

“Four years of ramen and poverty:” Using participatory research to examine food insecurity  
among college students at Kansas State University

by

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## **Abstract**

Defined by the U.S. Department of Agriculture as “limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods,” food insecurity is a symptom of systematic disempowerment and represents one of the most prevalent social ailments to impact first-world countries. In a county where one in eight individuals does not have regular access to meals, food insecurity is far from a problem typically associated with college students. However, Feeding America, the largest emergency food assistance network in the nation, reports that one out of every ten people they serve is a student. In total, half of all students will find themselves unable to afford to eat at least once within their academic career; consequently, 1 in 4 will drop out.

This thesis argues that the voices and narratives of food insecure students have been absent from the very research meant to represent them. Consequently, little is known of the situational nuances that accompany student hunger, reifying the dominant discursive structure. This research employs Photovoice, a participant-led methodology which invites members of marginalized groups to photograph places, things, and events representative of, or crucial to, their daily life. This study examines the narratives of seven college students, ranging from their first-year to PhD status, in an effort to fill the gap in the knowledge regarding student hunger and food insecurity.

This research found that students who experience food insecurity engage in self-blaming practices and, thus, do not believe they have the right to be hungry or ask for help. Instead, food-insecure students employ several strategies, including face negotiation and disclosure, to minimize the severity of their situation and mitigate tensions between their health, finances, and convenience. This study concludes with a discussion of implications, limitations and areas for future research.

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## **Dedication**

For my sisters, Victoria and Sabrina. You inspire me.

For the seven students outlined within this thesis for their perseverance and partnership.

## Preface

In 2014, I was serving as the student director of a nonprofit organization run out of my undergraduate institution, a small, private liberal arts college in an equally small town in the Midwest. The nonprofit provided food over the weekend to elementary students from low-income families across the city. Roughly 60 percent of the population of the municipality in which I attended college lived at or below the national poverty line, a stark juxtaposition to the student body of the college nestled in the city center which was, predominantly, comprised of individuals hailing from well-to-do Midwestern families. This, combined with a notoriously homogenous student body, meant that little effort was necessary to ensure that all 1,100 students had their basic needs met. One could only assume it is hard to get lost in a crowd so small. However, one October afternoon, I sat slumped in a large armchair in a circle with my team as our faculty sponsor solemnly asked if we might be willing to add an anonymous student from our own college to the list of youth served by the program. Amidst a student population assumed to match the textbook definition of privilege, our sponsor explained, one of our peers had been found to be literally starving.

As neither of my parents graduated high school, they were unable to be of mental or financial support during my collegiate career. Scholarships and employment made it possible for me to attend my undergraduate college of choice, yet complicated my involvement on campus. Most notably, this meant that my work schedule conflicted with the hours held by the campus dining hall; consequently, I only made use of my required - and expensive - meal plan less than ten times during my first two years on campus. Moreover, school policy mandated that students reside on campus until their senior year, drastically limiting my access to a kitchen in which to prepare meals. Perhaps unsurprisingly, a diet of granola bars and that which could be

microwaved was not particularly conducive to a healthy lifestyle. Accordingly, my energy level, mental health, and academic performance drastically diminished and, until I was presented with the narrative of my anonymous classmate, I assumed I was completely alone. The story of my classmate, in conjunction with my own experience, sparked my interest in exploring how other students navigate food insecurity during an already uncertain and challenging time of self-improvement.

The seven narratives contained within this thesis were shared with me by a group of students at Kansas State University. Without hesitation, I attest that I am a better person for having had the chance to work with them. This research is for them, but also serves as my attempt at shedding light on one more group in America forced to make the impossible decision between food and a future.

## Chapter 1 - Introduction

They always find some people who have expertise about poverty but who aren't poor. Well, I ask you, if you're not poor, how can you really know anything about poverty?

—Lola Sanford, welfare recipient, 1972

Defined by the U.S. Department of Agriculture as “limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate foods,” food insecurity is a symptom of systematic disempowerment and represents one of the most prevalent social ailments to impact first-world countries.<sup>1</sup> In a country where one in eight individuals does not have regular access to meals, American college students are far from the first group to be associated with food insecurity.<sup>2</sup> However, Feeding America, the largest emergency food assistance network in the nation, reports that one out of every ten people they serve is a student.<sup>3</sup> In total, it is estimated that half of all students will find themselves unable to afford to eat at least once as they work towards completion of an associate, bachelors, or post-graduate degree; consequently, one in four will drop out.<sup>4</sup>

Changing social and economic conditions have facilitated the increased pervasiveness of food insecurity among college students. Since 1980, the number of employers requiring at least a

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1 United States Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service, “Measurement,” October 04, 2016, <http://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-us/measurement.aspx>.

2 \_\_\_\_\_. “Key Statistics and Graphics,” October 11, 2016, <http://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-us/key-statistics-graphics.aspx>.

3 Nancy S. Weinfield, et al., 2014, *Hunger in America 2014 National Report*. Annual Report, Chicago: Feeding America.

4 James Dubick, Brandon Mathews, and Clare Cady, 2016, *Hunger on Campus: The Challenge of Food Insecurity for College Students*, Report, College and University Food Bank Alliance, National Student Campaign Against Hunger and Homelessness, Student Government Resource Center, Student Public Interest Research Groups, Raleigh: College and University Food Bank Alliance.

bachelor's degree has increased 68 percent.<sup>5</sup> The increased demand for an educated workforce has drastically shifted the demographics of college students. Compared to 64 percent in 1986, today, less than one-third of undergraduate students fit the definition of a "traditional" student: one who enrolls in college in the fall following high school graduation and pursues higher education on a full-time basis, graduating with a bachelor's degree in four or five years.<sup>6</sup> Traditional students typically have the ability to make college their primary focus, meaning they are financially dependent on someone other than themselves, do not have children, and/ or are employed only part-time, if at all, during the academic year.<sup>7</sup>

In juxtaposition, "non-traditional" students are considered to have divergent enrollment patterns, often delaying college for a year or more following high school, meaning they are frequently older than their peers of traditional student status.<sup>8</sup> Non-traditional students are frequently categorized as low-income, minority, or first-generation students.<sup>9</sup> These students may have received a GED or other form of high school certificate instead of a diploma and/or may experience constraints that are atypical of their traditional peers, such as providing for

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5 Pew Research Center, 2016, *Pew Research Center Social and Demographic Trends*, October 6, <http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2016/10/06/1-changes-in-the-american-workplace/>.

6 Dubick, Mathews, and Cady, *Hunger on Campus*; National Center for Education Statistics, 1996, *Trends in Enrollment from 1986 to 1992 and Persistence and Attainment Among 1989-90 Beginning Postsecondary Students*, Statistical Analysis, National Center for Education Statistics, <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs/web/97578e.asp>; Center for Institutional Effectiveness, 2004, *A Fresh Look at Traditional and Nontraditional Undergraduates at KSU*, Statistical Analysis, Kennesaw State University.

7 National Center for Education Statistics, 2015, "Digest of Education Statistics: 2014," *National Center for Education Statistics*, <http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d14/>.

8 \_\_\_\_\_, *Trends in Enrollment from 1986 to 1992 and Persistence and Attainment Among 1989-90 Beginning Postsecondary Students*.

9 Gary R. Pike and George D. Kuh, 2005, "First and Second-Generation College Students: A Comparison of their Engagement and Intellectual Development," *Journal of Higher Education* 76 (1): 276-300; Peter J. Collier and David L. Morgan, 2008, "'Is that Paper Really Due Today?' Differences in First-Generation and Traditional College Students' Understandings of Faculty Expectations," *Journal of Higher Education*, 55 (1): 425-446.

dependents, being a single parent, being employed full time during the academic year, or being financially independent.<sup>10</sup> This surge of low income, minority, and first generation students, among others for whom higher education is more difficult to attain, is a far cry from when the typical demographics of a college student were that of white, middle to upper-class young adults for whom college was the most natural next step following high school.

Food insecurity threatens college students with both physical and mental harm, inevitably triggering social implications. As poor nutrition is directly correlated to depression, weight fluctuation, and suicidal ideation, it is unsurprising that malnutrition is the second leading cause of mental health concerns in the college population.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, the consequences of student food insecurity reify college as a privilege. Sara Goldrick-Rab, professor of higher education policy studies at Temple University and founder of the Wisconsin HOPE lab, explains that students from low-income families, or who are the first in their family to attend college, are the most vulnerable student group to succumb to food insecurity.<sup>12</sup> As a result, these students tend to have a much lower retention rate and, thus, fall victim to a continuing cycle of unemployment and poverty.

Still, institutions of higher education continue to struggle to develop effective services to meet the needs of students. In part, assumptions of the privilege of college students threatens progress. Alex Ashbrook, director of D.C. Hunger Solutions, elucidates, “Administrators still

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> M Bruening et al., 2012, "Feeding a Family in a Recession: Food Insecurity Among Minnesota Parents," *American Journal of Public Health* 102 (3): 520-526; Mi-Ting Lin et al., 2013, "The Relationship Between Perceived Psychological Distress, Behavior Indicators, and African-American Female College Student Food Insecurity," *American Journal of Health Studies*, 28 (3): 127-133.

<sup>12</sup> Sara Goldrick-Rab, 2016, *Paying the Price: College Costs, Financial Aid, and the Betrayal of the American Dream*, Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.

assume that if you can afford to spend thousands of dollars on a college education, you can't possibly be poor enough to require food assistance."<sup>13</sup> Considering that the cost of tuition, books, and living expenses has increased 46 percent since 2001, this philosophy is not simply counterintuitive, it is detrimental.<sup>14</sup> However, institutional negligence is not solely responsible for the increase in food insecurity among students. In fact, a number of schools have made diligent steps towards rectifying hunger among their students. Since 1999, over 300 colleges and universities nation-wide have established student food pantries on their campuses.<sup>15</sup> Rather, systemic incongruities present a number of challenges for students attempting to access higher education. These issues present on the micro level, such as enrolling in college while mitigating any nontraditional student characteristic, as well as the macro level. For example, President Clinton's major welfare reform program in the 1990s, PRWORA, established 20-hour-per-week employment minimums for college students seeking to apply for food assistance.<sup>16</sup>

The majority of studies performed on food insecurity among the college population primarily conceptualize the phenomenon through demographic and quantitative frameworks.<sup>17</sup> As an inevitable consequence of these methods, the voices of food insecure students are absent in the very research meant to represent them. Consequently, little is known of the situational

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13 Alexandra Sifferlin, 2014, "New Worry for College Students: Food Insecurity," *Time*, January 28, <http://healthland.time.com/2014/01/28/new-worry-for-college-students-food-insecurity/>.

14 Jennifer Ma et al., 2015, *Trends in College Pricing 2015*, Report, College Board.

15 NPR, 2016, *More Colleges Open Food Pantries To Address Campus Hunger*, <http://www.npr.org/sections/thesalt/2016/10/14/497948224/more-colleges-open-food-pantries-to-address-campus-hunger>.

16 Goldrick-Rab, *Paying the Price*.

17 Dubick, Mathews, and Cady, *Hunger on Campus*; Loran Mary Morris et al., 2016, "The Prevalence of Food Security and Insecurity Among Illinois University Students," *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior* 48 (6): 376-382; Megan M. Patton-Lopez et al., 2014, "Prevalence and Correlates of Food Insecurity Among Students Attending a Midsize Rural University in Oregon," *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior* 46 (3): 209-214.

nuances that lead to, or result from, student hunger. In turn, this drastically limits the development of pragmatic solutions and reifies the dominant discursive structure.<sup>18</sup>

Due to the limited voice food insecure students have held in defining the phenomenon of which they are part, this topic is ideal to be broached from a communication perspective. By providing food insecure students the opportunity to communicate the reality of their situation via narrative, this study aims to fill the gap in understanding of student hunger in an attempt to inspire effective organizational and policy changes.

This study seeks to describe how food insecure college students communicate and enact marginalization. As the predominance of current research on college students who experience hunger or food insecurity is quantitative in nature, this study aims to expand upon the collective understanding of the students who are experiencing this growing phenomenon by procuring their narratives.<sup>19</sup> One way to rectify the limited voice of these individuals in research is to employ a participatory research agenda, wherein those who experience food insecurity become “co-executors in the production of knowledge.”<sup>20</sup> This study employs Photovoice, a participant-led methodology which invites members of marginalized groups to photograph places, things, and events representative of, or crucial to, their daily life.<sup>21</sup> The photographs were then used in facilitated dialogue among partners. The goal of Photovoice is “to move from a dyadic transfer

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18 Adam M. Pine and Rebecca de Souza, 2013, “Including the Voices of Communities in Food Insecurity Research: An Empowerment-Based Agenda for Food Scholarship,” *Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development* 3 (4): 71–79.

19 Lin et al., “The Relationship Between Perceived Psychological Distress, Behavior Indicators, and African-American Female College Student Food Insecurity.”; Morris et al., “The Prevalence of Food Security and Insecurity Among Illinois University Students.”; Kristen A. Renn and Robert D. Reason, 2013, *College Students in the United States: Characteristics, Experiences, and Outcomes*, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

20 Pine and de Souza, “Including the Voices of Communities in Food Insecurity Research,” pg. 74.

21 Ibid.



of knowledge to a dialogical construction of knowledge for the purpose of change.”<sup>22</sup> Ultimately, this form of participatory research documents the strengths of a community and highlights crucial areas for improvement.<sup>23</sup> By engaging with this population in research, findings from this study seek to add to literature regarding the use of narrative in marginalization communication.

## **Research Questions**

This thesis seeks to answer the following research questions of college students who experience food insecurity:

- RQ1: In what ways does the rhetoric of past and present welfare policies manifest itself in student responses to food insecurity?
- RQ2: Based on various messages, how do college students interpret and enact food insecurity?
- RQ3: Based on various messages, how do college students define and enact marginalization?
- RQ4: How can participatory research be used to increase communicative agency in marginalized groups?

To answer these questions, chapter two of this thesis features an overview of relevant literature. In chapter three, I describe my theoretical framework and research methodology. Next, chapter four features the results of this research broken and answers the research question outlined above. Finally, chapter five concludes this thesis with a discussion of implications, limitations, and areas for future research.

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid, p. 74.

<sup>23</sup> Sophie-Claire Valiquette-Tessier, Marie-Pier Vandette, and Julie Gosselin, 2015, “In Her Own Eyes: Photovoice as an Innovative Methodology to Reach Disadvantaged Single Mothers,” *Canadian Journal of Community Mental Health* 34 (1): 1–16.

## Chapter 2 - Literature Review

From the early days of colonization in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, American citizens have grappled with the answer to the question, *who deserves help, and in what way should help be provided?*<sup>24</sup> The modern political climate features a United States more polarized than ever before on key issues of social and economic reform. Social welfare policy, which attempts to determine those who should receive help and those who should provide for it, is consistently touted as one of the most divisive issues.<sup>25</sup>

To establish a background of welfare and food insecurity as it relates to college students, this chapter will review 1) the history behind the current cultural view of hunger and food insecurity, 2) the shifting sociocultural role of college students, 3) the institutional context in which food insecurity takes place and 4) make the case for why participatory methods are especially well-formulated to handle the delicate task of giving voice to marginalized communities in academic research.

### Conceptualizing Hunger and Food Insecurity

To understand food insecurity and how welfare policies and programs aimed at solving for it intersect with food insecurity in the college student population, this section will, first, differentiate key terms and concepts before providing a brief history of hunger and welfare reform in the United States. Ultimately, I will make the argument that antiquated policies and perceptions shape the modern way food insecure citizens are portrayed.

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24 Lisa Gring-Pemble, 2003, *Grim Fairytales: The Rhetorical Construction of American Welfare Policy*, Westport, CT: Praeger Publishing, pg. 15.

25 Marc J. Hetherington and Thomas J. Rudolph, 2015, *Why Washington Won't Work*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press; John Sides and Daniel Hopkins, 2015, *Political Polarization in American Politics*, New York: Bloomsbury Academic.

## Hunger: What is is and What it is Not

The National Nutrition Monitoring and Related Research Act of 1990 was the first to address the concept of food insecurity. In 1995, as part of a larger food security measurement mandated by the act, the Household Food Security Survey Module (HFSSM) became the standard model by which individual and familial food security, or lack thereof, is measured.<sup>26</sup> The original measurement has been modified slightly over the past two decades and is still in use today by the Economic Research Service of the USDA.

Perhaps the most misunderstood, yet vital, aspect of food insecurity is that it is not synonymous with hunger. The United States Department of Agriculture, the federal entity responsible for food and food access, does not concern itself with food *insecurity* as much as food *security*. The USDA asserts that food security exists on a spectrum.<sup>27</sup> The four points on this spectrum, “high,” “moderate,” “low,” and “very low,” designate an individuals’ ability to access food on a consistent basis.<sup>28</sup> Hunger, as the USDA defines it, is the biological response to “low” or “very low” food security. It is also vital to note that the very definition of food insecurity includes the term *healthy*. This means that, theoretically, one could have consistent access to food; however, if the food is of poor enough quality that it does not include the necessary vitamins and nutrients necessary for a healthy existence, one would still be considered food insecure.

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26 Morris et al., "The Prevalence of Food Security and Insecurity Among Illinois University Students.

27 United States Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service, “Measurement.”

28 Ibid.

Food insecurity is recognized as a health disparity as it “results in drastically different health outcomes in different segments of the population.”<sup>29</sup> Individuals who experience food insecurity are susceptible to malnutrition which can result in poor mental and physical health.<sup>30</sup> Additionally, lack of access to food is a symptom of imbalanced resource distribution which also plays a role in a much greater systemic inequity.<sup>31</sup> Poverty is widely understood to be the root cause of food insecurity, with the opposite also being true. Moreover, hunger, as a biological response, facilitates the cyclical pattern of poverty as those with limited access to food generally lack the energy to participate as a productive member of society.<sup>32</sup>

### How We Got to Now: A (Brief) History of Food Insecurity and Welfare Policy

In 1996, Congress passed the Personal Responsibility Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA). President Clinton claimed that PRWORA, the most recent major welfare reform effort to date, would “end welfare as we know it.”<sup>33</sup> Indeed, PRWORA did substantially re-write the welfare policies of the previous six decades. However, in keeping with the adage that there is nothing new under the sun, scholars note that many aspects of PRWORA were reminiscent of other historical welfare policies to date.<sup>34</sup> It is important to note that not every

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29 Mohan Jyoti Dutta et al., 2016, "Narratives of Food Insecurity in Tippecanoe County, Indiana: Economic Constraints in Local Meanings of Hunger," *Health Communication*, 31(6): 647-658, pg. 648.

30 Dochas, 2010, *Eliminating Global Hunger: Towards a Strategic Irish Response*, Discussion Paper, Dublin: Dochas.

31 Ibid.

32 Dochas, *Eliminating Global Hunger*; Ruby K. Payne, 1996, *A Framework for Understanding Poverty*, Highlands, TX: aha! Process, Inc.

33 Federal News Service, 1996, *Text of President Clinton's Announcement on Welfare Legislation*, Transcription, Washington D.C.: New York Times.

34 Gring-Pemble, *Grim Fairytales*.

individual who experiences food insecurity or hunger will seek assistance from social programs; However, the history of America's stance on the hungry and poor is most accurately represented by the rhetoric employed in the welfare policies of the time.

To establish an understanding of the recycled aspect of American welfare policy and its impact on modern social aid, this section will review three major eras in social welfare. For the purpose of this literature review, these eras have been termed the Colonization to the Progressive Era, the New Deal to Clinton Era, and the PRWORA Era.

### **Colonial Era to the Progressive Era (1600s -1928)**

Poverty was perceived as the ultimate moral failure of an individual - one that was as much a violation of Christianity as early American individualism.<sup>35</sup> Long before institutional aid programs, families and close friends of the impoverished were expected to shoulder the responsibility of assistance.<sup>36</sup> However, until 1870, over half of American colonists relied on farming for income and sustenance, and few families had extra to go around.<sup>37</sup> Thus, public assistance soon became necessary for survival of the colonies.

