. Everybody was just pissed off, in other words. They were just pissed off that it had to happen. Why did it happen?

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[12] Donald and his roommate Jane live in a smaller, two-story house on a corner. There’s a chain link fence with a gate within 6 or so feet of the front porch and front door. I walk inside a am offered a seat in a recliner right away in the small living room. There is a couch on the adjacent wall where Donald and Jane sit. There is an older generation console television, no bigger than 20 inches or so, on a tv stand by the front window. There are two large energy drink cans on the coffee table. At one point close to the end of the interview Donald gets up to “get something to drink” and brings two cans of soda from the kitchen for him and Jane (one was a Mountain Dew, the other a different soda packaged in a dark brown can. There are pictures and posters of wolves taped all over all the walls. They are mostly torn out of magazines. Pictures are attached to the walls with Scotch tape. I learn later that Donald has Pottawattamie heritage, and that at one time he received some food and general social assistance from the Pottawattamie, but no longer does now. In my mind that at least partially explained the fascination with wolves and the presence of all the wolf magazine cut-outs and posters on the walls.

- **LeAnne:**[13] People were very upset. There are a lot of people in financial situations. It's not the best part of town, but it's also very integrated with white, black, Hispanic, and all. There's, honestly I would say there's probably an equal number. Most people are working adults, we've got a lot of single moms and all, with their kids around here. So it made it difficult. There are a lot of elderly here. You know, we've got the two high rises (Polk Plaza and Tyler Towers) literally in my backyard almost, just a street away. That was a big deal for them as well. It was much easier to get to that Dillon's. There's a Chinese buffet now, close to Polk Plaza. The Tyler Towers has Walgreens, that's pretty much what you've got.

- **Joelynn:**[14] I mean my reaction was I was really sad to see it go, because it was so convenient for me. When I moved in here, as I may have just said, you know I had the

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[13] LeAnne lives in Central Park, but she prefers to meet me at her office. It is an insurance office with several at least three or four offices besides the reception area near the front door where LeAnne is stationed. It is located on a one-way street (Huntoon) across the street from boutique craft and other shops. The location is not in the neighborhood but is close, within a couple miles. All the additional offices are empty and LeAnne claims they are all on vacation currently. They appear to be offices that are used regularly. LeAnne is very friendly, hospitable. She offers me something to drink, and walks be back to the refrigerator in the back of the office. The fridge is fully stocked with bottled water (which I accept one of), diet sodas, and other types of pre-packaged/canned/bottled drinks. She has never had kids, and she attributes this to why she hasn't been able to receive social assistance/food assistance in the past. She is now fed up with food assistance and does not see that it is worth it to apply. After saying she has never used food assistance, she later confides that she has gone to Let's Help for help when she was between jobs (Let's Help is a "not-for-profit organization committed to helping people achieve self-sufficiency and break the cycle of poverty" letshelpinc.org/about). Because she does not have any children she was made to feel like she was a criminal who was "scheming the system." Also, when applying for food stamps in the past when she was between jobs, she was told there really wasn't much they could do to help her because she had no children. So, they (government worker assisting her with her food stamp application) told her to apply for unemployment. She did, but at the time her income was very low, "so my unemployment didn't even cover my rent, let alone food or utilities." She was a foster parent "for years." She currently fosters dogs and is part of an animal foster group. She has a small dog (chihauaha) in the office with her. She holds/cradles the dog during the entire interview. LeAnne has a bachelor's degree in organizational management.

[14] Joelynn is about 65 years old, obese, and moves around her townhouse slowly and deliberately. She is on disability, indicates she has several physical problems, and collects social security insurance. She used to be an attorney, but something bad happened at least 5 – 10 years ago when her life "fell apart." I later learn she was convicted of a felony for a financial-related crime, but I do not learn anything more specific. She comes from a tough upbringing: both of her parents were alcoholics. They left her to her own devices when she was very young. She was a single mother from the time her son was three years old. She has experienced some affluence as well as poverty, and, acknowledges the effects of her parents' alcoholism on herself and her family. She later says that alcoholics and addicts should not be allowed to have kids because they are selfish. Either they are wrapped up in their addiction and that takes a toll on everyone around them, or, they are in recovery and that takes a separate toll on everyone around them. For alcoholics, it is "all about them" so they should not be allowed to have children in their care. She has some independence when it comes to shopping for food. She shops at the Brookwood Dillon's around 29th and Gage about once a month and follows a very tight budget for food and medications. She owns a

thought in my mind, if I ever was without a car, I could probably walk over there. So that backup plan was immediately gone. Then I saw so many people walking or riding their bikes over there, I know it had to have a big impact.

Why did Dillon's Close?

Most residents could not believe Dillon's was not making enough money to stay in business. One couple, George and Delilah, expressed that closing the Dillon's store was retaliation against the neighborhood for officer shootings and other crime in the area. It is an extremely hot and humid day when I meet them, around 95 degrees Fahrenheit with high humidity, making it feel like over 100 degrees. I arrive and pull in the parking lot next to their apartment building. There is a man outside who arrives to the apartment building on a bicycle. He is shirtless and obviously very hot from riding there from Dollar General (presumably on 10th street), he has two or three plastic bags from Dollar General with food. He has a bag of hot dog buns, a loaf of sliced bread, and something else that I cannot see. He sees me call George to come let me in the front door. The man on the bike says he has brought some food for an old lady who lives in the building, that he does that somewhat regularly. George then lets me in the door and eyes the man with suspicion. He claims that the man was probably lying to get into the building, somehow related to drugs.

Outside the apartment building is a plain white and cream color. Inside appears and smells old and worn – the carpets in the hallway are stained, the stairway bannister is sticky

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gray Nissan Sentra with about 90,000 miles that has been reliable. However, she recently was in a wreck when she was driving home and started to experience "ferocious neck pain." She had to pay a ticket for running a red light, and she has to deal with the damage to her car. The damage does not prevent the car from being driven, but it is now in precarious condition. Joelynn feels that her transportation and relative food shopping independence is in jeopardy. She gets some help with transportation and other things from her son here and there, but he is busy with a full-time job at the Target distribution center (located at 1100 SW 57th street in Topeka) and he lives on the opposite side of town with his significant other and young children. So, he is not free to help out much, but Joelynn expresses appreciation for the help he does provide.

(George tells me not to touch anything else in the hallway or other public areas of the apartment building because it is dirty and sticky). He gives me a single-packaged wet wipe before I leave when the interview is finished. George double locks the front door when I arrive, and adds a pair of vice grips to the dead bolt lock so that the handle of the vice grips is pinned against the door knob (so no one will be able to unlock the deadbolt from the outside). As he is placing the vice grips on the door George says "this is how much we trust the landlord." Inside, George and Delilah's apartment is clean and organized and has been recently vacuumed. We sit at a small dining room table and chairs which George indicates doubles as his "office" desk. He has homemade stationary, and business cards on the table.

George and Delilah are resentful of illegal immigration because illegal immigrants are stiff competition for jobs and housing, and they tell stories about how they have been "pushed out" of a job at Reser's (processed food distribution plant) by "illegals." George is overall upbeat, chipper, and very talkative. He wears a turquoise colored tank top and shorts. He has a long skinny braid on the back of his head. He mentions being of Mexican descent at some point in the interview. He was very kind, insightful, and protective – he said I could call him if I got into any trouble with anyone else around the neighborhood. He claims to be running for Senate as a Republican. Delilah is an approximately sixty-year-old white woman. She is more lethargic and seems angrier than George. She agrees with and emphasizes what George says, and occasionally supplements what George is talking about with examples. George and Delilah see themselves as innocent victims of perceived retaliation of the city against the neighborhood:

> **George:** Me and my wife, we don't drink, we don't do drugs, we don't smoke, we don't commit crimes, and when you have somebody like us in a situation like that, that's probably the most terrifying thing to the city, the county, and the state, because we're coherent enough and believable enough to basically tell them…. And so as far as them closing that

store, we considered it retaliation.[15] We let them know, because we used to go there. I told the management of Dillon's, and I told the city council "if you guys don't start practicing politics with law enforcement and doing your work, something bad is gonna happen." And it did. And it was worse than I thought (referring to the officer shootings).

