FOOD SYSTEMS COMMUNICATION AMID COMPOUNDING CRISES: POWER, RESISTANCE, AND CHANGE

EDITED BY: Kathleen P. Hunt, Constance Gordon and Mohan Jyoti Dutta

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Editorial: Food systems communication amid compounding crises: Power, resistance, and change

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Editorial on the Research Topic
Food systems communication amid compounding crises: Power, resistance, and change

Introduction

The crises of climate change, labor inequalities, pandemic outbreaks, food insecurity, loss of species, and the erosion of sustainable food systems are accelerating. Together, they compound and are constituted through the hegemonic control of neoliberalism over the everyday organizing of global political economies, nation states, communities, and life forms (Parr, 2014). These crises are deeply intertwined with the politics of land, labor, life, and resources under the ambits of colonial-capitalist extraction and exist in continuity with the violence unleashed by the colonial projects. In other words, the crises we are experiencing in our contemporary contexts are extensions of longstanding transformations to global food regimes connected to these projects (Dutta, 2004, 2012; Holt-Giménez and Shattuck, 2011; Elers and Dutta, 2019). Interrogating such crises requires expanding what constitutes an environmental concern and challenging disciplinary norms that shape how we come to understand communication, food, and the environment.

A growing body of scholarship is emphasizing communicative relationships among food systems, power, and organizing (see for example Dougherty, 2011; Frye and Bruner, 2012; Williams-Forson and Counihan, 2013; Knezevic et al., 2014; Broad, 2016; Hunt, 2016; de Souza, 2019; Dutta and Thaker, 2019; Carter and Alexander, 2020; Cruz and Sodeke, 2020; Ivancic, 2020; Singer et al., 2020; Gordon et al., 2021; LeGreco and Douglas, 2021; Zoller et al., 2022 among many others). This Research Topic invited contributions that expand and deepen examinations of food systems with attention to historical and contemporary food system

struggles, injustices, and undercurrents revealed within them. Articles showcased in this Research Topic foreground these dynamics, focusing on communication's relationship to food organizing and labor, framing and storytelling in food policy and media, as well as racialized and speciesist discourses during global health crises. Analyses highlight relations among human and non-human networks, and how to cultivate symbolic and material registers for the (re)organization of more just food systems at various scales.

We came together as an editorial collective to merge our shared interest in cultivating more just food systems through environmental communication, health communication, and related interdisciplinary fields. Our mutual interests are threaded together by a desire to turn to the praxis of organizing food systems that resist the ongoing onslaughts of colonialism and neoliberal capitalism, and the capacities of communities to constitute more interdependent, equitable, and ecologically just relations. We share a commitment to scholar-activism that reflects non-extractive relationships as well as praxis-oriented theory-building. We also hold that communication plays a central role in the organization of the capitalist food system and struggles within and against it. To expand on the shared perspective that guides this Research Topic, we first explicate food systems communication research, then describe the political imperative of this work through the lens of crisis as communicative struggle, and conclude by reviewing the twelve contributions from scholars and collectives who contributed to this collection.

Food systems communication

Food systems communication invites scholars to engage in transdisciplinary thinking while emphasizing the communicative constitution of food systems and their politics. Elsewhere, two of us have defined *food systems communication* as a "framework that centralizes the pragmatic and constitutive role communication plays in arranging, negotiating, and challenging meaning-making related to food systems, including their relations, processes, and outcomes" (Gordon and Hunt, 2022, p. 115). We argue that land, labor, policy, and property are critical nodes at which intersectional communicative struggles over power take place. The food systems agenda for environmental communication aligns nicely with the ethical and political stakes of the culture-centered approach to intersectional health justice (Dutta et al., 2013) which is also demonstrated in this collection. Food systems communication research is expressly political, deriving its roots from environmental justice activism and scholarly interventions within environmental communication (Bullard, 2000; Pezzullo, 2001; Pezzullo and Sandler, 2007) and longstanding research on agrifood systems and movements (McMichael, 2009; Holt-Giménez, 2011; Alkon and Guthman, 2017).

Food systems transect human and natural systems, interweaving our environments, social structures, and lived conditions, in fundamentally uneven ways. The communicative constitution of food systems also transcends multiple scalar and temporal registers. What appears to be contemporary consolidations of power or specific localized struggles for food justice or food sovereignty are inextricably connected to much longer and enduring colonial, capitalist, and racial structures and organizing (Williams and Holt-Giménez, 2017; Mihesuah and Hoover, 2019; Garth and Reese, 2020). Mapping these relations of power, while attending to the more particular contours of food communication, builds a discursive repertoire that can be used to understand and intervene in unjust food systems.

Interventions into the food system take many forms, reflecting and constituting varied relationships between power and resistance. The original food systems communication agenda we put forward in *Environmental Communication* described how orientations to food systems change–for example, food system reform, food justice, and food sovereignty–offer *communicative* accounts of how power is interwoven within the food system (Gordon and Hunt, 2019). Building on food movement research and activism, we argued that each helps name a wider constellation of discourses (albeit not mutually exclusive) shaping how food movements approach socioecological systems change.

Food reform, for example, emphasizes improving food system processes, practices, and/or outcomes to bring them more in line with principles of food security, equitable access, and sustainable production. Food reform communication engages the discursive mechanisms that organize and (re)constitute food policy, agrifood production and distribution, as well as the advocacy tactics stakeholders use to affect change. *Food justice* stresses an intersectional approach to understanding how uneven benefits and harms are reproduced within the food system. Food justice communication discursively maps how food system inequities are interwoven with other systemic injustices, from labor regimes and uneven development to racism, classism, ableism, patriarchy, speciesism, and more. Food justice communication is polyvocal and may reflect different political commitments, epistemologies, and experiences.

Food sovereignty addresses how colonialism and capitalism not only reproduce the uneven distribution of benefits and harms but have undermined communities' ability to define their own relationship to food and ecological systems. Food sovereignty communication utilizes discourses of autonomy, control, and self-determination, sometimes deemphasizing a rights-based approach dependent on state recognition. Indigenous struggles for food sovereignty are intertwined with struggles for land sovereignty and communicative sovereignty, noting the interpenetrating relationship between land and food (Dutta and Thaker, 2019; Elers and Dutta,

2019). Culture-centered community-led interventions co-create communicative infrastructures for voice at the global margins. These infrastructures create the basis for de-centering and resisting the techno-capitalist rationalities of food systems immersed in whiteness (Dutta and Thaker, 2019; Mika et al., 2022). Contributions in this Research Topic traverse these orientations and include new discursive articulations that can be explored.

Crisis as communicative struggle

In taking up the concept of crisis, we center on how power and resistance shape food systems through communicative struggles over meanings, values, and epistemologies, and thus spatial and material control. For example, as a form of communicative inversion (Dutta, 2012), global food crises act as ruptures that can tighten increased technocratic control over the food system, rooted in the whiteness of the Global North while co-opting the languages of community, participation, and decolonization emergent from the Global South. Such practices form the basis of the ongoing colonization of food systems. In this backdrop, the process of cultural centering turns to the rationalities of resistance to the forces of colonialism and capitalism that offer anchors for transforming food systems by turning toward the already existing logics of organizing food that have long been held by local and Indigenous communities across the Global South (see Dutta and Thaker, 2019).

Communicative struggles also contribute to the ongoing dispossession of labor, land, and knowledges. The capitalist system is built on this fundamental element of land alienation, the enslavement of colonized peoples, exploitation of racialized labor, and extraction and appropriation of resources. These processes of extraction and exploitation reworked the relationships of communities with ecosystems and sources of food, disrupting community-led culture-centered practices of growing and sharing food. Moreover, the colonial process introduced taxation on colonized communities, imposed cash-based agriculture that threatened the food growing practices of local communities, and consolidated the power of food distribution into the colonial structure. The racist ideology shaping colonial food distribution shaped the production of hunger, including the production of genocides such as the great Bengal famine (Mukerjee, 2014). The neoliberal attack on food systems is an accelerated extension of this capitalist project, embodying its whiteness, and targeting unequally the land, labor, and food generating capacities of communities in the Global South. It produces raced, gendered, colonial crises of food shortage and perpetuates the imposition of technocratic solutions to food systems that push forth the capitalist agendas of profiteering (Falnikar and Dutta, 2021).

The interplays of power and control embedded in the colonial-capitalist structures that threaten the sustenance of food

systems across the globe point to the urgency of embodied academic labor. The extractive ideology of the colonial project has shaped knowledge as an abstract generation of theory, removed from the everyday lived struggles of communities at the global margins. In the context of food systems, the expert-driven organizing of food systems to uphold these structures is often removed from the everyday contexts of generating, preparing, and relating to food and ecological systems. The underlying ideology of whiteness, framing the values of white culture as universal, sees knowledge as generated in spaces that are placed at a distance from the labor of growing food, the practices of sharing and eating food, and the land that sustains food. This is coupled with the global rise of authoritarian techniques of technocratic management that silence voices at the margins as repressive policies are imposed. For those at the margins, narratives of hunger and food insecurity are erased, stigmatized, gaslighted, and disciplined (Tan et al., 2017).

Therefore, it is not enough to conceptualize these exploitative and extractive food system relations in abstraction, as the labor of generating theory. The very labor of generating theory ought to be placed within the context of struggles to respond to crisis and repair. The embodied work of communicative struggle involves the building of voice infrastructures at the margins that resist and dismantle the oppressive practices of hegemonic state-market-civil society organizing (Dutta et al., 2019). Scholarship on food systems is strengthened by thinking that traverses academic silos and engages in knowledge sharing from/with food movement activism (Gordon and Hunt, 2019). As a part of this project, we invited consideration about practices of solidarity, ways of forging ethical and reflexive partnerships, and the co-constitutive translation of food movement theory and praxis. We turn to these contributions next.

Article review

Articles in this Research Topic bring together a diverse array of perspectives on communication's relationship to food organizing and labor, framing and storytelling in food policy and media, as well as racialized and speciesist discourses during global health crises. To encourage cross-pollination, contributors could submit their work to *Frontiers in Science and Environmental Communication, Frontiers in Health Communication,* or *Frontiers in Sustainable Food Systems.* Contributors also chose to submit a wide array of article types including original research articles, perspective papers, review articles, hypothesis papers, and community case studies, the latter especially emphasizing collaborative scholar-activist communication. What follows is a brief review of contributions contained within.

The immediate effects of the COVID-19 pandemic clearly exposed longstanding and uneven vulnerabilities within the

capitalist food system, forcing disproportionately impacted communities and advocacy networks to mobilize in response. In "*Mobilizing networks and relationships through Indigenous food sovereignty: The Indigenous Food Circle's response to the COVID-19 pandemic in Northwestern Ontario*," Levkoe et al. share how the Indigenous Food Circle (IFC), an Indigenous-led and Indigenous-serving informal network, provided direct support to address Indigenous food insecurity, compounded by both the pandemic and the endurance of settler colonialism. Authors describe how amid infrastructural failures in Thunder Bay, Ontario to provide emergency food support, IFC expanded direct relationships, food storage, and financial support, especially to impacted remote First Nations communities. Importantly, they illustrate how addressing food insecurity should not be decoupled from a broader transformation away from the capitalist food system and requires deep relationship-building in support of self-determination.

Additional contributors highlight how retooling communication infrastructures and collaborative partnerships can help address food injustice across immediate, uncertain, and prolonged crises. In "*We still have to eat: Communication infrastructure and local food organizing as public health responses to COVID-19 in Greensboro, North Carolina*," LeGreco et al. highlight three examples of community-based responses to organizing and reorganizing communication infrastructures during the early months of the pandemic. Drawing on the authors' experience organizing for local food and food justice in the Greensboro, North Carolina region since 2009, they describe how the pandemic tested the communication infrastructure they had been building. Reorganizing communication infrastructures of listening and disseminating information allowed local food networks to creatively secure school meals, document emergency food resources, and refigure a community market to respond to impacted community needs.

Further, in "*Pivoting in the time of COVID-19: An in-depth case study at the nexus of food insecurity, resilience, system re-organizing, and caring for the community*," Fox and Frye describe how a Northwest Arkansas partnership among a museum, a food bank, and over 30 additional organizations adapted to provide basic needs, food, internet, housing, and arts relief to foster social belonging for isolated communities. They illustrate how the partnership was organized to intentionally circumvent the organization-client relationship so prominent in paternalistic anti-hunger infrastructures. Instead, embracing learning, early and ongoing outreach, as well as transparent and consistent communication, allowed the partnership to incorporate food justice principles into their organizing.

Contributors in this Research Topic also emphasize how communication constitutes historical and ongoing racialized labor regimes across sectors. In "*Racialized and gendered constructions of the 'ideal server': Contesting historical occupational discourses of restaurant service*," Dempsey traces transformations in the communicative constitution of servitude

across time and space. With particular attention to raced and gendered discourses, Dempsey draws connections between the contemporary devaluation of restaurant labor and longer histories of servitude, including plantation labor, dining car and domestic service, the establishment of tipping, and feminization of service in relation to other forms of culinary work. In doing so, Dempsey identifies the potential for solidarity among wage workers and the constant risks of eroding coalition-building.

The communicative constitution of vulnerability and disposability takes place across food system labor regimes traversing national borders. In "*Bodies and documents: The material impact of collaborative information-sharing within the Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program*," Clause describes the fraught practices of information-sharing across Canada's SAWP program, which enrolls and manages agricultural workers from Mexico and eleven Caribbean countries to labor on Canadian farms. Using critical discourse analysis to study official documents that circulate among workers and program stakeholders, Clause argues that most documents employ discourses of economization and omit information about social, health, and non-work-related topics that are critical to migrants' wellbeing. Official discourse thus constructs the disposability of SAWP workers, affecting the lives of those working in the agricultural sector, their families and communities, as well as the viability of the program.

Resistance to the corporate food system and inequitable labor conditions can take many forms, including union cooperatives and grassroots organizing. In "*Re-imagining localism and food justice: Co-op Cincy and the union cooperative movement*," Zoller illustrates how unionized cooperatives incorporate social justice in their organizing principles to address working conditions, food access, localization, environmental sustainability, and increased consciousness-raising among minoritized communities. This case study brings us to food organizing by Our Harvest and Apple Street Market in Cincinnati, Ohio. Both organizations are a part of Co-op Cincy, a cooperative network that was a founding member of the 1worker1vote ecosystem. Drawing on document analysis as well as knowledge derived from interviews and the author's board membership with Apple Street Market, Zoller describes how union cooperatives navigate, resist, and reimagine capitalism by emphasizing solidarity and transformative social change. This study highlights possibilities for networked and everyday organizing to advance the solidarity economy with attention to the local, place-based conditions of power, land, and labor.

Given the market-based logic that orients the capitalist food system, community-embedded food initiatives often can struggle to have stories about their importance and impact register with wider audiences. In "*Framing good food: Communicating value of community food initiatives in the midst of a food crisis*," Knezevic illustrates how framing such initiatives through the lens of diverse economies and more-than-market contributions can help. This case study takes up Nourishing

Communities, a decade-plus Canadian-based network that has researched and supported informal food economies and movements for food sovereignty. Knezevic illustrates how communicative frames can be employed to help food activists and practitioners tell stories about more-than-economic successes. In doing so, these frames can help organizations communicate their impact to participants, funders, and policymakers for long-term sustainability and support.

Communication is also at the heart of debates over food policy and how to rhetorically advocate for environmental and justice initiatives within place-based contexts. Some locally supported policy initiatives face political and legislative roadblocks that make it difficult to mobilize against harmful impacts. In "*Making food-systems policy for local interests and common good*," Lind and Reeves analyze common arguments by advocates on both sides of U.S. state governments' preemption debates and how they enable or constrain their advocacy efforts. Focusing on two preemption debates in Kansas, the authors address the policy, systems, and environmental (PSE) strategies used to advance policy change. Their analysis examines the affordances and constraints of appeals to self-interest and the common good and the implications of these rhetorical choices in food system reform deliberations.

The politics of storytelling is also taken up in "*Tracing the story of food across food systems*," where Khan addresses the use of blockchain and digital twinning technology in corporate food storytelling about food system supply chains. Khan argues that companies are increasingly drawing on these technologies to tell food stories, akin to early documentary media promises of advocating for "radical transparency" in food supply chains. These promises are often framed as telling the moral story of food systems, including transparency over its production practices, environmental impacts, and humanizing those who labor within the broader commodity chain. Khan posits that there are implications to this form of storytelling, including stories about North/South inequalities and the fantasy of absolute control over the food system, that tell us more about life within capitalism.

Rhetorical constructions of "food" in food systems discourse focus critical attention on ideological assumptions that undergird environmental communication scholarship and praxis. In "*Carnistic colonialism: A rhetorical dissection of 'bushmeat' in the 2014 Ebola outbreak*," Muller makes the case for placing critical animal studies and postcolonial critique into conversation. Assessing texts circulated in North America and Western Europe through ideological rhetorical criticism, Muller parses the colonial and speciesist logics articulated in mediated narratives surrounding the Ebola epidemic in West Africa, and the implications of these articulations for institutional responses to a public health crisis. Rhetorical analysis reveals three themes among these discourses: biosecurity, conservation, and development. Ultimately Muller argues that in such discourses "Western rhetors strategically minimize their own complicit

in the existential threat posed by zoonotic diseases" and vilify others through discourses of carnistic colonialism.

Intersections between food system communication and critical animal studies are also addressed in "*Cover stories: Concealing speciesist violence in U.S. news reporting on the COVID-19 'pork' industry crisis*." In this case, Barca takes up journalistic representations of pig farming and pork industry practices during the economic shutdown of the early pandemic period. Barca argues that framing choices legitimated animal violence, objectifying sentient beings (pigs), and constructed an image of animal production (specifically, slaughter and culling) as "humane" farming. Barca argues for a "just and non-human inclusive orientation to food systems communication," opening space to broaden conceptions of who and what is at stake in food system discourse. The paper concludes by revisiting recommendations for how journalists can better communicate about experiences of non-human animals in reporting "rather than dismissing their moral significance through a wholly anthropocentric discourse."

Of course, food system impacts are not outside of the everyday spaces that make it possible for us to research, learn, and teach either. In "*The neoliberalization of higher education: Paradoxing students' basic needs at a Hispanic-Serving Institution*," Schraedley et al. investigate proliferating experiences of basic needs insecurities in U.S. college campuses, in particular at a public institution in southern California. Focusing on the experiences of low-income, first-generation, and students of color, the authors make critical connections between neoliberalization in higher education, organizational paradox, and food, housing, and employment insecurity. Understanding the complex, overlapping, and persistent contradictions of basic needs (in)security, organized in and through neoliberal institutions like colleges and universities, invites food system communication scholars and practitioners to advocate for more comprehensive interventions instead of "patchwork solutions" that deepen inequalities.

Conclusion

These twelve contributions highlight how embedded questions of power and resistance are to food system struggles and possibilities otherwise. They remind us that food systems research exceeds normative assumptions about "environment" too often disarticulated from the scope of human and non-human relations, as well as political, economic, and cultural infrastructures that organize and affect them. This format offers an intriguing space to curate a conversation that traverses disciplinary boundaries and links theory and praxis. Contributors took this call to heart and drew connections between past research and contemporary struggle. Many case studies provided on-the-ground reports of activist and organizing practices. We are grateful for the support of Tarla

Rai Peterson, who assisted this vision by providing additional fee waivers to authors with community partnerships and those who would be otherwise barred from participating in this open-access format.

Of course, this collection remains incomplete. More can be done to adequately account for the overwhelming and disproportionate effect of food system inequalities globally, especially in the Global South. At the time of writing, significant global food crises have emerged and loom ahead. Processes that manifest them are intimately connected to the intensification of the capitalist food regime, climate injustice, accelerated expansion of racial capitalism in the form of land grabs, and increased consolidation of power globally. Attending to the contours of knowledge production around these issues, and the particularities of both research and voices of resistance must involve interrupting the political economy of open access publishing as well (Dutta et al., 2021). Compounding crises inevitably affect the publication economy, which we too witnessed firsthand as co-editors of this Research Topic. This was especially the case during a time when many food system scholars and activists were forced to navigate great changes in their lives and environments and engage in food system and other care work at the same time.

We mark these absences to acknowledge the range of creative, critical, and necessary work so many are doing beyond this arena and those who are routinely and systematically excluded from these conversations. Food systems communication research can continue to respond through ethical and reflexive research practices that attend to micro, meso, and macro power dynamics, advocate for the sharing of knowledge in non-extractive ways, and provide pathways for amplification that do not recreate inequalities. In doing so, the political project of food systems communication research can better contribute to the constitution of more just food systems, relationships, and worlds.

Author contributions

All authors listed have made a substantial, direct, and intellectual contribution to the work and approved it for publication.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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Carnistic Colonialism: A Rhetorical Dissection of "Bushmeat" in the 2014 Ebola Outbreak

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This article argues that a fusion of critical animal studies and postcolonial critique affords food systems scholars a richer understanding of Western media narratives regarding a "bushmeat problem" during the 2014 Ebola outbreak. To do so, I perform a rhetorical analysis of expert, journalistic, and editorial texts disseminated through outlets with high economic and/or social capital in North American and Western European countries. My analysis demonstrates three overarching themes in these texts regarding the intersections of bushmeat and Ebola, which I describe as: 1) biosecurity; 2) conservation; and 3) development. By invoking an ethic of anti-speciesism and decoloniality, I not only demonstrate the colonial logics at play in the 2014 Ebola outbreak, but also name an insidious ideology fundamental to food systems discourse in postcolonial contexts: carnistic colonialism.

Keywords: Ebola, bushmeat, critical animal studies, postcolonial, carnism, rhetoric

INTRODUCTION

In 2014, West Africa experienced an outbreak of the deadly Ebola Virus Disease, colloquially shortened to its filovirus strain, Ebola. It was both the first outbreak recorded in the region and the largest recorded outbreak on record. Ebola—a viral, contagious, and hemorrhagic disease infamous for its high mortality rate of between 25 and 90 percent—was an epidemiological rarity. Whereas occasional outbreaks were usually isolated, this one was unusually widespread, crossing city and country borders. Guinea reported its first suspected case in March 2014. By the end of the month, Liberia had multiple suspected infections. By May, Sierra Leone did too. Ebola spread so rapidly that the outbreak dominated news headlines from 2014 to the summer of 2015, when the virus seemed more-or-less "contained." The World Health Organization (WHO) did not remove West Africa's Ebola crisis from its list of Public Health Emergencies of International Concern until March of 2016. By then, 28,616 confirmed, probable, and suspected cases of Ebola had been reported, with 11,310 resulting in death (World Health Organization, 2016). According to the WHO, West Africa's 2014–2016 outbreak was "the largest and most complex Ebola outbreak since the virus was first discovered in 1976" (World Health Organization, 2021).

While 99% of all reported cases were confined to Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone, 2014–2015 transnational media discourses circulated the voices of rhetorical stakeholders concerned about the spread of a global, apocalyptic Ebola pandemic (Benton and Dionne, 2015). WHO Director-General Margaret Chan framed the frightening state of affairs as the "most severe acute public health emergency in modern times" (qtd. in Wilkinson and Leach, 2015, p. 136). Chan was one of many narrators, ranging from government officials to public health professionals to ideological

editorialists, fixated on the contagiousness of Ebola and its risk to publics residing *outside* of Sierra Leone, Liberal, and Guinea—or, more specifically, in "The West."

Such responses are unsurprising, as epidemics like Ebola are both medical and cultural phenomena. Diseases "bring into focus the concerns we have about the way we live our lives, our relations to community, environment, and cosmos, and they challenge us to explain the purpose of malfunction and suffering" (Anderson, 1999, p. 49) Perceptions of contagious epidemics often prompt searches for attributable "culprits" responsible for the outbreak. However, blaming specific parties for disease outbreaks all-too-frequently involves racialized rhetoric and ethnonationalist impulses (Huff and Winnebah, 2015). These impulses work in tandem to perpetuate a historical narrative embedded in Western European and U.S. American expansionism and colonialism "permitting the stereotyping of foreigners, the poor, and other races, as inherently disease-dealing and polluting" (Anderson, 1999, p. 49).

As a result, sociopolitical and mediated responses to exigent contagious diseases amplify stories of "zoonotic spillover events" wherein pathogens jump from insect to animal, from animal to human, from individual to community, etc. (Huff and Winnebah, 2015). Early international media coverage of the 2014 Ebola outbreak employed this prototypical "outbreak narrative," while searching for "patient zero," that human who had first contracted the virus and spread it outward (Huff and Winnebah, 2015; Hasian, 2016). This outbreak, it was concluded, started in small village of Miandou, Guinea, where two-year-old Emile Ouamouno was infected by a wild bat. Ouamouno likely handled fruit pre-contaminated by the bat, played too near a bat colony, or ate the bat itself. Despite unclear evidence, international media (particularly those geared toward U.S. American and Western European audiences) latched onto this third option: the child's possible consumption of contaminated, non-domesticated bat flesh.

To this day, precise details about the "ecology of Ebola" and the particular "circumstances that led to the [2014] outbreak" remain somewhat uncertain (Huff and Winnebah, 2015, p. 2). Multiple vectors of disease were possible and likely occurred in tandem. However, an outbreak narrative specifically centering African bushmeat consumption flourished throughout the 2014 Ebola outbreak and beyond. According to McGovern (2014), the rhetorical format of the Ebola outbreak had a distinctive formula: "Ebola is contained in exotic animals + West Africans eat these animals = a pandemic that kills its victims by causing their internal organs to liquefy" (para. 3). However, according to Wilkinson and Leach (2015), pinning blame on rural African populations' bushmeat diet and narrating it as the "official truth" regarding the Ebola outbreak amounted to mere "misguided exhortations" that "have contributed to the deluge of misinformation that has undermined local trust in what officials say about Ebola" (p. 144–145). Disseminating an outbreak narrative emphasizing bushmeat and bushmeat-eaters as the culprits behind the Ebola epidemic was not only inaccurate, but also "distract [ing] us from asking deeper questions about the complex ecological and sociopolitical dynamics" that allowed the Ebola virus to reach epidemic proportions (Huff and Winnebah, 2015, p. 2).

Materially, bushmeat ranges from the killed and cooked flesh of "wild" animals ranging from bats to birds to apes, although smaller fauna like reptiles and rodents are more commonly consumed than charismatic megafauna (Vander Velde, 2014). Rhetorically, however, the term bushmeat is both a symbolic stand-in for an animal's consumable corpse and a discursive reflector of foreign and unfamiliar meat consumption practices, often from a Western gaze. Citizens of so-called "developing" nations have long hunted and consume "wild" animals not typically understood as "food animals" in the Western world. For this reason, Huff and Winnebah (2015) described the prototypical outbreak narrative as one that tells the very partial, very incomplete story of contaminated consumption. It is a tale, devoid of colonial context, in which "to augment lean diets and leaner incomes, impoverished people encroach further and further into the *once-pristine wilderness* in search of wild sources of protein—bushmeat" (p. 1, emphasis mine).

I therefore argue that the rhetorical circulation of an African "bushmeat problem" is an incomplete portrayal of the 2014 spread of Ebola. It is also a glimpse into how hegemonic narratives regarding the construction/consumption of "food" and "meat" dictate public discourses and institutional responses to intermingling environmental, agricultural, and epidemiological catastrophes. The 2014 Ebola outbreak is thus a case study of how outbreak narratives centering Othered peoples' Othered meats employ carnist and colonizing master-narratives. These narratives pit a scientifically informed, hygienic West over an uneducated and unclean not-West. They indicate how contemporary colonial logics are embedded in discourses of flesh production and consumption. Among those discourses are all-too-familiar rhetorical constructions of food (particularly *meat*) that simultaneously justify colonialism, racism, and speciesism (see Harper, 2011; Belcourt, 2015; Kim, 2015; Ko and Ko, 2017; Montford and Taylor, 2020; among others).

To be clear, I do not suggest that circulating arguments centering bushmeat-as-threat carry no factual weight. Zoonotic diseases pose one of the largest existential risks of the modern era (Everard et al., 2020). Rampant deforestation and industrialization have brought insects and animals from the "wild" into closer proximity with human-centered spaces, resulting in rapid disease transferals. Hunting, cooking, selling, and consuming non-domesticated meats is intimately embedded in this process. Ebola is far from the only viral catastrophe borne at least partially from ecosystem degradation, and the current COVID-19 pandemic is no exception (Shepherd, 2020). Environmental communication scholarship must always grapple with the tension between symbolic constructions and the material world, and in the case of bushmeat, the material consequences of animal corpses through slaughter and human corpses through zoonoses is undeniable.

What I do argue, however, is that environmental communication scholars should be concerned about the problematics of environmental and agricultural reforms dependent upon colonizing understandings of what (or *who*) is "meat" and how/by whom that meat should be raised, killed, sold, and consumed. Raymie McKerrow explained that rhetoricians' obligation to counter "the excesses of a society's

own enabling actions, its 'repressive tolerance'. . .that underwrites the continuation of social practices that ultimately are harmful to the community" (McKerrow, 1989, p. 108). I suggest that a fusion of critical animal studies and postcolonial critique affords scholars insight into the dissemination of bushmeat narratives in times of global crisis. While bushmeat was both a material reality and a rhetorical construction during the 2014 Ebola outbreak, I posit that bushmeat-as-cultural-symbol *dramatically overthrew* the actual material elements of non-domestic animal hunting practices—particularly due to the intersecting politics of species oppression, capitalistic food systems, and colonial impulses.

Using ideological rhetorical criticism as my guiding methodology, I assess a series of mass-circulated rhetorical texts pertinent to the rhetorical construction of bushmeat during the 2014 Ebola outbreak. Ultimately, I identify three textual thematics at play: those of biosecurity, conservation, and international development. Although these rhetorical frameworks are convincingly cloaked in humanitarian benevolence, they belie an insidious desire to maintain a Western, colonial, and hegemonic standard of carnism. By invoking ethics of anti-speciesism and decoloniality, I not only demonstrate the colonial logics at play in the 2014 Ebola outbreak, but also name an insidious ideology fundamental to food systems discourse in speciesist and postcolonial contexts: *carnistic colonialism.*

CRITICAL ANIMAL STUDIES AND THE RHETORICAL CONSTRUCTION OF "MEAT"

I argue that a fusion of critical animal studies and postcolonial critique affords scholars a richer understanding of Western media narratives regarding a "bushmeat problem" during the 2014 Ebola outbreak. Meat is not an apolitical subject. Rather, it is embedded in the same material and symbolic systems that perpetuate inequality across race, gender, class, and species lines. Rhetorical criticisms of the food production/ consumption practices and public health discourses during the 2014 Ebola outbreak are incomplete when terms like "food" are left un-interrogated and when "meat" is assumed to be a product of specific animals raised and killed in specific ways. This conclusion is especially apparent during viral outbreaks of deadly diseases, particularly zoonotic viruses. By arbitrarily constituting certain animals as edible/inedible, safe/diseased, and disposable/valuable. Ebola narratives further revealed the insidious rhetoric of carnism guiding reprobations of bushmeat—a discursive manifestation embedded in colonial logics that I dub carnistic colonialism.

I use critical animal studies as a theoretical framework through which to render visible the discursive interconnections of animal exploitation (including animal slaughter, consumption, etc.) and human oppression (including racism, colonialism, etc.). Critical animal studies is a prescriptive and *telos*-driven approach to scholarship that interrogates the interweavings of speciesism with social justice politics writ large (Best et al., 2007). Speciesism is an ideology of *homo sapien* supremacy in which dubious anthropocentric discourse is used to justify the use and abuse of nonhuman animal bodies for human profit and pleasure (Singer, 1975). In naming speciesism as a matrix of domination fundamental to human and nonhuman animal oppression, the field advocates for an ethic of "total liberation" (Nocella et al., 2015). This ethic demands that its adherents rhetorically center issues of equity and justice through "intersectional" (Crenshaw, 1990) and "more-than-human" (Abram, 1996) analyses—specifically, of how speciesism functions in tandem with racism, sexism, ableism, and other oppressive to promulgate oppressive ontologies and practices within and across species lines.

Plumwood (2002) asserted that "human relations to nature are not only ethical, but also political" (p. 13). To wit, critical animal studies is a praxis-centered mode of academic analysis that "puts into action the feminist insight that 'the personal is political' and examines the political contexts of dietary choices as well as strategic and operational choices in science and economics" (Gaard, 2002). Cartesian-inspired "dualisms" such as human/nature, human/animal, and domestic/wild dualisms are fundamental to critical animal studies analyses because of how they allow "the western construction of human identity as 'outside' nature" (Plumwood, 2002, p. 2). Those deemed closer to "nature"—by virtue of gender, race, species, etc.,—are justified as inferior and therefore oppress-able, existing amidst "a field of multiple exclusion and control . . . casting sexual, racial, and ethnic difference as closer to the animal and the body construed as a sphere of inferiority" (p. 4). This binaristic model of subjectivity contributes to the maintenance of colonial logics by pitting the idealized Man against the animalistic less-than-human, or Not-Man (Ko and Ko, 2017; Wynter, 2003).

Understanding speciesism's role in the rhetorical construction of bushmeat during the 2014 Ebola outbreak necessitates defining another central term to critical animal studies: carnism. Coined by psychologist and animal rights activist Melanie Joy, the term refers to a hegemonic ideology in which the relentless consumption of animal flesh is presumed to be Natural, Normal, and Necessary. Joy (2011) argued that due to the diversification of food options and burgeoning of the vitamin industry in industrialized societies, hyper-capitalist food production and consumption discourses in the West prescribe industrialized meat consumption "not because we have to" but "because we choose to . . . simply because it's what we've always done, and because we like the way we taste" (Joy, 2011, p. 21). A flesh-centered carnist ideology functions through invisibility, cloaking mass slaughter of conscious subjects in object-oriented terms like "meat," "beef," or "pork." Adherents pass legislation designed to keep mass publics from seeing the brutal practices that hyper-capitalist standards wreak on the agriculture industry. Invisibility allows meat consumption to be perceived as a baseline behavior as opposed to a choice, like ethical veganism—flesh consumption is, after all, "normal, natural, and necessary" (Joy, 2011, p. 96). Nonetheless, the "three N's" guiding carnism maintain ideologically-bound underpinnings wherein "eating *certain* animals is considered ethical and appropriate" (p. 22, emphasis mine). Those deviating from

this carnist standard, either through eschewing animal products or eating the "wrong" meats, are named deviant.

Critical animal studies also concerns itself with the hegemonic ideologies and exploitative politics concerning nonhuman animal subjects' fleshy food-ness and edibility. Its critique of food production and consumption discourses thus recognizes that "food" and "meat" are metaphoric stand-in terms for specific sets of animals raised, slaughtered, and reproduced for mass consumption. These practices are naturalized, normalized, and necessitated through scientific and industrial discourses that eschew the subjectivity of "food animals" in favor of detached, abstract genres describing agricultural processes. Western-centric discourses of food production and consumption privilege specifically "domestic" animals and their products for ingestion, separating them from "wild" animals like chimpanzees or "vermin" like bats. In doing so, "Many environmentalists neglect that part of nature which is not 'green.' Domesticated animals . . . long ago ceased to be fauna" (Adams, 1997, p. 38).

Thus, the carnist term "meat" calls for intensive interrogation as a "mass term deontologizes animals" (Adams, 1997, p. 35). A cow becomes "beef," a she becomes an "it," and a living being a mere product for human consumption. This strategic carnist discourse maintains the invisibility of the mass cruelty and deaths involved in the consumption of animal products by linguistically transforming the once-living beings into what Adams (1994) called "absent referents." Despite conceptions of domesticated "livestock" as natural foodstuffs in the Western world, even categories of what food "is"/"is not" rely not upon a "natural order," but rather social constructions and discursive categorization processes.

When carnist rhetoric manifests in moments of inter- and cross-cultural antagonism, it often takes on colonial tonality. The production and consumption of animal bodies is still constructed as "natural, normal, and necessary," but only under the appropriate, "civilized" circumstances. Constructions of consumability remain tied to sociocultural forces that, even in "post" colonial contexts, are embedded in colonial histories and discourses disdaining "the natives" as "filthy," as "savage," and as "cruel." Carnism is not merely carnism, but rather *carnistic colonialism*, an ideology and discourse of edibility that favors Western, industrialized, capitalistic modes of animal production and consumption situated within transnational histories of coloniality, heteropatriarchy, and white supremacy. Carnistic colonialism is, perhaps, even more insidious than traditional carnist discourse, as it cloaks itself in whitewashed neoliberal norms of health, diet, and agriculture.

