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## **Making Sense at the Margins: Describing Narratives on Food Insecurity Through Hip-hop**

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Making Sense at the Margins: Describing Narratives on Food Insecurity Through Hip-hop

by

Lemuel Scott

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts  
Department of Communication  
College of Arts & Sciences  
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## **DEDICATION**

This work is dedicated to all the people visiting Trinity Cafe. They inspired this research and continue to inspire me to listen and expand my worldview. I am not only grateful for those who kindly agreed to participate in this study, but also for the many others who have shared their times, stories, and perspectives with me whenever I visit the site. I continue to be inspired by the honesty, optimism, and wisdom present during our conversations.

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## ABSTRACT

Neoliberalism is the contemporary political and economic thought that promotes ideas of private property, individualism, and market logic as key to advancing humanity. Scholars generally link neoliberalism to poverty from a broad perspective, but few have explored how it specifically impacts food insecurity. Globally, many people impacted by poverty also experience food insecurity. Hip-hop is important to resistance and fostering my critical worldview. Existing literature primarily describes hip-hop as a critical tool giving expression to people living at the margins. However, there is a need for hip-hop to be used more often as resistance by artists doing research. First, this study aims to understand food insecurity from the perspectives of food insecure individuals. Second, using the dominant themes from our conversations, I co-construct a hip-hop album. After conducting semi-structured interviews with 8 guests at Trinity Cafe, the analysis reveals the guests make sense of food insecurity by *questioning organizations*, through understanding *responsibility and response-ability*, and by showing *active optimism*. The hip-hop EP entitled *Margins* also emerged. Their knowledge challenges the commodification of food, complicates ideas of resilience, and foregrounds the importance of the collective. The study also provides important considerations for nonprofits and policy-makers by suggesting collaborations, intersectional approaches, and context-specific solutions are crucial.



## **CHAPTER ONE:**

### **INTRODUCTION**

After school one day, a fellow student told me about a group of boys who killed a homeless man with stones and glass bottles. My friends and I were watching a secondary school football<sup>1</sup> game when he casually told the story. He described the event with a smirk on his face, despite remarking, "daz rel shit hoss<sup>2</sup>, they actually killed a man." It took me a while to process what I'd just heard. I didn't know what to make of it. I didn't know how to react. I remember feeling strangely uncomfortable. They killed him? It was like I'd never imagined homeless people could die, because I'd never acknowledged that they lived. The more I think about it, the stranger it seems. It was like I had to imagine and come to terms with the man's humanity before acknowledging that those boys denied him of it. I remained uncomfortable for some time that day. I'm not exactly sure how long that story troubled me, but I soon shifted back into a state of safe, comfortable indifference... At least for the time being.

How does a homeless individual become invisible in the social fabric? What are the conditions that normalize the existence or lack thereof persons in extreme poverty? A few years later, when introduced to ideas of neoliberalism, I got some answers to these troubling questions. Neoliberalism is the contemporary political economic thought that promotes ideas of private property, individualism, and market logic. The advancement of humanity is professed to be achievable by "liberating entrepreneurial freedoms and skills" (Harvey, 2005, p. 2). The role of the state is minimal, and the individual is responsible for his/her own successes or failures

(Harvey, 2005, 2007). Hence, in the name of “freedom” evidenced by individually attainable success, neoliberalism has been normalized and embedded in political, economic, social, and cultural components of our society, affecting public perception of major issues (Peck, 2013). It functions as a hegemonic and pervasive ideology, legitimizing and facilitating systems which oppress poor persons like the man in my earlier account (Harvey, 2007). Crucially, these ideas function to render those who have failed to achieve The American Dream as deserving of their poverty-affected reality (Smith & Dougherty, 2012). In doing so, various forms of violence against poor, homeless and other disadvantaged persons become normalized, justified, and legitimized at their expense and by our consent (Rothe & Collins, 2018; Springer, 2012). I was ignorant of the ways I continued to consent to the oppression of poor and homeless people. This was the case until I had an eye-opening experience in my first semester of undergraduate studies in college.

I remember going to as many events that interested me as possible during my first semester. After seeing a flyer in her dorm building, Lily<sup>3</sup> invited me to a “Hunger Banquet” hosted by the Center for Leadership and Civic Engagement (CLCE). The event simulated various levels of income, living conditions, and access to food by randomly dividing the guests into three categories – 1) upper-class and wealthy, 2) middle-class, lower class and 3) extremely poor. Lily and I were being served a three-course meal at a table with other “upper-class” guests while they played a documentary film showing stories of homeless people. One man in the film mentioned that he never imagined he would ever be homeless. Recounting how he got into his current situation, he described a series of unfortunate events. I watched on as others relayed similar stories about crucial events like deaths in the family, physical and mental illness, and sudden unemployment.

Many of the occurrences described by those featured in the film were out of their control, yet they all led to lives of food insecurity and homelessness; circumstances I previously assumed resulted from suspect life-decisions at best. The hosts described the hunger banquet as an eye-opener to issues of hunger and homelessness. The event certainly opened my eyes to my own complacency and indifference. Hearing the stories of those I have often overlooked challenged core beliefs of mine that I rarely acknowledged. This left me feeling deeply moved. Still sitting at the “upper-class” table, I couldn’t finish my meal.

Globally, the issue of food insecurity has sustained an unwanted presence in the lives of many people impacted by poverty. In their 2017 *Global Report on Food Crises*, the Food Security Information Network—a coalition of humanitarian organizations—reported that 108 million people were facing “crisis level” food insecurity or worse, increasing 35 percent from the last report in 2015. In 2016, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) found that 41.2 million people lived in food insecure households, with 10.8 million of these persons being adults in households with very low food security. The USDA defines food insecurity as the uncertainty of having or being able to acquire the amount of food necessary to fulfill household needs, which is often attributed to a lack of money and other resources necessary to obtain food. Not merely a “household” issue, food insecurity is likely a more exacerbated problem faced by homeless persons in tandem with other problems concerning income, shelter, and health (Herault & Ribar, 2017; Lee & Greif, 2008).

Soon after going to the hunger and homelessness event, I started looking for volunteer opportunities and Trinity Cafe was one of the organizations which allowed me to do so. They aim to “serve hungry and homeless persons” a meal in the company of a friendly host and server at each table. It didn’t take long for the closer of the organization’s two locations to become a

regular volunteer site of mine. I had assumed during my early experience with the organization that all (or the vast majority of) the guests were homeless, but the more persons I interacted with over time, the more I realized that many of them weren't. Regardless of whether they were homeless or not, the identities of those visiting the food-providing nonprofit organization seemed a lot more complex than I previously imagined. Speaking with some of the guests, they shared stories of very difficult experiences. All of which I could only imagine. All of which I could hardly relate. Their stories continued to challenge what I imagined about people encountering poverty. They continued to confront my beliefs about those experiencing homelessness and food insecurity. What I comfortably reconciled as homogenous and simple now appeared a lot more diverse and complicated. The most I could do was listen.

Engaging how nonprofit organizations address poverty-related issues, scholars have reviewed and critiqued two major approaches to solutions: an overemphasis on promoting individual change (Burgess & Shier, 2016; Jacobson, 2007; O'Connor, Boyle, Ilcan, Oliver, 2016) and emphasizing the importance of both structural and individual change (Carter, Dubois, & Tremblay, 2014; Jindra, 2014; I. Jindra & M. Jindra, 2016). Fewer approaches focus on the experiences of those engaging with poverty-related issues first-hand when discovering solutions. Also, considering the influence of neoliberalism on our systems, a body of critical scholarship demonstrates how neoliberal ideas might be resisted from various, mostly broader perspectives (Asen, 2017; Cornelissen, 2018; Ganesh, Zoller, & Cheney, 2005; Shattuck, Schiavoni, & VanGelder, 2015; Spicer & Fleming, 2007). However, fewer research challenges neoliberal ideas specifically concerning food insecurity (Dutta, Anaele, & Jones, 2013).

My goal is twofold in this study. First, I aim to understand food insecurity from the perspectives of food insecure individuals using a culture-centered approach to communication

(CCA). CCA provides theoretical entry points and provides pragmatic guidelines for engaging with problems of marginalization and oppression (Dutta, 2011). The framework creates spaces for listening to those whose voices have historically been rendered silent by institutional practices (Dutta, 2011, 2015; Sastry & Dutta, 2013). The emphasis is on co-creating spaces of change by working dialogically with marginalized communities through collaborative communicative strategies. Second, using the dominant themes from our conversations, I aim to co-construct hip-hop songs in solidarity with those who experience food insecurity.

Identifying as an artist-academic-advocate, I draw from hip-hop's longstanding culture of resistance (Drury, 2017; Love, 2016; Navarro, 2016; Rashid, 2016), its importance in fostering my worldview (Boylorn, 2016; Durham, 2009), and CCA's theoretical insights on social change (Dutta, 2011, 2015) to challenge neoliberal ideas of food insecurity. I do this through the co-construction of cultural meanings by participants in their interactions with the structures surrounding their lives (Dutta, 2011). In doing so, I respond to Ganesh, Zoller & Cheney's (2005) call to engage in transformative communicative practice that offers new grounds for re-examining dominant neoliberal discourses in the field of communication. Because of my engagement with food insecurity (that are mostly dealt with by non-profits), and hip-hop as resistance, I am uniquely situated at the intersection of organizational communication and cultural studies. Ultimately, my goal is to offer resistance to prevailing power in order to deal with issues of social inequality shaped by market logic.

I begin by reviewing literature in three sections: 1) *neoliberalism, nonprofit and food insecurity*, 2) *resistance and hip-hop*, and 3) *solidarity and the culture-centered approach*, the study's theoretical framework. Then, I describe the research methods, where I include a section

on reflexivity to begin interrogating my positionality in this collaborative research. I then present an analysis of the findings before concluding with the theoretical implications of this study.

### **Endnote**

<sup>1</sup> Football here refers to the sport that is called “soccer” in the United States.

<sup>2</sup> Trinidadian English Creole is used here. Roughly, this statement means “that’s messed up, bro” In American English.

<sup>3</sup> Pseudonyms are used here and throughout the entire manuscript.

## **CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW**

In this chapter, I explore literature on neoliberalism and demonstrate how it operates hegemonically as a pervasive force. I follow this by outlining how scholarship highlights the ways in which neoliberalism affects the operations of nonprofit organizations, including those addressing food insecurity. I also reveal how proposed solutions undermine the experiences of those facing the social issue themselves, before introducing the importance of *solidarity* and a *culture-centered approach* to this study.

### *Neoliberalism, Nonprofit, and Food Insecurity*

Neoliberalism operates politically, economically, ideologically, culturally, and discursively to invade our lives and has become embedded and naturalized in our systems (Harvey, 2007; Peck, 2013; Rothe & Collins, 2018). Its structures have long become fortified under the guise of freedom through "private property rights, individual liberty, unencumbered markets, and free trade" (Harvey, 2007, p. 22). The perspective emphasizes values like individual responsibility, work ethic, and competition; presenting them as universal to obtaining (especially) economic success while simultaneously ignoring structures producing economic inequality (Harvey, 2005, 2007; Hasenfeld & Garrow, 2012).

Neoliberalism justifies federal and state governments taking a limited role in providing social services and welfare to poor persons. Accompanied by factors like privatization and

marketization, such devolution from federal to state, and from state to private and nonprofit organizations, affects the operations of nonprofit organizations in crucial ways (Feldman, Strier, & Koreh, 2017; Grønbjerg & Salamon, 2002; Hasenfeld & Garrow, 2012; Kissane, 2012). Despite devolution, the state is still recognized as pivotal to the distribution of power and funds (Feldman et al., 2017). Some scholars argue that shifting from public to private control negatively impacts regulation and funding for social services, threatens social rights, and limits the ability of nonprofit organizations to advocate for poor and marginalized persons (Grønbjerg & Salamon, 2002; Hasenfeld & Garrow, 2012). Scholarship also explores how nonprofits might still be active in policy-making and advocacy (Garrow & Hasenfeld, 2014; Mosley, 2011), acknowledging a complex view of the relationship between neoliberalism and nonprofit operations (Feldman et al., 2017). For instance, Feldman et al. (2017) describe neoliberalism as opening up “new opportunities for resistance and oppositional advocacy by nonprofits as much as it has undermined the very essence of such activities” (p. 260). They argue that these “new opportunities” emerge out of the need for service and advocacy work created by a neoliberal economy.