Early American aid programs were largely based on the English Elizabethan Poor Laws of 1601.<sup>38</sup> The poor laws were policies which functioned to impose a so-called moral order upon

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35 Herbert Hoover, 1922, *American Individualism*, Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Page & Company. American individualism is a moral and political ideology that emphasizes the importance of unfettered self-interest of the individual rather than the collective. In 1922, Herbert Hoover published his manifesto, *American Individualism*. In the book, Hoover remarked that American individualism is the "sole source of progress" for American citizens.

36 Gring-Pemble, *Grim Fairytales*.

37 Social Security Administration, 2016, "Historical Development," *Social Security Administration*, <https://www.ssa.gov/history/pdf/histdev.pdf>.

38 Walter I. Trattner, 1999, *From Poor Law to Welfare State: A History of Social Welfare in America*, New York: The Free Press.

citizens and categorize the poor into groups: the worthy and the unworthy of assistance.<sup>39</sup> Children, widows, and the disabled were considered exempt from employment and, therefore, considered worthy of social aid. Able-bodied men, women who bore children out of wedlock, and minorities who were unable to provide for themselves were perceived as immoral and, thus, unworthy of assistance. These categorizations of the poor carried over into colonial aid programs, and are considered to still reign prevalent in modern welfare policy.<sup>40</sup>

Aid policies and programs of this era earmarked resources for reform of the individual. The most prevalent form of social aid for most of this era was the poorhouse.<sup>41</sup> Also referred to as an almshouse or workhouse, poorhouses were public institutions where individuals and families were required to live when they were unable to support themselves.<sup>42</sup> The theory behind these homes was that “the necessity of working every day would be a deterrent for able bodied persons who were simply lazy or shiftless; and the regimen of daily life in a congregate setting would instill habits of economical and virtuous living in persons who were destitute because of moral weakness or self-indulgence.”<sup>43</sup> For the worthy poor, forms of outside aid, such as cash assistance, became more prevalent in the Progressive Era. By 1926, most all states were able to provide pensions to the elderly or mothers with children. Unfortunately, most of these programs benefitted only white widows and frequently discriminated against “divorced, deserted, or

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39 Social Security Administration, "Historical Development," pg. 24.

40 Gring-Pemle, *Grim Fairytales*; Payne, *A Framework for Understanding Poverty*; Social Security Administration, "Historical Development."

41 Gring-Pemle, *Grim Fairytales*; John E. Hansan, 2011, "Poor Relief in the Early America," *The Social Welfare History Project: VCU Libraries*, <http://socialwelfare.library.vcu.edu/programs/poor-relief-early-amer/>.

42 Hansan, "Poor Relief in the Early America."

43 Ibid.

minority” women who did not adhere to the moral code.<sup>44</sup> So despised were the poor that, for a time in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, due to the rise of eugenics and Social Darwinism, pauperism was thought to be genetic and was likened to mental retardation.<sup>45</sup>

### **New Deal Era to Clinton Reforms (1929-1993)**

In 1929, the Great Depression served as the impetus for a shift in the national perception of the hungry and impoverished.<sup>46</sup> Contrary to the individualistic social mindset of earlier years, failure to support oneself was no longer considered a great moral travesty.<sup>47</sup> Rather, as is routine with economic downturns, poverty came to be perceived as the unfortunate consequence of a failed economic system.<sup>48</sup> American individualism was soon a privilege that few could afford. Accordingly, social policy was adopted to fit this new mentality. Roosevelt’s Social Security Act of 1935 established three types of programs “designed to provide economic protections to different populations.”<sup>49</sup> Among them was a program that came to be known as Aid to Dependent Children, a program which subsidized the worthy poor including the elderly, the blind, and dependent children.<sup>50</sup>

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44 Constitutional Rights Foundation, 1998, "How Welfare Began in the United States," *Bill of Rights in Action* 14(3), <http://www.crf-usa.org/bill-of-rights-in-action/bria-14-3-a-how-welfare-began-in-the-united-states.html>.

45 Gring-Pemble, *Grim Fairytales*.

46 Emily C. Bianchi, 2016, "American Individualism Rises and Falls with the Economy: Cross-Temporal Evidence that Individualism Declines when the Economy Falts," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 111 (4): 567-585.

47 Ibid.

48 Bianchi, “American Individualism Rises and Falls with the Economy.”; Gring-Pemble, *Grim Fariytales*.

49 Hansan, “Poor Relief in the Early America.”

50 Hansan, “Poor Relief in the Early America.”; PBS, 2015, "The History of the U.S. Welfare Program and Reform," *PBS News Hour*

The population and economic booms that followed World War II shifted the national mindset back towards a traditional appreciation for American individualism. Those who remained in poverty as the country flourished were, again, accused of laziness and indolence.<sup>51</sup> Moreover, critics of federal aid programs began to insist that welfare had gone too far and had become a way of life rather than a transitional program.<sup>52</sup>

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, substantial welfare reform began to take place, primarily at the state level. State governments allocated the majority of resources towards fostering an “eligibility and compliance culture” with the goal of ensuring that aid recipients were truly desperate enough to qualify for aid.<sup>53</sup> Although later rendered unconstitutional by the Fourteenth Amendment, some states imposed residency requirements and passed laws such as the so-called man in the house rule which rendered families ineligible for aid when an able-bodied male figure resided in the home.<sup>54</sup>

In the mid-1960s, Lyndon B. Johnson’s administration helped legislation emerge at the federal level to address “situational and discrimination-based causes of poverty.”<sup>55</sup> Johnson promised to declare a “war on poverty” with his Great Society platform. Civic programs such as Head Start and the Job Corps, along with projects directed towards urban renewal, resulted in a

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51 Bianchi, “American Individualism Rises and Falls with the Economy.”

52 Robert Moffitt, 2008, “A Primer on U.S. Welfare Reform,” *Focus* 26 (1): 15-26.

53 Gring-Pemble, *Grim Fairytales*, pg. 57.

54 Moffitt, “A Primer on U.S. Welfare Reform.”

55 Gring-Pemble, *Grim Fairytales*, pg. 58.



decline in the national poverty rate.<sup>56</sup> However, the continued war efforts in Vietnam proved to be a drain on domestic aid and many programs began to flounder by the 1968 election.<sup>57</sup>

Richard Nixon, who had initially promised major reform to welfare programs, ironically expanded the reach of federal aid programs between the years of 1970 to 1975. Most notably, the number of food stamp recipients skyrocketed from roughly one million to nearly 19 million during this period.<sup>58</sup> The increase in the number of individuals receiving entitlements and food stamps certainly did not go unnoticed. Specifically,

As higher cash and in-kind benefits became available to a larger percentage of poor people, the work disincentives and high budgetary costs of welfare programs were increasingly challenged. The public and policy makers came to view increased welfare reciprocity as evidence that the programs were subsidizing dependency and encouraging idleness.<sup>59</sup>

With no federal work program, individual states began experimenting with their own forms of job pairing and skills training programs. The subsequent success of these state-level programs served as the impetus for the Family Support Act of 1988 and the JOBS program, a career, education, and skill-building program for welfare recipients.<sup>60</sup> Unfortunately, applying state-based programs at the federal level proved to be more difficult than anticipated; by the early 1990s, JOBS was largely regarded as a failure.<sup>61</sup> However, the precedent JOBS set - that federal

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56 Moffitt, "A Primer on U.S. Welfare Reform."; Constitutional Rights Foundation, "How Welfare Began in the United States."

57 Ibid.

58 Sheldon Danziger, 1998, "Welfare Reform Policy from Nixon to Clinton: What Role for Social Science," *The Social Sciences and Policy Making*, Ann Arbor: Institute for Social Research, University of Michigan, 1-45, <http://www.psc.isr.umich.edu/pubs/pdf/rr02-512.pdf>.

59 Ibid, pg. 8.

60 Moffitt, "A Primer on U.S. Welfare Reform."

61 Ibid.

aid should be accompanied by employment conditions - paved the way for the welfare as it stands today.

### **PRWORA Era (1993- Present)**

When I ran for President four years ago, I pledged to end welfare as we know it... Today the Congress will vote on legislation that gives us a chance to live up to that promise, to transform a broken system that traps too many people in a cycle of dependence to one that emphasizes work and independence, to give people on welfare a chance to draw a paycheck, not a welfare check. It gives us a better chance to give those on welfare what we want for all families in America, the opportunity to succeed at home and at work.

- President Clinton, August 1, 1996

The return of hostility and accusations of dependence aimed at those on social aid in the 1990s served, in part, as the catalyst for the Personal Responsibility Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA). An extension of President Clinton's 1994 proposal, PRWORA most notably, decreased social aid funding by \$55 billion over five years by replacing entitlement programs with a five-year lifetime limit on federal assistance.<sup>62</sup> Clinton, when signing PRWORA into law, noted that the policy was "far from perfect" but allowed America to "break the cycle of dependency that has existed for millions and millions of our fellow citizens, exiling them from the world of work."<sup>63</sup>

Scholarship on modern welfare programming in America highlights key similarities between current aid programs and historical policies. In fact, the modern iteration of PRWORA harbors policies which echo every major period of welfare reform dating back to the 1600s.<sup>64</sup> For example, in periods of economic crisis, such as the Great Depression of the 1930s or the Great

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62 Federal News Service, *Text of President Clinton's Announcement on Welfare Legislation*.

63 Ibid.

64 Gring-Pemble, *Grim Fairytales*.

Recession beginning in 2009, poverty is perceived as a fault of institutional structures. In cases such as these, it is appropriate for the government to provide assistance to needy individuals. At all other times, when the faith of the public remains strong in the system and American individualism, poverty is perceived as a character flaw of the citizen. Both of these perspectives adhere to Horatio Alger's myth of perseverance despite hardship; individuals should be able to overcome adversity through their own efforts after either they or the system is reformed.<sup>65</sup>

### **Exploring the Modern College Student**

#### **The Millennial College Student**

Students from the millennial generation, generally agreed upon as those who were born between the years of 1980 and 1999, began arriving on college campuses around the year 2000.<sup>66</sup> Today, the majority of students in colleges and universities across the country are from the millennial generation and are thought to have distinct behavioral characteristics which differentiate them from students of preceding generations.<sup>67</sup> Specifically, millennial college students are described as "special, sheltered, confident, team-oriented, conventional, pressured, achieving, optimistic and upbeat, accepting of authority, rule followers, and structured."<sup>68</sup> Though not all modern college students will adhere to these blanket generational descriptions, the demographic, economic, and academic atmospheres in which the modern college student operates is an ideal place to begin exploring the previously uncharted background of the narratives of their food insecure peers.

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65 Ibid.

66 Maureen E. Wilson, 2004, "Teaching, Learning, and Millennial Students," *New Directions for Student Services*, 106 (1): 59-71.

68 Ibid, pg. 64.

One highly visible way in which millennial students differ from their Gen X and Y predecessors is within their racial and ethnic diversity. Approximately one third of millennial college students are first-generation, 24 percent of which represent disadvantaged racial and ethnic groups.<sup>69</sup> Scholars attribute this trend to the rising number of immigrants in the United States, estimating that one in five millennial students has at least one parent who is an immigrant.<sup>70</sup> Unfortunately, increasing tuition in combination with shifts in university financial aid from need-based to merit-based, and shifts in the majority of federal student aid from grants to loans, means that minority and low-income students attend four-year universities at half the rate of equally qualified, but wealthy, peers.<sup>71</sup>

The cost of higher education is not always a major deterrent for millennials; however, “as tuition rises and more low-income, first-generation students enroll, the idea of the frugal college student who exists on ramen noodles has been displaced by the hungry student in need of help, yet unsure of how to ask.”<sup>72</sup> The financial Everest of attending, and completing, college has been exacerbated as the distribution of wealth has become increasingly polarized over the past two decades.<sup>73</sup> Although the families of millennials are wealthier than ever before (45.2 percent of parental income is above \$75,000 per year, compared to 25.1 percent in 1998), an equal number of families are making less than \$25,000 annually.<sup>74</sup> As a result, “the gap in the college-going

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69 Morris et al., "The Prevalence of Food Security and Insecurity Among Illinois University Students."

70 Robert DeBard, 2004, "Millennials Coming to College," *New Directions for Student Services*, 106 (1): 33-45.

71 Ibid.

72 Morris et al., "The Prevalence of Food Security and Insecurity Among Illinois University Students," pg. 378.

73 Ellen M. Broido, 2004, "Understanding Diversity in Millennial Students," *New Directions for Student Services*, 106 (1): 73-85.

74 Broido, "Understanding Diversity in Millennial Students."

rates between students from low-income families and those from high-income families is nearly as wide as it was three decades ago.”<sup>75</sup>

Contrary to previous generations, millennials do not see *not* attending college as an option.<sup>76</sup> Roughly 60 percent of millennials state that they believe there is a “very good chance” that they will earn at least a ‘B’ average in college and have plans to pursue a graduate or professional degree once they complete their undergraduate career.<sup>77</sup> This suggests that millennials do not simply have faith in their ability to succeed in college; they believe they will thrive. This self-confidence, coupled with the fact that they are “more willing to do what it takes to succeed” may mean that millennials are willing to push past the financial and nutritional uncertainty of their college years, whatever the cost.<sup>78</sup>

### **Food Insecurity in Students**

The influx of millennial students, coupled with the assumption and reification of education as a financial privilege, has resulted in the consideration of students as sheltered from the real world.<sup>79</sup> As such, when the needs of the student transcend the safety bubble of academia to intersect with the real world, society is divided on who holds the responsibility of preservation of that individual. The university? The government? Or is the individual themselves, having

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid, pg. 75.

<sup>76</sup> Broido, "Understanding Diversity in Millennial Students."

<sup>77</sup> Wilson, "Teaching, Learning, and Millennial Students."; Broido, "Understanding Diversity in Millennial Students."

<sup>78</sup> Wilson, "Teaching, Learning, and Millennial Students," pg. 66.

<sup>79</sup> DeBard, "Millennials Coming to College."

made the decision to abstain from the labor force, who is wholly responsible for self-preservation? In short, when is the inability to feed oneself justified?

Although the negative impact of food insecurity on adults is well documented, minimal research had been conducted on the intersection between student status and food insecurity. Following the panic of the Great Recession, studies slowly began to emerge which sought to identify the demographic characteristics of college students who had felt the ripple effect of food insecurity. Sporadic studies have been performed at universities across the nation in order to identify the prevalence and impact of food insecurity on students. A study performed at University of Hawaii – Manoa found that 21 percent of the student body, undergraduate and graduate students alike, was found to be either food-insecure or at risk of being food insecure.<sup>80</sup> Overall, the authors note that student food insecurity rates mirrored that of the state as a whole. Similar research at the University of Oregon found that 59 percent of their student body had experienced food insecurity at least once in the previous year and, perhaps unsurprisingly, that GPA is inversely related to food insecurity.<sup>81</sup> In October 2016, the College and University Food Bank Alliance released the most comprehensive study on collegiate food insecurity performed to date. Published in conjunction with the National Student Campaign against Hunger and Homelessness, the Student Government Resource Center, and the Student Public Interest Research Groups, the study asserts that, overall, 48 percent of students will experience food insecurity at least once within their collegiate career.<sup>82</sup>

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80 M. Pia Chaparro et al., 2009, "Food Insecurity Prevalence Among College Students at the University of Hawai'i at Ma'noa," *Public Health Nutrition*, 12 (11): 2097-2103.

81 Patton-Lopez et al., "Prevalence and Correlates of Food Insecurity Among Students Attending a Midsize Rural University in Oregon."

82 Dubick, Mathews, and Cady, *Hunger on Campus*.

Conclusions from previous research suggest that food insecurity among college students is not simply a question of whether or not one has the money to purchase food. Certainly, economic resources play a large role in the level of ones' food security, and some populations of students are certainly more susceptible to food insecurity than others; however, food insecure students represent a mixed bag of demographics, highlighting the inability of hunger to discriminate.

As previously mentioned, food insecurity within the general population is associated with a myriad of physical and mental health disparities including obesity, malnourishment and heart disease, as well as anxiety, depression, aggression, and suicidal ideation.<sup>83</sup> Within college students, studies have linked food insecurity to poor self-image, decreased conflict resolution skills, aggression, decreased GPA, and low retention rate.<sup>84</sup>

Despite the gravity of their situation, no study has identified the prevalence of food insecure students who participate in food assistance programs. The College and University Food Bank Alliance attributes this to stringent eligibility requirements for aid programs such as SNAP or EBT which, in addition to a lengthy application and yearly evaluations, a student must meet certain program requirements such as a minimum weekly employment of at least 20 hours a week.<sup>85</sup>

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83 Alisha Coleman-Jensen, Christian Gregory, and Anita Singh, 2014, *Household Food Security in the United States in 2013*, Report, Economic Research Service.; Bruening, "Feeding a Family in a Recession."

84 Lin et al., "The Relationship Between Perceived Psychological Distress, Behavior Indicators, and African-American Female College Student Food Insecurity."

85 Ibid.

## **Boots on the Ground: The Institutional Complexities of Solving for Student Hunger**

This section reviews literature relevant to performing research on institutions of higher education and applies it to Kansas State University (KSU). I preface this section with a disclaimer; I recognize that, within most qualitative work, it is unorthodox for the researcher to name the institution(s) from which data are derived. However, as Titus asserts, “the fabric of America’s higher education institutions is becoming more complex as students take advantage of specialized educational environments.”<sup>86</sup> Every institution of higher education features norms, customs, and traditions that blend into a culture unique to their campus alone. I have chosen to name Kansas State University as the source of my data collection for the purpose of providing the cultural and institutional context for the student narratives outlined herein. I justify this decision in two ways: first, hunger is best understood through a culture-centered approach and, second, context aids in sense making.

### **Culture-centered Approach to Food Insecurity at Kansas State University**

The culture-centered approach in academic research “foregrounds the capacity of the [people in the] margins to participate in dialogic processes of theoretical co- constructions that work in solidarity with academic partners to chart out a politics of social change.”<sup>87</sup> This is exceptionally appropriate with regard to research regarding hunger.<sup>88</sup> Globally, hunger is

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86 Marvin A. Titus, 2006, "Understanding the Influence of the Financial Context of Institutions on Student Persistence at Four-Year Colleges and Universities," *Journal of Higher Education* 77 (2): 353-375.

87 Mohan Jyoti Dutta, 2012, "Hunger as Health: Culture-Centered Interrogations of Alternative Rationalities of Health," *Communication Monographs* 79 (3): 366-384.

88 Ibid.



recognized as a form of inequality that is rooted in lack of access; however, to fully comprehend the nuances of the way in which hunger manifests, and to explore potential solutions, research must be grounded in the culture of the community.

Kansas State University brands itself as a *family* and insists that diversity and inclusion are among the top priorities of the institution.<sup>89</sup> A 2015 report on the campus climate reified this notion, stating that the majority of respondents (84 percent) were “comfortable” or “very comfortable” with the climate at Kansas State University.<sup>90</sup>

Titus holds that persistence is positively related to institutional characteristics such as selectivity, the student-peer climate, and size.<sup>91</sup> Respondents to Kansas State University’s climate survey who identified as female, white, and/or traditional experienced greater academic success than did students identifying as male, Color or Multiple Race, and/or Low-Income/First-Generation. However, all responding groups indicated that they intended to persist to graduation.

Not all results regarding the climate of campus were positive. Researchers concluded that 19 percent of student respondents reported feeling ignored by the administration when seeking assistance. Other respondents indicated that when a situation was brought to the attention of a supervisor, department head, or other K-State official that the issue had not been taken seriously.

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89 Kansas State University, 2017, *About K-State*, <http://www.k-state.edu/about/>; Kansas State University, 2017, *#Wildcat Way*, <http://www.k-state.edu/wildcatway/traditions/>.

