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# Eating in Crisis: Culturally Appropriate Food and the Local Food Movement in the Lives of Domestic Violence Survivors

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**Eating in crisis:**

**Culturally appropriate food and the local food movement**

**in the lives of domestic violence survivors**

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-----**Abstract**-----

After leaving situations of domestic violence, survivors are at high risk of poverty, food insecurity, disability, and mental illness. Part of the recovery process for domestic violence survivors involves addressing food insecurity, both for nutritional fulfillment and as a response to isolation and separation from families and communities. This research was conducted at a transitional housing program for domestic violence survivors in Massachusetts during a process of exploring how to change their food program to include more local and culturally appropriate foods. The research focuses specifically on culturally appropriate food, both among local food movement volunteers interested in donating food and the recipients of that food in a transitional living program for domestic violence survivors. Using qualitative ethnographic methods, including interviews and participant observation, this research seeks to convey how the local food movement translates across class lines, and how it meets, or fails to meet, the needs of food insecure women and children rebuilding their lives after escaping domestic violence. It also examined the conceptual category of “culturally appropriate food” and analyzes the contradictions between food as commodity and food as experience. By framing local food as “the answer” to hunger and inequality, local food discourse often silences the real needs of the very individuals it seeks to help. These women’s individual stories, experiences, and needs are highlighted to convey their complex relationships with food and how their cultural heritage around food connects with or clashes with local food movement discourse.

## -----Introduction-----

“I like to put on my boxing gloves before I go into the food pantry,” Liz told me. “Some people in there can be vicious.” The line into the pantry, a nondescript building in a strip mall, stretched around the block. Children stood patiently by their parents’ sides, occasionally calling out to friends or siblings. A young woman picked impatiently at her bright pink nail polish. Liz, shopping bags in hand, joined a friend at the end of the line. At the door to the food pantry, letting families in one at a time, stood a man in a baseball cap. He introduced himself to me as the pantry director and, after learning that I was a student, was eager to answer any questions. “Do you carry fresh vegetables here?” I asked.

He stared at me for a second. “You look like your mother shops at TJ Maxx. These people here, they do not. They shop at the thrift store next door. That’s something that a lot of people ask, about the fresh foods, the healthy foods. And it would be nice, but that’s not the problem we have here. That’s not the solution. It’s a middle class solution to a much bigger problem.”

The visit was part of my attempt to understand the obstacles to access for fresh vegetables for low income survivors of domestic violence.. I partnered with New Hope, an organization dedicated to ending domestic and sexual violence in southeastern Massachusetts. New Hope clients, including Liz, were at high risk of food insecurity as survivors of domestic violence. The organization’s staff expressed interest in changing its food program, and as a previous volunteer, I set out to examine the potential of increasing culturally appropriate and healthy food access for New Hope clients. I planned to look at the possibility for local food donation to address issues of hunger and food insecurity for domestic violence survivors. I had the opportunity to work in close capacity with New Hope clients and staff from June until August 2013. I also spoke with farmers, volunteers, and local food movement activists about their attempts to make fresh, local vegetables more accessible. The issue of access to healthy, culturally appropriate food for domestic violence survivors is intertwined with larger socioeconomic issues. This

thesis will critically engage with the concept of “access to healthy and culturally appropriate food” and challenge current assumptions about the local food movement’s potential to end food insecurity.

The first assumption I address is the concept of “culturally appropriate food” as something that can be provided by purchasing the right groceries. Culturally appropriate food is not simply an item of food but an amalgamation of all the rituals and practices central to its production and consumption. Food is only culturally appropriate *in context*; the same food, eaten with different people, in a different place and a different time, may hold an entirely different cultural meaning and connotation. Therefore, speaking about culturally appropriate food is not speaking just about what people eat but about how and with whom they eat. Additionally, I will explore the construction of food as a commodity and how this construction complicates the mission to procure culturally appropriate food.

Secondly, I will engage with the concept of “good food” and “right eating,” especially as defined by the local food movement. The local food movement often seeks to make “good food” more accessible without a critical understanding of what “good food” is for different groups of people. I will discuss the ways that concepts of “good food” are created and the connections of these narratives to institutionalized systems of power and oppression. For women at New Hope, who have often been marginalized by these systems, enforcing uncritical definitions of “good food” can be harmful.

The interaction with the food pantry’s director was indicative of the deep disconnect between efforts to make fresh produce more accessible and the scope of the problem of food insecurity. Though it may increase short- term access to fresh foods, improving the quality of food pantries is not a sustainable solution for food insecurity. Food pantries, as part of the larger emergency food system, were intended to be an emergency response to a dire need for food. Instead they have become regular sources of nutrition for entire families (Poppendieck 1999). The goal should not be to make food pantries better but to make them irrelevant through stronger safety nets and initiatives to end poverty.

Examining the lived realities for those experiencing food insecurity provides an opportunity to understand the obstacles to acquiring self- defined good food holistically, sustainably, and appropriately.

## -----Literature Review-----

### **Introduction**

This literature review will provide a background for understanding the interplay between food and groups of eaters. People eat together; food is a symbol for group cohesion, conflict, and inequality. Different types of food are visible, edible manifestations of larger power systems, including those connected to race, class, and gender. The literature will provide a basis for understanding the ways that notions of “good food” and “appropriate diets” are constructed within and by groups. Types of foods, and ways of preparing and consuming food, have vastly different meanings in different cultural contexts. I will first provide an anthropologically grounded background of the role of food in culture. Then, I will speak briefly about the local food movement’s history, discourse, and meanings around food, as well as alternative food movements that have formed in response to the local food movement. This discussion will include the role of food within capitalism and the contradictions of food both as a commodity and an experience. Afterwards, I will shift to providing a background on domestic violence and its connection with poverty and food insecurity. Finally, I will discuss the role of food in maintaining a sense of self and community outside its original setting.

### **Food and Culture**

The anthropological focus on food studies is rapidly gaining popularity (Counihan and Van Esterik 2013), yet the discipline has long been interested in the connection between food and culture. Academics espouse differing viewpoints on the factors contributing to individual and cultural food practices. Cultural materialists, including Marvin Harris (1985), interpret food choices solely as a result of economic and ecological conditions. Others see food practices as a direct result of cultural construction, while others point to the role of political and state powers in shaping diet (Allison 1991).

Anthropologists' strength, however, is in their holistic perspective; they are capable of understanding the complex role of food practices in people's lives and rituals (Anderson 2005).

Food is a part of nearly every human interaction and plays a role in many rituals. Methods of obtaining, preparing, and consuming food all function as symbolic acts (Anderson 2005). Humans are social eaters; therefore, what we eat cannot be understood outside of the context of how we eat and with whom we eat (Anderson 2005). As something that is shared and learned, food has often been compared to language (Levi-Strauss 1966; Anderson 2005; Counihan and Van Esterik 2013). Like language, food is a way to communicate messages only understood within specific cultural contexts. Anderson (2005) explains that in cultures where cultural constraints demand politeness over honesty, messages are often sent through food rather than words. These messages include the order in which people are served and how much and what quality food individuals receive. Within communities, food can serve as a symbol of comfort and love. Food is often associated with positive messages such as solidarity, and affection, but can also serve as a symbol of exclusion and isolation.

Eating, more than any other human biological function, is public and often highly visible. Eating identifies people as part of some groups while excluding them from others. Individuals choose what (and what not) to eat for a number of reasons, including biological necessity, personal preference, and economic availability (Anderson 2005). Beyond personal reasons, cultural groups are demarcated by specific cuisines and taboos. While eating for all organisms is a biological act, among humans it is a statement of group affiliation and personal identity as well. What we eat is "a way of showing the world many things about the eater" (Anderson 2005: 124). People use food as a visible marker to tie them to racial, religious, class-based, and ethnic groups. Since eating is a public and social action, what people choose to eat, and with whom they choose to eat, identifies them with a group.

Anderson (2005) explains that food forms group identities through its dual purposes of separation and solidarity. Sharing food unifies people; the vast majority of unifying rituals, from family dinners to romantic dates to business deals, involve food and drink. Public meeting spaces are almost always cafes, restaurants, bars, or other places that serve food and drink (Anderson 2005). Food unifies religious groups through its prominent role in rituals, holidays, and festivals (Ibid). While food unites certain groups, it also creates and reinforces borders to separate groups of people along ethnic, cultural, racial, class-based, and gendered lines. This is seen through culinary divisions based on social class. Elite food, based on the cultivation of “good taste,” has long been a marker of high social and economic status (Bourdieu 1979). Cultivation of good taste is not based on an objective reality of “good food” but on a desire to maintain a culinary boundary between income classes (Anderson 2005). White bread presents an interesting case study; once beloved by the upper class as refined and pure as compared to lower- class brown bread, white bread has now fallen out of favor with elites (Anderson 2005). As white bread became widely available, elites turned to artisan breads and whole- grain breads. When food surpasses boundaries, groups change their definition of taste to reestablish class divisions.

In the United States, ethnic, racial, and class divisions are often visible through dietary habits. The United States is a rich country with a surplus of food, but high levels of economic inequality create vast disparities in food access within small geographic areas. Organic food is a recent example of class-based food divisions (Guthman 2003). In the fifties, during the era of Jell-O salads and casseroles made of Campbell’s Mushroom Soup, processed foods were popular among elite consumers (Anderson 2005). Refugees growing organic, local, fresh foods in their backyards were ashamed of their habits (Lo 2011). Organic, fresh food is back in fashion now—and more expensive than ever. Whole Foods, an elite grocery chain catering to food- conscious customers, was recently critiqued for “food gentrification” for promoting collard greens, a traditionally African- American food, as the new hip green (Ho 2014). Foods come in and out of favor over time; groups’ norms and rules regarding “good food” and proper eating

are fluid. Elite foods are coveted not only because they are healthy, delicious, or convenient, but because they are elite (Anderson 2005).

### **Culturally Appropriate Food and Capitalism**

Many nonprofits devoted to providing appropriate services for underserved populations are seeking to provide “culturally appropriate food” for their clients. This goal comes from the understanding that groups of people define meaningful and appropriate food differently; food that is understood as nutrition for one group may be inappropriate or taboo for others (Anderson 2005). Underlying our current understanding of culturally appropriate food is the conception within capitalism of food as a commodity (Guthman and DuPuis 2005). The preexisting assumption of culturally appropriate food as something sold in a grocery store is directly connected to the commodification of food. Under neoliberalism, food and eating shifted from a shared experience of eating to an individual act of market consumption (Guthman and Du Puis 2005; Esteva and Prakash 1998). Gustavo Esteva (1998) distinguishes between *comida*, food as a communal experience of nourishment, and *alimento*, food as a commodity purchased by an individual from an external expert on food production. *Comida* is an experience of food, while *alimento* is a food object. Culturally appropriate food lies somewhere on the boundary between *comida* and *alimento*. It seeks to replicate food- based experiences without fundamentally changing the nature of food as a commodity. Regardless, consumers still thirst for authenticity in their food. Because capitalism responds to consumer desires, food products are often purposefully manufactured to perpetuate a feeling of authenticity (Cavanaugh and Shankar 2014). Culturally appropriate food could easily fall into the trap of capitalist- manufactured “authenticity.” This authenticity is not based on the commensality created by culturally appropriate food but on advertising strategies intended to sell commodities.

## **Introduction to the Local Food Movement**

The local food movement has exploded in popularity over the past decade. Activists speak of the importance of eating close to home in bestselling books, front-page articles, and popular blogs. Before analyzing the impact of the local food movement, I will briefly summarize its basic ideology and message. The local food movement is a method of responding to an environmentally unsustainable and physically unhealthy global food system (Pollan 2006). Local food activists vote with their dollars to support local farmers markets, community supported agriculture farms (CSAs), and grocery cooperatives. The local food movement advocates many benefits for eating locally, including a lessened environmental impact, community building, and improved physical health (Smith and MacKinnon 2005). Eating close to home is said to decrease environmental impact through minimizing the number of “food miles” food has to travel between farm and plate (Allen 2004). Local food also tends to overlap with environmentally responsible agricultural practices, such as organic agriculture and integrated pest management.

The local food movement seeks to connect consumers to the farmers producing their food. CSAs are one alternative forum for procuring fresh, local, seasonal vegetables. CSAs sell “shares” to community members for a fixed price. In exchange, shareholders receive a weekly box of seasonal vegetables. This model allows farmers to depend on a market for unusual vegetables and extend their growing season (Janssen 2010). CSAs also attempt to form a community between shareholders and farmers, though this goal is met with varying success (Janssen 2010; DeLind 1999).

The ability to meet and know your farmer is heavily touted, as having a direct relationship with farmers producing your food encourages accountability that is often lacking in global and national food systems (Allen 2004). Buying local keeps money inside of the local community, here defined as farmers and those operating specialty grocery stores, instead of supporting national big- box stores. Outside of

the farmer-consumer community, the local food movement often creates a feeling of camaraderie between local food participants through CSAs, community gardens, cooking classes, and communal dinners (Local Harvest 2014). Finally, eating locally has a number of physical benefits; activists explain the health benefits of eating seasonally, eating simple food, and focusing mostly on the consumption of vegetables (Pollan 2006; Klavinski 2013). Eating locally provides a number of social, physical, and economic benefits for the community. Beyond these explanations, however, eating locally is a central aspect of forming a social and political group through public and intentional eating.

Gleaning is another strategy used within the local food movement to capture and distribute surplus local food. Gleaning is the practice of taking fruits, vegetables, and other produce from a farm that would ordinarily be wasted (Almquist 2012). Farms often are unable to harvest all of the food they plant because of staff shortages and changing market demands. The unharvested food ordinarily is tilled back into the soil or thrown away (Almquist 2012). Wasted food is a big problem in the US; researchers estimate that Americans throw out 30-50% of the food they produce (Bloom 2010). Gleaners seek to harvest this surplus food from fields and donate it to local food pantries and food shelves, which rarely serve fresh produce. Gleaning links people in need with surplus food from farms, providing them with access to fresh, local vegetables that would ordinarily be wasted (Almquist 2012).

### **Identity formation and exclusion with the local food movement**

The local food movement frames purchasing, growing, preparing, and eating food as a moral and political act. The role of anthropologists in studying the local food movement is not to judge those values but to examine the ways those values are constructed, shared, and practiced. For instance, how does the local food movement create virtuous and forbidden foods? Who has power in creating those categories, and who is left out? As the local food movement seeks to expand access to fresh, local, or organic foods, it should retain a consciousness of why those foods are elevated in their discourse.

Scholars write about the importance of “reflexive localism,” but this concept is less visible in the quotidian operations of the local food movement (DuPuis and Goodman 2005). Reflexive localism entails a deeper analysis of local food system. Instead of assuming that food will become more equitable and sustainable through local provision, reflexive localism includes a deeper analysis of the inequalities within the local sphere (DuPuis and Goodman 2005). Throughout my research, I saw local food movement activists determined to provide more “good” or “real” food to food insecure individuals and families, without a careful analysis of how such categories are created. The local food movement not only upholds environmental and health- related values. It also elevates a specific way of thinking and acting around food, which is not disconnected from the identities and beliefs of the actors creating and disseminating those beliefs (DuPuis and Goodman 2005). Like every other set of food practices, local food movement discourse is based not only on morality but also on group identity formation.

Within the local food movement, “natural” is a positive category for determining food acceptability (DuPuis and Goodman 2005). Natural foods are those produced from local farms, preferably using organic agricultural methods. Natural foods are often, though not always, unprocessed; the rise of expensive, gourmet, “natural” processed foods is increasingly visible within the local food movement (Alkon 2007; Guthman 2003). This focus on the natural can be attributed to the local food movement’s romantic view of agrarianism and farm life (DuPuis and Goodman 2005; Alkon 2013). Conversely, the most harmful foods are those that are industrially produced and highly processed. These foods are the opposite of farm- centric organic vegetables: “Supporters continue to regard industrial agriculture not only as ecologically and socially damaging, but as unnatural” (Alkon 2013: 675). The local food movement uses this unnatural-natural dichotomy to judge acceptable and unacceptable foods.