In addition to creating an environment for their activities, neoliberalism influences how nonprofit relief organizations and human services address poverty-related issues (Feldman, 2018; Feldman et al., 2017; Gray, Dean, Agllias, Howard, & Schubert, 2015). After conducting a comprehensive and critical review on asset-building programs called “Individual Development Accounts,” Feldman (2018) claims that, despite the variety of individualized programs introduced, they are not nearly as beneficial to combating poverty as is claimed. The obstacles these poor persons face likely persist because of the continuous reform of neoliberal structures



and its effects like growing economic inequality (Frank, Sommeiller, & Price, 2015); neither of which was considered in the processes of these programs (Feldman, 2017).

More specifically, concerning food insecurity, scholars have critiqued how stakeholder organizations and agencies continue to perpetuate and normalize neoliberal structures and practices despite also claiming to combat food insecurity (Brooks, 2016; O'Connor et al., 2016; Pettygrove & Ghose, 2018; Steckley & Shamsie, 2015). “Resilience” emerges in literature as the ability to “bounce back” from difficulty. It emphasizes survival, recovery, and adaptation by the individual as opposed to resisting the economic and political structures producing circumstances of difficulty and inequality (Mckeown & Glenn, 2018; O'Connor et al., 2016). O'Connor et al. (2016) scrutinize the World Food Programme’s shift towards an underlying focus on resilience as a key solution to addressing poverty. The authors claim that focusing on fostering resilience normalizes food insecurity as a natural, universal, and inevitable threat, merely encouraging individuals to adapt to their conditions instead of resisting its structural causes (O'Connor et al., 2016). By this logic, only the most resilient individuals adapt and avoid the fate of being food insecure. Similar tenets of neoliberalism are internalized and adopted by those using social and nonprofit services, who might embrace ideas of individual responsibility and deservedness of aid while simultaneously denying the importance of structural conditions and refusing beneficial aid (Kissane, 2012).

Some scholarship highlights how private and market-based approaches are presented by influential organizations as a better solution to food insecurity than state intervention (Brooks, 2016; O'Connor et al., 2016). Brooks (2016) analyzed agricultural development policies implemented by the G7 New Alliance for Food Security and Nutrition—an alliance addressing poverty, hunger, and agriculture in Africa through work with small farmers—by claiming:

The main beneficiaries of this development model are not the smallholder farmers around whose needs these programmes have purportedly been designed, but agri-business corporations best able to position themselves strategically within these value chains and use this leverage to influence international and national policies, notably in land acquisition and seed regulation, to their advantage. (p. 776)

Even though organizations like the members of the G7 New Alliance provide financial aid for food and agriculture, they do so to their benefit while neglecting small businesses and further inducing food insecurity. The influence of neoliberalism on the existence of problems like poverty and food insecurity necessitates cultural forms of resistance to challenge the structural status quo. As mentioned earlier, the field of communication has largely ignored the potential of resistance that works to challenge ideologies, practices, and institutions that constitute neoliberalism (Ganesh et al., 2005). I aim to address this gap by exploring the resistive potential of hip-hop to challenge the dominant meanings of food insecurity as presented by neoliberal discourse.

### *Resistance and Hip-hop*

Resistance to neoliberalism has been addressed using different theoretical (Cornelissen, 2018; Shattuck et al., 2015), discursive (Ganesh et al., 2005; Spicer & Fleming, 2007), and community-grounded (Asen, 2017; Dutta et al., 2013) ideas and approaches. Scholarship shows how the very logics and structures of neoliberalism might effectively be resisted by engaging with the ideology, structures, and logics of neoliberalism. Imperialistic notions of globalization, for instance, can be resisted by coopting its discursive tactics (Ganesh et al., 2005), and pushing back against claims of its inevitability (Spicer & Fleming, 2007).

Some scholars engage in theoretical discussions about neoliberalism (Neilson, 2015), with some describing the need for a more nuanced approach to problems concerning neoliberalism than is common (Cornelissen, 2018). Cornelissen (2018) suggests that a Foucaultian perspective to resistance is too abstract and doesn't engage the issue with enough practicality, while arguing that political theorists such as Wendy Brown take an overly pessimistic view of neoliberal dominance that undermines opportunities for resistance (Cornelissen, 2018). Hence, Cornelissen (2018) calls for a form of critique that "at once [involves] the analysis of our present and the practice of refusing its parameters" (p. 141). Such a perspective conceptualizes power and resistance without undermining the role and agency of the subject.

The agency of those engaging with neoliberal structures is an important component of resistance literature. Researchers have explored ways in which people resist neoliberalism in sectors like education (Brown, 2017; Convertino, Brown, & Wilson, 2017; Kabir & Greenwood, 2017), health (Dillard, Dutta, & Sun, 2014; Dutta & Jamil, 2013), and food & agriculture (Pal & Dutta, 2013; Pal, 2014) as they occur in different cultural contexts.

Brown (2017) conducted participant observations and interviews with students, staff, teachers and others associated with a public school. Despite attempting to resist the school's overemphasis on "[essentializing] students into marketable (and quite problematic) race and class categories" (Brown, 2017, p. 189), teachers reflected on their roles as "neoliberal saviors" helping students market themselves in accordance with a neoliberal and White supremacist context (Brown, 2017). More directly engaging the concept of agency, Dutta & Jamil (2013) address the health experiences of Bangladeshi immigrants by describing how they negotiate their material and symbolic/communicative resources with neoliberal health structures. They do so

through practices like inquiring about and choosing jobs based on health care benefits and consulting other Bangladeshi immigrants who have more experience (Dutta & Jamil, 2013).

Fewer research has conveyed resistance to neoliberalism as it relates to food insecurity. However, community organization and engagement emerge as important ways of resisting neoliberal ideas affecting the issue (Dutta et al., 2013; Jones, 2015). Through a variety of qualitative and community-engaging methods, Dutta et al. (2013) worked with members of marginalized communities in West Bengal, India, and Indiana, USA to find solutions to food insecurity. Taking a CCA approach (Dutta, 2011, 2015), they discovered ways participants disrupt neoliberal logics, structures, and discourses by offering stories and photographs demonstrating their consistent hard work in spite of persisting experiences with food insecurity (Dutta et al., 2013). The narratives of participants in their research challenge the dominant discourse that essentializes individual resilience as the only resistance to food security.

Other approaches to resisting neoliberalism focus on language (Mearns, 2014), digital technology (Cammaerts, 2011), and culture (Lewis, Marine, & Kenney, 2018; Solomon, 2013). Hip-hop is an important form of cultural resistance explored by several scholars (Drury, 2017; Durham, 2009; Love, 2016; Navarro, 2016; Rashid, 2016). This form of artistic expression encompasses four main elements including graffiti, deejaying, breakdancing, and music (rap, R&B, and production) (Söderman & Sernhede, 2016). Hip-hop originated in Kingston, Jamaica before moving to—and further developing in—South Bronx, New York more than 40 years ago and has since been associated with social activism and education (Chang, 2005).

Since its first appearance, the traditional role of hip-hop as a platform for resisting class dominating systems has been affected by commercialization and centralized corporate control (Love, 2016; Myer & Kleck, 2007). As a result, independent and underground hip-hop—as

opposed to more mainstream and commercialized hip-hop—persist as important ways of resisting the hegemony of neoliberalism and its associated ideals by operating outside of the direct control of corporate industries (Love, 2016; Vito, 2015).

Proponents of hip-hop as a cultural and pedagogical tool argue that it offers resistance by furthering a critical worldview inside and outside of the classroom (Shelby-Caffey, Byfield, & Solbrig, 2018; Rashid, 2016), especially pertaining to issues of race and class (Martinez, 1997). Shelby-Caffey et al. (2018) explore ways in which hip-hop in education provides critical narratives on the lived experiences of students. They found that introducing classic hip-hop as literature in the educational context fostered critical thinking among students about structures of inequality, while also encouraging them to share their stories as they relate (Shelby-Caffey et al., 2018). Reviewing similar scholarship reveals how hip-hop acts as a pedagogical tool by providing critical narratives (Love, 2016; Rashid, 2016).

Hip-hop also provides a lens to view and understand culture and the world. This is a position especially taken by scholars in hip-hop feminism, who acknowledge culture as a crucial political site to explore the intersections of class, race, and gender (Boylorn, 2016; Durham, 2009; Durham, Cooper & Morris, 2013). In their work, these scholars not only recognize hip-hop as a cultural sense-making lens, but also acknowledge hip-hop artists as activists and academics who are engaged in intellectual work and knowledge-creation (Durham et al., 2013). As an artist-academic-advocate, I draw from Durham and other hip-hop scholars' ideas and aim to challenge the dominant norms of knowledge creation in Western-academia. I contribute by situating narratives of and knowledge from marginalized people in academic and cultural discourse. Part of this includes producing hip-hop music with narratives of food insecure members of society to raise social consciousness and join their fight for equity and justice.

Overall, I intend to address two major gaps in scholarship pertaining to neoliberalism and hip-hop as they respectively relate to food insecurity. First, scholars have generally addressed neoliberalism from a broad perspective, but few have explored how it impacts food insecurity specifically, leaving a gap in this area of research. Secondly, existing literature primarily describes hip-hop as a critical tool giving expression to people living at the margins, thereby resisting poverty and inequality that punctuate the neoliberal economy. However, there is a need for hip-hop to be used more often as resistance by artists doing research. I aim to address that gap not only to produce critical narratives on the topic of inquiry, but to also situate unheard voices within academic structures. In the following section, I describe how I aim to address these gaps in the literature by applying the theoretical ideas of *solidarity* and the *culture-centered approach (CCA)*.

### *Solidarity and the Culture-centered Approach*

Taking a *culture-centered approach (CCA)* facilitates meanings as they emerge at the intersection of culture, structure, and agency of local communities (Basu, 2010; Dutta, 2011). Culture refers to the interconnected webs of local meanings as they are made, shared, and interpreted in changing contexts in relation to influencing structures (Dutta, 2011). Structures refer to “the institutional frameworks, ways of organizing, rules and roles in mainstream society that constrain and enable access to resources” (Dutta, 2011, pp. 8-9). They also refer to the material and symbolic resources available to people within these organizing frameworks (Dillard et al., 2014; Dutta & Jamil, 2013). Agency refers to how people acknowledge and negotiate these constraining and enabling structures (Dillard et al., 2014; Dutta & Jamil, 2013). In the context of this research, agency will refer to ways in which people interact with cultural meanings

associated with food insecurity while challenging and/or working with its enabling and resistive structures. Understanding meanings at the intersection of culture, structure, and agency of cultural members prioritizes their local knowledge about the issues they face and the subsequent decisions they make.

By using the CCA, the researcher is best able to work in *solidarity* with the participants towards “creating spaces for listening to subaltern voices in ways that matter” (Pal & Dutta, 2013, p. 209). Although participants of this study may not be considered a subaltern group, this study assumes their experiences with food insecurity reflect their marginalization in a neoliberal context (Dutta et al., 2013). Solidarity is grounded in working with those whose culture and existence have been marginalized by structures of inequity and inequality (Dutta & Jamil, 2013; Pal, 2014). The viewpoint is dependent on transparency, accountability, and reflexivity on the researcher's part and their awareness of imbalances of power because of existing structures (Pal, 2014). It is demonstrated through the researcher's commitment to listening, awareness and reflexivity concerning one's position of power, facilitation of the participant's agency, and the discussion of interpretations of meanings with cultural members (Dutta, 2015; Pal & Dutta, 2013). Together, CCA and solidarity facilitate the reimagining of alternative frameworks which resist the erasure of the experiences of those marginalized through hegemonic neoliberal agendas (Dutta, 2015; Harvey, 2007, 2005).