90 Rankin and Associates Consulting, 2015, *Kansas State University Campus Climate Project Final Report*, Report, Manhattan: Kansas State University. Climate was defined by the study as “the current attitudes, behaviors, and standards of faculty, staff, administrators, and students concerning the level of respect for individual needs, abilities, and potential.” Level of comfort experienced by students, staff, and faculty was considered to be one indicator of campus climate.

91 Titus, “Understanding the Influence of the Financial Context of Institutions on Student Persistence at Four-Year Colleges and Universities,” pg. 372.

## Context of Food Insecurity at Kansas State University

Consideration of the institutional context is crucial when conducting research on higher education as it is the source of many important variables involved in the construction of meaning and sense making.<sup>92</sup> Context is established through examination “of the location of the organization and the cultural components of the organizational life of [the] educational institution.”<sup>93</sup>

Located in Manhattan, Kansas, a community of 56,000 residents, Kansas State University is positioned in the center of a region colloquially referred to as the *Breadbasket* of the United States.<sup>94</sup> The region, which includes much of the Great Plains area, is named as such because roughly twenty percent of the world’s output of wheat comes from this area.<sup>95</sup> Garreau contends that the Breadbasket is also a national leader in education and, largely due to the prevalence of regional conservatism, echoes President Nixon in his assertion that the Breadbasket is the “ratifier of social change” for the United States.<sup>96</sup>

Kansas State University was recognized as the nation's first operational land-grant university and, today, is revered as a major research institution and prominent member of the Big

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92 Jason E. Lane and M. Christopher Brown II, 2004, "The Importance of Acknowledging Context in Institutional Research," *New Directions for Institutional Research* 124: 93-103, pg. 94.

93 Lane and Brown II, "The Importance of Acknowledging Context in Institutional Research," pg. 95.

94 Joel Garreau, 1981, *The Nine Nations of North America*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin; Joel Garreau, 2014, "Nine Nations of North America, 30 Years Later," *The New York Times*, <https://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2014/07/03/where-do-borders-need-to-be-redrawn/nine-nations-of-north-america-30-years-later>. In 2014, Garreau testified in the New York Times that, 30 years after the debut of *Nine Nations*, relatively little has changed in terms of the boundaries and cultures upheld within them.

95 Joel Garreau, 1981, *Midcontinent Perspectives*, Kansas City, MO: Midwest Research Institute, <http://shsmo.org/about/kansascity/mcp/Garreau-9-10-81.pdf>.

96 Garreau, *Midcontinent Perspectives*, pg. 5. Joel Garreau proffered that America is not comprised of fifty states but, rather, nine culturally-specific regions.

12 Athletic Conference. The student body is comprised of roughly 24,000 undergraduate and graduate students from all 50 states and at least 100 countries. Currently, Kansas State University is working towards the goal of becoming a “top 50 public research university by 2025.”<sup>97</sup>

Attendance at institutions of higher education is stratified by socioeconomic status and, as such, a large, public university such as Kansas State University tends to attract more students of a lower SES.<sup>98</sup> The 2015 Kansas State University Campus Climate Assessment Project found that 39.4 percent of students who reported financial hardship also indicated that they had difficulty affording food.<sup>99</sup> Moreover, in a 2016 Financial Stress study conducted by the Kansas State University Office of Student Life, 14 percent of respondents indicated they did not have enough money to meet their basic needs; 51 percent stated that, at least once in the preceding three months, they did not have enough money for groceries.<sup>100</sup>

Accordingly, food insecurity has started to become a more visible cause for concern at the University. In 2015, an initiative known as FEED (Fueling Educational Excellence Daily) K-State was formed as a collaborative effort between students, faculty, staff, and the community. The initiative is dedicated, in part, to increasing food access to students, faculty, and staff at the university through a campus food pantry. Kansas State University is the only institution in the Big 12 Conference to not have an operational campus food pantry. Unfortunately, due to campus space constraints, FEED K-State has yet to secure a location on campus out of which to operate.

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97 Kansas State University, *About K-State*.

98 Titus, "Understanding the Influence of the Financial Context of Institutions on Student Persistence at Four-Year Colleges and Universities," pg. 373.

99 Rankin and Associates Consulting, *Kansas State University Campus Climate Project Final Report*.

100 Sonya L. Britt et al., 2017, "Student Loans, Financial Stress, and College Student Retention," *Journal of Student Financial Aid*, 47 (1): 25-37.

In a September 2016 personal interview with one of the founding faculty members of the initiative, it was reported that an application for space on campus by FEED K-State did not even reach the second round of reviews.<sup>101</sup>

## **Marginalized Voices**

The term “marginalization” casts a wide net, but can be broadly conceptualized as a “phenomenon of material resources” or, rather, lack thereof.<sup>102</sup> Marginalization occurs when an individual or particular group experiences a lack of economic capacity, wellbeing, or power to the point that participation in the labor market, cultural institutions, or civic society is limited.<sup>103</sup> As the majority of the aforementioned research points to the multiple health, social, and educational detriments experienced by food insecure students which, in turn, limit their access to educational and social opportunities, it is appropriate to define this particular group as marginalized.

Betts and Hinsz assert that group marginalization often occurs intentionally when the dominant group rejects and ‘others’ the members of a subordinate group, thus limiting their access to social and material resources.<sup>104</sup> In juxtaposition, marginalization can be unintentional, occurring as a consequence of frequently-overlooked systemic inequalities.<sup>105</sup> For example, if it

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101 For confidentiality purposes, I have chosen to omit the name of this individual.

102 Jane Jenson, 2000, *Thinking About Marginalization: What, Who and Why?* Report, Ottawa: Canadian Policy Research Networks Inc, pg. 1.

103 Ibid.

104 Kevin R. Betts and Verlin B. Hinsz, 2013, "Group Marginalization: Extending Research on Social Exclusion to Group Interactions," *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 17 (4): 355-370.

105 Vandhana Ramadurai, Barbara Sharf, and Joseph Sharkey, 2012, "Rural Food Insecurity in the United States as an Overlooked Site of Struggle in Health Communication," *Health Communication*, 27 (8): 794-805.

is assumed that all college students benefit from financial privilege, as earlier suggested by Alex Ashbrook, those that do not will almost inevitably be silenced by the dominant discourse.

## Chapter 3 - Methods

Through this research, I explore how members of a marginalized group communicate their lived experiences. To do so, I have employed Photovoice, a participant-led methodology which invites members of marginalized factions to photograph places, things, and events representative of, or crucial to, their daily life.<sup>106</sup> This chapter will begin with an argument for the use of both narrative and phenomenological approaches to inquiry regarding food insecurity among college students. Next, I will provide an exploration and justification of the use of Photovoice before, finally, outlining the methods of data collection and analysis.

### Theoretical Framework

This study aims to shed light on the lived experiences of college students who experience hunger and/or food insecurity. In this section, I will make the case for why this study benefits from a theoretical framework comprised of both narrative and phenomenological perspectives and how this two-part charter upholds a communicative approach to inquiry.

#### Narrative Inquiry

Narrative inquiry as employed within the field of communication studies is a relatively new form of qualitative research, one that draws from “realist, postmodern, and constructionist strands,” thus complicating agreement among scholars upon a consistent definition.<sup>107</sup> Squire presents narratives as “a way in which individuals make sense of themselves and the world, ” while Connelly and Clandin add that narrative inquiry is “the study of experience as a story” and

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> D. Jean Clandinin, and Janice Huber, in press, "Narrative Inquiry," In *International Encyclopedia of Education*, by B. McGaw, E. Baker and P. P. Peterson, New York.

“is first and foremost a way of thinking about experience.”<sup>108</sup> It is appropriate, therefore, to view narratives as “sequential and meaningful” retellings of particular happenings and the inquiry into such intimately represents the human experience.<sup>109</sup> As such, narrative inquiry provides a communicative benefit by serving as an ideal way to conduct research “through language *rather than* at language” [emphasis original].<sup>110</sup> The presumed audience of personal narratives, the form these narratives take, their temporal dimension, and the condition under which they are produced all shape both what is included in the text - and what is not.<sup>111</sup>

Narrative inquiry has seen two major movements. The first movement adopted a humanistic perspective, allowing for the advent of person-centered approaches to research.<sup>112</sup> Through histories or biographical telling, the narrative of the individual was the focal point of the research. The second movement, which served as the catalyst for modern postmodern and deconstructionist approaches to narrative, casts the narrator as one who is “fragmented” and “conflicted,” a “subject positioned within conflicting societal discourses,”<sup>113</sup> While these two movements complicate narrative inquiry and the experiential agency of the narrator, they do coincide in their understanding of narrative as a mode “through which individuals resist

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108 Clandinin and Huber, “Narrative Inquiry,” pg. 3.; Corinne Squire, 2008, “Experience-Centered and Culturally Oriented Approaches to Narrative,” In *Doing Narrative Research*, by Molly Andrews, Corinne Squire and Maria Tamboukou, 41-63, Los Angeles: SAGE Publications, Inc., pg. 44.

109 Squire, “Experience-Centered and Culturally Oriented Approaches to Narrative.”

110 Kathleen Wells, 2011, *Narrative Inquiry*, New York: Oxford University Press.

111 Mary Jo Maynes, Jennifer L. Pierce, and Barbara Laslett, 2008, *Telling Stories: The Use of Personal Narratives in the Social Sciences and History*, Ithica, NY: Cornell University Press.

112 Squire, “Experience-Centered and Culturally Oriented Approaches to Narrative.”; Wells, *Narrative Inquiry*, Pg. 10.

113 Wells, *Narrative Inquiry*, Pg. 10

prevailing ideologies.”<sup>114</sup>

Most pertinent to this research is Well’s assertion that the presentation of narrative as text “may provoke the empathy for their tellers that is required for a meaningful consideration of the definition of a just and moral world.”<sup>115</sup> In particular, narrative inquiry “relies on extended accounts that are treated analytically as units, rather than fragmented into thematic categories.”<sup>116</sup> Essentially, narrative analysis respects the authorial agency of the participant. In this way, the voice and personal experience of the participant is foregrounded as opposed to the researcher’s representation of such.

## Phenomenology

Consideration of phenomenology as a co-framework is proper as Connelly and Clandin argue that, “To use narrative inquiry methodology is to adopt a particular view of experience as phenomenon under study.”<sup>117</sup> In the broadest sense, phenomenology is the study of lived experiences or, more specifically, is “the study of human experience and of the ways things present themselves to us in and through such experience.”<sup>118</sup> Phenomenological inquiry is predicated upon the assumption that raw human experiences, such as hunger, have an “essence.” This essence emerges through the description of those who have experienced it; the role of the researcher, therefore, is to solicit and share the narratives of those who have experienced hunger so that they “show us the lived quality and significance of the experience in a fuller or deeper

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114 Ibid.

115 Ibid.

116 Wells, *Narrative Inquiry*, pg. 7

117 D. Jean Clandinin and F. Connelly, 2000, *Narrative Inquiry: Experience and Story in Qualitative Research*, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, pg. 375.

118 Robert Sokolowski, 2000, *Introduction to Phenomenology*, New York: Cambridge University Press, pg. 2.



manner.”<sup>119</sup>

As collegiate food insecurity is a relatively new social phenomenon, limited research has explored the truths and reality shared among the students who suffer. Collegiate food insecurity, therefore, is a topic that is ideally initially broached through a phenomenological lens in order to establish a base understanding of the experience. Furthermore, taking a communication approach to phenomenology allows partners to use narrative in order to construct a “conscious experience” of collegiate food insecurity – one that is meant to be shared, in part, with those who did not struggle to obtain food within their collegiate career.<sup>120</sup>

Various forms of phenomenological study have been articulated across a multitude of fields; however, Van Manen’s hermeneutic approach is one of the more commonly employed variations and the one which most appropriately underscores participatory research. The key differentiation that sets hermeneutic phenomenology apart from other frameworks is the role of the researcher in the interpretation of data. Hermeneutic phenomenology assumes that the influence of the researcher’s worldview on the interpretation of the data cannot be ignored.<sup>121</sup> As Wickert articulates:

The word hermeneutic is an etymological reference to Hermes, the messenger of the gods. Hermes was always required to tell the truth and in the same vein, hermeneutic phenomenologists aim to tell the truth about a phenomenon... Like Hermes, the researcher is left with the responsibility to describe the meaningfulness of his or her

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119 Max Van Manen, 1990, *Researching Lived Experiences: Human Science for an Action Sensitive Pedagogy*, New York: State University of New York Press, pg. 2.

120 Torin Alter and Sven Walter, 2007 *Phenomenal Concepts and Phenomenal Knowledge*, New York: Oxford University Press; John W. Cresswell, 2007, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches*, Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc., pg. 76.

121 Jonathan Wickert, 2014, “Managing Uncertainty During Unemployment: A Phenomenological Exploration of Social Class Differences,” (PhD Dissertation, University of Missouri).

participants.<sup>122</sup>

To emphasize the participant over the researcher, hermeneutic phenomenological inquiry relies heavily upon the participant's use of language to communicate the "essences" of a particular truth.<sup>123</sup> Thus, the use of narrative in combination with phenomenology in this particular study encourages the use of multiple forms of language in order to explore how college students experience and mitigate food insecurity, and how the narratives of partners reveal universal experiential truths.

### **Photovoice**

As the goal of Photovoice is to facilitate "dialogical construction of knowledge for the purpose of change," conducting this research from a communication studies perspective is especially appropriate.<sup>124</sup> Moreover, Photovoice is well-suited to explore how marginalized groups enact communicative agency as it foregrounds the voices of those who are most intimately familiar with a particular community or circumstance.<sup>125</sup> For example, recognizing that "the erasure of the poor from decision-making platforms is intrinsically tied to their impoverishment and their lack of access to fundamental resources such as food," Dutta et. al. found the Photovoice methodology to be effective in increasing the presence of the voices of food insecure individuals in research and policy spaces.<sup>126</sup>

Participatory methods such as Photovoice are also unique in that partners often report an

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122 Ibid, pg. 57.

123 Van Manen, *Researching Lived Experiences*.

124 Ibid, p. 74

125 Pine and de Souza, "Including the Voices of communities in Food Insecurity Research."; Dutta et al., "Narratives of Food Insecurity in Tippecanoe County, Indiana."

126 Ibid.

increased sense of empowerment as a result of their involvement in research. Moreover, because humans are natural story tellers, participatory research methods open the door for partners to share their lived experiences in the most comfortable way possible.<sup>127</sup> Valiquette-Tessier, Vandette, and Gosselin employed the Photovoice methodology with disadvantaged single mothers. The researchers reported that participants, while initially nervous, found it liberating to present their narrative in a group context. Walking away from the study, participants expressed feeling an improved sense of self-worth and community, despite having only known the other participants for a few hours.<sup>128</sup> In this way, participatory methods unite and empower disenfranchised groups. Specifically, when narrative agency is granted to college students who experience food insecurity, how do they choose to share their stories, and in what ways can these narratives be engaged to create change within and regarding the community?

## **Partners**

I preface this section with the note that I have made the conscious decision to refer to research participants in this study as *partners*. The unique way in which participatory research is conducted for the mutual benefit of both researcher and subjects, and generates knowledge that is co-created by both parties renders this a necessary semantic exchange.<sup>129</sup>

In order to qualify for participation in this study, partners must have been over 18 years of age and experienced at least one episode of food insecurity between August 2016 and February 2017. Episodes of food insecurity were defined as having skipped a meal or meals due to lack of access to food, experiencing a lack of access to finances to purchase food, and/or

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127 Wickert, "Managing Unertainty During Unemployment."

128 Valiquette-Tessier, Vandette, and Gosselin, "In her Own Eyes."

129 Randy Stoecker, 2013, *Research Methods for Community Change: A Project-Based Approach*, Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

having sought supplemental assistance from outside resources including SNAP/EBT, food pantries, and/or community meals. Partners must also have had access to a camera that allows for the electronic sharing of photographs. All partners owned personal smartphones and were able to use the devices to capture photographs and share them with me for the project.

### **Methods of Data Collection**

Research partners for this study were solicited from Kansas State University, a large, public, Midwestern research school. Due to the stigmatized nature of food insecurity, it is unsurprising that only seven students agreed to speak with me. It should be noted that two other students signed informed consent forms but, later, withdrew from the study. Another three students responded to the call for partners but chose not to engage in the research. Despite the limited number of partners, the data reached saturation upon the sixth interview. Ultimately, as this study is not meant to be representative of all students who experience food insecurity but, rather, to explore the experiential essence of the phenomenon, the quality and depth of the participant narratives outweighed my desire for quantity and breadth of the same.

For their partnership with the project, students were compensated with a \$60 gift card to the local grocery store of their choice. I employed convenience sampling methods which, while sometimes limited in representativeness, are effective and inexpensive sampling techniques best employed when it is unknown how many individuals in a given population fit the criteria of a study.<sup>130</sup> To recruit partners for the study I drafted a letter summarizing the intent of the research, the steps involved, and the associated risks and benefits (appendix A). These partnership letters were distributed to potential partners through third-party agents and organizations including the

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130 Michael Quinn Patton, 2003, *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods*, Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

campus career center, the Office of the Dean, and classroom instructors. Additionally, an ad featuring a condensed version of the partnership letter was also published in the daily campus email blast four times between the months of August 2016 and January 2016. Given the sensitive nature of food insecurity, and for the sake of student confidentiality, I sacrificed a number of my preferred recruitment tactics. For example, I chose not to stand outside of campus aid centers and hand out solicitation letters out of concern that my presence may have been intimidating and dissuaded students from seeking help in the future out of fear of being recognized.

My chosen recruitment tactic served two main functions: First and foremost, these strategies maintained the confidentiality of all students on campus who identified as food insecure. Second, these methods create space for partners to claim agency in their participation in the study. By allowing students to maintain their confidentiality until they choose to identify themselves to the researcher a vital level of respect and trust is established before the study commences.<sup>131</sup>

At the location of their choosing, I met individually with students who responded to the call for partners. After receiving an in-depth explanation of the project from myself, willing individuals signed an informed consent form and were provided with a copy of the same that was also signed by myself. Next, the six partners who were unmarried and did not have children were asked to take the U.S. Adult Food Security Survey (appendix B). One partner was married and had four children, qualifying him to take the U.S. Household Food Security Survey (appendix C).<sup>132</sup> A food security score is calculated by assigning one point to each affirmative response to the survey questions and counting the points at the end. Responses coded as “yes,” “often,”

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<sup>131</sup> Stoecker, *Research Methods for Community Change*.

<sup>132</sup> United States Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service, "Key Statistics and Graphics."

“sometimes,” “almost every day,” and “some days, but not every day,” are considered to be affirmative. Both surveys classify the food security of the respondent (and their family, if applicable) in terms of high, marginal, low, or very low food security. In the U.S. Adult survey, a score of zero indicates high food security; a one or two indicates marginal food security; a score of three to five indicates low food security, and a score of six to ten indicates very low food security. The U.S. Household survey is slightly longer than the U.S. adult survey as the Household survey asks questions regarding the food security of children in the house. Thus, this survey has a slightly different scale. A zero on the U.S. Household survey indicates high food security; a score of one to two indicates marginal food security; a score of three to seven indicates low food security, and a score of eight to eighteen indicates very low food security.

As previously noted, this survey is designed by the Economic Research Service and the USDA and provides two central purposes in this study. First, it provided me with quantitative evidence that the potential partner qualifies as food insecure per the guidelines set by the USDA. Only individuals who were found to have marginal food security or lower were invited to partner with the study. Second, the survey allowed me to categorically qualify partners as having high food security, marginal food security, low food security, or very low food security. Knowledge of the food security level of each partners allowed for comparative inquiry of narratives among partners.

Within the first individual interview, and with permission of the partner, I activated my voice recorder and asked the individual to choose if they would prefer to select a pseudonym for use in all research proceedings or if they would like to go by their real name, an ethical consideration I will justify later in this section. Next, students were asked to respond to a series of demographic and open-ended interview questions in order to familiarize myself with their

situation. At the end of the interview, partners were given a date two weeks into the future when they were to email their photographs to me for use in the second interview.