Delilah shared:

Delilah: I don't know the reason why Dillon's closed it, I do remember there was a policeman shot in the parking lot, and there was a shooting across the street at a filling station, but I don't know, and I don't remember ever reading Dillon's account of why they closed the store.

Me: Yeah, I don't believe I've seen that either… So do you have any thoughts on why it did close?

Delilah: Well, as I mentioned in an e-mail to you, it was either the policeman that got shot, maybe they were afraid that too much crime was in that neighborhood and they didn't wanna combat that, I also mentioned in my e-mail to you that it could've been, it was an old store, and with age, with old things, they take maintenance. Or, maybe the thought of having to have a police monitor when they were open all the time, it's extra money.

There is little agreement among residents about the amount of notice they were given regarding the Dillon's closing, and how they received the notice. According to Tiana:

Tiana: …they gave us a month, two months notice. The notice that they gave people for closing it was unbelievable. When people first heard that they were gonna close it, the people that have lived in this area or grew up in this area didn't wanna believe it. We were like, this store has been here forever. People like me are like, we've had a grocery store here forever. They can't be closing it. And yeah, they did.

[15] For all the crime in the area. Delilah and especially George emphasize the crime rate in the neighborhood throughout the entire interview. They feel especially betrayed by the Dillon's closing because they see it as retaliation by the city against the "bad people"/criminals in the neighborhood, and, they are innocent victims of this retaliation because they are good, law-abiding citizens.

According to Ramona:

> **Ramona:** "I don't remember exactly when it was now, but I think they gave us a date that it would be two weeks they said. The next thing we knew, it was suddenly closed. They did give us a notice, but it seemed like they closed before they said they were going to, if I remember correctly." George and Delilah do not remember any advanced notice of the store closing, "It (the closing) was very sudden."

Clearly, whatever notice was given about the Dillon's closing was not received uniformly by residents. This is partly why they feel resentment toward the store and the city for its closing. They do not feel part of the larger community that includes Dillon's, and the City of Topeka. The closing was almost hidden from residents. It is perceived as an injustice done *to* them. Because of their class status and the geographic location of their residence, they lack any semblance of power to influence and shape the food environment around them. The Dillon's closing was a disappointing and sad surprise that perpetuated and perhaps amplified a feeling of non-inclusiveness.

The Closing of Dillon's: Disinvestment in Central Topeka and focus on the west side

Over the course of conducting interviews, it became clear there is a shared perception that the City of Topeka disproportionately invests in the west side of town compared to Central Topeka and other poorer parts of the city. In addition, the city has concentrated public housing in Central and East Topeka:

> **Shawn:** There's a lot of mental health people in our area too. After the hospitals closed down and the high rises, there's a lot of people with mental health issues in our area.
>
> **Me:** That's something I wanted to ask about, because you said the rate of disability use is maybe relatively high, around this neighborhood. Do you think that's because of the age composition, or the mental health more so?

Shawn: The mental health, I think.

Me: I guess it could be a combination.

Shawn: They closed the State Hospital, those high rises, they're full of mental health people.

Derek: Well, because of their fixed income, a lot of those people tend to be in the high rises.

Me: So do you think a lot of those folks are older?

Shawn: No, no. It's a mix of ages.

Derek: We get a lot of mixed age, mental health issues, because we have that public housing in our neighborhood. Some of the surrounding neighborhoods don't have public housing.

Shawn: Polk Plaza Towers, all them over there. They're all in that same area, in Central Park. That's where the tornado came through and tore out the houses. So they built the public housing. Right down the street from me, Western Plaza too. Cuz it came right through here. Tore up the park. And they rebuilt Robinson (Middle School) over there. The school right across the street…"

There's been a change in the neighborhood, after the tornado. A lot of the old people passed on and left it to their kids. Jobs, there weren't very many opportunities in Topeka for young people to have jobs. I've got five kids, and four of them left because of the fact they couldn't get a decent job. That's been going on for some time…Topeka hasn't grown, if you look at the statistics, we don't have very good jobs for young people, and there's not very much socialization, 'cuz they gotta go to Kansas City or some other place.

> When I was commissioner, I was telling them they need to spread them around town. They put them in certain areas, the east side is loaded with them, and Central Topeka is loaded with them. You don't see none on the west side. You don't see none on the north side, and none way down south. They're mostly on the east side, and Central Topeka.
>
> **Me:** So they're pretty concentrated in a couple particular areas.

Respondents mostly agreed that the City of Topeka handled the Dillon's closing poorly. When I asked the interview question "how do you think the City of Topeka handled it (the Dillon's closing)" many interviewees launched into discussions about how the city disinvests in Central Topeka and over-focuses development efforts on the west side of town. Shawn uses the phrase "haves and have nots" and articulates how structural inequality is perpetuated by cities:

> **Shawn:** The city of Topeka didn't handle it very well because I'm gonna tell ya, it's all about the haves and the have nots. The ones that have the money, you know it's ok, they don't care. Because they're getting the services. You hear what I'm saying? It's the people that can't speak for themselves, or don't have the ability to do anything, that get screwed, to be honest with you. And that's the way it's always been, it's no change…That's the way it is.

This quote points to the hegemonic power of social structure. Although social structure is malleable, and not an inherent force of nature, there is a "duality of structure" (Giddens 1979) that is influential to the way individuals can subjectively navigate the structural (objective) world. Individuals have the ability to exercise agency, but their cultural, social, and emotional environments provide physical and social parameters within which options can be made in the process of navigating the social world. Social structure is malleable, agency is important and should not be ignored, however, the dominant social structure is effective at reproducing the status quo of unequal race and class relations. The status quo, or "the way it is" feels beyond

respondents' control. It is no surprise that the authority (the City of Topeka) handled the Dillon's closing poorly. The Dillon's was one bright spot in an otherwise troubled neighborhood. Poor people who cannot speak effectively for themselves "get screwed." This cycle of disappointment and betrayal by authority has rendered most of my respondents fairly hopeless and preempts efforts toward agency. Important to note, Shawn and Eric are the vice-president and president of the Central Park NIA. It is striking to hear authority figures from the neighborhood, who must experience a relatively high level of agency compared to non-participants in the NIA, express such hopelessness for the neighborhood.

Derek agreed with Shawn, emphasized community and identity aspects of food shopping, and the feeling of betrayal with Dillon's because they tend to come in to poorer areas, put smaller grocers out of business, and end up leaving the location themselves, leaving residents who are dependent on them "high and dry," especially lower income, older residents who are not able to own and operate reliable transportation:

> **Derek:** You know, I would kind of agree with that, because I don't think, outside of the community, there wasn't much of a reaction at all. They go, "Well our Dillon's is safe", you know. The same thing I thought of when the last Dillon's closed over there on 29th and Topeka Blvd., because I used to live over in that area when that one closed, and that was a big one too. I don't know why they closed. That whole store was just craziness, because you know the Dillon's came in and kinda started buying up everything and ran out all the Mike's IGAs and the Harry's IGAs, Falley's, so we got rid of all the independent grocers, because Dillon's is in those buildings now. When Super Food Barn was here in town, when it closed, Dillon's took that over. Then Dillon's closed that one, and now it's the Treasury, Department of Revenue or whatever it is. So Dillon's kinda ran out all these little guys, and now, just like in our neighborhood, left us high and dry. People outside don't really care because they've still got their Dillon's.

Tiana echoes Derek's resentment and feeling of betrayal:

Me: … how do you think the City of Topeka handled it (the Dillon's closing)?

Tiana: Piss poor. Because, honestly, they wouldn't have done this except any place but here. They wouldn't have done this.

Me: You mean in Topeka?

Tiana: Yeah. If this had been, let's say any place west of Gage (street), out to Urish Road. They never walked out there and closed one of them people's stores and gave them three months and said "guess what, we're gonna move all your stuff over to the east side of town. So ya'll get on the interstate, and ride that big loop around, and let's go over to the Dillon's over there." They wouldn't have done that.