A *culture-centered approach (CCA)* ensures that the researcher not only works with marginalized communities, but also privileges their experiences and voices in creating solutions and transformative spaces (Dutta, 2011). Applying CCA in research effectively acts to facilitate resistance to neoliberalism. This approach has especially been applied concerning issues of health (Dillard et al., 2014; Sastry & Dutta, 2013; Dutta & Jamil, 2013). Using CCA to explore

food insecurity will make room for alternative discourses, knowledge, and solutions regarding the issue which are often presented as common sense by neoliberal logics (Dillard et al., 2014; Pal & Dutta, 2014; Sastry & Dutta, 2013). Active engagement with the locally and culturally specific meanings of food insecurity is integral to discovering solutions (Dutta, 2011; Dutta et al., 2013).

Applying the CCA, as mentioned earlier, Dutta et al. (2013) centered the voices of the research participants. The authors also emphasized that solutions articulated by the participants are crucial to addressing food insecurity, while also facilitating their participation throughout the research process. Similarly addressing issues of food insecurity, this study centers the narrative experiences of guests at Trinity Cafe. In the next chapter, I describe my research methods.



## **CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODS**

This research enquires about ways in which participants make sense of food insecurity, seeks to understand the problem from their perspective, and aims to discover how their experiences and knowledge might offer opportunities for resistance through hip-hop. More specifically, the study explores two research questions:

RQ1: How do those who visit food-providing nonprofit organizations make sense of their experiences with food insecurity?

RQ2: How does their meaning making offer opportunities for resistance through hip-hop?

### *Research Site: Trinity Cafe*

Trinity Cafe is a nonprofit organization which serves meals to persons at two separate locations in Tampa. The cafe provides meals to anyone who visits during its operating hours from 11:30am-12:30pm on weekdays and from 9am-10am on weekends. Although there are no restrictions on who can enter and eat, they mainly cater to persons who are hungry and food insecure. According to their website, their mission is “to restore a sense of dignity to the homeless and hungry while serving a nutritious meal” ([trinitycafe.org](http://trinitycafe.org)). In their description, the organization also acknowledges having a stake in the issue of food insecurity in the Tampa Bay area. Volunteers at each location engage in tasks including hosting tables, preparing plates, serving meals, bussing tables, preparing drinks, rolling silverware, and other activities. Those

who come to Trinity for a meal are addressed as “guests” at the cafe by management and volunteers. Throughout this study, I primarily use this term when referring to the study participants. As a regular volunteer, especially at their second location, I have built rapport with the staff, regular volunteers and guests over time. After approaching the program director about the study, she showed interest in my plans and granted me permission to recruit participants from either of the organization’s locations.

### *Data Collection*

I conducted semi-structured interviews with 8 guests at Trinity Cafe from July to October 2018 with IRB approval. To recruit participants, flyers were posted inside both Trinity Cafe locations, introducing the study and displaying my contact information. Those who contacted me and showed interest in the study were provided all the study information. After agreeing to participate in the study, we set up interviews at mutually decided locations, primarily at places at their convenience. After confirming the first few interviews, I employed a snowball sampling technique to discover other potential recruits. Snowball sampling involves obtaining a study sample through referrals made by agreeing participants and is generally used to discuss potentially sensitive topics (Lindlof & Taylor, 2019). In this technique, the sampling begins when the researcher locates someone in the participant community who is willing to guide him or her to potential new interviewees. Some interviewees in the second group may then help the researcher identify further research participants.

Each interview was scheduled to last approximately 30 minutes to an hour, and the average interview time was 32 minutes. All interviews occurred face-to-face, though each participant had the option of requesting the interview be done over the phone instead. Interviews

were recorded with the consent of the participants. Semi-structured interviews aimed to offer opportunities for participants to speak about whatever they felt was important concerning the topic and influence the directional flow of conversation. Although they represent key areas I hope to address, the questions (see Appendix A) were designed to act more as a guide than strict protocol. All interviews were recorded and transcribed prior to the coding and analysis processes.

### *Coding and Data Analysis*

After transcribing the interviews, I analyzed the data using a grounded theory approach (Lindlof & Taylor, 2019). The transcripts were closely read several times to become familiar with the data. The data was then coded in 3 stages: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding (see Appendix B). This was done keeping the research questions in mind. In the open coding stage, the data was reviewed while labeling sections of the data and placing them in loose categories. During the axial coding stage, the data was reviewed again while making connections and merging the previously assigned labels into specific categories. For instance, the open codes “waste,” “malpractice,” and “deception” were all placed into the axial code “Expressing disapproval and dissatisfaction with corporate and government practices.” Selective coding was the final stage in the coding process. At this stage, the data was reviewed while placing the axial codes into larger themes connecting the data. The emerging selective codes were reviewed and analyzed in relation to the research questions and existing literature. The themes which emerged were also used in the creation process for the hip-hop album. This is described in more detail in the next section.

## *Hip-hop*

Giving voice to resistance against structures of oppression, hip-hop is (and has been) especially integral to African-American culture when addressing issues of racial discrimination (Martinez, 1997; Nielson, 2012; Söderman & Sernhede, 2016). Hip-hop is also used to speak to various other issues experienced by African-Americans (Love, 2016) and other cultural groups in the United States (Drury, 2017; Navarro, 2016) and in other countries (Menon, 2013; Saucier & Silva, 2014). The hip-hop album, produced as part of this thesis, primarily aims to discursively offer resistance against dominant meanings and structures of food insecurity primarily in the United States.

Incorporating the narratives of the participants into the creation of a hip-hop album adds an important layer of dynamism to the research process and the conveying of their stories. As a form of arts-based research (Barone & Eisner, 2011) hip-hop not only offers the opportunity to connect the participants' narratives with those who have had similar experiences (Shelby-Caffey et al., 2018), but it also offers the opportunity for inexperienced listeners to revisit and critically engage their assumptions and worldview (Barone & Eisner, 2011; Rashid, 2016). In sum, hip-hop is a cultural expression which provides a widespread communicative space for individuals to vocalize and engender group solidarity against structures of oppression and alienation. This research offers a co-constructed hip-hop album inspired by people facing food insecurity in the neoliberal economy.

The album features 6 tracks closely related to and inspired by the themes from the interview data. Nearing the end of the interview, participants were reminded about the album component of the project and asked to confirm whether they would like their story to be featured on the album (see Appendix A). They were also directly asked which aspects of their story they

most wanted to be featured in the album. Member-checks were also an integral part of the study (Lindlof & Taylor, 2019), including during album-creation, to help scrutinize the accuracy of the study findings, although contacting some participants proved to be difficult. I discuss this in more detail in chapter 5. Instrumentals for the songs were obtained from music producers and the songs were recorded in studios containing professional recording equipment. All necessary costs were privately funded, and the completed work will be made available on nonprofit music streaming platforms.

### *Reflexivity*

Throughout the study process, I aim to be reflexive in keeping with the values of the CCA and solidarity (Basu, 2010; Dutta, 2011, 2015; Pal, 2014; Pal & Dutta, 2013). Reflexive researchers acknowledge imbalances of power permeating our discursive spaces, interrogate their positions of power as academics, question how it affects the research process, and work to mitigate these imbalances (Dutta, 2015; Pal & Dutta, 2013). As previously noted, I kept a personal interview guide during interviews to help facilitate the conversation and cover decidedly-key topic areas. However, I attempted to facilitate the agency of the participants as best as possible by allowing their responses to influence the flow of the conversation as best as possible and by assuring them that there were no “wrong” answers. The goal was to emphasize listening to their experiences while facilitating their voices as the ones experiencing structural marginalization (Dutta, 2015; Pal, 2014; Pal & Dutta, 2013). In other words, they were acknowledged as the persons with expertise on the topic.

As also previously mentioned, discussing interpretations or conducting “member-checks” with the cultural members is important to reviewing the accuracy of the meanings which emerge

from the analysis (Dutta, 2015; Pal & Dutta, 2013; Lindlof & Taylor, 2019). This is crucial to co-constructing meanings with persons at the margins. However, the study involves working with persons living in precarious circumstances, so reconnecting with some guests proved to be a challenge, and (as previously noted) this is discussed in more detail in chapter 5. Throughout the study, I also kept a reflexive journal to account for these issues describing my positionality as researcher. These journal entries aimed to locate and acknowledge my role as researcher, while recording my reactions, thoughts, and feelings for the duration of the process (Basu, 2010; Lindlof & Taylor, 2019). These journal entries were analyzed in juxtaposition with the rest of the data.

## **CHAPTER FOUR:**

### **ANALYSIS – EMERGING THEMES**

#### *Questioning Organizations*

One of the ways the guests of Trinity Cafe make sense of food insecurity is by questioning, critiquing, and scrutinizing stakeholder organizations. Conveying their thoughts and experiences, they address the practices and behaviors of major corporations in the food sector. Also bringing the government and nonprofits into the conversation, they discuss how those organizations engage the issue. Importantly, they challenge dominant cultural meanings surrounding food and food insecurity; expressing their skepticism and dissatisfaction while offering a different perspective.

When describing how he deals with food insecurity, Charles expresses gratitude for corporations like McDonald's that offer meals from as low as 99 cents. He sees them as valuable options for himself and others earning in low-income brackets. Other guests acknowledge the convenience of options like 99 cents meals, but they also question its nutritional value. Despite providing options for as low as 99 cents, they believe corporations like McDonald's compromise the quality of their meals at the expense of customer health and nutrition. For instance, referring to their use of chemicals and GMOs in their products, Nathan says that the "poison" being fed by major corporations is a major problem. To explain the *cost* of their health compromises, he offers an analogy: "that's like we're building a building and you say, "well, we're not gonna put this beam in, because it's gonna take too long." But guess what? Now you have just compromised the

integrity of the whole structure.” Such compromises are common in neoliberal systems which prioritize (often short-term) profit over quality and consumer health (Albritton, 2009; Elmes, 2018). In agreement with Mike, Michael Elmes (2016) argues that businesses in the US food industry regularly compromise consumer health by limiting healthy food options and by creating “rhetorical ambiguity and uncertainty” (p. 1057) about their food’s nutrition. Emphasizing the interconnected nature of humanity, Mike further critiques major food corporations by saying, “We are all on this planet together, nah mean? If I'm selling a product that's killing you, it's gonna eventually hurt me in the long-run.” Although the monetary cost of “value” meals provides affordable options for food insecure persons, the meals incur a health cost that may not be worth the risk.

Guests continued to discuss corporate behaviors in the US by considering how much food they waste and suggesting necessary changes. Addressing “very wasteful companies that throw away lots and lots of food,” Nathan says they must be confronted. He acknowledges that health laws and guidelines prevent food from being sold under certain conditions. However, he and others believe a lot of this food can be donated and re-allocated well before it becomes unsafe to consume. To ensure this happens, some call for more people to push back against food waste at a national level by petitioning the government. Crystal believes we should pressure more companies to connect with “charities and nonprofit organizations” and help reduce the problem of food waste in the United States. She says the US should pass more laws and implement more taxes requiring companies to re-allocate food and reduce waste. In 2010, the USDA estimated food waste in the US as between 30-40 percent of the food supply or about \$161 billion dollars in food a year. Considering this staggering amount, the guests consider corporate waste a driving force of food insecurity (Warshawsky, 2016).



After denouncing how much is wasted at food warehouses, Stephen wishes more nonprofits received food for redistribution from corporations like Feeding America. Specifically, he talks a lot about churches throughout his interview, challenging more of them to be involved. As a member of a Christian church, I am moved by the distinction he makes between the large number of churches he encounters and the small number of them that offers him support. In the moment of our conversation, however, I fail to acknowledge myself as someone who hasn't often considered how we serve "homeless" and "hungry" persons at my church. Reflecting later through poetry, I respond to an imagined question from Stephen about whether I am member of any church in the Tampa Bay area. My imagined response reads:

I am. And I am happy to be a part of my church body,  
But pardon me, I'm apart from your critique,  
Doing service on my own, the only onus I carry,  
Hardly concerned enough to consider the state of my church's doors,  
Are they open? I'm not sure.

\*Pause\*

But surely,  
Being mindful enough to check is worth the risk of exposing my feigned ignorance  
disguised as contentment.  
Or satisfaction.