During the second individual interview, which I have termed the “photo interview,” partners were interviewed via the photos they took. This means that, rather than constructing a semi-structured interview guide, I employed two methods of inquiry with a list of preset, generic interview questions. The first, the “SHOWeD” method, is a classical interview technique employed when using Photovoice wherein the researcher asks the participant to describe their photographs in the following manner: What do you **see** here? What is **happening**? How does this relate to **our** lives? **Why** does this problem or strength exist? What can we **do** about it?<sup>133</sup> The second method, “LUUUTT,” is a CMM model which allows researchers to probe partners to go more in depth in their story telling. This model assumes that every story has the following components: The **L**ived story, the **U**ntold, **U**nheard, **U**nknown, and **U**ntellable story, the **T**old story and the manner of story **T**elling.<sup>134</sup> The idea behind this heuristic is that if, for example, I feel a participant has omitted parts of their story they feel are irrelevant, this model of inquiry can encourage the participant tell the story in greater detail. I chose to use these models rather than a semi-structured interview guide as both SHOWeD and LUUUTT are most aptly employed when attempting to get the full story of a participant while, simultaneously, avoiding the insertion of researcher voice or bias into the participant’s narrative.<sup>135</sup>

The average length of introductory interviews was approximately forty-five minutes; the average length of photo interviews was approximately one hour and fifteen minutes. When all

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133 Caroline C. Wang, 1999, "Photovoice: A Participatory Action Research Strategy Applied to Women's Health," *Journal of Womens Health*, 8 (2): 185-192.

134 Kimberly Pearce, 2011, *Public Engagement and Civic Maturity: A Public Dialogue Consortium Perspective*, Lulu Enterprises, Inc., pg. 63.

individual interviews had been conducted, the partners came together for a facilitated dialogue on their experiences with food insecurity. As I am a trained facilitator, for the purpose of confidentiality and the comfort of the partners, I chose to facilitate the group discussion myself rather than soliciting the assistance of a third party.

Partners were asked to select the one photo from their set that they felt spoke most candidly of their experience with food insecurity. Selected photos were individually projected onto a wall for all partners to view. Sitting around a table, partners were instructed to speak for five to seven minutes and explain the backstory behind their selected photograph and how it served as the clearest representation of their experience. After each participant presented, the group was given the chance to respond for an additional five to seven minutes. In total, the group discussion lasted one hour and thirty-eight minutes.

In total, nineteen hours were spent in interviews with partners and potential partners. I transcribed the individual interviews verbatim from the voice recordings. The group interview was transcribed professionally. I verified the accuracy of the transcript by listening to the recording while following along with the transcript and correcting any errors. In total, partners provided 59 photos. The number of photos taken by partners ranged from four to fifteen.

### **Methods of Analysis**

Any photos containing identifying information were omitted from the study. Moreover, dialogue in the transcribed interviews that would potentially identify a partner or their family was omitted and replaced with a bracketed description of the omitted information. For example, rather than writing the name of the home town of a participant, the phrase *home town* was placed inside of brackets. Additionally, the phrase *sic* is used within the data to denote consistency between specific terms or phrases in the recording and that which was transcribed.



## Thematic Analysis

To ascertain the essence of what it means to be food insecure as a college student, I employed a thematic analysis of the photographs and transcribed data. This particular method of analysis provides the grounds for "identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes)" that emerged through the interviews and group discussion.<sup>136</sup> Thematic analysis also allows for a great breadth of data to be collected while, simultaneously, maintaining theoretical flexibility; it is "a process that is not bound by rules but driven by the act of seeing meaning."<sup>137</sup> Ultimately, the volatility of thematic analysis allows for its use in many different contexts for the purpose of knowledge generation and sense-making.

Van Manen asserts that phenomenologists can adopt one of several approaches for thematic analysis: a wholistic approach, a selective approach, or a detailed approach. Through the wholistic approach, researchers review all text as a whole and attempt to extract a phrase which captures the essence of the text. Through the selective approach, researchers look at the text in parts and extract statements or phrases which appear to be revealing of the phenomenon. Finally, the detailed approach required researchers to examine the individual sentences of the text for revelations regarding the phenomenon.<sup>138</sup> Bearing in mind the phenomenological perspective, this study takes a selective approach to thematic analysis. Upon review of the transcribed data, it became clear that a wholistic approach would be much too vague to provide an intimate sense of student experiences; likewise, a detailed approach would overlook the

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136 Virginia Bruan and Victoria Clarke, 2006, "Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology," *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3 (2): 77-101, pg. 80.

137 Wickert, "Managing Uncertainty During Unemployment," p. 76.

138 Max Van Manen, *Researching Lived Experiences*; Wickert, "Managing Uncertainty During Unemployment."

overarching themes as they flowed through each narrative. A selective approach allowed for the generation of themes and, thus, understanding of each narrative.

Although there are few rules regarding how to conduct a thematic analysis, I followed a six- step procedure outlined by Braun and Clarke.<sup>139</sup> First, the interview data were transcribed verbatim and read three times. Second, an initial list of codes was generated from the text. Within thematic analysis, codes are recognized as elements of raw data that are combined in a significant and relevant way to describe the phenomenon.<sup>140</sup> Third, I reviewed the initial code list; commonalities were extracted from this list and grouped into overarching themes. Wicket defines a theme as “a main point or focus of the text, a simplification of the complex into a meaningful formulation, intransitive compilations of exemplars from across all of the texts, and, lastly, a description of the phenomenon.”<sup>141</sup> Fourth, I reviewed the resulting list of themes ensuring each was independent of the others and that the list was exhaustive of the data present. Fifth, the themes were named and their content was defined. Finally, specific sections of data from the partner narratives were selected to illustrate themes and relate the analysis back to existing literature.

### Validity and Verification

Cresswell outlines eight methods of verification (prolonged engagement, triangulation, peer review, negative case analysis, acknowledging bias, member checking, rich or thick description, and external audits) and recommends that researchers employ at least two for a

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139 Braun and Clarke, “Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology.”

140 Richard E. Boyatzis, 1998, *Transforming Qualitative Information: Thematic Analysis and Code Development*, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

141 Wickert, “Managing Unertainty During Unemployment,” pg. 76.

trustworthy interpretive study.<sup>142</sup> To verify the representativeness of this study, I employed triangulation, clarification of biases, and member-checking.

Initially, triangulation is a form of verification wherein multiple, diverse methods of data collection are used by the researcher.<sup>143</sup> Data was collected from partners through photography, interviews, and the USDA survey. Second, I employed clarification of my personal biases by clearly stating my personal experiences with the phenomenon in question both verbally to partners as well as in the introduction of this thesis. Finally, member checking was done by providing partners with transcripts of their interview as well as a copy of the final discussion section of this paper before it was submitted for administrative review. partners had the opportunity to clarify or remove sections of their transcript, as well as make suggestions for the final discussion section, that they did not feel accurately represented their experience. By taking these three steps, I am confident that this thesis stands to accurately represent the experiences of the students in question.

## Ethical Concerns

It is vital for participatory action researchers to remain cognizant of the nuanced ethical concerns of their work. While any researcher who chooses to study vulnerable populations has an obligation to critically examine their role in the research process, this project has required a level of reflexivity with which I was previously unfamiliar. Although efforts were taken to minimize researcher bias, it is impossible to sidestep the Hawthorn Effect, even in qualitative

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142 Cresswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches.*; Wickert, "Managing Uncertainty During Unemployment."

143 Cresswell, "Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design."

research.<sup>144</sup> However, O'Bryan argues that participatory research partially solves for this concern by "allowing for interpretive corroboration and discussion of how the participant wishes to be represented, including use of anonymizing features and other considerations."<sup>145</sup> Moreover, I made the conscious choice to explain the difference in researcher-partner relationships in participatory research, as well as to share my personal experiences with food insecurity with partners during the introductory interview. These steps were taken in an effort to minimize perceptions of hierarchy in the study and set the partners at ease before sharing their stories.

By its very nature, several facets of engaged participatory research do not allow for traditional ethical precautions to take place. For example, contrary to traditional forms of academic inquiry, researcher-participant immediacy is encouraged in participatory action research.<sup>146</sup> Nevertheless, all available precautions were taken to protect the well-being and confidentiality of the partners in this study. Following IRB protocol, partners were consistently reminded that all questions and activities related to this study are completely voluntary. Partners were made aware that they were welcome to stop an interview and/or withdraw from the study at any time if they felt uncomfortable. Raw data was read only by myself or the principal investigator and was maintained on a password-protected computer to which only I have access. All partners were given the option to select a pseudonym for dissemination purposes; However, partners were allowed to go by their real name if they chose to do so, a decision I made out of respect to one of the primary objectives of this project: providing a space for partners to obtain a

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144 Ayelet Kuper, Lorelei Lingard, and Wendy Levinson, 2008, "Critically Appraising Qualitative Research," *British Medical Journal* 337 (1): 687-692.

145 Jessica O'Bryan, 2017, "Where Words Fail: Storying Audio-Visual Data," in *Narrative Research in Practice: Stories from the Field*, edited by Rachael Dwyer, Ian Davis and Elke Emerald, 117-138, Singapore: Springer, pg. 123.

146 Stoecker, *Research Methods for Community Change*.

renewed sense of agency. Save for the names of partners who choose not to use pseudonyms, all other data was de-identified to protect partners and third party agents. Cities, places of employment, organizations, as well as the names of friends, family members, and acquaintances mentioned by partners were changed or omitted.

## Chapter 4 - Results

This study captures the narratives of seven food insecure students on the campus of Kansas State University and seeks to answer the following research questions:

- RQ1: In what ways does the rhetoric of past and present welfare policies manifest itself in student responses to food insecurity?
- RQ2: Based on various messages, how do college students interpret and enact food insecurity?
- RQ3: Based on various messages, how do college students define and enact marginalization?
- RQ4: How can participatory research be used to increase communicative agency in marginalized groups?

The partners in this study are comprised of two students in their first-year of college, two second-year students, one third-year, one fourth-year and one PhD student. They range in age from 19 to 41. Two students hail from a state outside of Kansas, and one is from a country in the Middle East. Four students identify as white, one identifies as latin@, one identifies as Middle Eastern, and one student preferred not to specify their race/ethnicity. Four students chose to identify by their real name and three selected a pseudonym. As mentioned in the previous chapter, six students took the U.S. Adult Food Security Survey; Five of these students scored a six or seven, qualifying them as having ‘very low’ food security. One student scored a five, qualifying him as having ‘low’ food security. Lastly, one student has a family and, thus, was asked to take the US Household Food Security Survey. This student scored a five on the survey, qualifying himself and his family as having ‘low’ food security.

*In what ways does the rhetoric of past and present welfare policies manifest itself in student responses to food insecurity?*

This study suggests that college students who are experiencing food insecurity respond to their situation using two main aspects of past and current welfare policy rhetoric: the identity of impoverished peoples and community responsibility.

Initially, students experiencing food insecurity respond to their situation with rhetoric that affirms the persistence of the feckless welfare recipient.<sup>147</sup> Kyle, a 21-year-old third year student who scored a seven (7) on the U.S. Adult Food Security Survey, has been food insecure for the past two years of his college career. He explains why he refuses to seek assistance and summarizes the rhetoric employed by most students in this study,

It's not true, but it's this idea that you're – I don't want to use this word - but that you're weak and you don't deserve to do things to better yourself because you couldn't figure it out on your own. That's the struggle, especially in Kansas.

Kyle, who has chosen to go by a pseudonym for the purpose of this research, hesitantly identifies the negative stereotypes he perceives to be held against food insecure individuals. Moreover, he emphasizes that identifying as food insecure in Kansas, a region notorious for traditionally conservative values, exacerbates this situation. Madison, a 21-year-old fourth year student, has been receiving SNAP benefits for the past two years of her college career, although she has been food insecure for the past three years. She testifies that sharing her narrative has not often been

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147 Gring-Pemle, *Grim Fairytales*. The theme of the feckless welfare recipient, according to Gring-Pemle, is played out in all discourse surrounding welfare and public assistance. This image maintains that individuals who depend on public assistance are broken. The feckless recipient is often characterized as an able-bodied individual unworthy of aid due to their failure to adopt key values or religious mandates, or having made poor life choices. The feckless include the unskilled or uneducated, substance abusers, and neglectful or abusive parents. Feckless women are thought to bear children who perpetuate the cycle of dependence.

met with positive responses due, in part, to the misconceptions associated with food insecurity.

She states,

I think it just goes back to that idea where people are like, “What? You’re not homeless?” We just, in America, have a really bad idea of food insecurity and so I just think that a lot of people are really put off by it.

This rhetoric certainly is not unique. The belief that impoverished and hungry individuals are morally compromised has pervaded the rhetoric of and dialogue regarding welfare policy for decades. As just one example, an 1818 annual report from the New York Society for the Prevention of Pauperism cited "ignorance, idleness, intemperance in drinking, lotteries, and imprudent and hasty marriages" as the root causes of poverty.<sup>148</sup> Consequently, students made it a point to emphasize that their identity did not fit with the rhetorically constructed identity of individuals who struggle with hunger and poverty. Scoring a seven (7) on the U.S. Adult Food Security Survey, Madison is considered to have ‘very low’ food security. When faced with the yearly renewal of her SNAP benefits, explained that she was fearful that the way in which she may be perceived based on her possessions would cast an alternative light on her financial situation,

Like, one thing I was worried about was like, last year I was in a totally different car than this car because I was in an accident and totaled that car and had to get a new one. And so this one happened to be a couple years newer. And so, by looking at it, you’d be like, “oh, well, she has a 2012 car like, why does she need it?” Realistically, it’s like, well we had to drain my mom’s retirement account to pay for it.

Similarly, Kyle expresses that perceptions of his employment status would complicate his ability to be perceived as a legitimate victim of food insecurity. Kyle, who is a soldier in the national

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148 Ibid



guard, works at a hotel in Manhattan, Kansas. Due to the presence of a nearby military base, Manhattan boasts a large military community. Kyle explains,

I work with a lot of military wives so being in the military I can't be like, "oh, I'm struggling so much" and blah blah blah (sic) or they'll be like, "You're in the military- you're getting paid." It's like, not really. Like, there are times I haven't been paid from the military in six months.

Abdullah, a 36- year-old, third year PhD student from the Middle East, states that he has also witnessed a tension between the perceived versus lived reality of students who struggle with food insecurity. He tells the narrative of a friend from his country who is also studying at Kansas State University,

We have another friend who is in a similar situation as us. He got a car, and it happened to be a Mercedes Benz, but it was very, very cheap. And I asked him why he was not going to [service organization] for help and he said, "I cannot go with this car" (laughs)! I see people with very nice cars there but he is not comfortable.

Abdullah, who has four daughters under the age of six and is the only married individual in the study, admits that he had a very different understanding of poverty when he moved to the United States. However, having lived and studied in America for five years, he acknowledges that he and the community of international students from his country have been socialized as to what behavior is appropriate of those who receive public assistance.

Second, food insecure college students use rhetoric that suggests there is a community responsibility to assist students who, like themselves, are in need. To reiterate, Early-American welfare policies were often centered around Judeo-Christian principles which held that community members who are well-off have a duty to care for those who are less fortunate. Madison explains that, having become more comfortable with her dependence on the SNAP program, she has begun to share her story with others. She states

There have definitely been people who have just had that immediate reaction like, 'well, why do you need it? Like, you're a normal person. Why does Kansas give you \$180 every month? Is that my money?' I've had people get very angry and very offended by it. And my ultimate response is like, 'look, I need it.'

Madison emphasizes that SNAP benefits have helped her remain in school and, ultimately, strive for a better life. Despite this hand-up being the intention of the SNAP program, Madison frequently encounters the negative rhetoric of those who misunderstand her use, and need, of the benefits.

Students continuously emphasized the importance of helping those in need, especially when it was not themselves who would be the recipient. For example, Kyle argues that food insecurity does not exempt oneself from contributing all that one can to the well-being of others. He explains,

Just because I'm struggling doesn't mean I'm not going to help others out every chance I can. If someone on the street asked me for money, I would give them whatever I had or whatever. Like, as much as I'm struggling, I know there are always people who are struggling to get that first meal on the table. I'm prepared; they're not.

Kyle views it to be his responsibility to help those individuals who are, inevitably, less-fortunate than he is.

***Based on various messages, how do college students interpret and enact food insecurity?***

Through this study, food insecure students interpret food insecurity as an inevitable aspect of college life. As such, food insecurity among college students is enacted through the mitigation of several tensions, the development of unique tactics for survival, and disclosure strategies.

## Mitigating Tensions

Close readings of the transcripts indicated that food insecure students in this study face two main tensions regarding their health which they must mitigate: health versus finances and health versus convenience.

First, the health versus finances tension illustrates the pull students feel between prioritizing their health and minding their strapped finances. Every single partner indicates that eating healthy was among their top priorities; however, this simply is not feasible most, if not all, of the time for various financial reasons. The majority of students indicate that “healthy eating,” to them, typically means the consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables. Unfortunately, for these students, fresh foods are simply not in the budget. Madison elaborates, “I don’t eat as much fresh food as I would like to honestly. Um, I’m a big fan of grapes but I only get them when they’re on good sale just because it’s just way cheaper. Same thing with apples. Like, they’re convenient but it’s like, how many apples can I buy here for this amount or I can I get like, five more packs of tuna for the same price?” Partners note that shelf life and price are the two main reasons they do not consume healthier foods. Instead, the primary dietary staples of these students are carbohydrate-rich pastas, and high-processed box meals. Zoe, a 19-year-old, first- year student, shares a photo of a microwavable cup of noodles and explains,

A car hit me and I had to fix my bumper and so a lot of my grocery money went to fixing my car. I was like, I really don’t have any money to be spending any extra so I brought those for the days that I did work as um, those were my meals those days. I actually brought in a label because I think it’s really interesting. It says here, “partially produced with genetic engineering” and it’s pretty much just fat and salt. For me like, it’s really important to not eat like, all organic but try to eat fresh food at least so this definitely hurt a little bit but it was \$.29 at Walmart. You can’t beat a meal for 30 cents.



**Figure 4.1 Zoe shows her daily meals after having to cover the unexpected expense of a car accident.**

Scoring a seven (7) on the U.S. Adult Food Security Survey, Zoe is classified as having ‘very low’ food security. She divulges that she moved out of her parents’ home at seventeen and has been supporting herself ever since. Zoe made the strategic decision to work extra hours during high school and place her money into a savings account in order to prolong her need to be employed once she was in college. Doing this allowed Zoe the opportunity to play in the KSU marching band, take extra time to focus on her studies, and become acclimated to college life. When we met to talk in January 2017, she had just been hired on as a server at a chain restaurant in Manhattan and had been living on a strict budget from the money in her savings account.

Although she had the funds in savings to pay for the necessary car repairs, this drastically cut into the money she had allotted for food. In the tension between minding her finances and feeding her body healthy food, finances most often win out for Zoe.

Hailey, a 20-year-old, second-year student who scored a seven (very low) on the U.S. Adult Food Security Survey, expressed experiencing a similar conundrum with regard to her nutritional intake. Hailey is a student athlete and, as a result, burns a higher average of calories per day than most students.<sup>149</sup> Simultaneously, she is unable to afford a surplus of nutritionally adequate food to meet that surplus. She explains,

For me the biggest thing is just making sure my calorie intake is enough whether its good or bad calories. So I just kind of eat what I have after the run rather than worrying about like, a holistic diet just because it's not really in my budget. I definitely feel like it [competitive performance] could be better.

Due to her financial limitations, Hailey finds that she has to sacrifice her health and, consequently, her competitive success.