To wit, critical animal studies' antispeciesist ethic is supplemented by a firm alliance with the field of postcolonial studies. Food and food systems are not immune from colonially carnistic politics. In fact, colonialism has been fundamental to the construction of contemporary industrialized agricultural systems. Ergo, in assessing the politics of carnistic colonialism in the 2014 Ebola outbreak, it is necessary to assess how cultural deviations from Western standards of meat production contributed to overblown fears of an African-borne global pandemic stemming from threatening terms like "bushmeat."

A postcolonial approach to anti-speciesism notes the distinctive responses to instances in which those species categorized as "non-food" are consumed by Othered peoples, as in the case of bushmeat (Bratanova et al., 2011). While critical animal studies emphasizes food de-familiarization and animal non-consumption as a praxis, it also invokes a nuanced animal liberation philosophy sometimes called "moral contextual vegetarianism" (Curtin, 1991). Real-life material circumstances do not tend to mesh with universal ethical frameworks. Particularly in rural societies with little other options for nutrition, slaughtering an animal for nutrients might not be in keeping with critical animal studies' vegan ideal, but can be understandable and/or appropriate for the sake of pragmatic survival. The anti-exploitation ethic of total liberation calls for the abandonment of animal consumption as far as is *possible* and *practicable* (Wright, 2017)—therefore, while it is not prima facie "wrong" to critique flesh-eating practices like bushmeat, an ethic of total liberation calls first for the individual's interrogation of their *personal* complicity with oppressive speciesist systems and the praxis-centered actions they can take themselves and in their *own cultural communities* for the sake of multispecies justice (Gaard, 2002; Kim, 2015).

A moral contextual, ethically integrative approach for postcolonial food politics allows for Western scholars/activists to take both inter- and cross-cultural approach to anti-speciesist, decolonial praxis wherein it is of less importance to condemn the consumption practices of "Others" than to reflect and condemn unsustainable agricultural practices in the Western world (Gaard, 2001). And, more pertinently to this essay, it further allows for a critique of those moments in which subjugated and/or less-resourced communities fight to have their resistive voices heard in "post" colonial, non-Western contexts (Hunt, 2014). Thus, the premier tasks of anti-speciesist rhetoricians raised and/or residing in the West is to 1) critique the species "tokenism" of environmental thinkers that value certain charismatic megafauna over others and 2) to build inter- and cross-cultural ethics that deemphasize moralistic outsiders critiquing cultural contexts they know nothing about while empowering community insiders to "*challenge oppression within the movements and the cultures of which we are a part*" (Gaard, 2001, p. 21, emphasis mine).

A rhetorical interrogation of carnistic colonialism through the lens of critical animal studies thus helps explicate the hegemonic ideologies that guide global food cultures and thus justify judgments of those who do not adhere to those arbitrary constructs. Studying carnistic colonialism adds credence to Carol Adams' theory that during discussions of food contamination, "the anxiety cultural commentators observe is not about what goes into food, but what is food" (Adams, 2006, p. 27). Doing away with normative understandings of meat consumption is essential to defamiliarizing the concept of "meat" altogether, as well as the other "categories" of animality (vermin, wildlife, etc.) that are named as disgusting, diseased, and/or inedible. Understanding that animal flesh need not necessarily be a part of most 21st century diets, rather than assuming that only "some" meats ought to be considered acceptable and "developed" cultural practices, renders

unintelligible those colonial logics condemning bushmeat consumption in "underdeveloped" African countries. Investigating discourses surrounding the transnational, transhistorical politics of food production, and consumption thus reveals how carnistic colonialism constructs and maintain unsustainable visions of food and public health while furthering longstanding colonial logics constructing "the unsanitary native."

A rhetorical analysis of bushmeat from both an anti-speciesist and an anti-racist perspective calls thus for a decolonial ethic. This ethic is in keeping with the de- and postcolonial rhetorical scholarship produced in communication studies. Wanzer (2012) in particular noted how rhetoricians must practice "epistemic disobedience" in the pursuit of praxis that "de-links" the study of rhetoric from colonial ontologies. "Colonial" in this instance can be studied through what Quijano (2000) dubbed the "coloniality of power," referring to the ordering and classification of the world *via* a process of racialization and the construction of difference *via* systems of knowledge, hierarchies, and culture. De-linking from master discourses normalizing such power relations must invoke an ethic of decolonization:

The energy that does not allow the operation of the logic of coloniality nor believes the fairy tales of the rhetoric of modernity ... decolonial thinking is, then, thinking that de-links and opens ... to the possibilities hidden" (Mignolo, 2011, p. 46).

Studying Ebola discourses from a decolonial perspective thus enacts a *telos* through which scholars "think of new ways of raising consciousness about political problems, so that scholars can combat the pernicious effects of what Spivak has called the "social textuality" of colonialism" (Hasian, 2001, pp. 23–26). Since, as Sastry and Dutta (2017) insisted, the cultural dynamics of infectious disease pandemics influenced the resultant development of mass-disseminated ontological Ebola narratives, analyzing the discourses of 2014 Ebola outbreak necessitates understanding the embeddedness of colonial logics guiding cross-cultural interactions with "tropical" and "wild" lands. The intersections between colonial logic, food cultures, and global public health rhetorics are made manifest through postcolonial critique and decolonial ethics. Pointing out such connections resists contemporary manifestations of what Shome and Hegde (2002) dubbed "the discrete positioning of cultures without any sense of their interconnected histories" that "reproduces the violence of colonial modernities and fixes difference in a spectacle of otherness" (p. 263).

The history of medicine is hardly apolitical, particularly as scientific and medical knowledge manifested themselves in European colonies. And the history of Western colonization is incomplete without studies of how colonial medicine functioned "within an expansive ideological order of the empires, linked to the economic interests of the colonizers" (Davidovitch and Zalashik, 2006, p. 309). Colonial applications of medicine both as potential cures for disease and part of a colonial logic in which medicinal rhetoric produced "borders and distinctions between colonizers and colonized bodies as well as between Western knowledge and traditional local knowledge" (p. 309). Colonies in Africa and South Asia had environments teeming with new flora, fauna, bacteria, pathogens, and disease when Western colonists sought to settle their empires. To prevent their own

deaths, colonists "called for massive, ceaseless disinfection" (Anderson, 1995, p. 641). The disinfecting process would involve human and animal bodies, often at the same time. Policies could involve culling particular species en masse, as occurred in German scientist/colonist Robert Koch's 1906 "war on crocodiles"—a confounding attempt to rid East Africa of the animals he believed to be the primary vectors of sleeping sickness.

Central to the colonizing mission "was to examine systematically the whole population ... and to reform its customs and habits ... an instance of a material power that operates on distinctly racial bodies to produce the sort of body that colonial society required" (p. 645). Warwick Anderson's research on the colonized Philippines presented the arguments that "bodies that polluted [the environment] required control and medical reformation; and the vulnerable, formalized bodies of the American colonialists demanded sanitary quarantine" (Anderson, 1995, p. 641). Despite applications of (in)voluntary vaccinations, "the more effectively vaccination intervenes, the less useful it is as a vehicle for social discipline" (p. 19). Of equal importance was doing away with cultural arenas like "the marketplace," where bushmeat was available. Colonial diplomat Nicholas Roosevelt remarked that at such markets, "many varieties of intestinal germs and parasites may lurk in most foods," and Daniel R. Williams, a member of the U.S. Philippine Commission, remarked that native marketplaces were "unwholesome and death-dealing plazas" (qtd. in Anderson, 1995, p. 656).

The 2014 Ebola outbreak is a rich case study in the longstanding and ongoing rhetoric of carnistic colonialism. To wit, in the following sections, I demonstrate how contemporary medical discourses surrounding the 2014 Ebola epidemic followed a familiar discursive pattern in which both "nature" and "natives" were presented as unclean, uneducated, and immoral, and thus in need of *moral* (and not necessarily medical) interventions.

IDEOLOGY AS RHETORICAL METHODOLOGY

The following analysis utilizes a very specific type of rhetorical criticism: *ideological rhetorical criticism.* Performing rhetorical critique means engaging with how a rhetor's various communication practices influence their audience to induce an action or orientation toward the world. By assessing the macro- and micro-elements of an argument's structure (called by various names, including "rhetorical fragments," "symbols," "ideographs," etc.) rhetoricians identify effective and/or fallacious elements of discourse that succeed and/or fail to produce a desired behavior. For the purpose of this study, ideology can be defined as "a political language, preserved in rhetorical documents, with the capacity to dictate decision and control public belief and behavior" (McGee, 1980, pp. 3–4). Ideological rhetorical critique is a descriptive and prescriptive approach to scholarship that is embedded in critical theory and critical performance (see: McGee, 1980; Wander, 1984). It is a

way to operationalize "critical rhetoric," which emphasizes the interconnections of language, knowledge, and power. Ideological rhetorical critique calls upon the rhetorician to "reconstruct" a series of argumentative fragments and put forward their interpretation(s) of this collection (see McKerrow 1989). In doing so, the critic reveals dominant and/or hegemonic ideologies implicit in the text as manifested through a rhetor's discourse (or their *non*-discourse). According to Marouf Hasian and S. Marek Muller, rhetorical contextualization *via* ideological critique:

demands that we consider the "I" (who the author is and is not), the text (what it did and did not say), the audience (who was and was not addressed), the problems (what was and was not mentioned/defined), and the solutions (what was and what not offered, and to whom) (Hasian and Muller, 2016, p. 5)

Essentially, ideological criticism names ideologies as "fundamentally rhetorical creations" (Hasian and Muller, 2016, p. 5).

In keeping with the premise of ideological rhetorical criticism, I conducted this study by systematically analyzing discrete units of analysis *via* a process of purposive sampling (Hasian and Muller, 2016). This mode of non-probablistic sampling relies on the critic's disciplinary judgment and prior subject-area expertise when choosing members of the broader human population to emphasize in their study. A rhetorician utilizes purposive sampling for ideological critique in order to access a particular discursive profile. Therefore, for this study, I collected a series of rhetorical texts that I believed most relevant to elucidating a specific phenomenon.

For this analysis, I chose texts that I deemed most suitable to addressing dominant and/or hegemonic ideologies guiding Western constructions of bushmeat in the 2014 Ebola outbreak. I specifically chose written texts that were available in an online format, that did not require a paid subscription to view, and that were authored by individuals and/or organizations with a wide viewer base. I did so in order to ensure that the texts I studied were more likely than others to reach large segments of the English-speaking population (since, while "the West" is composed of multiple North American and European countries, English is a primary or secondary language of most of these places).

The texts that I sampled came in three genres: expert, journalistic, and partisan. "Expert" texts were defined as pamphlets, essays, and other written discourse authored by those with advanced degrees and professional careers in public health, conservation, etc. "Journalistic" texts were defined as informative and non-editorialized pieces published in professional news media outlets. "Partisan" texts were defined as editorial and/or opinion pieces published in overtly left- or right-leaning outlets meant to both inform and sway audience toward some political and/or social goal. Furthermore, of the English-language texts I sampled, I chose authors, organizations, and/or outlets publically understood to be "known names" in their respective fields (for example, the Center for Disease Control for experts in public health, *Newsweek* for English-language journalism, or *One Green Planet* for left-leaning environmental advocacy). In summary, through a purposive

sampling of over 30 online texts disseminated by expert, journalist, and partisan rhetors, I conducted an ideological rhetorical criticism of "bushmeat" discourse during the 2014 Ebola outbreak. The results that follow contain quotes and examples most representative of the three themes I identified in this discourse.

MAPPING CARNISTIC COLONIALISM IN EBOLA DISCOURSES ABOUT BUSHMEAT

My analysis of the 2014 Ebola outbreak reveals three thematic discourses used by Western authors to condemn bushmeat consumption in Africa, usually to other Western audiences: biosecurity, conservation, and development. Despite their veneers of objectivity, a rhetorical critique of these texts reveals colonial, carnist conceptions of civilized food practices (specifically, civilized *flesh-eating* practices) in a globalizing world. An ethic and discourse of carnistic colonialism guided anti-bushmeat discourses during the 2014 Ebola outbreak.

Biosecurity

The first emergent discourse regarding the 2014 Ebola outbreak's "bushmeat problem" centered biosecurity. Specifically, rhetors warned that if the bushmeat trade was not curbed, Ebola could spread beyond West Africa and into other, specifically North American and Western European, countries. An August 2014 issue of *Newsweek* garnered controversy with its article "Smuggled Bushmeat is Ebola's Back Door to America." The authors described an America besieged with contaminated immigrant communities complicit in the Ebola pandemic:

Less than three miles from Yankee Stadium, the colorful storefronts of African markets lining the Grand Concourse are some of the first signs of a bustling Bronx community that includes immigrants from those West African nations hit hardest by the recent and unprecedented outbreak of the Ebola virus ... A turbaned woman smiles vividly when we enter one small market with canned goods displayed in its window, but the light in her eyes immediately dims when we ask about bushmeat. Shrugging, looking away, she says she knows nothing about it and then, after a moment's calculation, asks us to repeat the word, as if she didn't understand what we had said. (Flynn and Scutti, 2014, para. 1–2).

The article emphasized African immigrants' love for bush rats and guinea pig meat "despite the fact that it is illegal in the U.S. (para. 6). Noting that immigrants might pay $100 for a slab of bushmeat, they analogized the trade as "a luxury indulgence in the same way illegally imported caviar might for Russian émigrés in Brooklyn" (para. 6). Increased immigration, they reported, led to an increase in illegal bushmeat in America, despite the meats' "deadly threat" to Americans *via* Ebola, SARS, Monkeypox, and even HIV, which was "almost certainly transferred from bushmeat" (para. 33). True, U.S. medical personnel had yet to find any Ebola pathogens in confiscated bushmeat, but "they only tested a few samples" (para. 26).

Immigrants could and would continue smuggling to enjoy a meal that has "just barely processed in order to keep it from rotting" (para. 27).

Some outlets blamed lack of governmental oversight for overseas bushmeat trades. Prior to the 2014 epidemic, *Food Safety News* reported on a smaller Ebola outbreak, commenting "In the U.S., all store-bought meat comes from regulated, government-inspected slaughter facilities. There are rules . . . But when it comes to African bushmeat, all bets are off" (Richardson, 2012, para. 3). Indeed, "Poachers' wire snares catch animals indiscriminately, without regard to the species snared or the health of the individual animal caught" (para. 3). This discourse continued into 2014–15, with many rhetors commenting that, while those handling the raw bodies of bushmeat animals bore the greatest risk of contracting zoonotic diseases, consuming cooked bushmeat was still a concerning disease vector. *BBC* acknowledged that the actual risk of contracting Ebola from an improperly cooked animal corpse was low: "The estimate of more than 100,000 bats consumed has not resulted in a single case of Ebola in Ghana" (Hogenboom, 2014, para. 22). Nonetheless, *Newsweek* maintained that despite African immigrants' traditional pathogen-containing methods *via* smoking and drying the bushmeat, "bushmeat may appear safe, but the flesh inside is still juicy—filled with blood, fresh tissue and more" (Flynn and Scotti, 2014, para. 26).

Still others—particularly medical experts and scientific institutions—attributed bushmeat's biosecurity risks to African immigrants' naiveté. Dr. Marcus Rowcliffe told *BBC*: "People who eat bat bushmeat are rarely aware of any potential risk associated with consumption. They tend to see it as healthy food" (qtd. in Hogenboom, 2014, para. 21). Dr. George Amato of the American for Museum of Natural History concurred with this thesis, complaining to *Newsweek* about bushmeat the relationship between meat smoking and smuggling: "If you wanted to safely transport meat and not worry about pathogens, you wouldn't smoke it. It's not a very efficient way of killing microorganisms." (Flynn and Scutti, 2014, para. 27). Further, the Center for Disease Control (CDC) composed a one-pager on bushmeat avoidance, instructing educated U.S. immigrants to "Tell friends and family to avoid African bushmeat because it is illegal to bring it into the United States and can make people sick" (CDC, 2014, para. 5). Granted, it acknowledged, "there have been no reports of human sickness in the United States from preparing or consuming bushmeat illegally brought into the United States" (para. 3). The WHO further warned that "The initial source of past EVD outbreaks was likely human contact with wild animals through hunting, butchering and preparing meat from infected wild animals ("bush meat")" while immediately adding that "in the current outbreak, the majority of cases are a result of human to human transmission" and that "If food products are properly prepared and cooked, humans cannot become infected by consuming them: the Ebola virus is inactivated through cooking." (World Health Organization, 2014). Editorial appropriated and elaborated upon these expert discourses to their political advantage, with the conservative *Breitbart* reporting that "The refusal to believe bush meat is unsafe is partly due to a belief that Ebola was caused by medical workers to harvest organs from African villagers" (Chastain, 2014, para. 7).

However, these biosecurity discourses conveniently ignored institutional practices and material realities that, when identified, call into question the legitimacy of the enthymematic linkage between the spread of Ebola and the consumption of bushmeat. Consider, for instance, the myth of the sanitary Western healthcare professional as antithesis to hysterical African vectors. Condit (2015) noted how rhetoric itself did not infect and kill people with Ebola pathogens, but "a specific rhetoric employed by the World Health Organization impeded the containment of the epidemic because it coded medical personnel as expert saviors rather than as vectors of the disease" (Condit, 2015, p. 121).

Experts, journalists, and partisans were sometimes so concerned with preventing unclean Africans and their food from moving beyond their borders that they overlooked how anyone contact with Ebola patients—even a Western medical doctor—could contract and spread the disease. By October of 2014, more than 500 African and non-African medical professionals contracted Ebola, and half died. Yet, health care workers continued receiving special exemptions from surveillance procedures: "their role as vectors was papered over by scientific literature, and they were depicted by WHO's public rhetoric as victims of an irrational public" (p. 122). Condit's analysis demonstrated that, while biosecurity discourses identified African natives and immigrants as premier vectors for an Ebola pandemic, they rendered invisible medical professionals' equal and often increased potential for spreading Ebola transnationally.

Anti-bushmeat biosecurity discourses also papered over the inherent "diseased-ness" of normalized Western meats—for instance, prototypical processes of industrial agriculture such as genetic engineering, overuse of antibiotics, and intensive confinement. Contemporary applications of genetic engineering in industrialized agriculture diminishes species biodiversity. In so doing, it fuels zoonotic pathogen adaptation and undermines animals' immunocompetence. Fowl, pigs, and cattle currently demonstrate increased disease susceptibility, an alarming discovery considering "73% of emerging and re-emerging human pathogens are zoonotic in origin" (Greger, 2011, p. 2). To deal with decreased immunocompetence, some agriculturalists pump their animals with antibiotics. This controversial veterinary practice significantly threatens human health "as pathogenic-resistant organisms propagated in these livestock are poised to enter the food supply and could be widely disseminated in food products" (Landers, et al., 2012, p. 5). Furthermore, exhaustive production methods like intensive confinement results in intense physiological change in animals that compromises their immune systems (Hinchliffe, et al., 2013). Indeed, "The high population density of modern intensively managed livestock operations results in sharing of both commensal flora and pathogens, which can be conducive to rapid dissemination of infectious agents" (Landers, et al., 2012, p. 5). Humans risk contracting *Campylobacter*, *Salmonella*, *E-Coli*, influenza, and other potentially deadly illnesses from confined livestock animals.

Poor regulation of meat quality leads to outbreaks of painful and frequently fatal illnesses. Despite some rhetors' insistence that Western meat was somehow more edible due to better quality control, "controversies [rage] about the failures of the regulatory system in detecting new pathogens" (Collier and Lakoff, 2008, p. 11). USDA regulatory standards are so low that in many cases slaughterhouses are left to police themselves: "Carcasses have been considered acceptable for human consumption even when they've contained blood clots, stains, scar tissue from ulcers, liver spots, and hemorrhages" (Joy, 2011, p. 77). Indeed, "We have left the fox to guard the chicken coop. And not surprisingly, we have ended up with shit in our meat" (p. 79).

By ignoring these common disease vectors, mediated rhetors erroneously pathologized African people and their "unregulated" meats as substantially more dangerous than common, larger-scale Western practices. Doing so rendered invisible the "troubling growth of "modernization risks" that are produced by institutions meant to promote health, security, and prosperity" (Collier and Lakoff, 2008, p. 8). Thus, the biosecurity trope amplified bushmeat's comparatively miniscule risk of transnational pathogenicity in favor of colonial and carnist standards of (un) sanitary consumption and agricultural (under) regulation.

Conservation

The second emergent discourse strand in the 2014 Ebola epidemic related bushmeat and Ebola to larger African conservation issues. Many Ebola-centered environmentalist rhetors applauded increased scrutiny of the bushmeat trade as Ebola's "silver lining" (Williams, 2014). For instance, *New Scientist* published that "We all hope this epidemic can be contained soon. But will we learn to change the behaviours that directly brought it about?" (Williams, 2014, para. 2). Calling upon bushmeat's erroneous status as a "main" vector, its production and consumption should immediately end: "The Ebola outbreak [was] an opportunity to clamp down on a practice which both causes disease outbreaks and *empties forests of wildlife*" (para. 4, emphasis mine).

To be clear, forests worldwide are in dire straits due to unsustainable environmental practices ranging from industrial logging to illegal poaching. However, while deforestation, ground clearing, and poaching absolutely amplify habitat loss and resultant zoonotic contacts between species, this fact served as a pretext for a dubious discursive trope deriding African ambivalence towards animal life and environmental sustainability—a trope contingent upon the naturalization and normalization of carnistic colonialism.

That bushmeat can and does make its way out of rural communities and into urban centers is not under debate. However, according to the Center for International Forestry Research (CIFOR,) over ten million Africans rely on bushmeat for over 80% of their protein intake—far from a privileged few (Cooney, 2014). Anti-bushmeat rhetors centering conservation argued that bushmeat was not as much a *subsistence diet* for disenfranchised rural populations as an *expensive luxury* for urban elites. Two years prior to the Ebola outbreak, *One*

Green Planet was already warning that "Our appetites for unnecessary "exotic meats," especially those which are endangered, must be curbed." The author further protested:

The meat of these endangered animals does not feed starving people. It is bought and sold at incredibly high prices as a luxury item by urban Africa, as well as transported internationally and sold on black markets. In some cities, a small piece of chimpanzee meat can fetch the same price as an entire cow. (McArthur, 2012, para. 5).

2014 anti-bushmeat rhetoric functioned similarly, framing bushmeat as an exotic treat falsely represented by cultural activists as necessary nutrition for the poor. Conservationists worried about the "commercialisation of bushmeat" wherein "Animals are hunted for food in rural areas, but also to sate the desire for wild meat in the more populous urban centres" (Bryce, 2015, para. 8). Bushmeat was little more than an illegal indulgence, a "secret market" that had "hitherto been defended on cultural grounds" (Malone, 2014, para. 7). It was simultaneously "a luxury" and "a deadly threat" (Flynn and Scutti, 2014, para. 7). That threat was not only the spread of Ebola, but the gradual elimination of Africa's endangered species for little reason other than Africans' moral ambivalences.

Some rhetors portrayed an out-of-control bushmeat trade as resultant from unnatural interactions between human civilization and pristine African wilderness. They accurately noted how intensive deforestation *via* over-logging and mining propelled bats and other species out of their isolated forest habitats and into close contact with humans. However, anti-environmental business policies aside, for many writers the greater concern was the brutal, callous Africans hunting wildlife without regard for ecological welfare: "the [bushmeat] trade is horrifically cruel. Wild animals should be left in the wild, for all our sakes" (Williams, 2014, para. 8). *The Guardian* concurred: "The answer seems like a given. Without bushmeat, infection is almost entirely cut out of the picture, and vulnerable forest species are shielded from hunters." (Bryce, 2015, para. 4). And, since natives could not be trusted to stop bushmeat hunting on their own, *New Scientist* appealed to multinational corporations, particularly airlines, to "rapidly and unilaterally make a huge difference" by ceasing transportation of wildlife, alive or dead (Williams, 2014, para. 7).

In advocating for permanent bans on the bushmeat trade, Ebola's "silver lining" was that some countries' bushmeat "crackdown" could turn into a long-term conservation move that might "give dwindling forest species room to recover". (Bryce, 2015, para. 2). Granted, not all bushmeat animals were created equal. Writers mostly reserved their animal welfare frames for charismatic megafauna like great apes. *The Guardian* encapsulated how "endangered species" became a carefully coded phrase for those specific animals deemed culturally valuable: "Bushmeat has a bad name for a good reason: it threatens already endangered species, and strips forests of their keystone species, with untold effects on ecosystem biodiversity as a whole" (para. 7). Even while acknowledging their relatively marginal presence in the African bushmeat trade, the author mourned: "Great apes comprise a small percentage of the bushmeat trade in

Africa—5%, or less—but these highly vulnerable animals are still illegally hunted, and even a small dent in their already fragile populations can have a devastating impact" (para. 7). Similar media narratives highlighted charistmatic megafauna such as elephants and lion under the banner of the West African bushmeat trade—again, despite their marginal presence compared to the small, lesser-known, and ecologically "resilient" animals most typically slaughtered: animals like porcupines, pouched rate and duikers (Vander Velde, 2014).

Again, my critique aims neither to minimize global ecological concerns impacted by unregulated hunting nor to advocate for the wanton slaughter of animals provided they are not endangered. However, the conservation-themed discourses emerging in the 2014 Ebola epidemic reveal concerning hegemonic ideologies guiding the valuation of certain charismatic species over mere "vermin" subsequent desires to protect those special animals from morally ambiguous natives. That one conservative editorial outlet claimed "Bush meat is a foreign concept to most Americans" (Chastain, 2014, para. 3) is a misnomer: big game hunting is, after all, a standard activity for wealthy Westerners traveling to Africa, including former U.S. President Donald Trump's elder sons. Considering the popularity of hunting "game" in Western countries—the outcry over hunting wild animals native to the African continent is ironic. Indeed, concern over intensive hunting seems restricted to practices "over there" reflects differential cultural standards guiding which animals "matter" and which people should be allowed to hunt them—a standard teeming with colonial history.

Colonial logics have historically painted Africans as horrifically cruel to animal beings in contrast to the more "humane" practices of Westerners:

According to whites—missionaries, settlers, and colonial officials alike—Africans acted with wanton cruelty to dumb beasts. Africans who regularly inflicted unnecessary suffering on animals felt no empathy for their victims. In contrast, Europeans, modern bourgeois individuals, abhorred suffering. Or rather, they abhorred unnecessary suffering. (Shadle, 2012, p. 1098).

While both Westerners and Africans hunted for food and other materials, colonial European hunting ethics maintained that animal suffering resulting in *positive* results was not cruel. Brutalization that served no logical purpose—like barbaric bushmen's spear-hunting--was inhumane, antithesis to civilized society, and in need of moral intervention by colonists (Shadle, 2012). Colonial intervention strategies included banning traditional hunting tools while simultaneously banning natives from owning or discharging firearms (the only civilized way to hunt), thus restricting the hunting of wild "game" (read: bushmeat) to white, moneyed men.

Understanding colonial histories of "humane" hunting and "positive" animal suffering elucidates the problematics of conservation argumentation during the 2014 Ebola outbreak. Different categorizations of animality evoke different affective responses in humans when confronted with an animal's death and consumption (Bratanova, Loughnan and Bastian, 2011). "Food animal" is conceptual frame that makes salient particular attributes of an animal, such as its tastiness, at the

expense of others, like its capacity to suffer. Thus, when people confront the "meat" of creatures not commonly classified as "food" animals, they are more likely to "picture the living animal from which it came, and we tend to feel disgusted at the notion of eating it" (Joy, 2011, p. 15). When confronted with the consumption of "vermin" (like Emile Ouamouno's bat), people's affective responses are compounded *via* "pestilence discourses" (Knight, 2000)—frames depicting certain animals as dirty, criminal, numerous, and killable. These frames manifested as empathic "sentiment with powerful political valences" (McGovern, 2014, para. 7).

While the suffering involved in *any* animal's death for consumption is undeniable, to frame only certain killings as "grotesque," "inhumane," or "unnecessary" conveniently ignores the cruelties involved in industrialized meat production and Western animal consumption practices. Consider American practices of de-beaking chickens and tail-docking pigs, or force-feeding geese for foie gras, or intensive confinement of animals leading to psychotic breaks, or recorded instances of slaughterhouse employees beating "downed" animals—all despite readily available alternatives such as legumes, nuts, vitamins, plant-based fibers, governmentally-subsidized soy, etc.

For those who would label African bushmeat as particularly unethical because bushmeat animals are endangered, again note how carnistic colonialism renders invisible the species degradation involved in industrialized agriculture. As the World Animal Foundation (WAF) has noted:

The animal agriculture industry is killing our environment and putting every species on this planet at risk of extinction. The animal agriculture industry's pollution of our air, water and land, along with deforestation and soil degradation, all contribute to habitat loss and species extinction. Like a domino effect, a multitude of aspects is leading to the destruction of Earth's biodiversity. (WAF, 2017, para. 8).

Even if chimpanzees and other endangered beings are, for some reason, of greater moral importance than other animals due to their diminishing numbers, this rationale is not enough to explain cognitive dissonances towards transnational animal consumption and destruction. The extreme deforestation that has put bushmeat hunters and endangered fauna ever closer together is not a result of specifically African moral deficiencies. Multinational logging and mining industries also encourage these unsustainable environmental practices, as does international demand for coffee and diamonds, as has the search for palm oil (Biello, 2008; Casey and Elias, 2015).

Portrayals of conservation as Ebola's "silver lining" thus represented a well-intentioned yet colonial, carnistic discourse. In aiming to "save Africa from Africans" (Nelson, 2003), rhetors seemingly in favor of biodiversity and animal welfare rendered invisible the Western hunting, farming, and extraction practices culpable in the destruction of African wildlife, wildlife writ large, and Ebola's spread.

Development

Amidst the 2014 Ebola epidemic emerged a third controversial discourse: development.

Development discourses frequently centered Western standards of privatized agriculture. A notable argumentative trope emerged, arguing that African economic and health development agendas hinged on countries' willingness to adopt capitalistic livestock markets. This discourse invoked carnistic colonialism by dubbing industrialized agriculture as natural, normal, and necessary for the progress of humankind.

Rhetors argued that for Ebola-stricken communities, international agricultural development meant a shift from bushmeat as a source of protein to a Western-style livestock market economy. In other words, agricultural development should comport to colonial, carnist standards previously set forth by "developed" communities. The *Ecologist* condemned the "often romanticized view of native peoples as conservationists," as "this situation is more to do with their limited technology and small populations relative to their environment" (Young, 2014, para. 15). While the native-as-ecological-panacea argument is problematic (see Krech, 2000), this particular author argued that the African bushmeat trade continued to flourish because "judges in these countries where the hunting takes place often, naively, believe the hunter's pleas of poverty and just "smack them on the wrists"" (para. 19). Such claims, he argued, were facile, as hunting-and-gathering lifestyles were "much more expensive than buying chicken from the supermarket" (para. 20). If African peoples *really* wanted to make a decent living through food production, they needed to acknowledge "Humans spent the last few years breeding chickens, cows, and pigs for a reason: they make a nicer, cheaper, and less dangerous dinner" (para. 20). Still other writers concurred, arguing that rural Africans, "despite the evidence … have expressed panic at the idea of changing their lifestyles and creating a livestock market" (Chastain, 2014, para. 1).

The United Nations (UN) adopted a similar argument. Chief veterinary officer Juan Lubroth suggested that discouraging bushmeat hunting depending upon shifts to livestock markets: "We recognize [sic] the importance that bush meat has to quality nutrition … Can we have a more development agenda where we could have poultry production, sheep, goats, pigs … so that there is no undue encroachment into the forest for hunting?" (qtd. in Chastain, 2014, para. 12–13). The United States Development Programme (UNDP) for Sierra Leone chastised existing arguments that African development might occur through "sustainable" bushmeat hunting, publishing a report stating: "evidence from other African countries shows that the domestication and commercial farming of wildlife can protect livelihoods, help meet the demand for animal protein and benefit local ecosystems" (UNDP, 2015, p. 2). Its steps for developing Sierra Leone's infrastructure included "Introducing alternative sources of animal protein, such as poultry or pork production, especially among communities reliant on bushmeat" as well as promoting "Commercial farming of wildlife species and nationwide marketing" (p. 2).

"Development" writ large is a troublesome ideological trigger-button often serving as a catch-all term for industrialization and capitalist transition. Within the context of food production and consumption, however, entities like the World Bank consider international agricultural development as essential for "spurring growth, overcoming poverty, and enhancing food security" vis-à-vis "a sharp productivity increase … by diversifying into labor-intensive, high-value agriculture" in order to "help developing countries address climate change; and overcome looming health pandemics for plants, animals, and humans" (World Bank, 2008). The modernization of food production through ever-industrialized agriculture in "developed" nations has undoubtedly provided many humans access to a predictable, diverse, and abundant food supply (Collier and Lakoff, 2008). However, ownership of domestic crops and animals is often associated with distinctions between civilization and barbarism, wherein agriculture represents questions about what it means to be human (Cudworth and Hobden, 2014). High-tech agriculture can act as metaphor for a "standard of civilization," primarily based on assumptions that humankind and nature must be kept separate. Within this set of standards, "those societies that are perceived as being most detached [are] regarded as the most civilized, while those that are mired in nature are perceived as in some ways less civilized" (Cudworth and Hobden, 2014, p. 747).

Thus, at the bottom of this sliding scale of civility are hunter-gatherers, the barely-humans who "were either to brought within these forms of society, or would naturally die or be exterminated" (p. 752). Managing exotic, extreme forms of nature in colonized (or "post" colonized) territories has traditionally been a mechanism for "civilizing" both the colonized. A part of this process includes mandatory transitions from hunters for farmers, from wild fauna to domesticated livestock/mono-cropped plants. Indeed, "current narratives of progress in agricultural production are linked to the development of intensive stock-raising systems throughout parts of Africa" (p. 760). Therefore, this transition is not natural, normal, and necessary, but colonial and carnistic.

Some predict that even if Africa converted to industrial agribusiness, resultant "development" (in the form of increased personal wealth for citizens) would be limited. High-tech agriculture in "third-world" countries historically tends to strengthen control of elites and perpetuate social inequality—for instance, by maintaining moneyed men's control of the economy (Shiva, 1993; Plumwood, 2002). Pushing against colonial, carnist standards of development requires questioning the thesis that industrial agriculture is an indubitably more civilized, sustainable, and economically viable mode of food production. Some are already doing just that, asserting that banning the bushmeat trade would do more harm than good to rural African peoples. The *Independent* reported that bushmeat represents a quarter of meat consumption in Liberia's rural areas. During increased restrictions during the Ebola epidemic, women traders in cities and towns "lost the empowerment that comes with being employed" experienced "nutritional disadvantage and rising food insecurity" (Bryce, 2015, para. 4). The consequences of 1,000 + traders, particularly women, losing their jobs and the income that sent their children to school were "the more complex aspect of the argument that's often left out, because it's easier to fixate on bushmeat" (para. 13). CIFOR concurred, equating the "just switch to livestock" narrative to saying "let them eat cake" to vulnerable populations: "Achieving sustainable harvest of bushmeat is therefore a necessity, and by far the best available option" (para. 11).

Analyses of the social and economic consequences of shift to industrial agriculture need not be restricted to Africa. Even in purportedly "developed" societies, increased water and air pollution from animal agribusiness further separates the rich from the poor as the means for a healthy life are privatized. Health and nutrition become "the privilege of those who can afford to pay for them … The losers will be (and in many places already are) those … without market power" (Plumwood, 2002, pp. 13–14). Environmental racism thrives in countries like the United States, with industrial agribusiness centers disproportionately polluting poor and disenfranchised communities (Zimring, 2017).