I question my contentment with doing service work independently. This also reveals my contentment being ignorant about the service (or lack thereof) done through my church community. It reveals my comfort with maintaining distance from nonprofit organizational bodies, like churches, who Stephen recognizes can "do more." He is in agreement with other

guests who believe that substantial connections between organizations in the corporate and nonprofit sectors would help alleviate food insecurity. After commending the work of nonprofit organizations, Laura admits wishing they were more interconnected, as this would make finding support for various life challenges easier.

Guests also challenge dominant narratives and perspectives presenting food as a marketable and conditional commodity. From early in our conversation, Charles expresses his knowledge and interest in principles of business and suggests I study it myself in the future. When addressing some of his main challenges, he raises several concerns about the motives of corporations and nonprofits invested in the food industry. Highlighting what he calls “the uncertainty,” he is wary of:

Those that do not have a true desire, a true gain, or [are not] making a true decision about things. Some people have things for the purpose of [something], and it might be for accreditation, it might be for monies, it might be for their brand-new car, or maybe a pair of socks.

Charles is troubled that the connections made between organizations in the corporate and nonprofit sectors might be unevenly focused on their personal gain. He claims these organizations, despite what they claim, make decisions that aren’t “truly for the makings or the decisions of that protection of humanitarian nutrition or providing a necessary means for humanity.” Asserting that business surrounding food should necessarily be philanthropic, he believes this work should be done with invested interests in benefitting humanity.

Charles and others believe healthy food should be easily available and accessible to everyone, along with other necessities like hygiene products, clothing, and water. In other words, nutritious food should be a humanitarian right of life to all. Instead, in the free-market and

neoliberal society of the US, healthy food is more likely a commodity of privilege for some and a reminder of the marginalization of others (Springer, 2012, p. 137). I think about how I benefit from this privilege. During our conversation, Nathan justifiably identifies me as a middle-class man who has access to “higher learning,” and is therefore less likely than him to be concerned about securing my next meal. Providing an example of how he’s seen food privileged, he says,

I see a guy [and he says], "oh you shouldn't be eating this donut" and I'm just thinking ... there's like different levels. It's like you got people that are like, they just need a meal so they don't die. You know that it don't matter if it's a donut or a piece of pizza, it don't matter how many calories in it. Because it's going to keep them alive from today to tomorrow. I like to say it'll make a turd, you know. So it's like, then you got people that just ... they're good and they got so much food, they're like, "and I'm gonna try a diet. I ate too many donuts last month, so I gained five pounds, so now I gotta lose weight this month, so Ima eat no bread."

As a man experiencing both homelessness and food insecurity, Nathan draws an important comparison between cultural meanings of food for persons in “different levels” of socioeconomic classes. He resists the narrow and privileged perspectives of persons who accuse those eating innutritious food—as a means of survival—of making the wrong decisions. Such persons assume a neoliberal and meritocratic stance that their wellbeing solely exists at the mercy of their individual decisions. This often ignores the absence of quality food for poor persons “in spite of [their] hard work and labor” (Dutta et al., 2013, p. 163). Grounded in class-related inequalities, these perpetuated meanings surrounding food and food insecurity undermine class-induced differences in experiencing what is a universal necessity.

While communicating food as a humanitarian right, participants call for stable and permanent organizational structures to make food available to everyone. Charles says,

If we gonna actually have to protect people with nutrition, then let's do it and let's do it with foundation. You know, something like the police department or fire department, it's gonna be here forever. So why can't you be the same way? And why can't these programs be the same?

Likening food-providing organizations to integral social institutions like the police and fire department, he believes food security should be something that people always have. Food should always be available and accessible to all people. Acknowledging that this is currently not the case in the US, Nathan suggests this is because powerful organizations, in search of profit, prefer to maintain power and control over marginalized people by limiting their access to necessities. Convinced that “there’s enough food for everybody,” he says,

[It’s for] money, and really, it’s power. A person will make another person dependent upon them, that way they cannot succeed and go on with their life being self-sufficient. Because once that person becomes self-sufficient then the person who was holding that other person down will lose the power.

In agreement with Nathan, Mike believes that accessing necessities like healthy food is limited to ensure major corporations benefit from consumer dependence. The concentration of power in large corporations and agribusinesses especially affects low-income persons and families when their access to food—and influence over what is produced—is limited (Brooks, 2016; Elmes, 2018). By doing so, major corporations and stakeholders in the food industry secure profit at the expense of—especially poor—consumers.

Nathan, Mike, Charles, Laura, and others express distrust and dissatisfaction with profit-prioritizing corporations and governmental organizations, associating their insensitivity and negligence with their struggles with food insecurity. Closely related to these ideas, they also share nuanced ideas about liability for their past, present, and future experiences. To discuss this, I explore their knowledge about *responsibility* and *response-ability*.

### *Responsibility and Response-ability*

The guests at Trinity Cafe explore their past and present experiences and describe how they relate. They reveal who and/or what they believe is liable for crucial events and experiences—*responsibility*—while also suggesting who is and should be obligated to respond accordingly—*response-ability*. During our conversations, the guests reveal complex relations between structural and individual influences on food insecurity in their lives.

As noted in the previous section, corporate and civil insensitivity, government negligence, and public perception are important considerations by the guests. To these realities, they attribute some of their main struggles. While seeing their decisions as largely influenced by structural circumstances, guests also acknowledge the importance of individual agency throughout. Along with food insecurity, Nathan experiences homelessness, malnutrition, mental illness, and addictions to caffeine and cigarettes. Explaining that these issues all relate, Nathan uses his addiction to caffeine as an example:

It pretty much all comes down to food. I mean, I didn't eat right last week, I didn't sleep right the last week. So how am I going to get through the day? Caffeine. And all the caffeine does is burn up all the nutrients I got anyways, even quicker.

Nathan frames his addiction to caffeine as an unfavorable response to homelessness and food insecurity. Despite recognizing that “it’s not very productive in the long run,” caffeine helps him

cope. Recognizing that caffeine isn't a sustainable option, he hopes to implement a solution he really wants: stockpiling seeds and self-sufficient farming. However, securing a stable means to do so remains a problem.

During our conversation, Charles strongly emphasizes structural influences on his experiences with food insecurity, homelessness, and earning money in a low-income bracket. Also drawing from his knowledge of business, he predicted that he and others would eventually have limited access to necessities like food. Charles believes this is largely because of a lack of humanitarian motives within organizations, a lack of sustainable connections between organizations, and a lack of government intervention in the food industry. Mike's concern with the current state existence of food includes the quality of it. Unperplexed by why food insecurity exists, Mike and others illustrate how cultural meanings, influencing structures, and their individual agency interplay to inform their experiences (Dutta, 2008).

Mike is frustrated that healthy food options are more expensive and less accessible than their cheaper and less nutritious counterparts. Having limited options is, in no way, coincidental to him as he asserts that mega-corporations intentionally engender people's cultural reliance on their products. He believes corporations like McDonald's should be held accountable for narrowing food options and luring consumers to make unhealthy decisions. Referring to these actions as "guerilla tactics," he says major food corporations obtain profit by ensuring people are dependent on them for cheap and unhealthy food. Amidst this culture of fast food dependence, Mike admittedly indulged in unhealthy eating habits and became a "sugar-freak," eating sandwich bags full of sugar to satisfy his cravings. Now, he distinguishes his determination to pursue more health-conscious food options as one of his greatest challenges, but believes it is an ongoing and necessary process. Terming it "deprogramming," he encourages everyone to do the

same and resist the appeal of cheap and convenient fast foods for the sake of their present and future livelihood. In sum, Mike claims that the cultural and structural power and impact of US fast food corporations reveal their *responsibility* for the quality of food he chooses (Freeman, 2007; Otero, Gürcan, Pechlaner, & Liberman, 2018). Because of this, Mike appeals for cultural change involving both community and individual resistance; he believes we must demonstrate our *response-ability*. He wants to see more community gardens—shared plots of land producing fruits, vegetables, and other healthy foods for the community—implemented and encourages more people to choose healthier foods instead of “fast” and more convenient options.

A few guests propose that the will and decision of the individual are most important when addressing food insecurity. For instance, Jason thinks obtaining enough food is mainly about prioritizing one’s decisions and resources. He believes that because of nonprofits like Trinity Cafe and others in the Tampa Bay area, there are plenty of options available for anyone who needs food. Hearing Jason and others’ emphases on individual responsibility, I respond internally with resistance and attempt to reflexively account for this in my journal. I reflect that, although they answer my call for persons experiencing food insecurity, I feel dissatisfied when I hear their perspectives seemingly align with a worldview I’ve come to resist: neoliberalism. I struggle against framing their responses as “wrong,” while implementing a study that seeks to prioritize their knowledge and justify their lived experiences as important. Further, this uncovers the importance of questioning my views of what neoliberalism is and how it operates. What monolithic ideas about neoliberalism have I entered this study with? How might they have impacted my reading of what appears to be a pro-neoliberal stance? I attempt to lay bare my biases while also attempting to reveal the guests’ knowledge and ideas in their provided contexts. However, although I prioritize their expertise, I wonder how my particular perspective of

neoliberalism might depart from theirs. I wonder how my particular theoretical anti-neoliberal orientation likely affects the results that emerge.

While some of them place individual responsibilities on themselves and others, the guests also reveal other factors influencing how they experience food insecurity. In doing so, they reveal how key events significantly influence(d) their reality. Since getting injured on the job, Stephen has a running lawsuit against his former employers. His injury led to him being unemployed—and eventually homeless—for about a year and a half. He never imagined he'd be homeless, but his circumstances left him with few other options. Encouraging us to avoid assigning individual blame, he says:

Everybody that's in a homeless situation ... or may not have enough to eat, a lot of those people, something happened to them to put them in that position. Everybody don't choose to just not ... to be homeless or choose not to do anything. Some people be forced in these situations.

Stephen asserts that although he experiences homelessness and food insecurity, this is not because he's—directly or indirectly—chosen this path. Rather, injury and imposed circumstances by his former employers limited his options. Still, as a man who had previously been “working all his life,” Stephen encourages others to learn skills and acquire work to avoid depending on nonprofits for food and other necessities. However, his life and knowledge also demonstrate that being a skilled worker doesn't guarantee one will avoid experiencing food insecurity and/or homelessness. As he puts it, “some people be forced in these situations” even after acquiring the *necessary* skills to avoid them.

Crystal came to Florida from Georgia to “start over” after coming out of an 11-year, on and off, abusive relationship. She says she “lost everything,” including custody of her kids after



her partner was deemed by the judge as having the “better job.” Despite being subjected to domestic violence, Crystal places the responsibility for her current situation on herself.

But I chose this [pause, crying]. I probably still can't forgive myself, you know. That's probably why it still brings tears to my eyes, because I don't think I can forgive myself for letting my kids go behind a man and relationship.

Crystal believes she was wrong for “letting it go on” longer than she should have. Claiming her past is now “haunting” her as she moves forward, she expresses great regret over losing her kids and accepts blame for the challenges she subsequently faces. However, although she claims the responsibility for what she now experiences, Crystal also acknowledges that her partner’s abuse drove her to exhaustion; to a point where she felt the best option was to leave. Recalling an environment where she was being “verbally, physically, mentally, just exhausted,” she says, “it actually led me to say forget him to actually get out this relationship, I don't care if I starve or whatever to just start over, so that's where I'm at now.” The apparent tensions in Crystal’s account reveal that, although she made her own choices, her actions and resulting experiences with food insecurity were largely influenced by circumstances of domestic violence (Lentz, 2017; Moraes et al., 2016; Ricks et al. 2016). While her narrative provides a complex view of *responsibility* that situates her choices within the context of domestic violence, it also reveals her *response-ability* through her consciousness of the violence she experienced and her decision to leave.

Discussing how past and present influences affect their realities, the guests consider structural forces like corporate oppression and domestic violence while also considering their individual actions. They demonstrate how they make sense of tensions of *responsibility* and *response-ability*. These tensions help reveal how they make sense of their experiences with food

insecurity. Also reflecting their agency, the guests create meanings of *positivity*, *purpose*, and *resilience* from their experiences, as we see next.