The local food movement’s use of the concept “natural” often disregards the ways that natural-ness is itself a socially created concept. Anthropologists believe that values and morals are created and

formed by societies, not intrinsic facts; feminist research especially questions the uncritical categorization of values as natural, universal, or normal (Hesse-Biber et al 2004). The local food movement, in spreading its vision of what the ideal food system looks like, “naturalizes one set of socio-natural relations as right and legitimate rather than a more open discussion of what kinds of agro-ecological landscapes should be preserved and why” (Alkon 2013: 676). The local food movement’s claim of natural-ness as a virtue presupposes conversations about what it means to be “natural” and whose definition should be used in creating alternative food systems.

In local food discourse, local communities are depoliticized and portrayed as idyllic, utopian areas without their own power relationships and hierarchical structure. When discussing local food, it is important to consider “the local” as its own unit of analysis (DuPuis and Goodman 2005). Within local systems, certain individuals and groups hold power, whether because of structural privilege based on race, class, or gender or because of specific community politics. While opening the discussion of food at a local level is a necessary first step, it “is not sufficient because some voices drown out others” (Allen 2004: 171). A local community still contains very real power divisions, but the utopian discourse of the local food movement makes these divisions invisible. Local food movement discourse often fails to recognize that “reducing the scale of human interactions does not necessarily achieve the social equity or empowerment espoused by alternative agrifood movements (Allen 2004: 173). Making food systems local may address some of the environmental and health problems plaguing the current food system. Alone, however, this is not enough to address the power discrepancies, inequalities, and inefficiencies which leave so many in the country without access to enough appropriate food.

In one study of farmers markets in California, Julie Guthman (2008) spoke with farmer’s market managers and participants about why the markets were primarily white spaces. Most of the patrons and managers believed that the primary barrier to engagement in farmers markets was lack of education

about the horrors of the current agrifood system. One manager said that, “I believe that the food is affordable to all: it’s just a matter of different values and priorities. Education and outreach are the only hope I have of interesting more low- income people” (Guthman 2008: 393). This discourse promotes outreach and education as the main method to incorporate people into the local food movement, often overlooking other structural obstacles (Guthman 2008). In this context, local food is equated with being a moral decision or a lifestyle choice (Guthman 2003). According to the discourse of local food, those who eat fast food, conventional food, or other mainstream methods of eating do so because of lack of education about where their food comes from (Guthman 2008).

In a similar vein, DuPuis and Goodman (2005) caution that ethics around local food, like all ethics, are tied up with complex identity politics. The majority of those involved in the mainstream local food movement, meaning those attending farmers markets, participating in CSAs, and writing books about the importance of eating local are often white and middle to upper class (Guthman 2008; Alkon 2007; Allen 2004; Nonini 2013; Slocum 2008). The concerns addressed by the mainstream local food movement, therefore, are the concerns of this group of people. Though the environmental and social impacts of the food system are inextricably intertwined, elite local food activists often focus on issues of environmentalism and sustainability instead of hunger and access. Local food activists in North Carolina spoke about the importance of improving the local community through the food system but “displayed an impatience with, and some even an antagonism toward, the focus on broad social issues related to food that bring up forms of injustice or seek social redress for harm done to poor people and racial minorities” (Nonini 2013: 271). The “community” that activists seek to support, though local, is often delineated by lines related to race and class.

There are often other economic, social, and cultural barriers prohibiting certain individuals or groups from engaging in local food practices. In a study of the Mo’ Better Foods farmers market in

Oakland, California, Alison Alkon notes that African Americans' vegetable purchasing habits are informed by a historical association between agriculture and sharecropping and slavery (Alkon 2007). Farmers markets entering into primarily African- American neighborhoods "cannot rely on an already existing demand for fresh produce. Instead, it must create demand within an African American community whose agricultural narrative remains dominated by the history of slavery" (Alkon 2007: 93). The romanticism associated with local food for local food activists simply does not exist for those, including many African- Americans, who hold a very different vision from local food activists' romantic nostalgia for an agrarian past.

Participation in the local food movement is as much a process of expressing group affiliation and identity as an environmental and health concern. Eating "natural" foods, especially in public, demarcates the eater as a member of a specific, virtuous group of eaters. On *The Fat Nutritionist*, a thoughtful nutrition blog, the author points out that eating kale, a symbolic food for the local food movement, is fulfilling for many people not because of micronutrients but because eating it makes them feel "vaguely more virtuous" (Michelle 2013). The local food movement presents a culturally appropriate way of eating for a certain group of people, identified both by nutritional and environmental benefits as well as visible group affiliation.

### **Responses to the Local Food Movement**

As a response to some of the many critiques of the local food movement, several movements incorporate a more critical approach to some of the issues discussed above. These groups seek to incorporate a more inclusive and critical discussion of environmental and social equity issues. The local food movement is critiqued for employing mainly market- based strategies to respond to issues in the global food system (Mares and Alkon 2011). It gives those who can afford it the opportunity to "buy out" of a problematic food system rather than fundamentally changing it (Alkon 2013). Some authors argue

that engaging with the ways that capitalism and neoliberalism create inequalities in access and power is a more effective way of changing the global food system (Mares and Alkon 2011). Without this deeper critique, those who cannot afford the luxury of alternative food remain confined to the bottom of an unequal food system.

Many involved in the local food movement aim to use their purchasing power to change the nature of the food system by promoting specific environmental values and practices. Local food movement activists seek to change the manner and location of food's production but do not question the essential nature of food as a commodity. The local food movement creates new conceptual categories for food, including "local," "organic," and "sustainable." These categories themselves are commodified; food within these ethical categories is more valuable and expensive than "unethical" food (Guthman 2003). However, the local food movement continues to rely on changing the conditions by which food is created rather than fundamentally questioning the categorization of food as a commodity. Within the United States, two movements, the Community Food Security movement and the Food Justice movement, present viable alternatives to transform the food system.

The Community Food Security (CFS) movement focuses on strategies that communities, rather than individuals, can use to create sustainable food systems (Mares and Alkon 2011). The CFS movement first introduced the concept of cultural appropriateness in food provisioning (Mares 2013) and outlined the necessity of "community self-reliance" in maintaining food security. Rather than relying on external sources, CFS argues that a community should define their own terms for food security, including how food is acquired, prepared, and consumed. CFS also emphasizes the need for communities to define their own problems with the food system and set their own agenda for an ideal food system. This model is focused on issues of access and follows an antihunger model in its approach (Mares and Alkon 2011). Though CFS expands the discourse of the local food movement to include an

emphasis on access, it is critiqued for excluding a specific understanding of how race, privilege, and power impact people's engagement with the food system (Ibid).

The Food Justice movement focuses specifically on food access for low- income and minority communities, using techniques such as CSAs, locally owned grocery stores, and farmers markets. Food justice activists believe that these projects should be created by low-income communities in addition to serving them (Mares and Alkon 2011). Food Justice builds off of the Environmental Justice movement, which works to equally distribute the benefits and dangers of environmental issues. The Food Justice movement emphasizes the way that food systems interact with other systems of power and oppression, including those connected to race, class, and gender. It seeks to draw its policies from the lived experiences of people of color struggling with food insecurity (ibid). This movement, more than others, is utilized by activists of color to address issues specific to marginalized and minority communities. Both CFS and the Food Justice movement incorporate a focus on food insecurity, access, and hunger. As the local food movement becomes increasingly interested in bringing local food across class lines, it could look to the CFS movement or the Food Justice movement as a model. However, those seeking to incorporate this approach into the local food movement must remember the emphasis on lived experience and community perspectives (ibid).

These alternative food movements engage with food insecurity and hunger. Food insecurity is widespread in the US; in 2012, 14.5% of US households were food insecure at some point throughout the year (Coleman- Jensen et al 2013). Food insecurity occurs when families or individuals lack access to enough nutritionally appropriate food because of lack of money or other resources (ibid). Federal benefit programs to expand food access include SNAP (supplemental nutrition assistance program) and WIC (supplemental nutrition program for women, infants, and children). SNAP is available for US citizens living under a certain income and can be used in most major grocery stores. WIC is geared toward

pregnant women and children under five and can be used to purchase very specific, nutritionally age-appropriate foods. While the USDA and other federal programs provide some monetary food assistance, many Americans are reliant on emergency food, such as food pantries or soup kitchens, as a primary source of nutrition (Mares 2013; Poppendieck 1998). Undocumented people cannot receive federal nutrition benefits and stand an even greater risk of food insecurity (Mares 2013). Alternative food movements seek to find more sustainable, long-term solutions to food insecurity than emergency food providers such as food pantries and soup kitchens.

### **Factors in food choice for low-income women**

While group affiliation and identity are part of individual food choice, they are only some of the many reasons for choosing what to eat. The extensive literature on motivations for individual food choice focuses on health, affordability, personal preference, cultural background, preferred grocery stores, and convenience, among many other factors (Middaugh et al 2012; Wiig et al 2008). This research explores some of the factors in food choice for low-income women, specifically about their definitions of and adherence to a “healthy diet” (Wiig et al 2008; Damman and Smith 2010). Scholars show that what people eat is not clearly connected to any one attribute of their identity; rather, it is a complex mixture of factors, differing by individual and situation.

Individual food choice has gained attention recently as part of discussions around the obesity epidemic in America (Drewnowski and Darmon 2005). Maintaining a “healthy diet” as a means of combatting obesity is often portrayed as a matter of personal motivation (Ibid). Obese individuals and people with other diet-related health concerns are often blamed for their lack of personal control, but a growing body of research sheds light on the many reasons people fail to follow USDA nutritional guidelines. Foremost among these are economic concerns; it is very expensive to eat a healthy diet in the United States today (Drewnowski and Darmon 2005). In the past 30 years, the price of vegetables

has risen dramatically, especially in comparison with nutrient-poor, calorie- dense foods such as soda (Powell et al 2013). Particularly among those on limited food budgets, buying nutrient- poor, calorie- rich foods becomes a viable option to fill hungry bellies (Dammann and Smith 2010; Wiig et al 2013).

Beyond economic inequalities, studies have found that accessibility to grocery stores constrains women's food choices. Women without their own cars could rarely get to the grocery store, motivating them to buy meat, processed foods, and shelf stable foods that would not spoil (Wiig et al 2013). Women were also less likely to purchase fruits and vegetables because of their ability to spoil quickly (Ibid). Mothers with young children wanted to purchase foods that their children would eat, and if their children did not eat vegetables they would buy other food (Ibid). Studies found that low- income women spent the largest portion of their food budget on meat (Wiig et al 2013; Dammann and Smith 2010). Participants viewed meat as essential for health and growing children, more so than vegetables (ibid). In addition, meat's place as a status symbol in the United States, particularly the Midwest, where these studies were conducted, motivated women to spend more money on it (ibid). Low- income women whose friends and family emphasized the importance of eating vegetables purchased and ate more vegetables than those who did not (Williams et al 2012). Adherence to a healthy diet is also dependent on one's definition of a healthy diet. Some believe that federal guidelines outline best health practices, while others are more reliant on traditional or cultural ways of eating (Ristovzki- Slijepcevic et al 2008). Others use the internet, health magazines, or alternative sources to define a healthy diet (ibid). While economics does play into low- income women's food purchasing habits, it is not the only factor informing their decisions.

Many low- income women are indeed following what they believe to be the most appropriate and healthy diet for their families. The most important nutritional concern is getting enough calories; if affording calories is a concern, buying more meat than vegetables is a logical decision (Wiig et al 2013).

Grocery shopping for a family is always a complex process; shoppers must remember every person's individual preferences and dislikes and plan meals for a number of people for a number of weeks. On a budget, this negotiation becomes even more difficult. Women buying food for their families on a budget may have different obstacles and goals for grocery shopping than local food activists with ample disposable income. Therefore, their definition of "good food" and a healthy diet is reliant on addressing the specific obstacles and needs in their lives.

### **Background on Domestic Violence**

All of the New Hope clients involved in this study had recently left situations of domestic violence. The term "domestic violence" incorporates a large number of behaviors surrounding abuse within intimate relationships, familial relationships, or a household. For the purposes of this research, "domestic violence" specifically refers to intimate partner violence (IPV), in married or unmarried co-residence relationships, though domestic violence can be extended to include other abusive relationships, including child abuse, elder abuse, and disability-based abuse (Black et al 2011). Domestic violence can include a large range of abusive behaviors, including but not limited to physical, sexual, verbal, economic, psychological, cultural, and spiritual abuse (Black et al 2011). Abusers are generally extremely controlling of their partners and work to isolate them from their support systems, such as friends, family, or work relationships. Domestic violence leaves lasting physical and emotional impacts on its victims/survivors including physical injuries, post-traumatic stress disorder, substance abuse or addiction, and other mental and psychological problems (Wies 2011).

Domestic violence occurs around the world, though its form, harshness, and acceptability vary widely (Brown 1999). In the US, it affects people from all economic classes, races, and religious and cultural backgrounds. A 2010 CDC study found that "more than 1 in 3 women (35.6%) and more than 1 in 4 men (28.5%) in the United States have experienced rape, physical violence, and/or stalking by an

intimate partner in their lifetime” (Black et al 2011: 2). In Massachusetts, 31.7% of women and 19.2% of men had, at one time in their lives, been stalked, raped, or physically abused by an intimate partner (Black et al 2011: 74).

Though both men and women can be abused in intimate relationships, much of the literature on domestic violence focuses specifically on women to highlight the gendered nature of IPV, as well as the fact that the vast majority of the victims of IPV are women (Brandwein 1999; Sokoloff and Dupont 2005). This approach conceptualizes how structural forces, including sexism, play into the personal experiences of domestic violence, and enable policy makers, academics, and activists to approach domestic violence as a societal, structural, and cultural issue rather than an individual or family problem (Sokoloff and Dupont 2005). Early activists working against domestic violence framed domestic violence as something that can happen to anyone. As Beth Richie (2005) notes, this framing really means that domestic violence was not something that could only happen to poor women or women of color—domestic violence could happen to anyone, including white women and middle and upper class women. This framing has recently been criticized for centralizing the needs of white, middle class women while ignoring the voices of already marginalized communities:

“ ‘everywoman’ became a white middle-class woman who could turn to a private therapist, a doctor, a police officer, or a law to protect her from abuse...intervention strategies were based on her needs, she was featured in public awareness campaigns....[and] victimization of women of color in low-income communities is invisible to the mainstream public, at best” (Richie 2005: 53).

Given the influences of feminist theories of intersectionality, domestic violence literature has recently shifted to incorporate an understanding of the way that race, class, sexual orientation, immigration status, culture, and religion intersect with gender in domestic violence. This thinking understands that there is no single, unified “woman” who experiences domestic violence; rather, it is

essential to recognize that all experience of domestic violence, as many experiences of violence in general, “are mediated through structural forms of oppression such as racism, economic exploitation, colonialism, heterosexism, and other systems of inequality” (Sokoloff and Dupont 2005:6).

Appropriate approaches to ending domestic violence and helping survivors have been widely disputed, but it is generally accepted that the two most necessary elements to stop domestic violence are sanctions for abusers and sanctuary for the survivors (Brown 1999). In the US, there are a number of organizations working to provide services to individuals victimized by domestic violence. These include hotline services, emergency shelters, legal assistance, and counseling. These agencies are often underfunded and rely on volunteers and fundraising to make ends meet (Wies 2011). The current resources do not meet the scope of the problem; women calling hotlines looking for help are occasionally turned away because of a lack of space (Salcido and Adelman 2004). In 2013, New Hope consistently turned women away from its two emergency bed shelters. Only one bed was open for one night over the course of the entire year.

These agencies are essential because formal law enforcement structures, including the police, often fail to protect women trying to escape domestic violence. Many women, especially women of color and immigrant women, are hesitant to involve police because of associations and history with violence at the hands of the state. Because of their oppression and abuse at the hands of the police, African American communities often seek to develop alternative, community- based strategies for handling domestic violence (Incite!-Critical Resistance 2005). Activists have pointed to the parallels between domestic violence and state violence, emphasizing that incarcerating more members of these communities is not an appropriate solution to domestic violence, while ignoring the issue entirely further marginalizes the survivors of domestic violence (Incite!- Critical Resistance 2005). A similar issue exists for immigrant and undocumented women. Undocumented women are especially cautious of approaching law enforcement for help because of fears of deportation (Salcido and Adelman 2004).