Intensive livestock industries are, according to the United Nations, "one of the top two or three most significant contributors to the most serious environmental problems, at every scale, from local to global" (qtd. in Joy, 2011, p. 86). The world's largest source of water pollution is animal agriculture. The more intensive the production, the worse the pollution. Water is contaminated by antibiotics, hormones, chemicals, animal waste, erosion-caused sediment, fertilizer, and feed crop pesticides. 55% of soil erosion in the United States has resulted from animal agribusiness, as has 37% of insect- and animal-killing pesticides. 70% of the Amazon's forestland has been completely converted to livestock pastures (Joy, 2011). According to CIFOR, inhabitants of entire Africa's Congo Basin consume five million tons of bushmeat per year, nearly equal to the annual cattle production of the European Union. After a decade of studying the bushmeat trade, CIFOR concluded that producing the same amount of meat through cattle ranching in the basin would require a full twenty-five million hectares of forest to be converted into farmland, about the size of Great Britain (Cooney, 2014).

Furthermore, a conversion to industrialized agriculture would hardly "civilize" the agricultural workforce. Injuries, psychological distress, and disease are endemic in industrialized slaughter industries. For instance, employees in American abattoirs, many of whom are undocumented immigrants and/or people of color, work in unsanitary conditions that expose them to noxious gases, concentrated waste, and the same blood and guts that Ebola commentators worried would spread disease. These employees have considerably higher rates of zoonoses than the rest of the population, despite the industry's supposedly superior health and safety standards compared to bushmeat hunting. Employees additionally demonstrate high rates of respiratory disease, reproductive dysfunction, seizures, and neurological dysfunction (Muller, 2018). In essence, claims that hyper-capitalist, high-tech, industrial agriculture is more sanitary and more protective to workers and citizens conceals how corporate agribusiness consistently avoids regulation, thus perpetuating a thoroughly *un*civilized system of food production in the name of colonial and carnistic "progress". This discursive trope not only represents mass-mediated overconfidence in the benefits of industrialized agriculture, but also demonstrates the continued silencing of Other potentialities for "knowing" and "doing" food production and consumption, a phenomenon that Shiva (1993) condemned as "monocultures of the mind."

Anti-bushmeat discourses centering development, emphasizing that Africa and Africans might be "saved" from Ebola by replacing traditional hunting practices with corporatized farming practices. Rhetors' simplistic conception of a hunter-gatherer/agribusiness dichotomy when dealing with issues of global food security, ecological destruction, and disease management, carried "the imperialist baggage of a civilizing mission" (Cudworth and Hobden, 2014, p. 761). Development frames did little more than continue a long-standing colonial logic concerned with separating civilized humans from wild, undomesticated nature.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Assessing how bushmeat narratives functioned during the 2014 Ebola outbreak elucidates the connections between food, flesh, and (post)colonial politics. While the consumption of non-domesticated animal flesh likely played at least some role in Ebola's spread, Western rhetors' bushmeat-centered outbreak narratives demonstrated less of a concern with accurate epidemiology and more of a concern with the grotesqueness and deviance of non-Western meat consumption. Writers ranging from expert to editorialist perpetuated standards of carnistic colonialism–a term future scholars might use to further understanding of the relationships between colonialism, racism, speciesism, and contemporary cultural dynamics of biosecurity, conservation, and international development.

Pinpointing instances of carnistic colonialism demands defamiliarizing and critiquing meat as a shifting construct and flesh consumption as a global practice. Fighting it demands the constant critique of what/who "meat" is and what the future of food could be. Critiquing carnistic colonialism must go beyond simple castigations some foreign Other's unsavory foodstuffs. Rather, critics should engage in a genuine (and very uncomfortable) evaluations of the food production and consumption practices in which they themselves are most complicit. For some people, these practices will have to include bushmeat. Others need look no further than the factory-farmed cow flesh waiting in their freezer.

Meat is not a clear or stable concept, yet during pandemic threats, normative Western standards of meat consumption are elevated to maintain anthropocentric, ethnocentric hierarchies through acts such as animal naming, raising, slaughtering, cooking, and consumption. Carnistic colonialism thus privileges the human over the animal, certain humans over other humans, and certain animals over other animals. These valuations are cloaked in debates over edibility, animal cruelty, economics, and hygiene. While the 2014 Ebola outbreak is an exemplar of this hegemonic discourse, it was not the first and will not be the last. Reminiscent of anti-bat meat discourses during the 2003 SARS epidemic and current anti-dog meat protests in response to the Chinese Yulin Dog Meat Festival, the 2014–16 consumption of *particular* animals' (vermin and/or precious) was deemed unnecessary and immoral, and thus in need of mass Western intervention. Recent depictions of Chinese "wet markets" have been disproportionately tied to the current COVID-19 pandemic in a manner hauntingly similar to 2014 (Shepherd, 2020).

To be clear, I do not argue that eating bushmeat is in *all* or *any* circumstances ethical or desirable. As a *Western* rhetor raised and embedded in *Western* consumption systems, that is not how I view my scholarly duty. Rather, I offer carnistic colonialism a needed counter-criticism of hyper-capitalist, industrial standards of meat consumption so often offered as the pinnacle of civilized society. I do not insist that *no* action should be taken locally, nationally, or internationally to curb unsustainable food practices—hunting-based or otherwise. Indeed, given the existential threat posed by zoonotic illnesses and the ongoing terror of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is clear that the more-than-human world is in desperate need of moral and material change. However, *who* precisely *must change* and *in what capacity* is consistently glossed over through the vilification of Others via discourses like carnistic colonialism.

The ultimate conclusion of this essay is this: Understanding and invoking anti-speciesism in conjunction with a decolonial *telos* uncovers how Western rhetors strategically minimize their own complicity in the existential threat posed by zoonotic diseases like Ebola and COVID-19. Omnipresent in the rhetoric that is carnistic colonialism are 1) the colonial drive to to demonize the (post)colonial Other; 2) the moral elevation of Western standards of meat production and consumption; and 3)

the fallacious and ahistorical implication that the Westernization of non-Western food systems would be a "magic bullet" solution to issues of public health, conservation, and international development. Global food production and consumption practices need to change and there is no doubt about that. However, the solutions posed through carnistic colonialism are akin to patching a stab wound with a bandage. Without a serious reconsideration of speciesism, meat production and consumption, and the global food industry's historical/ contemporary relationship with colonial politics, the world only has a matter of time before it bleeds out.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/Supplementary Material, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

The author confirms being the sole contributor of this work and has approved it for publication.

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Mobilizing Networks and Relationships Through Indigenous Food Sovereignty: The Indigenous Food Circle's Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic in Northwestern Ontario

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This paper explores the Indigenous Food Circle's (IFC) response to the COVID-19 pandemic in Northwestern Ontario, Canada. Established in 2016, the IFC is an informal collaborative network of Indigenous-led and Indigenous-serving organizations that aims to support and develop the capacity of Indigenous Peoples to collaboratively address challenges and opportunities facing food systems and to ensure that food-related programming and policy meets the needs of the all communities. Its primary goals are to reduce Indigenous food insecurity, increase food self-determination, and establish meaningful relationships with the settler population through food. This community case study introduces the IFC and shares the strategies and initiatives that were used during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 to address immediate needs and maintain a broader focus on Indigenous food sovereignty. The food related impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on Indigenous People and determining solutions cannot be understood in isolation from settler colonialism and the capitalist food system. Reflecting on the scholarly literature and the experiential learnings that emerged from these efforts, we argue that meaningful and impacting initiatives that aim to address Indigenous food insecurity during an emergency situation must be rooted in a decolonizing framework that centers meaningful relationships and Indigenous leadership.

Keywords: COVID-19, food security, food sovereignty, Indigenous, northwestern ontario, pandemic

INTRODUCTION

The dominant food system is deeply embedded in a legacy of social and ecological injustice (Holt-Giménez, 2017). While profits and other benefits from these developments have been appropriated by the economic and political elite (Clapp and Isakson, 2018), capitalist logics have led to adverse effects for food systems including the lands and watersheds, producers and harvesters, and the many species (human and non-human) that depend on these

interconnected systems for survival. In Canada, this is especially evident for Indigenous Peoples[1] who have been violently removed from their traditional territories and foodways since the establishment of the colonial state (Manuel and Derrickson, 2015). Further, food has been used as a tool of genocide to engender the ongoing theft of land, culture and identity, and traditional knowledge (Daschuk, 2013; Rotz, 2017). While these realities have been in motion for well over 500 years, they have been exacerbated most recently by the COVID-19 pandemic that have severely impacted Indigenous communities that face high levels of economic, health, and social inequity (Levi and Robin, 2020; Power et al., 2020). Despite these challenges, Indigenous Peoples have continued to maintain their traditional food systems through struggles for justice and self-determination (Grey and Patel, 2015; Settee and Shukla, 2020).

In this paper, we describe the Indigenous Food Circle's (IFC) response to the COVID-19 pandemic in Northwestern Ontario. Established in 2016, the IFC is an informal collaborative network of Indigenous-led and Indigenous-serving organizations that aims to support and develop the capacity of Indigenous Peoples to collaboratively address challenges and opportunities facing food systems and to ensure that food-related programming and policy meets the needs of the diverse communities in the region (Levkoe et al., 2019). Its primary goals are to reduce Indigenous food insecurity, increase food self-determination, and establish meaningful relationships with the settler population through food. The ultimate vision of the IFC is to realize Indigenous food sovereignty, an ideal that builds on the right to healthy and culturally appropriate food and to ensure people have the power to determine and control their own food systems (Patel, 2009). Beyond a rights-based discourse and settler conceptions of policy and governance, Indigenous food sovereignty focuses on the sacred connections among land and water-based food systems and the revitalization of traditional ecological knowledge, culture, and self-determination (Morrison 2011; Coté, 2016; Whyte, 2017).

This paper introduces the IFC and shares the strategies and initiatives that were used during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 to address immediate needs and maintain a broader focus on Indigenous food sovereignty. The impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on Indigenous People cannot be understood in isolation from the legacy of settler colonialism and the dominant capitalist food system. Reflecting on the scholarly literature and the experiential learnings that emerged from this work, we argue that meaningful and impacting initiatives that aim to address Indigenous food insecurity during an emergency situation must be rooted in a decolonizing framework that centers meaningful relationships and Indigenous leadership.

We write this account as three individuals engaged with food sovereignty struggles and the work of the IFC. Charles Levkoe is a settler scholar-activist involved in community-based action research embedded in social and environmental justice. He has supported the IFC since its establishment, serving as an administrative team member. Jessica McLaughlin is an Anishinaabe community-based practitioner from Long Lake 58 First Nation and the coordinator of the IFC. She helped to establish the IFC and has played a leadership role since its inception. Courtney Strutt is a settler community-based educator and program development practitioner who contributes to the IFC administrative team. The insights for this paper have emerged directly from our work with First Nations and Indigenous communities in Northwestern Ontario and engagement with IFC members, including Indigenous Elders and Knowledge Keepers.

INDIGENOUS PEOPLE AS VULNERABLIZED

According to Statistics Canada (2017), Ontario has the largest Indigenous population in Canada with almost 80% living in northern regions of the province. In the city of Thunder Bay, Northern Ontario's largest urban center, the majority of the population are of European and Scandinavian descent with about 13% made up of Indigenous People, the highest proportion of urban Indigenous People in Canada. A community-based research study conducted in 2020 coordinated by Anishnawbe Mushkiki suggested that Thunder Bay's Indigenous population is likely over three times higher than official data indicates (Smylie, 2021). The city is located on the northern shores of Lake Superior on the traditional land of the Anishinaabe people, today represented by Fort William First Nation, signatory to the Robinson Superior Treaty of 1850. The city is a regional center for healthcare, social services and commercial activity. In addition to more than 80 First Nation reserves in Northwestern Ontario, the region includes political representatives of the Anishinabek Nation, Grand Council Treaty #3, the Nishnawbe Aski Nation, the Metis Nation of Ontario and independent First Nations.

Statistics suggest that over 14% of Thunder Bay's population lack access to an adequate diet of sufficient quantity and quality[2], however, these numbers are likely underreported. Across Canada, research has demonstrated that the rate of food insecurity among Indigenous households is over 28%, compared to 11% for White populations (Tarasuk and Mitchell, 2020). Not only are imported foods more expensive and harder to access in the north, but food insecurity has been particularly devastating for Indigenous communities coping with lack of access to potable water and health care, and dealing with intergenerational trauma (Robidoux and Mason, 2017). Today, most Indigenous People are dependent on highly processed, low quality food provided by the dominant

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[1]We recognize that the terms Indigenous, First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples includes a diversity of cultures, languages, practices, institutions, and relationships with the land. In this paper, we use the term "Indigenous People" to acknowledge and differentiate between the peoples that are the original inhabitants and peoples who have colonized and/or settled those lands.

[2]This statistic was provided by the Thunder Bay District Health Unit based on the 2018 Foundational Standards/Epidemiology Report for Healthy Living Program.

food system and controlled by large corporations driven by the logic of profit maximization.

Food insecurity for Indigenous Peoples in Northwestern Ontario (and beyond) is directly linked to the historic and ongoing violence of settler colonialism. Settler colonialism is rooted in the dispossession of Indigenous land by settler populations (Tuck and Yang, 2012; Coulthard, 2015; Lowman and Barker, 2015). Premised on the imposed legal and political system and doctrine of discovery that institutionalized and legitimized White supremacy (Manuel, 2017), settler colonialism works towards the elimination of Indigenous Peoples through dehumanization and subjugation (Wolfe, 2006; Lowman and Barker, 2015). The settler colonial project is focused on removing Indigenous Peoples from their land in order to exploit resources, but also on eliminating Indigenous culture, identity, and opportunities for self-determination. This has been evident in Thunder Bay, where Indigenous People face ongoing racism and colonial violence (Haiven, 2019; Jago, 2020). Indigenous foodways are inherently bound to place, history, and contemporary socio-political relations and have been significantly impacted by settler colonialism (Daschuk, 2013; Martin and Amos, 2016).

When the COVID-19 pandemic arrived in Northwestern Ontario in early 2020, it further complicated an already challenging situation for Indigenous Peoples. Around the world, pandemics have had devastating and disproportionate impacts on Indigenous People and the ability to practice and maintain their cultures and identities (Power et al., 2020). This reinforces the fact that Indigenous People in Canada (and globally) have been vulnerablilized; meaning that vulnerability does not exist outside of historical and social realities (Katz et al., 2020) and that people are not inherently vulnerable, but are made so by the institutions and systems of capitalism, settler-colonialism, and White supremacy. Despite being made vulnerable by unjust social structures in the face of crisis (and beyond), Indigenous peoples and communities should retain the power to choose the most appropriate response for their needs.

When the COVID-19 virus was first detected, there was very little information available, which led to heightened concern and fear along with challenges accessing food. In Northwestern Ontario, many food banks, and support organizations were forced to close their doors, limiting access to emergency food and related services. A number of First Nations responded to the pandemic by physically blockading entry to their reserves and restricting travel in an attempt to protect the health and safety of their communities. Most First Nations did not have the infrastructure or capacity to purchase, transport, and store large amounts of food. Those that could order in bulk struggled to find adequate transportation, especially if they were dependent on flights that had been restricted or canceled. When food was able to be delivered, there were many reports of long delays, incorrect orders, damaged packaging, and rotting produce. In recognition of the imminent crisis, the federal government along with a number of philanthropic organizations committed additional resources for Indigenous communities. While this support was welcomed, concerns were raised that the injection of funding would only deepen

the ongoing dependence on the state and the charitable sector without addressing longer-term systemic issues (Levi and Robin, 2020; also see; Riches, 2018). Recognizing the importance of Indigenous-led responses to the COVID-19 pandemic, the IFC worked to address immediate needs in a respectful and culturally appropriate way while also continuing to forefront the longer-term visions of food sovereignty and self-determination as part of this work.

AN INDIGENOUS-LED RESPONSE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The IFC is made up of Indigenous leaders in the Thunder Bay region, representing the social services, health, education, and community development sectors as well as tribal councils, Elders and Knowledge Keepers (for more details on the IFC's history and background see Levkoe et al., 2019). It also includes settler allies that constitute a direct support network contributing to front-line engagement and wrap-around supports, along with research, education, and other supportive functions. The IFC is coordinated by an administrative team and governed by an Advisory Circle that meets separately from the general membership gatherings. The IFC functions as an informal network to avoid unnecessary bureaucracy and to focus on supporting its members and their communities. One implication of this is that the IFC cannot formally hold funding which makes the network dependent on partnerships with member organizations that are able to hold monies on behalf of the collective. Since its inception, members have contributed to annual gatherings, working groups, and a number of projects developed to build on the diverse knowledge and skills within the network, address gaps in existing services, and advance Indigenous food sovereignty in the region. For example, since 2018, the IFC has collaborated with the Thunder Bay District Health Unit and the Sustainable Food Systems Lab at Lakehead University to coordinate the Understanding Our Food Systems project (see www.understandingourfoodsystems.com/). Working closely with fourteen First Nations, the team supported each community to develop their own Food Sovereignty Vision that articulated longer-term goals. The project also helped participants to develop and build food related infrastructure (e.g., a communal moose hang and culturally appropriate butcher shop, community and household food gardens, and collective kitchens coupled with food-related workshops), co-create a series of educational resources to share learnings (e.g., annual reports, Traditional harvesting, and food preparation videos), and develop education tools (e.g., an interactive Traditional food harvesting poster, community food assessments).

Building on existing relationships and the trust established within Indigenous communities and networks in the Thunder Bay region, the IFC was in a unique position to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. The response focused on connecting with its membership and partners in First Nation communities to better understand the challenges people were facing, supporting existing programs to address immediate needs, connecting these efforts to networks and funding opportunities, all while

continuing to work towards the longer-term goal of food sovereignty. In the following subsections we briefly describe the key activities that the IFC supported.

Immediate Food Supports

When the pandemic was first declared, First Nations each developed a unique response in regard to transportation and food access with varying degrees of capacity. To help address immediate needs the IFC worked closely with its partners and mobilized its networks to bring much needed food supports to communities across Northwestern Ontario. This was initiated when the IFC began receiving messages from the communities requesting additional help to ensure there was enough high-quality food available. In response to these requests, the IFC provided support by connecting each community's pandemic response team to regional food suppliers and distributors in order to develop their own relationships for bulk food ordering. In regard to household food security, many communities identified the ability to provide non-perishable items, but the logistics around bulk ordering and delivering fresh food created challenges. From April to June, the IFC partnered with the Good Food Box[3] program to facilitate monthly household fresh food distribution to nine road accessible First Nations, providing a total of 3,265 households boxes. By the summer a number of communities no longer felt that this support was needed. Some communities however, continued the monthly Good Food Box program on their own. For example, Red Rock Indian Band continued to work with the IFC and the Good Food Box program to build internal capacity to run this program themselves. By early 2021, Red Rock was supporting 192 households to receive a regular monthly Good Food Box.

Northern Fruit and Vegetable Program Support

The Northern Fruit and Vegetable Program (NFVP) is a school-based program that aims to increase consumption of fruits and vegetables among elementary school students in Northern Ontario through the distribution of fresh food (Northwestern Health Unit, n.d.). Since 2006, the funding and coordination for the program have been offered through a partnership with the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-term Care, the Ontario Fruit and Vegetable Growers Association, and the five district health units that serve Northern Ontario, including First Nation communities. When the pandemic was declared and schools were closed, the NFVP was forced to reassess how it would function. Recognizing an increasing need for direct food supports, the IFC worked with the Sudbury Social Planning Council, and other community partners to advocate for the NFVP to continue. The IFC also worked alongside the district health units to get food directly into the households of First Nation community members connected to the program.

To support the NFVP during the pandemic, the IFC used its longstanding relationships to help connect new eligible communities to the program. This was particularly important because many of the program coordinators found it difficult to reach schools in remote Indigenous communities, which meant that those schools were not receiving fresh foods offered by the NFVP. The IFC reached out to new schools and communities to inform them of the support and the opportunity to participate. Prior to the pandemic, 15 First Nations in Northwestern Ontario and 35 in Northeastern Ontario were participating in the NFVP. With the IFC's support, an additional nine communities in Northwestern Ontario and four in Northeastern Ontario were able to access the NFVP during the pandemic and into the following school year. The IFC also supported data collection for the NFVP to help track shipments across First Nation communities. The IFC has continued to work with First Nations to explore opportunities for communities to build their own partnerships, acquire their own funding, and administer these kinds of programs internally.

Advocacy With Remote Indigenous Communities

Beginning in late March, several remote communities across Treaty 9 territories that had a previous relationship with IFC coordinator Jessica McLaughlin, began reaching out to request additional food supports. Some communities requested support for bulk food orders while others, particularly those communities associated with industry projects, were flooded with food donations. While the needs and responses differed between communities, a common theme expressed was a need for support with ordering and coordinating food shipments, along with an additional challenge of the storage and distribution of food once it arrived in the community. For many First Nations, the infrastructure to store large quantities of food was insufficient and there was limited capacity to get food into peoples' homes.

Initially, the IFC's support for remote Indigenous communities was *ad hoc* because there was limited capacity to deal with the influx of requests. Through regional and national connections with broader Indigenous food sovereignty networks, McLaughlin participated in discussions with national level funders and advocated for financially supporting Indigenous communities in a respectful and meaningful way. With the work of directly supporting communities well underway through the IFC, there was a growing understanding of the needs and challenges on the ground as well as relationships that could be mobilized to ensure new financial supports could be distributed directly and equitably. McLaughlin advocated that money be spent not only on immediate food needs, but also on building infrastructure and processes that would support sustainable thinking and action around food system development at a local level beyond the immediate crisis.

Inspired by this approach to crisis related food response, Community Food Centers Canada (CFCC)[4] engaged in a

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[3]The Good Food Box is a community-based non-profit organization that offers year-round affordable fresh produce and is administered through the Northwestern Ontario Women's Center in Thunder Bay (https://goodfoodboxtb.org/).

[4]Community Food Centers Canada is a national network that uses food to build health, belonging, and social justice in low-income communities (https://cfccanada.ca).

funding partnership with the IFC to provide direct community support through two pots of emergency food funding. The first pot was a crisis fund that was used to offer direct food supports to communities facing significant struggle (e.g., deaths in the community, forced evacuation); the second was a general pot of food related funding that was used to support remote First Nations, however they deemed most beneficial for their community. Drawing on the existing partnership with the Social Planning Council of Sudbury, the IFC held, coordinated, and distributed the funds to the remote First Nations. In addition to these funds for the communities, the IFC also secured resources to pay a team of coordinators over a six-month period.

Coordination of Funding With Remote Indigenous Communities

Coordination and distribution of the emergency food funding for remote communities was a multifaceted process. The work entailed offering wrap-around supports to facilitate spending the funds, networking with suppliers and other partners throughout the region, connecting communities with each other, and creating a space for critical dialogue with community representatives about food security. Through communication with IFC staff, community representatives were asked what was already being done in respect to emergency food response and what additional supports were needed. This was also a chance to inform each community about opportunities for funding and other supports they might be eligible for. By expanding direct relationships with communities, the IFC team was able to have critical conversations about food security that went beyond short-term measures of immediate food access and led to rich conversations about food sovereignty. Overall, 29 communities benefited from this funding and support, which included immediate food orders as well as three forms of food infrastructure support that varied in scope and scale from community to community.

The first form of support provided increased food storage infrastructure that allowed communities to safely store and distribute greater quantities of food, immediately and in the future. For example, in Kasabonika First Nation, the IFC supported the purchase and transport of an industrial three-pronged fridge and freezer, which breathed new life into an existing community cooking space. It has also led to plans for expanding the cooking space to support and enhance the community's fish purchasing and distribution system.

The second form of food infrastructure support was providing tools to help build self-sufficiency, sustainability thinking, and action around food system development at the community level. For example, Sandy Lake First Nation has been growing food for over 30 years with varying degrees of success. Through the IFC's support, Sandy Lake identified potatoes as a valuable place to start expanding food growing. The IFC supported the community with the purchase of a tractor, a potato harvester, a potato seeder, connection with seed suppliers, and the facilitation of soil testing to inform the community how to improve yields. Moving

forward, the hope is to feed their own community as well as the five surrounding communities, contributing to food sovereignty in their region.

The third form of food infrastructure support identified was providing tools and equipment for community members exercising their rights to source Traditional foods through hunting, fishing, and harvesting. For example, in Slate Falls First Nation, the IFC helped to facilitate the purchase of fishing nets, lines and tools to offer equipment to interested community members for all-season fishing and harvesting. In Poplar Hill First Nation, the IFC helped to procure funding for a land-based hunting educational camp held in the fall.

Beyond listening to communities needs and supporting relevant purchases, coordination of the funding for remote communities included distributing the crisis fund. Between April and June, these funds supported twelve communities that identified greater needs. For example, following a devastating multiple suicide in one community, funds were used to supply food to families that were directly impacted. In another First Nation, the community faced multiple tragic losses due to a drowning and a house fire. The funds were able to support the affected families with two weeks' worth of food. Overall, the process of coordinating food funding for remote communities broadened and strengthened the relationships between the IFC with First Nations and contributed to building a better understanding of Indigenous food sovereignty in the region.

Assessment of Emergency Food Support Systems With Urban Indigenous Organizations

In the first few weeks of the pandemic, it became clear that Thunder Bay did not have the infrastructure in place to adequately coordinate emergency food supports. To fill this gap and address the emerging food needs facing vulnerablized populations, a series of *ad hoc* round tables came together to facilitate communication and resource sharing amongst social service organizations. The IFC was invited to participate in a number of these groups but there was a noted lack of Indigenous voices and organizational presence. In response, the IFC conducted an assessment of the experiences of urban Indigenous organizations with emergency food response during the early stages of the pandemic. The assessment aimed to understand the gaps, challenges, needs and opportunities with a specific focus on urban Indigenous Peoples. The IFC conducted informal interviews with representatives from urban Indigenous organizations operating in Thunder Bay to explore experiences of access to services, food support being offered, perspectives on the overall response, and oportunities to enhance collaboration.

This assessment provided a comprehensive picture of emergency food response by urban Indigenous organizations in Thunder Bay in the early months of the pandemic. Overall, participants reported observations of increased food insecurity that affected a wide range of the population, making short-term food access the predominant concern for many agencies. While many individual organizations felt that they were able to support most of those in need during the pandemic, the response at a community level was extremely fragmented. There remained a significantly underserved population with many people facing

accessibility barriers (e.g., transportation, communication). Further, the pressure on organizations to meet the basic needs of their clients while adapting to an evolving crisis situation was taking heavy a toll on staff and volunteers. While new public and private funding for emergency food provisioning was made available, some organizations struggled to access financial support primarily due to internal capacity issues and the burden of reporting requirements. On the whole, collaboration between the existing food access infrastructure and other community organizations remained limited.

The assessment of emergency food support systems for the urban Indigenous population revealed the need for a more integrated and effective approach during times of community-wide crisis in the City of Thunder Bay. Meetings with the participating organizations led to a decision to collaboratively develop a Community Emergency Food Response Plan (CEFRP) with the goal of building stronger relationships and networks across the community, streamlining communication, avoiding duplication, and utilizing resources more efficiently in the face of future crises. Beyond planning for emergencies, the IFC helped to maintain focus on the longer-term systemic changes needed to address food insecurity. In the summer of 2020, the Thunder Bay and Area Food Strategy[5] took on the role of coordinating the CEFRP development. This began with securing funding and establishing a multi-stakeholder advisory committee. The project launched in the fall, with a goal of having the draft plan ready to share with the broader community in 2021. The IFC continues to play a leadership role in this project, with three members of the administrative team sitting on the advisory committee for the project and many IFC members actively engaged in the process.

Advancing Indigenous Food Sovereignty

Beyond the practical work of supporting Indigenous communities and First Nations during the COVID-19 pandemic, the IFC maintained a focus on longer-term goals of food sovereignty and self-determination. While addressing immediate needs is imperative, food insecurity is a symptom of a much deeper problem. In other words, to end food insecurity, it is essential to focus on eliminating poverty, inequity, systemic racism, and settler colonialism. For the IFC, this meant continuing to center Indigenous voices, fostering leadership among IFC members, demanding accountability from those that hold power, building relationships, and expanding networks with other Indigenous Peoples and groups to share stories of struggle and resurgence. These immediate actions (e.g., feeding people, responding to crisis) and longer-term activities (e.g., food sovereignty and self-determination) are deeply interconnected. It is the grassroots level work and human-to-human relationships that inform the vision of what Indigenous food sovereignty actually means. It is through these relationships with people, communities, and organizations that the vision of a more equitable and sustainable food future begins to take shape.

There were numerous examples of the ways that responses to the COVID-19 pandemic led to broader engagements in Indigenous food sovereignty. For example, the IFC played an important role advocating for food sovereignty as part of a national Indigenous task force on funding (as described above). This group brought together high-level public and private funders, Indigenous food activists and practitioners, academics, and health workers with the goals of bridging different paradigms, better understanding what was happening within different regions, and agreeing on ways to support vulnerabilized Indigenous communities. A second example is the IFC's lead role in creating the Northwestern Ontario Indigenous Food Sovereignty Collaborative (NOIFSC). Formally established in July 2020, the NOIFSC is an Indigenous-led, grassroots organization working to support Indigenous food sovereignty across Northern Ontario through an innovative and collaborative approach to decolonizing philanthropy and funding. In winter 2021, the NOIFSC's first action was to launch the Sovereign Household Grant Program that provided financial support for activities and equipment to increase the capacity for food security at the household level. The NOIFSC also provides small grants to communities and organizations along with a suite of wrap-around supports that help solidify and reinforce the initiatives. It recognizes food sovereignty work and food system transformation efforts as vehicles for, and accelerators of Indigenous sovereignty and resurgence. The overall goal of the NOIFSC is to advance Indigenous food sovereignty in Northern Ontario and beyond.

CONCLUSION

The COVID-19 pandemic has had devastating effects on communities across the globe. As we reflect on how to respond and rebuild, there is an opportunity to learn from the evidence and experiences that have illuminated the deep inequities underlying the pandemic's uneven impacts. For Indigenous Peoples in Northwestern Ontario, food insecurity and health were already at crisis levels, and COVID-19 made this even more visible. In this paper, we have argued that responding to the COVID-19 pandemic in a meaningful way entails addressing both short and long-term challenges. From a food systems perspective, it demands supporting the immediate needs of the people and communities that have been vulnerabilized and simultaneously transitioning away from the capitalist food system while building different kinds of food systems rooted in justice and sustainability (James et al., 2021). Moreover, to build Indigenous food sovereignty, this work should be led by Indigenous social movements, organizations and communities with the support of settler allies that can provide direct assistance and wrap-around supports (McMeeking at el., 2020; Power et al., 2020). In our discussion of the IFC's response to the COVID-19 pandemic, we have highlighted the way that an Indigenous-led network was able to use food as a tool to mobilize communities and partners to provide emergency response and consider longer-term, underlying systemic issues. Even though the IFC was under-resourced and understaffed, its experiences highlight the importance of relationships built over time and being well positioned and ready to respond when needed.

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[5]The Thunder Bay and Area Food Strategy is a network of over 50 organizations in the Thunder Bay region that aims to build a healthy, equitable, and sustainable food system (see http://tbfoodstrategy.com/).

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/Supplementary Material, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

All authors have made a substantial, direct, and intellectual contribution to the work. While each author comes from a different training and background, their contributions are collaborative. All authors have approved the article for publication.

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frontiers
in Communication

Re-Imagining Localism and Food Justice: Co-Op Cincy and the Union Cooperative Movement

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Co-op Cincy is an incubator of worker- and community-owned cooperatives, including the farm and food hub Our Harvest. The incubator is part of the innovative 1worker1vote.org network of unionized worker cooperatives stemming from a partnership between the Spanish Mondragon Cooperatives and the United States Steelworkers. This Community Case Study examines Co-Op Cincy's food sector organizing as an example of resistance to the industrial, corporate food system. Their hybrid and experimental approach creatively re-imagines both cooperative ownership and localist food systems. Whereas some local efforts fail to address questions of social justice or drift from social justice missions, this essay describes how Co-Op Cincy and Our Harvest 1) define their social justice goals in pursuit of locally rooted ownership, 2) raise consciousness about the connections among food systems and racial and class disparities as well as the need for sustainability, solidarity, and democratic ownership, and 3) embody these commitments in everyday organizing. Their experimentation lends insights into potential paths to create a more equitable food system and a more just economy.

Keywords: food justice, worker-owned cooperatives, food cooperatives, communication and social change, generative economy

COMMUNITY CASE STUDY

The call for this Frontiers Topic enumerated crises associated with the neoliberal organization of food, including hunger, environmental degradation, consumer and worker illness, economic devastation, and colonial dispossession of land, asking, "How are dominant and marginalized food system participants engaging, navigating, and/or resisting these conditions?" This "community case study" examines Co-Op Cincy's food sector organizing as an example of grassroots resistance to the industrial, corporate food system through the development of alternative models. Co-op Cincy incubates worker- and community-owned cooperatives, including the farm and food hub Our Harvest and a cooperative grocery initiative. The incubator is part of the innovative 1worker1vote. org network of *unionized* worker cooperatives initiated by an agreement between the Spanish Mondragon Cooperatives and the United States Steelworkers. This hybrid and experimental model represents a creative re-imagining of both cooperative ownership and localist food systems that centers social justice.

The health, economic, and environmental consequences of the industrial food system have sparked a significant rise in food activism by local communities, non-profits, unions, government entities, and social movements (Alkon and Guthman, 2017). Critics point out that many of these efforts fall short of promoting food *justice* (Hall, 2016; de Souza, 2019), although there is significant debate about what constitutes justice and how best to achieve it. This qualitative case study examines

how Co-op Cincy centers social justice as it articulates its mission, promotes its vision for change through consciousness raising, and enacts these ideals in concrete practice. First, I provide a background on the organization and then overview literature addressing social change and local food businesses, cooperatives, and solidarity economies.

Background

Cooperative businesses are owned by their workers or members and reinvest profits in the organization or to owners through dividends (Battilani and Schröter, 2012). Many cooperatives emphasize democratic control and decision-making by owners, focusing on the development of stable, high quality work (some seek business efficiencies instead) (Lima, 2007). The cooperative movement increasingly prioritizes community benefits such as sustainability and food access (Webb and Cheney, 2014). Co-op Cincy (originally named the Cincinnati Union Cooperative Institute) was incorporated as a non-profit in 2011 with the goal of incubating union cooperatives in the Greater Cincinnati area. Co-op Cincy has launched numerous businesses including Sustainergy, which retrofits houses for energy efficiency, Care Share childcare cooperative, and Renting Partnerships, which helps build equity for apartment dwellers. Co-op Cincy helps to start cooperatives through training, education and funding, and then provides ongoing education and support. Incubated businesses work together with Co-op Cincy, sharing resources such as accounting and public relations. A percentage of any profits go back into Co-op Cincy to help launch additional businesses. This case study is based on qualitative research and participation primarily related to Our Harvest farm and food hub, and Apple Street Market, a worker and community-owned grocery cooperative initiative.

Co-op Cincy was a founding member of the 1worker1vote.org network, which results from an agreement between the Mondragon Internacional and the United States Steelworkers union to mutually promote the development of Mondragon-style worker-owned cooperatives. Mondragon is a high-profile federation of mutually supportive worker-owned cooperatives in the Basque region of Spain. The Mondragon system includes a cooperative bank and Mondragon University, which trainers workers in business skills as well as cooperative principles and values, which are embodied in the Mondragon Cooperative principles (Heras-Saizarbitoria, 2014). The agreement with the Steelworkers created the opportunity for expanding intercooperation (mutually supportive cooperatives) to include global trade. Mondragon leaders explained that they partnered with the United States union movement in part to promote the culture of solidarity that is common in the communal Basque region but less dominant in the individualistic United States. The union movement provides support for the network, and worker-owners in individual cooperative businesses affiliate with local unions.