### *Active Optimism: Resilience, Positivity & Purpose Amidst Uncertainty*

When dealing with food insecurity, sudden changes, and overall uncertainty, the guests of Trinity Cafe reflect positive and/or purposeful perspectives of their lives. They reconcile their past and present experiences as valuable, despite the undesirability and adversity of their circumstances. Additionally, guests express hope in their future while simultaneously wrestling feelings of hopelessness amidst great difficulty. I call this “active optimism,” as the guests of Trinity Cafe make sense of their lives by taking a promising view of very adverse circumstances. By being actively optimistic, they demonstrate a type of resilience that is aware of socio-economic and political realities.

Great uncertainty often underscores the lives of persons living with food insecurity (Brooks, 2016; O’Connor et al., 2016). When making sense of this, the guests of Trinity Cafe point to drastic changes in the past as main catalysts for their present experiences. Crystal references a previous phase of her life that was “excellent” before trying to reconcile it with her current struggle with food insecurity. In between her “excellent life” and her current life are several confrontations with domestic abuse. She refers to her experiences in an abusive relationship as leading her to where she is now saying, “some days I don't know what I'm gonna eat, and I don't know what I'm gonna do, or how I'm gonna make it.” She is happy for places like Trinity Cafe, but admits she still struggles to find food. Stephen also points to drastic change in his context when making sense of his current situation.

Stephen references going from working and having a home to being unemployed and homeless when reflecting. He was eventually terminated after getting injured on the job and is

currently suing his former employers. However, he remains unemployed and homeless at the moment. Thinking about now having to adapt to new circumstances he says, “when you used to being one way all your life and then you have to get adjusted to... being homeless! You know, it's hard. It's hard.” Stephen used to work for the city of Tampa for more than 10 years doing work which included “removing homeless people from their camps,” he says. Looking back, he never imagined he would ever be homeless himself. Like Crystal, Stephen defines his experiences with food insecurity and overall uncertainty by contrasting past and present realities, and by emphasizing points of major change.

In a seemingly philosophical way, they also discuss the uncertainty of life in a broader and more general sense. They present uncertainty as a force with overarching influence on their lives. For instance, Crystal says that in life, “you really can't make a plan, because tomorrow's not promised, you know.” Life’s uncertainty is described as a current and recurring fixture of their lives and experiences that becomes evident throughout daily actions. Referring to such precariousness, Stephen says, “you just have to make it from one day to the next one, but this day might be different, tomorrow might be totally opposite. . . But that's how you just build on it day to day.” Despite describing uncertainty as a resulting fixture in their lives, the guests resist having an overall pessimistic view of their lives. Amidst unsolicited adversity, they remain optimistically resolute.

Laura reflects on the times she was “going through hardship,” including when her job and home incurred damage from hurricane Irma. She champions the fact that, although there were times when she felt she was “down in a fricking hole,” she would always get back out of it. Laura and others assert that resilience is important when dealing with food insecurity and the uncertainty of their lives. While connecting his experiences to those of others, Stephen says,

It's everybody could have a little hope, because like I said, I never knew this was gonna happen to me, so now I have to find myself even depend on God or do the things I know. When you get in positions like this, it don't work, because it ain't enough people that's gonna reach out to you, and every day is different. I meet a good guy today, and tomorrow I'll meet somebody that'll tear me down. You know what I'm saying? Like I say, you gotta be strong, if you don't know God, it's rough. It's rough. And a lot of time we don't put ourself in that position. It just happens.

Claiming that he and others must “be strong,” Stephen suggests that resilience is necessary when living in contexts of high uncertainty and unpredictability. Scholarship suggests that such resilience is born out of neoliberal contexts where people are led to accept the inevitability of their adversity, leaving socio-economic and political forces unquestioned and unchallenged (Joseph, 2013; Kaufmann, 2013; Mckeown & Glenn, 2018; O’Connor et al., 2016). However, the guests demonstrate how they engage with resilience while simultaneously resisting neoliberal norms and calling for change.

The guests describe their acts of resilience in tandem with acts of resistance to the neoliberal norm. They are aware that their resilience is necessary because of the structural conditions imposed by powerful organizations in the country. Nathan goes to food-providing organizations like Trinity Cafe for meals and sometimes drinks coffee to deal with food insecurity and take his mind off his hunger. However, he recognizes that such should never be the case considering how much food is regularly wasted by corporations in the United States (USDA, 2010; Warshawsky, 2016). They also acknowledge how this reflects neoliberal value systems of the country which define food as a commodity instead of a human right (Albritton, 2009; Elmes, 2018) and call for a shift in organizational and corporate motives. Mike asserts that

ideas surrounding community gardens should be normalized. At the same time, he survives by eating at nonprofit organizations providing healthy food, buying healthy meals himself, and avoiding healthier yet more easily accessible foods. Although they necessarily adopt the neoliberal consequence of resilience to survive, the guests remain very aware of and, hence, resistive to socio-economic and political drivers of their experiences. Necessarily, they must adapt in the face of neoliberalism, which enhances their skills of resilience.

In her article entitled, “Resilience,” Buzzanell (2010) theorizes one of the communicative processes involved in resilience as a type of emotion work where people acknowledge their hardship, but “[background] negative feelings and [focus] on the positive” (p. 9). The guests of Trinity Cafe do express *positive* outlooks on their circumstances by assigning value to their experiences and being hopeful of their future. However, they do so in paradoxical ways alongside *negative* outlooks on their circumstances of food insecurity. After contrasting his life before and after becoming homeless and food insecure, Stephen says he’s “not happy this happened.” However, he follows this statement by saying he’s still “glad that it did,” because he is now wiser and more empathetic from his experiences. In another instance, Crystal emotionally recalls her transition from life in an abusive relationship to life after distancing herself from her partner and says—in comparison—she doesn’t want to be where she is right now. However, she assigns value to her experiences by thanking God for them and claiming she “[wouldn’t] know where [she’d] be” without them. Through apparent contradictions, the guests reveal a struggle to assign meaning to and through their experiences. With this, they demonstrate a battle for a positive outlook amidst daily uncertainty that seemingly exists at the forefront of their lives and minds.

The close relationship between “negative” and “positive” feelings and experiences is best revealed in the guests’ acknowledgement of value in their lives regardless of what they’ve faced. Amidst his apparent ambivalent statements about being homeless, Stephen attributes value to the fact he can use his knowledge to help others. He says, “because I've experienced being hungry, I can not only tell somebody that's been in my position, I can bring them. And that's what it's all about.” Similarly, Crystal recognizes a call to “ministry” and helping people who are in similar situations as hers.

I tell people, "look, if I look like what I've been through, I'd be unidentifiable. I mean, I don't know where I get this strength from or the courage or just the courageousness and the spontaneousness, you know, I don't know where I get it from, but I know what I was put here for. And I have to... it's like I have to uplift people. I have to really uplift. I feel like I'm here just to uplift people and even though I don't have anything right now ... I'd be saying [to myself] a lot of times [that] people could kiss my behind and I ain't gonna do this and that, but [at the end of the day] I'm still helping people and I don't have nothing.

The guests assert altruistic purposes despite being in very difficult situations themselves. Based on their sense-making, the “negative” feelings about what they experience don’t appear to remain backgrounded (Buzzanell, 2010). While addressing the negativity of their situations, they simultaneously express positive thoughts about their experiences, presenting a meaning making that is complex and ambivalent. The positives and negatives about their experiences both appear to operate in the foreground of their lives.

The complexity of what creates and informs food insecurity is not lost with the interviewed guests of Trinity Cafe. They challenge powerful organizations and dominant

neoliberal thoughts, while acknowledging their own capabilities within and against it. They unpack tensions concerning the undesirability of their experiences while finding individual and collective value within them. Their knowledge reveals important meanings and implications on the topic that we should consider.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### *Making Sense of Food Insecurity*

*Or at least attempt to make connections / That will stand the test of time, remain effective  
Serving what we need regardless of our earned amounts / But on the grounds of wealth,  
we've been rejected (from “Skeptical,” see Appendix C)*

The emerging knowledge from the guests of Trinity Cafe illuminate how they make sense of food insecurity. Their expressed meanings and definitions of food insecurity demonstrate needs for: restructuring our socio-economic conditions, nonprofits and policy-makers taking an intersectional approach to solutions, and theoretically rethinking “resilience.”

During interviews—grounded in a culture-centered approach—guests were encouraged to provide their own meanings and definitions of food insecurity as a springboard for our discussions. I would only offer a definition if participants expressed a desire for one. Moments of tension arose from that decision, as I wondered at times whether guests were *correctly* assigning meaning to the issue, or whether they had misunderstood the topic. Although I planned to ask about intersecting topics later in the conversation, guests often raised different issues without being prompted to do so. In a journal entry after one of my first few interviews, I express discomfort over responses I initially perceived as digressions from the topic:

This was difficult to address, because I intentionally inform participants that I would be comfortable allowing the conversation to flow as they lead, but I imagined it would still



remain “on topic” with food insecurity for the most part. However, this may very well contradict my application of reflexivity to value their agency, and responses as having no “right or wrong” answers. Is this cause for re-evaluation of my techniques, questions and motives?

I later reflected that my view of these “digressions” only reveal how I privilege monolithic and stable definitions of issues—including food insecurity. The guests suggest that their experiences with food insecurity cannot be adequately understood and addressed without considering how domestic violence, family neglect, the justice system, poverty, homelessness, unemployment, addiction, cultural oppression, natural disaster, and other issues they raised are intertwined. Although they often spoke specifically concerning food, the multiplicity of other problems they raised were not only discussed *alongside* food insecurity, but described as existing *within* the same context. The problems they face are not separate entities, but instead coexist and influence one another, so they should be considered together. We recommend more collaborations between nonprofits engaged in different issues to acknowledge the intersectionality of these problems and formulate collective solutions.

An important limitation to this study is that it did not inquire about demographic information. Despite facilitating their voice concerning food insecurity, I am implicated in the structures already rendering them invisible, because I do not reveal salient characteristics of their identity. Inadvertently, I may be homogenizing the guests into the general identity of “food insecure person” by not allowing more explicit connections between food insecurity and issues like race (Freeman, 2007) and gender (Lentz, 2018; Ricks et al. 2016) to be explored. However, what emerged from this study still suggest that nonprofit organizations invested in food insecurity should be careful not to simplify the issue by taking universal approaches to the

problem. Given the diversity of experiences defining food insecurity, context-specific solutions are crucial.

The very cultural meanings associated with food should be resisted along with the operations of powerful organizations in the industry. Currently, food exists as a commodifiable commodity in the United States in the power and at the discretion of major corporations. The guests believe that food is a human right for everyone and should primarily be understood as such. Food has rhetorically been presented as a human right by influential global organizations like the United Nations, but has failed to materialize as such, especially in the United States (Albritton, 2009; Elmes, 2018). The guests see this denial of their human rights as spearheaded by powerful corporations in the food industry. Referring to these corporations, Mike says,

“We are being led like cattle. Because we depend on them for everything. And, if it's not coming from them, we can't get it or grow it ourselves...this is what causes food insecurity. This is what causes people to go hungry in America, which should not be happening...”

Additionally, they recognize that unhealthier—often fast foods—are more affordable, more readily accessible, and more likely to be their main source of food than their healthier counterparts. Elmes (2018) attributes this problem to the “industrial food system” consisting of “a highly concentrated group of food-related corporations that control agricultural inputs, food processing, and food retailing along the food supply chain” (p. 1052). Making market decisions for short-term profit, these agribusinesses have limited poor people’s access to healthy foods through inflated costs and isolating poorer urban areas from supermarkets (Freeman, 2007; Otero et al., 2018). In line with a view of food as a human right instead of a commodity, we should

question and challenge the power in the hands of corporations who determine our access to healthy food.