Hailey's competitive success is only one victim of this tension. Sam, a 41-year-old, first-year student who is qualified as having low food security per the U.S. Adult Food Security Survey, explains that his depression often takes precedence over his financial situation:

Originally I was going to clean to show just how small the kitchen is, but then I figured I'd just go ahead and leave it just to show off an example of the problems with depression making it harder to clean dishes and find the energy to cook...It's just a lot easier to go out and run out of money than to force myself to cook.

Sam elaborates that, although his depression and anxiety have been life-long struggles, they have been exacerbated by the unpredictability of his present situation. Brook, a 21-year-old, second-year student who qualifies as having very low food security per the U.S. Adult Food Security

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149 College and Professional Sports Dieticians Association, 2014, *State of the Science: Student- Athlete Feeding*, Collegiate and Professional Sports Dieticians Association, [http://www.sportsrd.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/State\\_of\\_the\\_Science\\_on\\_feeding.pdf](http://www.sportsrd.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/State_of_the_Science_on_feeding.pdf).

Survey, echoes this sentiment. Brook's mother had recently been diagnosed with cancer and the family had taken a pay cut as a result. Between financial and food insecurity, she details the high level stress she had been under for months and the impact this experience had on her health,

I didn't realize I had a stress ulcer for, like, a month, until I was like, my pants don't fit and I haven't bought groceries - what's going on here? And one of the symptoms is like, you don't eat so I don't know. So I went to this woman at Lafene [health center] and she was like, what's going on and I said, "I don't know I just, like I'm not eating and it hurts and it's uncomfortable when I eat and I don't know if it's just because I'm not eating as much or what." And she was like, no, it's a stress ulcer. So I'm on like, three weeks' worth of medication right now - I just have to take this, like, tablet every day an hour before a meal which is hard because I don't know when I'm going to eat! I don't know when an hour before a meal is, so I just take it in the morning and hope something happens.

Partners in this study demonstrated that even when physical or mental harm is imminent, they will continue to prioritize finances over health.

Moreover, students describe the emotional burden that comes with the mitigation of the health versus finances tension. Abdullah chooses to feature a can of store organic garbanzo beans in one of his photos. He explains the impetus for doing so,

I was surprised that I was able to get organic with WIC. I just went to [the grocery store] and I saw that on their WIC shelf and then I was surprised to see the organic label. But, okay, first of all – back up (laughs). I don't know, really, if there is a difference between organic and not. Because I have tasted both and have not tasted anything to say, "okay, yes, that is it." But this is expensive and it causes temptations for those who do not have enough because the price tag is higher and it makes you think that it would be higher quality but you do not have enough to buy it and, so, in the back of your mind you are thinking, "I am not getting the best quality food because I do not have enough." Whether or not that be the case – it might be the same quality as the non-organic – but you just leave the shop with the feeling, "I am buying low-quality food."

Abdullah expresses that the health versus finances tension leaves him feeling guilty for providing his family with low-quality food. Unfortunately, as Kyle explains, this guilt is not easily assuaged,

It bothers me [that it's not healthy] in the sense that it sucks when people tell me that. Like, I get it. But I'm just not in a position to do that [eat healthy]. College students get this bombardment of healthy ideals but, like, that is the ideal. Ideally we would eat five meals a day and consume, in small portions, a healthy, balanced diet. But we don't necessarily have that option, and especially probably not the people you are interviewing. What we have is what we can get together – what we have when we *can* have it. That's our number one priority and, when we're told we're wrong all the time, it's like – can I cuss at all? - it's like, “well fuck you and your privilege.” I'm busy trying to survive and, once I'm done there then I'll start worrying about how to do it *right* [emphasis original].

Kyle articulates that the weight of being unable to afford to maintain a healthy lifestyle while in college is ever-present, a sentiment echoed by the other partners. Unfortunately, as previously stated, the cost of prioritizing health over their financial security could result in these students sacrificing their education.

Second, students in this study experience a tension between maintaining their health versus their need for convenience. It is frequently asserted that convenience surpasses concern for the nutritional quality of the food they consume. Madison explains that the bulk of her SNAP benefits go towards meals that are not only inexpensive, but can also be prepared and consumed quickly. This behavior is a drastic shift from her first year at Kansas State University when loans were her main source of financial support. She states,

Like, my freshman year I was like, ‘Oh, I can't go home and I don't have anything with me so I'll just get something at the Union.’ But eight dollars later you're like, ‘uh oh.’

As a result of this, she took alternative measures to privilege both convenience and finances, squeezing nutrition into this equation if it is feasible. She continues,

I'll have a box of popcorn, ramen, and, like, a box of crackers and tuna in my trunk. So then, when I go to work and I only have like 15 minutes to eat, I'll just take it in with me and that will tide me over until I can have like a snack or something. I picked them, one, based on pricing- they were all cheap. And then quantity- you get a lot with popcorn and ramen. Also, tuna was like one way for me to get the protein that I wasn't getting from like popcorn or ramen.

This strategy allows Madison to prevent food from becoming a barrier in life and to her college experience, whatever this might mean for her nutritional intake. Similarly, Hailey elucidates that she has chosen a job that offers her the convenience of flexibility with school over one that might ensure her financial security and, thus, more access to healthy food,

I love my job, like it's really low-key which is nice with school but it doesn't pay super great. There are times where I'm like, well, I could be working as a waitress, but it's a trade-off.

Hailey is cognizant of the fact that she would make more money as a waitress; however, she prioritizes the convenience of her job at an athletic store, and the guarantee that she will have time for school, over income.

Abdullah faces a unique challenge resulting from the intersection of his religious beliefs and food insecurity. As a Muslim, Abdullah and his family follow the dietary regulations of the Islamic faith. For them, he tells me, this primarily means meat is limited. Pigs are considered sacred in Islam, so the consumption of pork and pork-byproducts are— in Abdullah's words — “explicitly stated [as] a no-no.” In addition, meat consumed should be *halal*, meaning that the animal must be slaughtered by a person “of the book.” Abdullah elaborates,

People of the book are Christians and Jews and the purpose of mentioning this in the Quran is that they are also following certain procedures when they are killing animals. At that time, you would call the name of God when slaughtering an animal to show that nobody else is worthy of this. But that was at that time. Also, another part of it is that all the blood must be gone from the animal, so you cannot eat an animal that is dead by itself. You cannot eat an animal that is hunted by another animal, or you cannot eat an animal that is fallen from a height, or out of some disease, or suffocated, or in any way that does not allow them to bleed out.

Understandably, this complicates Abdullah's access to food that is affordable and also accepts benefits from the state of Kansas. He continues,

Meat has spread out a bunch of different ways. So its hard to get even bread. Sometimes I will even have to turn that down [from aid centers]. I mean, it would be easier to buy any meat instead of, like, being specified because you cannot find



it in Walmart or something. Usually we will buy from our Islamic center or from Kansas City. There are some meats we can find in certain Asian markets but those are limited. Sometimes we find the opportunity to go to a far and slaughter for ourselves which is easy and cheap – way cheap. And that eases the tension created like, “Oh, I’m not too sure about this.”

Ultimately, the tension between convenience and health is never effectively or completely mitigated for these students. Similar to the previous tension, convenience will often take precedence over health.

### Tactics for Survival

To mitigate food insecurity, students in this study allude to the use of various tactics for survival. Two main themes emerged: the use of outside resources, and planning. Initially, students expressed that they frequently take advantage of outside resources in order to alleviate the strain of insecurity. Madison and Sam chose to seek SNAP benefits and Abdullah was able to obtain WIC benefits; however, not all governmental or community resources are an option for students. Abdulla explains how his position as both a student and a student of international origin has gravely impacted the resources available to him.

Once, I approached [service organization in Manhattan] and they denied the help because I was considered a student. They are for other community members. For example, my daughters did not qualify for the food stamps but hopefully we will have less trouble this time because I have completed my five years of residency, including the two years I was here for my masters.

The Manhattan community is home to several aid organizations which work to alleviate the high levels of poverty within the town. However, despite the fact that college students comprise a major faction of the towns’ impoverished, Abdullah’s narrative highlights how they are often excluded from aid meant for the larger community. Instead, a number of the research partners testified that opportunities for free food on campus and in the community have become a substitute for traditional forms of food assistance. Madison elaborates,

And like, at work they'll be like, "hey there's free food in the break room" and I feel like I'm always the first to be like, "Okay, I'm coming!" (laughs) Like, there was a day that I wasn't working but it was, like, Employee Appreciation day and they had a barbeque and ice cream coming. I had it planned out in my schedule to go into work just to get the food. Like, I need this food. It's been harder in the past semester just because I'm not on campus during the prime hours of, like, when food is given out.

The Manhattan community has a number of church organizations which take turns hosting a free supper each week night. Additionally, two major campus religious centers host free meals one night a week for students. These centers continuously maintain a marquee on the front of their building which advertises the meal. Moreover, a multitude of campus activities and organizations host events which often boast of free meals of some variety. Partners in this study acknowledge taking advantage of these resources. As Zoe explains,

If there's, like, a free food event on campus if I'm even a little bit interested I will make an effort to go. Or like, my friends who have guest passes for the meals for the halls [and ask me to go] I'm always like, "yes!" and then I'll get a to-go box and fill up the to-go box. Like, if there's an opportunity I will definitely take advantage of it.

When outside food resources are not enough, the food insecure students in this study admit to having gotten creative in the way they curb their hunger in dire times. Zoe and Madison both admit they make sure to keep gum or mints on their person to fend off stomach rumbles.

However, Zoe often goes one step further. She discloses through one of her photos,

This is an appetite suppressant tea – its actually meant for weight loss to, like, keep your appetite down, but it really does suppress your appetite. It definitely makes it so I'm not, like, constantly thinking about food. It's like gum - a tool I would use to bridge the gap. And hunger - especially since that car accident - hunger has been something that, like, has been on my mind more and I HATE that. Like, that is not something I should be worried about or focused on, so I got this tea and gum so I didn't have to think about it or worry about it.



**Figure 4.2 Zoe shares how she manages her hunger.**

Second, partners in this study alluded that the extra time meal planning takes while food insecure is incredibly cumbersome. Students stated that planning for their next meal often begins while consuming a meal. Through one of his photos, Sam explains,

This is Chinese food – fried rice. I ordered takeout for dinner and this size box lasted me about three to four meals. I just portioned it out and that’s all I ate for the next three days.



**Figure 4.3 Sam shares how he prepares for future meals.**

Several other students expressed a similar sentiment with regard to the importance of being strategic in their meal planning. Hailey states,

If I know I'd rather have like, a really good dinner I'll just be like, okay I'll just save this lunch for tomorrow. Uh that way I don't have to worry about the next day.

Additionally, through one of his photos, Kyle asserts,

These are black bean burgers. What I was trying to show is that when I do make food, I make it in bulk. And then, that's the cheapest bread on the market - It's just a dollar. So its just showing that I need to be practical with meals and not buy, like, luxury items. I'll make like 30 of them and freeze them and then they'll last me up to a year if I need them to.



**Figure 4.4 Kyle shares his meal prep process**

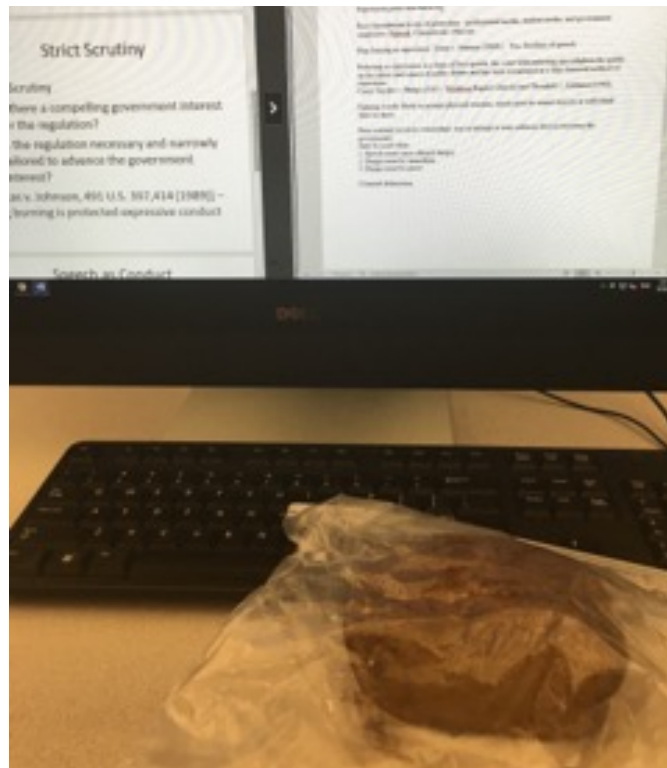
Skipping meals and preparing meals in bulk helps to assuage the fear of being left without resources in the future. However, even when students would like to plan ahead, they find themselves limited. Madison, who live in a three-bedroom apartment with five other women, explains how her living situation presents a physical limitation to her ability to prepare in advance,



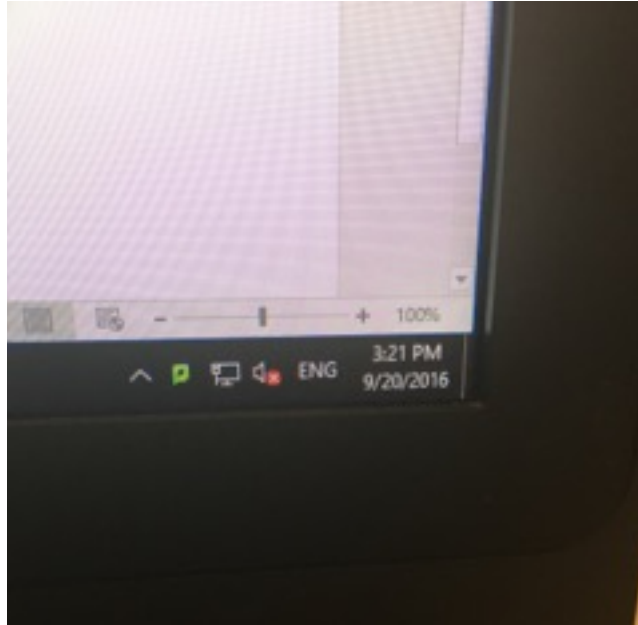
I have tried meal prepping but a lot of it unfortunately has to do with space because, like, I tried where I like make chicken and rice or something and put it in containers and portion it out but I just don't have the space to put it anywhere. Luckily I have found ways on how to change up your ramen flavors because I was just like, you know what, a girls gotta do what a girls got to do.

In juxtaposition, Madison elaborates upon the consequence of not being prepared through one of her photos,

I was house sitting the weekend before for my aunt and uncle. And, before they left, she had made some pumpkin bread for me to take back. On Monday morning I was in such a rush because I had to drive back from [town] and still had to be at work by 8:30a.m. And um so I totally just spaced on like, lunch in general. I didn't take anything to work; I didn't have anything but my water bottle and so it was just very like stressful. And I was just like, "I'm starving..." But then I remembered- as I was digging in my backpack, I was like "what's this?" and pulled it out and it was part of the pumpkin bread loaf! I was just on the verge of tears. Like it was just one of those moments where I was like, "I am starving and my emotions were just like- they're living, you know?" So I just had to take a picture of it. And through the next one [picture], I just wanted to stress what time I was eating this: 3:21p.m. That was the first time I had eaten that day. Um which was not something I had done- or had to do- in a very long time.



**Figure 4.5 Madison captures the bread her aunt had given her; the only food she had consumed that day.**



**Figure 4.6 Madison notes the time at which she eats her bread.**

Because Madison, like many other partners in this study, do not have the luxury of spending money on food should they fail to think in advance, the inability to prepare most often ends in hunger.

#### Disclosure

Students in this study stated that they are conscious of to whom they disclose their food and financial situation, as well as how much they disclose. Within this study, the closer the interpersonal relationship, the more extensive the situational disclosure. Students most frequently disclosed their situation to immediate family members such as parents. Madison states,

The only two people that I have like expressed that to other than my immediate family, like my mom and my dad, that I'm on food assistance, are my two aunts and uncles just because it is more difficult with some of the other family just because that connection is not there. At first it was hard to tell some of my family that I was on food assistance because there's that stereotypical, "oh, you're on food assistance so you're poor and you're homeless." And a lot of my family is like, not financially struggling like, at all.

Madison suggests that immediacy is a major concern regarding a students' choice to disclose.

However, even when students felt close to their families, they still maintain that their families are not fully cognizant of the gravity of their situation. Kyle explains,

They have access to my bank account but they don't- it's not a conversation that we have. They don't know that I don't have a lot of food; they don't know that I skip meals sometimes. They don't know that.

Brook continues,

My dad is so – like, I keep him out of the loop for everything, like he has so much to worry about because my mom obviously isn't working right now while going through chemo so he's like, doing his own thing trying to keep food back home on the table and stuff. So I'm just like, "Yeah, things are good. Like, I budget food and stuff." And she [mom] like, she kinda knows – like, she's not dumb she's a mom – but I don't think she knows the full extent.

Abdullah, from an international context, explicates,

I mean, even now, when I talk to family back home they will say, "wow! You are living a good life!" I am just barely making it but, back home, they think I am hiding stuff just so nobody asks me for money. He [dad] has this feeling that when you are in the US you will not be left hungry like, "don't worry you are in good hands."

Predominantly, students assert that they do not disclose the gravity of their situation to their parents due to the simple fact that their parents are not in a place to assist them. Moreover, these students all live a great distance away from their families, making it easier to disguise their situation.

Overall, these students asserted that they are slightly more comfortable disclosing their struggle with food insecurity to their peers. However, it is not a discussion they are likely to initiate. Rather, these students suggested that they rely upon their friends to pick up on social cues of their financial and food insecurity. As Zoe affirms,

I think my friends are aware of it because they all live in the dorms and they're aware that – they're aware that I have to be like, budget savvy but I don't think they're quite aware of the full extent. Yeah, I don't know. Like, if they come over



I'll offer them coffee or tea or something, but they know that I don't have like snacks or soda to offer them. I think they're able to pick up on it.

Hailey furthers that her roommate and best friend has had no personal experience with food insecurity or financial instability, making it hard for Hailey to disclose her own struggle,

I remember like, during October and November, she [roommate] was like, "yeah, I didn't really see you ever eat." And I was like, well, yeah, that's because I really didn't (laughs). But I don't know. I think she was aware at one point but it was just like- like, she's never had that issue and even if she did it would just be a totally different situation with her parents. So we don't really talk about it.

Kyle told me that he had not openly discussed his financial troubles and food insecurity prior to our interview. Still, his close friends had been able to pick up on his struggle and step in to provide help. Even then, Kyle admits, discussion on the topic is scant,

We don't talk about that. I've never had a conversation with my friends where I'm like, I can't go out because money is tight or whatever. You don't talk about finances; like, keep that away, that's a personal problem. And to do that, you need to create an illusion- a mask. Like, I've never had that conversation with them but they probably recognize it. Like, my closest friend [friend] has been friends with me for a long time so he understands - I'm comfortable asking him like, "hey, I need this much money for this, this, and this." And he's in a better position than I am and he'll say hey, no problem, and I'll pay him back eventually. Like, there have been times where I haven't paid him back for six months. But he's not going to put that pressure on me because we have our facades, you know? Even when you borrow money you maintain the appearance that you're doing well.

Madison, in an effort to adhere to SNAP regulations, found that she had no choice but to disclose her situation to her friends. However, she notes that they have all been more than willing to support her in times of need. She explains,

Once, I had, like, \$2 in my bank account and \$0.80 on my food card and, like, 50 miles to empty in my gas tank, so that was like the biggest stressor of like financialness (sic) right there. But I drive friends to school in the morning in my car and when I mentioned it to them they said, "oh we'll help you with gas." and so they put money in my tank.