Food Activism and Social Change

Food activism ranges from filling gaps such as raising money for the hungry (Ivancic, 2017; de Souza, 2019) to improving food labor wages and working conditions (Rosile et al., 2021), to attempting to transform the food system (Holt-Giminez and Wang, 2011; Counihan and Siniscalchi, 2014). *Transformative* efforts promote alternate visions of food organizing, addressing social justice and ecological relationships. The food justice frame highlights both who is served by the food system and who controls it, connecting low income food workers, producers, and consumers (Loh and Agyeman, 2017). Food justice activists address racism and intersectional oppression related to class, gender, nationality, and other differences embedded in the food chain and beyond it (Gordon and Hunt, 2018). Activists in the global south conceptualized food sovereignty in terms of "people's self-government of the food system" (Holt-Giménez and Patel, 2009, p. 86), promoting indigenous land rights, improved ecosystem relations, and resisting imperialism and patriarchy (Holt-Giménez and Patel, 2009; Pal, 2016).

This case study focuses on localist, alternative food businesses. Critics observe that many localist efforts primarily serve the needs of white, middle-class people and reinforce neoliberalism (Busa and Garder, 2015; Butterfield and Ramírez, 2021). However, as more localist efforts adopt social justice discourses (Clendenning et al., 2016; Alkon and Guthman, 2017), we need to investigate how these groups communicate and enact their visions of change.

One rationale for localist food systems is strengthening environmental sustainability through reduced food miles and improved growing practices. "Grow local" policies and small farms may reduce the use of fossil fuels and agricultural chemicals by making better use of local natural resources (e.g., water reclamation and crop diversification) and replace mechanization with human labor (Holt-Giménez and Patel, 2009; Levitte, 2010). These sustainable practices require shifting farm knowledge networks from hierarchical corporate systems to interpersonal and horizontal networks (Levitte, 2010).

Unfortunately, sustainability discourses have historically privileged environmental impact over things like food access (Allen, 2004), coming slowly to embrace food sovereignty and justice concerns (Blay-Palmer, 2010; Gordon and Hunt, 2018). Blay Palmer (2010) argued that food evidences the linkages among environmental, economic and sociocultural sustainability; for example, farmers must be socially and economically enabled to make environmentally sustainable choices and offer fair wages to farm laborers. Larger organic farms tend to provide better wages and offer benefits to workers, but small organic efforts often cannot afford to hire many workers or struggle to pay them more (Shreck et al., 2006). In one study, sustainable growers (not certified organic) desired to improve labor conditions but believed they could not afford it (Strochlic et al., 2008).

Local food initiatives connect food producers and consumers. As Gordon and Hunt (2018) described, "Agricultural practice can localize food system relationships, cultivating intimacy with ecosystems and communities" (p. 11). Spaces like community gardens foster intergenerational learning among people normally removed from agricultural production. At the same time, efforts such as farmers markets may circulate a "white farm imaginary" (Slocum, 2007; Gordon and Hunt, 2018) that celebrates white farmers and white histories (McCullen, 2011), erasing Latino and

other farm workers of color in consumers' minds (Carter and Alexander, 2020). Farmers markets and local groceries also may serve white and middle class consumers (Webber et al., 2010; Conley and Eckstein, 2012). Even efforts that start with the goal of addressing systemic inequities can drift from their social justice missions towards gentrified, aesthetic, and/or fetishized practices (Conley and Eckstein, 2012; Hall, 2016).

Critics also argue that local food businesses reinforce neoliberalism by participating in private, market-based efforts. However, focusing on the binary question of whether local food businesses resist or reinforce neoliberalism prevents us from recognizing an array of imaginative and pragmatic efforts at social change. For example, despite the complexities presented in chapters of their edited volume on food activism, Alkon and Guthman's (2017) introduction sets up a dualistic tone by inviting contributors to assess whether activist efforts are neoliberal. Dualistic framing fails to address complex interconnections of economic, environmental, and social challenges; see for example Hinrich's (2010) critique of local/global and conventional/alternative binaries (Hinrichs, 2010). Ivancic (2017) study of rural philanthropy challenged binary categorizations of who gives and receives food aid.

Alkon and Guthman (2017) embraced capitalist reproduction discourses, which establish a dualism between neoliberal capitalism and noncapitalism, and ignore existing, heterogenous economic relationships or place them in a subservient, reinforcing position to capitalism (Gibson-Graham, 2006). For example, the authors suggested that alternative efforts "by women and communities of color to highlight economic success stories from their communities, and to create additional ones, can be seen as neoliberal in that they uphold individual wealth as an indicator, if not a method, of social change" (p. 11). Despite acknowledging Gibson-Graham's (2006) argument that capitalist reproduction discourses impede alternative imaginaries, Alkon and Guthman (2017) dismissed alternative economy efforts as marginal to the capitalist project: "while potentially generative, exist at the margins of the neoliberal political economy" (p. 17). Furthermore, Alkon and Guthman (2017) privileged governmental policy change to resist neoliberalism, positing that alternative food efforts "convince a generation of activists that is impossible to confront the state or corporations in the interest of human and environmental health" (p. 17).

This case study strongly supports a pluralist approach, which "eschews rigid blueprints and the belief in a single, correct path [and] builds on concrete practices, many of which are quite old, rather than seeking to create utopia out of theory and thin air" (Kawano, 2013, p. n.p.). Focusing on interstitial spaces of social change "invites us to depart from a polar divide between autonomous oppositional movements on one side, and a cooptation by powerful corporations and states on the other" (Friedmann and McNair, 2008, p. 430). Efforts that partially embrace market logics may also resist elements of neoliberalism. For example, initiatives in Mexico reviving regional food cultures exploited market niches to promote environmental justice and democratic governance (Blay-Palmer, 2010). Loh and Agyeman (2017) positioned urban agriculture as both neoliberal and

radical. Figueroa and Alkon (2017) described how regional food hubs in Black neighborhoods temper neoliberal tendencies through collectivist practices.

Rather than assume that local efforts prevent more widespread change, we need to *investigate* whether incremental changes impede or facilitate more systemic change over time. Gordon and Hunt (2018), for example, acknowledged that "reform initiatives can work synergistically with other efforts toward longer-lasting change" (p. 14), particularly when they redress structural barriers such as racism. Alternative economy efforts may foster rather than supplant policy change. For example, environmental justice activists (a model for food justice organizing), simultaneously promoted local resistance to racist and classism pollution siting decisions and advocated for broader policy changes (e.g., toxic waste siting policies). Moreover, privileging policy change ignores limitations to transformational politics in elite-dominated governmental systems, where even reformist policy changes take immense effort on the part of marginalized groups and are subject to being reversed by well-connected industry groups, particularly under conservative administrations (Conrad and Abbott, 2007). The slow pace of policy change must be balanced with meeting urgent needs (Levins and Lopez, 1999). To what degree can localist efforts catalyze cultural changes needed to cultivate and sustain policy change by raising consciousness and demonstrating the utility of alternatives?

We also need to recognize existing noncapitalist economic forms, including widespread "alternative" economy efforts operating interstitially under a variety of names including solidarity economy, "new economy, local living economy, generative economy, and sharing economy" (Loh and Agyeman, 2017, p. 261). For example, Loh and Agyeman (2017) described how low-income residents in Roxbury and Dorchester organized for-profit, non-profit and cooperative businesses (farms, kitchen incubators, community gardens, etc.) together form the Boston Food Solidarity Economy, representing a solidarity economy ethos countering the dominant food system. Efforts focused on creating democratic, just, and sustainable models of exchange focused on human and ecological needs are documented throughout the United States, in the social economies of Europe and South America as well as the international cooperative movement (Hoyt and Menzani, 2012; Kelly, 2012; Peter, 2015; Calvário and Kallis, 2017).

Cooperatives are alternative spaces that reimagine capitalism in terms of worker voice and ownership (Cheney et al., 2014). Cooperatives complicate debates about neoliberalism in the food system because they defy the dichotomies of market/non-market (Battilani and Schröter, 2012). They differ from corporations in that owners are either workers or consumers but also differ from non-profit or governmental efforts because they seek profit (albeit one that is shared with members). In the U.S., agrarian purchasing cooperatives have a long history (Harter, 2004; Battilani and Schröter, 2012), and member owned cooperatives include grocery stores, consumer supported agriculture, farms, and food hubs. Historically, cooperatives represented a working-class response to industrial capitalism and many cooperatives were organized by immigrant groups and African Americans as a

path towards reducing the wealth gap (Nembhard, 2014; Peredo and McLean, 2020). In addition to developing stable incomes and quality jobs, worker-owned and community-owned cooperatives increasingly embrace sustainability and community contributions (Cheney et al., 2014). In practice, cooperatives may embrace liberal market logics or more radical approaches (Lima, 2007), as demonstrated by Zitcer's (2017) comparison of the divergent paths of Mariposa and Weaver's Way grocery cooperatives in Philadelphia. As I will discuss, Co-Op Cincy and the 1worker1vote.org network adopt a transformative ethos and further defy dichotomies through innovative hybrid models of member/worker ownership and unionization.

Case Methods

This case study is based on public documents produced by 1worker1vote.org, Co-op Cincy and the Our Harvest farm and food hub it incubated. Material includes websites, social media posts, and Co-Op Cincy's Cooperative Handbook (2019). In addition, I draw from field notes of observations at Co-Op Cincy events over the last eight years. I attended and took field notes during two biannual worker cooperative symposiums, multiple presentations, and annual celebrations. My analysis is also indirectly informed by insights from a focus group interview with five Our Harvest farm workers in 2018, which took place in the hoop house during the off-season. Although not a direct part of the case study, my board membership with Apple Street Market also informs my analysis. I become a board member as a way to contribute to Co-op Cincy, attending weekly and/or monthly meetings and other organizational activities. In this role, I represented Apple Street Market at an additional worker-cooperative symposium and multiple Co-op Cincy community presentations and annual celebrations. For this case study, I analyzed the organization's articulation of social justice, including how it educates the public and enacts social justice.

RE-IMAGINING FOOD SYSTEMS: SOCIAL JUSTICE THROUGH LOCALLY ROOTED OWNERSHIP

This case study describes how CC and its food cooperatives envision a creative alternative to the industrial food system. I describe how these organizations incorporate social justice into their missions, raise consciousness about the interconnections of food, economy, sustainability, and equity, and enact their innovative mission through everyday organizing.

Communicating a Social Justice Mission

Co-Op Cincy leaders explicitly incorporate justice issues into mission statements and other organizational descriptions. Like many contemporary cooperatives, the incubator's vision goes beyond the traditional cooperative focus on quality jobs to address community needs. Co-op Cincy leaders envision a cooperative economy that redresses marginalization and promotes community equity, in contrast to extractive forms of

capitalism that prioritize benefits to distant corporate managers and shareholders (Deetz, 1992; Cray, 2010).

The incubator's mission statement explicitly centers issues of power and justice: "Co-op Cincy creates an economy that works for all—that supports family-sustaining jobs, provides business ownership opportunities for underserved and historically marginalized people, and is accountable to the communities that drive it" (https://coopcincy.org/). The statement prioritizes equity by developing business ownership among those who previously have been excluded from the benefits of the market system. Invoking community accountability re-envisions corporate governance, which has come to prioritize accountability to distant stockholders (Ritz, 2007).

Co-op Cincy's social justice mission informs the development of their food cooperatives. During Our Harvest's incubation, Co-op Cincy leaders employed localist discourses highlighting economic benefits of shifting dollars from distant corporations to local spending. In contrast to localist discourses that contribute to gentrification, Our Harvest addresses inequalities in accessing the benefits of local spending. The organization seeks to create food access, environmental sustainability, and quality jobs:

> Co-op Cincy's first cooperative and the first Mondragon-style union co-op in the country! Our Harvest creates access to healthy, local food in a way that honors land and labor. By creating farm jobs that pay family-sustaining wages, and employing responsible growing practices, we are working to strengthen the local food system in Cincinnati. Through strategic partnerships and advocacy, we seek to make access to fresh, local food a possibility for all in Greater Cincinnati. https://coopcincy.org/our-harvest.

The theme of "honoring land and labor" paints a vision that integrates environmental sustainability with food access and quality work. The incubator's 2016 Annual Report reinforced the dual goals of sustainability and food access: "… to make sustainably-grown food available to all of the Greater Cincinnati community" (n.p.). Our Harvest leases two urban farms in the Greater Cincinnati area. Despite lacking resources to undergo organic certification, the organization uses natural growing methods and eschews industrial equipment: "Our food is just that: food. We never use synthetic pesticides or fertilizers. We grow our food the way nature intends" (https://www.ourharvest.coop/).

Our Harvest's mission also includes restoring farming skills among urbanites that has been lost in the transition to industrial farming. "Our Harvest is committed to creating family-sustaining jobs, strengthening the local food system, increasing access to healthy food, and sustaining these efforts by training new farmers" (Our Harvest Annual Report, 2016, n.p). Worker-owners in the focus group described significant challenges in learning to farm and use natural growing methods, but also greatly appreciated acquiring this skillset.

Co-op Cincy's mission emphasizes local action, but simultaneously envisions a broader, transformative influence

on the larger food system and economy. Co-founder Ellen Vera explained, "We have such an issue around jobs and inequality in our country right now. My hope is that Our Harvest Cooperative and the Mondragon USW union co-op template can serve as a model for communities across the country as a way in which we can truly improve our food system, employ our neighbors, and create the type of society we all want to live in" (Our Harvest Annual Report, 2016, n.p). Co-founder Kristen Barker told prospective cooperators that Co-op Cincy is building a network of worker-owned cooperatives in order to create a Cincinnati "thriving in every neighborhood," adding, "we have a goal of operating across the world but we're going to start here."

The incubator also links localism to broader social transformation through participation in the union movement. In different national and local settings, cooperatives may be viewed as an ally or antagonist to the union movement (Lima, 2007; Sbicca, 2017). Affiliating cooperatives with unions represents a proactive growth strategy for United States unions, which face declining membership. Representatives from at least nine different unions, including the Steelworkers, UFCW, Machinists and the United Electrical, attended the 2017 Union Co-op Symposium. At a session on the union-cooperative relationship, participants emphasized the idea that worker-owned cooperatives are a way to achieve worker ownership of the means of production.

The model combines Mondragon's cooperative principles with collective bargaining, "in a way that not only makes the workplace more participatory and more accountable to the workers, but also further protects the interests of the workers…" (Worker Co-op Handbook, p. 9). Union representation helps to prevent degeneration (mission drift) by adding another layer of worker protection if cooperative managers begin to emphasize short-term business goals over the Mondragon principle of the "sovereignty of labor."

Unions are an important bulwark against class inequalities, and the 1worker1vote.org network further seeks to diversify the union movement. Union leaders acknowledged that although the union movement has been an important factor in creating equality for underrepresented groups, it has not always been inclusive. At the 2017 Union Cooperative Symposium, 1worker1vote Director Michael Peck described the organization's outreach in "healing communities where unions didn't serve their interests when it was needed." Small group working sessions included frank discussion of past United States union failures to represent marginalized groups. Participants shared methods for facilitating greater inclusion of immigrant workers within existing laws and advocating for more just immigration laws.

Social Justice Through Consciousness Raising

In order to make this innovative vision of a just food system a reality, Co-op Cincy and its food cooperatives engage in extensive efforts to raise consciousness about the need for food access, environmental sustainability, and democratic ownership through a solidarity economy.

Given that the United States public is not highly familiar with worker-owned cooperatives, Co-Op Cincy raises awareness about the model and the wide scope of cooperative efforts in order to recruit potential cooperators and supporters. Leaders highlight the percentage of GDP that comes from cooperatives, and the high success rate of cooperative businesses.

Leaders work to achieve their social justice mission of building ownership among the marginalized through consciousness raising efforts aimed to recruiting women, minority, and immigrant-led businesses. At one outreach event at New Prospect Baptist Church in a predominately Black neighborhood, speakers described how worker-owned cooperatives can aid low-income and minority neighborhoods, and attendees brainstormed potential cooperative businesses. Speaker Sarah Gellar from Yes! Magazine highlighted communities enacting intersectional justice through regenerative economies from her book "The Revolution Where you Live" that featured Our Harvest's efforts. Rev. Damon Lynch described the impact of white flight and redlining on wealth in black communities, suggesting that "We have to build and control our own community." He explained, "We have to re-imagine. Rosa Parks didn't just resist the busses, they desegrated by creating their own network of rides: we [the black community] created Uber. But when that was over, they went back to using the bus. They needed to create their own networks… We need black business, press, church, and schools."

Co-op Cincy created Co-op U for people interested in opening a cooperative business. The program pairs business training with consciousness raising about solidarity and cooperative culture including the Mondragon principles. In order to promote ownership among marginalized communities that may lack access to adequate education and opportunities to gain management-level business experience, the program provides training in business strategy, accounting, and marketing.

Ongoing on-the-job education sessions, "serve to demystify financial statements, tap into people's collective intelligence about how to problem solve and build the business, develop communication skills, and integrate co-op values" (2016–2017 Cincinnati Union Cooperative Institute Annual Report, n.p.). During the focus group interview, Our Harvest farm workers expressed their appreciation for learning about business strategy and workplace communication, along with farming skills.

Prospective farm workers, particularly urban young people, often lack knowledge about farming and natural methods due to the shift to industrial farming. Farm Manager Stephen Deinger wrote in their 2016–2017 Annual Report, "I have come a long way as a farmer and as a manager, and I could only have done it with the support of the coop [Co-op Cincy]. I went from working by myself on a half acre, to now managing five farmers on over 12 acres. I could barely operate a tractor… I can now run all four of our tractors with just about every implement…" (n.p).

In addition to worker training, Our Harvest raises consciousness by connecting food consumers and producers. For example, the organization hosted a dinner celebrating one of its farms' (Bahr Farm) 100-years anniversary. Tables were set up among the crops, and supporters got the chance to speak with farmers about growing methods and business challenges. The

Farm Manager shares a weekly farm report through newsletters and social media, connecting their buyers to the growing process. Leaders are frank about the challenges of small-scale farming. Their 2016–2017 Annual Report described, "The seasonal nature of produce, the intensive capitalization required, the low cost of conventional produce, and the unpredictability of the weather reduces the margin of error we have to work with-in."

Recognizing that consumers need to understand natural food practices to support the CSA, the farm reports educate consumers about seasonal eating and sustainable farming. Consumers also learn about the benefits of supporting the union cooperative model in particular. Our Harvest's hybrid model gives workers more voting rights than the public in order to protect worker democracy, but consumer owners need to support the cooperative ethos as well.

These consciousness-raising efforts challenge the "white imaginaries" of farming histories. For example, a November 5th, 2020 Facebook post profiled Dr. Booker T. Whatley, "the man who brought us the CSA" by developing clientele membership clubs to aid in the survival of black farms. The post observed, "BIPOC farmers have played a central role in agriculture. Yet they are overlooked and uncredited in our retelling of history. In a world where the majority of the ones who feed the world are people of color." The post further shared: "We want to tell the true story of food. We highlight farmers from around the world and celebrate their ingenuity. We understand that erasure is a form of violence and commit to giving credit where credit is due" and asked, "Why is it so hard for white people to recognize that people of color have the solutions?"

CC's commitment to education extends beyond Cincinnati by hosting a biennial symposium with cooperative leaders (established and start-ups), experts from Mondragon, union leaders, and 1worker1vote.org advocates. Many attendees have been eager to learn about Our Harvest and Apple Street Market and to share insights from their own food system initiatives, including food hubs, community gardens, grocery stores, and catering companies. In 2017, participants discussed efforts to counter gentrification through affordable housing and food businesses. Brooklyn Sprout organizers (a community urban garden supplying hospitals and health centers through Vital Brooklyn), described teaching young people about farming and creating a "self-sustaining space for people of color to control their wealth." Creating these spaces for mutual learning facilitates shared strategizing in the face of resource challenges, and also aids in managing tensions between the mission to create locally rooted businesses and to transform global economies.

Embodying Social Justice Through Everyday Organizing

This essay primarily focuses on Co-Op Cincy's creative re-imagining of food embodied in its mission and consciousness-raising efforts. However, it is also important to consider how these communicative practices translate into their everyday organizing, given the risks of mission drift (degeneration) and/or gentrification.

Our Harvest maintains its commitment to localism by growing and aggregating food within 150 miles of Cincinnati, primarily within the city core. It connects localist farming to food access by distributing at farmers markets, low-income community locations, and through mobile delivery. Given business costs (e.g., wages, sustainable growing) and low profit margins, Our Harvest engages numerous philanthropic and governmental programs to promote affordability. Harvest Day "brings fresh, local product directly into your community at prices affordable to all" (https://coopcincy.org/our-harvest). By partnering with Produce Perks Midwest, "SNAP benefit customers can purchase $20 of produce each week for just $10" (https://www.ourharvest.coop/affordable-produce-program). Harvest Day hosts (community organizations and churches) in underserved neighborhoods facilitate orders and act as distribution sites (along with mobile outlets), receiving a portion of the profits. In addition, "We donate our extra produce to communities in need through partnerships with Freestore Foodbank and CAIN Food Pantry" (https://www.ourharvest.coop/mission). These efforts require extensive time and relationship building, but they are key to achieving the twin goals of food access and family-sustaining jobs.

In 2017, Our Harvest was able to pay managers $15/hour and workers $10/hour, with a system of raises and bonuses to increase their income. Workers also received a $450 monthly stipend to purchase health insurance through the UFCW union. At that time, three of nine workers had achieved cooperative ownership status, paying $3,000 in installments.

To achieve its agricultural educational mission, Our Harvest builds farm knowledge through its apprentice program. "Cultivate! Ohio Valley's farm apprentice training program educates farm staff by combining on-farm training with classes in the Sustainable Agriculture Management Certificate program at Cincinnati State Community and Technical College" (https://www.ourharvest.coop/education).

Co-op Cincy also lives out its social justice goals by going beyond the Mondragon cooperative principle of "open membership" (nondiscrimination) to embrace Mondragon's principles of solidarity and transformative social change. Leaders actively redress barriers to ownership by marginalized groups, including participation in Co-op U by underserved communities. In 2019, they partnered with nonprofits and city government programs to create the *Building Resilience in the Refugee Community of Cincinnati through Agriculture and Entrepreneurship* initiative, which pays for participation and provides childcare for low-income immigrants and women attending training. In 2020, fifteen Bhutanese refugees worked with Our Harvest to prepare for a business growing vegetables to supply Bhutanese grocery stores. A group of graduates is developing an affordable grocery delivery to apartment complexes in a neighborhood where many Bhutanese immigrants live (https://coopcincy.org/updates/2020/7/13/refugee-owned-grocery-delivery-in-a-food-desert). Co-op Cincy is hiring bilingual facilitators to work with a group of Congolese refugees attending Co-op U, and a racial justice educator for the Power in Number program, which will incubate black-owned businesses, by providing seed capital to overcome racial wealth

inequalities. These efforts pair consciousness-raising with material resources to address barriers to participation.

Our Harvest also continually investigates ways to increase sustainability. Their Facebook Farm Report on January 11, 2020 described improving soil at White Oak farm, which was "put through many years of monocropping creating harsh environment for life to flourish." Now under Our Harvest, "After years of careful crop rotation and soil building cover crops we noticed white hairs clinging to the roots of our turnips and rutabaga this winter. Mycorrhizae!" They explained, "This is great news for the future of White Oak and its production of nutritious food for not only its caretaker humans but for life under the soil." These posts share their oingoing commitment to sustainable growing methods on urban farms.

Speaking to the ways that local organizing can contribute to larger policy and cultural change, Our Harvest supports several local food policy initiatives, including the Greater Cincinnati Food Policy Council, Green Umbrella, and the Creating Healthy Communities Coalition. Moreover, C-op Cincy participates in several national and international loan funds including Seed Commons, "a national network of locally-rooted, non-extractive loan funds that brings the power of big finance under community control" (https://seedcommons.org/). Co-op Cincy supporters also have advocated for city development funds to be distributed for food support in low-income rather than gentrified areas. These efforts demonstrate the potential for union cooperatives networks to promote social justice and policy change.

CONCLUSION

This case study adds to research demonstrating how activists engaged in alternative, solidarity economy businesses are re-imagining the food system, defying the corporate colonization of the status quo in public consciousness. These groups communicate ambitious visions for social change, raising consciousness about food justice and enacting these visions in their everyday organizing. These efforts also concretize transformative visions, demonstrating that other economic systems, with different values and assumptions, are not only possible but currently available.

Rather than center possible residues of neoliberalism, this project highlights Co-op Cincy's and Our Harvest's unique approach to achieving social justice goals, with a goal of catalyzing future efforts. Our Harvest integrates social justice, addressing inequities in food production and consumption, with environmental sustainability.

We can recognize the embodied constraints that alternative groups face organizing from within a capitalist framework with an eye towards understanding how these groups counter corporate dominance by co-opting resources and structures designed to reinforce capitalist interests. Co-op Cincy creatively and flexibly redeploys resources from market mechanisms, non-profits, government programs, community organizing, unions, and the larger cooperative movement to promote an independent and democratic model of community wealth and ownership.

It is also crucial to understand how self-identified alternative economy efforts with social justice missions maintain those commitments in the face of lower access to capital and lack of public knowledge about more collectivist models, including cooperatives. Co-Op Cincy and Our Harvest pair innovative approaches to funding with enduring commitments to education that promote cooperative culture. Their educational efforts spread awareness of the need for equality in the economy and food system. Their efforts further enact social justice by providing material resources that redress intersectional structural barriers to participation in education and worker ownership.

Taking a generative approach highlights the transformational capacities of alternative economy food businesses, asking how we can further catalyze these models rather than dismiss them as incidental to the capitalist project. Theoretically, scholars need to investigate in practice the degree to which localist, interstitial, alternative food initiatives are inhibiting or catalyzing larger social justice coalitions and policies. Co-op Cincy offers one model for building and expanding power among the marginalized. By connecting locally rooted businesses in a national/international network of Mondragon-style, hybrid community- and worker-owned union cooperatives, the organization promotes ownership among women, minority, and immigrant workers, creates food access for low-income publics, and advocates for policies that support marginalized groups. Other articles in this Topic highlight additional paths.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/Supplementary Material, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

ETHICS STATEMENT

Written informed consent was obtained from the individuals for the publication of any potentially identifiable images or data included in this article.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

The author confirms being the sole contributor of this work and has approved it for publication.

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Pivoting in the Time of COVID-19: An in-Depth Case Study at the Nexus of Food Insecurity, Resilience, System Re-Organizing, and Caring for the Community

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According to the School Nutrition Association, nearly 100,000 schools serve free or reduced school lunches and breakfasts daily to approximately 34. 34 million students nationwide. However, as COVID-19 forced many schools to close, students who depended on the public schools to meet the majority of their nutritional needs faced an even larger battle with food insecurity. Recognizing this unmet need, and that food insecurity was intertwined with other needs within the community, the Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art and its satellite contemporary art space the Momentary, partnered with the Northwest Arkansas Food Bank and over 30 additional partner organizations to pivot their existing outreach services. In this case study, we identify lessons learned by Crystal Bridges that might be useful for other organizations who seek to foster meaningful engagement with the public, especially in times of crisis. Specifically, we focus on three main lessons: 1) how the museum created a plan to learn through the pivot in order to capture their own lessons, 2) how the members of the organization experienced a sense of coming together (congregation) during the pivot, and 3) how the organization planned to improve both internal and external communication.

Keywords: food justice, case study, crystal bridges museum of American art, lessons learned, crisis communication

INTRODUCTION

In March of 2020, when quarantine was falling over much of the United States, people became very concerned about stocking their homes with food. In the following weeks and months, what began as "stocking up" quickly slid into stockpiling and even hoarding large amounts of perishable and non-perishable foods. Behavioral economists, in particular, were interested in how people were spending money, especially on food, in order to gain a sense of security, and how it led to unusual hoarding behaviors (Baddeley, 2020). However, the "security" afforded to those who had the luxury to store-up resources was not felt by all; some of the most vulnerable in our society watched as their trusted sources of sustenance began to dry up.

According to the *School Nutrition Association*, nearly 100,000 schools serve free or reduced school lunches and breakfasts daily to approximately 34.34 million students nationwide (Okamoto, 2020). However, as COVID-19 forced many schools to close, students who depended on the public schools to meet the majority of their nutritional needs faced an even larger battle with food insecurity. In light of this, the USDA Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) introduced "key flexibilities" and contingencies to existing

programs such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Child Nutrition Programs, Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), among others (Falkheimer and Heide, 2006). For example, the Nationwide Parent/ Guardian Meal Pick-up Waiver allowed parents/guardians to pick-up meals and bring them home to their children though the 2020–2021 school year.

Even with all of this flexibility being introduced into the system, unmet need continued to be a problem in many communities. A survey of school nutrition professionals conducted from April 30th-May 8th representing 1,894 school districts nationwide, showed that "95% of respondents were engaged in emergency meal assistance, and combined, these districts reported serving more than 134 million meals in April alone" (Buzanell, 2010).

Recognizing this unmet need, and that food insecurity was intertwined with other needs within the community, the *Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art* and its satellite contemporary art space the *Momentary*, partnered with the Northwest Arkansas Food Bank and over 30 additional partner organizations to pivot their existing outreach services. The Chief Education Officer explained, "Art and arts programming are powerful aids to dispel the effects of social isolation, but we also have team members who can be of service to the community in other ways right now" (Buzzanell and Houston, 2018).

Crystal Bridges reallocated staff and resources to focus on five areas of support: "food, internet, housing, artist relief, and a campaign for social belonging to foster connections with vulnerable, isolated groups." As a result, they've distributed nearly 2,000 food boxes per week to area food pantries, as well as an additional 3,600 meals for school children. Delivering food that could be prepared by children for themselves (and often for other children in the family), directly to the apartments and homes where they lived helped fill a gap in support services. In this way, our approach is similar to Okamoto (2020), Houston (2018) in that we position Crystal Bridges as an organization that acts "as a scaffolding which connects individual and community levels of resilience" (p. 619).

We now live in an era of crisis acceleration (McGreavy, 2016) wherein organizations have to monitor increasingly complex risks with the potential to become crises, and once they do become crises, organizations must move quickly. This essay takes a case study approach to interrogate how one community organization used communication to adapt quickly to crisis and mobilize resources to address multiple scales and types of resilience (Gordon and Hunt, 2019a). The communication and organizing successes by Crystal Bridges in the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic exemplifies resistance to acquiesce to the intersectional inequities already existent within United States society, amplified since early 2020, and particularly the conventional food system (Schraedley et al., 2020). This case study illuminates how communication processes can support adaptive crisis behavior, organizational restructuring, building resilience, and creatively advancing food security (Gladwell, 2000). Specifically, we seek to identify lessons learned by Crystal Bridges during the pivoting process, that might be useful for other organizations who seek to foster meaningful engagement with the public, especially in times of crisis. To this end, we performed a textual analysis of the in-depth evaluation materials produced by Crystal Bridges (based on data gathered before, during, and after the pivot) to identify barriers and facilitators to reaching their goals. To frame and

clarify information in the lessons learned documents we gathered, we spoke with five employees who were instrumental in the communication, operations, and logistics of the pivot (Sipiora and James, 2002). The stories of their lived experiences compliment and extend the textual analysis, and are included as "personal correspondence" within this article. We seek to add to the growing literature on resilience, specifically by exploring these stories for lessons learned as an integration of "tragedy as well as triumph" that acknowledges "the frailty and vulnerability of the human spirit as well as its strength (Barlett and Chase, 2004). In other words, when we directly asked people to reflect on their experiences of *what worked well* and *what didn't work* during the pivot, they shared tragedy and triumph from their perspectives at the "intersections of people, place and identity" (p. 619) during a time of crisis.

ADDRESSING FOOD JUSTICE DURING A PROLONGED CRISIS

Crystal Bridges was charged by their Board of Directors to find a way to continue to serve the community when the COVID-19 global public health crisis shut down much of the "business as usual" flows between societal institutions and individuals. This shutdown occurred in all sectors including private, public, and not-for-profit. As an art museum, Crystal Bridges, fits into the not-for-profit space and has a mission to "welcome all to celebrate the American spirit in a setting that unites the power of art with the beauty of nature." (Department of Educat) The Mission Statement language to "welcome all" is taken seriously. As a world-class art museum, Crystal Bridges operates in a space where culture is celebrated and world-class art is available to share with the community. Like many art museums, sharing art with the community means the community is welcome to visit the museum and take in the permanent and temporary exhibitions. In addition to the exhibits, visitors to Crystal Bridges have access to educational programming, the beauty of the grounds (120 acres in the Northwest Arkansas Ozarks), and meals or snacks in the on-site restaurant and café. During the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic across the United States in March 2020, Crystal Bridges, like many other community organizations, was forced to shut its doors to the public. This posed a particularly unique challenge to continue its normal operations in order to carry out the organization's mission.

In addition to Crystal Bridges' mission and the Board of Directors (BOD) charge to find a way to continue to serve the community, after a recent evaluation of the organization's operations and programming, a decision was made to bolster their community engagement. The previous year, Crystal Bridges had committed its Community Engagement focus to work on anti-racist initiatives (Orr, 2009). Art museums often operate as a "coded space" where certain groups of people don't necessarily feel welcome inside the museum's various spaces, and Crystal Bridges discovered that it too had work to do in this area (Hertz et al., 2020). In particular, Crystal Bridges discovered that people of color reported they were more comfortable with behavioral norms in outside spaces, resulting in a "perception barrier" for this demographic to feel welcome and comfortable inside the museum's walls. Combining the goal of inclusion with the feedback they received about comfort levels in the museum revealed the need to make changes. This context combined with the dynamic needs of the

unfolding pandemic led to an opportunity to not just bolster, but re-imagine the organization's community engagement.

When the museum was required to shut its doors to the public due to the spread of the COVID-19 virus, this also meant that it no longer had work for dozens of employees the organization employed to support and engage with visitors inside the museum. The organization's board of directors and other members of leadership teams recognized an environmental change that may have caused a "tipping point" (Fisher et al., 2020). Crystal Bridges was in a *kairotic* moment-a time of crisis and opportunity (Poppendieck, 1999).

A series of Listening Sessions were set up with partner community agencies and key museum leadership in Education and Community Outreach departments. Some of these were the museum's pre-existing partners and some would become new agency partners. As a result of these Listening Sessions, five areas of need and opportunity were identified. These five areas were: 1) food; 2) housing; 3) mental health; 4) suffering artists; and 5) a digital divide. Crystal Bridges decided to partner with specific community agencies in each of these areas of need as identified by the Listening Sessions and Community Needs Assessment. By early April, Crystal Bridges pivoted its operations from a "business as usual" cultural art institution to what could only be described as a crisis intervention and humanitarian relief organization.

"Task Teams" (Gordon and Hunt, 2019b) composed of a Strategy team member, Community Engagement team member, museum Operations staff, an internal content specialist, and a community agency partner. As such these teams were cross-functional and a new form of Crystal Bridges-Community interface. The tasks each of these teams began to engage included the following: 1) food distribution; 2) household and personal care supply distribution; 3) social connecting; 4) artist support; and 5) internet and information sharing. These five task areas correlated with the results of the above-described Listening Sessions and Community Needs Assessments. The number of kits and boxes that were distributed for each task area are presented in the graphic below. The "social connecting kit" and the "my museum kit" were aimed at needs beyond those of food, personal care products, and house care products. The decision to centralize creative arts during this time was in response to the need to help improve quality of life, not just to sustain it. While reflecting on the children he visited, one of the team organizers said "We can give them food, but that only takes up a small fraction of their day. The rest of the time they might be stuck in an apartment with not much to do." Although it was not the goal of our lessons learned work with the museum, this particular combination of food security work coupled with fostering creativity through the arts adds an additional item to Buzzanell's (2018) call to investigate resilience through storytelling, rituals, routines, etc.

Kits & Boxes
73,514 distributed

Social connecting kit
5,739 distributed

- COVID-19 Resource Sheet with tips for combatting isolation and contact information for local service organizations
- Postcard completed by a community member
- Additional blank postcards
- Creativity kit*
- Watercolor paints to decorate postcards

My Museum kit
12,000 distributed

Each kit focused on a theme and included physical materials for art activities, written instructions in English and Spanish, and links to digital resources including videos about the work of art in the Crystal Bridges collection and instructions for art-making.