I grew up in Topeka and have gained an even more intimate knowledge of the city since moving away. I could not help but completely agree with Tiana; it is unimaginable that the city would allow the primary source of food for affluent, predominately white residents, to be moved to the East or Central Topeka.

Barry described Topeka's response as "in one ear and out the other":

Barry: It didn't matter, except to a small area of a lot of poor people in our neighborhood, and their voice isn't strong. The best example is right now the Mission (Topeka Rescue Mission) is out of money and looking at closing, yet they're (the City of Topeka) looking at spending 10 million dollars on a pickleball park, on the west side of town.

Donald and Jane point out crime as a reason for Dillon's closing, but also highlight steps the city could have taken to mitigate crime if they didn't disproportionately invest in the west side of town and other projects that do not benefit the poor:

Me: How would you say the city of Topeka handled it (the Dillon's closing)?

Jane: Not very well.

Donald: Poorly. They could've hired more security.

Jane: Because we don't have much money to do that with. It just seems like Topeka don't stop and think, they don't study really hard, because to me, they're wasting money on places that we're still paying taxes, that is still sitting there vacant and falling apart. They could use much of it by putting it into apartments or grocery stores, second-hand stores, all kinds of things. But people just, they want to put money on things that I think, it's really truthfully, dumb. Just dumb.

Me: So you feel like the city, instead of investing in this store that this neighborhood really liked, that they're taking those resources and putting them somewhere else. And to you, it doesn't make sense. What specifically do you think the city is investing in that you said is dumb?

Donald: Remodeling the Expocenter. That didn't need to be done. Like putting that hotel downtown. Why? Nobody's gonna go to that expensive hotel. Nobody has the money to.

Me: So it's like they're taking these funds and spending them on other things.

Donald: Topeka doesn't care for poor people.

Jane: No, they really don't. Because in the Expo(center), when they have all these fun things, people like us wants to go to them, but can't. We can't. We would love to go watch these things, but we can't. Well we can, if we don't wanna feed our kids, feed ourselves or pay our bills.

Other respondents expressed that the decision to close Dillon’s was not up to the city, it was a calculated business decision. According to Rochelle:

Rochelle: I think it was a business decision from Dillon's. It was a small store, it definitely had a sewer problem, for the last 15 or so years. Some nights you'd go in there and it'd just be horrendous. I assume they didn't wanna fix it. I'm sure they had somebody look at it, it was gonna be way too expensive to fix, so they just kinda goosed it along, for as long as they could, then sold the building. That's just my opinion, I don't have any facts to back that up.

LeAnne echoes the emphasis on economics and profit:

Me: Ok. So how would you say the city of Topeka handled the closing?

LeAnne: They supported Dillon's decision, because of the new facilities, the new grocery stores (on west side and other parts of town) were bringing in more income... So honestly, I don't know if they got a break, or if Dillon's agreed to continue leasing the buildings until they were filled or not, I don't know, but I doubt it. I know that there was some talk about that. But truly, the city really didn't do much of anything. They really couldn't, it wasn't their decision.

Joelynn emphasizes profit, crime, and the possible connection between the two:

Me: Ok. So how would you say the city of Topeka handled the closing?

Joelynn: Well what was put out was that they had been unprofitable for two years. Then of course, right before I moved to Topeka, two cops were shot to death in that parking lot. So, I think maybe it became more unprofitable, because people thought it was more dangerous to be over there… But if you think that any corporation is interested, really, in anything but profit, you're wrong. They're legally obligated to their shareholders to earn profits, and to run their corporation in a profitable manner. They are not legally obligated to help poor people. So they can do what they want to. They can throw a few shekels to some program in the community so they'll look like they're being thoughtful and great. And then just jack up the price of whatever they're selling you, to pay for it.

Whether they think the city should have had a more active role in preventing the Dillon's closing, or, they had a more hands-off attitude, respondents mostly expressed an "us versus

them" perspective. In other words, a "poor people" versus "affluent people" perspective. Respondents perceive that city resources are disproportionately invested in the west side of town, and they have no say or control over the way city funds are distributed. Poor security and infrastructure are problems that can be fixed. If these problems had been addressed, maybe the Dillon's could have remained open.

The closing of Dillon's highlighted how precarious healthy food availability is for many Central Park residents. The area was a relative "food oasis" before, with a full-service grocery store located within close physical proximity, literally within the neighborhood. Identity and social class are tied to one's geographic area of residence. Living in Central Park and losing the Dillon's has led to decreased feelings of inclusion, increased feelings of powerlessness, the perceptions that the city and Dillon's are doing these things *to* them. The Dillon's store represented an important form of material survival, nourishment, as well as symbolic capital. It was a point of pride, and a valued resource not only for the access to healthy food it provided, but also because, like in Tach and Amorim (2015)**,** it boosted neighborhood reputation.

Ramon moved to the area because the Dillon's, and other amenities downtown, were accessible by foot. Dillon's was only a twelve minute walk each way. Now, to access most healthy foods like vegetables, fruits, and meats, he is forced to walk to the neighborhood Wal-Mart at 10th and Gage Boulevard - a forty-five minute walk each way. Having stores nearby that sell high-quality, and/or healthy products, allow residents to make small, spur of the moment purchases, and feel "middle class," at least for the moment.

Self-sufficiency and sticking to "the basics"

Not all residents in the area experience poverty and were significantly affected by the

closing of Dillon's. Barry commutes to Kansas City for work at a small environmental consulting company that does training on hazardous materials. He was "soured" on Dillon's after they closed. Since he works out of Kansas City, sometimes he stops in Lawrence on his way back to Topeka "because I can get more organic and fresher foods there, and I can afford them, as folk in my neighborhood can't." He owns a reliable car, has money and credit. He "can make up for the lack of food diversity in my neighborhood." When Dillon's was open, he did 90% of his shopping there. "It was close and easy, I could even ride my bike there, with some sacks. It was five blocks away." Since it closed, he claims his diet has changed for the healthier:

> **Barry:** You know, actually in some ways it (my diet) has (changed), because I do shop more organically. I'm probably eating healthier, actually. But, it's because that store (Dillon's) had no organic selections, maybe a few things…"

Others claim to be fine but are clearly in a precarious situation. Angela[16] and Mrs. Courtright both own automobiles. There is only one other woman besides Angela who owns a car in their Tennessee Town building. Other people use delivery services, get rides, or use the bus. Angela claims that Tennessee Town leadership tried to work with the city to get rides to the store for its elderly residents but she hasn't heard any news in two years. Fortunately, Mrs. Courtright also owns a car and is still "able to drive yet." It is fortunate that respondents like Mrs. Courtright and Angela own cars and are still able to drive. However, it is not realistic to

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[16] I pull my car up and park in front of Angela's small townhouse. She is waiting behind her partially open front door for me. Inside her place is neat with stacks of papers and laundry baskets (not containing laundry, not sure what they contained) lining several of the walls and by the front door. She was not able to use Medicaid in Alabama, where she moved to Topeka from. She was disabled for two years before moving to Topeka and needed to find a place to live relatively quickly. She used the Topeka Housing Authority (THS) to find housing, and fortunately was able to find something within a few weeks (she claimed most people would never be able to find any housing, or it would take much longer than it took her). She felt lucky to find affordable housing so quickly. Angela is very small and skinny, about 5 feet tall and no more than 90 or so pounds. She pays close attention to my questions and prompts and is very knowledgeable about the neighborhood and general area. At one point, when I ask the USDA short form food insecurity questions, she claims that her doctor tells her she needs to eat *more* meats and fatty foods.

expect all elderly residents to be able to drive themselves relatively long distances on a regular basis to purchase food. Also, many elderly residents in this area do not own cars, and, as they acknowledge, Mrs. Courtright and Angela are lucky to be able to own and operate their own private transportation.