With regard to personal relationships, partners alluded to willingness to disclose if the partner had also experienced food insecurity. For example, Sam states that his girlfriend is well

aware of his struggle with food insecurity as she has experienced it in the past. He states that she will often bring him meals from the restaurant she manages. Of his relationship with his girlfriend, Sam states, “We’ve been together since April so, like, 6 months. She has had similar struggles in the past, but she’s doing fine at this point.” However, contrary to Sam, Kyle chose not to disclose his situation to his girlfriend. The impetus from this largely stems from his belief that she would not be able to relate to his situation. He illustrates,

It [food insecurity] generally just manifests itself in fights. Like, me not being open about it and her wanting to understand why I’m not doing certain things like why I’m not buying fresh ingredients. It just manifests itself in fights because I’m not going to disclose that- I’m just going to keep doing that under the guise that it’s cheap. It’s just – I don’t know – it’s just hard because I can see that she struggles with it but I’m just not going to disclose that. It’s admitting my faults. Like, I can mitigate fights and I can control conversations but once it’s there- once it’s disclosed – it’s in her face. And it makes me vulnerable and I don’t like that.

Kyle and his girlfriend had been together for almost a year at the time we spoke. He alluded to a possible engagement sometime in the future and noted that, at that time, he would be forced to be more open with her regarding his financial situation.

***Based on various messages, how do college students interpret and enact marginalization?***

To reiterate, marginalization occurs when an individual or particular group experiences a lack of economic capacity, wellbeing, or power to the point that participation in the labor market, cultural institutions, or civic society is limited.<sup>150</sup> The results of this study suggest that food insecure students interpret their marginalization as a self-inflicted result of their own decisions. As such, they enacted their marginalized status by minimizing their situation. Simultaneously,

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<sup>150</sup> Jenson, *Thinking About Marginalization*.

these students attempted to break down stereotypes they perceived to be held against them. Finally, through face maintenance and negotiation, their marginalized status continues to be hidden.<sup>151</sup>

### Perception of Self-Inflicted Marginalization

Students in this study unanimously expressed that they perceived college to be period of life in which financial and food insecurity was inevitable. Madison explains that, even after her situation became so dire that she finally convinced herself to apply for SNAP benefits, she was shocked when her application was approved. She summarizes,

I don't think I would have [realized I was food insecure] because I would have just said what I always used to say which was like, "this is just the college thing. You're supposed to be broke and hungry."

Madison elucidates that the approval of her application provided her with the necessary validation to recognize her food insecurity for what it truly was. Not all students in this study have received this validation and, as such, find it difficult to perceive their situation as deserving of help. As Hailey states,

I was talking to my mom and I was just like, "I think I'm just a broke runner right now and I think it's just this season of life right now." Like, what I'm making and the way I'm living where everything I'm making goes right back out and that's okay. Like, my health isn't being super impaired – at least, I don't think it is.

Kyle continues, "we all struggle. Like, I know my friends struggle with food and finances and stuff like that but that doesn't matter because we need to be able to feel like we're living a normal life. We need to be able to step out and say, 'hey, I'm not impoverished' or 'I could be in a worse off situation.'"

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151 Sasha Ting-Toomey, 1988, "Intercultural Conflict Styles: A Face-Negotiation Theory," in Young Yun Kim & William B. Gudykunst (Eds.), *Theories in Intercultural Communication*, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, pg. 215.

This sentiment – that food insecurity and college go hand in hand - resulted in partners who admitted to feeling a great deal of guilt and regret for having willingly placed themselves in this situation. As Abdulla illustrates, “it is so sad to have so many cares for something and then end up financially devastated. Sometimes I say, ‘you could live with your Master’s. Why would you get your PhD?’” Kyle also illustrates that his decision to further his education rather than his professional career is a source of regret when life gets particularly rough,

In my mind I run into the issue where, you know – I have these struggles, I have these problems - and I can always or, well, I should have- *should have-* gone active duty. And I always have that possibility that I could have just gone active duty and I never would have faced this. I never would have had these issues with finances, I would have had a lot more sources for income, I would have had a consistent job.

The majority of these students are responsible for only the well-being of their individual bodies; however, Abdullah has a family for which he is, and *can* only, be the sole provider. Because he and his family reside in the United States under his student visa, his wife is unable to work. However, due to the legal citizenship of their youngest daughter, Abdullah and his wife are able to obtain SNAP benefits for her. Abdullah details the guilt he and his wife experience with regard to their use of the benefits,

She is the only American resident so we get the bulk of our food assistance from her (laughs). We can purchase formula for her or whatever we want. But she has also got her WIC and WIC is quite sufficient so we prefer not to spend those benefits on that. It is just that, emotionally, you are thinking, “okay, this is just for her but you are not giving it all to her.

The use of SNAP benefits for immediate family members is legal; still, Abdullah sees the benefits as money allocated to the well-being of only his youngest daughter.

### Minimization

Food insecure students in this study continuously asserted that they initially did not, or still do not, perceive their situation to be severe enough to define themselves as food insecure.

Madison explains how this delayed her seeking assistance: “It took me like, almost a half a year to fill out the application like, because I was like, I don’t need this. And it was also a huge pride issue, like, to have to fully say that [I am food insecure].” Although pride played a role in her hesitation to apply for SNAP, Madison’s minimization of the dire nature of her situation delayed her request for help. Hailey adds, “I definitely think it [calorie intake] probably could be better but um I don’t think it’s super detrimental. Like, very rarely have I been like, ‘Oooo I don’t know if I have enough to feed my body.’” Here, Hailey is quick to downplay the severity of her situation. Additionally, she and others expressed that they expect things will be different after college. Hailey explains that time time of life is highly transitional,

Once I get a job or once I get married - if I get married - I know my income will be more steady and I won’t be making minimum wage, like I’ll have a real job doing what I like and getting. College is just really unique in that aspect like it’s just, “Ahhhhhh,” I don’t even know how to describe it; it’s just everything all at once. Like my mom was just like, “that’s just what this is. You’re just a little broke and that’s okay. That’s just what life looks like right now.”

Kyle furthers, “I’ll just struggle until I graduate and things get better. Hopefully. Hopefully things will get better after I graduate. I’ve been considering going active duty because it makes things a little easier but having a degree helps my resume.”

Finally, some students indicated that, despite the difficulty of their situation, they considered it to have benefited their character and helped them to grow as a person. Hailey elaborates that her parents expected that college, and all that came with it, would be on her shoulders,

When it came time to think about college my parents sat me down and were like, you know, you can go wherever you want but it’s your responsibility. They’re just like, “this is your life and these are your responsibilities.” And it was never one of those things that I never thought was unreasonable. Which I appreciate, I think, because it’s helped me grow up pretty fast.

Hailey, Madison, Zoe, and Brook all contended that the challenges they have faced since the onset of their food insecurity have developed their character and made them stronger individuals. Zoe, having been on her own for several years now, admits that she tends to struggle to connect with her classmates as a result of her advanced maturity. Ultimately, although these students carry a heavy burden, they are able to minimize the severity by which it has impacted them through a central focus on how it has benefitted them.

### Face Maintenance and Negotiation

Face is a public, projected image ourselves which is created within, and maintained through, behavior in interpersonal settings.<sup>152</sup> Most often applied to situations in which individuals experience conflict, Ting-Toomey holds that all individuals are constantly creating, maintaining, and negotiating face.<sup>153</sup> This study found that food-insecure students who choose to engage in face negotiation do so to prevent isolation and assuage discomfort.

Through one of his photos, Kyle asserts that maintaining his social identity as a college student is crucial,

This is at [bar]. They have a drink they make with vodka - it's five dollars for an entire fishbowl. What I was trying to do with this is show that, you know what, I am in college and there's a college lifestyle that is expected of me. At times, I have to continue to thrive in a social atmosphere even if it makes being at home more of a struggle. It's putting on um a face that I have money to spend. You need to be able to go out for a drink with your friends sometimes. You can't say, "no, I can't do that" all the time. It's not an option. And I try to make the most of my money; like, five dollars for something that will get me pretty tipsy compared to three or four beers that cost me 12 dollars. So I'm actually able to meet that expectation while being smart about it, and hide the fact that I'm being smart about it.

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<sup>152</sup> Ibid.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid.



**Figure 4.7 Kyle illustrates how he maintains social connections while remaining financially conscious.**

Kyle views alcohol as a necessary social lubricant and perceives the ability to go out for drinks with friends as a non-negotiable aspect of college. Concern that his financial insecurity may leave him socially isolated means that he privileges the purchase of alcohol over food. Moreover, he has found a way to be mindful of his finances while, simultaneously, disguise that it is, in fact, a concern.

From an intercultural context, Abdullah asserts that there is a strong community among the other students from his country. They often have social gatherings, watch each other's children, and worship together. Abdullah asserts that, although he does not ascribe to the

importance of face maintenance in his culture, it is just as important in the United States as back home. He notes,

Culturally, we are thinking that if you don't have money you are not in a good class. I have a friend who was using [social aid service] but he got worried and didn't want anyone to learn about it because he would lose his pride. At first, we went together but after a while he was like, "well, I guess it has more expired food and I just don't think I need to go there. But you can go." And I said yes, I will go (laughs). But, by coincidence, one day I went and I saw him there (laughs)! And he was like, "Yeah, I just figured maybe some vegetables – I am not coming very often." And I said, "okay" (laughs). My other friend makes fun of me because I am spending my time getting cheaper stuff and not buying from Walmart. He is saying I am parsimonious and that, if you are smart, you can do it, so you must be saving. Because he is saying in a funny way I know he is joking but he is always trying to pretend he is more rich than he is.

Facework regarding financial status is crucial to social inclusion given the cultural context under which Abdullah and his community members operate.

Zoe highlights how she uses humor to save face in situations of internal conflict. Through one of her photos, Zoe explains that taste-testing many of the meals was part of training at her new serving job. Of this experience, she states,

I trained with two girls; one was a vegetarian, so she didn't eat any of the meat, and the other only ate a couple of bites of food so I was like, "I'll eat it." Like, I would kinda joke about it, "oh, I'm not turning it down" but it definitely made me feel awkward that I was the only one who had a full plate and they each only had like, a bite, of each meal. But I wasn't going to turn it down like, there was no way I was just not going to eat to fit into the social or whatever.





**Figure 4.8 Zoe uses the food she has the chance to sample at work for training to illustrate how she takes advantage of all resources, regardless of whether it is socially appropriate.**

For Zoe, humor was the appropriate way to manage her internal discomfort regarding the test meals. Still, she maintains that being able to eat is far more important than maintaining face. Similarly, Madison chooses not to engage in face negotiation in order to educate her peers. Through one of her photos, she explains that her name is on a cabinet in the kitchen so visitors know not to eat her food. This is Madison's way of ensuring compliance with SNAP regulations. She admits that it is a highly visible strategy that does not allow her to maintain face; however, it does serve as the catalyst for conversations. She explains,

And a lot of times - this is like, super awkward - just because a lot of times people will walk in and be like, (whispers) "why does your roommate have her name on the cabinet? What is she doing? Does she care about food that much?" Over time, I've gotten more comfortable with it and it'll allow me to share that like, yeah, I

identify as like, food insecure and this is, like, what I'm on. And this is also a story of me being able to get the funds that I need to stay in school and have a job. So yeah, it's been a process. Uh because they were probably thinking, 'oh, she's a snob. She doesn't want anyone touching her food.' And so what I hope they get out of it is just a little more education and realize that it's just so much more common than you think. Like, take me to a lecture hall with 900 people! Come on, let's do this! I have ramen; I can't share, but you guys can watch me eat!"



**Figure 4.9 Madison shares how her effort to conform to SNAP regulations inadvertently provided her with an opportunity to educate others**

Ultimately, Madison sacrifices face for the education of others.

***How can participatory research be used to increase communicative agency in marginalized groups?***

In this study, participatory research provided a safe space for marginalized individuals to disclose their personal struggles and their frustrations with navigating institutional complexities.

Through this research, participatory research also provided an outlet for food insecure students to emphasize the need for change through the creation of dialogue.

Of the seven students featured within this research, four chose to be identified by their real name and three chose pseudonyms. Regarding her choice to identify by her real name, Madison maintains that she is unashamed of her narrative. In stark juxtaposition, Kyle chose to select a pseudonym for fear that his career could be placed in jeopardy. However, he maintains that his participation as a partner in the study was crucial. He states,

I feel like it's important to have different views, and me being able to talk about these issues from the military perspective without having to say, "here's my name, here's who I am and here's my story." Like, you get to hear my story but you don't necessarily know who I am. And hopefully it'll produce change. People don't talk about the military being a major group of people with food insecurities- and especially when we're so close to a military base here I just think it's important.

Indeed, Kyle's narrative offers a unique perspective. He also offers that the interview process allowed him to share about the challenges associated with food insecurity which, he vehemently asserts, have not previously be shared. Likewise, Zoe and Abdullah state that the project offered a space of confidence in which to disclose - an opportunity which rarely presents itself through interpersonal relationships or classroom discussions. Zoe, a women and gender studies major, explains that most of her classes are discussion-based and frequently examine issues of inequality. She explicates,

Like, I'll -I'll often bring up [in class] that I have to work or that I'm first-gen student, but I don't ever discuss, "hey, this was my meal for the day." I think pride is a lot of it. Like, I would say that to you; I have no shame in admitting that here, but I would definitely say like pride is a lot of it Also, by bringing that up I know it would cause a lot of people to feel guilty or bad and that's not what I want to do. We had a unit on economic inequality and, when you put it on yourself, it makes other students uncomfortable discussing those sort of topics later in the class because they know that you are struggling. That's not something that I want to put on the students or the teachers as well. Like, I don't want to

place that strain on them or step on people's toes (laugh) so yeah it's just easier to not like, discuss my own food insecurity.

For Zoe, pride and the fear of causing others discomfort prevents her from disclosing her experience with food insecurity in other spaces of dialogue. However, the research facilitated her ability to do so with the guarantee that she would be free from judgment. Abdullah expressed a similar sentiment, asserting that he has had difficulty finding outlets through which disclosure on his food and financial struggles is appropriate. As previously stated, his culture puts a heavy emphasis on class maintenance, and Abdullah admits he has had trouble connecting with his American peers due to differences in communication style. Though he only submitted six photos, my interviews with him were, by far, the longest and most frequent.

Next, this study facilitated the partners' ability to brainstorm, share, and navigate the institutional complexities surrounding food insecurity as a student. Depending on their standpoint, students experienced different challenges with a variety of institutions. Abdullah alludes that limitations placed on him as an international student facilitate his financial struggles,

I cannot work outside of campus and, on campus, I cannot work more than 20 hours when school is in session. Over the summer, it is 40 hours. Up, to this point I was employed by my advisor but, as I said, he has run out of his start-up funds and is struggling to find additional support for the project. If that happens, then I will be unemployed and will not be able to work outside of campus. And they [the department] do understand my situation but everything is not in their hands. They would like to help but they cannot.

Abdullah alludes to the restrictions placed on him by the American federal government through his visa. In this way, Abdullah shifts the blame from Kansas State University as an institution, acknowledging that many aspects of his situation are outside the realm of university responsibility. Though he does not directly state as such, Sam echoes this notion, suggesting that Kansas State University was a major source of assistance in a difficult time. He elaborates,

I was on food stamps for a while but, when you're a student, you have to work a

minimum of 20 hours a week. I was only able to work one or two days a week over the summer because I was in archeological field school back in June and class was 45 hours a week so I had no time. After that, there was just no money left. I ended up going to a couple of the churches and popped in a few of the free meals um and I actually had a K-State proud grant this summer. That helped, and I was able to get an advance on student loans from the financial aid office which helped me during the summer, too.

For Abdullah and Sam, limitations from the state and federal level are the most prominent institutional structures against which they must battle. However, Brook asserts that inadequate communication among the financial aid divisions at Kansas State University nearly resulted in her having to leave the school. Brook elaborates that her mother has been out of work as she undergoes chemotherapy and, as a result, did not have the documented income to qualify as a cosigner for Brook's second-semester student loan. This obstacle was unanticipated by Brook and her family. With no other family member qualifying as a cosigner, Brook went to the Office of Financial Aid on campus to find out what options she might have with regard to her late tuition. Through one of her photographs, Brook detailed this encounter,

I told them [Financial Aid] my situation and they just kept saying, "Well, if you don't pay it, you're gonna get hit with a bigger fee." If that lady just told me like, "I see you're like clearly upset, and can't pay your tuition. Why don't you go to Student Life? Why don't you talk to your college? Why don't you talk to the front desk, and see what scholarships they have?" Like she could have said so many things, or given me a card with any resources instead of just sending me on my way, and saying, "Well, sorry, according to the sophomore level, you only qualify for \$2,000 in loans."



**Figure 4.10 Brook shares a photo of her lunch as she sits outside of financial aid waiting to discuss her tuition payment options.**

Brook explained that she went to the Office of Financial Aid for help and was, in her words, told to “get scholarships.” However, Brook stated that, as she was leaving financial aid in tears, she ran into one of her professors. Concerned, the professor pointed her towards an aid advisor in the Office of Student Life. The aid advisor, once given the details of Brook’s situation, was able to remove the late charges on her tuition, help her apply for a grant, and work out a payment plan on the remaining balance. Thankful, yet exasperated, Brook stated,

I was like, "Why couldn't the Office of Financial Aid just tell me like, go see [aid advisor]?" I get so frustrated, because imagine if I never ran into [professor] and I just was stuck like this. Imagine all the other students who have outstanding balances that go to the same woman, and she sends them on their merry way.

Finally, partners of this study emphasized the need for further dialogue regarding food insecurity among college students. Zoe elaborates,

Food is such a –it’s so necessary and people who have it don’t realize. Definitely if there are others who struggle with it - like, if I’m not the only one - then I definitely, could see like the benefit of –like the comradery of it like, “hey, you’re also struggling with this.” I think that making it aware to more people especially like of the college-age demographic is a positive thing because people are like, “well you’re in school. You live by yourself in an apartment so obviously you have enough money to pay for food,” and those are like the really common misconceptions that I think talking about would help to eliminate.

Zoe, having never encountered students facing similar challenges as herself prior to this study, speaks to the benefit of establishing a community among food insecure students. She was correct in her assertion; following the facilitated group conversation, the students articulated that they felt an increased sense of community and had learned valuable skills from the other partners.

Madison has participated in a number of advocacy events across campus and is thoroughly engaged in food justice work. For Madison, her narrative has driven her to a career in the humanities. She asserts that putting a face to the stories of those who suffer from food insecurity helps to humanize the issue and break down stereotypes,

I really think that communication about this is like the most important thing, and I think for any of us in this room, especially. In the past I was just like really embarrassed of this, but now it's like all my work, even this semester, last semester, people that I've talked to, things that I'm doing all revolve around food insecurity, and the amount of times that I've had to share my story and bring to light that, "Hey, I'm a student. I'm struggling. We're all on the same playing field, here." I think it's just important to just let it out there, because I think that the higher up people obviously have heard about it, but they don't have the emotional, raw connection to it. And I think if, you know, like I'm not saying like go cry in their office, or ... but I'm saying that like if you did bring in that raw emotion to them, and like, "This is like my story. This is like what could really help me." Then they should be able to be like, "Yes. Let me help you."

Students in this study unanimously agreed that increased dialogue would help to expand awareness of food insecurity among college students and, ultimately, break down stereotypes and barriers to assistance.

## Chapter 5 - Discussion and Conclusion

The results of this study conclude that students who experience food insecurity engage in self-blaming practices and, thus, do not believe they have the right to be hungry or ask for help. Instead, food-insecure students employ several strategies, including face negotiation and disclosure, to minimize the severity of their situation and mitigate tensions between their health, finances, and convenience. These results yield implications on the theoretical, practical, rhetorical, and institutional levels.

### Theoretical Implications

Initially, on the theoretical level, this study renders implications regarding the role of participatory research the construction of truth and the challenges associated with engaging marginalized individuals.