- Color kit
- Sculpture kit
- You + Me kit
- Art of Kindness kit
- Show & Tell kit

House Cleaning Supply kit
1,022 distributed

- Toilet paper
- Sponges
- Floor cleaner
- Degreaser
- Toilet brush
- Paper towels
- Creativity kit*

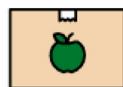### Personal Care kit
500 distributed

- Hand sanitizer
- Body wash
- Tampons and Pads
- Toilet paper
- Hairbrush
- Toothbrush
- Creativity kit*
- Postcard completed by a community member

*Creativity kit
19,588 distributed
Art activity including materials and instructions

Food & Meal boxes

Meals
28,050 distributed

Food boxes
6,615 distributed

WHAT WE DID | PAGE 6

Art and artistic expression are powerful ways to learn about the struggles and strategies of those in crisis.

The food distribution task grew out of the observations and knowledge gained by Crystal Bridges personnel through dialogue with the Northwest Arkansas Food Bank. The Northwest Arkansas Food Bank is located roughly 16 miles south of Crystal Bridges off I-49 in Bethel Heights. The food distribution task team began by mapping resources that Crystal Bridges could leverage during the COVID-19 crisis and museum shut down to engage the food insecure in their community. The Food Bank had lost much of its volunteer force as a result of the quarantine orders issued to protect public health against the spread of the virus. Thus, the Food Bank of Northwest Arkansas found itself in a position with a food supply that it couldn't pack and distribute to county beneficiaries. In addition to the new challenges faced by the Food Bank of food (re)packing and distribution, supply chains in general became an exacerbated problem in the US for many communities, businesses, government agencies and programs, and schools at the onset of the pandemic in Spring 2020 (Abi-Nader et al., 2009). In this context, Crystal Bridges' resource mapping identified two key assets that could potentially be marshalled and repurposed: its people and its command of physical space.

As a cultural institution, Crystal Bridges was invested in social justice and the opportunity to repurpose its people and its physical space in order to fill gaps and needs created by the pandemic became their new vision, purpose, and motivation. Food justice is an important but often overlooked subcategory of social justice but through Listening Sessions, Community Needs Assessments, Resource Mapping, and new networks for action (Abraham, 1971), Crystal Bridges was able to mitigate hunger and injustice amplified by the public health crisis while also advancing their own Community Engagement initiatives. This sort of crisis intervention and work revisioning is not the norm, particularly for community organizations who may not even have a mandate or mission to operate in these spaces or ways.

Of particular interest and import with regard to the food distribution task is: 1) the way in which Crystal Bridges arrived at a finding of real community need; 2) the way in which communication was central to that discovery; 3) the multi-level nature of the crisis that resulted in both food security and food justice shortcomings for the community.

After partnering with the Food Bank, the food distribution task team also needed to locate the populations most in need of a continuous flow of food. The Listening Sessions revealed that public schools in the community were having difficulty accessing food. Several of the K-12 public schools in the area are Title one Schools (Singer et al., 2020), which means that children from low-income families make up at least 40% of the school's enrollment.[1] Title one Schools receive federal funding to support low-income students' ability to perform at the standard required by state academic standards. The funding is used for school-wide programming to help raise the performance of the lowest-performing students. The two factors of age (legal minors

below 18 years of age and *low-income* backgrounds (according to official United States household income determinants), combined to create a very vulnerable population.

The second thing important to note is *how* Crystal Bridges determined this population's unmet need. As a non-profit community organization with some standing, Crystal Bridges began its food distribution community outreach work by going through official channels. That is, an inquiry was made with Department of Education officials to verify the food access gap for community schools in Northwest Arkansas.[2] Crystal Bridges intended to interface with the Department of Education (DOE) in order to ascertain potential causes to this food access problem and begin collaborating with the Food Bank and the DOE to intervene and help mitigate the problem. Strangely though, according to the DOE contact, there was no food access problem at the Title 1 schools (U.S. Department of Education, 2018). In an effort to cross-reference this information and messaging from official sources, Crystal Bridges began conversations with local school administrators to determine whether they were experiencing exacerbated food access problems in the face of COVID-19. The response received from these local community administrators was markedly different than the perspective of the DOE. In concert with this new information, Crystal Bridges took action and moved forward with their food distribution task team in order to help the Food Bank distribute available foodstuffs to local populations in real need. Crystal Bridges relied on personal relationships (and those individuals' lived experiences) to cross-reference official sources of information and messaging regarding need. This triangulation of information is crucial in emergencies because distant, official sources may not have accurate on the ground, locally relevant, and accurate data or understanding. Scholars and analysts have anticipated the need for deliberately building more resilience into our local communities and basic life support systems for some time now.[3] This became strikingly clear during 2020 with breakdowns in supply chains. Building community level resilience means building redundancies into the system. One of the kinds of redundancies that may be essential but overlooked or not considered in crisis mode is communication behavior. Information seeking behavior needs to change and multiple sources need to be consulted to arrive at the most accurate picture possible of needs, causes, gaps, resource availability, opportunities, and allies. The Midwest Academy has a community organizing and advocacy tool (strategy chart)[4] that very much resembles many of the steps that Crystal Bridges took when re-organizing themselves in response to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020.

The third point that is important to make here is that, based on the data, the situation that Crystal Bridges food distribution task team encountered actually addressed multiple levels of

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[1]https://schoolnutrition.org/aboutschoolmeals/schoolmealtrendsstats/

[2]https://www.fns.usda.gov/coronavirus#flex

[3]https://schoolnutrition.org/news-publications/press-releases/2020/sna-survey-reveals-covid-19-school-meal-trends-financial-impacts/

[4]https://crystalbridges.org/blog/crystal-bridges-mobilizes-staff-to-provide-food-arts-and-more-through-the-community-outreach-initiative/

intervention. The first, most obvious level is food insecurity but the second, less obvious level is food justice. For a non-profit art museum to pivot in a time of crisis, do novel needs assessment, partnership building, resource mapping, and repurposing of their assets and capital is not expected, not the norm, and is laudable. In addition to this intervention, however, there is another level of action, food justice advocacy and this is a more systemic contribution to society.

A cursory first analysis might suggest that through their food distribution task design, Crystal Bridges is only reinforcing the perpetuation of a disempowering hunger management status quo for the school children of low-income households in Benton County. There is some legitimacy to this kind of critique. The anti-hunger movement has been in a "holding pattern" for some time now in the United States as more conventional approaches to solving food insecurity include potentially fraught relationships between food pantries, food banks, federal food programs, and agribusiness corporations.[5] The charitable and philanthropic investments in hunger reduction in the United States not only offer financial benefits to corporations that are not in the business of sustainable community food systems but they also create a disempowered and dependent population. By establishing the anti-hunger structures and relationships that exist today in the US, food assistance recipients are treated as clients rather than partners. In *Sweet Charity*, Poppendieck contends that these clients end up often waiting in lines, feeling like dejected objects.[6] This is not the same as partnering with the poor to help build their political and economic power. Instead, the "hunger problem couches income inequality in a veil of temporary need that heralds corporate philanthropy and draws attention away from systemic causes."[7]

The leadership of Crystal Bridges wasn't oblivious to these complexities as the Executive Director voiced regret about the limited sustainability of their food distribution crisis intervention.[8] Nonetheless, committed and passionate anti-hunger advocates recognize these contradictions and have begun proposing viable alternatives. Even still, it is important to distinguish between crisis response and sustainable community development. With its mission, community organization type, and federal tax status as a 501c (3), Crystal Bridges may actually be positioned more as an agent of sustainable community development than an emergency response organization like the American Red Cross. In this case, however, Crystal Bridges' reinvention of itself in the aftermath of the COVID-19 crisis has yet another level of engagement. In virtue of the BOD charge to find a way to continue to operate and serve the community, the overall Community Engagement strategy enabled Crystal Bridges employees to continue to have paid work, but the work itself would be very different than their normal day-to-day task performance. Even though the museum was mandated to shut its doors to the community, potentially removing employees from its payroll and further exacerbating the structural inequity that hunger is merely an ugly symptom of, it was able to creatively adapt and pivot its entire identity and structure and thereby attack both food insecurity as well as advance food justice through keeping community members and their households in gainful employment while contributing to an immediate need which highlighted even more weaknesses in the political and economic arrangements within United States society.

Injustices across food chains share ecological and economic links.[9] The national collaborative work of the Center for Whole Communities offers a field guide for community food system planning and evaluation—Whole Measures for Community Food Systems.[10] This field guide lays out six relevant dimensions for evaluating a community food system: 1. Justice and Fairness; 2. Strong Communities; 3. Vibrant Farms; 4. Healthy People; 5. Sustainable Ecosystems; and 6. Thriving Local Economies. While the specific criteria for Food Justice include: 1. Provides food for all; 2. Reveals, challenges, and dismantles injustice in the food system; and 3. Creates just food system structures and cares for food system workers; and 4. Ensures that public institutions and local businesses support a just community food system.

While Crystal Bridges approach to ease the suffering of their community in the aftershock of nation-wide quarantines will not transform the United States food chain, it is also important to observe that their response advanced food justice by stepping in where others did not or could not (including the DOE and Northwest Arkansas Food Bank) to provide food to some of the most vulnerable in the community (children from predominantly low-income households) while also contributing to a thriving local economy by finding creative ways to keep their labor force on the payroll. While the particularities of the kairotic moment Crystal Bridges faced may not be replicable, their process and the thoughtful, effective outcomes instantiate the kind of creative rethinking and reworking more individuals and institutions will need to engage in order to creatively address persistent and troubling food system problems.[11]

LESSONS LEARNED: ANALYSIS OF THE EVALUATION MATERIALS

Crystal Bridges has a research team who was tasked with evaluating the effectiveness of the different initiatives launched during the pivot. This team crafted an evaluation plan "that would focus on the

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[5]One of the employees who shared their story is the brother of the first author of this article. The original intent for this case study was to assist in quality improvement efforts with the museum, as well as to gather lessons that could be shared with other non-profits, especially museums who are in a position to meet similar community needs.

[6]Ibid

[7]"About" https://crystalbridges.org/about-crystal-bridges-art/

[8]Executive Director and Chief Diversity and Inclusion Officer, personal correspondence, January 1, 2021

[9]Chief Education Officer, personal correspondence, January 7, 2021.

[10]2020 Community Engagement COVID-19 Report

[11]Andy Fisher (2020).

collective impact across the region and within Crystal Bridges and the Momentary."[12] The researchers asked three questions in their evaluative efforts; 1) "How did this project impact the organizations and staff members of Crystal Bridges and the Momentary?" 2) "How did this project impact Northwest Arkansas Communities?" and 3) "What have we learned that could impact future community engagement efforts?" Over the six-month period, the evaluation team worked with the community engagement team to learn about when new project phases were "ramping up or ending in order to schedule data collection activities in tandem" (p. 13). Our goal was to examine this document for the transferrable lessons that could be useful to other organizations that might find themselves in similar situations. From this analysis, we've identified lessons in three areas: 1) planning to learn, 2) organizational congregation through segregation, and 3) internal and external communication.

Category #1: Planning to Learn

Any new community engagement initiative should be evaluated not just for effectiveness at reaching outreach goals, but also for *how the employees perceive their own work and efficacy*. One of the highest priorities of the museum during the pivot was to provide work for employees who wanted to keep working. For example, many of the museum's staff who were employed in the museum's restaurant picked up hours packing the My Museum kits, personal hygiene kits, and cleaning kits. One employee wrote "Es una gran ayuda para la gente y claro que si. Tambien es una gran ayuda para nosotros los que trabajamos en la cocina, gracias a esto hemos tenido trabajo." (It's a great help for the people, of course it is. It's also great help for those of us who work in the kitchen. Thanks to this, we have had work" (p. 17). Another employee wrote, "I'm thankful the museum is giving me the opportunity to earn wages" and another wrote "Also, it feels like it's not just made up work. That we are actually contributing. That feels good" (p. 17).

It takes a lot of effort to maintain momentum for a project of this size and it is important that employees see their work as necessary, and their efforts as making a difference. 86% of the employees agreed or strongly agreed with the statement "I feel proud of my organization's community engagement initiatives during COVID-19." One survey respondent said "Packing meals on the loading dock was really rewarding and I actually felt like my help made a difference." Another respondent said "This has been one of the most meaningful projects I've worked on." Initially, there was concern that highly trained professionals might not feel fulfilled with the assembly line style work putting together the kits for delivery. However, when people realized they could contribute meaningfully to the work that needed to be done, everyone stood to gain. For example, the creativity kit contained a craft that required a certain number of paperclips. Employees diligently counted out the paperclips, which was time consuming, until the chefs from the restaurant observed the process, filtered it through their own specific

training, and recommended weighing the paperclips instead so that the process could be faster. These creative, collaborative opportunities provided the chance for people to recognize that their contributions could make a difference. It also provided a mechanism for building multiscalar resilience through redundancy and cross-functional task work that took advantage of knowledge and skill transference.

It was important for museum employees to feel valued throughout the process, but because of the assembly line style of work and the fact that most of the employees did not deliver the kits (in order to see those they served) team leaders worked to identify ways to prevent people from feeling disconnected from the fruits of their labor. One tactic was to build prototypes of the kits so that people who were assembling one part of it could see what the end result would look like. Another tactic was to capture stories and photos (when possible) of those receiving the kits, and make sure that the people assembling the kits saw that feedback. In this way, team leaders were working to create resilience in the community, but they were also concerned about the resilience of their employees through the process.

Staff members also reported personal learning that occurred throughout the process that enriched them in multiple ways. 77% reported that they felt more connected to Northwest Arkansas, and one staff member said they "felt ignorant of the disparities" across Northwest Arkansas prior to COVID and this project.

In addition to learning about the importance of performing valuable work, the employees learned lessons about the constraints of collecting sensitive data to determine project effectiveness, in a pandemic that requires social distancing and has other constraints. The research team tasked with evaluating the different initiatives during the pivot encountered hurdles to data collection. They made intentional decisions given these constraints, adjusted as they could, and explained them in their reporting. One of the most important considerations was to recognize power dynamics (between provider and recipient or evaluator and evaluation participant) and "scale" data accordingly. For the evaluators, this meant making the decision not to collect data directly from public individuals receiving critical resources. Rather, they "focused on understanding the collective impact from the scale of resources distributed, as well as on gathering feedback from community partner organizations" (p. 13). They wrote, "While these decisions produced limitations for the kinds of impact we can articulate, the evaluation team felt it was more important to forge or strengthen community partner relationships during this period" (p. 13). Constraints on data sensitivity can also lead to valuable lessons regarding culturally sensitive communication. One example of this is Crystal Bridges' community needs assessment with Northwest Arkansas populations such as the Marshallese.[8] This population is a comparatively closed community with higher than average language barriers.[13] The

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development of the Personal Care Kits for the community was facilitated by increased cultural sensitivity of Crystal Bridges.

However, they were also creative about how they gathered data when they could. They honored the time of the participants (particularly networked organizations) by joining existing debriefs or regularly scheduled meetings to avoid adding another meeting to their schedules. They also delayed data collection or considered alternative ways of learning about a particular issue if they could.

Category #2: Congregation Through Segregation

Organizations who are faced with a shared, external threat, such as a pandemic, may pivot that threat into a way to experience new type of congregation within the organization and with organizational partners. In other words, a common threat can function to bring people together. Employees reported that they learned about the constraints facing employees who do different work in the organization, and 69% of employees reported feeling more connected to their co-workers as result of the community engagement efforts. Importantly, employees also reported learning more about the internal structures of partner organizations and the best strategies for communicating with these partners. When reflecting on the lessons learned, the *School and Community Programs Coordinator* mentioned that she had been working to engage the schools with the museum long before the pandemic (personal correspondence). She attended back-to-school meetings at the local schools in the fall to provide teachers the opportunity to integrate the museum and its educational offerings into their curriculum. She told us that building that network and making those connections outside of the time of crisis, enabled her to call upon those networks to identify the best ways to help during the crisis.

Her work with the schools outside of the time of crisis made it much easier for her to communicate with them during the crisis. She was able to organize the delivery of the kits with greater ease and the people she had already networked with became additional assets to spread the word about the work that Crystal Bridges was doing. For example, when they delivered the kits to the teachers they had already met, they were sure to make the boxes very conspicuously labeled so that they would draw attention. In effect, the teachers who received the brightly labeled kits functioned to advertise the opportunity to other teachers.

Crystal Bridges' community engagement assessment combined with their pivot response to the pandemic, new forms of community organization partnership were discovered. Partnering with the Northwest Arkansas Food Bank allowed community needs to be better filled. In the aftermath of the initial widespread outbreaks and quarantines in March 2020, the Food Bank witnessed volunteer attrition and heightened community food insecurity. Because of the asset mapping conducted by Crystal Bridges in conjunction with their new community engagement efforts, an innovative partnership was formed to bridge the gap in terms of both food security workers as well as innovative food distribution networks. Due to the success of this particular temporary crisis response, Crystal Bridges has decided to continue its partnership with the Northwest Arkansas Food Bank in its redesign of their 2021 Community Engagement Pillars to include ASAP (Art + Social Impact Accelerator Program). This reveals that *responding to a crisis with a community outreach/engagement based strategy combined with internal asset mapping can result in new organizational fields that better serve community needs and strengthen resiliency.*

Category #3: Internal and External Communication

Some of the most important lessons from the pivot were about ways to improve both internal and external communication. When an organization creates a new system or initiates a large-scale change, the success or failure of that initiative is bound-up in the communication around it. For example, "The ways in which decisions were made and the flow of communication made it difficult for some task team members to understand the current status of each initiative, which in turn caused uncertainty" (p. 20). The pressure to move quickly in a crisis produces the context wherein this type of internal communication may not be as effective. One tension that arises in many organizational crises is the increased need for timely information to decrease uncertainty, with a decreased time to produce (and consume) these messages. Additionally, internal updates that are produced may not be read or understood when people are struggling to keep up with a changing work environment. One way to combat this is to *standardize expectations when it comes to communication frequency and content*. For example, if people knew they would receive an internal update on Mondays that summarized the work of the last week, projected the needs of the next week, and identified who would be responsible for following up, they may feel more certain about their work, even in a context of uncertainty. Additionally, organizations needing or choosing to pivot in response to crisis can *build a new kind of expectancy value for adjusted communication behaviors into their organizational cultures.* Leadership that practices more aggressive information-seeking behaviors can provide an example for others within an organization to follow. Internal communication between subordinates and superiors can be modeled after the crisis communication behaviors adopted by leadership. Such aggressive information-seeking behavior can reduce uncertainty for both task and social behaviors and provide better information flow through differing levels of an organization hierarchy.

The *School and Community Programs Coordinator* reflected on one of the communication strategies that helped with both internal and external communication: communicating the tentativeness of a plan. She reflected on the need to provide information to people even if it is impossible to get rid of all uncertainty and what those messages might sound like. She said that one strategy is to tell people "this is the plan right now, but if it changes, here's how we will change to adapt" (personal correspondence, January 1, 2021). This increased transparency can help organizations pivot more efficiently, even if the plan itself continues to change, the planning becomes the focus for

internal communication and this process-orientation can facilitate more rapid and less stressful program and behavior change. Another strategy was to communicate that leadership was open to problem-solving ideas, as opposed to seeming as if leadership had all of the answers and were just handing them out. She said one way to do this was to say openly, "We think this is what we will do but if you have a different idea, please share it." Rather than having to have all of the answers, leadership was open to building the best answers with the employees and partners.

Employees also had a chance to look back at the questions they initially asked about the project and what they would ask next time to help with both internal and external communication. The nature of how these questions changed is instructive for any organization who might be embarking on a new, large-scale change. For example, employees originally asked "How can we supply critical resources to those in need?" After reflection, they realized they needed to be asking much more refined questions. So that one question became five much more detailed questions. "If we're supplying materials, who decides which resources are supplied? How will we store materials? How long do they take to purchase and ship? Where will they be assembled and who is responsible for assembling? How long will assembly take? What does the drop-off site look like and who is the lead contact there?" (p. 21). The process of looking back to "what we thought at the time" vs. "what we learned" enables organizations to be more resilient and apply the same logic of reasoning to other problems.

External communication with partnering organizations as well as the public was critical to the success of this project. Reflection on what worked and what didn't work also led to important lessons for communication. Most of the feedback that Crystal Bridges received was about the products (contents of the kits) and some were about the process. For example, community partners reported that the size of the hand sanitizer bottles in the care kits were so large that they weren't portable to some members experiencing hosing insecurity. Another example is that the personal care kits might not have taken cultural differences into consideration. One of the communities who were the hardest hit by the pandemic in Northwest Arkansas were the Marshallese. The personal care kits originally included tampons, which are inapplicable to this community "because of cultural differences." The pragmatic feedback about the size of the hand sanitizer bottles, and the cultural feedback about the hygiene products were lessons at the content level, but the larger lesson was about working with partners earlier in the process to gather more information about the specific needs of the different communities before identifying any specific solutions.

CONCLUSION

Organizations have experienced the pandemic in different ways. Some organizations were forced to close their doors and would likely say that the pandemic led to an organizational crisis for them. Other organizations, specifically those whose mission is to

aid others during crises, may not see the pandemic as causing a crisis for their particular organization. For example, a hurricane does not necessarily produce a crisis for the American Red Cross; they are in the business of responding to hurricanes. For Crystal Bridges, "the crisis moment would have been to shut down and leave our employees without work" (Executive Director and Chief Diversity and Inclusion Officer, personal communication, January 1, 2021). To avoid this crisis, Crystal Bridges quickly pivoted to address an emergent need, even though much of that need fell outside of the traditional wheelhouse of a community focused art organization. They were able to make this pivot because of the existing networks they had nurtured, their willingness to come together and set aside official roles and titles to get the necessary work done, using an external threat to create opportunity, and their adaptive internal and external communication strategies.

In the midst of the COVID-19 global pandemic, basic needs for both communities and individuals were undermined. This is particularly true for those that already relied on more external support networks, resources, and programs to meet those needs. Crises such as COVID-19 exacerbated inequities in societal access and distribution to basic needs such as food, as well as higher-order needs such as growth and creativity.[14] Recognizing crisis as opportunity, Crystal Bridges pivoted to fill gaps in the newly amplified food access issues instigated by the pandemic. Providing a critical organizational role that no one else in the community was able to, they contributed substantively to an immediate community need while also staving off even worse inequity by repurposing their resources and personnel. In doing so, they were able to engage both food insecurity as well as food injustice. While food security is not the same as food sovereignty or food justice, many contemporary food advocates know that in spite of the seemingly thorny, intractable problems between these movements and discourses, they are inextricably bound together.[15]

We do not know what the next pandemic (or organizational crisis) might be. We do know that there will be more events that trigger the need to pivot in agile ways. The steps that Crystal Bridges took before, during, and after the initial phases of the pandemic to learn from the environment and their own effectiveness in meeting the needs of their partners is what will develop their capacity to weather crises and cultivate resilience.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Publicly available datasets were analyzed in this study. This data can be found here: https://crystalbridges.org/community-engagement/.

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[14]People descended from the Marshall Islands.
[15]Procurement Manager, January, 14, 2021.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

All authors listed have made a substantial, direct, and intellectual contribution to the work and approved it for publication.

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Framing Good Food: Communicating Value of Community Food Initiatives in the Midst of a Food Crisis

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Community-embedded food initiatives exist in market economies, but make more-than-market contributions. They challenge the dominant, industrialized food system, while generating non-monetary benefits in their communities. Yet food policy, regulation, and public spending in much of the world is still framed by the values of market economy. Revenue, yield, and technological advancements remain key formal measurements of the wellbeing of food systems. Community-embedded food initiatives like small local businesses and non-profit organizations, are often committed to advancing social and environmental benefits of non-industrialized food, and they call for clearer recognition of their more-than-market contribution to community wellbeing. The Nourishing Communities network has worked with such initiatives for more than a decade, undertaking community-engaged research with practitioners across sectors. The network has found that these initiatives are impeded by a communication conundrum. On the one hand, they are expected (by funders, governments, and other institutions) to demonstrate their value using market-economy measurements and translating what they do into "social returns on investment." On the other hand, many of those initiatives need non-market terminology to express the values that they espouse and generate. To balance these needs, Gibson-Graham's framing of "diverse economies" can potentially offer a pathway to better communication and thus more accurate valuing of the work of such initiatives. Their notion of diverse economies offers endless opportunities to frame community food work as valuable in ways that go beyond market-economy measurements. As such, the diverse economies framing offers new possibilities for alternative food, and for more general discussions of social reform.

Keywords: food systems, food policy, framing, diverse economies, community food initiatives

INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic immensely affected food systems with supply chain breakdowns, border closures, outbreaks on farms and in food processing plants, relatively high rates of infection among food retail and restaurant workers, and shifting consumer behaviours. Critics of global industrial food, who have long called attention to food system vulnerabilities, are now seeing their concerns validated. Emerging research suggests that many of their predictions have come to bear, and their calls for robust regional food systems are increasingly resonating with the public (Knezevic et al., 2020).

Much is being said about plans to "build back better" after the pandemic, which in terms of food will entail developing diverse, redundant, and responsive supply chains (Goupil and Blay-Palmer, 2020). The argument presented here, which builds on more than a decade of collaborative, community-engaged research of the Nourishing Communities[1] network, makes the case that those efforts must not be limited to material recovery. Conceptual reframing of food value chains will be critical for effective post-pandemic recovery. Specifically, reframing food economies to include more-than-monetary values, is now essential, and food systems actors, including researchers, can play a key role in that reframing where the potential exists to inform new policy.

FOOD SYSTEMS

A food system comprises the full range of actors (human and non-human) and relationships involved in the production, harvesting, processing, distribution, procurement, consumption, and disposal of food (FAO, 2014). There are multiple contemporary food systems ranging from Indigenous food ways to global supply chains. The one that dominates politically and economically, is the global system of industrialized food (Clapp, 2012). It consists of a handful of international conglomerates with concentrated power in seed sales, farm inputs, production, harvesting (e.g., fishing), processing, distribution, and retail (Clapp, 2012; Howard, 2016). It relies on large-scale, intensive, specialized crop and livestock production. The immense economic and political power that food conglomerates wield shapes the range of policy measures implemented by various levels of government (De Schutter, 2019). Still, estimates suggest many of the global eaters depend on subsistence, rather than industrial, farmers and harvesters[2] (ETC Group, 2017). Food systems are not dichotomous, and they comprise a range of initiatives in between industrial farms and small enterprises, but the political power of those very large conglomerates presents the greatest challenges to the smallest of enterprises, and much of that small-scale effort is now framed by its participants as working in opposition to the industrial model.

The political economy of the industrial system, or what food systems theorists termed the industrial "food regime" (Friedmann, 1982; Friedmann and McMichael, 1989),

promotes productivist approaches to food production, harvesting, and distribution (Buttel, 2003). These approaches focus on volume/yield, market efficiencies, and profitability, framing industrial-scale production as necessary. What makes them a "regime" is the very way in which these approaches permeate policy at all levels of governance. Proponents of industrial food argue the model is capable of producing more food at lower costs (Blomqvist et al., 2015; Nordhaus et al., 2015). Yet, a growing body of evidence demonstrates that these approaches are not even close to eradicating hunger and food insecurity (Webb et al., 2018). Though industrial agriculture can produce more in the short term, this only refers to volume, and not to nutrient density or variety. Farms smaller than 2 ha globally generate "28–31% of total crop production and 30–34% of food supply on 24% of gross agricultural area … and account for greater crop diversity, while farms over 1,000 ha have the greatest proportion of post-harvest loss" (Ricciardi et al., 2021, p. 64). Industrial-scale production has been linked to extraordinary environmental degradation, including pollution, waste, soil erosion and loss of biodiversity (Qualman, 2019). It has contributed to growing incidence of diet-related disease (Lang et al., 2009; Albritton, 2009), social inequities (Agyeman and McEntee, 2014), and loss of community cohesion through gutting of rural areas and altering food labour (Magnan, 2015; Bronson et al., 2019). Compounded by climate change, destabilization of governments, and most recently a pandemic, these problems now amount to a veritable food crisis (Holt-Giménez and Shattuck, 2011; Holt-Gimenez and Patel, 2012; Blay-Palmer et al., 2020; Brescia, 2020).

Contemporary literature calls for transformation of food systems to address these challenges (Levkoe, 2011; Blay-Palmer et al., 2013; Knezevic et al., 2017). Community solutions are increasingly lauded as critical players, though not panacea, in addressing the most pressing crises, be they economic, social, or environmental (Alkon and Agyeman, 2011; Broad, 2016; Altieri, 2018). Peasant farmers, small-scale processors and distributors, and community activists have converged around "alternative" food (Renting et al., 2003; Whatmore et al., 2003; Sonnino and Marsden, 2006; Brunori, 2007; Guthman, 2008a; Goodman et al., 2012; Levkoe, 2014). These alternative food networks are loosely organized, heterogenous assemblages of individuals, organizations, and business entities, that typically position themselves as working in contrast to globalized industrial food and the political frameworks that underpin it. Some of the alternatives have been to varying degrees co-opted by the industrial system (e.g., organics, Guthman, 2003), but it is still fair to say most of them seek ways to deliver food that is more nutritious and more socially just than its industrial counterpart (Alkon and Agyeman, 2011). They aim to ensure equitable access to affordable, healthy, and culturally appropriate food (Broad, 2016). They work with, rather than against, ecosystems, to provide remediation instead of degradation (Knezevic et al., 2017; Altieri, 2018). They tend to engage with policy makers and planners to chip away at the entrenched political assumptions at the heart of food system vulnerabilities (Levkoe, 2014; Andrée et al., 2019). Such alternatives include diverse actors: farmers who embrace agroecology, outdoor

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[1]The network, based at the Laurier Centre for Sustainable Food Systems in Waterloo (Ontario, Canada) includes researchers from several of universities in Canada and internationally, along with more than 150 organizations that include non-profit groups, small businesses and cooperatives, farm groups, and informal community initiatives. Led by A. Blay-Palmer, the UNESCO Chair on Food, Biodiversity and Sustainability Studies, the network has undertaken dozens of community-based research projects, most notably through the six-year international partnership Food: Locally Embedded, Globally Engaged (see https://fledgeresearch.ca/).

[2]"Harvesting" in this context refers to myriad food procurement practices that do not involve cultivation, such as "wild" or country food harvesting, urban foraging, fishing, and hunting.

classrooms that teach traditional food harvesting, processors and distributors who source locally or use eco-friendly packaging, seed exchange groups and events, community food centres that advance access to food and food literacy, fruit rescue groups that tackle access and waste concurrently, food policy councils that inform planning, community investment groups that offer micro-financing, etc., (Knezevic et al., 2017; Koc et al., 2016; Knezevic, 2021).

Admittedly, some forms of "alternative" food have long been criticized for elitism and for deepening, rather than addressing the injustices in food systems (Guthman, 2003; Allen 2008). Further critiques noted that the alternatives tend to offer reforms rather than systemic transformation (Desmarais and Wittman, 2014; Gordon and Hunt, 2019), and for failing to escape the neoliberal economic model (Guthman 2008b), but as Andrée et al. (2015) point out, these valid criticism must nor obscure the ability of some initiatives to "challenge, and potentially alter, neo-liberalization" (2015, p. 1468).

Further, these "alternative" actors, parallel to and in stated opposition of industrial food, are individually not entirely resistant to shocks. Many small businesses and community organizations fail. But jointly, they form a more flexible and stable set of actors with potential to better support food security, and human and environmental health. Researchers and international bodies have been promoting food systems that consist of diverse actors—diverse in scale and production practices, as well as internally diverse, such as farming practices that incorporate multiple species and varieties of plants and animals (IPES-Food, 2016; FAO, 2019).

As one of the many groups advocating for these "alternative" systems, Nourishing Communities' decade-plus years of research are evidence of the potential of diverse, community-based food systems. The international network integrates theoretical insights and empirical research, relying on both practitioner and scholarly knowledge. Since 2007, the network has been working with community-embedded food initiatives in Canada and several international partners to document the impacts of their work. The findings show that community food initiatives can build social capital, encourage co-operation over competition, stimulate social and environmental innovation, offer spaces for business mentorship and knowledge sharing, and contribute to community well-being. Because they tend to be nimbler, more responsive to community needs, and better supported by their communities, they filled critical gaps during the pandemic and have consequently rapidly gained visibility since early 2020. In Canada, this is most visible in two areas: overwhelming demand for services from community organizations with food focus (food centres, community gardens, and food banks) (Lourenzo, 2020); and unprecedented interest in products from small community-embedded business (producers, processors, farmer's markets, and food-delivery services) (Food-for-cities, 2020). In recent interviews with small-sale food processors in Canada, for example, participants described how their communities rallied around local businesses to support them and ensure their survival (Knezevic, 2021). Partnerships among community food actors are flourishing, and while still anecdotal, demonstrate the potential of collaboration, in some cases critical to ensuring they can continue

their work. When large food manufacturers had to shut down processing plants due to COVID-19 outbreaks, causing massive supply chain bottlenecks and prompting producers to throw out tonnes of produce (Blake and Walljasper, 2020) and send thousands of animals to landfills (Charlebois, 2020), small-scale community-embedded actors proved able to pivot quickly to the new conditions (Knezevic, 2021). Yet, because many of the community organizations work on shoe-string budgets, and many of the community-embedded businesses have relatively small revenue, they continue to struggle for formal recognition as significant and necessary elements of food systems. Ensuring their wellbeing is deeply integrated into new policy and programs will require a different way of thinking and talking about food, as communities attempt to reorganize after the initial pandemic shocks.

FRAMING FOOD

Few texts have influenced communication studies as much as Goffman's, 1974, which posits that humans make sense of and draw meaning from the world by utilizing "frames" of reference. Frames shape understandings of new information and are influenced by a range of rhetorical materials from media, institutions, and other social surroundings. In turn, the rhetorical strategies deployed by institutions are often examples of framing. It matters a great deal whether we think of agriculture as industry or a human and environmental practice, just like it matters if we think about food as fuel or nourishment.

One of the projects of the Nourishing Communities group explored social and informal economies of food in Canada over four years (Knezevic et al., 2019; Martin et al., 2019; Stephens et al., 2019a). The project's community partners repeatedly pointed to their conundrum in communicating the value of their work. To secure material resources for their operations, such as space/land, equipment, transportation, monetary resources (grants, investments or loans), they felt constant pressure to describe what they do in terms of monetary benefits, as profit remains the ultimate measure of value in the neoliberal order (Otero, 2018). Yet, many of them found that their work supported economies even more significantly in intangible and indirect ways. They were sometimes asked to demonstrate their successes in terms of social return on investments, often in the simplest meaning of that phrase—to translate their social and environmental impact into dollar figures. Some initiatives have done so successfully. Alternative Land Use Services program in Canada (https://alus.ca/), for example, allows private sector donors to financially compensate farmers who ecologically restore parts of the farmland by taking them out of production and re-naturalizing them. But most initiatives continue to struggle to see their contributions recognized.

The partners in both the for-profit and non-profit sectors have repeatedly asked Nourishing Communities researchers to assist them in communicating the importance of their work to institutions that typically use narrow market-economy measures of success. The research team experimented with

media styles and formats, but over time that communicative work came to focus on fundamentally transforming how the key food systems issues are framed.

Industrial food has for decades been successfully framed as a modern, efficient path to abundance, despite its unsustainable nature. Community-embedded initiatives interested in more-than-market contributions struggle with the extent to which such framing has permeated policy. As policy reforms begin in the wake of the pandemic, it will be critical to ensure that recognition of such contributions is integrated into policy discussions. This needs to happen systematically and comprehensively, and not just as an add-on to economic considerations.

REFRAMING FOOD ECONOMIES

Urgent need for food policy changes is no longer debatable. What is still up for debate is what kinds of changes are needed. History shows that the inherently political nature of policy[3] means that evidence alone rarely generates adequate change, due to diverging priorities among actors, including policymakers. Conflicting priorities sometimes translate into actors speaking past each other, or what some scholars describe as intractable policy problems—stubborn policy disagreements complicated by the actors' conflicting frames (Schon and Rein, 1995; McIntyre et al., 2018). We have seen this play out in political forums around the globe in the context of COVID-19, with public health pitted against economy, as if these inextricable issues were separate from—and in competition with—each other. One possible way to address intractable policy problems can be found in frame reflection (Schon and Rein, 1995). Frame reflection refers to efforts to identify and analyze conflicting frames, and understand and transform how frames are constructed (McIntyre et al., 2018).