Immigration policy in the US does not provide many pathways for women escaping from domestic violence, and undocumented women, or immigrants whose husbands control their legal paperwork, are often extremely vulnerable to domestic violence (Salcido and Adelman 2004). Minority groups are also often discriminated against by the police when seeking help, and cultural minorities are often dissuaded by their communities from seeking external help for fear of reflecting negatively on the community (Dasgupta 2005). These examples underscore some of the many ways that domestic violence intersects with state power and policy.

### **Domestic Violence and Poverty**

Though domestic violence happens in all socioeconomic classes, fleeing domestic violence creates a number of obstacles that leave women and children financially insecure. One major obstacle to leaving an abusive relationship is a lack of sufficient funds (Davis 1999). Those who leave domestic violence situations often have to leave everything behind, so even those who were financially stable before leaving become financially insecure (Davis 1999). One facet of domestic violence is economic abuse. Economically abusive behavior includes making women financially dependent on their abusive partners by forbidding them to control their own money; in this case, many women have to hide money in small amounts to save some of their own money to leave (Brandwein 1999).

Beyond losing control of access to their own money, many women cannot work because of issues related to domestic violence. Being in an abusive relationship interferes with work in a number of ways. If a woman is dependent on her partner for transportation or childcare, that support can become inconsistent, causing women to be consistently late to work or miss work entirely, which may cause them to lose their jobs (Brush 2004). Abusive partners can purposely sabotage a woman's ability to work in other ways, such as hiding keys or turning off an alarm clock (Davis 1999). Studies have shown that as many as 96% of women in abusive relationships had issues with employment related to the abuse, and

70% of women in abusive relationships were called repeatedly, stalked, or harassed by their partner while at work (Davis 1999). This can be distracting and distressing to the women involved, as well as disruptive to the work site, and may, once again, cause a woman to lose her job or have to quit (Brush 2004). Other obstacles include sustaining injuries, both mental and physical, which cause women to lose jobs due to disability. After sustaining physical, visible injuries, women may not be able to work because of the physical pain or because of the stigma associated with sustaining visible injuries (Brandwein 1999). Beyond physical injuries, the emotional and psychological effects of the trauma of abuse can prevent women from achieving financial stability.

After leaving an abusive relationship, many women exhibit signs of post-traumatic stress disorder comparable to those suffered by veterans returning from a war zone (Brown 1999). Many women leaving abusive relationships have serious mental health issues, and some of them self-medicate with alcohol or drugs, leading to further inability to hold a steady job (Brush 2004). Without the financial means to secure counseling or other psychological help, many women fall into traps of addiction as a result of their trauma (Brush 2004). This is especially true of children who experienced abuse or sexual assault. The psychological repercussions of childhood sexual assault include “low self-esteem, sexual acting out, and post-traumatic stress disorder” (Brandwein 1999: 8). Many women go on public assistance in order to leave abusive relationships; an external funding source is almost always necessary to make this transition (Brandwein 1999).

### **Food, Gender, and Violence**

Women leaving domestic abuse situations are likely to experience poverty (Power 2006), and female-headed households are more likely to experience food insecurity (Chilton and Booth 2007). When living within an abusive relationship, women are likely to be food insecure when food is used as a source of abuse. In Elaine Power’s (2006) study on intra-household food insecurity and poverty, she

explains that food insecurity is typically studied at the household level. However, looking within household often reveals dynamics dictated by familial abuse that inform food and resource distribution within a household or family. There have been few studies about intra- household food distribution in domestic violence situations, but one study in the 1980s found that men's food preferences determined how the food budget would be allocated. Because of women's traditional role as homemakers, "food has long been acknowledged as a catalyst for physical and psychological violence against women in abusive heterosexual relationships. In such relationships, a woman's perceived failure to carry out what her partner considers her "proper" duties can act as a trigger for violence" (Power 2006: 258).

More recent studies have shown a link between domestic violence and food insecurity. Women experiencing food insecurity, especially mothers, incorporate strategies for preventing food insecurity for their children. These include regularly skipping meals or not eating enough to ensure that there is food available for children (Power 2006). When families in domestic violence situations are food insecure, women often bear the brunt of the burden. One woman describes the experience of preparing very specific food to meet her husband's specifications and avoid violence, while she and her children "...would eat a different meal, which saved money because it incorporated less expensive, lesser quality food than her husband ate" (Power 2006: 259). Single mothers are at higher risk of food insecurity than childless women, married women, or single fathers (Martin and Lippert 2012). US- born single mothers exhibited higher rates of food insecurity and higher rates of obesity than other groups. The researchers hypothesized that single mothers' high rates of obesity were due to their tendency to take on gendered, maternal roles and sacrifice for their children. In situations of food insecurity, women were more likely to eat cheap, high- calorie food to ensure adequate food for their children and, therefore, gain weight themselves as a result of a calorie- high, nutrient- low diet (Martin and Lippert 2012).

The psychological impacts of domestic violence, including PTSD, can manifest through damaging relationships with food. Women leaving domestic violence situations often develop disordered eating habits as mechanisms to cope with their trauma. Brewerton (2011) reviews the link between interpersonal trauma and disordered eating. Brewerton points to the use of food as self-medication, especially foods high in fat and sugar. Foods high in fat and sugar exhibit some of the same calming, pleasure-inducing effects as drugs, leading several scholars and scientists to identify their addictive properties (Brewerton 2011). Others (Romans 2001; Bardy 2008) have identified links between childhood exposure to domestic and sexual violence and eating disorders.

In a study of poor inner-city Black women, participants described two kinds of hunger: hunger of the body and hunger of the mind (Chilton and Booth 2007). Hunger of the body referred to situations in which food was completely unavailable and women suffered serious physical side effects of hunger, including fatigue, inability to sleep, and illness. Hunger of the mind referred to self-inflicted hunger, moments when, because of emotional and psychological difficulties, the women were unable to feed themselves. Participants described experience of being unable to eat or take care of themselves as a result of the trauma of extreme poverty, domestic abuse, rape, and interpersonal and community violence (Chilton and Booth 2007). During the most difficult times, women were unable to eat even when food was available. One participant explains that she would go to the church food pantry, not only for food but also for spiritual comfort and guidance. The women's two experiences of hunger, of the body and of the mind, were interrelated. Women were most likely to experience an inability to eat due to trauma if they had experienced physical or sexual abuse while children (Chilton and Booth 2007). These studies suggest that symptoms of trauma, including anxiety, depression, and an increased need for control, lead to the development of disordered eating in childhood survivors of trauma.

As the traditional homemakers within a family, women have a special relationship with food (Counihan 2009). For women, food can serve as a proxy for love in relationships with friends and family (Counihan 2009; Janowski 2012; Sidenvall et al 2000). For many women, eating is intimately linked to connections with other people (Sidenvall et al 2000). After leaving communities to escape domestic violence, New Hope clients experienced changes in their relationships with food parallel to their newfound isolation and separation from friends and family. Many of the clients, used to cooking big meals for their extended families, felt uncomfortable cooking and eating alone. Many of the participants in this fieldsite felt that eating their favorite foods was something they did with their family or community. Without their family or community, their conception of the food's value had to change. Because of their traditional societal role as caregivers, women's relationship with food is often based on providing and sharing food with others (Sidenvall et al 2000). When separated from others, women can have difficulty forming meaning around food alone.

In an ethnographic study of Polish refugees in the 1940s, Janowski (2012) found that Polish women used traditional foods to maintain a sense of Polish-ness in the terrible conditions of refugee camps. Women approximated traditional Polish dishes out of available ingredients to create the feeling of familiar foods. More importantly, women maintained traditional meal structures when possible to maintain Polish identity. One participant describes her experience of displacement; "It was not a normal life at all ... there was no structure to meals. It was more like animals' type of feeding. You were hungry, you ate what you found" (quoted in Janowski 2012). A central aspect of recovery from trauma was returning to both traditional foods and the traditional way of eating, family dinners. Ensuring the continuance of family dinners enabled Polish refugee women to regain a sense of identity and place.

While food can be a manifestation of abuse and struggle, it also has enormous potential as a tool for healing. The current food system is fractured in a number of ways. It is environmentally

unsustainable and is characterized by unequal distribution. Attempts by the local food movement to address these issues often fail to address the whole scope of the problem. More so, the needs addressed by the local food movement are very different from the needs identified by survivors of domestic violence. Domestic violence survivors often seek to establish economic independence, regain a sense of personal identity, and reestablish security. Absent from the literature is the role that food plays both in domestic violence survivor's experiences of identity formation and personal recovery. For New Hope clients, speaking about food provided a forum for speaking about community, isolation, identity formation, independence, and recovery.

## -----Methodology-----

### **Background with New Hope**

The primary field site for this ethnographic research was the office of New Hope, an organization devoted to ending domestic violence and sexual assault located in southeastern Massachusetts. The organization serves numerous communities and counties and provides a large variety of services. New Hope operates two emergency shelters, supplies victim advocates to two area courts, facilitates a meeting space for children and noncustodial parents, operates a twenty-four hour hotline, and provides ongoing counseling and support to all clients. The organization provides education about domestic violence, sexual assault, and teen dating violence to local schools. New Hope staff also work closely with community clients to provide economic, psychological, and emotional support to women and men in abusive relationships.

In December 2010, I began volunteering with New Hope over my school break. Though the organization is well staffed, they rely heavily on volunteers and interns for help with fundraising, logistical work, and other support services. Rena, the VP of operations at New Hope, is a friend of my family and has been talking to me about her work for years and encouraged me to volunteer at the organization over school breaks and facilitated my entry into the organization. As a volunteer, I mainly worked inside the administrative office and had little interaction with clients, completing basic tasks like sorting through Christmas donations and photocopying materials. This original volunteer position gave me the opportunity to learn about New Hope's programs and mission. In January 2013, I approached New Hope to determine their interest in acting as a research site for my senior thesis. Through conversations with Rena, I learned about New Hope's desire to reexamine their program's food use. The vast majority of food used in New Hope's shelters and given to community clients is provided by nearby food banks. Most of the vegetables and fruit are either frozen or canned with few fresh options. New

Hope was interested in incorporating fresher and healthier foods into their meal plan, as well as pursuing food and nutritional options appropriate to their diverse client base. New Hope serves clients from very diverse backgrounds and is increasingly focused on providing culturally appropriate care in many venues, including counseling and legal services. My research on culturally appropriate food and nutrition was one aspect of their larger goals of inclusivity and cultural appropriateness.

To facilitate research on the role of culturally appropriate food in New Hope's programs, I interned with New Hope's transitional living program (TLP) from May to August 2013. I was financially supported through a grant from the University of Vermont's Undergraduate Research Office. TLP's five confidential apartments provide housing to families, mainly women with children, transitioning out of domestic violence shelters. To be eligible for a TLP placement, applicants must be currently living in a domestic violence shelter, have children, and have a source of income. The goal of TLP is to empower clients to become economically independent, process trauma, and learn about the structure of healthy relationships. While living in TLP, clients learn life skills such as budgeting, writing a resume, and parenting skills, and both they and their children receive counseling. Staff members also assist clients in setting and achieving goals, such as finding a job or returning to school, with the eventual goal of financial stability. The program is intended to last eighteen months, though some participants stay for a longer or shorter time as needed to make their transition. TLP staff works with clients to find stable housing and employment when they leave.

In January 2013, I completed a 30- hour volunteer training run by New Hope, mandatory for anyone interested in working with clients. This training included an intensive study of all of New Hope's services and programs, a background understanding of the cycle of domestic and sexual violence and measures taken to respond to the cycle and provide services to survivors. New Hope follows an empowerment model for supporting clients. Through intensive trainings, staff, volunteers, and interns

learn the core principles of the empowerment model, such as supporting clients in their decisions, providing many options, respecting clients as experts on their lives and stories, and practicing non judgment and compassion.

Part of the training included the opportunity to observe New Hope's other programs. I spent two days shadowing victim advocates at area courts, which provided a perspective on the legal difficulties associated with getting restraining orders or pressing charges for domestic violence. A few days were spent in the two emergency shelters observing the workings of their kitchen, food purchasing, and food donations. I also looked through their materials on federal guidelines for food served in emergency shelters, especially food served to children. I recorded these experiences through extensive field notes and recorded my observations and interactions as part of my research data.

As a TLP intern, I fulfilled several roles beyond that of anthropologist and student researcher. Beyond conducting interviews and participant observation, my role as an intern involved performing a number of tasks to support TLP's staff. I sat in on many staff and client meetings, where I was exposed to the different ways that staff members assist clients in acquiring economic and emotional stability. I researched community resources for clients, transported and sorted donations, and sat in on many meetings with staff and clients. My main task as an intern was organizing, shopping for, and cooking for bimonthly dinners with the clients. The office's counselor led a parenting program, which was followed by a chance for the women to socialize, eat, and relax together. At these parenting groups, I served the role of both logistical organizer and researcher. It was difficult to balance my two roles, both as intern and as researcher. These two roles often complemented each other, as my internship enabled me to conduct more participant observation and form more contacts than would otherwise have been possible. However, these two roles occasionally came into conflict. When meeting new clients or staff members, other people would often introduce me as an intern, though I wanted to be clear that I was

conducting research. I continuously reminded staff and clients that I was conducting research. On several occasions, I put away my pen and paper to respect clients' requests for privacy.

### **Personal Background with the Local Food Movement**

The local food movement is very active in communities like Burlington, Vermont. As a student at the University of Vermont, I have benefitted from the university's focus on food systems through environmental studies classes critiquing conventional agriculture and the global food system. In different environmental studies classes, I have learned the problems with conventional farming, long-distance food transportation, and highly processed foods. This academic focus on the virtues of local food is mirrored in community and student life. I am a member of my school's environmental cooperative, Slade Hall, where we buy local, organic food in bulk from farmers that we know. This community frequently praises the virtues of local, organic food and discusses the importance of engaging with the food system and making intentional choices about food purchasing. My community and friends often purchase food at farmers markets or the local food cooperative, City Market. Like many of the members of this community, I am white and come from a middle-class background with the affluence to go to school out-of-state with enough disposable income to spend on buying "responsible" foods.

These communities often discuss the morality of food purchasing. Bumper stickers around Burlington remind us that "you are where you eat" and that "eating is a political act." A Valentine's Day cookie at a local café tells us to remind a loved one that "you're hot like kale." Within this context, alternative food movements become the norm, and those uninterested in these approaches are often framed as uninformed or uneducated, neglecting the many financial, cultural, and personal dimensions of food choice. Recently, a fellow UVM student asked how much I would judge her if we stopped at a McDonald's. After hastily assuring her that there would be no judgment, I reflected on the impression

my community makes both as advocates of alternative food systems and as the harsh agents of the food morality police. These experiences have given me an appreciation for the personal attachment that individuals have to food and ways of eating and a new understanding of the defensiveness that people exhibit when their ways of eating are attacked. When researching, I was careful to separate my moralistic biases about eating from the lived experiences of research participants. In doing so, my own attitude towards eating has changed dramatically as I have incorporated new perspectives and moral discourses on eating into my own food practices. In my research, I was aware of the local food movement's occasional role as the "food police" and, in engaging with efforts to increase the accessibility of the local food movement, aimed to step back from and critique the raced, classed, and gendered nature of food choice politics.

I gained an interest in food access and the local food movement after learning about different initiatives in Burlington to expand access to fresh, local food. These initiatives include accepting SNAP and WIC at farmer's markets; offering discounts for those using food stamps; and donating gleaned food to food pantries and food shelves. Most "alternative" food is more expensive than conventional food, and these programs can be viewed as responses to critiques about the accessibility of the local food movement. As part of my research, I decided to examine the accessibility and ideology of the local food movement in southeastern Massachusetts.