Ramona mentions Meals on Wheels (MOW). MOW is a volunteer-run service that delivers meals to the elderly at their home. She hasn't used it but knows a woman who does. "She doesn't drive, she's up there in years. And so far I've managed to still walk and I cook, to a certain extent, for myself. So that works for me." She is very optimistic in the face of a clearly vulnerable situation. She relies on rides from friends and neighbors to get to stores that offer healthy food. This reliance brings up a question I had for Ramona and other similar respondents:

> **Me:** What do you think you would do if you didn't have the friend to give you that ride?
> **Ramona:** Well, it would be, which I still do in between times, like I said, if I run out of two or three things, I guess I'd hoof it down the street to Tilton's on 6th.[17] And once in awhile I walk all the way down and go to the Dollar Store,[18] they've got like bread, and well I'm sure you're familiar with Dollar Store…it's just been inconvenient is the bottom line, it's just you know, the inconvenience.
>
> **Me:** I'm wondering if, say you're someone in a different situation, or you don't have the neighbors or the ride, do you imagine that your diet would change, with having to walk and make more trips?
>
> **Ramona:** Maybe a little bit, and the expense would be more, because Tilton's is more expensive than Walmart. Yeah if I was constantly on foot, it would be, I might have to make two trips or something like that. But it could be doable.

[17] Tilton's on 6th street is 1.5 to 2 miles from Ramona's street.

[18] The "Dollar Store" or Dollar General on 6th Avenue is about 4 miles from Ramona's street.

Eat the Basics by Choice

Another theme and common coping strategy that came out through the interview data was sticking to "the basics." This is framed as a choice, not a result of poverty, old age, or a combination of the two.

> **June:** …when I've gotten older, and because my kids no longer are with me, they're out of town, I'm only buying for myself and my two poodles. I go to Sam's Club maybe once a month, once every 6 weeks, and that's mainly for toilet tissue, paper towels, Kleenex tissues, and then I do buy chicken breasts and frozen Jimmy Dean sausages, and I split those up into individual freezer packs and put them in the freezer. And I even buy a gallon of milk and pour it into small wax cups and freeze it. Because I could never use up enough milk before it would go bad. So that's because I'm older, and it makes less trips to the store when I can freeze items, milk included…No. I don't eat balanced healthy meals, but it's not because of not being able to afford the food, it's because I don't like a lot of the healthy food, and because no one is supervising me, I pretty much do and buy what I want. So it's not from the lack of money that I don't eat healthy.

Tiana echoes this sentiment:

> **Me:** Have you not been able to afford food, in like, the past year, or eat balanced meals?
>
> **Tiana:** No, no, now that all my kids are grown, I eat out practically every meal. So if I don't eat a balanced meal, it's just because I don't go in there and cook… so no, I don't face that challenge. But again, my mother-in-law, even though she has transportation, a lot of my neighbors are on social security or disability. Even my daughter that lives down the street, she's on disability. Every year for the past 3-4 years... she's getting to where she's facing that challenge of having access to healthy food.

Ramona claims to be a vegetarian, so that helps with having little income to spend on groceries:

Ramona: I manage. It hasn't been easy. I'm on social security disability, so it has not been easy. But it's a good thing I'm not used to expensive steak. I'm a vegetarian so I think that makes things easier in a lot more ways than one. What I eat is not traditional steak and potatoes, so I think that helps. You know, I have things like peanut butter and, just the basics, that's what I call it. Just the basics.

Conclusion: What do food environment narratives tell us about who residents are and how they see themselves?

"I can make up for the lack of food diversity in my neighborhood. But, there's a lot of folks…who cannot" (Barry)

Although most resident respondents talked about using some sort of food assistance and experience poverty and food insecurity, several did not necessarily rely on the local Dillon's before it closed, have never used food assistance, and are either currently working at or retired from a decent paying job. They have agency and numerous sources of symbolic capital that stem from vehicle ownership and income. They can venture outside of the neighborhood for food. With a personal vehicle, they can combine trips to work, the doctor, the veterinarian, etcetera, with food shopping. Less fortunate residents with little or no income, and who do not own transportation, are at the mercy of inadequate public transportation, expensive cabs, Uber, and other ride services, their neighbors, friends, and family for rides to the store. Or, if they are physically able, they walk, and miss out on the carrying capacity that any average vehicle affords. Instead of exercising agency over the food system, poorer residents are struggling to survive and navigate a food environment that dictates their behavior and daily routine.

Several, more affluent residents, talk about eating "the basics" now that their kids and/or spouse have moved out. Relying on "the basics" like sandwiches and cereal is clearly "unhealthy," but in this context it provides residents with a sense of agency and control.

No inclusion, no communication

The local food environment and nearby stores are an integral part of identity in a low-income neighborhood. Accessible food stores like Dillon’s are one last important source of symbolic consumption for poor inner-city residents. Dillon’s was taken away from residents rather abruptly. I asked every resident respondent if they were any notice given of the Dillon’s closing, and how long were they notified in advance. All resident respondents had varying recollections of the amount of notice given before Dillon’s closed. We could attribute this to faded memories, as Dillon’s closed several years before I conducted interviews. However, what is clear is that whatever notice was given about Dillon’s closing, it was not uniformly received by residents Here is a selection of different responses given during interviews. I was struck that I did not hear the same answer repeated, everyone had a slightly different response:

- **Me**: From what you recall, was there advanced notice of the Dillon's store closing?

  Barry: Two weeks.

  Me: How did you find out about that, do you remember?

  Barry: It was a trip to the store. It could've also been in the news, you know, the city commission, the local representative from our area fought against it, went to bat, at least verbally. He tried to make some type of an impact, or find out why. So we had about two weeks notice, and it became pretty...I think I first found out there, at the store. A notice on the door.
  Me: Ok, and then there were stories on the news a couple weeks before?

  Barry: Yes, the same day, I think.

- **Me:** Was there any advanced notice of that store closing?

Denise: Very little. I wanna say a month? Maybe a month.

Teenager: We didn't even know until we saw the signs that said they're closing and that's it. I think that was, no more than a month.

- **Me:** One thing I'm really interested in is if there was advanced notice of the store closing.

George: I don't think there was, was there?

Delilah: No, they just said they were closing on such and such a date, and that was it.

- **Me:** So there was some notice, you said it was about a month?

Tiana: About 2 months, maybe 3 months-notice.

Me: How did they let people know, do you remember?

Tiana: If I can remember correctly, there was a sign on the door.

Me: At the store? "We're gonna close in two months"?

Tiana: Yeah. Because I had my prescriptions there, and my daughter that lives right down the street had her prescriptions there. So we had to hurry up and contact our primary care provider and let them know that we had to transfer all of our prescriptions to the Dillon's out on Fairlawn. The Dillon's that they had on Gage doesn't have a pharmacy. So you were double screwed. You ended up not having a grocery store, but if you had a prescription there, now we have to go all the way out west. We have to go all the way out to Fairlawn.

Me: That's much further.

Tiana: Yeah it is. Much further.

I hope it becomes more than just a blip on the radar. Because it's painfully obvious that they did not listen, or did they even canvass the neighborhood to see what we thought about moving Dillon's. They didn't even go around and walk around and say "Hey, we're thinking about this." The decisions were made behind closed doors, down at city council or city hall, and then a notice was put up on the door saying Dillon's is gonna be closed at such and such a time. No feedback from the community at all.

- **Me:** … I'm wondering was there advanced notice of the Dillon's closing?

  Ramona: Funny you should mention that. I don't remember exactly when it was now, but I think they gave us a date that it would be two weeks they said. The next thing we knew, it was suddenly closed. They did give us a notice, but it seemed like they closed before they said they were going to, if I remember correctly.

  Me: So it was no more than two weeks?

  Ramona:: It was, I think it was about half of what they said.

  Me: So it was even less, you think.

  Ramona: Just crazy. I remember just before they suddenly up and closed, they had a crazy sale. Oh my gosh, it was crazy. Everybody in the country it seemed like, we were all packed in there grabbing the sale items, and next thing we knew, bam that was it, they were closed. So yeah, they closed a little bit before they said they were going to, if my memory serves me correctly.