As one approach to frame reflection, Nourishing Communities' researchers have utilized Gibson-Graham's "diverse economies" (2008). While not the only possible approach, and perhaps not even the best one in certain contexts,[4] it can pave way for reframing values in food systems (Ballamingie et al., 2019; Marshman and Knezevic, 2021). Diverse economies framework conceptualizes economy as a wider frame. In addition to formal (monetary) economy, it recognizes "the plethora of hidden and alternative economic activities that contribute to social well-being and environmental regeneration" (Gibson-Graham, 2008, p. 618). The model is frequently represented by an iceberg image where the smaller, visible portion of the iceberg above the surface represents monetary economy. The larger, below-the-surface part of the iceberg encompasses unpaid labour like child and elder care, co-operative and do-it-yourself models, arts and cultural work, education, non-profits, public services, and so on. Two aspects of this framework are notable. First, by referring to these activities as "economies" the approach declares monetary economy as inseparable from non-monetary initiatives. Second, when visually represented by the iceberg, the framework demonstrates that other activities play an even larger role in human and non-human life, and that monetary exchanges rely on the foundation of more-than-monetary contributions. Put simply, a community that values these other dimensions and can build on them is more likely to also develop a sustainable and more equitable monetary economy. Community support that transpired during the COVID-19 pandemic, for local organizations and small food businesses, speaks directly to this.

Gibson-Graham's concept of diverse economies is widely adopted by social and economic geographers, but remains underutilized in communication studies. Although the framework has not been without its critics (Samers, 2005; Ossewaarde and Reijers, 2017), it offers an opportunity to reframe community-embedded food initiatives. Unlike many other theoretical frameworks, this one is highly accessible and it resonates, at least among the Nourishing Communities partners, with community-embedded food initiatives committed to social and environmental wellbeing. The iceberg image has assisted partners in 1) reflecting on their work to recognize their significant albeit barely acknowledged contributions beyond revenue-generation, and 2) articulating this new understanding into how they present their work to funders, supporters, collaborators, and media. The framework can open a pathway to better communication and thus more accurate valuing of their work—a possible way out their communication conundrum. Research on a hospital garden, for example, allowed the partners to taut their work as "concrete evidence" of the multiple benefits of food gardens that in the long run justify initial financial investment (CBC News, 2016). When monetary economy is pitted against other social values, sound policy solutions are difficult to reach. Reframing food systems in terms of diverse economies can open doors to policymaking that favours investments (monetary and otherwise) in a diverse range of actors. These may be financial, but can also come in the form of tax incentives, land access, or any number of other social investments.

Partners in the Nourishing Communities network offer a promising glimpse into how food systems can be transformed by organizations that insist on focusing on more-than-economic successes. Seed-saving organizations like Seeds of Diversity (https://seeds.ca/) produce value in biodiversity, food literacy, knowledge conservation and exchange, and social capital (Worden-Rogers et al., 2019), relying on grants that support this critical social infrastructure. Food Share in Toronto provides subsidized fresh produce while advocating for social equity (https://foodshare.net/). Funding for such community food centres is an investment that can offset public costs of diet-related disease and social marginalization (often intertwined with un/underemployment, mental health, etc.) (Mikkonen and Raphael, 2010). In Canada's capital city, the food systems organization Just Food Ottawa (https://

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[3]Unlike the English language, some languages do not distinguish the political decision-making from the resulting directives and programs and use the same word for "politics" and "policy".

[4]The Nourishing Communities network has always been firmly grounded in its position that food solutions are place-specific. Various models of community food work can be informative and inspiring, but they can only in rare circumstances be replicated in their exact forms in other communities.

justfood.ca/), arranged with the regional planning and conservation commission to affordably lease a 160-acre farm property for 25 years. The land remains part of the city's "greenbelt" while providing spaces for new farmer training, public education, famers' market, and community events. In Nova Scotia, Farm Works Investment Co-operative (https://farmworks.ca/) provides low-interest micro-loans and ample mentorship to local farmers and food businesses. It has transformed local food in the province, but its financial model is only possible because of very generous provincial tax incentives for community economic development investments (Stephens et al., 2019b). Small Scale Food Processors Association (https://www.ssfpa.net/) based in British Columbia and partly supported by government grants, provides training and mentorship for small businesses, helping them develop products, processes, and business plans, and thus access more financing options. The community-led Ka'a'gee Tu Atlas in the Northwest Territories (https://kaageetuatlas.wordpress.com/), partly funded by provincial and federal governments, provides an online tool that tracks environmental changes affecting the land and in turn Indigenous food ways in the region. The examples only scratch the surface of what is possible if we think about food through the lens of diverse economies, as each of them is motivated by more than monetary rewards. These organizations vary in how and if they use the framework—implicitly or explicitly—but without fail recognize themselves in it whenever the framework is part of network consultations.

DISCUSSION

The Nourishing Communities network has over the years documented countless community-embedded food initiatives—formal and informal organizations and community-embedded small businesses—that produce value. That value is not always monetary, but all of it is still fundamental to thriving monetary economies. Mapping out such initiatives reveals that their distribution is uneven (Nelson et al., 2013) and their existence often precarious. Nevertheless, they are essential for resilient, sustainable food systems. To develop and strengthen such systems, a systemic transformation is needed and it will require a major discursive shift (see also Gordon and Hunt, 2019).

Reframing food economies as diverse economies is one possible way to stimulate the discursive shift that expands policy possibilities. Support for diverse food actors can no longer be haphazard. COVID-19 has exposed the cracks in food systems, which if left unchecked can result in dire consequences. The pandemic has made it urgent to construct new framings that can bridge the gap between the economy-focused institutions and those diverse actors with multiple and intertwined values.

As geographers, Gibson-Graham left an indelible footprint on the geographies of food research, but their work has made few inroads into communication scholarship. Their notion of diverse economies can help frame community-embedded food initiatives as valuable beyond market-economy measurements. That framing offers new possibilities for "alternative" food, and for more general discussions of social reform. Practitioners and scholars can find a useful tool in diverse economies of food. This tool can stimulate food system transformation by transforming how we work with food, and how we speak and write about it.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/Supplementary Material, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

The author confirms being the sole contributor of this work and has approved it for publication.

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frontiers
in Communication

We Still Have to Eat: Communication Infrastructure and Local Food Organizing as Public Health Responses to COVID-19 in Greensboro, North Carolina

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Food insecurity remains a pervasive and persistent social justice concern, both locally and globally–a concern that was heightened during the COVID-19 pandemic. This essay focuses on three short case studies around local food organizing, communication, and community in Greensboro, NC. Partners across three separate but related interventions leveraged their community and communication resources through listening sessions, surveys, and stories to ensure that individuals and families could continue to access food during the uncertainty of the COVID-19 pandemic. By offering these case studies as an example of organizing (and reorganizing) during COVID-19, the analysis also opens up a conversation about power, resistance, and change at the intersections of poverty and access. Scholarly discussions of food insecurity continue to reinforce the need to address both food access and poverty in attempts to build resilient food systems. We take a community-engaged approach that emphasizes the importance of communication infrastructure to illustrate both the simple and mundane resources as well as the creative and innovative interventions that communities and their partners implemented during the initial onset of COVID-19 in the United States.

Keywords: food security, community engagement, communication infrastructure, local food organizing, food access, resilience

INTRODUCTION

In March 2020, when stay-at-home orders and social distancing practices related to COVID-19 began emerging in the U.S., most public health messages emphasized behaviors and practices related primarily to the spread of the disease between individuals and across groups. Wash your hands. Stay six feet apart. Wear a mask in public. Alongside these messages, a similarly-important set of conversations developed around local food systems and the need for community-based and culture-centered health messaging. Health, organizational, and environmental communication scholars were quick to highlight the importance of communication infrastructure in reorganizing health practices (e.g., Dutta et al., 2020), particularly as it related to local food systems and practices (Schraedley et al., 2020).

The need for secure food systems that are accessible and affordable comes into sharp—and sometimes stark—relief during a global pandemic. Grocery stores and their employees were labeled essential. Restaurants closed or converted to curbside and delivery systems. Farmers markets and food pantries scrambled to create contactless and socially-distanced distribution models. School districts enacted networks to get food to students who were now learning at home (Hodgin, 2020).

From the consumer-side of food system, people hoarded food and resources purchased from grocery stores—particularly meat, non-perishable food items, and we are certain few will ever forget, toilet paper (Kunkle and Ruane, 2020). At the same time, individuals and families sometimes struggled to find food—especially when someone in their household either lost a job or could not work because of how city, county, and/or state-level policies impacted their place of work (Sy, 2020).

The ways in which local stakeholders adjusted, reorganized, and in some cases created new relationships across food systems served as a reminder that even during a pandemic we still have to eat. As we consider how communication is tied intricately to food systems and practices, particularly during periods of crisis, we find it prudent to document how communities responded to growing concerns around food security at the initial onset of COVID-19.

This essay features three, short case examples that illustrate public health and community-based responses to reorganizing food in Greensboro, NC during COVID-19 stay-at-home orders and initial social-distancing phases. We emphasize the importance of communication infrastructure in a community's capacity to quickly develop public health and food systems interventions during a period of extreme uncertainty and reorganizing, like a global pandemic. After drawing theoretical connections between communication infrastructure, public health interventions, and local food organizing, we focus on how school meal programs, farmers markets, and community food networks relied on existing communication infrastructure to help individuals and families secure food in the midst of a pandemic.

LOCAL FOOD ORGANIZING AND HEALTH COMMUNICATION INFRASTRUCTURE

To illustrate how public health and food systems interventions apply not only to individual health behaviors related to COVID-19, but also how communities reorganized local food systems and practices amidst the spread of the virus, we ground our work in the importance of communication infrastructure as it relates to health communication messaging and interventions (Kim and Ball-Rokeach, 2006; Dutta and Thaker, 2019). In particular, we emphasize the relationships, networks, organizations, and policies that invite participation from multiple stakeholders and remain committed to community-based and community-driven organizing. This kind of communication infrastructure draws from some of the core concepts related to Communication Infrastructure Theory, but perhaps more critically, we rely on key extensions of the term as it relates to Culture-Centered-Approaches to Communication (CCA) and similar advancements that emphasize community voices (Dutta, 2012; LeGreco and Douglas, 2021).

Communication Infrastructure for Community-Based Interventions

Communication infrastructure frequently emphasizes various material and social resources, policies, and practices through which communities and institutions can mobilize responses to

uncertainty and risk, as well as community-identified needs for change and equity. The creation and ownership of communication infrastructure can be facilitated through neighborhood storytelling networks (Kim and Ball-Rokeach, 2006; see also; Dutta, 2012; Dutta et al., 2013; Dutta and Thaker, 2019; Wilkin et al., 2010; Wilkin, 2013), community organizations and local planning committees (Heath et al., 2002), hyperlocal and community-owned media (Dutta; LeGreco et al., 2015; Wilkin, 2013). Examples of communication infrastructure frequently include local stories and spaces for community dialogue, as well as media technologies that enable community conversations and engagement.

Communication Infrastructure Theory (CIT) suggests that communities must create the social fabric that keeps individuals connected (Kim and Ball-Rokeach, 2006). These connections are not simply given, rather we build relationships through sharing stories, engaging in social interactions, collectively building policies, and organizing in ways that decenter power and instead center culture and community voices (Dutta and de Souza, 2008; Dutta, 2012; Dutta et al., 2013). In this way, the creation of a densely-connected communication infrastructure establishes a foundation for civic engagement and social activism, which can help community members prepare for when they must work together—across neighborhood and organizations—to address collective health crises, like the pandemic spread of COVID-19.

Communication infrastructure enables and constrains collective efficacy in communities, which frequently operates through four dimensions—a perceived willingness to intervene, local political control, a mix of community and instrumental support, and shared organizational participation (Sampson et al., 1999; Kim and Ball-Rokeach, 2006). Communication infrastructure includes identifying and strengthening storytelling networks among neighborhoods. These networks involve not only narratives about personal experiences, but also a wide range of communication strategies used to construct the story of a community—including sharing stories with the media, policy advocacy, healthy eating campaigns, community celebrations, and documenting neighborhood events and activities. For example, in her review of applications of CIT, Wilkin (2013) highlighted the ways in which neighborhood-level influences, like a lack of access to healthier food options in low-income neighborhoods, can reproduce structurally-constituted health disparities. Communities with strong storytelling networks and a high sense of collective efficacy have a more developed capacity to mobilize both material and human resources to address these neighborhood-level disparities. A key piece of the efficacy surrounding these storytelling networks, however, is their sustained organizing through residents and their social networks, community organizations, and hyperlocal media. This notion of sustained organizing is explored further through more culture-centered approaches to building communication infrastructure.

Culture-centered approaches, community-based and community-driven organizing, narratives, and communication technologies are all necessarily related to communication infrastructure (Kim and Ball-Rokeach, 2006; Harter et al., 2017; Dutta and Thaker, 2019; Dutta et al., 2020; LeGreco and

Douglas, 2021). For example, the Culture-Centered Approach (CCA) to communication (Dutta, 2012), and more recent extensions of this approach to pandemic communication (Dutta et al., 2020), emphasize the centrality of culture and community in designing health interventions. Centering culture in health interventions "anchors communicative responses to pandemics in community voices, constituted in the work of everyday organizing" (Dutta et al., 2020, p.2), but it does so in a way that prioritizes accountability to the community. In doing so, CCA frequently support radical forms of organizing that rejects neo-liberal efforts to co-opt as opposed to center community voices.

Perhaps the most essential concept provided by the CCA to our analysis of local food organizing amidst changes related to COVID-19 is the concept of infrastructures of listening (Dutta et al., 2013; Dutta, 2018; Dutta and Thaker, 2019). Infrastructures of listening create space for people to share stories and experiences from perspectives that are often relegated to the margins. By regularly and engaging these stories, requiring the voices who are routinely centered to decenter themselves and listen, and doing so in ways that are necessarily facilitated by infrastructure, communities can work across a mix of community and instrumental support to develop messages and interventions that are more meaningful during rapid responses to pandemics and other uncertain, insecure, risky, or critical health situations. At the same time, neighborhood-level interventions and research partnerships that adopt culture-centered approaches caution against performative listening, in which storytelling networks and can create the illusion of participation from the community, while reproducing power relationships that re-center the interests of more dominant voices (Dutta, 2018; Dutta and Thaker, 2019).

Second only to infrastructures of listening, we also argue that existing networks and partnerships are vital components of communication infrastructure. Sustained partnerships between universities and communities, non-profit and civic organizations, local governments, and neighborhood-level leadership are important when it comes to creating the social fabric that is necessary for collective action (Jovanovic et al., 2015). For example, in their study of communication infrastructure within the context of risk communication, Heath et al., (2002), compared both local emergency planning committees and community advisory committees, only to find that neither structure had a meaningful influence on their communities' practices and awareness of risks. Rather, the structures required a more active and routine engagement with individuals and communities in order to prompt action at the neighborhood level. Building on strong partnerships reinforces the need for reciprocity, or the mutual benefits that partners experience by participating in the sometimes arduous and often exhausting process of designing health messages and interventions that can organize and reorganize everyday practices—like figuring out how to adapting eating practices during the food shortages, store closings, and other changes during pandemic stay-at-home orders.

These infrastructures of listening and existing networks, alongside related dimensions of CIT—like the mix of community and instrumental support—can be crucial to the design of public health and food systems interventions, especially those that invite participation from multiple individuals and organizations across a community. Communication infrastructure does not emerge overnight, and when communities must coordinate actions and work collectively during periods of uncertainty and crisis—such as a pandemic—community members must act quickly and decisively to enact the shared resources required to change health practices. We continue to examine this need for communication infrastructure in the context of local food organizing.

Local Food Organizing as a Form of Communication Infrastructure

Communication practices and structures related to food security—and related concepts of food insecurity, food justice, and food sovereignty—have generated an important conversation among health, risk, and organizational communication scholars (Schraedley et al., 2020; see also; Pine and de Souza, 2013; Dutta et al., 2015; Okamoto, 2016; LeGreco and Douglas, 2017; Dougherty et al., 2018; Gordon and Hunt, 2019; Dutta et al., 2020; Ivancic, 2020). With an emphasis on local storytelling, decentralized power, environmental and economic justice, community engagement, and creating shared resources, this compelling body of research interrogates current food systems, policies, and practices and asks what we can organize together, as communities, to ensure equity and reduce disparities across our food systems. Perhaps most notably, this body of research has centered practices of creating communication infrastructure as necessary components of health communication that addresses food security.

Local food organizing to ensure equity adds a layer of complexity to this conversation by returning to the idea that even in a pandemic, people still have to eat. Changes to everyday eating practices during COVID-19 stay-at-home orders and social distancing practices have meant that consumers navigated changes in how they shopped for, ordered, and purchased food *alongside* the recommendations to wear a mask, socially distance, and avoid contact with large crowds. Additionally, food providers, distributors, and retailers have changed how they get food to people, including the implementation of mask requirements, new signage to control traffic flow in grocery stores and at farmers markets, increased food handling safety, and drive-thru food distribution. These changes require creative and advanced communication interventions that make it feasible for people to secure food during an insecure and uncertain situation.

Building communication infrastructure involves not only dialogue and deliberation about the ideas, problems, and solutions within a community, but also strategic efforts to coordinate groups and individuals who often hold different priorities (Sandy and Holland, 2006; Bloomgarden and O'Meara, 2007). Engaging in this kind of work through local food organizing frequently involves evidence-based strategies across short, medium, and long-term community engagement in local food systems. Community-based communication infrastructure, especially in the context of securing food during

a pandemic, might focus the short-term organizing and likely includes documenting available resources, counseling communities on maximizing those resources; identifying quality and quantity inequities across neighborhoods; educating consumers about food resources (McCullum et al., 2005).

These strategies and conversations for building communication infrastructure through local food organizing emphasize the centrality of communication and community voices in organizing food responses during any periods of food insecurity. Moreover, they create the necessary conditions for individuals and communities to engage with institutions in complex dialogues, policy conversations, and critical reflection on topics like food systems reform (Gordon and Hunt, 2019). In other words, communication infrastructure as it relates to local food organizing can aid communities and researchers as they address food security and related questions of accessibility and affordability, food justice and questions of equity and power, and food sovereignty and the abilities of communities to build their own food systems and practices. Simply including community voices and supporting community-organized efforts, however, does not always ensure that food systems will magically become secure; that puts an impossible amount of pressure on community members to have the resources and capacity to deliver highly nuanced solutions to increasingly difficult problems. Because working with food systems means working with such a diversity of stakeholders, local food organizing has come to rely on the creation of communication infrastructure to manage the design, implementation, and evaluation of public health messages and environmental interventions aimed at food security, food justice, and/or food sovereignty. Researchers are increasingly called to align their work with a variety of communities and partners to facilitate discussions, implement and evaluate interventions, organize and manage institutional memory, and work with partners to create sustainable, community-driven action.

When applied to the specific context of organizing and reorganizing local food systems and practices as a response to COVID-19, that means some of these conversations must already be mobilized. But with an intentional and well-developed communication infrastructure with a goal of food security, communities have an opportunity to leverage that infrastructure into more nuanced and perhaps effective methods for designing public health messages and interventions. Such forms of organizing can help communities navigate periods of food insecurity—like those related to COVID-19 stay-at-home order and social distancing practices.

To further consider the centrality of communication infrastructure in public health and food systems responses to COVID-19, we pose the following research questions:

RQ1: In what ways can communication infrastructure provide necessary resources for communities to respond and reorganize during periods of crisis and uncertainty?

RQ2: How can long-term investments in communication infrastructure aid communities in reorganizing local food systems during a global pandemic?

RQ 3: In what ways can communication infrastructure help communities focus conversations during the initial onset of a crisis or period of uncertainty?

RESEARCH METHODS: THREE SHORT CASES OF SECURING FOOD AMIDST A CRISIS

Our case study approach takes us to Greensboro, NC—a medium-sized city in the southeastern United States. With a population of approximately 270,000 and a metropolitan area of just over 5,00,000, Greensboro sits within Guilford County, which is home to a racially-diverse set of communities and one of the largest immigrant and refugee populations in the state. On March 10, 2020, North Carolina Governor Roy Cooper declared a state of emergency in response to the spread of COVID-19, and local stakeholders began organizing in earnest to identify health resources in Greensboro (Exec. Order No. 116, 2020). Shortly after, on March 14, North Carolina closed all public schools and prohibited gatherings of more than 100 people (Exec. Order No. 117, 2020). Stay-at-home orders were announced on March 27, 2020 through an executive order signed by Governor Cooper (Exec. Order No. 121, 2020), with the support of the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services (NCDHHS). North Carolina then moved into a phased reopening process on May 5, 2020 (Exec. Order No. 138, 2020), with the state transitioning to Safer at Home recommendation and Phase 2 on May 20 (Exec. Order No. 141, 2020) and Phase 3 on September 30 (Exec. Order No. 169, 2020). Modified stay-at-home orders were lifted on February 24, 2021 (Exec. Order No. 195, 2021), and the state moved to a new model of easing restrictions for gathering in public, which included restrictions related to wearing masks in public, customer capacities for businesses, and general practices for social distancing. This timeline for stay-at-home and social distancing orders also shaped how individuals and families secured food, as these orders also identified grocery stores and farmers markets as essential services, closed restaurants initially and reopened them at reduced capacity under Phase 2, and required people to adjust—or in some cases completely change—their eating and shopping habits as most meals moved to the home.

To sufficiently frame Greensboro as an appropriate site to consider community-based responses and public health messaging and interventions related to COVID-19, we must take readers back to 2009, when food access and food insecurity was first identified by the Guilford County Department of Health and Human Services (GCDHHS) as a public health concern in Greensboro. As part of their Community Health Assessment (CHA) process, the county's epidemiologist first highlighted health disparities in food access—namely limited access to grocery stores alongside high rates of heart disease and diabetes—among low-income neighborhoods in Greensboro. In what the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) would later call "food deserts," the county's epidemiologist worked alongside community and university partners to start conversations with local residents about the kinds of resources they wanted to create in their neighborhoods. These conversations would later inform his 2010 CHA report (Smith and Mrosla, 2010), and food access remained a priority in subsequent CHA reports for 2013 and 2016 (Smith and Mrosla, 2013, Smith and Mrosla, 2016).

Amidst these local conversations about food access and insecurity, Greensboro would also make a climb on the Food Research and Action Center's (FRAC) list of major metropolitan cities experiencing food hardship—a term FRAC defines as very similar to food insecurity and focuses on poverty and access. After making local headlines when it reached the #4 spot in 2012 (FRAC, 2012), Greensboro topped the list in 2015 (FRAC, 2015). During this time, local food organizers across Greensboro would institute several practices to help build communication infrastructure that could be leveraged into community-based and community-driven food resources. For example, in 2012, the first author worked with several non-profit groups and Guilford County health and agriculture agencies to organize a two-part community forum called Food for Thought. Hosted at the Interactive Resource Center, a day center serving Greensboro's homeless community, this forum brought together leaders from local government, individuals and organizations involved in health advocacy, non-profit and faith-based groups, and everyday community members to imagine what was possible in when it came to our local food system. Out of these conversations grew a series of local interventions and sustained communication infrastructure, some of which played vital roles in Greensboro's messaging and interventions around food access, and some of which we will discuss later in the case studies. This type of communication infrastructure created some necessary social fabric for local food organizers to begin increasing food access in Greensboro and improve our FRAC rankings to ninth in 2016 (FRAC, 2016) and #14 in 2018 (FRAC, 2018).

In many ways, COVID-19 has tested the communication infrastructure that we have been building around food in Greensboro since 2009. So that when COVID-19 cases started to increase in the U.S., stakeholders in Greensboro were able to organize resources quickly, network numerous partners to manage our local food systems, implement local interventions to help individuals and communities adjust their eating and shopping practices, and do so in ways that prioritized food access. The short cases featured in the remainder of this essay highlight how multiple stakeholders drew upon communication infrastructure around local food organizing to assist both providers and consumers in adjusting food access, eating and shopping habits, and distribution practices in response to COVID-19. Before we examine some of the communication strategies and local food interventions that constitute these case studies, we offer a quick framing of our data collection and analysis.

Data Collection

This essay is part of a much larger and ongoing effort to examine changes in local food organizing and food security as part of the National Communication Association's Center for Communication, Community Collaboration, and Change (NCA Center). The authors are part of the Communication Studies Department that was selected as the inaugural program for what is designed to become a rotating center to promote the communication ethics highlighted in the Center's title. The authors of this manuscript received funding from NCA to work alongside a

local farmers market initiative—the Neighborhood Markets—to focus on food access and food justice in low-income communities. As such, the qualitative case studies included here are presented as preliminary data, from both the Neighborhood Markets project and other community-based efforts, that document some initial and immediate observations that we considered relevant to food systems communication amid compounding crises.

Data collection for this project is rooted in multiple, related qualitative and community-based research projects related to food security and food justice in Greensboro, NC. The first author has been immersed in local food organizing from a community-based perspective since 2009, when she began partnering with the Guilford County Department, several non-profit organizations that focus on food access, and numerous neighborhoods with low food access and high rates of poverty. As such, she has a long history of working across communities to build the kinds of communication infrastructure that are needed during the reorganization of food systems during a pandemic. Data collection also included participation from a larger research team, which included the second and third authors, as well as a research partnership with market managers and farmers from the Neighborhood Markets project, although the latter group's participation focused exclusively on the third case study featured in this essay. In particular, the second and third authors were funded through the NCA Center to provide research support, including survey construction and on-site interviews with vendors and customers, as well as technical support, including content production and website development for the Neighborhood Market partners.

The short case study examples included in this essay are informed by the following qualitative sources of data:

- The first author's participation in a series of public meetings hosted by Guilford County Schools and a local foundation to enact a school meal network for students who were now staying at home. Meetings were hosted weekly, starting in March and moved to bi-weekly or monthly starting when North Carolina moved into Phase 2 on May 22. The first author attended four meetings between March 16 and May 22, and the research team collected meeting minutes and zoom recordings for the remaining meetings that have been made publicly available.
- The first author's coordination of multiple stakeholder and community members in the creation of a Greater Greensboro Food Resources guide, which directed people who were now required to stay home to available food resources that individuals could obtain through limited or no contact and within local and state policy guidelines. The first author kept detailed field notes and email exchanges to reconstruct the case study examples, and the research team track and monitored guide use through both bitly.com and Google analytics.
- The research team's documentation of a community-based partnership with the Neighborhood Markets, a collaboration between two farmers markets—the Corners Farmers Market and the People's Market in Greensboro—who are working to promote equitable food access through neighborhood-based

food markets. The first author began working with the Neighborhood Markets to help develop a sustainability plan for their Green4Greens program, which is designed to double the dollars for customers who use SNAP/EBT to purchase food items at either market. That work transformed into an effort to keep the Corner Farmers Market open during COVID-19 stay-at-home orders. This case includes 25 individuals interviews that were conducted through face-to-face, online, and phone conversations, as well as 55 online surveys. Both the survey and the interviews included questions to assess how/if participants' eating and shopping habits have changed, as well as how the market has responded to customer and vendor needs to access food.

Data Analysis

Considering that this project is ongoing, our data analysis continues to develop as we work alongside our research partners. At the same time, the authors were able to isolate some initial insights that focus on the design and implementation of public health and local food interventions and demonstrate the creative products of an intentional communication infrastructure. Our analysis draws from iterative and constant-comparative methods of analyzing qualitative data from numerous sources (Strauss and Corbin, 1997; Tracy, 2019), as well as discourse tracing methods of establishing timelines to reconstruct case studies (LeGreco and Tracy, 2009). We engaged in both open and axial coding to make connections between existing communication infrastructure and the emergence of new needs related to securing food during stay-at-home orders. We also focused on documenting processes, as well as integrating tracking and monitoring data to illustrate how communication played a part in local interventions around food. We refined our observations to identify the core pieces of each narrative and provide useful insights for engaged food systems communication scholars and organizers.

FOOD AND COMMUNICATION INFRASTRUCTURE IN RESPONSE TO COVID-19

When stay-at-home orders were implemented in North Carolina on March 27, 2020, local food stakeholders—including grassroots organizers, local businesses, and city and county health agencies—had already been partnering to reorganize food resources and create new mechanisms to access and distribute food. The following three examples illustrate some of the key features of communication infrastructure that enabled strategic interventions and related public health messaging to help individuals and families find food as COVID-19 cases began to spread. We focus specifically on the time period between March 27 and May 2, which encompasses the initial stay-at-home and social distancing orders through the Phase 2 reopenings. We also offer supplemental stories and examples that continued through October 2, when NC moved into Phase 3 reopenings and additional easing of restrictions. In doing so, we pay particular attention to how communities responded and

reorganized during that initial onset of uncertainty and reorganizing during the pandemic. Each case study speaks to each of the three research questions on some level. The first case study emphasizes existing communication infrastructure around school meal programs as its central feature, while the second case highlights how the collective documentation of resources serves a sustainable way to aid communities and community organizations in finding food resources, and the third case study focuses on the ways that a grassroots farmers market community engaged its customers and vendors to navigate the initial period of uncertainty. Across these cases is an attempt to identify the communication infrastructures that individuals, communities, and institutions turned to initially during those early phases of COVID-19 reorganizing.

Securing School Meals Through Community-Based Infrastructure

On March 14, 2020, Guilford County Schools (GCS) announced that public schools would be closed, likely through the end of the 2019–2020 the school year, and remaining instruction would move online. Within 3 days of this announcement—on March 17—GCS launched a 33-site school meal network, which allowed the school system to provide supplemental school meal programs and additional food resources for students who would now be learning from home. As part of this school meal network, any person who was 18 years old or younger, regardless of their enrollment status at GCS, could pick up a grab and go meal between 11:30 am and 12:30 pm, Monday through Friday. Food was provided through the USDA's National School Lunch Program (NSLP) in partnership with GCS, and pickup locations included local recreation centers, faith-based organizations, and existing food pantry drop sites.

The implementation of the school meal network, particularly the speed with which GCS was able to launch a highly-coordinated, 33-site intervention, can be traced in part to community-based communication infrastructure and existing food networks that could support such an endeavor. The GCS school meal network was modeled after Greensboro's summer meal network—a grassroots effort launched in 2015 in partnership with the City of Greensboro's Community Food Task Force—which provided supplemental meals during the month of August. During June and July, the NSLP provided access to food directly through the school systems; however, August was considered a "gap month," in that the NSLP did not provide food to students—some of whom were dependent on school meals for daily access to food. To fill that "gap month," local food organizers had created a densely-connected network of food pantries, faith-based organizations, recreation centers, and other neighborhood partners to ensure access to meals for students when the NSLP could not. With support from the city's Community Food Task Force, the summer meal network had already been effectively filling food gaps for students for 5 years before COVID-19 disrupted food access during the 2019–2020 school year.

Both the summer meal network and the GCS school meal network that was modeled after it in response to COVID-19 can

be traced even further back to the 2012 Food for Thought event that we first mentioned in the previous section. The two-part event started with a community viewing of the film *A Place at the Table*, followed by presentations from Guilford County's Department of Social Services (GCDSS) and several non-profit and community-based organizers about the landscape of food access and SNAP/EBT usage in Greensboro. Two weeks later, participants were invited back for part two, which featured several breakout groups that asked people to imagine the food resources and communities they would like to build in their neighborhoods. Out of these small-group discussions grew several interventions that contributed to Greensboro's communication infrastructure around food, like mobile farmers markets and local food policy councils. One of the breakout sessions focused on providing meals for K-12 students to fill the "gap month" when the NSLP did not operate. That session and the momentum generated through the Food for Thought event would inspire service groups—like a local Greensboro chapter of Rotary International—to spark conversations with food pantries and backpack programs, neighborhood leaders, representatives from the City's Parks and Recreation Department, and other food stakeholders to create the summer meal network.

As such, when the increasing cases of COVID-19 forced the closure of schools in Guilford County in March 2020, GCS was not completely unprepared to manage local food needs for their students. They simply tapped into the existing relationships, networks, and communication infrastructure that had been established to fill previous gaps in food access for students. In doing so, GCS also enacted an intervention and a structure with which many students were already familiar, as some of them were already accustomed to visiting the grab and go distribution sites during the summer months. Thus, community-based organizing and communication infrastructure played a key role in GCS's quick response to school closings related to COVID-19, because they provided a foundation from which local partners could quickly develop interventions to ensure food access for students.

Moreover, these existing networks reinforce the importance of sustained communication, storytelling, and world-building (Jovanovic et al., 2015) in the service of securing food during periods of insecurity. Threads of the school meal network connect back to conversations that were started through community-based dialogues and opportunities for neighborhood-driven storytelling 8 years before the network was needed during the COVID-19 pandemic. This kind of sustained communication can help communities build the kinds of infrastructure that become useful over time for a variety of stakeholders.

Coordinating Food Access Through Documenting Resources

The dialogues and interventions that were initiated around food access for K-12 students also created the conditions to amplify other food resources that were available during COVID-19 social distancing and stay-at-home orders. At one of the weekly, public meetings hosted by GCS in March 2020, the first author was asked to speak about additional efforts to organize food resources, especially considering that increasing numbers of Greensboro

residents were left without work due to COVID-19 closings. Combined with short-term food shortages, due primarily to overbuying and hoarding at the start of the pandemic, the reduction of income faced by many individuals and families meant that some would struggle to find food and most residents would need to adjust their shopping and eating habits in at least some way. During that meeting, the first author challenged partners to begin working on a coordinated list of local food resources that could be made available to Greensboro residents in a format that was both easily shareable and updateable. As she mentioned to the group, "you all are working so hard to create and coordinate some very useful resources, but if no one knows about them, no one is going to use them."

From that meeting in mid-March, a small group of local food organizers branched off from the K-12 schools conversation to begin assembling the Greater Greensboro Food Resources guide, as well as a similar guide for neighboring High Point. With UNC-Greensboro's Lifetime Eating and Physical Activity Program (LEAP) and the Greater High Point Food Alliance coordinating the conversation, organizers created a Google Doc that could direct people to food resources in their respective communities. Organizers settled on a Google Doc as a method of distributing information, because we could create a document that linked users directly to the organizations and communities providing the resources, and we could do so using a platform that was easily updateable and shareable across websites, social media pages, and email listservs. The document centered communication infrastructure, specifically the creation of communication resources that could be shared across a variety of media, as a mechanism for disseminating public health messages related to securing food during the spread of COVID-19.

The Greater Greensboro and Greater High Point Food Resources featured a dashboard that helped us streamline how users could access information that was most relevant for their needs. The dashboard featured six components—food assistance, grocery store information, local farms and farmers markets, local restaurants for takeout and delivery, volunteer, and donate. Within each link from the dashboard, users were directed to a collection of resources and information that had been sourced by local food organizations and community members. For example, under "Food Assistance," users could find links to the GCS school meal network and other food support for K-12 students. They could also find information about food pantry locations and drive-up free meals being offered to community members through local non-profit organizations. Under "Grocery Store Information," the resources guide provided updated information about grocery store hours, special hours for seniors, and mask policies before statewide mask ordinances were instituted. Through the "Local Restaurants for Takeout & Delivery" links, users were taken to websites and social media pages that had been organized by neighborhood associations to identify restaurants that remained opened, albeit in a different capacity. Users could also access social media pages that documented people's experiences finding food in the midst of a pandemic, like the Greensboro Takeout Facebook page—a site started by a city

councilwoman to share information about local restaurants providing curbside, carryout, and delivery options—as well as the GreensboroBLACK Food Mob—a site started specifically to promote Black-owned restaurants and food businesses who offered those same services.

Local food organizers maintained the Google Doc from March 20 through May 22, primarily as a resource for local residents as they transitioned through stay-at-home orders. During the active use of these resource guides, we accounted for over 2,490 unique views of the Greater Greensboro document and 750 unique views of the High Point document. Document views were concentrated most highly during the first 2 weeks after stay-at-home orders were announced, with use slowly tapering off as Greensboro approached Phase 1 in early May. We suspended updates when Greensboro moved into Phase 2 reopening, and an archive of the Greater Greensboro Food Resources guide remains available at bit.ly/GSOfoodDoc.