To complement my fieldwork at New Hope, I also used ethnographic methods to study the local food movement in southeastern Massachusetts, I performed participant observation at three small farmers markets in the area. In addition, I had a part-time job working at a local, organic, community supported agriculture (CSA) farm. Though I was not officially performing participant observation at work, my experiences at the farm informed my perspective on the local food movement in the area. I took field notes on my experience at the farm to record daily events and attitudes. I worked with

volunteers to glean produce for a food shelf, and I interviewed three volunteers involved with local food movement accessibility.

## **Funding**

Funding for this research was provided by the Undergraduate Summer Research Grant from the University of Vermont. This grant provided research materials and compensated me for research time. Without this grant, I would not have been able to conduct the research in as much depth or over an extended period of time. The grant enabled me to fully focus on research for several months and is directly responsible for the extent of data I was able to collect. My original plan was to conduct participant observation at New Hope once a week; because of this grant, I spent about 35 hours a week actively conducting research. Much of the grant was used to provide food- related materials to New Hope, such as basic cooking appliances and food. This grant enabled the creation of bimonthly dinners for New Hope clients by providing funding for food and cooking supplies. It also provided the funding for interview compensation, transportation, and an audio recorder.

## **Ethnographic Methods and IRB**

I used ethnographic methods to study domestic violence, food insecurity, and the local food movement. These methods included participant observation and structured and unstructured interviews. Ethnographic methods are uniquely suited to this research because they draw on people's direct understanding of the world and are therefore helpful in determining how best to address their needs. In addition, ethnographic methods are ideal for a close, localized understanding of specific issues (Madison 2005). Because they are, by definition, qualitative, ethnographic methods are well suited to small- scale research, allowing the researcher to understand the layers and complexity of a specific context.

I conducted participant observation from May to August 2013. The participant observation mainly occurred in the New Hope offices, though I also visited clients' homes, gleaned with local food movement activists, went grocery shopping with staff, and visited food pantries. Much of the participant observation involved shadowing TLP staff members, Margaret and Carly. During participant observation, I took detailed field notes, which I later typed up into a completed transcript. The participant observation enabled me to speak to a variety of people in informal settings and conduct a number of informal interviews, which were recorded in the field notes.

I conducted a total of eleven structured interviews for this research. Because of the many different topics that this research covered, I conducted interviews with several different groups of people. To study New Hope, four of the interviews were with New Hope staff members and three were with New Hope clients. Of the New Hope clients, two were current TLP participants and one was a community client. I chose interviewees for their availability and their interest in the topic. To study the local food movement, I conducted three interviews with volunteers in the local food movement and one with a farmer at a local, organic farm interested in food donation.

I audio recorded all of the interviews, except for those conducted with New Hope clients. For issues around safety and confidentiality, the New Hope client interviews were noted by hand and then later written into a transcript. New Hope guidelines strictly forbid audio or visual recording of clients working with the organization. Interviewees were compensated for their time with a \$20 gift card to a grocery store of their choice. Common stores that clients selected were Save-a-Lot and Wal-Mart. I analyzed all interview transcripts, and field notes were then coded them for common themes. All fieldnotes and transcribed interviews were coded using HyperResearch software. I assigned each interview to a category ("clients," "staff," "volunteers" etc) then analyzed the transcripts using thirteen major codes. A complete list of codes can be found in the appendix. My first code was "types of food,"

which I used whenever someone mentioned a specific kind of food or made a moral judgment about eating, such as referring to good or bad food. One category of codes, including “benefits,” “donations,” and “food providing locations,” referred to the strategies clients, and some staff members, employed to afford and purchase food. The code “obstacles to access” included all logistical or structural obstacles preventing people from acquiring food in the way they wanted. There were a set of codes that referred to interactions between people, including “community,” which referred to steps taken to build community, and “cross cultural,” which referred to interactions, specifically but not only related to food, between people of different cultural backgrounds. A number of the codes referred to New Hope’s programs and philosophy, including “empowerment” and “education,” which included all life skills programs.

Some codes were only used for specific groups of people. For example, “waste” was a common point of discussion among local food movement volunteers but was rarely mentioned by New Hope clients or staff. I also included the code “farm” specifically for volunteers, though several clients also brought up farms. Likewise, much of the discussion with New Hope clients and staff revolved around benefits, a topic never mentioned by volunteers, perhaps because it was not included on my interview questions for this group.

Because the New Hope clients are considered a vulnerable population, I went through a lengthy IRB approval process before beginning the research. Unlike most student research, the research was not considered exempt and underwent expedited IRB review. All of the New Hope clients that I interviewed are currently hiding from abusive ex- partners, and any revelation of their location or identity could be potentially harmful to them. Therefore, the interviews conducted with clients were not recorded to protect their privacy. Instead, they were transcribed from notes and memory immediately after the interview. All names and locations of research subjects have been changed. Before beginning an

interview, subjects were given a written statement for informed verbal consent to avoid collecting any identifying information, including signatures.

### **Obstacles with Ethnography**

My original research plan was to track the network and relationships that surround local food donation. I intended to interview farmers interested in food donation and gleaning, the volunteers who gleaned the produce, the staff who facilitated delivery to New Hope clients, and the clients who received the food. The intent of this study was to understand the differing perspectives of the actors involved in transferring local food across class lines. There were a number of obstacles that changed my research design.

Due to the time frame of the project (June-August), it was very difficult to work with gleaners and farmers. The summer is the busiest time for farmers; most of the farmers I contacted said they were not interested in becoming involved in this project during this time of year. One of the gleaning organizations, Boston Area Gleaners (BAG) had well-established connections with several farms, but also had relationships with a number of food pantries and was not interested in building a relationship with New Hope. Another gleaning organization, Gan Shalom Gleaners, had a miscommunication with a local farm and decided to defer their program until the next season. In addition, BAG explained that the busiest season for gleaning in Massachusetts is late August until November. Because of the timing of my research, I was not able to work to establish a relationship between the farmers, gleaning organizations, and New Hope. I was able to deliver vegetables to New Hope on a few occasions, but not frequently enough to establish an identifiable pattern. These difficulties represent just a few of the logistical obstacles in local food donation. Despite the fact that my job at this point was conducting research, I was unable to create these essential connections. The obstacles for individuals building this network beyond their daily jobs and routines are considerably larger.

Logistical obstacles impacted my research at New Hope as well. TLP is, by definition, transitional; during my internship some of the clients with whom I worked and formed relationships left suddenly, while new clients joined the program. Clients often did not have phones or reliable forms of transportation, and more than once I planned to meet a client somewhere just to have them not show up at the last minute. The same was true with staff; since they were working with a population in crisis, often engagements were broken or forgotten for the sake of more urgent work. As an intern, I was not allowed to visit client's' homes alone and was therefore dependent on staff member's schedules. This obstacle severely limited the contact that I could have with clients. In addition, since I could only meet with clients with staff members present, it was difficult to determine when, and how, clients' views differed from staff members' opinions.

Therefore, I shifted the focus of my research to examine culturally appropriate food, the meaning of food, and methods to address food insecurity. My reworked research questions included: How does the local food movement interact with those outside of its target audience? What makes food meaningful? How can food contribute to trauma and healing from trauma? I interviewed different actors involved in food work on their differing perspectives on these issues. These interviews provided valuable material for creating gleanings- food provider relationships in the future. In doing so, I found many interesting perspectives on the role of purchasing, preparing, and consuming food in personal and group identity formation.

Though ethnographic methods were helpful for a number of reasons, there were many difficulties with ethnography that required a redefinition of some of its basic principles. Given the transient and diverse nature of New Hope's clients, it is difficult to classify this specific population as one culture. The only thing all the clients had in common was experience with domestic violence. They did not necessarily share beliefs, values, or practices generally associated with the study of a culture. In this

case, ethnographic methods were used to study a context, one specific place and time, rather than a culture that has gradually developed over time within a larger group of people. The staff members at New Hope had more of what would be traditionally understood as a culture, and much of my research ended up examining the culture around domestic violence prevention among the staff. As a result, this research ended up being more focused on the staff culture and perspective than the clients.

### **Theoretical Orientation**

On the spectrum ranging from “pure research” to applied or activist research, this research attempts to orient itself more closely with applied or activist research. Conducting research within this framework involves a feeling of obligation to the research participants; the goal of the research is not simply to contribute to the academic literature but to provide some positive outcomes for the research participants as well (Mohan 1999). Since this research was conducted in close collaboration with New Hope, it followed a Community- Based Research (CBR) model. CBR has a number of intended outcomes, including working in collaboration with a community partner and seeking out the opinions and perspectives of multiple actors (Behrman 2011). In doing this research, I attempted to continually seek feedback from the clients and staff of New Hope. The research questions were designed in collaboration with the community partner. When designing this research in Spring 2013, I was in close contact with New Hope staff in determining my job as an intern and the organization’s desired focus. Though I brought an interest in food, the organization informed me of what they wanted me to focus on rather than setting an independent agenda.

This research involved working very closely with a “vulnerable” population. As a researcher working with a “vulnerable population,” I remain aware that the impacts of my research could have potentially damaging impacts on these women. Any breach in confidentiality could reveal their location to their abusive partners, putting them and their families at great risk. I was careful throughout the

course of the research to maintain confidentiality and to follow all volunteer guidelines set forth by New Hope. However, there were a number of direct benefits for the research participants that outweighed these risks. Beyond seeking constant feedback from participants, I tried to incorporate programs that would directly benefit research participants. These included using research funds to purchase food and supplies for clients, fund and prepare community dinners, and purchase and transport other supplies. I will return the results of this research to New Hope and use them to create informational guidelines for donors about the connection between domestic violence and food insecurity.

Most of the women who participated in the research have recently escaped from horrific circumstances, beyond what I have experienced and can ever truly understand. They have been marginalized over and over again; as victims of gender-based violence, some as new immigrants struggling with U.S. policies, some as women of color fighting institutionalized racism, some as poor women struggling to pay rent and feed their children. The staff members with whom I worked had their own struggles as well; their voices were consistently overlooked in their work and their attempts to make domestic violence and sexual assault visible. A main theme that came up again and again in conversations with staff and clients at New Hope was the importance of building awareness, both of the larger issues of domestic violence and sexual assault and a more personal understanding of the importance of storytelling and being able to share your own story in your own voice. In doing this research, I hope to work to make some of those stories more visible, to bear witness to what these women have overcome and display their perspective.

After returning from “the field,” so to speak, I struggled with the task of conveying others’ voices respectfully and appropriately. Ruth Behar’s (1996) work on vulnerable ethnography influenced me as I coded, analyzed, and reflected upon the data. Behar writes about her experience working in difficult situations that the researcher has no direct power to change, or fix, asking:

“When horror looms... in memories that won’t recede and so come pouring forth in the late-night quiet of a kitchen.... Do you, the observer, stay behind the lens of the camera, switch on the tape recorder, keep pen in hand? Are there limits—of respect, piety pathos—that should not be crossed, even leave a record? But if you can’t stop the horror, shouldn’t you at least document it?” (Behar 1996:2)

This perspective greatly informed my approach to doing research. Domestic violence is a highly emotional and vulnerable topic. As a researcher, I was not immune to that, especially considering that many of the clients were young women my age with whom I was able to connect on a personal level. This point was brought home for me when once, after chatting with a woman and playing with her two-year old son, a staff member handed me her keys and asked me to get something from her office. The client asked why I got to have the keys. “Because she’s an intern,” the staff member responded. The client laughed, surprised. “Oh,” she said, “I thought you were one of us.”

In line with the principles of vulnerable ethnography, as well as feminist research and other alternative research models, my grounding in this research was not to create myself as a separate, objective observer conducting research on people completely unconnected to myself. Vulnerable ethnography is one approach to avoid the creation of “expert” knowledge, which is so closely bound up with manifestations of power. Instead of following a traditional positivist approach to knowledge generation, in which an “expert” researcher studies a subject, chooses which questions to ask, and interprets the answers to those questions, I attempted to follow a feminist approach, which incorporates local knowledge and rejects the idea that only certain people can create and represent knowledge (Mohan 1999; Hesse-Biber et al 2004). Feminist research incorporates horizontal power structures and embraces the importance of self-representation.

Speaking specifically about privileged women telling other women's stories, bell hooks once wrote that:

“even if perceived ‘authorities’ writing about a group to which they do not belong and/or over which they yield power, are progressive, caring, and right-on in every way, as long as their authority is constituted either by the absence of the voices of the individuals whose experiences they seek to address, or the dismissal of those voices as unimportant, the subject-object dichotomy is maintained and domination is enforced” (quoted in Sokoloff and Dupont 2005: 8).

As an undergraduate student conducting my first major research project, I have no answers to these difficult questions of power and representation in research. Perhaps I should never have conducted this research at all. I actively struggled with these dilemmas and attempted, in my research, analysis, and writing, to preserve the voices of my research participants and provide them a forum to tell their own stories.

### **Profile of Study Sample**

This research involved interactions with dozens of local food movement activists, New Hope staff, and New Hope clients. However, most of the specific data is drawn from eleven unstructured interviews with eleven subjects. All names have been changed.

#### *Local Food Movement Subjects*

**Molly** is a middle-aged woman who works as a special education teacher. She lives with her husband and has two college-aged daughters. Along with her husband, she is a member of a local CSA, Moose Hill. Molly has been a member of the CSA for a number of years and greatly enjoys the community and fresh vegetables that it provides. As part of her CSA membership, Molly volunteers on the farm several hours per season. This season, Molly volunteered to bring surplus vegetables to a local food pantry.

**Andrew** is a middle- aged man and a small business owner. He lives with his wife and their two young daughters. Along with Molly, he is a member of the Moose Hill CSA. Andrew considers himself an “idea person” and has long been involved in a variety of social justice programs, mainly related to his Jewish faith. During this research project, Andrew organized several groups of volunteers to glean the fields in the CSA.

**Rob** is a farmer at the Moose Hill CSA. Before working at the farm, he was a general maintenance worker for the nature center and summer camp attached to the CSA. He has worked with the farm on and off for ten years but often displayed impatience with farming in general and organic farming specifically. He was supposed to work only part- time at the farm, but the lead farmer, Catherine, contracted a chronic illness at the beginning of the season, leaving her responsibilities to Rob. At the end of August 2013, Rob left Moose Hill to work on a lobster boat, explaining that he never wanted to farm again. In addition to being a research subject, Rob was also my boss during my time working on the Moose Hill CSA.

**Mike** is a young man in his mid- twenties who works for Boston Area Gleaners. At BAG, he coordinates volunteers and logistics for gleaned produce transportation. Before working at BAG, Mike went to St. Michael’s College in Colchester, Vermont. While in college, he gained experience working on farms and in the local food movement.

#### *New Hope Staff*

**Rena** is the VP of Operations at New Hope and has worked there for two years. Before her time at New Hope, she worked in a number of domestic violence organizations, both in direct service and as a supervisor. She holds a Masters in Social Work. As VP of Operations, Rena oversees all of New Hope’s programs.

**Margaret** is the TLP coordinator. During summer 2013, she had worked with TLP for about six months. She is not a counselor or social worker; her position entails managing clients' physical needs, such as providing them with transportation to doctor's appointments and picking up clothing donations. She also regularly works one- on- one with her clients to help them set and achieve goals. Foremost among these goals are budgeting and financial independence. Her job also involves a lot of paperwork and improvisation.

**Carly** is New Hope's housing coordinator and community advocate. Her job involves working with clients to navigate the federal and state benefits system, especially as it applies to housing assistance. As a community advocate, she works one- on- one with clients to help them find safety and comfort. Before working at New Hope, Carly spent several years working at a domestic violence shelter on a Native American reservation in South Dakota. At the end of August 2013, Carly left New Hope to move back to South Dakota.

**Jane** is the director of both New Hope shelters. She began working at New Hope in May 2013 so was very new to the position. Before working at New Hope, she had worked at a food pantry in Connecticut. She is very enthusiastic about food and focused on bringing healthier food into New Hope's shelters.

#### *New Hope Clients*

**Camila** is a twenty-year-old woman living in a TLP apartment with her one-year-old daughter. She grew up in Western Massachusetts with a large, extended family. After leaving her abusive boyfriend, her father's daughter, she had to move several hours away from her family. Camila moved into TLP in July 2013, halfway through my fieldwork. She spoke about returning to college and getting an advanced degree.