Throughout our conversations the guests foreground the importance of the collective and the idea of community. Grounded in this perspective, they oppose neoliberal thought that situates food insecurity in the realm of the individual and personal responsibility. Their narratives promote mutual understanding among people and constructing a collective “we” towards survival and resistance. Crystal emphasizes the importance of connecting and sharing knowledge and resources with others to help navigate their difficulties. Likewise, Stephen discusses his ability to help mobilize and support others in similar circumstances. Describing how he can help people eat and survive, Stephen says, “I can not only tell somebody that’s been in my position, I can bring them [to where they need to be].” They suggest attending to the inequitable structures through relationships among people looking out for each other. This runs contrary to neoliberalism, which functions by “weakening relationships among people and devaluing coordinated action” (Asen, 2016, p. 331).

The guests’ frustrations with corporations also specifically include the large amounts of food they waste (Warshawsky, 2016), which reflects a national-level problem in the United States (USDA, 2010). Their irresponsible disposal of food is an overt denial of our humanity. Waste and other capitalist and profit-centered practices are damaging to the overall economy, harmful to the physical environment, and ultimately unsustainable (Elmes, 2018; Jacobs, 2017). Once owners and power-players of major corporations neglect poor persons and the environment for (usually short-term) profit, they ultimately affect everyone, including themselves.

Opposing the corporate commodification of food and its ensuing marginalization of working-class and poor persons, the guests call for a restructuring of capitalist food systems.

Their identification with the importance of the collective and association of food with human life is accompanied by a desire for enduring organizational structures that are committed to an economy of care. Echoing their desire for an expanded definition of food insecurity, they not only want accessible and permanent structures providing healthy and affordable food, but also structures ensuring water, hygiene products, clothing, and other necessities. Nonprofits specializing in poverty-related issues should take this into consideration, as this study suggests more stable connections between unique organizations are needed to provide multiple products and services as needed. However, we must still recognize that the conditions for such needs are created by a neoliberal economy (Feldman et al., 2017; Harvey, 2007). If food (and other necessities) are to be rhetorized as our human right, then material structures must be put in place to ensure healthy food is available to all humanity. As Charles puts it, “if we gonna actually have to protect people with nutrition, then let's do it, and let's do it with foundation.” We recommend government intervention in the food industry by passing and enforcing laws deterring corporations from wasting food and requiring they redistribute it instead. This might better reflect food as a human right. This also suggests envisioning a form of social democracy where basic necessities such as food are treated as a fundamental human right.

This study also contributes to literature on resilience, both concerning its communicative processes (Bottrell, 2009; Buzzanell, 2010) and its functions in the context of a neoliberal state (O'Connor et al., 2016; Joseph, 2013; Kaufmann, 2013; Mckeown & Glenn, 2018). The guests of Trinity acknowledge how issues like homelessness, limited food-access, and domestic abuse necessitate their resilience. Simultaneously, they construct positives outlooks from their past, within the present, and towards their future. By juxtaposing these contradictory thoughts and feelings, they don't subdue the “negativity” of their circumstances (Buzzanell, 2010), but allow

them to coexist with more constructive and optimistic perspectives instead. Also concerning its communicative and political function, this study suggests we should be reluctant to dismiss *resilience* as useless to those experiencing the brunt of neoliberal violence.

This research agrees with scholarship suggesting the widespread need for “resilience” is born out of neoliberal normalization of structural limitations inducing poverty (Joseph, 2013; McKeown & Glenn, 2018). Addressing resilience as a neoliberal creation and function, O’Connor et al. (2016) claim that it “aims only to equip people and populations with capacities to live with the instabilities of a neoliberal food system without questioning, destabilizing, or resisting the very sources of socio-economic and political instability” (p. 4). However, although the guests describe resilience as necessary, they also explicitly question and resist the structures informing their insecurity. This is evident in their critiques of the insensitivities of corporations, their dissatisfaction with the ensuing material and symbolic conditions, and their resistance to the very meanings of food and poverty disseminated to and by the public. They also emphasize the importance of government intervention on the “freedoms” of capitalist trade. Their appreciation of resilience, therefore, is not accompanied by contentment with the operations of neoliberal structures. Despite its constraining function in a neoliberal state, resilience is also used by guests of Trinity to enable the agency and survival of themselves and others (Dillard et al., 2014; Dutta, 2011; Dutta & Jamil, 2013). Although it is crucial that academic and intellectual work illuminates how resilience reinforces neoliberalism, future research should explore how resilience might be used in ways which also facilitate resistance without undermining its history.

*“Margins” – Making and Sharing Meaning Through Hip-hop*

*Why am I so late to find the fire / to bring to light the light that shines in them and share it? / They don't need me but, if I could listen / and help them create the spaces for hearing them, Lord lead me* (from “Journey (Intro),” see Appendix C)

Under my rap alias, Legacy, I wrote and recorded 6 tracks (5 songs and one spoken, interview-based interlude) which emerged from the analysis. This included re-voiced excerpts from interviews<sup>1</sup>. Together, the songs form an EP<sup>2</sup> entitled "Margins." The album focuses on creating a space for the voices of those who have always been speaking but have not been heard—have not been listened to. The tracks are mainly based on the broader themes from the analysis, but some songs focus more on individual stories. For instance, "Skeptical" was mostly written based on the theme *Questioning Organizations*. The second verse begins with the questions, “*Is it a right to life or just a commodity? / Is food for humanity or the economy?*” and continues by questioning underlying class structures affecting food insecurity. Otherwise, "Stephen's Optimism" closely relates to *Active Optimism*, but was mainly written from Stephen's perspective. While it was made in juxtaposition with the written manuscript for this study, the entire production of “Margins” aims to add experiential dimensions of emotion and understanding through the beats, voice delivery, and voice excerpts<sup>3</sup>, which all serve important functions in hip-hop music. *Margins* attempts to (re)produce the stories of persons who have been marginalized by systems that dehumanize them. It speaks of marginal lines of differences. It speaks of marginal lines between security and insecurity. It speaks of marginal lines between agency and the lack thereof.

I also include moments of reflexivity throughout the songs on the EP, but reflexive thought was a special feature of "Journey" and "Reflex," the intro and outro songs on the album.

I was able to get into contact with a few of the guests to have them listen to songs, hear the themes throughout the study process, and provide feedback. They gave feedback and mainly approved of what emerged but didn't suggest any changes. However, I received difficulty reaching other participants because of their precarious living situations and often limited contact information. This serves as an important limitation to the co-construction process, especially when working with persons living at the margins. This is one of many tensions arising while working in solidarity.

*Making Sense of the Tensions: Working in Solidarity*

*...listening while / They provide their truth, I'm still cross-checking for lies, why?  
Because they question the food that I buy / Or 'cause I question their info won't fly  
When I bring and present what they've said to those high / In academy spaces, they'll  
wave me bye-bye (from "Skeptical," see Appendix C)*

As I selected and filtered through pages of data, I became increasingly aware of the implications of my decision-making. I voice the frustrations, concerns, knowledge, ideas, and experiences of persons living at the margins, but is it not ultimately through my particular gaze? Throughout our conversations, I listen to what the guests say, acknowledging them as creators of knowledge (Pal, 2014). Simultaneously, I wrestle with concerns about my academic audience, about academic conventions. What claims made by the participants at the margins might need to be supported by citing authors in academic journals? How might I need to make sense of their sense-making to communicate to—and within—the academy? Such were the tensions experienced throughout this study. Such are the tensions still present. These tensions become illuminated as I learn and unlearn; as my privileges surface and are reflexively accounted for throughout the process.

As much as I desire to voice the views of the participants as they express them, the influence of my own worldview is undeniable. The impossibility to present the information as they provided it became clearer as I reflected during the analysis process. For instance, I held a suspicion of corporate organizations and their practices prior to this study. Also, as a middle-class man who spent most of his life in Trinidad & Tobago, this suspicion likely arose from very different contexts than those visiting a food-providing nonprofit in the US. Although I gather the knowledge they have created, I unavoidably recreate that knowledge as I present it throughout this study. Even as I attempt to reproduce their perspectives, I produce my own version of it through my theoretical lens. Discussing this in my journal, I expressed a desire to “figure out how to honestly situate my already-existing desire to question organizational practices and motives within it all.” I don’t know if I completely uncovered and resolved my positionality, but I also don’t believe this decreases the value of what emerged. Such tensions accompany co-creation between researchers and those living at the margins as we attempt to open spaces for their voices to be heard (Dutta, 2015; Pal & Dutta, 2013). However, it is important that when working in solidarity, we are aware of these differences in experience and privilege while obtaining and creating knowledge towards change.

My privileged position was no more apparent than after someone, despite initially agreeing, declined to participate in the study. We had verbally agreed to an interview and met at a decided location. However, the man changed his mind while expressing that he felt he would be giving any potential gain from his story to me upon agreeing. He believed that I, as researcher, was the only one truly gaining from the study. Early on in the study, this accentuated my identity as a privileged, degree-seeking academic speaking with people experiencing food insecurity at the margins. I was identified in connection with the institutional power—and



historical oppression—of Western academia (Shome & Hegde, 2002). Although I hope this study resists problematic ideas and moves us towards sustainable solutions, I am the one most likely to gain the direct and tangible benefits from it. This caused me some internal conflict, as I struggled—and still struggle—to accept the impossibility of doing research solely for the sake of others. Even as I voice my academic struggles, my privilege is apparent in the fact that my problems are unlike the violent conditions marginalized persons regularly experience. Researchers working with persons at the margins should expect and even welcome such tensions. It is while working in reflexive solidarity that differences so important to understanding neoliberal creations of marginalization are negotiated.

*Outro: Towards Reflexivity, Towards Empathy*

*Part of a system where they built their kingdom / On the backs of people when they  
claimed to help them / I try to prevent this but from my reaction / Did I mix their wisdom  
with my own ambition? A hypocrite (from “Reflex (Outro),” see Appendix C)*

You show so much interest in the study as we first speak; you seem so eager to do the interview. So am I. You say you like poetry; you do spoken word. So do I. We connect. We meet at your home, the location you prefer. I give you the background on the study: briefed. You seem uninterested now based on your short responses: brief. One, two, a few words when answering each question. I only have a few to prompt you. Hoping more would emerge impromptu. But you don't say much. You look distracted, on your phone, detracting from the value of our conversation. Maybe it's because I didn't say, "I'm mainly here to listen." I usually say that before we begin. That's probably what's missing. I also usually say something like, "I'm happy to let the conversation go in whatever direction you want it to go in." Did I forget? And even if I

didn't forget, do I believe that statement? "I'm happy to let the conversation go in whatever direction..." But what if that direction is no direction at all? "I'm happy to let the conversation go..." Am I? Surely, you have the right to give and/or refuse information, even after consenting to give it. Yet still, I feel discomfort as this threat on my scholarly privilege surfaces.

During my interview with Tamar, I struggled to be content with what I perceived as disinterest as he seemed more preoccupied doing something on his phone. Early on, he mentioned he was looking for a job that night, hence his phone use. However, I hadn't accounted for this when feeling my inner frustrations about the flow of our conversation. Should I not be content with finding a job being his priority? Though I don't believe I adequately reflected on any of these feelings during our interview, my post-reflections reveal the tensions imbued in our dialogue. They unveil the existing tensions in the imbalances of power between us. I'm encouraged to privilege my own interests as a full-time, degree-seeking student with a part time job at a renowned university. Even as I listen to and later analyze what Tamar and other participants have to say, I am mindful of my academic audience. I am mindful of what I am set to gain from a successful presentation of their information—our information. Such tensions reveal the power imbalances inherent in research as solidarity activist with people at the margins (Pal & Dutta, 2013). However, we must still endeavor to make similar connections from a culture-centered approach and expand spaces for inclusive dialogue (Dutta, 2011; 2015).

Stephen, working with the city of Tampa, went from physically removing homeless persons from public view to eventually experiencing homelessness himself. Homeless for about a year and a half at the time of our conversation, he now values his ability to relate to others who are in similar situations. He now values his ability and power to help others maneuver their circumstances. As a Caribbean man from a middle-class family, I entered (and leave) this study

with very different lived experiences from Stephen and other guests who participated. I entered with a goal to bring forth narratives of persons at the margins experiencing food insecurity, and I emerge now more aware of the power imbalances, difficulties, and ambivalences accompanying this kind of work. However, these tensions only affirm the need for reflexive work from researchers who not only trouble dominant narratives but question their own positions of privilege throughout the process. This, I believe, is crucial to collaborative resistance that situates unheard voices in cultural and academic spaces.