The case of the Greater Greensboro and Greater High Point Food Resources guides demonstrated how local food organizers created the conditions for building new and expanding the existing communication infrastructure around food in Greensboro. These coordinated resources proved useful in numerous situations, such as when a single mother of two young children contacted the first author via email about finding food. She was laid off from her job due to COVID-19 and she had recently qualified for the Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) food program; however, her benefits had not yet come through. Due to food shortages at her usual grocery stores, she was having difficulty finding staple items like milk and other food to feed her family. The first author was able to use the Food Resources guide to help her find food pantry drop sites that were providing the food she needed that day, as well as free meal locations to help her find food for the remaining week. Additionally, the guides have carved out space to continue generating resources for communication infrastructure that are owned by and accountable to the community, such as the GreensboroBLACK Food Mob Facebook page. The page has remained active throughout stay-at-home orders and phased reopening, even planning events to support Black-owned restaurants throughout the pandemic.

Creatively Reorganizing Food Access Through an Infrastructure of Listening

Our final case example focuses on the creative reorganization of food access in partnership with the Neighborhood Markets, specifically the Corner Farmers Market in Greensboro. The Corner Market is a grassroots-organized neighborhood market that sits on the border of a middle-income neighborhood, and a neighborhood that the US Department of Agriculture defines as both low-access and low-income (USDA, 2021). The Corner Market was built on a philosophy of creating neighborhood-based food markets that are driven by residents of the communities and geographic areas relative to the market(s). Although some vendors and one of the anchor farms for the Corner Market reside outside the neighborhood, the majority of vendors, organizers, and market managers live within a mile of

the market. The market was established in 2013, and in 2018 began partnering with a fledgling market two neighborhoods across town—the People's Market. They formed the Neighborhood Markets, an umbrella organization that would allow the two markets to share resources, like SNAP/EBT accounts, and provide mutual supports in reaching their customers and vendors.

During a March 9, 2020 meeting of the Neighborhood Markets research team, which included the first author and two of her graduate students, as well as representative from both the Corner Market and the People's Market, the weekly conversation started with plans to develop a website for their combined Green4Greens program. The partnership—including the three members of the research team, as well as our research partners from the community—was funded by NCA's Center for Communication, Community Collaboration, and Change to create a sustainable funding network to double the dollars for SNAP/EBT users at both markets. Early in that March 9 conversation, however, the market manager for the Corner Market brought up rumors that Governor Cooper would declare a state of emergency regarding COVID-19, perhaps as early as that afternoon (the declaration would come the next day). She was concerned about the team's ability to keep the Corner Market open, as well as to open the People's Market for the season.[1] The members of the research team paused the meeting to consider that we might need to focus less on Green4Greens and, at the present moment, concentrate more on how the markets can respond and intervene as communities faced the spread of COVID-19.

Shortly after the state of emergency was declared in North Carolina on March 10, the market manager contacted our state representative to confirm that farmers markets were considered essential space for food access—similar to grocery stores—and would not be subject to closing their doors. The Neighborhood Market partners could then focus on how to reorganize the Corner Farmers Market to respond to COVID-19. We considered options like creating an advance ordering and drive-thru pickup model to keep the market open while promoting social distancing, as well as outlining conditions for when we would close the market, like if the market manager developed symptoms of the virus. But before we chose to implement any of those ideas, we planned to host two listening sessions at the upcoming Corner Market on March 14.

The first listening session was held during the market, primarily for customers, with the first author and an organizer for the People's Market sitting at a market booth with a sandwich board sign that read "Times are Weird, Let's Chat." 18 customers participated in the listening session across the three-hour market. In an effort to adopt social distancing practices, most of the conversations occurred interpersonally (as opposed to in small groups) between the market organizers/research team and the customers. Participants frequently started their conversations

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[1]The Corner Market operates as a year-round market on Saturday mornings, while the People's Market is a seasonal market that operates from April through October on Thursday evenings

with questions, seeking what information market organizers had about the virus and its potential impact on our food system. As one neighborhood resident posited, "you don't think you're going to have to close, do you? One thing you have going for you is that you're outdoors, and I've heard the virus hates sunlight!!" At least two conversations started with attempts to figure out what six-foot social distancing looked like, as people were still becoming accustomed to staying further apart. When pressed on what the markets should be doing, one participant said, "keep doing what you're doing—maybe spread out a little more—until somebody makes you stop," while another said simply "keep the market open as long as possible."

Perhaps these initial comments are not surprising, as we spoke primarily with people who were still shopping at the market even after a state of emergency had been declared for NC; however, these insights were also echoed in the interviews, almost all of which occurred off-site from the market. In these subsequent interviews with Corner Market customers, specifically regarding their concerns about finding food going into stay-at-home orders, one neighborhood resident stated, "it makes me feel better to know that the market is there. That I can get food just down the street. Going into summer, it makes me feel safer to know that I can still get fruits and vegetables that have—quite frankly—passed through fewer hands to get to me." While the listening sessions and interviews gave market organizers confidence that customers would still support the market amidst the growing pandemic, and gave us an opportunity to discuss additional details like the advanced-ordering and drive-thru pick up model, they also gave organizers a clearer understanding of how meaningful a resource the Corner Market had become to the neighborhood. One that residents did not want to lose as restaurants began closing and grocery stores began limiting their hours.

The second listening session was held immediately after the market, on the back porch of one of the anchor farmers, who lived just down the street. Although this meeting was held with vendors, several of the people on the porch also lived in the neighborhood, were customers at the market, and at least one of them used the SNAP/EBT program. Our goal was to assess the community's capacity for continuing to operate, as well as the interests in developing an advanced-ordering and drive-thru pickup model. We reported the quick results from the listening session with the customers, including the interests in developing the advanced-ordering model. The vendors highlighted some of the health practices that they had already implemented, but how some of those practices would not be sustainable over time. As one vendor mentioned, "we brought 100 pairs of disposable gloves, and we went through all of them. We changed gloves for every transaction, and I'm not sure that's something we can afford to keep doing on our own. So having the advanced orders might be really good for us."

The group talked through additional practices, such as providing hand sanitizers, and the likelihood that organizers, vendors, and customers would have to begin wearing masks in the near future. When it came time to make some final calls about keeping the market open and developing a drive-thru, one of the anchor farmers spoke up and said, "whatever you need. We'll

figure it out," and all of the participants agreed. These sessions, with both customers and vendors, introduced the potential for infrastructures of listening (Dutta, 2018; Dutta and Thaker, 2019) as a communication practice that could help the Neighborhood Markets design interventions that could accomplish the goals as outlined by the participants.

The Neighborhood Market partners quickly collaborated to design and implement the advanced-ordering and drive-thru pickup model at the Corner Farmers Market, as suggested by partners at the March 9 meeting and later supported by both the customers and vendors at the listening sessions on March 14. The market manager added a webpage to the Corner Market site that linked customers directly to contact information for individual vendors who were participating. Customers were instructed to contact vendors to order and pay for their items directly. On Saturday mornings, vendors dropped off labeled items at the drive-thru tent, which was located in the parking lot of an adjacent restaurant that remained closed due to COVID-19. Customers had options to walk up or drive through and pick up their orders. Market volunteers also offered limited contact interactions, and they would load purchases into the cars as each customer moved through the line.

This model worked well for customers who were used to ordering online for food, or who could pay ahead directly to the vendor. However, SNAP/EBT users were required through an agreement with the USDA to run their transactions through the market manager; therefore, we created a space for SNAP/EBT users to pay the market manager on pickup, and SNAP/EBT users were the only group of customers who were not required to pay in advance. Once the market manager figured out how to include SNAP/EBT users in the reorganization of the Corner Market, partners began to track participation for the advanced-ordering and drive-thru, as well as well general SNAP/EBT dollars spent at the market.

The advanced-ordering and drive-thru pickup model was launched on May 20 and qualified as an overwhelming success, especially during the period of time between March 27 and May 8, when full stay-at-home orders were in effect. At the height of its usage, 375 advanced orders were fulfilled in a 3-h period, and that level of participation was sustained throughout most of the month of April and parts of May 2020. The research team continued to track advanced orders through November 21, 2020, which is when the Corner Market moved to a more sophisticated system for centralized online ordering and adopted a new method for tracking orders. During this initial time period, the Corner Market fulfilled 5,893 advanced orders. **Figure 1** shows the relationship between use of the advanced-ordering system and the timeline for stay-at-home and phased reopening through Phase 2.

The trends clearly document a relationship between the volume of orders and the various stages of stay-at-home orders and phased reopening. Simple frequency counts demonstrate how advanced order numbers peaked during stay-at-home and fell steadily as Greensboro moved out of Phase 1 and into Phase 2. These observations were also affirmed in the interview and survey data. Of the 55 survey participants, 25 of them identified using the drive-thru pickup
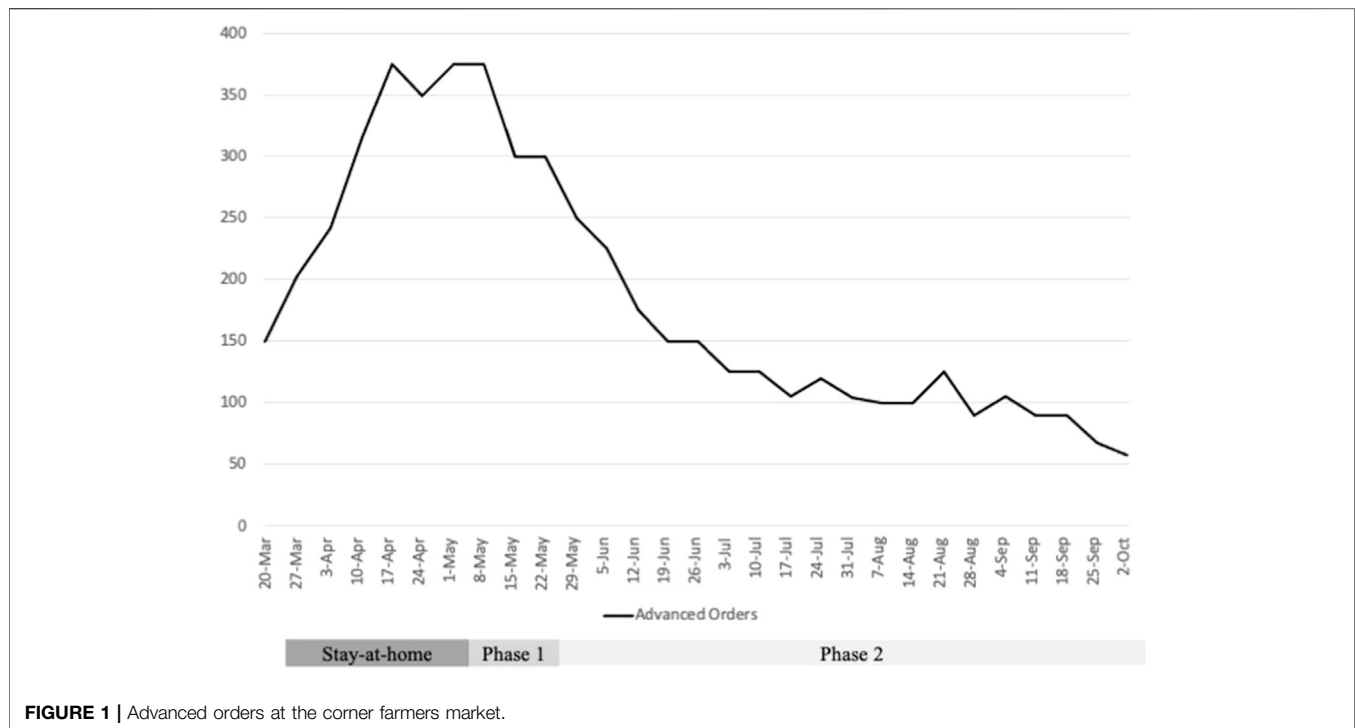
FIGURE 1 | Advanced orders at the corner farmers market.

system as a method for finding food during stay-at-home and social distancing orders. As one participant noted, "The drive-thru was especially important in the very beginning, when you couldn't get a slot at the [regional grocery store] for drive-thru pickup." Another survey participant highlighted how the advanced ordering helped them navigate uncertainty around new risks to their family, stating "we love it!! We have a high risk family member so this makes it possible for us to continue buying goods from the market. If it wasn't available we would not shop at the market." The trends suggest that customers were most reliant on the advanced orders and drive-thru pickup when the local food system was in the greatest flux.

The infrastructures of listening instituted at the Corner Farmers Market allowed for a more nuanced approach to reorganizing access at the market. These practices were beneficial not only for drive-thru customers, but also for SNAP/EBT customers. In a single Saturday in July 2020, the Corner Market doubled more than $700 in SNAP, which was equivalent to what they had doubled in the entire month of July in 2019. SNAP/EBT users noted in personal interviews that the doubling program at the Corner Market helped stretch their food dollars during COVID-19 and as one mom of a special needs child noted, "the program has been a gamechanger, because I'm able to get access to many of the gluten-free foods I need for my daughter." She spoke about noticing an immediate change in the supply chain when it came to gluten-free products, with some grocery stores having limited or no access when products sold out. The benefits provided to SNAP/EBT customers at the Corner Market were also illustrated in the survey data. Although only five of the 55 survey participants reported using SNAP/EBT, four of the five reported facing barriers to finding food. Their responses

included "shortages of stable items at grocery stores" from one SNAP/EBT customer, "general access to food I know I can pay with SNAP," from another, and even "using food stamps" from a survey participant who had recently become SNAP-eligible after losing employment due to COVID-19.

As a response to COVID-19 stay-at-home orders and social distancing, infrastructures of listening alongside existing networks and community-based organizing made reorganizing food systems and local food practices possible at the Corner Market. Although some of the conversations gravitated toward practices that sometimes reified dominant market structures, such as the relationships between customers and vendors and the reliance on SNAP/EBT to provide food assistance, they also created a moment for the organizers and research team to begin collecting stories and building the kinds of storytelling networks and practices that can imbue grassroots markets with a more culture-centered approach. In one of the lengthier and more provocative interview related to COVID-19 reorganizing at the Neighborhood Markets, the first author spoke with someone who was a SNAP/EBT user at the Corner Market and had worked as a vendor at the People's Market. He mentioned how the efforts to reorganize practices at the markets "made everything less scary during COVID-19." Even more, he spoke directly to how he had been able to cultivate his own sense of community through the market, stating "some of the farmers and the folks there are my friends. I met them all through what they were doing. Like, we weren't friends before the market, but now we've even worked on projects together." This participant also highlighted how grassroots markets like the Corner Market and the People's Market are a different kind of model that allows for more decentralized relationships across our food system. "For me,"

he said, "it goes beyond purchasing power when I can support the people I can talk to. There's more of an ability to thrive when things are decentralized."

CONCLUSION

The case studies presented in this essay reinforce the importance of communication infrastructure, both in the design of health and food systems interventions, as well as their application in the context of food security. Examples from school meal programs, community resources guides, and drive-thru pickup models at local farmers markets have illustrated the centrality of communication infrastructure in engaging communities and mobilizing their members to imagine new possibilities for secure food systems. These observations are in line with where both food communication scholars and communication activism scholars are pushing our discipline (e.g., Dutta and Thaker, 2019; Schraedley et al., 2020; LeGreco and Douglas, 2021). These approaches to communication scholarship and practice not only encourage us but frequently compel and even require us, as researchers, to engage directly with the individuals and communities that are involved in the contexts we study. Even going so far as to create structures of community-driven ownership and accountability in organizations and practices we help build.

Taken together, the three cases in Greensboro have clearly demonstrated how existing resources and relationships enabled quick responses when routine food practices changed almost overnight, but the networks that launched these resources and mobilized these relationships did not appear in response to COVID-19. Rather, they reflect almost 10 years of organizing, building trust, changing policies, and communicating across institutions, non-profits, and neighborhoods (LeGreco and Douglas, 2021). In the case of the Corner Farmers Market and the People's Market, for example, the first author had worked with each of the three market managers on separate projects, independent of the markets, before she partnered with them on their Green4Greens and advance ordering system. Each Neighborhood Market partner recognized how we could shift focus from fundraising for SNAP-doubling to advocating for the market to remain open and creating a system to keep vendors and customers connected during COVID-19, because we already knew how to partner with each other from a community-based perspective. Because of this, we recognized the opportunities to enact our infrastructures of listening and reach out to our communities *before* COVID closings threatened to keep us apart; we tested out a creative yet practical way to keep vendors and customers connected to ensure that people still had access to food; and we refocused our attention on supporting our SNAP customers as the reorganizing unfolded. The sister markets have even witnessed an expansion in their capacity during this crisis, as they have maintained a 400% increase in SNAP usage at the markets, compared to their pre-pandemic seasons, and the Corner Farmers Market has

upgraded to a centralized advanced ordering system as a way to permanently expand their services to include the drive-thru pickup.

At the same time, we must also remain cautious as communication researchers who make observations and help design community-driven and community-based interventions, as our work also raises important questions about power and agency, particularly from a culture-centered approach. For example, the practice of hosting listening sessions was introduced to the Neighborhood Market partners in the spirit of the infrastructures of listening as envisioned by Dutta and his various colleagues (2018; Dutta and Thaker, 2019). One aspect of these infrastructures that Dutta urges us to avoid is performative listening, where organizers create the illusion of input, but marginal voices continue to be overshadowed by stronger ties and existing relationships within the neighborhoods. Practices of regularly engaging the neighborhoods in listening sessions to identify challenges within our food systems have yet to become regular and routine across the two markets. Moreover, some of the early conversations seemed to reify dominant structures of power and agency, such as relationships between customers and vendors and the reliance on SNAP/EBT to fund community support efforts. We must also acknowledge, however, that the grassroots and pop-up nature of both the Corner Market and the People's Market gives them the opportunity to continue moving toward a more idealized version of a culture-centered approach. These two markets are very much "owned" by the people in their respective neighborhoods, with supplemental support from some farmers and vendors who are not residents. What both markets are working toward doing now is building the types of communication infrastructure that will enable them to stay committed to their neighborhood-based approach. We will continue to address this central tension as the research develops further.

One of the most challenging aspects of building communication infrastructure—particularly as a method to prepare for crisis, uncertainty, and insecurity—is that communities and partners are often creating resources and relationships that they are not yet sure how they will use. Indeed, when we first organized the aforementioned Food for Thought events in 2012, partners never once considered how the work we were doing would produce networks, relationships, and resources that would help us 1 day respond and reorganize during a pandemic. Within this space of unknown futures, however, we as communication scholars can do some of our most important work. We can assist communities and neighborhoods as they recognize the importance of communication and build the infrastructure necessary to support it. We can document processes and help partners collect data, so they can make sense of the work they are doing with their communities. Perhaps most importantly, we can use communication infrastructure to help carry the narratives that communities use to stitch together their experiences, resources, and potential into a truly resilient structure of support.

Although the work related to these cases is ongoing, the preliminary data suggest that the communication infrastructure that we have built around food in Greensboro has indeed served the community in the design of health and food systems interventions related to COVID-19. The pandemic has represented one of the first true tests of how well our community can respond to securing food access in times of crisis and insecurity. While it would be premature—and perhaps a bit naïve—to suggest that our attention to communication infrastructure has ensured access and equity for all community members, we do argue that Greensboro is moving in the right direction when it comes to creating the types of symbolic and material moves that are required for building vibrant, resilient, and secure food systems. This observation is also evident during the pandemic, with the launch of the Grove Farmers Market in East Greensboro—another project in partnership with the NCA Center for Communication, Community Collaboration, and Change, with this market focusing on creating opportunities for Black and brown farmers.

Our analysis of three cases in Greensboro must also acknowledge some of the limitations of this study, which give rise to opportunities and calls for continued research. We chose to focus on Greensboro, because of our proximity to this community and its neighborhoods during COVID-19 closures, as well as our own embeddedness as community-based researchers. As such, we recognize that some of our observations are indeed indicative of Greensboro and may be limited to communities and metropolitan areas similar to it. Initial reports of reorganizing food systems from comparable communities have reinforced the need to build resilient systems through multi-sector partnerships, advanced ordering and curbside food distribution, and increased attention to voices along the margins (Community Food Lab, 2020). So while some of our initial observations may transfer to communities beyond Greensboro, we also acknowledge that our analysis has privileged an urban perspective based in the southern United States. As we submit this essay, we remain in a global pandemic, and we would be remiss if we did not reminder readers that we live within not only local but global food systems. Across the multitude of layers that make up our many food systems, different resources, relationships, partnerships, and structures converge in ways that make food easier to access in some neighborhoods and households than others—especially among poor and rural communities and communities of color. As communication research that addresses food systems continues to grow, scholars are well positioned to examine how communication infrastructure both enables and constrains how communities can remain resilient in the face of immediate food crises and ongoing food insecurity.

Another methodological limitation of our case study approach concerns our emphasis on initial responses to COVID-19 stay-at-home and social distancing orders. Our approach was very intentional in that we wanted to examine how communication infrastructure could enable and constrain the food system reorganization in the first few months of what would become almost a full year of COVID closings. In other words, our goal was to illustrate how partners worked together to coordinate and mobilize resources around local food access in the immediate reorganizing around COVID-19. What we have only begun to examine is how everyday individuals and families used those resources to weather that remaining year of the pandemic. We have some preliminary data from the Corner Farmers Market—such as the 400% increase in SNAP usage at the markets—that suggests customers have leaned heavily on local markets during the pandemic. However, we do not have access to the same tracking and monitoring data to examine how K-12 students and their families utilized the school meal network. Anecdotally, we have stories of the mother and father who walked their daughter to her nearby elementary school to pick up food every Monday through Friday, not only to get breakfast and lunch, but also as a way to add in some daily physical activity. At the same time, we also have the story of a single father of four who picked up food for his children for 1 week, but stopped after they repeatedly refused to eat the mostly packaged and heavily-processed food options. The COVID-19 pandemic has given scholars the opportunity to examine not only how communities responded and reorganized food systems, but also how individuals and families reorganized their own eating practices in light of limited access to their regular food routines. Future research must continue to expand this emphasis on how individuals, families, neighborhoods, and communities use the resources that are available to them, particularly as they make decisions about something as everyday as what to eat. Even more, culturally-centered approaches that emphasize communication infrastructure can push this research further by considering how communities also participate in the construction of those resources to begin with.

As local food organizers in Greensboro continue to move closer toward culturally-centered, community-based forms of food organizing, much work remains. Key voices in these conversations continue to rely on executive and civic leadership from within non-profit and government agencies, and advocates and activists sometimes struggle to center the voices that are regularly relegated to the margins. Witnessing how local food organizers in Greensboro responded to COVID-19, however, gives us hope that working toward food security—even amidst a pandemic—is more than possible.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/supplementary material, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

ETHICS STATEMENT

The studies involving human participants were reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board at the

University of North Carolina at Greensboro. The patients/participants provided their written informed consent to participate in this study. Written informed consent was obtained from the individual(s) for the publication of any potentially identifiable images or data included in this article.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

The first author was responsible for the overall framing, data collection and analysis, and writing of the article. The second and third authors were responsible for additional data collection and assistance with final writing and references.

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frontiers
in Communication

Making Food-Systems Policy for Local Interests and Common Good

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The unjust distribution of poor health outcomes produced *via* current United States food systems indicates the need for inclusive and innovative policymaking at the local level. Public health and environmental organizers are seeking to improve food environments from the ground up with locally driven policy initiatives but since 2010 have increasingly met resistance *via* state-government preemption of local policymaking power. This analysis seeks to understand how political actors on both sides of preemption debates use rhetorical argumentation. In doing so, we offer insights to the meaning-making process specific to food systems. We argue that advocates for local food-system innovations are forwarding understandings of food and community that contradict the policy goals they seek. We offer suggestions for local food and environmental advocates for adjusting their arguments.

Keywords: preemption, food policy, agricultural policy, rhetoric, common good, special interest, inclusion, topoi (argumentation schemes)

INTRODUCTION

Opportunities to access healthy food and, consequently, diet-related health outcomes are unevenly distributed and disadvantage people of color, rural areas, and communities with lower educational attainment and economic activity (Larson et al., 2009; Walker et al., 2010; Cooksey-Stowers et al., 2017). The same is true of environmental hazards (Taylor, 2014). To address food and environmental health disparities, government officials, advocates, and community groups are engaging citizens in developing and advocating for healthy food environments. Such strategies include local policy initiatives ranging from healthy kids' meals in restaurants to sugary drink taxes to requiring farmers' markets to participate in food-assistance programs (Gorski and Roberto, 2015; Whitsel, 2017).

However, state governments have responded to such citizen-driven policy initiatives with an old tool—preemption—deployed in a new way. Preemption is a necessary means of ensuring consistency between levels of government, but evidence indicates that state legislatures increasingly turn to preemption to preserve favored policy by banning local discretion. Food-system reform is at risk, as is the democratic trust required of representative governance.

Because policymaking is intrinsically communicative and integral to food-systems equity, we undertook a rhetorical analysis of public testimonies offered for and against two preemption bills in Kansas, which has been a leader in state preemption. Through analysis of *topoi* and appeals in statements made by lobbyists, trade associations, nonprofit leaders, public-health officials, local-food activists, and concerned individuals, we find that those countering preemption's limits on food and environmental policies could be undermining their cause with rhetorics of local control and responsibility.

We begin by reviewing scholarship relevant to democratic inclusion in policymaking and food-systems reform. We then highlight the general philosophy of food and environmental law in Western

democracies, community-level efforts to improve, and how the new preemption in the United States blocks this work. We next turn to the role of rhetoric in policymaking, the cases we studied, and how we conducted the analysis. Our findings include simple counts of appeals and topics as well as interpretive readings to explain the connection between patterns of rhetorical choices made by those for and against preemption and the meanings they invited audiences to accept. We end by discussing what the appeals and *topoi* imply for food-system reform and make communication recommendations to address the new preemption.

FOOD SYSTEMS AND THE NEW PREEMPTION

Reform *via* Policymaking: Possibilities and Limits

Our analysis enters food-systems communication scholarship *via* policymaking. As fundamentally communicative acts, policy and policymaking are ideal spaces for communication scholars to advance food-system reform.[1] LeGreco (2012, p. 61) reminds that polices "serve important communicative roles in organizing everyday experiences." Similarly, Asen (2010, p. 129) distinguishes policymaking from policy by pointing to their respective communicative functions, with the former concerned with meaning-making and the latter maintaining and enforcing meaning.

Regarding types of communication relevant to food-systems reform, Gordon and Hunt (2019, p. 13) identify "lobbying, boycotting, and mobilizing to call upon organizations—from non-profits, government institutions, and corporations" as typical. Recently and increasingly, scholars explore how peoples enact such advocacy outside formal channels. Nevertheless, institutional and organizational procedures such as federal rulemaking, legislative hearings, and strategic planning continue to facilitate policymaking. Ultimately, whether publics work within or outside of officially sanctioned processes, the policies they seek to alter merit consideration as they can profoundly shape food systems.

Arguably, people turn to extra-institutional communications in part because organizations disadvantage certain voices in policymaking, thus sowing "the seeds of distrust between leaders and community members" (Hunt et al., 2019, p. 5). In the context of food-systems reform, citizen-driven policy innovations are needed for practical and ethical reasons. Practically, policy initiatives are more likely to reduce health inequities when they are locally crafted and supported. Ethically, the very populations marginalized from policymaking uncoincidentally also suffer disproportionately from

environmental (cancer, asthma) and nutritional (obesity, diabetes, etc.) diseases. Thus, "an important goal of law should be to maximize community voices, and especially the voices of socially disadvantaged and marginalized groups, in public health solutions" (Aoki et al., 2017, p. 11).

However, incorporating the diversity of knowledge, experience, communication styles, and opinions into a common process of policymaking in a fair and consistent manner across time and place is, to say the least, difficult. Through cross-cultural study of participatory processes in mostly for-profit organizations, Stohl and Cheney (2001) highlight four tensions that undermine inclusive policymaking: structure, efficacy, identity, and power. For example, as democratic organizations seek to successfully compete for resources and profits, they tend to encourage workers to participate in decision-making about issues immediate to their daily tasks while disallowing input in company-wide policy (Stohl and Cheney, 2001). As LeGreco (2012, p. 52) comments in her study of school-lunch policymaking, "Managing these types of paradox is an important part of working with policy, because stakeholders can encounter practices of text and talk that undermine policy goals."

In *public* policymaking, the tensions of participation are magnified for at least three reasons. First, authority is fragmented across various agencies, making it difficult to enact policies that account for systemic interactions. In the case of food systems, departments of agriculture promote food production and marketing while departments of health and environment address air and water quality. Consequently, the interdependent effects of food production and consumption on soil, air, and water are inadequately addressed.

Second, public policymaking tends to be dominated by experts and special interests. While public-interest groups and concerned persons find spaces to contribute to state-level processes (Crow et al., 2020), Yackee (2006, 2019) demonstrates that businesses exercise out-sized influence in policymaking in fact and public impression. Yackee (2019) identifies two reasons for the dominance: the high cost of participation and the specialized expertise demanded of participants. Because commercial interests are most directly affected by regulations, they more readily justify the time and effort of lobbying at all stages of rulemaking. Regarding expertise, most public processes demand a specialized language and communication conventions. Additionally, Yackee (2019) finds that agency officials place greater value on the abstract arguments and technical details offered by experts compared to emotional appeals. At the legislative level, agribusiness campaigns successfully defend nutritionally and environmentally harmful farm subsidies as protecting the family farmer, indicating propaganda at work in policymaking (Schnurer, 2012). Ironically then, food and environmental policymaking in the United States is neither accessible nor deliberative since it fails to meet standards of discourse quality (Steiner, 2012).

Third, public policymaking is especially strained thanks to neoliberalist assumptions about personal responsibility and market omnipotence. As scholars across various fields demonstrate, public discourse presumes that markets know

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[1] Gordon and Hunt (2019) suggest at least three paths for food-systems communication scholarship, including reform, justice, and sovereignty. As they suggest, the paths are not mutually exclusive. This analysis, too, primarily considers policymaking as a means of systems reform but also implicates questions of justice as well.

best and privatize the rights and responsibility of consumers to care for their own health. In the context of environmental policy, J. Robert Cox (2007) critiques "U-curve" arguments supporting economic development as the most effective and natural way to achieve environmental sustainability in the long term. Cox demonstrates that rhetorically, these considerations privilege economic development over environmental concerns while also making democratic debate irrelevant. Regarding food policy, framing obesity as an epidemic places responsibility on individuals, giving corporate food a pass (e.g., Lawrence, 2004; Thomson, 2009; Singer, 2011; Seiler, 2012).

Even when public participation in policymaking is encouraged, neoliberalist thinking channels it through consumerism, which offers the semblance of choice while in fact limiting options to those that preserve the consumerist system. Recent analyses show how such discourses hide in a cloak of common concern. Through analysis of Canadian public-health documents, Derkatch and Spoel (2017, p. 155) find that agencies "appear collectively to promote high civic values such as physical well-being, community prosperity, and sustainability." However, the "notion of responsibility (particularly consumer responsibility) is mobilized to influence individual behavior regarding food consumption" (Derkatch and Spoel, 2017, p. 155). Similarly, via analysis of Australian food-policy documents, Ehgartner (2020) finds that environmental sustainability is included in policy considerations but only through the lens of consumer choice and personal responsibility. This framework emphasizes a free-enterprise model of consumption in which the healthy consumer is figured as an autonomous agent (Ehgartner, 2020). Thus, across Western representative democracies "civic values are instantiated within a framework of consumption and choice that invests market ideologies into the very language of public health" (Derkatch and Spoel, 2017, p. 165).

In contrast, the United States holds agriculture to a different standard. Rather than individual responsibility, much United States policy exempts agricultural businesses from liability for environmental harms (Ruhl, 2000). While the siting of concentrated animal feeding operations (CAFOs) generally remains the purview of county officials, "Right to Farm" acts further insulate agriculturalists from legal challenge over water, air, or noise pollution (Ruhl, 2000). Similarly, ag-gag laws that criminalize the undercover filming of industrial animal agriculture protect public conditions of "non-knowing" about its full effects (Broad, 2016).

Read together, food policy and environmental law support an understanding of publics primarily as food consumers responsible for their own choices. But as scholars and activists have documented, one's health and environment are consequences not just of individual decisions. Social structures condition what food choices and physical activities are available, the quality and quantity of obtainable medical care, and how much pollution exposure one experiences. Dixon and Issacs (2013, p. 67) point to the growing global recognition that "health of populations cannot be divorced from eco-systems broadly understood." Therefore, they (2013, p. 75) advocate

for making "healthy and sustainable choices easy choices" through policies that lower costs and increase access.

The New Preemption and Food-System Reform

Toward similar ends, United States public-health practitioners and advocates employ a variety of policy, systems, and environmental (PSE) strategies to address institutional policy change, modify infrastructures or procedures, or improve social norms and attitudes toward healthy food. Emerging research shows that local policies may be effective in reducing obesity and type 2 diabetes rates (Freudenberg et al., 2015). But state preemption threatens to block food-systems reform. In fact, Bare and colleagues label the "threat of preemption to public health" to be "so great that the *Institute of Medicine* devoted a full chapter to the risks associated with preemption" in its 2011 report (Bare et al., 2019, p. 101).

In the simplest terms, preemption occurs when a higher level of government removes or limits the authority of a lower level of government. Preemption may take two forms: floor or ceiling. Floor preemptions, such as minimum wage laws, mandate a lowest standard beyond which local governments might adopt more stringent requirements. Floor preemptions are rarely relevant to PSE policy. In contrast, ceiling preemptions set a maximum standard for local policy. For example, a state preemption might disallow counties from raising property taxes more than 2% annually.

Preemption is an integral part of the United States system of governments, which is structured so that higher levels of government can limit the authority of lower levels to harmonize policy. Legitimately in many areas the states have an interest in uniformity or comprehensive regulation. Moreover, preemption has been used to advance well-being and equity. Haddow (2019) points to the federal Civil Rights Act of 1964 as a positive example.

While regulatory uniformity is often advantageous, political scientist Lori Riverstone-Newell (2018, p. 31) states that "it is not always necessary to create a workable business environment." Nevertheless, every year since 2010 has seen more state preempting of local laws than the last. Termed "the new preemption" by Richard Briffault (2018) and "hyper-preemption" by Erin Scharff (2017), the current state preemption drive "is distinctive in its magnitude, malice and disruption of democratic norms" (Haddow, 2019, p. 49 ELR 10767). Over the past decade, dozens of states have passed laws to restrict or remove local authority on a wide range of issues, including anti-discrimination laws, short-term-rental rules, gun and knife control, creating municipal ISPs, sugary-drink taxes, and plastic-bag regulation (Hodge and Corbett, 2016; O'Connor and Sanger-Katz, 2018; Preetika, 2020). According to Jessica Bulman-Pozen (2018), an increase in single-party state government facilitates preemption, as well as partisan polarization. Additionally, many preemption bills in different states show uncanny consistency. Originally crafted by the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC), business organizations such as the National Rifle Association and the

American Progressive Bag Alliance now distribute model preemption legislation. In doing so, they seize "not only on ideological affinity, but also on state legislators' lack of time and resources" (Bulman-Pozen, 2018, p. 28).

Ostensibly, preemption battles are conflicts between state and local governments (Hicks et al., 2018). In fact, business interests and other lobbying groups drive the new preemption behind the scenes. Aoki and colleagues point to "the priorities of powerful interest groups such as Big Tobacco, Oil, Food, and even health-related trade organizations like the American Dental Association (ADA)," which "often conflict with health equity and community goals" (Aoki et al., 2017, p. 11). As Riverstone-Newell (2018, p. 31) concludes, the "role of industry and interest group influence on state preemption policies is clear, as are the effects of this influence on local autonomy." Riverstone-Newell (2018, p. 31) goes on to warn that "state leaders, in their attempt to remove obstacles for industry groups or to create a social environment more pleasing to their constituents . . . may be overlooking the costs associated with lost local control."