**Nicole** is a woman in her late twenties living in a TLP apartment with her six-month-old son. She has a bachelor's degree and works in a center for at-risk teenagers. She had lived in TLP since December and was getting ready to move out on her own.

**Diane** is a New Hope community client; she does not live in a TLP apartment. She is in her mid-fifties and has one grown daughter and a granddaughter. Diane has lived in and out of domestic violence and homeless shelters, but recently moved in with a friend and is feeling more stabilized. Diane has been involved with New Hope for several years and spoke extensively about her gratitude towards the organization. Since her life has become more stable, she started volunteering with New Hope as well as being a client.

## **Introduction**

Beyond a biological necessity, food is a central component of how we define ourselves (Anderson 2005). Food, as an aspect of self- definition, is highly personal and variable. For people who are food insecure, the dimensions around acquiring appropriate food become more difficult. However, donors seeking to help end hunger often fail to realize the complex factors underlying food choice for low- income people. People’s understandings of what comprises “good food” and a proper diet is informed by their race, class, gender, and personal background (DuPuis and Goodman 2005; Anderson 2005). In this section, I address seven categories and definitions of “good food.” The first two sections, “good food is local, fresh, and/or organic” and “good food is not wasteful” follow definitions of food for volunteers in the local food movement. The following five sections, “good food is purchased with dignity,” “good food is convenient,” “good food is up for interpretation,” “good food is eaten with others,” and “good food is beside the point” refer to definitions of appropriate food expressed by New Hope clients and staff.

Volunteers and farmers involved with the local food movement created clear categories of good and bad food. These categories were based on understandings of food as “fresh” and “natural.” This group speaks more about the food system, farms, agriculture, and sustainability. When these volunteers speak of donating food to pantries and homeless shelters, they speak of improving people’s diets through the provision of fresh, local foods.

When speaking to New Hope staff about their vision for food in their program, they described a program with food that was healthy, fresh, and culturally appropriate for clients. Yet, staff had differing visions of what this program would look like. Some wanted to see more “fresh produce, fresh vegetables, and lean meats” (Jane, interview, 7/25/2013) while others emphasized more room for

clients' voices and preferences in food choice. Staff members were particularly concerned about clients from different cultural backgrounds and their access to culturally appropriate food but noted that a healthy, culturally appropriate lifestyle extended beyond diet. "Healthy" and "culturally appropriate" are not diets but ways of living and therefore cannot be separated from other factors in people's lives.

New Hope clients spoke of good food as food that was convenient and shared with others. Many of the women were living alone or with young children. Displaced from their families and communities by domestic violence, they were discouraged from cooking without anyone with whom to share food, even though many of some generally enjoyed cooking. Many of them received federal food benefits, including SNAP and WIC. Access, convenience, and commensality were factors in determining "good food" for New Hope clients. Their understandings of "good food" were intimately connected with other struggles in their lives, including economic insecurity and displacement from their communities and families.

Examining people's relationships with food involves "...taking into account ways in which people's notions of "right living," and especially "right eating," are wrapped up in these possessive investments in race, class and gender .... [E]ating—like all human action—is imperfect and contradictory." (DuPuis and Goodman 2005: 362). Food is not just about diet; it is about identity formation, group affiliation, and personal belief. At the same time, food is purely functional—everyone needs to eat. Saddling these contradictions causes us to understand the moral qualities and assumptions underlying understandings of food, nutrition, and other eaters.

### **Good Food is local, fresh, and/or organic**

The local food movement activists that I interviewed often referred to the importance of "good food," especially the importance of bringing good food into food pantries. Interestingly, the term "good food" was rarely explicitly defined. Rather than being defined, the word "good" was often associated

with other adjectives such as local, fresh, and/or organic. These adjectives connect to the local food movement's portrayal of farms and agriculture as natural and good, while other spaces are considered unnatural (Alkon 2013). Local food narratives are often farm-centric, lauding the role of farmers in the food system (Allen 2004). These narratives are instrumental in forming the community around local food, where members share stories about their food's ethical background. Food in the food movement is not an objective nutritional object but is a value-laden vessel for storytelling and identity formation.

Farmers markets are a central space for local food movement activists to enact their values and build community. In Southeastern Massachusetts, as in many other areas of the US, farmers markets are gaining popularity. In 2013, over eight thousand farmers markets were registered in the United States, up from under three thousand in 2000 (USDA 2013). During my fieldwork, I visited several of these markets in an attempt to understand the local food movement in that area. None of the farmers markets advertised that they took SNAP, though some did accept WIC checks for specific foods. Two of the farmers markets had many stands that sold products other than fresh vegetables, such as homemade jams, bakery items, wine, and crafts. All of these food and non-food products were united by their adherence to the narrative of local food. The people staffing the stands at the farmers markets were often those who had produced or created the foods they were selling. When interacting with sellers, farmers market customers often asked questions about specific products, especially crafts, jams, or other processed products. These questions helped consumers situate the food and products with a larger narrative. These interactions underscored the importance of the story and the relationships in farmers market shoppers' understandings of good food. In addition to providing "good food," farmers markets create a space for community formation and interactions. Those who share a common definition of "good food"- and the disposable income to purchase it- are given an opportunity to share food narratives and experiences.

Members of a local CSA demonstrated a similar sentiment. Molly spoke about how the CSA encouraged her to try new foods that she had not been exposed to before; "...it also makes me more interested in food. We went online, and we looked up information about ... the nutritional value of the vegetables" (Molly, interview, 7/12/2013). She also spoke about the sense of solidarity and community that came through CSA membership. The CSA was a primary site for promoting solidarity based on shared experiences of food (Anderson 2005). This particular CSA required that all members volunteer at the farm in some capacity in return for a reduced share price. Molly enjoyed the experience of volunteering; "I've mostly harvested in the fields, and I like to work on the days that I pick up foods, because I feel like I'm picking the vegetables that I'll then get later....which is fun because you get to meet more people. Everyone's ....been friendly, and happy to talk and share recipes" (Molly, interview, 7/12/2013). Andrew expressed the same sentiment about community formation within the CSA: "Harvesting...is a wonderful experience, wonderful way to connect with people, and that's part of the dynamic of being out there in nature, and having a topic that's kind of natural for connecting" (Andrew, interview, 7/23/2013). Molly and Andrew's positive experiences at the CSA were related to their relationships with the farm and other CSA shareholders.

Part of Molly's experience at the CSA involved donating food to a local food pantry. She spoke about her experience delivering tubs full of fresh zucchini, summer squash, beets, greens, and onions to the local food pantry. She observed that the people waiting in line were excited to receive the fresh vegetables. They thanked her personally for delivering them, and several women helped her carry the tubs from her car into the church.

"And I thought the food all looked so good- it was all fresh, beautiful vegetables... I thought, wow, how often do these people get fresh vegetables like this? Maybe not that often. I think usually in a food pantry you get things that aren't fresh. I would imagine that you usually get canned goods, packaged things like that, probably things that aren't as nutritionally good for

you as the fresh food. It just- the food just looked so good. And they were very grateful.” (Molly, interview, 7/12/2013)

Other volunteers also spoke about the importance of making fresh food accessible. Fresh food, especially organic or local food, is generally more expensive than canned or processed food (Drewnowski and Darmon 2005). Food pantries rarely carry fresh foods (Tarasuk and Eakin 2005). Andrew spoke extensively about the importance of providing fresh food to food pantries and soup kitchens, especially when people would enjoy it.

“We went to the shelter, one of the things I loved was Marcus the cook, I asked him... I’m actually bringing you a couple hundred pounds of cauliflower and a couple hundred pounds of broccoli. Is it realistic that you could use this? And he said yes. He said ‘I can use that in meals tonight, tomorrow, that we’ll serve the broccoli, save the cauliflower for a couple of days.’ Said what will you make with this? Said I’ll add some butter, I’ll add some of the spices I used in Haiti, he said the thing that I really add, the thing that people can taste, is love.” (Andrew, interview, 7/23/2013)

Mike, the volunteer coordinator for Boston Area Gleaners, spoke of the importance of providing “healthier and tastier food to more people” (Mike, interview, 7/29/2013) but expressed hesitancy at judging other people’s food decisions: “... organic food is kind of expensive... it’s not as easily accessible as canned food or other, generally less quality food... I know it’s not an objective thing, saying less quality, but... that’s probably subjective.” (Mike, interview, 7/29/2013). While embracing the role of farmers markets and local food in his own life, Mike did not want to judge the food choices of others and impose his expectations on them.

Those involved in the local food movement associated “good food” with narratives about agriculture and community. The people involved in this study rarely spoke about the health benefits of “good food” but about the benefits of forming a community dedicated to sharing good food. Good food is procured in specific ways that are often very public and community- based, such as farmers markets

or CSAs. These forums help create the narrative around food; that it is organic, that consumers understand where and how it was produced, and that it is “natural.”

### **Good Food is not wasteful**

In August 2013, I joined a group of gleaners at the CSA for the first volunteer- based gleaning harvest of the season. They brought a cardboard box, which read “fresh, local, organic vegetables.” It sat in the corner of the barn, ready to be filled with vegetables gleaned from the fields outside. Gleaning is a practice where volunteers harvest fields that would otherwise go to waste. In the pouring rain, the volunteers walked through a neglected row of squash. We harvested the squash with knives, filling 50-gallon tubs with oversized zucchini and summer squash. After two giant tubs were filled we decided to stop. Everyone was astonished at how many vegetables they had harvested. The volunteers only took one tub to the soup kitchen- the rest did not fit in their car.

A major theme that came up repeatedly when speaking to volunteers was the concept of waste. The original intent of this research project was to look at the potential of gleaning to fulfill the hunger of TLP clients. Wasted food in the United States is widespread; recent estimates show that about 40% of the food produced in America is later thrown out (BSR 2013). Some of that waste comes from the household level, but much of it is from food production, whether agriculture, supermarkets, or restaurants (BSR 2013). The issue of food waste has caught the attention of many activists concerned with hunger and health. Boston Area Gleaners (BAG) is an organization that gleans excess produce from farms in Massachusetts and donates the food to local food banks. In 2012, they harvested and donated over 55,000 pounds of produce (Mike, interview, 7/29/2013). Mike, BAG’s volunteer coordinator, explained his reasons for getting involved with gleaning. Before working for BAG he worked at several small farms and witnessed the food waste that happens there.

“We would end up throwing out, composting so much kale, and it was always in the back of my mind, can’t we do something with this besides throw it to the pigs?... People could be eating this, definitely, it’s good kale. We didn’t have the labor to deal with it... And that’s where Boston Area Gleaners comes in. And we say, wait, don’t throw that away... we’ll do the labor, you don’t have to worry about it, we’ll take care of it.” (Mike, interview, 7/29/2013)

Learning about food waste inspired Andrew to get involved with gleaning as well. Andrew is a member of a local organic CSA, and he worked with members to organize a gleaning project at the end of the season to harvest excess produce. He saw that the farm was consistently unable to harvest everything it grew, so hundreds of pounds of fresh vegetables were wasted. Though the CSA was local and organic, and in many ways fit the categories of “good food” described above, it wasted much of its unharvested produce because of staff shortages and busy schedules. In an attempt to glean the farm fields one October, Andrew organized a group of volunteers, including his two young daughters. He explained,

“The reality I saw, in any farm, is that the farm can’t harvest everything when it’s ripe and the farm has to prioritize- what should we harvest today? I’m sure it depends on the farm, whether it has to do with the personal preferences, or whether it has to do with the order a farmer has for the produce that’s being harvested. But I saw that things get missed in the course of harvesting. And I saw at the end of a couple of seasons in a row there was still a lot on the vine.” (Andrew, interview, 7/23/2013)

Though I had difficulty contacting farmers because they were in the middle of the growing season, the one farmer I interviewed felt very positive about the gleaning volunteers. Rob was the farmer at the CSA where Andrew gleaned. He described continually seeing plants rot on the vine, or entire rows given up to weeds. As an organic, community- based farm, they rarely had the human labor necessary to harvest and weed all the fields that they planted. Rob felt that one of the downsides of organic farming was that it incurred more waste. Without pesticides and herbicides, many crops were too aesthetically damaged to be distributed to shareholders. The problem of waste in general is often

due to aesthetic reasons. Supermarkets, restaurants, and farms often throw away food because it is not pretty enough to be sold, not because it is inedible (BSR 2013). Rob was grateful to the volunteers that came in but pointed out that the sheer volume of one kind of vegetable made it impossible to salvage all food waste.

“Well, on the waste end, this is the tenth season, it’s still not easy to come to terms with having the stuff just plowed under... It could be devastating when- I’ll take the tomatoes for instance, because they’re such a fragile crop. They’ll start coming in nice, and then three days of rain, and they’ll start exploding, you know, splitting... I mean even a food pantry wouldn’t be able to take that stuff ....it’s pretty sad, seeing it.” (Rob, interview, 7/23/2013)

BAG and other gleaning organizations aim to make the transition from farm to pantry easier for all parties involved. They provide volunteers to harvest extra food, transportation to food pantries, and short- term storage. BAG has positive relationships with farmers, who appreciated that the food they grew was not going to go to waste. BAG also works closely with local food pantries, which rarely had access to fresh food otherwise. Mike explained that food pantries were generally very grateful to have the fresh produce,

“Albeit, sometimes confused as to what to do with it. Once you reaffirm with them that they can cook it and how to cook it, it’s really easy, most of the stuff, they’re very happy, and actual pantry workers are always very happy to talk to us or work with us and receive these things” (Mike, interview, 7/29/2013)

Andrew, another gleaning volunteer, explained that, “gleaning is about capacity.” He explained that throughout his life, he had been blessed with enough resources to live a comfortable life. Gleaning, and other techniques to prevent waste were, for him, an extension of his religious beliefs about justice and generosity. He shared a story of his college experience:

“I met someone at the post office who was from Chile, and he said he had lost his clothes and all his money and he had been sleeping in doorways and, good opportunity for me to continue to

work on my Spanish, and I told him that I had a place for him to stay. And not long after that I met another man, a young boy from Colombia.... So before I knew it I had two roommates....I had enough peanut butter and jelly and almonds and vegetables and things I ate for all of us, and so I- that concept of gleaning is- I had the capacity. Gleaning is about having a capacity that you use... it just seemed like the right thing to do, I never regretted, you know.” (Andrew)

Andrew discussed his other experiences with volunteering and embracing “capacity”. He explained the difficulty when what a volunteer wanted to share was different from what people needed or wanted to receive. He recalled his experience when, as a volunteer bringing meals to people diagnosed with AIDS, he was screamed at and kicked out when he tried to ring the doorbell and bring in the food. He remembered another experience working with the Big Brothers program:

“I’ve been involved in the Big Brother program for a long time with a special needs little brother. Only officially until he was 21, now this man is 36. And I thought that the way I wanted to relate to him was I would take him out and we’d throw a football, play basketball, I’d bring him to my martial arts classes ...that wasn’t what he wanted to do at all, right. He wanted to sit and eat Chinese food, listen to rap music, and go to see movies that he already saw. That was comfortable for him. If he already saw the movie 3 times that was more comfortable for him. Sometimes when we decide we want to give of ourselves- we want to glean, we want to volunteer, we want to make a difference- we think, oh this is how I want to do it.... [but] if I wanted to relate to him, I needed to sit and watch these rap movies with Ice Cube and Ice T and Snoop- Doggy Dogg.” (Andrew)

The difficulty with gleaning specifically, and with volunteering in general, lies in when what people have to give is different from others’ self- identified needs. Unfortunately, the people who are in need are often not consulted when creating volunteer or donation programs. Those who have the capacity to give, because they have resources, time, or energy, are often responsible for setting the agenda about what is important to give. Food banks and pantries receive donations from businesses and individuals based on what those people can provide, not on what the food pantry needs (Tarasuk and

Eakin 2003). Discourse on gleaning and wasted food focused largely on making the CSA better by reducing the amount of food it wasted, not on where that gleaned food went, who needed it, and why.