- **Me:** Ok. Did they give any sort of advanced notice about that store closing?

Geraldo: No. It just straight closed. They just boarded it up, unloaded it and boarded it up one day.

We "don't drink, we don't do drugs, we don't smoke, we don't commit crimes" (George)

Residents see themselves as innocent victims of perceived retaliation from the city against the neighborhood because of high crime rates. George explicitly points out an incident where two police officers were killed in the parking lot of Dillon's several years earlier as the reason for this perceived retaliation. George and Delilah empower themselves with the narrative that they are different from the norm. At one point, George used the term "nouveau homeless"[19] to describe him and his wife Delilah. According to George, nouveau homeless are modern people who find themselves homeless, not because of their personal shortcomings, and not because they don't want to work:

> **George:** …we're not the victims of what most people would say, "Well why do you live in poverty? Because you don't wanna work?" Well, I can't work,[20] my wife's already retired…

Overall, interviewees feel resentment toward the city and Dillon's. They do not feel part of the broader community outside the Central Park area, throughout the rest of the City of Topeka. The Dillon's closing is perceived as an injustice done *to* them. Because of the location of their residence, and social class, most respondents lack power and agency to influence and shape the food environment around them. The Dillon's closing was a disappointing and sad surprise that perpetuated and perhaps amplified a feeling of non-inclusiveness. There is a clear

[19] George and Debbie are not currently homeless but have been in the past.

[20] George has been consistently out of work because of a wrist injury.

feeling that the City of Topeka disproportionately invests in the west side of town instead of Central Topeka and other poorer parts of Topeka, and, “that's the way it's always been, it's no change…That's the way it is” (Shawn).

If profitability was the problem, the city and Dillon’s could have invested in the store to make it more profitable. For example, they could have hired better security, improved lighting, and/or refurbished the exterior and interior of the building. The neighborhood perception is, outside of this area, there is not much thought or care about the Dillon’s closing. “Other” people who live in different parts of town think “Well, our Dillon’s is safe” (Derek) and don’t think much about healthy food accessibility for the poor. According to Donald, “Topeka doesn't care for poor people.” There exists a clear feeling and narrative of “us versus them” or “poor people versus affluent people.”

At the same time, several residents expressed acceptance for Dillons’ closing, and recognized that the closing was a “business decision.” In other words, they feel they do not have the right, or at least it’s not worth the effort, to try to influence Dillon’s to stay/come back to the neighborhood. The social structure of the food environment feels very rigid for these mostly impoverished residents.

By way of conclusion, chapter six will now address the remaining research questions of what overarching narratives respondents use to describe the food environment? and, what do respondents’ stories say about how they see the possibilities for change in the future? How do they see their own agency in fostering change? What implications do this study’s findings have for more effectively addressing food insecurity in the future?

Chapter 6 - Conclusion

"This is how poor people live…you scramble" (Joelynn)

After completing the interviews and analyzing the data, the central theme of scrambling to get food and survive emerged. Not all respondents articulated it exactly this way, but most resident respondents acknowledged the scramble and struggle that low income residents endure in order to access food. Joelynn articulates the scramble that most other respondents express in one way or another when we discuss her car. Having a car does not eliminate the burden of balancing expenses for food and medication when on a fixed, low income. She, like other respondents who are fortunate enough to own their own transportation, acknowledges she is lucky in this respect while also articulating the struggle of making ends meet each month:

> **Joelynn:** …there are lots and lots of people who don't have that option (private transportation). I'm not in a situation where I'm food insecure right now. But it would just take a couple other little disasters, and I would be. I would be scrambling to figure out, like I said, I've got these two friends that live here, but one of them works full time, and the other one, she and her husband are very wealthy, they pick up their grandkids from school and they're very active, it's not like they're available to be my, you know my ride. And like I said, my son will do it, but he's got responsibilities. So it would be something I would have to work out and plan for. I do that now, when I buy groceries. Like this past month, in addition to having the disaster of having to pay a $176 ticket, which was just almost my entire food budget, it was a five-week month for me. That makes a huge difference in how I buy groceries, and what I have to plan for. All my prescriptions will come due before I get paid again. One month, I get paid and I've got enough money, because I always leave enough money on my social security card to pay for my prescriptions. Well, if they all come due again, and in a five-week month they will, because they're 30-day prescriptions. Then I've got a week where I have to scramble to do the prescriptions and have enough money to buy all those scripts again. And I have to do the same thing with food. I have to think about, what kinds of things should I buy that'll last? So I don't buy a lot of produce

and stuff that you might have to run to the store for once a week, to get some fresh lettuce, or whatever. I'm buying canned soup and frozen food, and things like that, so I know I'll have something there if I need it. So it does affect what I choose to buy at the store.

Scrambling to survive takes a mental and physical toll:

Joelynn: It is so stressful. And anxiety, at least the effect it has on me, is that I can't think as straight as I normally could. Plus, I have all these physical problems that make me real anxious too. You're just like, well what should I pay, what should I do? Should I pay this bill, and hang on to this other one until next week? Well maybe my friend will bring me something to eat today, maybe she won't. You know, you're pretty much just, nuts.

The closing of Dillon's was completely disruptive to Ramon's life. Like Denise, Ramon was completely reliant on the Central Park Dillon's for groceries before they closed. Since then, his food buying routine and health has changed drastically:

Ramon: Twice a week I walk to Dollar General, once every couple of weeks I go to the Wal-Mart market just because I only have like a set amount of energy to walk that far. There I buy things that are super cheap like milk, and eggs…then the next day I might go to Dollar General for supplemental items, like chili powder, orange juice, cans of beans, or something simple like hotdogs. Dollar General stopped carrying hamburger because it always gets stolen, so I have to buy meat at Walmart…My blood pressure has gone up quite a bit since I moved to Topeka because of my diet, I've gained weight which is odd…I'm not eating more I'm just eating less. I'm eating food that doesn't make me feel good, that doesn't make me feel mobile, or athletic, or comfortable. Like a fresh orange, I'll feel good like "Boosh!" with a burst of energy. But, if I eat a bunch of pre-packaged junk food type stuff then I'm eating maybe not as much but I'm not doing as much, I'm not ready to face the day like after having a good breakfast. I'm eating cereal with dry milk…

The other thing is psychological… it takes a psychological toll [scrambling for food]. You feel exhausted a lot, you don't feel healthy, you feel like you're always constantly in this battle of wondering why you don't feel well, why your body is breaking down, why your

blood pressure is going up, why your heart rate is going up, and it's like a cycle where you don't feel well, then you can't walk, then you can't exercise which would make you feel better, but you don't have the right kind of diet to supplement that. So it becomes this cycle – eating bad, not exercising, wanting to exercise, but not having the psychological impetus, not feeling like you can, or feeling like your only exercise option is that day you spent all your time walking to the grocery store… Let's say you have a job, I work temporary sometimes, my employment goes up and down, but when I'm working my diet goes "into the tank" because when I'm working all my energy goes into that, so at the end of the day, after working eight hours, the last thing I want to do is walk, or let's say I have money for a bus pass – it takes fifteen or twenty minutes to get to a bus stop, take about 20 minutes to get to the store, so I still spent an hour but I haven't spent it walking… at the end of the day, it's still the same hour or hour and a half trip even when I'm working… A lot of times, I have to weigh how much working is gonna benefit me, I'm like wait, do I work eight hours a day or six hours a day? If I work six, I have a couple extra hours to go to the store and take care of my business…That takes a lot out of you. If I'm working, I have money but don't have the time or the energy to spend getting groceries and I tend to eat out more.

Several respondents mentioned that they could send their children to walk to Dillon's to pick up milk or other items and ingredients that were not purchased during a pre-planned shopping trip. Denise and her teenage daughter articulate this inconvenience and the way shopping and eating patterns are affected when healthy food accessibility diminishes:

Me: So you did get groceries from Dillon's here before they closed?

Denise: We did all of our shopping there. Everything.