It is my aim that *Margins* uniquely contributes to the cultural site of critical inquiry and political critique that is hip-hop. As Lemuel *and* Legacy—as academic, artist, *and* advocate—this project troubles distinctions between spaces of knowledge-creation. By working with the guests of Trinity Cafe and connecting our sense-making and worldviews, I aim to demonstrate the value of collaboration and reflexivity. We hope our re-presentations of complex narratives disrupt the dominance of neoliberal thought so imbued in our culture. We hope our co-created knowledge initiates and continues conversations surrounding all that defines food insecurity. We hope to invoke support from others who will live and act in solidarity with persons at the margins.

## **Endnotes**

<sup>1</sup> The actual recording from the interviews were not used because of complications with approval from the IRB.

<sup>2</sup> EP stands for “extended player” and usually refers to a few songs showcasing an artist’s talent. More contemporarily, the term is used to showcase a short album of usually 3-6 songs with a running time of 20-30 minutes.

<sup>3</sup> 4 out of 5 songs on the EP were produced by Jose Andujar Jr. He also mixed and mastered the recordings on the entire EP. “Reflex (Outro)” was produced by Lugia Beats.

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## **APPENDICES**

## Appendix A: Interview Guide

1. Tell me what you know about the problem of food insecurity
  - a. What comes to mind when you think about food insecurity?
  - b. What are your first-hand experiences with the issue?
2. What are some of your experiences dealing with food-providing organizations in the Tampa Bay area (like Trinity Cafe, Metropolitan Ministries, and any other organization you have experienced)?
  - a. When did you first visit a food-providing organization like Trinity Cafe?
  - b. Before you first visited, did you imagine you would ever have to visit a food-providing organization(s)?
3. In general, what are some important challenges that you regularly face?
  - a. Do any of these challenges relate to food insecurity?
4. How do you deal with challenges relating to food insecurity (access to food, cost of food, quality of food etc.)?
5. How do you think the problem of food insecurity can be addressed?
6. As mentioned earlier, a part of this study involves creating a hip-hop album to spread awareness about food insecurity.
  - a. Would you like your story to be included in the song-creation process?
  - b. Are there any specific parts of your story surrounding food insecurity that you want to be included in the album?
  - c. What type of music do you like or usually listen to? This may help with the creation process.
7. What suggestions do you have for me to study on the topic of food insecurity?
8. What other general questions or comments do you have?



## Appendix B: Sample Codes

| Open Codes  | Axial Codes   | Selective Codes   |
|---|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Corporations</li> <li>• Organizations</li> <li>• Nonprofit</li> <li>• Waste</li> <li>• Dependence</li> <li>• Malpractice</li> <li>• Misleading</li> <li>• Deception</li> <li>• Satisfaction and dissatisfaction</li> <li>• Skepticism</li> <li>• Humanity</li> <li>• Humanitarian</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expressing skepticism of corporate and government practices and motives.</li> <li>• Expressing disapproval and dissatisfaction with corporate and government practices.</li> <li>• Appreciating yet challenging nonprofits.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Questioning Organizations</li> </ul> |

| Open Codes  | Axial Codes  | Selective Codes   |
|---|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Agency</li> <li>• Structure v. agency</li> <li>• Decision-making</li> <li>• Individual</li> <li>• Collective</li> <li>• Unity</li> <li>• Resistance</li> <li>• Responsibility</li> <li>• Uncertainty</li> <li>• Change</li> <li>• Unexpected event or reality</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Responding to change and important events – past, present, and future.</li> <li>• Attributing responsibility for events and experiences – past, present, and future.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Responsibility &amp; Response-ability</li> </ul> |

| Open Codes   | Axial Codes   | Selective Codes  |
|--|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Future</li> <li>• Hope, hopelessness</li> <li>• Purpose</li> <li>• Faith</li> <li>• Uncertainty</li> <li>• Unexpected event or reality</li> <li>• Learning &amp; Education</li> <li>• Experience</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Taking a positive outlook</li> <li>• Expressing faith, purpose, and action</li> <li>• Navigating change and uncertainty</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Being Positive &amp; Purposeful Amidst Uncertainty</li> </ul> |

## Appendix C: Song Lyrics

### Journey (Intro)

#### Verse 1

Hmm, this is my introduction  
Almost didn't give it, I'm cynical are they're thinking  
I'm gaining the credit for it?  
Cause I earn a degree and might think I'm better for it  
Well then to a degree I might earn a letter for metaphors  
And rhymes, I'll open up their minds I hope, reverse the time  
I'm home, Trini boy on the sidelines of a game  
Hear the story how they took a man's life with no shame  
Homeless man facing young boys, not too old  
In their hands were bottles and a few stones, they're too cold  
I'm too cold, it soon dawned  
I need heat, to move on, but ignored, I'm lukewarm

#### Hook

When we notice where we are  
Then we'll notice where we were  
When we notice where we are  
Then we'll know we have to go

When we notice where we are  
Then we'll notice where we were  
Though we notice where we are  
Where will we go, how will we know?

#### Verse 2

Forgetfulness, or indifference?  
The difference is in a new space  
College boy, got messages from a friend, saw message of an event  
Made reservations and told me that we should plan to attend,  
“Aite, sure.” We walk through the door, have a seat  
They provide, so we eat, with our eyes on the screen  
Hearing people talk about their lives, where they've been  
I realize I could never visualize what they've seen  
Made invisible, told existence is pitiful  
Neoliberal pressures on individuals  
Undermining occurrences underlying environments  
Violence normalized against them, their unwise  
I guess it's justified  
Assuming decisions were fueling their living conditions

Cause to revisit the things I believed that were hidden  
Feeling moved inside, my appetite had died, something in me had risen

### **Hook**

When we notice where we are  
Then we'll notice where we were  
When we notice where we are  
Then we'll know we have to go

When we notice where we are  
Then we'll notice where we were  
Though we notice where we are  
Where will we go, how will we know?

### **Verse 3**

Mind shift, my light switch was now flicked  
Tryna find shifts to give time, I might pick  
Where hors d'oeuvres are cost free  
They serve in course meals of three with big smiles, I liked it  
Assuming they were all homeless and hopeless  
When I'm thinking I learn more, I know less  
We're conversing while they finish their plate  
Knowing what they face, I cannot relate  
Why am I so late to find the fire  
To bring to light the light that shines  
In them and share it, they don't need me but  
If I could listen and help them create the spaces for hearing them Lord lead me ugh  
I hope I don't impose my thoughts  
But make room for theirs to make room for ours to be tested  
Hoping to scrutinize myself  
And see the ways I delved into this looking for how I might affect it

---

## **Skeptical**

### **Intro (voice clip)**

The uncertainty. The uncertainty of it all. Those that do not have the true desire, the true gain, or are making a true decision about things. Some people have things for the purpose of... and it might be for accreditation, it might be for monies, it might be for their brand-new car, or maybe a pair of socks. It's not truly for makings and the decisions of protections of humanitarian nutrition or providing a necessary means for humanity. I think that's what we have to look at.

They will probably tell me I'm just being cynical  
I don't think you care about the people, I'm skeptical

### Verse 1

I'm looking and questioning your decisions  
I'm seeing but wondering, what's your vision?  
Your mission seems unclear from my eyes at times  
But otherwise it's plain you undermine our lives  
For profit, try to keep us living  
Under specific conditions  
Even though I still believe that  
The self is sufficient  
I've been studying and eagerly  
Learning the principles to do business efficiently, ethically  
That was Charles, his income is low  
He values the value meals, he's grateful  
Nathan and Mike said, although they price the food low  
With the health risk, what good is a plateful of waste?  
They're wasteful. Corporate bosses doing more  
To cause what we should all divorce with  
Concerned with losses they ignore the cost  
That is incurred on us I wish the laws enforced for less food lost  
(To malpractice)

### Hook 1

Why you sell it if it's nothing that's nutritional?  
Yea you profit, but think, is it really valuable?  
They will probably tell me I'm just being cynical  
I don't think you care about the people, I'm skeptical

### Verse 2

Is it a right to life or just a commodity?  
Is food for humanity or the economy?  
Instead of depending on corporate endeavors  
We should shift to the public, establish forever  
Or at least attempt to make connections  
That will stand the test of time, remain effective  
Serving what we need regardless of our earned amounts  
But on the grounds of wealth, we've been rejected  
Dropping their knowledge, they serve as reminders  
I'm viewing their lives through privileged eyes, we look  
We look and we question the products they buy  
But while we choose food for pleasure, they eat for survival  
Neoliberalism, a system they're willing to rival  
By their life testimony but still you  
Ask why they don't just earn their money  
As if they don't try or they don't work already, when will you empathize?

## Hook 2

Why you say it if it's nothing educational?  
Yea you think it's true but is it really rational?  
They will probably tell me I'm just being cynical  
I don't think you care about the people, I'm skeptical

## Verse 3

What do I prioritize when analyzing?  
Drawn to those who do advise that we should rise  
Against the powers oppressing them, listening while  
They provide their truth, I'm still cross-checking for lies, why?  
Because they question the food that I buy  
Or 'cause I question their info won't fly  
When I bring and present what they've said to those high  
In academy spaces, they'll wave me bye-bye  
They're seeking security, while insecurities  
Of mine are flooding my mind, I'm morally  
In a bind, while trying to exemplify their words  
Though the study is mine, I'm hoping they might be heard

---

## Responsible

### Intro

You don't know what I've been through  
One bad move you could end up here too  
Even if you do everything that you need to  
They will still point a finger at you. They will still tell you everything is your fault

### Verse 1

Spent a lot of time with this on my mind, I've been tryna to figure out  
Would these people all be living better lives if they chose another route?  
Listening to what they're saying, thinking "this is contradicting what I read" (and feel)  
Cause Jason told me it's in their power to prioritize what they need  
But Nate said if he could have his own stockpile he would plant seeds  
But the shortage of food means that he relies on the caffeine  
Mike used to be a sugar-freak sweet was the only thing he craved  
Though he found another way he says the corporate culture pushers are to blame

### Bridge

You don't know what I've been through (been through)  
One bad move you could end up here too (here too)  
Even when you do everything that you need to (need to)  
They will still point a finger at you. They will still tell you everything is your fault

### **Hook**

Everything is your fault  
When you struggle, your fault  
When you fail, your fault  
For the pain, your fault  
(Repeat x2)

### **Voice clip**

Because I was just tired. I was just tired. I was tired and I had other options. I got like 5 or 6 restraining orders, but then he still comes back and then I let him back and stuff like that. But my past just really haunts me and now I wanna move forward, but I can't because I can't understand.

It won't click in my head, like what was I thinking?

### **Verse 2**

Spent a lot of time with this on her mind, she's been tryna figure out  
Would she still be living in a better life if she chose another route?  
She was living in the GA but she moved to the sunshine state  
Hit the highway after years of abuse took a toll on her mind state  
Pushed far 'til she's irate if her nerve falls to the floor  
Then it might break. Still endured more than she ever thought she might take  
Left looking for a new beginning, but she's wishing that it cost less  
Judge said he had the better job, she lost the kids in the process

### **Bridge**

You don't know what I've been through (been through)  
One bad move you could end up here too (here too)  
Even when you do everything that you need to (need to)  
They will still point a finger at you / they will still tell you everything is your fault

### **Hook**

Everything is all your fault  
Struggling, it's all your fault  
Failed and it's your fault  
Everything is all your fault

### **Voice clip**

"Like I always heard, experience is the best teacher. So, if you ain't never been homeless, you don't know how it is to be homeless. No matter who say what. You could listen to a thousand stories, if you've never been there, you don't know. You don't know. If you never been in like a shortage of food, you know. But it's people that are... that's actually got in these positions when they had nothing to do with it."