### **Good Food is Purchased with Dignity**

Dan is the director of the church food pantry near the TLP apartments. One afternoon, Carly drove Liz, one of the TLP clients, to wait at the food pantry. The pantry opened at six; by 5:30, the line of people stretched around the building. Everyone in line held a color-coded entrance card; they are only allowed to go twice a month, their days indicated by color. The food pantry gives out about \$100 worth of food per client per visit, thousands of dollars of food every single day. The demand is high here, as the town is what Dan describes as “section 8 housing heaven” (fieldnotes 6/6/2013). Fortunately, community support is also high; community members donate to the pantry, and many pantry clients volunteer there on days when they do not pick up. The pantry caters mainly to the working poor, people whose minimum-wage jobs at supermarkets or fast-food restaurants do not pay enough for them to feed their families. The pantry is part of a larger system generally known as emergency food. Emergency food sources were originally intended for, as the name indicates, emergency food shortages. Since the 1980s they have shifted from last-minute resort to a basic source of food for many people in the US (Poppendieck 1998). For many people, especially the working poor who make just too much money to receive SNAP, food pantries are an essential source for food (Poppendieck 1998). Food pantries are often at least partially federally funded but rely, for the most part, on nongovernmental support. While food pantries help stave off hunger in the short term, it has been well documented that they are not a sustainable solution to hunger or food insecurity (Mares 2013). While obtaining food from food pantries helps fill hungry bellies, it rarely provides an opportunity for satisfaction or the provision of “good food” (Mares 2013).

The pantry provides food for anyone who demonstrates need, regardless of background. Some of the people there are homeless, and some have drug addictions. “There are sexual predators here, some people would say shoot them and put them in the ground, but that’s not what we do here” (Dan, fieldnotes, 6/6/2013). The food pantry provides many kinds of food; bread and pastries donated from bakeries, canned and preserved food, fresh milk and eggs. The eggs were donated from a nearby farm. When I asked Dan about including fresh vegetables, he became visibly impatient.

“A lot of farms donate during the growing season, but this is New England and the growing season is short. This is a different scale. That’s an upper middle class solution to a much bigger problem. It’s a trend, but people don’t realize how big the problem actually is. Fresh foods, healthy foods- it isn’t actually addressing the problem” (Dan, fieldnotes, 6/6/2013)

The move to provide fresh vegetables at food pantries is, in a large part, a response to criticisms of food pantries carrying only processed food. Camila described her experience getting food from a pantry: “It sucked. Everything seemed expired and everything’s in cans. If I had to go again I would- you gotta do what you gotta do, but I want to prevent going if possible” (Camila, interview, 8/15/2013). Diane also felt that the food in pantries was of lower quality than she would prefer:

“The stores give the breads and things and they’re already old so they don’t last too long. They’re science projects with 3 days. There is very little as far as fresh food.... Sometimes there were fresh foods, and everybody was happy about that, but if you were halfway down the line all the fresh foods would be gone by the time you would get there... people would line up 2 hours before to get in. They would block the thrift store next door and wind around the block“(Diane, interview, 7/23/2013).

Diane spoke about relying on the food pantry for food, especially when her daughter was young. She appreciated fresh vegetables when they were available, but they did not help her address her food insecurity. For many, making food pantries healthier is unproductive when the emergency food system itself is an inappropriate way to provide “good food.” Accessing healthy vegetables—and making them

more readily available in food pantries—may increase short-term access, but it does not address food insecurity. For many, getting fresh vegetables at a food pantry does not translate to health or appropriateness of food. Before working as shelter director, Jane had been unemployed for several years. During her unemployment, she was unable to afford food after paying her other bills and used a food pantry to access food.

“I figured it’s just kind of ironic, it’s like karma, I mean, I ran one, now I get to go to one! I didn’t feel- I did feel a little like- I didn’t really though-Maybe if I had been unemployed in another state, I would have felt that way, but Rhode Island is just so wretched. I mean, this is when they had like 11% unemployment... I knew so many friends, in my level of the profession, who were out of work. And one of them, I suggested to go to the food pantry, and for her, she had a teenage son! I mean, my daughter’s grown, I don’t have any dependents anymore... So I turned her on to my local food bank. It’s in the East Side of Providence, I mean, it’s got Whole Foods stuff... So I figured she’d be delighted to go, and she- one of her neighbors was volunteering there, and she just had a complete meltdown, she was so ashamed and mortified... well, people are ashamed sometimes, like I don’t need help, I don’t need this” (Jane, interview, 7/25/2013).

For many people, acquiring food from a food pantry was anathema to eating good food. Jane’s neighbor’s experience of humiliation in the food pantry- despite the fact that the food pantry had high-end food- demonstrates that how food is acquired is as important as the substance of the food.

Definitions of “good food” rely not only on what the food is but how and from where it is purchased.

The emergency food system was originally set up in the 1980s as a response to major benefit cuts during the Reagan era (Poppendieck 1998). Families found themselves without enough money to buy food; food pantries were a short-term solution to a problem volunteers believed would be addressed by a growing economy (Poppendieck 1998). Over thirty years later, food pantries remain a major- and growing- part of the antihunger movement. Recent initiatives to improve the quality of food in pantries often overlook their mission as a short-term answer to an immediate need, not a sustainable solution to

food insecurity and poverty. Ending hunger and food insecurity will happen not by improving the emergency food system but by making it irrelevant.

### **Good Food is convenient**

As the previous vignette about the emergency food system shows, it is not just what we are eating but the circumstances in which we acquire and eat food that make food culturally appropriate. When New Hope clients and staff expressed the importance of a healthy diet, the circumstances were very important to them. Their definitions of “health” and “good food” were more focused on its convenience and accessibility than what it actually comprised.

New Hope clients and staff expressed different understandings of what “good food” looks like for them. Concerns about convenience and accessibility often took prominence over ethical or ideological notions of food narratives. These include limitations related to affordability, storage, transportation, and convenience. It has been well chronicled that the cost of a healthy diet in the US makes healthy eating inaccessible to many (Drewnowski and Darmon 2005). Healthy food is expensive; it is considerably cheaper to buy 500 calories worth of packaged snacks than 500 calories worth of vegetables. However, price alone does not determine food choice, especially people’s decisions to buy and consume vegetables. Studies have shown few associations between income and produce consumption (Middaugh et al 2012). A closer look at the obstacles for busy, low- income individuals reveals the many aspects and considerations in food choice.

Price was an enormous factor in people’s food purchasing decisions. Clients expressed skepticism at the quality of the vegetables at the supermarket and felt the high cost was not worth it. Nicole, who was born in Haiti, expressed frustration at the expense of “organic vegetables- what you call organic and we call normal” (Nicole, interview, 7/30/2013). She recalled growing fresh vegetables in her backyard, significantly cheaper and more delicious than what she bought in supermarkets in the US. She

was hesitant to pay extra money for what she considered a “normal” vegetable. Diane felt that the produce quality was often low considering the high price for fresh vegetables:

“Sometimes the fresh stuff is really expensive. Like peppers, they’re \$1.99 a pound. They’re cheaper if you buy them in a package, but that’s sneaky because they’ll turn it so you can’t see the bad side of the pepper, then it turns out you have to throw away a whole big piece of it. Another problem is, if you buy fresh stuff you have to keep your fridge at a cooler temperature which increases the electricity bill.” (Diane, interview, 7/23/2013).

Margaret, the TLP coordinator, explained that all of her clients are single mothers with children. Most of these women lacked dependable transportation. For women with young children, taking public transportation to get to the grocery store was a considerable effort. As such, they often preferred to buy nonperishable foods that would not spoil between trips to the supermarket. For many people, the taste difference between fresh and canned vegetables was not significant enough to buy fresh vegetables.

“Sometimes the canned stuff doesn’t taste as good but I know how to season it, add herbs and spices, sometimes I’ll add that Greek dressing, and it tastes just as good (Diane). Clients often bought canned or frozen foods both because they were cheaper and less likely to be wasted than fresh vegetables. Carly explained that buying canned or frozen vegetables was more convenient because:

“People... don’t have time to go to the grocery store every single time they want to make a meal. But- that’s why I think they tend to stick with those things. They don’t have to worry about them going bad as quickly, they always have access, they can stockpile, they’re cheaper”(Carly, interview, 8/8/2013).

Similarly, Camila explained that her preferred vegetables were “...boiled vegetables, from a can. That would be corn and green beans. And a salad on the side” (Camila, interview, 8/15/2013). She did not explicitly differentiate between canned and fresh vegetables. Camila’s conception of healthy food did not focus specifically on fresh vegetables but on vegetables in other forms, including canned.

Other places to buy fresh vegetables, such as farmers markets or CSA shares, were inaccessible to people without a car. Because of transportation difficulties, clients were more likely to buy perishable foods, such as milk, at corner or convenience stores. If they needed to go to the supermarket “...they would have to walk miles or take the bus, and if they don’t have money to take the bus...” (Carly, interview, 8/8/2013). Corner stores tend to have perishable staples such as milk or bread but are less likely to have fresh fruits and vegetables. Recent initiatives have spoken extensively about food deserts and the importance of providing fresh vegetables in underserved areas (Cummins et al 2013). Attempts to address the lack of food in food deserts include initiatives to include fresh vegetables in corner stores and recruiting larger supermarkets to open in underserved areas. However, a recent study showed that simply increasing access to vegetables was not enough to change habit or consumption (Cummins et al 2013). Access to vegetables must be understood within the larger context of people’s lives and circumstances.

Carly, New Hope’s housing advocate, focused on the intersection between federal benefits for food and homelessness. She explained that alternative, non-governmental sources for food, such as the food pantry or soup kitchen, were in greater supply than housing options. She spoke extensively about clients who had enough food stamps but are not utilizing coupons or bargains because “they have \$600 in food stamps, but not enough cash to get a newspaper” (Carly, interview, 8/8/2013). In her experience, Carly found that people struggled less with SNAP than with other types of benefits. She worked with clients to navigate the federal benefits system and explained that SNAP was often the easiest federal benefit to get, particularly for families with children. Yet, for people who were unemployed or who had no regular source of income, access to SNAP did not fully address their food security concerns. For example, Carly spoke of working with clients who were homeless and asked “if you don’t have a place to live, where do you store all this food?” (Carly, interview, 8/8/2013). SNAP cannot be used to buy prepared foods or foods in restaurants, and buying only raw ingredients is very

inconvenient for people who do not have a home, much less a kitchen. Carly felt that many of her clients would benefit more from federal cash benefits than SNAP, as federal cash benefits enables clients to determine their own needs and were less limiting. Clients could access alternative options for food, such as a soup kitchen or a food pantry, but had no other access to cash, which could be used for paying bills, providing housing, and accommodating other needs.

Diane, a middle- aged white woman who was a community client at New Hope, spoke about the difficulties she encountered with SNAP while living in a homeless shelter. She felt frustrated that she could not use her SNAP benefits to purchase appropriate food for her situation while living in the homeless shelter. With access only to SNAP, she was unable to save money for rent. She recounted:

“I used to live in a homeless shelter, and the problem is that you can’t spend EBT [electronic benefit transfer, another name for SNAP] at McDonalds, and there’s no kitchen in the shelter. Once we wanted to make a big chili, cook it for all the hundred and fifty of us in the shelter, and they said we couldn’t because they don’t have a kitchen. So how are you supposed to use EBT? They would tell us to save the EBT for when we got out of the shelter. Then I hear on the news the politicians talking about how there is all this EBT money not being spent, they have all the money piling up and they say it’s a waste. I bet those people are in homeless shelters. Also, people in the shelter would sell their EBT to drug dealers, then the dealer would get \$200 of groceries and they would get \$100 of whatever drug. My SOB ex used to do that with alcohol, and I would do it with the rock. The problem with that is, too, how are you supposed to save money for rent if you have to spend all your cash benefits on food?” (Diane, interview, 7/23/2013)

For survivors of domestic violence in general, homelessness and displacement is a major problem (Brandweirn 1999). One survey found that the majority of homeless women were survivors of domestic violence (Ibid). As a result of the domestic violence and trauma, many women also struggle with substance abuse and addiction. In such an extreme state of insecurity, the provision of food benefits is not adequate to meet people’s needs. According to Carly, officials within the benefits system

felt more comfortable providing food assistance than cash assistance under the assumption that food assistance could only be used to provide “good” resources. Diane felt the same frustration that officials within the government were alleging to provide her with resources without actually accommodating her needs. This demonstrates one point where the federal benefits system coincides with nonprofit emergency assistance systems. Like food pantries and food banks, the majority of homeless shelters are operated privately, not through federal systems. While homeless shelters provide a short-term solution to those without a place to stay, they do not provide a holistic solution to homelessness, hunger, or poverty. These much larger issues of displacement and insecurity must be addressed before survivors of domestic violence can start focusing on attaining “good food”.

Another important factor for food choice among New Hope clients was ease and efficiency in preparation. In light of the hardships faced in other spheres of their lives, many women preferred foods that would be easily prepared and consumed. Except for a few women, who enjoyed cooking as a hobby, the vast majority of women considered good food that which is easily prepared. When I asked Margaret about what her clients looked for when purchasing foods, she claimed the two most important factors were ease and convenience.

“It’s easier to eat crap. It’s easier to go through a drive-thru, not that my clients can, but I mean, it’s easier. I find that’s the things my clients miss the most- is that, you know, getting something prepared for them, or... just going up to a drive-thru and getting something.... Cause it’s a treat for them. But it’s a lot easier to eat frozen food, or like, stuff like that. Especially for my client with the baby. It’s so much easier for her to microwave stuff” (Margaret, interview, 7/16/2013).

Fast food came up consistently as something that the clients wished they could eat but did not have access to. Most clients had no cash but had SNAP, which cannot be used to purchase fast food or prepared food. For many of the clients, comfort and familiarity with respect to food related to the opportunity to have food prepared for them, not be given the finest ingredients to cook meals

themselves. Camila said that before coming to TLP: “I ate a lot of candy. In my teenage years I ate a lot of fast food, McDonald’s. I always got the McDouble with only ketchup, if you want to be specific. Then when I was pregnant that was all I ate, McDoubles, and I also ate a lot of Big Macs when I was pregnant.” (Camila, interview, 8/15/2013)

For Camila, and many other New Hope clients, “good food” was comfortable and convenient. While Camila expressed the importance of eating vegetables and consuming a healthy diet, she missed eating fast food, candy, and other convenience foods. The town where TLP clients lived has a bus system, but it remains an inconvenient way for women with children to travel to far-away supermarkets. Because of busy schedules and difficulties with transportation, some women felt more comfortable buying shelf-stable rather than perishable foods. With so many other obstacles in their lives, many of New Hope’s clients emphasized convenience and comfort when making decisions about food purchasing and consumption.

### **Good food is up for interpretation**

One of the central points of tension in New Hope’s food program was the conflict between the empowerment model supported by New Hope and the nutritional guidelines prescribed by government regulations and funders. According to the empowerment model, staff should provide options and support for clients in making decisions but not push them to make specific decisions. Carly, a community advocate, explained that she could not give her clients her advice or opinion on anything. She especially could not pressure them to leave their abuser if they were still in an abusive relationship. Because the client, not the staff, had to live with the outcome of the decision, New Hope believes that the client alone should be responsible for making decisions. Staff advised clients and provided options but did not make decisions for them. However, for food, the empowerment model clashed with nutritional guidelines prescribed in the shelter. The shelter was partially federally funded, meaning that meals at

shelter followed strict federal nutrition guidelines, especially for children. New Hope staff members tried to give clients as much leeway as possible within these strict nutritional guidelines. Staff members spoke of federal guidelines as yet another obstacle to acquiring appropriate food. Rena explained,

“[Funders] prescribe what they think nutritionally appropriate meals should be for a child. And we don’t override- Unless the parent’s doing something grossly unsafe, we’re not going to say to a parent, “No, you have to feed your child this because this grant says this is what you have to feed your kid.” That’s not what our program’s about. We’re about empowerment.”