Me: Ok. Would you walk?

Denise: I could. Yeah, we would walk over and carry our groceries. I used to have a wagon, and we'd just go over there with our wagon, me and the kids, all three kids, ducks in a row. We'd go over there and go shopping.

Me: Definitely your shopping routine has changed since that Dillon's closed, then.

Denise: Yeah. And also, as the kids grew up and became older, having one of them just run across the street and grab such and such, a gallon of milk.

Teenager: There were so many times that I'd run over for a gallon of milk or a thing of eggs.

Denise: Just those things that you needed right then, you know. It was very convenient.

Me: I bet. Do you think that your diets have changed since that Dillon's closed?

Denise: Oh yeah. My meal planning has changed since that. Because it's sort of wonky, because I can't cook.

Teenager: But even then, we have to really watch what we get. We can't have actual meal meals, except like once in awhile, or maybe a few times a week, we can swing getting more stuff.

Me: What do you mean by meal meals?

Teenager: Like an actual home cooked meal, cooking everything from scratch. But like what, hot dogs and Spam and kielbasa and rice.

Denise: Yeah it's all prepackaged more.

Me: So before the Dillon's closed, you might do more meals from scratch?

Denise: I think I did, cuz it was just too convenient, you know? To go across the street, if I forgot anything. Now if I forgot anything, I have to scrap everything I did and start over.

Rochelle's shopping routine and as a result her eating routine and diet has also changed since Dillon's closed:

Me: If that Dillon's was still there, do you think you'd still be doing all the shopping?

Rochelle: Oh yeah. I'd still be doing all the shopping, and I'd probably be cooking more. At this point, we never have everything I need to cook a specific thing.

Me: And you can't just pop down there to get what you need. That gets to one of my questions. How has your food shopping routine changed since it closed? Do you think your diet has changed since that store closed?

Rochelle: Yes. A lot of bologna sandwiches, ham sandwiches, stuff like that instead of...and I've never been a bread eater. That was a real shock to my system.

Me: So definitely, you didn't eat bread at all before, and now you eat sandwiches pretty regularly?

Rochelle: Yeah.

Me: Anything else that's changed, besides generally preparing less fresh meals?

Rochelle: Less cooking, and not having the things that we usually have all the time. You don't wanna go that far for one thing, if you forget to get it on the list. So then it never gets picked up. We went without eggs for a week one time, cuz nobody could remember to get it on the list, and it wasn't worth running.

Denise and her daughter further elaborate on the effects of Dillon's closing on her household, and how much more difficult grocery shopping is now:

Denise: Our biggest effect was that it sent us out.

Me: Out of the neighborhood?

Denise: Right. Before where I would've just shopped at Dillon's and called it good, now I go to two to three different places to do my shopping for one month's worth of food.

Me: So more driving, spending more money on gas, car service, oil changes, stuff like that's gotta increase at least a little too right?

Denise: Yeah, but that's the biggest thing for us, I'm used to staying in my little hole, here, and now I have to go to places I don't like, I can't stand driving on Wanamaker, California isn't any better, it's just, took me out of my comfy hole.

Teenager: When the Dillon's was there, we had one street we had to worry about. If we could get across that street, the sidewalk was right there. We could easily, safely walk up to the building and we were fine.

Me: It sounds like you felt pretty safe, any other concerns getting to that Dillon's at that time?

Denise: No.

Teenager: When I was in elementary [school] I was walking over there.

Denise: I felt that safe, that I could send my sixth grader over and not think anything was gonna happen to her, you know?

Denise is hesitant to admit that they face challenges accessing food. However, her daughter disagrees and indicates that they do in fact face challenges. Denise cannot help but agree:

Me: So would you say you face challenges accessing the food that you need for your household?

Denise: Not challenges, inconveniences. It's just inconvenient.

Teenager: I'd say challenges. What if it's a week that we can't afford to put gas in our cars? That 10-15 minutes for a grocery trip, to go and spend that extra money, it's a challenge. Making sure that everything is good here, so that when we can go, especially with all the crap that's going on now. I'm scared to go to work because of all the shootings that have been happening lately. If that Dillon's were still open, I could just walk to Dillon's. Come straight home from work and just walk to that Dillon's and be done. But I don't wanna spend any time at work that I don't have to, because of everything that's been going on lately.

Denise: She's got a point, it is a challenge.

There are clearly physical benefits that come along with being able to access healthy foods. Briefly discussed in chapter five, there is also symbolic value tied to healthy food access, especially being able to make an unplanned trip to the store. With food stores difficult to access, residents in food deserts are potentially missing out on material as well as symbolic benefits that stem from having agency within one's food environment. The concept of narrative can augment our understanding of these benefits, and the decisions that poor residents make within their food environments. The meaning related to shopping decisions, and the symbolic benefits related to agency (or lack thereof) within the food environment, take the form of stories that help explain these perceptions. Narratives are an important way that people produce and reproduce social knowledge and make sense of our places within the social world (Esterberg 2002). Traditional, quantitative and largely map-based studies of food insecurity and "food deserts" do little in terms of uncovering these influential meanings. Ver Ploeg et al. (2017) make clear that "access-

burdened” households do what they can to overcome distance barriers to accessing healthy foods. Structural factors alone cannot explain food shopping behaviors. We must turn to residents on the front lines with the tools of narrative sociology to arrive at a deeper understanding of how residents cope with and make sense of food insecurity.

Is change possible? How do respondents see their own agency in fostering change?

According to Angela, people in the neighborhood do not think about getting another store, putting in the effort to get another store, or social justice more broadly. Many minds are “on the west side” and how they will travel there to get groceries and survive. Joelynn’s situation gives her little hope for being able to cause any change:

> **Joelynn:** … there's nothing I can do about it. I can't vote, I don't have any money to give to any candidates. I can't walk door to door to help somebody get elected, I mean it's just...and people that are real stressed out, you know, you wonder why there's not a revolution, why people aren't in the streets all the time, and aren't out there saying we want a better life, or we want the planet to be saved, or we want jobs, or something. It’s because they have to live this life, and bounce off the walls, and scramble to make ends meet. They don't have time to go out there and march.

Sociology of the Food Environment

There are several points discussed throughout this dissertation related to important theoretical concerns in the field of sociology, and how this study advances the field of sociology and the study of poverty and food insecurity. By showing the utility and effectiveness of applying narrative sociology to these social problems and context, this study advocates for more “ground-level,” interpretative studies of food insecurity in other contexts in the future. At the same time, this study advocates for the use of narrative sociology to understand and address other social problems that may be largely understood from a largely “bird’s eye,” quantitative

perspective. The next several paragraphs summarize the importance and value of narratives and narrative analysis, and how this study advances the field of sociology and the empirical and theoretical study of poverty and food insecurity.

Resident respondents often expressed the importance of Dillon's to their individual and community identity. They used phrases like "our Dillon's" and "we lost the Dillon's" when the topic came up in interviews. This points to the symbolic value of being able to access healthy, high-quality groceries. There are certainly material benefits associated with grocery store access. Residents can shop for food with less time than if the store was far away, they can more easily access nutritious foods, and they can access other services like post offices and pharmacies, just to name a few. Grocery store access also boosts neighborhood reputation, and provides opportunities for symbolic consumption, or small, unplanned purchases (Tach and Amorim 2015). The ability to make unplanned, spontaneous grocery purchases made respondents feel "middle class," at least for a short time.

During interviews, residents used phrases like "haves and have nots" indicating their awareness of social class, and how it may influence their life chances. This creates and reinforces a feeling of "us versus them" within the city. Social structure shapes how individuals feel about the food environment, influences the way they can subjectively navigate the food environment, and shapes how they relate to the rest of society. These "feelings" can only be uncovered through narrative analysis.