#### Participatory Research and Sense-Making

The use of postpositivist methods of scientific inquiry has been a source of contention for thousands of years; however, it was the advent of the Enlightenment that foregrounded instrumental rationality in the social sciences.<sup>154</sup> Quantitative data was, and, arguably, still is, held up as the most effective way to predict human behavior; narratives and other quantitative modes of exploration, conversely, are considered to be void of empirical legitimacy.<sup>155</sup> However, as Lindblom so eloquently argues, “if social science were near perfection, it would be the only

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154 Frank Fischer, 1998, "Beyond Empiricism: Policy Inquiry in Postpositivist Perspective," *Policy Studies Journal*, 26 (1): 129-146; Bent Flyvbjerg, 2001, *Making Social Science Matter: Why Social Inquiry Fails and How it Can Succeed Again*, Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press.

155 Fischer, "Beyond Empiricism."



human institution that had achieved that status.”<sup>156</sup> When investigating something as messy and unpredictable as the human condition, empiricism hardly represents its subjects.

Moreover, quantitative data provides only a birds’ eye depiction of human issues. Demographic and statistical evidence irrefutably assist in the identification of the breadth of concerns; however, for those who adhere to a postpositivist social science framework, narrative is the vehicle through which depth and sense-making of the issue emerge. Fischer argues that social scientists must “turn from the traditional understanding of scientific proof or verification to a discursive, contextual understanding of social inquiry.”<sup>157</sup> For example, the 2016 report, “Hunger on Campus,” published, in part, by the College and University Food Bank Alliance, presents the the most extensive study of material resource challenges faced by college students in America to date.<sup>158</sup> From surveys of thirty-four campuses, the authors concluded that homelessness plagues students – disproportionately, community college students - in addition to food insecurity, and pinpoints the extent to which these scarcities harm students’ education.<sup>159</sup> The qualitative research presented in this thesis, however, provides context for these scarcities. Students detail experiences of familial monetary insufficiency, prolonged autonomy, and the unpredictability of life as just some of the catalysts for student food insecurity. Additionally, the qualitative research outline herein is able to note the specific ways in which students cope with food insecurity, and how these strategies may exacerbate health concerns, as well as the ways in which food insecurity harms students’ social and emotional wellbeing.

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156 Charles E. Lindblom, 1990, *Inquiry and Change: The Troubled Attempt to Understand and Shape Society*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, pg 10.

157 Fischer, “Beyond Empiricism,” pg. 130.

158 Dubick, Mathews, and Cady, “Hunger on Campus.”

159 Ibid.

Perhaps most detrimentally, when social scientists limit their exploration of instances of dire insufficiency to a clinical, statistics-based approach, the subjects of this inequality remain only as numbers on a page. Qualitative inquiry pairs a name and narrative with the numbers. Specifically, participatory research uniquely foregrounds the expertise of study partners based on their first-hand experience with the issue in question.<sup>160</sup> For example, straying from framed, semi-structured interview guides and, instead, asking research partners to present their story in the group discussion requires the researcher to consider nothing else but the way in which the partner views and shapes their narrative. This is vital to phenomenological inquiry because, as Lindblom argues, “any claim that social problem solving is now largely a task for social scientists or other scientists obscures the ordinary citizen’s role... in producing and disseminating knowledge.”<sup>161</sup> Ultimately, the partners presented in this thesis have expert knowledge of the ways in which institutional structures contribute to the marginalization of students. It is by soliciting their expertise that effective program and policy solutions come to light.

### Participatory Research and Engaging Marginalized Individuals

Marginalization occurs as a result of unequal power distribution within a society, most often with regard to economic or social capital.<sup>162</sup> As a result, individuals and groups who fail to ascribe to the dominant power narrative are relegated to the margins of society.<sup>163</sup> It is in this

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160 Dutta, “Hunger as Health.”; Stoecker, *Research Methods for Community Change*; Wang, “Photovoice.”

161 Lindblom, *Inquiry and Change*, pg. ix.

162 Vivian Chavez et al., 2011, “The Dance of Race and Privilege in CBPR,” In *Community-Based Participatory Research for Health*, by Meredith Minkler and Nina Wallerstein, 91-105, San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass; Jens S. Dangschat, 2009, “Space Matters- Marginalization and Its Places,” *International Journal of Urban and Rural Research* 33 (3): 835-840.

163 Dangschat, “Space Matters.”

way, Pine and de Souza argue, that “material disenfranchisement is intrinsically linked to communicative disenfranchisement.”<sup>164</sup>

Internal and external challenges exist when attempting to engage marginalized voices in research and dialogue for the purpose of change.<sup>165</sup> External sources of exclusion include the various ways in which marginalized voices are entirely left out of public conversations.<sup>166</sup> At times, the failure of inclusion of marginalized voices is purposeful. For example, Gring-Pemle examined welfare reform hearings and debates during the 102nd, 103rd, and 104th Congresses (1991-1997).<sup>167</sup> Her analysis revealed how discursive exchanges shaped the 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA). In this case, the Republican congressional majority attempted to frame the discussions to fit in line with their particular agenda. By inviting only partners that congressional members were aware would testify to the feckless nature of welfare recipients, they successfully changed the nature of the discussion and the resulting policy reform.

More often, marginalized individuals are left out of the conversation simply because research and other participatory opportunities are inaccessible to their way of life. Advertising may not reach the communities in which disenfranchised populations live, or may be provided only in English. Economically marginalized individuals may work odd shifts which conflict with the times during which the researchers are available, or may struggle to find child care if it is not

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164 Pine and de Souza, "Including the Voices of Communities in Food Insecurity Research," pg. 72.

165 Alice Siu and Dragan Stanisevski, 2012, "Deliberation in Multicultural Societies," In *Democracy in Motion: Evaluating the Practice and Impact of Deliberative Civic Engagement*, by Tina Nabatchi, John Gastil, G. Michael Weiksner, and Matt Leighninger, 83-102, New York: Oxford University Press.

166 Ibid.

167 Gring-Pemle, *Grim Fairytales*.

provided. Moreover, transportation to can be challenging, especially for those who live in rural communities. Ultimately, when research is conducted in a way that fails to meet marginalized populations where they stand, the dominant structure is further privileged.

Internal exclusion concerns the ways in which partners of marginalized groups lack the ability to influence the thinking of other partners.<sup>168</sup> Individual biases of partners from the dominant structure may discredit those who reveal, or are perceived, they do not fit within the educated and affluent populations that frequently attend deliberative events.<sup>169</sup> Often, marginalized partners are not included in public discussions simply because perceptions of their lifestyle have rendered them inadequate to participate. Of the PRWORA deliberations, Gring-Pemle furthers,

“Constructions of the feckless welfare recipient as immoral or incompetent and the young welfare recipient as immature and inexperienced largely warranted the exclusion of welfare recipient testimony. Legislators and witnesses constructed welfare recipients as having forfeited their right to speak authoritatively on welfare precisely because they were on welfare.”<sup>170</sup>

Due to the negative nature of the conversations surrounding welfare recipients, the legitimacy of the few who were able to be in attendance was negated. Ultimately, marginalized individuals must often manage the stigma associated with their identity before they are granted the authority to speak.

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168 Siu and Stanisevski, "Deliberation in Multicultural Societies."

169 Ibid.

170 Gring-Pemle, *Grim Fairytales*, pg. 121.

The significance of including the voices of marginalized individuals in research far outweighs the challenges. For example, Gring-Pemle argues that, had the voices of those having actually experienced poverty held equal pull in the conversation, PRWORA may have been more successful in its aim to empower citizens in the labor market.<sup>171</sup> When working with disenfranchised populations, a substantial amount of debate exists with regard how to effectively integrate these individuals into group discussions. The results of this study are further testimony to the benefit of participatory methods. Employing Photovoice within this study engaged partners on both individual and in deliberative capacities where they were able to safely act as co-executors of knowledge.<sup>172</sup> Partners had several opportunities to share resources and information with each other. Perhaps the most poignant exchange was initiated by Madison as she shared one of her more intimate secrets for cutting the cost of protein:

Madison: I have struggled with even finding a lot of resources here at K-State. I know that the work of a campus food pantry possibly happening would be great. But something that I have used outside of like the campus is ... So every night at closing at [store], like when their meat sections close, they have packages of meat that they can no longer keep, and so it's just free. But you have to actually ask them if they have any free meat. And there's been times when I got like eight packages of meat that I'll just like go home and freeze, and it will last a long time. So that's like one of the resources that I use that every couple times of a week, I'll go there and be like, "Do you guys have any free meat?" You know, and they of course know me by looking at me, but ...

Zoe: Like, "Oh, God. She's back."

Brook: Free meat lady. (laughs)

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<sup>171</sup> Ibid.

<sup>172</sup> Julie L. Ozanne, Emily M. Moscato, and Danylle R. Kunkel, 2013, "Transformative Photography: Evaluation and Best Practices for Eliciting Social and Policy Changes," *Journal of Public Policy and Marketing* 32 (1): 45-65; Pine and de Souza, "Including the Voices of Communities in Food Insecurity Research."; David R. Novak, 2010, "Democratizing Qualitative Research: Photovoice and the Study of Human Communication," *Communication Methods and Measures* 4 (4): 291-310.

Madison: I also use Harvesters when they come to K-State through Hands On K-State, which is kind of hard to ... You have to get there like right when they start, because they run out pretty fast, but it definitely is a nice resource because they give you a ton of food. But those are just a couple things that I would suggest. If you want some meat, go to [store] when the meat section's closing. We have two [store] so get it done.

Sam: Don't go to your [store], I'm assuming?

Madison: Huh?

Sam: Don't go to the one you go to.

Madison: You go every other night, and I'll go the other night.

Brook: She'll fight you.

Sam: What time do they close?

Madison: I think it's ... Is it eight? Yes, I'm pretty sure it's eight. It's either eight or nine. I just go from class.

Participatory research all but solves for the major external and internal challenges associated with engaging marginalized voices. Moreover, just by having the opportunity to engage with each other, the partners in this study were able to walk away with tangible resources as well as the knowledge that they are not alone in the challenges that they face.

## Practical Implications

Next, this study renders two central practical implications regarding SNAP benefit qualifications for college students and the importance of narrative testimony in policy deliberation.

### SNAP Benefits and College Students

Varied and repeated responses implied that partners would like to see information regarding student qualifications for SNAP benefits more widely disseminated. As Zoe stated, it “might take away some of the stigma if you were to see it around more often.” Indeed, college students are often unaware that SNAP benefits may even be an option in their situation and, if they are, may still be unwilling to apply due to the stigma. Madison, the only partner who received SNAP benefits, divulged that she was on the verge of leaving Kansas State University when a friend studying social services happened to bring the application to her attention. Upon hearing Zoe’s testimony during the group interview, Madison inquired if she had considered applying for SNAP benefits. Zoe responded,

Well, I had it [application] and then it just ... I never brought myself to fill it out. I moved out of my house when I was 17, and so I've really always had a very, "I can provide for myself. I'm capable" [mindset]. And like I worked as a waitress, and like I'm not trying to like brag, but I'm a good waitress. I make good tips off of it, and it's definitely not a minimum wage job for me. I make good money off of it, and so I was like, "Well, I really shouldn't be doing this, especially when there are people who need it."

Zoe, like Madison, found it difficult to overcome the timeless anti-welfare rhetoric of the deserving versus undeserving poor. For Madison, it took several months and iterations of the SNAP application before she made the decision to turn it in for approval; Zoe may not ever do so. It is irrefutable that not many college students are like Madison and will qualify for SNAP aid, and few will even take the steps necessary to see if they might. However, increasing

awareness of the SNAP program as it applies to students, according to these partners, is the first step towards breaking down the barriers to acceptance.

Unfortunately, there are few situations in which college students qualify for SNAP assistance. The United States Department of Agriculture reports, “Most able-bodied students ages 18 through 49 who are enrolled in college or other institutions of higher education at least half time are not eligible for SNAP benefits.”<sup>173</sup> The most common reason a college student would possibly qualify for SNAP benefits is if they work more than twenty hours per week. However, the narratives outlined in this study highlight the unfeasible nature of the work requirement for students. All students in this study work in some form of paid position, on or off campus. Additionally, for Sam and Hailey, working twenty hours a week in addition to a full-time course load is simply not feasible. This is not uncommon; the most recent census data explicates that only 26 percent of full-time college students are working at least twenty hours per week.<sup>174</sup> As for students like Kyle and Brook, who are able to make work a priority over classes, a consistent number of hours is not always guaranteed. Ultimately, the red tape of benefit approval must be cut away before the additional marketing of SNAP benefits to college students has the desired effect.

### Narrative Manipulation in Policy Reform

Examination of the narratives presented herein alludes to the responsibility of the researcher to present data in a way which aligns with the truth of the partner in order to prevent narrative manipulation in policy discussions. Narrative evidence is frequently and strategically

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173 United States Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service, 2016, *Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP): Students*, <https://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/students>.

174 National Center for Education Statistics, 2016, *The Condition of Education*, National Center for Education Statistics, [https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/pdf/coe\\_ssa.pdf](https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/pdf/coe_ssa.pdf).



offered in policymaking to strengthen or undermine measures under the assumption that “people will pay attention to narratives because they are boundedly rational, seeking shortcuts to gather sufficient information, and prone to accept simple stories that confirm their biases, exploit their emotions, and/or come from a source they trust.”<sup>175</sup>

The function of narrative in policy hearings is to provide evidence for truth that has already been internalized. As the Republican party controlled both houses for the majority of the welfare reform debates, the narrative testimony granted an audience served to confirm the truths held the party. Of these discussions on PRWORA, Gring-Pemle states, “Republican staff invited people to testify because they knew these witnesses held similar beliefs. In doing so, they could promote Republican welfare strategies, educate their constituency, and lessen the force of oppositional testimony.”<sup>176</sup> Moreover, limited testimony was granted to individuals receiving aid. The few who were allowed the opportunity to speak told stories akin to the American Dream; these individual had pulled themselves out of poverty by their so-called bootstraps having received only a few months’ worth of aid, if any at all. This chronicle, while far from the average, confirmed the truth of the American Dream for those listening.<sup>177</sup> Similarly, when taken out of context, any one of the seven narratives offered in this study could be used to confirm internalized truths regarding the feckless nature of the millennial college student.

The manipulation of narrative truth in policy is particularly disconcerting for marginalized populations as Gring-Pemle concluded that, in comparison to public opinion and

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175 Paul Cairney, 2015, *Policy Concepts in 1000 Words: Critical Policy Studies and the Narrative Policy Framework*, <https://paulcairney.wordpress.com/2015/03/06/policy-concepts-in-1000-words-critical-policy-studies-and-the-narrative-policy-framework/>.

176 Gring-Pemle, *Grim Fairytales*, pg. 173.

177 Ibid.

policy research, anecdotal evidence is the driving force behind policy change on issues of citizen welfare.<sup>178</sup> If, in a post-truth world, facts are socially constructed, the presentation of narrative data that aligns with the truth of the participant can provide a moral compass.<sup>179</sup> For the marginalized, this compass may be their only saving grace when facts dispute their very right to exist.

## **Rhetorical Implications**

This thesis renders two implications regarding the rhetoric of individualism and the rhetoric of Kansas State University's family slogan.

### **Rhetoric of Individualism**

This thesis demonstrates how the ideology of American individualism permeates the rhetoric surrounding welfare and public aid. Thus, because "ideas and action are indissolubly linked" through rhetoric, it is vital to discuss the ways in which this rhetoric impacts the behavior and lived experiences of individuals who receive, or qualify for, public assistance.<sup>180</sup> This rhetoric manifests through action in two ways: harmful individualism and a sense of responsibility.

Initially, this study demonstrates that the rhetoric employed in policy and policy deliberations over the past five centuries regarding individuals who benefit from public assistance – that they are feckless and broken and have failed as members of the body politic – prevents the very same individuals from seeking help.

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<sup>178</sup> Ibid.

<sup>179</sup> Fischer, *Beyond Empiricism*.

<sup>180</sup> Russell L. Hanson, 1985, *The Democratic Imagination in America: Conversations with Our Past*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, pg. 6.

The students in this study engaged in harmful forms of individualism in an effort to quell fears that they embody the rhetorical construction of the feckless welfare recipient. To reiterate, this study found that students who experience food insecurity recognize their struggle to access food as a consequence of their decision to pursue higher education. Additionally, these students expressed feeling they had failed as a result of their inability to provide for themselves. Zoe uses appetite suppressant tea and Madison uses gum; Abdullah and his wife change the times of their two daily meals to more efficiently stretch them, Brook celebrated the fact her stress ulcer meant she did not have a desire to eat, and Kyle and Sam account having gone days at a time without eating all together. On average, these students reported consuming 1,000 to 1,500 calories per day, far below the guidelines set by the USDA and World Health Organization.<sup>181</sup> Ultimately, so great is the fear of these students' of being perceived as the feckless welfare dependent, they are willing to starve rather than ask for help.

Second, the students in this study employed rhetoric that demonstrated a heightened sense of responsibility of the marginalized to help those in need. This is, perhaps, unsurprising as individuals who experience economic disenfranchisement contribute a substantially higher portion of their livelihood to charity.<sup>182</sup> Individuals who make over \$50,000 per year are more likely (70 percent) to make a monetary donation to charity; however, annual donations for this end of spectrum tend to hover around two to three percent of income.<sup>183</sup> In stark juxtaposition,

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181 United States Department of Agriculture Center for Nutrition Policy Promotion, 2017, "Estimated Calorie Needs per Day by Age, Gender, and Physical Activity Level," *United States Department of Agriculture Center for Nutrition Policy Promotion*, [https://www.cnpp.usda.gov/sites/default/files/usda\\_food\\_patterns/EstimatedCalorieNeedsPerDayTable.pdf](https://www.cnpp.usda.gov/sites/default/files/usda_food_patterns/EstimatedCalorieNeedsPerDayTable.pdf); World Health Organization, 2015, *Healthy Diet*, <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs394/en/>.

182 Philanthropy Roundtable, 2017, *Statistics*, <http://www.philanthropyroundtable.org/almanac/statistics/>.

183 Ibid.

individuals who make less than \$25,000 are less likely (37 percent) to donate to charities; however, annual donations from individuals on this end of the spectrum account for 12 percent of their income.<sup>184</sup>

Nation-wide, 73 percent of all charitable giving is done by individual citizens and annual charitable donations have increased every year since 2010.<sup>185</sup> The nonprofit sector has also grown faster than either the government or public sector over the past generation; today, it accounts for roughly one in ten American jobs.<sup>186</sup> The Midwest, while notorious for its adherence to staunch conservative ideals, including an unfailing devotion to American individualism, includes some of the most charitable states in the nation by income.<sup>187</sup> These changing trends in giving, particularly in wake of the financial challenges of the Great Recession, echo Hanson's assertion that "When practices change, that implies that ideas also have changed."<sup>188</sup> Arguably, this demonstrates that the vast majority of Americans – particularly those in the Midwest – are experiencing a growing sense compassion and responsibility for those in need; they would just like to do so of their own volition rather than prescribed by a government entity.

### Applications of "Family" Rhetoric

As previously mentioned, Kansas State University boasts a slogan and tradition rooted in the concept of family. Featured prominently on the homepage of the University's website is a tab

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184 National Center for Charitable Statistics, 2017, *Charitable Giving in America: Some Facts and Figures*, <http://nccs.urban.org/data-statistics/charitable-giving-america-some-facts-and-figures>.