During my fieldwork, the largest factors in staff decisions around food were funders’ nutritional guidelines. In the shelter, thick binders in the main office included lists of acceptable and unacceptable foods. Every shelter meal had to contain a vegetable, a protein, and a starch. On the first page of one of the binders was a post it that said, in all capital letters, “potato is a vegetable.” Other foods considered vegetables included ketchup and pizza, which counted as two vegetables if there were vegetables on top in addition to the tomato sauce. Guidelines for children emphasize dairy intake over all else, and milk had to be served at every meal. SNAP and WIC have additional restrictions and regulations and can only be used for specific types of food. While vegetables can always be purchased with SNAP benefits, the food that clients actually want to eat often is not. Food fell into this trap; while clients were empowered to make their own decisions and eat as they want, they were restricted by nutritional guidelines to eat specific products. Federal regulations took precedence over individual needs, by necessity; New Hope could not afford to lose any grant money. New Hope wanted to provide food that was appropriate to clients, whether culturally, medically, or preferentially, but appropriate food does not always match federal and state funder’s understandings of healthy food.

Staff members mediated this dilemma with weekly food planning meetings. On Sunday nights, shelter residents and staff used charts to plan nightly meals. Each shelter resident filled out which

protein, starch, and two vegetables they would cook for dinner. Jane appreciated this model, explaining that it ensured balanced meals:

“This is what they’re doing, in the shelter, in dinner at least, including all the basic food groups. ...So I think they just base the meal, with the main food groups, they think 1 vegetable a day and they’re okay, they really think that protein- meat- is the most important. If they had access to a lot of sweets, which they don’t, because we don’t buy a lot of them, I think those would get eaten” (Jane, interview, 7/25/2013)

One further concern was shelter residents’ tendency to eat candy, chips, and other high calorie, low nutrient foods. The desire to provide nutrition education conflicted with New Hope’s empowerment model. The only mandatory activities in shelter are attending meal planning meeting and cooking dinner once a week. Because of federal guidelines, New Hope staff were pushed to set aside the empowerment model to ensure balanced meals and nutrition.

New Hope was focused on meeting clients’ self- defined needs, not telling them what to do. One client called Margaret in a crisis, and Margaret offered to go over to her apartment and bring her anything she needed, such as pizza or cigarettes. She explained that, “we can’t judge someone else’s need. Like me and coffee, I always need coffee or I get in a bad mood. I was thinking, it’s bad enough that she’s sitting there in her bed depressed, but sitting in her bed depressed without a cigarette when she really needs one, that’s the worst” (fieldnotes 6/13/2013). New Hope explicitly did not want to interfere with clients’ habits unless the client decided those habits needed to be addressed. Therefore, it was difficult for them to promote one specific way of eating, even if that way of eating is considered to be healthier. Even when Margaret was concerned about the health of her clients, or what they fed their children, she rarely chose to interfere in their decisions.

“That’s all the kid will eat, just wants chicken nuggets and ramen noodles. I mean, I’m not their parent, so I can’t really say this is what they should or shouldn’t be eating.... I can only make

suggestions, say hey, maybe this would be better, maybe this would be easier, maybe this would be cheaper, and that's what I do with them... They're gonna do what they want anyways. It's their life." (Margaret, interview, 7/16/2013)

In shelter, clients and shelter staff make a grocery list during Sunday meal planning meetings. Because of funder guidelines, all meals had to include a protein, a starch, and two vegetables. Shelter staff members buy food according to clients' requests, and clients generally request a lot of meat. Studies (Dammann and Smith 2010) have shown the importance of meat and meat purchasing among low- income women. This could be because of meat's role as a status food in mainstream American culture. It could also be related to the need to get family members filled up, and meat is seen as the best way to do that. "I think they just base the meal, with the main food groups, they think one vegetable a day and they're okay, they really think that protein- meat- is the most important" (Jane, interview, 7/25/2013). Because clients are consistently requesting more meat than vegetables, New Hope purchases more meat than vegetables.

Because the client population in shelter is so diverse, there are a number of clients who really enjoy cooking and eating vegetables. Over the summer, Jane facilitated several trips to local farmers markets. Upon their return, a shelter resident excitedly told me about purchasing summer squash and her plans to cook it with her young son. Others walked a mile to the closest supermarket to buy brightly colored peppers to cook for the communal shelter dinner. When shelter residents requested vegetables, more vegetables were purchased. The shelter's transient nature and the diversity of clients it housed caused food purchasing to vary greatly.

Some staff spoke of the importance of a healthy diet in shelter and expressed interest in incorporating more fresh food. However, they did not want to interfere with clients' requests in shelter. Many clients do not prefer to eat vegetables during meals; "We make some sort of vegetable with every meal and often it's what's left over at the end" (Rena, interview, 7/9/2013). Jane, the shelter director,

expressed her desire to buy more fresh produce and lean meats but acknowledged that the demand for fresh vegetables “may not be as high as I would hope it was” (Jane, interview, 7/25/2013).

New Hope supports clients’ health, but it does not want to push clients to eat in a specific way. TLP is focused on enabling clients to live on their own and supporting them in developing life skills, not telling them what to do. As Margaret explained, “I can tell you that one of my clients wants to eat healthy but just doesn’t have the energy to do it. I don’t really know.... I think it’s just a security thing, something they don’t want to give up. Something they have, have control over” (Margaret, interview, 7/16/2013). Following the empowerment model meant that New Hope chose to focus on maintaining clients’ sense of control rather than upholding nutritional guidelines. Margaret spoke about working with a client to improve her health through exercise and nutrition.

“It was something she wanted to do, so I just kind of helped her with it...Everything is based around what they want to do, and I just kinda give them options and help them with it if they want help with it. If she didn’t want to, we probably wouldn’t have worked on that... it’s not something that I would suggest to somebody.” (Margaret, interview, 7/16/2013)

Health and nutrition is not New Hope’s primary goal. Through following an empowerment model, New Hope works with clients to help them live a safe life free of abuse. They aim to help clients take control of their own lives; many of the clients have never been able to make their own decisions before, coming from abusive relationships, some of them starting in childhood. Margaret’s favorite memory of working at TLP involved witnessing her clients taking control over their lives and their decisions.

“I had a client that used to call me every time it snowed outside. It would- ohmygod, it’s snowing, I don’t know what I’m going to do, like this is crazy, you know, like I’m stuck in my house...I can’t get my child to daycare, blah bla blah... And then one day it was snowing and she called me and she’s like “I just wanted to let you know that I was all set.” So I’m like what happened? What did you do? And she’s like well I took care of it. I did this and I did that. And

that's- like, that's a big deal! I mean, I know it's only snow, but it was huge for her, and that was really really awesome" (Margaret, interview, 7/16/2013).

Living a healthy life, according to New Hope, is a process by which clients take ownership of their lives and decisions, independent from abusive and damaging relationships. According to New Hope's empowerment model, "good food" is decided by clients to meet their own self-described needs and goals. Federal nutrition guidelines can impede this goal, as can implementing external beliefs about right ways of living. "Healthy eating" is therefore often eschewed in favor of a larger, more holistic goal of healthy living.

### **Good Food is eaten with others**

What does culturally appropriate food mean outside of its original cultural context? When TLP clients left their homes, their families, and their communities to escape abusive relationships, their ways of living changed as well. It has been well documented that people often have difficulty eating alone, especially when put into a new role or a changed environment (Sidenvall et al 2000; Anderson 2005; Chilton and Booth 2007). Commensality, or the importance of sharing meals to build community, is an important concept in understanding the role of food and eating among TLP clients. One qualitative study of elderly widows in Sweden found that the women derived meaning from cooking and providing food for other people. Without family to cook for, women lost interest in cooking and eating all together (Sidenvall et al 2000). The program Meals on Wheels, which delivers meals to elderly and disabled people, found that they needed to ask volunteers to sit with recipients while they ate; they simply wouldn't eat when they were alone (Anderson 2005). Isolation from family, friends, and community often plays as much or more of a role as separation from traditional foods in determining people's eating habits.

Margaret initially commented that women rarely cooked big meals for themselves when living alone. She explained that her clients generally preferred to eat simple meals. “Yea. It’s a lot of them eating Ramen noodles, simple stuff, stuff you just heat up. I don’t think they’re really cooking huge meals. Some of them are, some of them aren’t. But if it’s only them, they’re not gonna cook something huge” (Margaret, interview, 7/16/2013). Nicole and Camila both came from big families where cooking healthy meals meant cooking for a huge family. The transition to TLP apartments in a new city meant that they were living alone, without a community, for the first time. Nicole, who was born in Haiti but moved to America as a young teenager, spoke about her experience cooking and eating with a large group of people.

“You also gotta cook everything- there’s no such thing as cooking small in the Caribbean. If you’re cooking for your family, someone might walk by and you’ll be like (motions with hand) come in! So if you’re supposed to be feeding 4 people, you’ll cook for 6. And you share food- you’ll send some of the food over to your neighbor or someone if you know they like the way you cook. Even if you know they’re also cooking, you’ll send them some of your food. In the Caribbean we like to have enough.” (Nicole, interview, 7/30/2013)

Nicole loved cooking, but more so, she enjoyed cooking for other people during happy occasions. She did not want to cook for herself and would not eat much of the food that she enjoyed cooking. During our interview, she was cooking for a community TLP dinner, the first opportunity she had to cook for others in months. Though I offered to use my research funds to purchase food for the community dinner, Nicole insisted on buying food and supplies herself, as her enjoyment around food was based on providing food for a large group of people, not consuming the food herself. Most of her stories around food revolved around the enjoyment of cooking for and with other people.

“Back in [state] I used to cook for every holiday, no matter whose house I was at. All the women in my husband’s family loved my food, especially the plantains. They would always ask me for

recipes. I remember once I had to buy a bunch of plantains and show them how to peel them, fry them, everything. It was so funny.” (Nicole, interview, 7/30/2013)

Nicole’s difficulties with food in TLP lay not in her access to food, but in her feeling that cooking for just one person was a waste. She received both WIC and SNAP benefits, and these benefits enabled her to buy food comfortably for herself and her son. In fact, she used her extra SNAP benefits to purchase food to donate to a church food pantry. However, Nicole rarely cooked for herself. She made elaborate fresh fruit purees for her son while donating the prepackaged baby food she bought with her WIC benefits to the church food pantry. In terms of her own consumption, she ate mostly nutritional drinks and frozen food:

“Here, I’ve become so- I barely cook anymore. This is the first time I’ve cooked a big meal like this for months, probably since Noah was about 3 months old. I don’t bother, I’m not going to cook a whole meal just for me. So what do I eat? Now I eat like you do in America- I buy frozen food.” (Nicole, interview, 7/30/2013).

Camila expressed similar sentiments. To leave an abusive relationship, she also had to leave her hometown, and her large, extended, tight-knit Puerto Rican family. When Camila spoke about food, she spoke about the large parties, celebrations, and holidays her family would commemorate by celebrating together.

“We have tons of holidays, and we always have family get- togethers, and they’re always potlucks... And we have a big family! We eat everything you can possibly eat. There’s tons of food. Always lots of rice, beans, meat, pork. My favorite is the cornbread, it’s so sweet. I usually eat it last, as a dessert. My family piles everything up on top of each other on one plate, they say it’s all going to the same place so what does it matter? But that’s too much for me! I like to have it separate, as a dessert.” (Camila, interview, 8/15/2013)

While rice, beans, and meat were important cultural foods for Camila, she rarely ate these foods after moving to her TLP apartment. Like Nicole, Camila was not prevented from cooking by economic

obstacles. Camila chose not to cook meals that required extensive preparation because she felt it was unnecessary to cook all that food for herself, relying instead on basic foods: “I don’t cook as much since it’s just me and her. I could, but it’s just these big pots of stuff and then there’s a ton of leftovers, which is okay, but I don’t do it as much. Now I guess I microwave more stuff” (Camila, interview, 8/15/2013). When I asked Camila about cooking and preparing her favorite meal, she described preparing a meal of rice, *pollo guisado* (braised chicken), and vegetables. She explained that this was the kind of meal she would cook “if I was going to have a guy over for dinner and wanted to impress him” (Camila, interview, 8/15/2012). Though she had access to these foods all the time, she rarely chose to cook them for herself, instead saving them for the opportunity to cook with others.

When we spoke about food, Diane explained that most of her memories around food were related to her mother, who passed away a few months before our interview. Though she tried to replicate the food her mother cooked for holidays and family gatherings, her mother’s absence was still felt.

“My mom usually prepares the food but she passed away a few months ago, in February, right before my birthday, so I don’t know what we’re going to do this year. It was a problem on the fourth of July, my mom always staked out this one spot with a blanket and lots of food, and I went and I brought my granddaughter but my daughter didn’t want to go. She took it really hard.” (Diane, interview, 7/23/2013)

The experiences of Nicole, Camila and Diane with food both reflect their feelings that cooking elaborate meals, those that they associate with their cultural backgrounds, are only appropriate when eaten with others. “Culturally appropriate food” cannot be understood universally; food is only culturally appropriate when eaten in a certain context with certain groups of people. A culture, by definition, involves groups of people, and these women had difficulty enacting their culture while struggling with being alone and displaced from their families and communities. Providing culturally appropriate food

for clients is not as simple as making a grocery list and finding the right stores. Culturally appropriate food is about the experience of cooking and eating with others, which invokes a feeling of solidarity through commensality.

Despite the obstacles, food can provide a common ground for some people. Sue, one of the counselors in the TLP office, started hosting dinners for community clients and TLP clients. Though clients had difficulty getting to these dinners because of lack of transportation or work conflicts, the clients who came seemed to greatly enjoy the opportunity to eat together. Staff described other occasions where food could unite people.

“I think sometimes, when people have had a similar experience, it’s either we’re going to talk about that similar tragic experience or we’re just not going to talk about it at all and be really uncomfortable. And I think this opportunity to talk about food is going to give them, as well as the clients in shelter- it gives them an opportunity to talk about something else.” (Carly, interview, 8/8/2013)

One of the downsides of TLP is the isolation that women experience. Women in TLP have their own apartments and their own space, but they do not have the opportunity to meet each other or support each other through forming a community. Many of them are isolated in their new apartments, having moved to a new city to get away from their abusers. New Hope provided a number of counseling groups, but these groups, while helpful, were not a relaxing social experience for the clients. Sue wanted to start hosting dinners for her clients to give them an opportunity to socialize without thinking about their trauma, and dinners, she found, were one way to do that. While the women were in the parenting group, Margaret and I would watch their children and prepare food for the dinner. Margaret took great care to ensure that the dinner would be beautifully presented. She carved a tomato rose as a centerpiece for platters of food, and together we set the table with tablecloths and scented candles. Sue, the counselor, began and ended the dinner with a short grace that began, “Thank you farmers,

thank you land..." (fieldnotes 7/2/2013). Over dinner, the main topic of conversation was children, another thing all the women had in common. Their children, meanwhile, entertained themselves with Thomas trains and spinning office chairs.

Nicole offered to cook for the next parenting dinner. She spent all day preparing trays of chicken, pork, rice, vegetables, and dessert. She explained that this dinner was the first time she had cooked a big dinner in months, because she loved to cook for other people but was rarely given the opportunity in TLP. In the midst of nasty custody battle with her abusive ex-husband, cooking this meal was both a distraction for her and an opportunity to share her culture and her food with others.

Because Margaret and I prepared the food, the clients had the opportunity to relax and have food served to them. These dinners gave the clients an opportunity to relax with other people. Margaret emphasized the importance of having a relaxing meal.