The dominant, classed, social structure effectively reproduces the status quo of unequal race and class relations. The status quo feels beyond respondents' control. Poor people with little to no power cannot effectively speak for themselves, and the cycle of disappointment and perceived betrayal by the city leads to feelings of hopelessness and fatalism. These findings, in

addition to findings by Tach and Amorim (2015) suggest there can be important differences between "food desert" neighborhoods. For example, residents in neighborhoods where there has not been a store in recent memory tend to be more fatalistic in terms of the food environment and community in general compared to residents in neighborhoods that have recently lost a store. It appears residents in Central Park, Topeka are becoming more accepting of the idea that they may never have a food store nearby again.

Individual agency is constrained by social structure. In this case, the economic rationalization of food retailing, and race and social class segregation, directly shape how residents behave in their food environments. Poor residents are the least equipped to survive and the most vulnerable in terms of being regularly exposed to unhealthy behaviors and lacking access to healthy food. To access *any* food, never-mind food that is "healthy," poor residents in Central Topeka have to "scramble" and meticulously plan. "Scrambling" on a limited or scant budget increases anxiety and stress, especially for older populations who are often dealing with additional physical limitations.[21]

The structural conditions of the food system extend beyond the control of individual consumers, particularly those on the margins. The case analyzed here clearly shows how the current structure of the food system shapes agency and identity, and how food insecurity plays out "on the ground." With little to no capital or power to influence their surroundings, poor residents are rendered virtually powerless within the food system. Often, women are forced to derive power from the very work that re-inscribes traditional gender roles and perpetuates their subordination (Carney 2012).

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[21] "Physical limitations" include being able-bodied, and/or owning a car and being able to drive oneself to the grocery store when needed.

In this study, residents used various strategies to cope with poverty and poor food access. One common strategy, especially used by older residents, is to "eat the basics by choice." Sticking to the "basics," for example, milk, cereal, eggs, and bread, and, eating unhealthy and unbalanced meals, is framed as a choice that is made (agency), rather than a strategy for dealing with an inhospitable food environment (structure). I interpret this as "narrative accommodation" (Rosen 2017) and respondents creating and preserving some semblance of agency in the face of an inhospitable context. It may seem illogical to some outsiders to intentionally reject healthy foods. However, as Hochschild (2017) and other researchers find, agency can take the form of defiance, especially among populations who may possess few if any other avenues for agency.

Poor consumers' behaviors within the food system reinforces the status quo. For example, residents become more fatalistic about food insecurity and living in a food desert. They focus on scrambling to survive, seek out symbolic value through defiance, "focus on the west side" instead of pursuing social change, and in doing so they are effectively reproducing the status quo of the current food system. Changing the local food environment feels out of reach, and larger changes to the overall food system and structure of society are incomprehensible. The efforts of the CTGO group discussed above in Chapters three and four represents one important manifestation of agency, however, most resident respondents I interviewed were not aware of this group.

Discussions with respondents point to feelings of exclusion from political and community processes. For example, respondents uniformly gave different responses to the question of how much notice was given regarding the neighborhood Dillon's closing. Besides this disagreement, discussions about the food environment, community, and identity often brought up "narratives of loss." Respondents' reactions to the Dillon's closing were uniformly sad and upset.

Suburban sprawl, the result of numerous policies encouraging urban dispersal (Duany et al. 2007), has contributed to increasing social problems and social atomization in centrally located urban neighborhoods, Central Topeka included. Social viability, including access to nutritious foods, is many times dependent on automobile ownership and/or access. Social mechanisms that have led to segregated neighborhoods in the U.S., including redlining, neighborhood disinvestment, steerage, blockbusting, and sub-prime lending (Massey and Denton 1993: 132-182; Pongracz 2004) result in numerous social disadvantages for poor residents. Poor food access may be the most deleterious consequence of residential segregation because of the universal need for food, and the implications that healthy food intake has for health. In addition, besides nutritional and health concerns, disinvestment in Central Topeka, whether real or perceived, has clearly led to a real sense of rejection and exclusion among residents.

Central Topeka has become unattractive for business and residential investors and homeowners and a result of disinvestment. Suburbanization has led to higher proportion of renters in Central Topeka, and as a result transiency among residents. This makes it harder to establish meaningful relationships with neighbors and contributes to the social atomization that most residents expressed. As long-time resident Barry said, there just are not the same types of interactions with neighbors as there used to be.

Some contrast that residents draw between the “way things used to be” and the current situation are surely the result of nostalgia, especially among elderly, long-time residents. They talked about a sense of pride in the community, perhaps romanticizing the selection of food stores and wide variety of fresh produce that used to be available in the neighborhood. Central Park was not always a food desert. The City has moved forward from the disastrous tornado of 1966, and Central Topeka has largely remained stagnant. As a result, respondents largely

perceive that their community identity has been left behind and neglected by the City of Topeka and residents living in more affluent parts of town.

What implications do this study's findings have for addressing the problem of food insecurity in the U.S.?

Poor people have many of the same, interconnected problems. According to Ramon, there has been some progress in terms of outreach and assisting the poor. For example, some pantries have moved to offer less food that is high in salt and preservatives. But, in other ways, assistance-providers are locked-in to the usual ways of doing things. There are people who care, and genuinely want to help, but, they tend to be focused on one small aspect of outreach (e.g., food insecurity, transportation, or addiction) or have limited ability and funding to help address multiple interconnected issues. Issues and outreach are compartmentalized. This provides focus to volunteers and activists while concealing the numerous related social issues and underlying causes of food insecurity. Corporations and agencies like the USDA make sizeable donations to private food assistance entities like food banks. These interests tend to have a conservative perspective which perceives legislative efforts related to poverty, hunger, and inequality as politically liberal. Food banks are forced to conceal advocacy efforts. For example, they will promote a hunger advocacy project by emphasizing that it helps thousands of poor kids eat lunch during the summer rather than focus on the structural issues of inequality and poverty (Poppendieck 1998). If food assistance providers were more willing and able to promote efforts to recognize and address underlying social issues like race and social class segregation, they could help lower the rate and prevent food insecurity in the future.

One respondent, Ramon, suggests that we need more holistic and comprehensive outreach and solutions for addressing food insecurity. For example, local governments could

provide financial assistance for bus passes, and provide transportation assistance at other locations like addictions counseling clinics.

All stores should be more welcoming and accommodating, physically and socially. For example, governments could incentivize stores to physically locate themselves closer to poor neighborhoods. Public transportation can be improved. Stores and governments can work toward fostering inclusiveness and community for all types of customers.

There can be important differences between seemingly similar "food desert neighborhoods." Not all "underserved neighborhoods are underserved for the same reasons – local efforts to promote access may be more successful if they are informed by the distinct barriers at play in a targeted neighborhood" (Tach and Amorim 2015: 829-830). Residents' feelings and resulting narratives regarding the food environment will vary based on where they live and their expectations. Understanding these types of narratives through narrative sociology can help inform efforts to effectively address food insecurity and improve healthy food access. Narrative sociology provides an overall deeper understanding of a particular context. By contrast, typical food desert studies often focus on spatial elements of the food environment, like household proximity to stores, and transportation barriers. These types of studies, while valuable, do not tell us very much about what food insecure people are experiencing, and how they are making sense of and navigating their lives. This study provides a deeper understanding of one context and hopefully can contribute to further efforts to understand and effectively address the unacceptably high food insecurity rate and "food desertification" in the United States.

Appendix A - Interviewee Recruitment Flyer, Postage, and Main Message

Research Participant Recruitment Flyer, Postage Side (front)

What do you think about food access and availability in your neighborhood?

What does the Dillon's closing on Huntoon mean to you?

***Please see message on back for information about this project and how to share your opinion and become involved.**

QUESTIONS, CONCERNS, AND TO SCHEDULE A CHAT PLEASE CONTACT:

Michael Miller
Phone Number:
Email: Mmille24@ksu.edu

Research Participant Recruitment Flyer, Main Message Side (back)

Invitation: Participate in project related to food access in your neighborhood

Project Title: The Stories We Tell About Food: Understanding Narratives of Food Environments and Coping with Loss of Food Access

Greetings!

My name is Michael Miller and I am a sociology graduate student at Kansas State University. You are receiving this letter because you currently live near the former Dillon's grocery store location at 1400 Huntoon.