185 Philanthropy Roundtable, *Statistics*; National Center for Charitable Statistics, *Charitable Giving in America*.

186 Ibid.

187 National Center for Charitable Statistics, *Charitable Giving in America*.

188 Hanson, *The Democratic Imagination in America*, pg. 7.

labeled, “#WildcatWay.” This page pays homage to the K-State Family mantra, reading, “It’s a well-known fact that when you enter the Kansas State University community, you become part of a family...With any family, you’re bound to have shared memories, commonly held values and honored traditions... However, the one tradition that crosses all generations, cultures and paths of K-Staters is a word all Wildcats hold dear: family. We know that without family, traditions are fleeting. It’s when we band together that our values last forever.”<sup>189</sup> Kansas State University seemingly asserts that a family is created when a group of individuals “band together,” and the products of this communion are shared memories, values, and traditions.<sup>190</sup> It is, indeed, a successful brand. As Zoe elucidates,

My parents didn’t go to college but I grew up a K-State fan. Like, we went to the games when I was little and I was familiar with Manhattan so I knew, ever since I was little, that this was my preferred college. So when it came to touring colleges and universities I really didn’t waste a lot of time. Like, the family environment was really important to me. If I had gone out of state or to KU I would have had a very different experience. Like, I really do feel the whole family environment thing, and maybe it’s just because I’ve always been a KSU fan but like, Bill Schneider is a hero figure to me, the band- being involved with the band was a cool experience -but like, you can stop anyone on the sidewalk and they’ll talk to you and the professors will all meet with you –like, they have the time to do that. I think that everyone here is really invested in student success.

Zoe believes that the family slogan is more than just empty words and that Kansas State University does have a cultural feel to it that is reminiscent of a family.

Rhetorically, Morpew and Hartley argue there are two ways the use of *family* as an institutional brand functions: as a guidebook for behavior of community members, or as the means to an undefined end.<sup>191</sup> Specifically, Morpew and Hartley state, “a clear mission helps

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189 Kansas State University, #Wildcat Way.

190 Ibid.

191 Christopher C. Morpew and Matthew Hartley, 2006, "Mission Statements: A Thematic Analysis of Rhetoric Across Institutional Type," *The Journal of Higher Education*, 77 (33): 456-471.

organizational members distinguish between activities that conform to institutional imperatives and those that do not. Second, a shared sense of purpose has the capacity to inspire and motivate those within an institution and to communicate its characteristics, values, and history to key external constituents.”<sup>192</sup> In juxtaposition, Morphew and Hartley add that the few scholars who have examined the rhetoric of higher institution branding view slogans and mission statements “as a collection of stock phrases that are either excessively vague or unrealistically aspirational or both.”<sup>193</sup>

Superficially, the rhetorical framing of Kansas State University as a family arguably functions as an appeal to the traditional ideals held by the residents of the predominantly conservative state of Kansas, as well as to offer a sense of belonging to a demographic that desires connectedness.<sup>194</sup> However, if Morphew and Hartley are correct and the K-State Family mantra functions as instruction for the behavior of members of the Kansas State University campus, the results of this research suggest that the campus community has an obligation to care for the students among them who are suffering.<sup>195</sup> In contrast, per Morphew and Hartley’s warning, substantial evidence is not offered as to what defines Kansas State University as a family. Specifically, it is vital to ask: in what way are students, faculty and staff expected to “band together,” and what values are they expected to uphold? As students in this study repeatedly elucidated that they perceive themselves to have vastly different values and encounters with the college experience than their peers, they may very well run the risk of being

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192 Ibid, pg. 457.

193 Ibid, pg. 457.

194 Terrell L. Strayhorn, 2012, *College Students' Sense of Belonging: A Key to Educational Success for All Students*, New York: Routledge.

195 Morphew and Hartley, “Mission Statements.”

named the black sheep of their so-called family.

### **Institutional Implications**

Finally, this study renders institutional implications for Kansas State University regarding the “Family” brand and the role of dining centers in alleviating student food insecurity.

#### **“Family” Privilege**

Initially, this study concludes that Kansas State University could be doing more to make the “K-State Family” inclusive of all students, and particularly those who are disenfranchised. Partners unanimously expressed that they did not feel they were included within the K-State Family. These students, who would, arguably, benefit most from a familial support structure at college, perceive the family mantra as only applicable to students who come from a place of privilege. Lamentations voiced by Kyle received agreement around the table. He asserted,

This is my third college, so I’ve seen that with college, depending on your income level, you have a very different relationship to the school that you go to. So, like, the low income students I see generally don’t have that close knit family tie that they advertise and talk about. But, like, middle and upper – specifically upper – level income students are very much into this idea that we’re a family here and we take care of each other. Yeah, that’s not what the family is, but the way it’s been advertised, it makes it so they feel like they’re a family. When worse ... the people who need it, who need that family support, don’t get it.

Zoe, while not nearly as jaded as Kyle, was in agreement. As previously disclosed, Zoe recognizes that the family mantra was a major selling point for her. Though she is mostly satisfied with the environment at KSU, believes there is more the university could be doing. She elaborated,

It’s the students and it’s the librarians at Hale, and things like that. Those are the people that really hold themselves and the University to that family standard. Whereas the financial aid and, like, the people in those offices- in those

departments – don't. They don't have that family mindset, and I just think like, if you're going to portray it, and if you're going to market that as something that you want people to grasp onto, then you should also take that into your own personal disposition towards your students.

The partners in this study echo a common theme in literature surrounding higher education: privilege is intrinsically connected to student retention.<sup>196</sup> Success in college does not simply require academic ability; rather, students are required to master the college student role.<sup>197</sup> Grounded in symbolic interactionist role theory, Collier and Morgan assert that roles, such as *student*, are employed as resources that individuals use in social interactions with others to reach their goals.<sup>198</sup> In the case of higher education, this often means persistence to graduation.

Students who enter into university life with family, financial, or social privilege “possess an important resource for recognizing what is expected of them and responding appropriately to those expectations.”<sup>199</sup> However, non-traditional, first-generation, and other students groups who are more prone to food insecurity, often enter university life with a limited understanding of the student role.<sup>200</sup> Consequently, these students struggle to understand the culture of higher education, adhere to the work standard expected by professors, and bond with more privileged

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196 Pike and Kuh, “First and Second-Generation College Students”; Kathleen L. Byrd and Ginger Macdonald, 2005, “Defining College Readiness from the Inside Out: First-Generation College Student Perspectives,” *Community College Review*, 33(1): 22-37.

197 Collier and Morgan, “Is That Paper Really Due Today?”

198 Ibid.

199 Ibid, p. 429.

200 Patton-Lopez et al., “Prevalence and Correlates of Food Insecurity Among Students Attending a Midsize Rural University in Oregon.”; Chaparro et al., “Food Insecurity Prevalence Among College Students at the University of Hawai'i at Ma'noa.”



peers, directly affecting the students' potential to persist.<sup>201</sup> Considering that one in eight students will drop out of college due to food insecurity, assuring that the "K-State Family" mantra applies to the most marginalized of students can help ensure persistence.<sup>202</sup>

### Pondering the Pantry

As previously stated, Kansas State University is in the midst of establishing a campus-wide food pantry. However, though it should be noted that study partners were adamant about the importance of a campus pantry, this option was viewed as far from a panacea. Rather, students voiced a myriad of concerns regarding the effective use of resources by the dining centers on the Kansas State University campus. Specifically, partners asserted that that food insecurity on campus could be greatly reduced if the dining centers engaged in food rescue practices and reconsidered meal plan policies.

First, partners asserted that they had encountered many opportunities on campus where, had food rescue practices that benefitted the students of Kansas State University been in place, their immediate hunger could have been greatly reduced. Food rescue is the practice of transferring usable food that would have otherwise been thrown away from restaurants, grocers and other food industry sources to food-insecure individuals.<sup>203</sup> It is a practice in which a number of K-12 schools across the United States engage in, and Brook believes this practice would be life-changing for students at Kansas State University. She works at one of the dining centers, has seen first-hand the food waste that takes place on campus. Brook laments that food that is not

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201 Mark P. Orbe, 2004, "A Co-Cultural Theoretical Analysis of Communicating on Campus and at Home: Exploring the Negotiation Strategies of First-Generation College (FGC) Students," *Qualitative Research Reports in Communication*, 5 (1): 41-47.

202 Dubick, Mathews, and Cady, "Hunger on Campus."

203 Food Rescue US, 2017, *About Food Rescue*, <http://foodrescue.us/about/>.

consumed must be discarded or donated to community organizations, and that taking this food for self-use is grounds for termination. Although the Kansas State University dining centers do make a concerted effort to donate useable food to local aid organizations, partners in this study did not feel that the students on campus who are also in immediate need are taken into consideration. Brook elaborates,

Instead of giving it to [local pantry], why isn't [dining hall] like, at 8:00 PM, "Hey, this is what we have left- take it." You know? Or like kind of saying like, instead of making it a food pantry or whatever, just whatever's left at [dining hall], just whoever needs it come get it. Why is that so hard?

Brook asks that, if the food is to be donated away in the first place, should it not be given to the campus community before the Manhattan community at large?

Second, with regard to meal plans, partners proffered many changes they believed would help assuage student food insecurity. The most specific and agreed upon measure, however, was presented by Zoe. She maintains that the use of guest passes for students with on-campus meal plans should not differ from the use of guest passes for off-campus meal plans. She elaborates,

I have a lot of friends who are on the meal plans; off-campus meal plans you pay for a set amount of meals, and then you can guest pass like as many people as you want, but it just takes off of those meals. And it's something that they really encourage is towards the end of the semester, they're like, "Hey, you have like 20 meals left. Guest pass some people in," and so that's really cool. On-campus meal plans, though, which is what a majority of students are on because they live in the dorms, you cannot do that. You have a limited number of guest passes. At the end of the week, what meals you don't use are gone, and it's like, they paid for that! You are entitled to your leftovers if you have already paid for it. I just think the fact that off campus students can do it, but then they put those restrictions on the on campus students because I think they just have more control over it, and I think that's kind of some bull.

To Zoe, the lack of roll-over of guest passes for students with on-campus meal plans feels wasteful and exploitative. As stated in the previous chapter, Zoe has occasionally benefitted from friends' guest passes to the dining center and found it to be a particularly useful tool in times of

dire need. Furthermore, by asserting that this practice is “some kind of bull,” she alludes to a moral responsibility the school has to not take advantage of their students. By allowing students with on-campus meal plans to roll over their guest passes, Zoe feels that less money would be wasted by students and meals would be more accessible to all.

### **Limitations and Areas for Future Research**

Initially, this sample in this study was predominantly comprised of traditional students. As previously stated, traditional students are most often defined as one who enrolls in college in the fall following high school graduation and pursues higher education on a full-time basis, graduating with a bachelor’s degree in four or five years.<sup>204</sup> However, non-traditional students, who are often older, may have children, or be employed full-time in addition to school, comprise roughly 64 percent of all college students in the United States.<sup>205</sup> These individuals experience a greater bifurcation of consciousness between work, home and school life which may significantly impact the role food insecurity plays with regard to their identity as a student. With only one partner in the study (Sam) considered, by the most frequently accepted to be a non-traditional student, the application of these findings beyond traditional undergraduate students is limited. Thus, future research may benefit from a deeper understanding of the communication and stigma management techniques employed by students with a higher level of at-home responsibilities.

Next, only two partners in this study are non-white individuals. This is representative of the demographic homogeneity of Kansas State University where 75 percent of undergraduate

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204 National Center for Education Statistics, *Trends in Enrollment from 1986 to 1992 and Persistence and Attainment Among 1989-90 Beginning Postsecondary Students*; Center for Institutional Effectiveness, *A Fresh Look at Traditional and Nontraditional Undergraduates at KSU*.

205 Ibid.

students are white; however, the limited number of racial minority students successfully recruited for partnership in this study hinders the ability of this study to examine the intersection between minority status and food insecurity among college students.<sup>206</sup> Given the greater degree to which racial minorities experience economic disenfranchisement, future research on this topic would greatly benefit from the narratives of black and Hispanic individuals.

Finally, it is important to note that there is a myriad of different ways this data can, and, arguably, should be presented. although this study takes a thematic approach to analysis,

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206 Kansas State University, 2016, *Undergraduate Student Demographics*, Office of Planning and Analysis, <http://www.k-state.edu/pa/student/studentfb/ugdemo.pdf>.

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## Appendix A - Partnership Letter

Greetings:

My name is Miranda Klugeshertz and I am a graduate student at Kansas State University conducting research on the experiences of food insecure college students. I am reaching out because you have been identified as someone who may qualify and I would be thrilled to partner with you on this research!

For this project, “hungry” or “food insecure” means that, since August 2016, you have had to skip one or more meals due to lack of money or access, and/or you have had to seek help from a supplemental resource like a food pantry or government assistance program.

Half of all college students will struggle with food insecurity during their time in school. This project is meant to construct a picture of the lived experiences of food-insecure students and, ultimately, find more effective ways to help them. Your experience is unique; my job is to put your voice first and provide you with the opportunity to share your story in a safe, confidential environment.

Should you agree to work with me, I will ask you to take pictures of your life over a two-week period. You will meet with me individually to talk about the photos, as well as participate in a group discussion with the other research partners. As compensation for your time, at the end of the study you will receive a gift card to the grocery store of your choice. The following four steps outline your commitment:

1. Participate in an introductory interview/ training session with Miranda.  
(Duration: approximately 30 minutes)
2. Photograph your personal life experiences as they relate to food insecurity.  
(Duration: two weeks)
3. Participate in an interview with Miranda regarding your photographs  
(Duration: approximately 60 minutes)
4. Participate in a final group discussion and debriefing session.  
(Duration: approximately 120 minutes)

Because your privacy is important to me, your personal information will remain confidential. During the project, you have total control over what you choose to share, and your participation is entirely voluntary at all points. At the end of the project, excerpts from your interview may be shared in an academic paper or presentation; however, your name and other identifying information about you will **not** be shared.

I would love to have the chance to work with you on this project. If you are interested or would like more information before you commit, please feel free to contact me at any time (call/text/email) at **[phone number]** or **[email]**. I look forward to hearing from you!

Best,  
Miranda Klugeshertz

## Appendix B – U.S. Adult Food Security Survey

1. For this statement, please tell me whether the statement was often true, sometimes true, or never true for you or your household in the past 30 days:  
**“I worried whether food would run out before I got money to buy more.”**
  - a. Often
  - b. Sometimes
  - c. Never true
  - d. I do not know/ prefer not to answer.
2. For this statement, please tell me whether the statement was often true, sometimes true, or never true for you or your household in the past 30 days:  
**“The food that I bought just didn’t last, and I didn’t have money to get more.”**
3. For this statement, please tell me whether the statement was often true, sometimes true, or never true for you or your household in the past 30 days:  
**“I couldn’t afford to eat balanced meals.”**
4. In the past 30 days, have you ever cut the size of your meals or skipped meals because there wasn't enough money for food?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
  - c. I do not know/ prefer not to answer.
5. If you answered yes to number 3, how often did this happen?
  - a. Almost every day.
  - b. Some days but not every day.
  - c. Only once or twice.
6. In the last 30 days, did you ever eat less than you felt you should because there wasn't enough money for food?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
  - c. I do not know/ prefer not to answer.
7. In the last 30 days, were you every hungry but didn't eat because there wasn't enough money for food?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
  - c. I do not know/ prefer not to answer.

8. In the last 30 days, did you lose weight because there wasn't enough money for food?
- a. Yes
  - b. No
  - c. I do not know/ prefer not to answer.
9. In the last 30 days, did you ever not eat for a whole day because there wasn't enough money for food?
- a. Yes
  - b. No
  - c. I do not know/ prefer not to answer.
10. If you answered yes to number 9, how often did this happen?
- a. Almost every day.
  - b. Some days but not every day.
  - c. Only once or twice.

## Appendix C – U.S. Household Food Security Survey

1. For this statement, please tell me whether the statement was often true, sometimes true, or never true for you or your household in the past 30 days:  
***“I worried whether food would run out before I got money to buy more.”***
  - a. Often
  - b. Sometimes
  - c. Never true
  - d. I do not know/ prefer not to answer.
2. For this statement, please tell me whether the statement was often true, sometimes true, or never true for you or your household in the past 30 days:  
***“The food that I bought just didn’t last, and I didn’t have money to get more.”***
3. For this statement, please tell me whether the statement was often true, sometimes true, or never true for you or your household in the past 30 days:  
***“I couldn’t afford to eat balanced meals.”***
4. In the past 30 days, have you ever cut the size of your meals or skipped meals because there wasn't enough money for food?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
  - c. I do not know/ prefer not to answer.
5. If you answered yes to number 3, how often did this happen?
  - a. Almost every day.
  - b. Some days but not every day.
  - c. Only once or twice.
6. In the last 30 days, did you ever eat less than you felt you should because there wasn't enough money for food?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
  - c. I do not know/ prefer not to answer.
7. In the last 30 days, were you every hungry but didn't eat because there wasn't enough money for food?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
  - c. I do not know/ prefer not to answer.

8. In the last 30 days, did you lose weight because there wasn't enough money for food?
- Yes
  - No
  - I do not know/ prefer not to answer.
9. In the last 30 days, did you ever not eat for a whole day because there wasn't enough money for food?
- Yes
  - No
  - I do not know/ prefer not to answer.
10. If you answered yes to number 9, how often did this happen?
- Almost every day.
  - Some days but not every day.
  - Only once or twice.
11. For this statement, please tell me whether the statement was often true, sometimes true, or never true for you or your household in the past 30 days:  
***“We relied on only a few kinds of low-cost food to feed our children because we were running out of money to buy food.”***
- Often
  - Sometimes
  - Never true
  - I do not know/ prefer not to answer.
12. For this statement, please tell me whether the statement was often true, sometimes true, or never true for you or your household in the past 30 days:  
***“We couldn’t feed our children a balanced meal, because we couldn’t afford that.”***
- Often
  - Sometimes
  - Never true
  - I do not know/ prefer not to answer.
13. For this statement, please tell me whether the statement was often true, sometimes true, or never true for you or your household in the past 30 days:  
***“Our children were not eating enough because we just couldn’t afford enough food.”***
- Often
  - Sometimes
  - Never true
  - I do not know/ prefer not to answer.



14. In the last 30 days, did you ever cut the size of any of the children's meals because there wasn't enough money for food?
- a. Yes
  - b. No
  - c. I do not know/ prefer not to answer.
15. In the last 30 days, did any of the children ever skip meals because there wasn't enough money for food?
- a. Yes
  - b. No
  - c. I do not know/ prefer not to answer.
16. If yes to 15, how often did this happen?
- a. Almost every day
  - b. Some days but not every day
  - c. Only once or twice.
17. In the last 30 days, were the children ever hungry but you just couldn't afford more food?
- a. Yes
  - b. No
  - c. I do not know/ prefer not to answer.
18. In the last 30 days, did any of the children ever not eat for a whole day because there wasn't enough money for food?
- a. Yes
  - b. No
  - c. I do not know/ prefer not to answer.

## Appendix D – IRB Approval



University Research Compliance Office

TO: Tim Shaffer  
Communication  
208 Nichols

Proposal Number: 8325

FROM: Rick Scheidt, Chair  
Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects

DATE: 06/28/2016

RE: Approval of Proposal Entitled, "Back in Focus: Community- Based Participatory Research and Food insecurity in Kansas."

The Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects has reviewed your proposal and has granted full approval. This proposal is **approved for one year from the date of this correspondence, pending "continuing review."**

APPROVAL DATE: 06/28/2016

EXPIRATION DATE: 06/28/2017

Several months prior to the expiration date listed, the IRB will solicit information from you for federally mandated "**continuing review**" of the research. Based on the review, the IRB may approve the activity for another year. **If continuing IRB approval is not granted, or the IRB fails to perform the continuing review before the expiration date noted above, the project will expire and the activity involving human subjects must be terminated on that date. Consequently, it is critical that you are responsive to the IRB request for information for continuing review if you want your project to continue.**

In giving its approval, the Committee has determined that:

- ☒ There is no more than minimal risk to the subjects.  
☐ There is greater than minimal risk to the subjects.

This approval applies only to the proposal currently on file as written. Any change or modification affecting human subjects must be approved by the IRB prior to implementation. All approved proposals are subject to continuing review at least annually, which may include the examination of records connected with the project. Announced post-approval monitoring may be performed during the course of this approval period by URCO staff. Injuries, unanticipated problems or adverse events involving risk to subjects or to others must be reported immediately to the Chair of the IRB and / or the URCO.