---

## Stephen's Wisdom (Interlude)

### Voice clip

Me being on both sides of the track, I've learned that... I've been around homeless people, right. And whatever they have, they'd share it with each other. And I'd been around peoples that's dignitaries, but whatever they got, then they got their friends to share it with. They ain't gonna share it with whoever need it. They go share it with whoever they wanna share it with, and homeless people don't do that. So, you know, it's good to have places that you could go to, but they got a long way to go. They got a long way to go. I go to the park every morning, right. I go to the park every morning. It's probably about 10, 12 people out there sleeping in the park. They ain't got nowhere to go, you know. Now I'm sure if you ain't got nowhere to go, you ain't got nothing to eat. So, like I say, it's real need, but we got a long way to go. We got a long way to go.

---

## Stephen's Optimism

### Verse 1

Reminiscing on days past  
Reminding me I can't predict the weather, the forecast  
I remember when I used to work and earn cash or checks  
And now I'm laid off, it's a real task at best  
With no place to rest in bed or rest my head  
One is the physical, one is the mental  
Through it all I learn to trust the Lord  
And find what I need to eat to feed my system  
And I know where they serve food and show you love  
Where they don't tear down, but build you up  
Plus I know I'll be good soon, I'm coming up  
I could share what I've learned with who's coming up  
Every day I'm learning to depend on God  
I need strength to walk the steep hills I climb  
Even when I've been in the deep end, I've learned to swim  
But I spin in whirlpools at times

### Hook

Though I don't know what tomorrow holds  
I wanna be optimistic (repeat x 3)  
Though I don't know what tomorrow holds  
I wanna be optimistic (repeat x 2)  
Still wanna be optimistic, yea

### Verse 2

The years I worked for Tampa seen many  
Times when we've cleaned the scene to seem pretty  
Really what that means is we've relieved many  
Homeless persons from their camps to bolster image



Facades. Was ignorant of the life they lived  
And how they fight for good food and health  
Now I struggle for meals and been without a place to live  
I never thought I'd be homeless myself  
Learning how to cope with much less than hoped  
But overall, I'm glad I had the chance  
To hone my eyesight and see what it's like  
To feel when it's dark and cold to need light  
And heat to feel like those who lack food  
But survive 'cause defeat's a weight they won't carry  
Though they hope the public servants soon serve them justice  
They refuse to wait, they won't tarry

### **Hook**

Though I don't know what tomorrow holds  
I wanna be optimistic (repeat x 3)  
Though I don't know what tomorrow holds  
I wanna be optimistic (repeat x 2)  
Still wanna be optimistic, yea

### **Outro**

I wanna be optimistic  
I wanna be optimistic, yea

---

### **Reflex (Outro)**

#### **Intro**

Nah. We not done yet.

Reflex (x2)  
(Whose Legacy)  
Reflex (x2)

#### **Verse 1**

I wanna be an open book you can flip through  
Knowing every time I front, then I step back  
Looking back on young Legacy, don't wanna see  
I cared more about my syntax than my impact  
Spilling out my mind 'cause it's been packed  
Taking time to revise what I did back  
When deciding to write on the lives  
Of the ones who provided their time so we could chat  
No incentives, but they still felt this  
Could be something worth their words  
Talking to Crystal when she said this, "Lem you smiled

“and you didn't judge though you could think the worst.”  
But otherwise, there was a guy who refused  
He remembered the times he was played in the past  
He wasn't convinced that he would gain, if he gave me his life story  
He would let the benefits pass to me

### **Hook**

Can I be, reflexive? (repeat x2)  
Though it's not reflex  
Can I be, reflexive?

### **Verse 2**

I never been an open book you can flip through  
So, to sift through everything I'm doing, that I will do  
Is challenging but looking back  
I hope I can say that it bred and molded character, no mildew  
Empathy, is what I seek  
So then why does it evade me?  
Looking at Tamar but he doesn't gaze me  
Even when he speaks, I just think he's lazy  
With his responses, all I want is  
A little attention when I ask my questions  
Why doesn't he mention when he felt the tension of the imperfections  
Of the world and felt he needed intervention  
Then my penmanship would be valued  
And I'd move to mountain tops from the valley  
All my accolades would be raining  
With so many awards, it's too much too tally  
Wait  
Tamar was just looking for a job on the night shift  
He was distracted but the fact is  
He'd gain more Securing his work than adding to my thing  
Part of a system where they built their kingdom  
On the backs of people when they claimed to help them  
I try to prevent this but from my reaction  
Have I mixed their wisdom with my own ambition?  
A hypocrite

### **Hook**

Can I be, reflexive? (repeat x2)  
Though it's not reflex  
Can I be, reflexive?

**Outro**

Know your position

Know your privilege

How does it affect others?

---

## Appendix D: IRB Letter of Approval



RESEARCH INTEGRITY AND COMPLIANCE  
Institutional Review Boards, FWA No. 00001669  
12901 Bruce B. Downs Blvd., MDC035 • Tampa, FL 33612-4799  
(813) 974-5638 • FAX (813) 974-7091

7/2/2018

Lemuel Scott  
Communication  
14509 Prism Cir. Apt. 304B  
Tampa, FL 33613

RE: **Expedited Approval for Initial Review**  
IRB#: Pro00034957  
Title: Describing Narratives on Food Insecurity Through Hip-Hop

**Study Approval Period: 6/29/2018 to 6/29/2019**

Dear Mr. Scott:

On 6/29/2018, the Institutional Review Board (IRB) reviewed and **APPROVED** the above application and all documents contained within, including those outlined below.

**Approved Item(s):**

**Protocol Document(s):**

[Lemuel Scott IRB Protocol V1 6.25.18.docx](#)

**Consent/Assent Document(s)\*:**

[Lemuel Scott IRB Consent Form V1 6.25.18.docx.pdf](#)

[Lemuel Scott IRB Verbal Consent V1 6.25.18.docx\\*\\*](#)

\*Please use only the official IRB stamped informed consent/assent document(s) found under the "Attachments" tab. Please note, these consent/assent documents are valid until the consent document is amended and approved.

**\*\*verbal consent forms are unstamped**

It was the determination of the IRB that your study qualified for expedited review which includes activities that (1) present no more than minimal risk to human subjects, and (2) involve only procedures listed in one or more of the categories outlined below. The IRB may review research through the expedited review procedure authorized by 45CFR46.110. The research proposed in this study is categorized under the following expedited review category:

- (6) Collection of data from voice, video, digital, or image recordings made for research purposes.
- (7) Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

Your study qualifies for a waiver of the requirements for the documentation of informed consent as outlined in the federal regulations at 45CFR46.117(c) which states that an IRB may waive the requirement for the investigator to obtain a signed consent form for some or all subjects if it finds either: (1) That the only record linking the subject and the research would be the consent document and the principal risk would be potential harm resulting from a breach of confidentiality. Each subject will be asked whether the subject wants documentation linking the subject with the research, and the subject's wishes will govern; or (2) That the research presents no more than minimal risk of harm to subjects and involves no procedures for which written consent is normally required outside of the research context. This waiver of documentation of informed consent is granted to allow the study team to obtain verbal consent.

As the principal investigator of this study, it is your responsibility to conduct this study in accordance with IRB policies and procedures and as approved by the IRB. Any changes to the approved research must be submitted to the IRB for review and approval via an amendment. Additionally, all unanticipated problems must be reported to the USF IRB within five (5) business days.

We appreciate your dedication to the ethical conduct of human subject research at the University of South Florida and your continued commitment to human research protections. If you have any questions regarding this matter, please call 813-974-5638.

Sincerely,



Kristen Salomon, Ph.D., Chairperson  
USF Institutional Review Board

## Appendix E: IRB Informed Consent Form



### Informed Consent to Participate in Research Involving Minimal Risk

Pro # 00034957

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You are being asked to take part in a research study. Research studies include only people who choose to take part. This document is called an informed consent form. Please read this information carefully and take your time making your decision. Ask the researcher or study staff to discuss this consent form with you, please ask him/her to explain any words or information you do not clearly understand. The nature of the study, risks, inconveniences, discomforts, and other important information about the study are listed below.

We are asking you to take part in a research study called:

#### **Describing Narratives on Food Insecurity Through Hip-Hop**

The person who is in charge of this research study is **Lemuel Scott**. This person is called the Principal Investigator. However, other research staff may be involved and can act on behalf of the person in charge. He is being guided in this research by Dr. Mahuya Pal.

Interviews for the research study will take place at a location of your preference that is also agreed upon by the researcher.

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#### **Purpose of the study**

The purpose of this study is to gain information about food insecurity, find out how people experience the problem, and discover how the problem can be addressed. The goal is to explore food insecurity by interviewing persons who are affected by the issue, listening to their stories, and later sharing their stories anonymously in an academic thesis containing a written document and recorded hip-hop album.

## **Why are you being asked to take part?**

You are being asked to take part in this study because you are a guest at Trinity Cafe, a nonprofit organization that mainly addresses food insecurity by providing meals to those who visit.

## **Study Procedures:**

If you take part in this study, you will be asked to:

- Be interviewed for approximately 30 minutes to an hour at a time and location agreed upon by both you and the researcher. You are only required to be interviewed once, and the location of the interview can be anywhere that is comfortable and convenient to you.
- Answer interview questions that will mainly ask about how you make sense of food insecurity, your experiences with the issue, some of the challenges you face related to the issue, how you believe the issue can be addressed, and whatever other information you believe is important.
- Provide consent to audio-recording of the interviews. The conversation will not be recorded unless you give permission. Audio-recording will help the researcher transcribe the interviews to ensure that your responses are accurately recorded. The audio file and transcribed data will be stored on a USB flash drive and kept in a locked file cabinet in the researcher's office on USF's Tampa campus. The audio file and transcribed data will also be backed up in an electronic file located on a password-protected laptop which can only be accessed by the researcher. All research files will be deleted after 5 years.

## **Total Number of Participants**

20 individuals who visit Trinity Cafe will take part in this study.

## **Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal**

You do not have to participate in this research study. You should only take part in this study if you want to volunteer. You should not feel that there is any pressure to take part in the study. You are free to participate in this research or withdraw at any time. There will be no penalty or loss of benefits you are entitled to receive if you stop taking part in this study.

## **Benefits**

The researcher is unsure if you will receive any direct benefits by taking part in this research study. It is the hope that the research will raise awareness about food insecurity and provide suggestions to addressing the issue.

## **Risks or Discomfort**

This research is considered to be minimal risk. That means that the risks associated with this study are the same as what you face every day. There is a potential risk of breach of confidentiality. There are no other known risks to those who take part in this study.

## **Compensation**

You will receive no payment or other compensation for taking part in this study.

## **Costs**

It will not cost you anything to take part in the study.

## **Privacy and Confidentiality**

We will keep your study records private and confidential. Certain people may need to see your study records. Anyone who looks at your records must keep them confidential. These individuals include:

- The Principal Investigator (Researcher).
- Certain government and university people who need to know more about the study, and individuals who provide oversight to ensure that we are doing the study in the right way.
- Any agency of the federal, state, or local government that regulates this research.
- The USF Institutional Review Board (IRB) and related staff who have oversight responsibilities for this study, including staff in USF Research Integrity and Compliance.

We may publish what we learn from this study. If we do, we will not include your name. We will not publish anything that would let people know who you are.

## **You can get the answers to your questions, concerns, or complaints**

If you have any questions, concerns or complaints about this study, or experience an unanticipated problem, call **Lemuel Scott** at (813) 331-9931.

If you have questions about your rights as a participant in this study, or have complaints, concerns or issues you want to discuss with someone outside the research, call the USF IRB at (813) 974-5638 or contact by email at [RSCH-IRB@usf.edu](mailto:RSCH-IRB@usf.edu).



### **Consent to Take Part in this Research Study**

I freely give my consent to take part in this study. I understand that by signing this form I am agreeing to take part in research. I have received a copy of this form to take with me.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Person Taking Part in Study

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name of Person Taking Part in Study

Permission to be audio-recorded: \_\_\_\_\_  
**Yes**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**No**

### **Statement of Person Obtaining Informed Consent**

I have carefully explained to the person taking part in the study what he or she can expect from their participation. I confirm that this research subject speaks the language that was used to explain this research and is receiving an informed consent form in their primary language. This research subject has provided legally effective informed consent.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Person obtaining Informed Consent

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name of Person Obtaining Informed Consent