I am writing to request that you participate in my research study. Participation will simply involve a conversation with me mainly about food access and availability in your neighborhood. Your participation will be a valuable contribution to this research, and, I also hope this work will bring attention to the neighborhood.

The conversation should only take about 30 to 45 minutes of your time. It will be recorded, but your name, and all other personal information will be kept confidential. I prefer to meet in person at a location of your choosing. If we can't meet in person I can talk on the phone, or via video chat.

Please call or text the phone number below with a day, time, and location that will work for you. If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me!

Thank you!

Michael Miller

Graduate Student, Sociology
Kansas State University
Phone: [redacted]
Email: mmille24@ksu.edu

QUESTIONS, CONCERNS, AND TO SCHEDULE A CHAT PLEASE CONTACT MICHAEL MILLER*:*
PHONE NUMBER: [redacted]
OR EMAIL: MMILLE24@KSU.EDU

Appendix B - Interview Protocols

Primary Interview Questions – Neighborhood Residents

Introduction, Consent

1. Thank you very much for agreeing to participate in this research project to understand more about how people experience the food system. We are interested in learning more about how people experience the food system in their neighborhoods, how they experience food access, and how they deal with any challenges related to access, especially to healthy foods. Information about you and any other information you share will be kept confidential. Your actual name and any other identifying information will not be used in any notes or future papers or reports. Your participation is voluntary and you can decide to quit participating at any time.

How People Experience Food Environments

2. Tell me about the food environment in this neighborhood and around Topeka.

    a. Can you walk me through your typical routine buying food?
    b. Where do you usually get food?
    c. Do you get food by means other than grocery shopping, e.g., food assistance, trading, food-for-work arrangements, hunting, "gathering", etc.?
    d. Do you usually get food in this neighborhood?
    e. Did you get your groceries from Dillon's before they closed?
    f. (If yes) Where do you get your groceries/food since the Dillon's closed?
    g. How has your food shopping routine changed since it closed?
    h. Has your diet changed since it closed? If so, how?

3. Tell me about the Dillons closing.
    a. How long have you lived in this neighborhood?/Did you live here before the Dillons at 1400 Huntoon closed?
    b. Was there advance notice of the Dillon's closing?
    c. What was the community reaction?
    d. How did the City of Topeka handle it?
    e. How did the food assistance community in Topeka handle it?
    f. What do you think the reasons were for the closing?
    g. What have been the effects of the closing on your household? On your neighborhood?

How do they perceive and understand their food environment and challenges and barriers they might face in negotiating market and non-market resources while coping with food insecurity?

4. Do you ever face any challenges in accessing the food you need for your household? If so, what are they? And, what might be done to improve things?

5. In the past year or so have you ever not been able to afford food?
    a. Were you ever unable to afford to eat balanced/healthy meals?
    b. Did you cut the size of meals? Or eat less than you thought you should because not enough money to afford food?
    c. (If yes) How do you deal with food shortages?
    d. (If no) Do you know how other people/families in this neighborhood deal with food shortages?

6. Do you use any food assistance programs?
    a. If so, why do you use that particular program?
    b. Is that a common way people get food here?
    c. What are the pros and cons of using that/those programs?
    d. How do you feel about the following programs?: SNAP (food stamps), food pantries, free and/or reduced school lunch, other types of food assistance?
    e. What other ways do people in this neighborhood get food?
    f. What about the school district?
    g. If you do not use any food assistance, why not?

Internalizing and Externalizing Social Class and Agency

7. Do you feel like you have choice/in control of the choices you make within the food environment?
8. Do you feel that you have good food options in your neighborhood?
9. If you had control how would you change things?
10. Walk me through what an ideal food environment would look like?

Snowball Sampling

11. Do you know other people in this neighborhood or nearby that might be interested in talking with me about these issues?
    a. (If yes) Could you share their contact information with me? Or, could you please share my contact information with them?

Possible follow-up? Any questions or comments?

12. Would you be able to participate in a follow-up interview, call, questionnaire, etc., if necessary?
13. Is there anything else that we've missed?

Secondary Interview Questions – Non-Residents

Introduction, Consent

1. Thank you very much for agreeing to participate in this research project to understand more about how people deal with the food system. We are interested in learning more about how people experience the food system in their neighborhoods, how they experience food access, and how they deal with any challenges related to access, especially to healthy foods. Information about you and any other information you share will be kept confidential. Your actual name and any other identifying information will not be used in any notes or future papers or reports. Your participation is voluntary and you can decide to withdraw your participation at any time.

Food Environments in Topeka

2. "My research is especially focused on the food environment in the [neighborhood name] neighborhood of Topeka, but also in the city generally. Could you tell me what you know about the food environment in that neighborhood?"
    a. How long have you been located/had an office here? Have you been located here since before February 2017 (since before the Dillon's closed)?
3. Do you think that residents in [neighborhood name] face challenges regarding food access? If so, what do you see as the major challenges in the neighborhood?
4. In your view, what steps do you think might be taken to address those challenges?
5. Tell me about the Dillon's closing.
    a. Was there advance notice of the closing?
    b. What was the community reaction?
    c. How did the City of Topeka handle it?
    d. How did the food assistance community in Topeka handle it?
    e. What do you think the reasons were for the closing?
    f. What do you think the effects have been on the residents in the neighborhood?

Snowball Sampling

6. Are there other key people with knowledge of the food environment in Topeka that we should talk to?

Possible follow-up? Any questions or comments?

7. Would you be able to participate in a follow-up interview, call, questionnaire, etc., if necessary?
8. Is there anything else that we've missed?

Secondary Interview Questions used at Aaron Douglas Art Fair (ADAF)

Introduction, Consent

1. I am a graduate student at Kansas State University working on a research project that looks to understand more about how people experience the food systems. We are interested in learning more about how people experience the food system in their neighborhoods, how they experience food access, and how they deal with any challenges related to access, especially to healthy foods. Information about you and any other information you share will be kept confidential. Your actual name and any other identifying information will not be used in any notes or future papers or reports. Your participation is voluntary and you can decide to quit participating at any time.

2. Do you live around here? / Do you live in or around the Central Park neighborhood?

If no:

3. Do you know other people in this neighborhood or nearby that might be interested in talking with me about these issues?
    a. (If yes) Could you share their contact information with me? Or, could you please share my contact information with them?

If yes:

4. Do you mind chatting with me for a few minutes about the food environment and Dillon's closing?

If no:

5. Do you know other people in this neighborhood or nearby that might be interested in talking with me about these issues?
    a. (If yes) Could you share their contact information with me? Or, could you please share my contact information with them?

If yes:

6. Tell me about the food environment in this neighborhood and around Topeka.

    a. Can you walk me through your typical routine buying food?
    b. Where do you usually get food?
    c. Do you get food by means other than grocery shopping, e.g., food assistance, trading, food-for-work arrangements, hunting, "gathering", etc.?

    d. Do you usually get food in this neighborhood?

    e. Did you get your groceries from Dillon's before they closed?

f. (If yes) Where do you get your groceries/food since the Dillon's closed?
g. How has your food shopping routine changed since it closed?
h. Has your diet changed since it closed? If so, how?

7. Tell me about the Dillon's closing.
    h. How long have you lived in this neighborhood?/Did you live here before the Dillon's at 1400 Huntoon closed?
    i. Was there advance notice of the Dillon's closing?
    j. What was the community reaction?
    k. How did the City of Topeka handle it?
    l. How did the food assistance community in Topeka handle it?
    m. What do you think the reasons were for the closing?
    n. What have been the effects of the closing on your household? On your neighborhood?

Snowball Sampling

8. Do you know other people in this neighborhood or nearby that might be interested in talking with me about these issues?
    a. (If yes) Could you share their contact information with me? Or, could you please share my contact information with them?

Possible Follow-Up Full Interview at their residence or other location nearby of their choosing:

9. Would you be able to participate in a follow-up interview?

10. Contact information? (I will call/text asap to set up a meeting)

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