"In shelter we used to bake a lot, used to make cookies and brownies, and it kind of brought people together, a sense of community, I guess. Just having that support- it's kind of normalizing to people who have experienced trauma and domestic violence. It's helpful." (Margaret, interview, 7/16/2013)

Eating together gives people an opportunity to share their interests and culture with one another. Jane noted that food acts "as an entrée to culture" among people from different cultural backgrounds. The opportunity to share cultural food could be very positive and negative. For people from similar cultural backgrounds, the opportunity to cook together could be bonding. Carly remembered her experience working and living at a shelter in a different state:

"We had a client who was also Puerto Rican, because I'm half Thai, half Puerto Rican... I personally identify more with my Asian side, because my mother raised me herself. And she was like, what do you mean you don't know what this is? And so she spent a day making it so that when I came in at night I could have it and try it and experience this thing that she felt that I was

missing out in my life.... she just thought my identity was based on having this one experience and food was around it, that's really important. I think, that they're able to have that with each other, in shelter." (Carly, interview, 8/8/2013)

Nicole enjoyed cooking Haitian food for the parenting dinner, especially because another client, Sarah, was originally from the Dominican Republic and shared a similar food culture. She and Sarah enjoyed the opportunity to share their food culture with each other, as well as with others in the parenting group. Food gave them an opportunity to talk about their cultural backgrounds and their families and communities, as well as reminisce about their lives before coming into TLP and shelter.

Cooking and eating can provide a powerful opportunity for building community. However, food can be an enormous source of conflict for people who have different understandings of appropriate food. Within shelter and TLP, the only thing all members definitely have in common is shared experiences of domestic violence. Most women are reluctant to share their traumatic experiences with virtual strangers. In shelter especially, having clients live together can be extremely difficult, let alone forming the kind of supportive community that enables healing. "Any communal living situation's a recipe for disaster. You know, putting a bunch of traumatized folks together and telling them to get along and live together- not so easy" (Rena, interview, 7/9/2013). Because clients are from many different cultural backgrounds, judgments about what people are cooking or eating can be taken extremely personally. In shelter, each resident is responsible for cooking dinner one night a week. This can cause enormous interpersonal conflict when people cook foods that others are not used to. Food has the potential to build community through the shared experience of cooking and eating together but can also cause major conflicts.

"Well, the woman from the Middle East... she was making a lot of couscous, and made a dish that I always think of as Moroccan chicken... very aromatic, very flavorful, very different. You know, I remember one client saying, "I've never had chicken like this. I eat my chicken fried." This was totally different. So couscous was not something that most clients had ever even heard

of before. And so people looked at it like, I'm not eating that, before even trying, just the visual because it was something new and different. And, you know, that's hard for someone to make the effort to make a dinner for everyone and have it rejected. It doesn't go over well." (Rena, interview, 7/9/2013).

Nicole also remembered being hurt in shelter when trying to cook for others and having her food rejected. "I love to cook for lots of people, but here I can only cook for people from the same area of the world as me. When you cook for people they're not open-minded. Like in shelter, I would make this big meal for people and they would complain about it. It's because they're used to eating crap." (Nicole, interview, 7/30/2013). These conflicts could often become deeply personal. Staff explained that the largest issue around providing "culturally appropriate food" in shelter was the clashes between clients at dinner. Before working at New Hope, Jane worked in Connecticut and experienced what she referred to as "culture wars:"

"My population, at the Hartford drop-in center, was about 49% African-American, 49% Latino, primarily from Puerto Rico, and 1% other.... And we had one caterer who had been there forever who cooked the most incredible soul food, and everyone loved it.... collards, you name it, macaroni and cheese, lots of pork, fish, and she retired. ...And we had the dilemma of what do we serve? And we had a steering committee, and the Latino representative of the steering committee insisted...we have to get this particular restaurant... La Cocina. And the African-Americans wanted another restaurant, Lily's Soul Food, to bring in, but the Soul Food was so busy that for the first few weeks we had Spanish food ... And the African Americans were like- I'm not going to eat this crap, I'm not going to eat this shit, you know... and then Lily's was available so we split the week between Lily's and La Cocina. It was really amazing to see- the Latinos had had plenty of experience with soul food, but... the African Americans hadn't had too much experience with Spanish food... I mean, there were fights. People yelling and screaming and walking out and storming out and I'm not eating this crap! And within a couple of months everybody loved everything." (Jane 7/25/2013)

Sharing food can be a source of both comfort and conflict. For many people, solitude can cause a loss of interest in eating and cooking, especially when those are understood as social activities. Eating

with a group can ameliorate the isolation, but sharing food with those who eat differently can enhance alienation and distance instead of creating community. Most important is that the goodness of food is often defined in context of how and with whom it is eaten. Preparing culturally appropriate food alone, or with those who do not appreciate it, negates the comforting and healing power of sharing food.

### **Good Food is beside the point**

There is a “joke” among domestic violence prevention staff about the unpredictability of abuse. A man walks into the kitchen and asks his wife to make him two eggs, one scrambled and one fried. She obliges and brings him the prepared food. When he receives the plate, he throws it at the wall and knocks her to the ground, screaming, “You fried the wrong egg!”

Though not heavily explored in the existing literature, food can be a source of conflict and shame within abusive relationships. For people who are recovering from traumatic situations, particularly where food was a source of tension, eating good food can seem unachievable. With so many other obstacles in their lives, many of New Hope’s clients were prevented from caring fully for themselves, let alone create well-balanced meals for their families. Rena explained:

“When folks are in crisis, what to make for a meal is not gonna be the highest on the list of priorities... So for folks who are in crisis- an internal thought process about food, and what’s going to be healthy and appropriate for their family, is not gonna happen. And we are working, by definition, with a population of that’s in crisis. So if healthy food options aren’t *immediately* available, it’s not gonna happen” (Rena, interview, 7/9/2013).

Though New Hope ostensibly works to end domestic violence and sexual assault, clients seek help with a number of other issues as well. These include poverty, homelessness, addiction, mental illness, and PTSD, among others. People exiting traumatic situations, especially those related to domestic violence or sexual assault, often have difficult relationships with food (Romans et al 2001; Chilton and Booth 2007). Studies have shown high rates of eating disorders among victims of domestic

violence (Bardy 2008), as well as high rates of food addiction and the use of food high in salt, sugar, and fat as a form of food addiction (Brewerton 2011). Difficult relationships with food were evident among New Hope clients, though the staff did not have a specific procedure for dealing with eating-related issues. Staff described disordered eating behavior, including clients who rarely ate, clients who would hoard food, and clients who would binge eat in private while refusing to attend group meals. There were numerous stories of people hiding meals in their rooms or stealing the little junk food kept in shelter in the middle of the night. Margaret explained:

“In shelter, yea, I absolutely saw it. And they would eat weird things, well weird things to me. Like, I don’t know, there was this one client that would eat spaghetti, and put ranch dressing on it.. just, different weird things that I probably wouldn’t touch. I’ve seen people hoard food, even when they weren’t hungry, they would just take it, take it, take it. We used to find loaves of bread in client’s rooms, and stuff like that, and so it was really bizarre. And people that would eat late at night... you know...” (Margaret, interview, 7/16/2013)

Food was a manifestation of some people’s most difficult struggles. Jane told a story of a woman with peanut allergies who threatened to commit suicide by peanut butter. During shelter staff meetings, staff would monitor clients’ progress partly by who was coming to dinner and eating in public and who was not. Rena explained that “we definitely know that we have lots of clients who don’t have healthy relationships with food, whether they have full- fledged eating disorders or not” (Rena, interview, 7/9/2013). Clients’ difficult relationships with themselves and their bodies was manifested through difficulty eating. Some of the children in shelter and TLP had difficulty eating as well:

“Some of the children, I don’t know if this is a function of their traumatization or what, but...these guys don’t seem to have an appetite, you know, their parents have to struggle to get them to eat. And I’m not sure- I’ve just glimpsed this- I’m not sure if it’s what they’re offering, or a function of trauma that these kids aren’t eating right.” (Jane, interview, 7/25/2013)

Being able to feed oneself was also a sign of independence, something many women struggled with, especially in shelter. One of the major aspects of abusive relationships is carefully cultivated control and dependence. Many women, as they lost their sense of self in abusive relationships, also lost the ability, or the interest, to care for themselves. For women who had been abused since they were children, the notion of self-care associated with healthy eating was a very foreign concept. Charlotte, a community client, explained that she had lost sixty pounds since living with her abusive boyfriend. He regularly stole or hid her EBT card; without it, she was unable to purchase food. Many women had never been financially independent; their finances had been controlled by their abusive partners, and they had no idea how to purchase or prepare their own food without help. "Food is not really what is on their minds... and some of our clients, they have never cooked for themselves before... someone would always just provide for them, so that's something they need assistance." (Carly) In shelter and TLP, many women were introduced to major life skills, including cooking and nutrition, for the first time.

"So we have been participating... in a research program to look at survivor outcomes... Part of what was learned from that process was that clients, almost to a person, wanted more life skills kinds of activities in shelter. They didn't want to process their trauma. They didn't want to learn the dynamics of an abusive relationship. They wanted to learn how to write a resume. They wanted cooking classes. They wanted parenting stuff. They wanted things that they could utilize to be successful out in the world. And food, nutrition came up." (Rena, interview, 7/9/2013)

Food, cooking, and nutrition represented independence and self-sufficiency, which was out of reach for many women at New Hope. Before clients learned to eat healthily, they needed to regain a sense of control and ownership over their lives. TLP was a perfect setting to witness this resurgence of control. Margaret spoke about clients who had entered TLP barely able to take care of themselves or their children but left several months later with a job, enrolled in school, and in control of their own lives. Staff explained that clients' interest in cooking was valuable because it indicated a renewed

interest in self-care and ownership over their lives. This healing process was more visible in TLP than some of New Hope's other programs:

"You- because you're doing TLP- you're seeing clients .... who have done some healing and are kind of in a different place and are also able to assert their independence more because they're not in a shelter setting so it feels different. But shelter- not everyone makes it to a TLP. Shelter we have some folks who are really- compromised. And we worry about them being able to function out in the community in a way that's safe and ok." (Rena, interview, 7/9/2013)

Food can be viewed as a symbol for health and independence. The ability to feed oneself in a healthy and appropriate way represents some degree of stability, which is elusive for many of New Hope's clients. For those still in the beginning of dealing with trauma, abuse, mental illness, addiction, and many of the other byproducts of domestic violence, eating good food can be beside the point.

## -----Conclusion-----

Food, like language, is a culturally specific mode of sending messages to others (Levi-Strauss 1966). Culturally appropriate food is not solely a good but an experience of connection with a group. Food is used to send messages to others and to the self about love, rejection, and acceptance. All groups have their own understandings of how food should be shared appropriately. However, cultural groups are fluid; individuals' numerous, overlapping identities govern the way they relate to food. Culturally appropriate food cannot be understood as simplistically as eating the foods traditionally consumed in one's country of origin; it is an experience that cannot be easily replicated or articulated artificially.

Definitions of culturally appropriate food and good food are based on context. Our narratives about food are not related solely to the items of food themselves but to how and with whom they are produced, cooked, and consumed. Eating with others is an essential aspect of group identity formation (Anderson 2005). Therefore, sharing beliefs about what comprises "good food" unites a community, while clashing ideas can divide it. For local food movement activists, "good food" follows a specific, farm-centric narrative (Allen 2004). CSAs and farmers markets serve as sites both for buying food and forming a community based on shared notions of ethical consumption. None of the local food movement volunteers involved in this study was food insecure. Their concerns about food focused not on access to food in general but access to foods with a "proper" narrative and origin: local, fresh, or organic foods. These types of food can be understood as culturally appropriate foods for the local food movement. Part of their desire to make these foods more accessible to others rests in their understanding of the nutritional benefits of fresh, local, and organic foods. However, they also wished to share the ethical and moral advantages derived from eating their version of culturally appropriate food.

For New Hope clients, eating holds specific personal and cultural meanings separate from the meanings derived by local food movement activists. These meanings centered on relationships with

family and friends. Displaced from their communities, New Hope clients struggled to reproduce the culturally appropriate foods of their pasts. Eating for many of these women was about filling a social and emotional hunger as well as a physical hunger (Chilton and Booth 2007). For some clients in shelter, healthy eating represented a kind of self-care and self-love out of reach due to the repercussions of their traumatic experiences. After experiencing trauma, eating foods high in fat, salt, and sugar typically known as “junk foods” can be a form of self-medication in an attempt to address deeper wounds (Brewerton 2011). New Hope clients’ complex relationships with food caused them to define “good food” differently from local food movement activists.

As Klindienst (2006) aptly notes, people remain connected to cultural foods and food practices long after they dissociate from their traditional language, dress and traditions. Even after assimilating in many other ways, food is still used to transmit messages of love and solidarity within ethnic and cultural groups (Anderson 2005). However, culture is complex and fluid; culturally appropriate foods are continuously changing based on context and understanding. These foods are not fixed, specific items but experiences that cannot be solely attached to a commodity.

Our understanding of culturally appropriate food still operates within the narrow confines of food as a commodity (Esteva and Prakash 1998). Food is culturally appropriate based on its context and surrounding experiences and relationship; these connections cannot be replicated through the provision of a specific food commodity. True culturally appropriate food cannot be achieved or provided within the narrow structure of food as a commodity under capitalism; to provide culturally appropriate food, we must revisit the structuring of food as a commodity rather than a shared experience and a human right.

Rhetoric within the emergency food system also bases itself on the concept of food as a commodity. These strategies assume that hunger is about the item of food; if hunger is the condition of

not having enough food commodities, the logical solution is to provide more food. The local food movement often seeks to address hunger by improving the emergency food system. However, the emergency food system is not a sustainable method of addressing food insecurity. Hunger and food insecurity are not about food but about poverty, so addressing food insecurity must involve examining deeper structural factors as causes of inequality. Economic and structural obstacles prevented New Hope clients from accessing fresh, local foods. Many were not able to shop at farmers markets because they did not accept SNAP or lacked adequate public transportation. Others spoke about the lack of information about farmers markets. Women explained that time was an obstacle; working, single mothers rarely have the time to prepare meals with fresh vegetables, preferring instead to rely on convenience food. These structural obstacles are part of the reason that most New Hope clients failed to participate in the local food movement.

The local food movement could follow in the footsteps of other food movements, including the Community Food Security Movement and Food Justice Movement. These movements incorporate discourse about core causes of inequality in their attempt to address inequities in the food systems. They seek to substantively include perspectives on food access from different groups of marginalized people. They seek to question the structure of food as a commodity and reframe the discussion around food as an experience and a human right.

CFS and Food Justice provide strong analyses of the root causes of hunger and espouse grassroots- driven solutions. However, they have never specifically focused on the intersection between food insecurity, gender, and domestic violence. Female survivors of domestic violence have unique perspectives on the role and meaning of food and food insecurity in their lives. These perspectives could be better utilized by CFS and Food Justice to create more encompassing, equitable methods of addressing poverty, inequality, and food insecurity.

Future research on this topic could continue to investigate the concept of “culturally appropriate food” as it is used by different service providers and nonprofit organizations. This research could broach the complexity of the relationship between culture and food with an understanding of culture as a fluid rather than fixed category. Research could also investigate the relationship between food and trauma and the role that food plays in the lives of survivors of violence. This research will expand understanding of culturally appropriate food not as a commodity but as a communal and individual experience of connection and meaning formation.

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-----Appendix-----

**Codebook**

<b>Code Name</b>	<b>Subcodes</b>	<b>Description</b>
<b>Benefits</b>		Federal benefit programs: SNAP, WIC, cash benefits, affordable housing, MassHealth
<b>Community</b>	Community building Volunteer	Desire/attempt to contribute to larger community or connect with others through community building
<b>Cross cultural</b>		Food- related cross- cultural interactions, both positive and negative
<b>Culturally Appropriate Food</b>		Culturally appropriate food items, rituals, memories, and desires
<b>Education</b>	Food education Life skills	Education related to New Hope’s educational program, both current program and desired changes
<b>Empowerment</b>		References to New Hope’s empowerment philosophy
<b>Farm</b>		Any farm, especially the CSA involved in this research
<b>Food providers</b>	Donations Food pantry Food providing locations	Locations where people acquired food, including supermarkets, corner stores, bodegas
<b>Food regulations</b>		Federal regulations by New Hope funders impacting food program
<b>General health</b>	Eating disorders Health Mental health	Information related to health, both related and not related to food
<b>Obstacles to access</b>		Obstacles to food access, including storage, transportation, money, and time
<b>Types of food</b>		Both specific types of food and categories of food, including good or bad food
<b>Waste</b>		Food waste, including gleaning