With these concerns in mind, we analyzed arguments made for and against two Kansas preemption bills: one broadly preempting local food and nutrition regulation and the other easing restrictions on siting poultry CAFOs irrespective of local land-use planning. We wanted to understand what strategies each side used as they sought to advance their respective cases with state legislators. Analyzing policy advocacy allows us to assess the potential effectiveness of various argumentative strategies and, more fundamentally, to explore how dominant understandings of the food system are resisted or reaffirmed in public discourse.

ANALYZING POLICYMAKING IN PREEMPTION DEBATES

Rhetorical Acts in Policymaking

Like other policymaking processes, local initiatives to improve food systems and the state laws that preempt them are "irreducibly rhetorical acts" (Asen, 2010, p. 129). Because policymaking processes are "atypical moments in the lives of policies where meaning-making appears as the central task occupying participants," rhetorical analysis becomes an ideal means to consider this communicative dimension of food systems. Asen (2010) also attests to the inherently political nature of policymaking, which both constrains and enables rhetoric as a force within policy debates.

Therefore, we cataloged, described, and interpreted the "reoccurring inventional structures," or *topoi*, drawn on by advocates for and against state preemption of food-system policymaking (Eberly, 2000, p. 4). Translated from the ancients as "commonplaces" or "haunts" where arguments could be found, conceptualizations of *topoi* vary widely. In his review of topical systems from Aristotle through Boethius, Michael Leff (1983, p. 24) concludes that "the classical lore of topics is as confused as the contemporary efforts to revive it." Even so, scholars today consistently apply *topoi* in a way complementary with an understanding of knowledge/power as seated in discourse, making it an ideal "food *systems* perspective"

in its concern for "the matrices of power, history, and ongoing forms of domination that affect food systems" (Gordon and Hunt, 2019, p. 11).[2]

Eberly (2000) argues that an analysis of *topoi* allows for least two things that a thematic analysis does not. First, it emphasizes "rhetoric as an art concerned centrally with the production—invention and judgment—of discourses" (Eberly, 2000, p. 5). Therefore, the *topoi* of policymaking debates "serve as both source and limitation for further discussion and deliberation." Second, "*topoi* are architectonic in that...they serve as probabilistic function for the intentions and judgments of arguments" (Eberly, 2000, p. 5). For these reasons, a critical inquiry into *topoi*, rather than themes or frames, allows us to draw conclusions about the practical use of rhetoric in the world and suggest ways that advocates might improve their communication.

While Aristotelian commonplaces such as "more or less likely" or "consistency of motive" can help generate arguments, we sought an emergent reading of the texts and rhetorical situations. Toward a similar end, Eberly (2000, p. 6) approaches *topoi*-in-use as organic, meaning that they "disclose argument from the common ground up." Therefore, rather than applying an existing topical system we approached the artifacts inductively, drawing on our knowledge of the controversies, the first author's experience in policy advocacy, and our collaborative discussions to identify and assess patterns of *topoi*. Our goal was to understand how reliance on *topoi* by various actors constrained and enabled food-system reform.

Because special interests are commonly involved in preemption debates, we also analyzed appeals to self-interest and the common good. Deliberative democrats generally concur on the value of the common good but are divided on the proper place of self-interest (Steiner, 2012). We take the position of Mansbridge et al. (2010); namely, that expressing self-interest, properly constrained, improves the quality and diversity of information available in public decision-making and supports democratic inclusion. However, our primary interest is not in the normative questions of deliberative democracy but in the rhetorical choices of various political actors. Environmental advocacy groups, for example, use emotional communication productively, contradicting the frequent critique of environmental messaging as overwrought and manipulative (Merry, 2010). This research caused us to wonder whether and how various sources in preemption debates would use common-good and self-interest appeals, respectively, toward their political ends.

The Kansas Case

The Kansas legislature has been very active in state preemption. Since 2011, among other preemptions the legislature has revoked lower-level gun and knife regulations (Hanna, 2014), banned local minimum wages and housing inspections (Wentling, 2016),

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[2]See, for example, Condit's (2019) "supra Aristotelian/Foucauldian" theory, as well as Eberly's (2000) use of *topoi* in the classical sense along with a Foucauldian analysis of power and cultural authority.

and eliminated inclusionary zoning. Additionally, the Kansas legislature considered but failed to pass bills banning municipalities from regulating retail bags (Swaim and Asbury, 2020) and providing internet services, a strategy for overcoming the digital divide in rural areas (Hiltzik, 2016).

In food policy, the legislature debated and passed HB2595 in 2016. It was one of 14 similar initiatives enacted within the past decade in the United States, but the Kansas version was the most restrictive of them all. It not only bars political subdivisions from addressing food and nutrition labeling, but it bans state agencies from doing the same, deferring all such policy to the federal government (Pomeranz et al., 2019). Modeled on an ALEC bill, it prevents local authorities from restricting portion sizes, taxing soda and sugary drinks, and banning incentive items in meals. Misty Lechner of the American Heart Association told Kansas City Public Radio that "no one was talking about wanting to ban soda sizes" in Kansas. Rather, localities considered "requiring park concession stands to provide healthy options alongside hot dogs, nachos and other typical snack foods," but were thereafter "scared off by the state law" (Fox, 2019, para. 9–10).

Local citizen engagement figured into SB405, too, though in a different way. In 2017, a planned Tyson, Inc., development in Tonganoxie, Kansas, was rejected over county commissioner approval and Kansas Department of Agriculture recruitment, thanks in large part to community activism. The following year, the Kansas Department of Health and Environment introduced SB405. While not a preemption bill *per se* SB405 strengthened state control over land use, a function traditionally left to counties. Kansas law prohibits local zoning of agricultural land, with state statutes or executive agency interpretations determining how closely CAFOs may be placed to adjoining property (Volland, 2018). At the request of Tyson, which seeks another Kansas location for integrated chicken production, SB405 codified setbacks for dry-manure chicken barns, which were not previously addressed in state statute. The rule now allows barns of up to 333,333 chickens to be confined at a single site within 1/4 mile of any occupied structure and within 100 feet of a neighboring property line. Legislators also rejected a proposed amendment that would have allowed county citizens to vote on whether to site a large chicken slaughterhouse and associated CAFOs. Current Kansas law allows counties to vote on corporate-owned hog factories and dairies; therefore, failing to extend the same local consideration for chicken production demonstrates the bill's *de facto* preemption.

Kansas in several ways mirrors others states active in preemption over the past decade. For most of this period, the state has experienced unified government, with Republicans controlling the House, Senate, and governorship. In fact, Republicans have controlled both legislative bodies in Kansas since 1993. Additionally, several of the preemption bills passed in Kansas were ALEC-authored bills, including HB2595. Finally, Kansas preemption laws targeted issues in which citizen groups in local communities engaged in policy work, including gun control in Topeka, safe housing in Manhattan, inclusionary zoning in Lawrence, and high-speed internet access in Chanute. For scholars of political participation and organizing, as well as social movements and contentious politics, the Kansas case offers a chance to learn how state preemption debates speak to citizen engagement and special-interest efforts to shape policy.

At the same time, Kansas affords several unique factors relevant to the new preemption and food-system reform. While many state preemption fights can be accurately characterized as partisan power struggles between Republican statehouses and Democratic cities, this in no way describes the Kansas experience. With the exceptions of Lawrence and Topeka, no Kansas county or city is controlled by or perceived to be controlled by Democrats. Therefore, striving for partisan dominance in policymaking cannot be driving Kansas preemption. Additionally, considering the food-labeling and agricultural-zoning bills together allows for comparison of policy preemption at different points in the food system, as well as contrasting political and legal contexts. While HB2595 originated in a nationwide partisan organization and banned local innovations at the point of sale, SB405 strengthened existing law in ways amenable to the agricultural industry and that explicitly rejected local consent. Therefore, we chose to analyze public debate before the legislature on these bills as case studies of meaning-making in policymaking.

Texts and Procedure

We conducted the analysis as follows: Public testimonies submitted for both bills were downloaded from the Kansas State Legislature website. In total, 91 were analyzed, with 32 submitted on HB2595 (hereafter, food-labeling bill) and 59 on SB405 (hereafter, agricultural-zoning bill).[3] Except for three testimonies offered by science and technology experts, none run more than two, single-spaced pages. Most are only one page long. **Table 1** summarizes the sources, categorized by who the testifier represented. Governmental agencies included executive branch (e.g., Kansas Department of Agriculture), local governments (e.g., Johnson County, The City of Lawrence), and research institutions (Kansas State Research and Extension). Organized interests and advocacy groups spanned trade associations (e.g., Kansas Corn Growers Association), public-interest organizations (e.g., American Heart Association and Kansas Sierra Club), and issue lobbies (Americans for Prosperity).

While initially reading the texts, we noticed that advocates for and against the respective bills offered markedly different kinds of arguments. Preemption advocates were clear and consistent. They posited that the bill provides uniformity and standardization for doing business; the bill protects the exercise of some right; and the bill prevents locals from making uninformed or malevolent policy. In contrast, PSE testimonies were heterogeneous, offering a greater number of

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[3]Testimonies on HB2595 are available at http://www.kslegislature.org/li_2016/b2015_16/committees/ctte_h_cmrce_lbr_1/documents/date-choice-2016-02-17/. Testimonies on SB405 are available at http://www.kslegislature.org/li_2018/b2017_18/committees/ctte_s_agriculture_and_natural_resources_1/documents/date-choice-2018-02-12/ and http://www.kslegislature.org/li_2018/b2017_18/committees/ctte_s_agriculture_and_natural_resources_1/documents/date-choice-2018-02-13/ and http://www.kslegislature.org/li_2018/b2017_18/committees/ctte_h_agriculture_1/documents/date-choice-2018-03-06/.

TABLE 1 | Sources testifying on preemption bills.

	Opposition testimonies	Supporting testimonies
Food Labeling		
Organized interests and advocacy groups	17	10
Government agencies or elected officials	2	1
Individuals	2	0
Ag Zoning		
Organized interests and advocacy groups	9	7
Government agencies or elected officials	1	9
Individuals	32	1

TABLE 2 | Appeals to self interest and the common good.

	Opposition testimonies (*n* = 63)	Supporting testimonies (*n* = 28)
Include at least one appeal to vested interest	74%	62%
Include at least one appeal to common good	53%	38%

TABLE 3 | Relative use of topoi, opposing state preemption.

	Dispersed vs. central decision-making	The few vs. the many	(Local) doing good vs. (central) doing nothing
Opposition testimonies referencing topic	39%	32%	42%
Food-labeling-opposition testimonies referencing topic	64%	5%	81%
Agricultural-zoning-opposition testimonies referencing topic	25%	48%	20%

novel reasons for opposing the bills. Ultimately, we decided to focus on what appeared to be the three most frequently used *topoi* in oppositional testimonies, which included the following: local decision-making is better than state legislators making decisions for locals; the bill preferences the few over the many; the bill ends positive civic work and/or policy preferred by locals. **Tables 2**, **3** summarize the *topoi* and their use in testimonies.

Regarding self-interest and common-good appeals, we followed Steiner (2012). Specifically, we defined self-interest as any reference to benefits or costs to self or one's own group. For example, when Greg Krissek of the Kansas Corn Growers Association testified that the ag-zoning bill "would provide another marketing opportunity for the producers of Kansas corn to market their product and increase the production and profit potential of Kansas farmers," we considered this an expression of self-interest. Conversely, common good included references to costs or benefits incurred by *everyone* in Kansas. In the same testimony, Krissek states that the new policy will lift "the entire Kansas economy," a common-good appeal. We included both utilitarian (i.e., this does the most good for the most people) and difference appeals (i.e., all are served by helping the least advantaged in society) in our counts of common good.

The analysis proceeded as follows. We jointly developed a code sheet to guide the distinction between common good and self-interest appeals and to identify *topoi*. We next worked collaboratively on 20% of the testimonies, refining our criteria

as we encountered disagreements and liminal instances. We then worked independently, recording the presence of common good and self-interest appeals as well as *topoi* in the remaining 80% of testimonies. Our agreement ranged from 81% to 97%.

For the second stage of analysis, we undertook collaborative readings of all testimonies. We did so to draw connections between the patterns of evidence in the artifacts to the messages' persuasive potential (Hart et al., 2018, p. 85). More specifically, we sought to understand how *topoi* and appeals serve, to paraphrase Eberly (2000, p. 5), as resources and limits for further deliberation. Overall, we were struck by the ways the preemption advocates were advantaged in the debates and concluded that the types of arguments made and avoided had much to do with this impression.

PREEMPTION DEBATES: LOCAL WELFARES, MUTUALITY, AND WHO DECIDES

Self Interest vs. Common Good, and Locals vs. Kansans?

Table 2 presents relative frequencies expressed as percentages of opposition and supporting testimonies with at least one common-good and one self-interested appeal, respectively. Strong majorities of both opposing and supporting testimonies

included at least one self-interested appeal. Interestingly, a slightly *lower* percentage of supporting testimonies, which were almost exclusively submitted by trade associations, contained appeals to self-interest. Likewise, a higher percentage of opposition testimonies appealed to the common good of all Kansans relative to supporters of preemption.

Our analyses indicate that the opposition's comparatively frequent appeals to self-interests are complemented by a foregrounding of the local. As detailed in **Table 3**, more than a third of all opposition testimonies include arguments drawn from the *topoi* of local versus central decision-making. Food-labeling testimonies especially relied on this topic, with almost two-thirds arguing for the superiority of provincial policymaking.

Some warrant decentralization based on the value of targeted innovations that leverage community characteristics. For example, Kansas Rural Center President Mary Fund concludes that "each community is unique and needs to be able to address food, nutrition, and access differently for the wellbeing of their populations. . . . This bill would take away a community's ability to... address food-based health disparities and solutions tailored to their needs." Amanda Gress of Kansas Action for Children echoes a similar sentiment: "KAC encourages policy makers to allow local government the ability to innovate and explore options to encourage healthy eating." Others assert that local governments must be responsive to citizens. Johnson County officials testify that they support "the retention and strengthening of local home rule authority to allow locally elected officials to conduct the business of their jurisdiction in a manner that best reflects the desires of their constituents." Still other PSE advocates turn to both policymaking and citizen trust to justify local authority: "The American Heart Association urges to you avoid a one-size-fits-all solution and allow our local units of government to be responsive to the desires of their constituents." Overall, PSE advocates assert, as does Tonganoxie resident Kerry Holton, "The state needs to leave the rules as they are and allow local communities and counties to decide what sort of industry they want." These examples illustrate that opponents offered different reasons for the supremacy of local food-systems decisions, but all originated from the same *topoi*: locals know best.

But as PSE advocates explain why local policymaking is needed, a contradiction emerges: the problems addressed are not local in cause, effect, or scope. In the food-labeling testimonies, preemption opponents turn to state-wide health indicators to support the need for local action, with a damning litany of facts indicating system failure:

- American Heart Association: "64.4% of Kansans were overweight or obese."
- Kansas Rural Center: "Kansas ranks 13th in the nation for adult obesity, with an obesity rate of 31.3%. 30% of Kansas children age 10–17 are considered overweight or obese."
- KC Healthy Kids: "Currently, 30% of Kansas children age 10–17 are considered overweight or obese."
- Kansas Public Health Association: "The health of Kansans has not been moving in the right direction. According to a 2015 America's Health Rankings report, Kansas dropped to

the 26th healthiest state in the nation, down from 8th place in 1991."

Given the widespread, negative outcomes of the food system, these presentations would prompt a naive listener to wonder why the *state* government is not being called upon to address the issue.

Regarding causation, Ashley Jones-Wisner of KC Healthy Kids cites the 2010 Dietary Guidelines for Americans, which she says point to "eating and physical activity patterns that are focused on consuming fewer calories, making informed food choices, and being physically active." Jones-Wisner does not explain why these general causes require tailored policies. Critical analyses detail how the obesity frame preferences personal culpability over systemic changes to remedy health inequities (see e.g., Seiler, 2012). In preemption debates such discourses are doubly detrimental, as faulty individual actions dispersed across society do not directly support the need for localized, systemic solutions.

Likewise, advocates opposing the ag-zoning bill point to a systemic problem, that being industrial-scale animal production and slaughter, but do not explain why local policy is the preferred response. Sue Lamberson of Clearwater passionately testifies as follows:

> Not only do these methods use up precious water resources, and pollute the air and ground where they are, they also produce meat that isn't healthy for us to eat. The cruelty to the animals and the unsafe, low wage jobs that come with these places are other reasons to keep them from establishing any more locations in our state. We do not need to produce toxic, cheap meat at the expense of our precious water resources and our clean air.

Janet Hofmeister, Tonganoxie, also testifies against "The Tyson Bill" by pointing to state environmental harm. Nevertheless, she seems resigned regarding whether anything can be done, state-wide or locally:

> I feel sad for Kansas. I have always boasted to my out-of-state relatives and friends on how beautiful Kansas is...how our lakes are beautiful and our air fresh. However, more and more, our state is being ruined by legislation that is more beneficial to big business and less beneficial to the people who live in Kansas.

Opposition testimonies such as these essentially argue that *no one* should have to suffer industrial chicken production, contradicting calls for local policy discretion. Lamberson concludes, "We can't let Kansas go the way of Iowa with all their CAFO's. And as a property owner and taxpayer, I should be allowed to vote on whether some monstrosity like this is allowed to set up shop in my community." But as her testimony makes clear, if "this monstrosity" comes to her town of Clearwater, the ill effects will be felt throughout the state. Why ought Clearwater residents have a say, for example, while Arkansas City, 50 river miles downstream, should not?

Certainly, a case can be made for homegrown standards to ameliorate systemic problems. For instance, the localized nature of foodways and living arrangements, as well as the uneven geographic and social distribution of health outcomes, ought to justify local policymaking. And a few PSE advocates provide local evidence. The Latino Health for All Coalition testifies thusly:

> The issue of nutrition and the food environment is particularly important to our community. In Wyandotte County, almost 40% of adults are reported to be obese. Approximately one in five Wyandotte County residents live in areas with limited access to opportunities to purchase healthy foods in supermarkets or large grocery stories.

Despite the association's mission, the testimony lacks a specific reference to the disproportionate health effects faced by Latinx communities in Wyandotte County, which could benefit the argument that cultural knowledge is a strength of localizing policymaking. Thus, the testimony does not go as far as to indicate why local solutions are necessary to attend to cultural rules, norms, and the social environment of the Wyandotte County community.

When advocates working to defeat the Tyson Bill turn to local distinctions, they sometimes point to factors that have as much to do with relative privilege as unique policy needs. Kerry Holton admits that "corporate agricultural processing facilities have a place in Kansas, but, when they are inappropriately located, the harm done to communities can be devastating and permanent." Holton further explains that his town of Tonganoxie, a bedroom community for Topeka and suburban Kansas City, is too densely populated to be suitable for industrial-scale chicken farming. Undoubtedly, more people will suffer the air pollution, noise, truck traffic, and declining property values of a Tyson plant if placed in Leavenworth County instead of sparsely populated Cloud County, for example, 150 miles to the west. However, Cloud County's median household income also is 38% lower than Leavenworth's, leaving open the possibility that socioeconomic status has much to do with Cloud County's appropriateness. In the end, PSE advocates undercut their own rationale for local control by allowing a place for CAFOs in any community.

Meanwhile, preemption advocates deemphasize what they will gain by curtailing local policymaking and instead present preemption as serving the common good. Sometimes, they do so by connecting agricultural businesses to the broader Kansas economy, as does the Kansas Agricultural Alliance, which states, "The construction of a new agricultural processing facility and the accompanying investment in animal agriculture infrastructure in Kansas is a great way to encourage growth and provide job security for both rural and urban Kansans." Alternately, preemption supporters refrain from directly addressing either special or public interests. The testimony of Stacy Forshee, a Farm Bureau member from Cloud County, is illustrative. In her 360 words on HB2595, Forshee clearly communicates Farm Bureau's position on the bill (supportive, with a preference for federal rather than state labeling standards) without explicitly stating

why. She details what Farm Bureau supports ("consumer friendly, science-based labeling") and rejects ("mandatory labeling of food products containing biotechnology") but never explains the costs or benefits of these policies to farmers or anyone else. Apparently, she does not need to do so, for she uses phrases that signal positions Kansas Farm Bureau has put before legislators dozens of times in committee testimony and other lobbying activities. Consequently, preemption supporters can offer their backing without testifying explicitly to what they potentially gain from the bill.

Some PSE advocates present the food system and its shortcomings as a common, state-wide problem. Dawn Buehler of Friends of the Kaw, an organization protecting the Kansas River, reminds legislators that the watershed crosses three states and provides "drinking water for 800,000 Kansans." She claims the ag-zoning bill is not a threat to any community but to all of them: "All of that waste has the potential to pollute our drinking water every time it rains and the water and pollution from this facility will impact everyone downstream, all the way to Kansas City." Eschewing scientific language for a plainspoken style, Buehler makes the case that what happens on a farm in Central Kansas affects all on the river: "That is how watersheds work—if you are down stream, you get the pollution." Brian Morely of Lawrence puts it even more succinctly: "S.B. 405 is an affront to our common wealth and a dangerous health risk as well." However, these examples serve as exceptions. As a group, the PSE testimonies posit the *non sequitur* claim that food systems are failing the state's citizens and locals ought to be empowered to improve them.

Critiquing Policy or Power

Thinking strategically, the preceding discussion raises a no-win choice for PSE advocates: Should they point to legislative inaction as justifying local initiative? Or should they foreground local successes in improving food systems? PSE advocates in the food-labeling testimonies overwhelmingly chose the latter, dipping into a deep well of nascent efforts across the state to improve healthy food access and information. As reported on **Table 3**, 42% of all opposition testimonies found inspiration in the local-action topic, with an overwhelming 81% of food-labelling statements using the *topoi*.

Several illustrations of how reform advocates use the local-action *topoi* follow:

- Marjorie Van Buren, Topeka: "[HB2595] would hinder, if not stop altogether, the fledgling efforts of Kansas communities to create more economic development around local food."
- Lea Ann E. Seiler, Hodgeman County: "HB 2595 will halt the momentum of GROW; as well as that of our Lions Club Community Garden; Countywide Farmers Market; and initiatives that support increased access to healthy foods in our community (such as adding frozen yogurt sticks to the snack menu at the swimming pool in the summertime--instead of only candy bars)."

- Johnson County officials: "HB2595 would be a huge step backwards in JCPRD's efforts, and successes, to positively impact the community's health and well-being."
- Cultivate Kansas City: "HB 2595 will halt the growth of the food policy councils, community gardens, local farms, urban agricultural zoning, and other local initiatives that support wider availability of health food across Kansas communities."

In contrast, practically no one mentions state-level *inaction* to address glaring food-system failures. While not part of our topical tally, we found exactly two such examples. In both cases, the authors make this point near the end of their respective testimonies, offering it more as an afterthought than a central argument.

But for a body charged with enacting policy in the best interests of the state, success at the local level could be read as evidence of the legislature's fecklessness or, worse, a competitor succeeding where legislative authority has failed. Preemption advocates encourage this interpretation, offering liberal-state boogeymen as visions of what lies ahead if locals go unchecked. While the Kansas Chamber of Commerce states that "burdensome regulations and restrictive laws are unfortunately becoming a part of everyday life," they point to no Kansas examples. Instead, they turn to "New York City's proposal to ban sugary drinks, and San Francisco's ban of Happy Meal toys." As examples of "restrictive regulations on the food service industry," the Kansas Restaurant and Hotel Association predicts "specific labeling requirements related to trans fats, sodium etc., along with local limitation on the size of sodas and french fries (sic.) and prohibitions against toys in a chain's value meal." Never mind that no Kansas cities or counties have ever considered such policies. Rather, the hot-button examples plucked from media coverage suggest a threat to businesses *and* legislative authority.

Those supporting stronger preemption of agricultural zoning use similar tactics. The Kansas Farm Bureau has "seen political subdivisions in others states limit agriculture producers from being able to raise or grow certain products based off of biased and non-science-based information, including misleading marketing ploys." In case legislators miss the point, Roger Woods of Americans for Prosperity reminds that competing political subdivisions are legion: "Kansas has more than 700 municipal and county governments that currently have authority to impose local ordinances." While the casual reader might not immediately recognize these as scare tactics, the primary audience is Republican state legislators. If they have committed to maintain a positive business climate and have any ego invested in being an elected official, such statements could provoke a motivating fear to kill challenges to their policymaking authority while they still can.

To protect their position from being understood as a power grab, PSE advocates employ several rhetorical strategies. LiveWell Lawrence, for example, defines local policy initiatives as a capacity that the state should be encouraging, not a competitor to quash: "Local authorities need support to develop effective solutions to address the most pressing public health concerns in Kansas today ... If this legislation were to become law, it could negate the capacity that exists in our local communities to develop evidence-based strategies to address these issues."

Most notably, PSE advocates return to the *topoi* of local authority. In Hodgeman County, the local food-policy council is said to have been "developed in response to the community's need AND desire" for more healthy choices: "Kansas residents WANT to enhance their LOCAL food system, and want the local control to do it. A resolution authorizing GROW was signed by our Board of County Commissioners in May 2015." Johnson County officials cited a 2012 survey indicating overwhelming support for calorie counts and healthy food options at county concessions and workplaces. Billie Hall of the non-profit Sunflower Foundation defends local governments as "responding to the preferences of their constituents by increasing access to nutritional information." Hall continues as follows: "Kansas consumers want nutritional information so that they may choose healthy options for themselves and their families. Voters have made this clear with the recent increase in publicly appointed food policy councils across the state."

Nevertheless, business advocates paint pre-empting local food policy as a legislative duty that must be taken up lest chaos ensue. We note the appeal to the legislature's authority in a Kansas Farm Bureau testimony, made more urgent by the federal government's failure to assert its own: "In the absence of federal regulation on nutrition and menu labeling, the state of Kansas should exert authority and ensure fair and unbiased sound-science labeling is enacted in all 105 counties and all cities within the state." Additionally, advocates suggest legislators' pre-emptive responsibility is relatively modest. Thus, compared to the regulatory morass threated by 700 uncheck local governments, preemption bills are said to be an unobtrusive and necessary means of standardization. Nearly three-quarters of the pro-preemption testimonies take advantage of this commonplace (see **Table 4**) to argue for the exertion of legislative authority for homogenous business rules.

Meanwhile, only 24% of preemption proponents look to the *topoi* of sound science versus incompetent and nefarious local politics. Even so, when read carefully the arguments originating from this place suggest that preemption must be something more than mere neutrality. For example, a hypothetical offered by the Kansas Association of Wheat Growers indicates that "if a regulation requires only the disclosure of carbohydrates, then it could lead the consumer to reasonably conclude that a Fudgesicle (16 g of carbohydrates per 100 g) is healthier than a slice of bread (22g of carbohydrates per 100g)." The absurdity surely is meant to draw a chuckle, but the fantastic scenario also invites questioning. No subdivision would require labeling only carbohydrates in the name of more nutrition information, so what are the Growers suggesting?

Similarly, Christianne Miles of the vending company Treat America Foodservice warns that without the bill, doing business will be nightmarish:

> Vending operators would need to warehouse and
> transport more product with different labels that

TABLE 4 | Relative Use of topoi, Supporting State Preemption.

	Preserving or taking rights	Simple and consistent rules vs. burdensome micromanagement	Sound policy *via* science vs. nefarious policy *via* politics
Supporting testimonies (*n* = 29) including *topoi*	7%	79%	24%

meet the local requirements. . . . In addition, it would also place a burden on manufacturing and distributors that would be face with having to have different product packet for each of their items sold to comply with local rules.

It indeed sounds onerous, but the reality of state-and-federal policy shows it to be mostly mythmaking. To our point, automakers have not responded to California's tougher fuel-efficiency standards by manufacturing a separate line of California cars. And despite the scare tactics, only two states—Kansas and Mississippi—have pre-empted local food policy to the bill's extent. Yet nationwide no one is arguing Fudgsicles to be health food nor are manufacturers creating separate lines of food packaging for various cities.

In sum, while preemption advocates suggest that their bills are a legislator's apolitical duty—nothing more than establishing a uniform set of rules—in fact preemption blocks policy reform. To its credit, the Kansas Chamber of Commerce is explicit in why it supports the bill: "HB2595 prohibits excessive regulations on restaurants and vending machines in the state." Thus, the new preemption allows industry to rhetorically position the bill as a disinterested leveling of the playing field while in fact putting its organized thumb on the policy scale by protecting the status quo.

In the instance of agricultural zoning, the choice of rhetorical stance for food-system reformers is foregone since Kansas does not allow local control. Only 20% of opposition testimonies on the ag-zoning bill forward the superiority of local initiatives, while 48% contend that the interests of a few are privileged over the many (see also **Table 3**). Some authors offer a strident tone as they directly accuse legislators of failing to represent constituent interests, as do the following:

- Kerry Holton, Leavenworth County: "Senate Bill 405, if made into law, will allow large corporate agricultural processing corporations to make an adverse impact on the constituents who sent you to Topeka to represent them."
- George Hanna, Tecumseh: "I respect each and every one of you. . .however, any consideration of such a bill like Senate Bill 405, blatantly disregards the wishes of the people for whom the communities are affected and their elected official within local government."
- Alisa Branham, Douglas County: "Please encourage people to stand up against this bill, or at least allow local citizens to make the final decision about whether it's built or not."

Each of the proceeding advocates certainly opposed expansion of the poultry industry. But we also note that their arguments

quoted here have little to do with the merits of the policy change. Rather, each is critiquing the legislative process. Put more crassly, these advocates are telling elected official how to do their jobs.

Alternately, some advocates save face and more directly address the policy at hand by pointing to the usurpation of local agricultural zoning, arguing legislators consequently are responsible for acting on behalf of citizens who might find themselves living next door to 333,333 chickens. In stating Kansas Rural Center's opposition to the ag-zoning bill, Paul Johnson cites "expansion of State preemption power over county governments in siting and environmental issues in regards to industrial poultry operations." He then calls for a year delay to research "the social and environmental impact of industrial poultry impacts on local communities and the State." Thus, Johnson invokes the legislators' responsibility to do right by the state's citizens rather criticizing them for even entertaining the bill.

Because the ag-zoning bill effectively strengthens state control over land use, many PSE advocates are drawn into critiques that are only obliquely related to food-system failures and have more to do with who controls policymaking. These questions merit consideration, particularly in the face of the new preemption. But we also wonder about the effectiveness of this choice when testifying before legislators. Stylistically, it positions PSE advocates as outsiders, having to beat on the statehouse door to be heard.

DISCUSSION

Others have pointed to partisan polarization as a driver of the new preemption (e.g., Bulman-Pozen, 2018). Certainly, readers of these testimonies might wonder if the authors from the respective sides were declaiming on the same legislation. According to Hart, Daughton, and LaVally (2018, p. 91), "Topical analysis is particularly useful for examining public controversies, arenas in which people often talk past one another precisely because they have begun their arguments in different places." Our simple counts and critical readings indicate a more fundamental divide than partisanship, with proponents commencing from neoliberalism and opponents from populism. In what follows, we consider implications of these choices for food-systems reform, as well as the specific ways that advocates might shift their arguments to challenge the new preemption.

Neoliberalism or Populism: A False Choice for Food-System Policy

In their testimonies 79% of proponents visited the topic of uniform business regulation. A few argued from the position that diffuse policymaking is deleterious and even fewer defended

preemption as emanating from a held right. These totals, combined with our interpretive readings, indicate that supporters start from neoliberalist assumptions about the cool rationality and effectiveness of markets. Consequently, preemption supporters find themselves in an enviable rhetorical situation: While they are on the offensive in advancing new legislation, they can do so with a discourse that defends unfettered markets as maximizing good, which is mostly taken for granted in United States politics.

Meanwhile, opponents of preemption found inspiration in at least three different places: dispersed versus centralized decision-making, the few versus the many, and taking initiative versus expecting others to act. Thanks to its global resurgence, many will recognize the populist thread running through these topics. In a country founded on suspicion of distant elites and centralized power, populism is a reasonable place to look for arguments. Michael Lee (2006, p. 374) locates a similar *topoi* emanating from "The Declaration of Independence, in concert with a populist reading of the Preamble of the Constitution, Jefferson's First Inaugural, and the rhetoric of anti-Federalist opposition … from which subsequent populists found a structure and a political language." But as our reading suggests, deploying this discourse to reform food systems could be counterproductive.

To our point, our analysis suggests a form of NIMBYism (not in my backyard) at work in some of the opposing testimonies (DeLind, 2004). Gregory Koutnik (2021) posits a positive parallel between populism and NIMBYism. Koutnik (2021) argues that "ecological belonging" can be galvanized to mobilize people to participate in political action in defense of places they call home. Patrick Devine-Wright (2009) makes a similar suggestion from a social-psychological perspective. Even so, to avoid the exclusionary and authoritarian impulses of some populisms organizers will need to find ways to rise above defense of beloved places. Usher's (2013, p. 825) study of anti-coal action in the United Kingdom speaks to the difficulties and potential of such an approach, which requires reformers "transcend localism" and its strongly felt place attachments. From our reading, we agree that the psychological drives that lead to NIMBYism are not the problem. Rather, the failure to see mutuality in others' losses is what turns protection of home into regressive NIMBYism.

Additionally, by adopting what Lee (2006) terms the populists argumentative frame, food-system reformers lose an opportunity to challenge the dominance of neoliberalism in policymaking. Until presumptions that unencumbered markets provide the highest level of social good are called to question, it is unlikely that PSE advocates will be able to effectively argue that policy innovations at the state or local level are needed to improve public health and the environment. While home-grown innovations to food systems can strengthen local economies, at the statehouse such arguments will always be at a disadvantage when competing with organized business claiming to represent thousands of members and vast segments of economic activity. Likewise, arguing that preemption benefits the few over the many will fail to persuade since such a statement is illogical to neoliberalist thinking. Therefore, the dominance of neoliberal logics and the

argumentative strategies that uphold them must be addressed in food-policy debates.

Rhetorical Strategies and Tactics for Countering the New Preemption

Arguably, PSE advocates in Kansas are not full and equal participants, giving credence to populist conspiracies. Both bills passed by comfortable margins despite opposing testimonies outnumbering supporters two-to-one. Others have documented how the hegemony of sound science marginalizes reform activists in institutional policy debates (e.g., Sauer, 1993; Healy, 2009). Given the demonstration of disregard for local control in the Kansas case and with sensitivity to the rhetorical context, public-interest advocates likely will need to use communication strategies that question the legitimacy of the process.

At the same time, our analysis suggests PSE advocates ought to reflect on the ways that their argumentation could be unwittingly reifying an understanding of food systems that contradicts their larger philosophy and goals. Overall, we encourage PSE advocates to creatively engage in preemption debates in ways that forward local innovations and consent as a necessary benefit to *all*. Specifically, we offer the following three recommendations.

First, in future preemption debates PSE advocates should emphasize that state food-system policies are failing everyone. While our quantitative results indicate just over half of opposition testimonies included appeals to the common good, our readings indicate that the weight of these arguments might be lessened by other rhetorical choices. By instead crafting testimonies that illustrate how state policy—or the lack thereof—has harmed the common good, advocates would be implicitly acknowledging the legislator's power to act in a way that shapes local action for the benefit of everyone. This stance can be achieved without discursively relegating community action to a subsidiary role by emphasizing local efficacy as a state asset. Overall, rhetorics that approach food-system policy as a partnership between the state, local governments, and citizens will better support policymaking for all places and communities.

Second, we encourage PSE advocates to counter the dominant trade-association definition of preemption bills as objective and apolitical. Ultimately, no public policy is neutral; contra to supporter rhetoric, preemption is an effort to codify current practices. In our analysis, we found no examples of PSE advocates challenging this rhetorical argumentation. When advocates can forward their preferred definition of preemption as a neutral policy that only promotes fairness, opponents lose an opportunity to demonstrate that preemption ties the hands of public servants across all levels of government—including the *legislator's own*—making it even harder to address public problems.

Third, rather than countering state preemption with claims of harm to local property values or as threats to citizen choice, we suggest PSE advocates look to undermine neoliberal logics in their argumentative strategies. For example, more coordination among advocates would allow them the speak with a unified voice on the social inequities endemic to the current food system. If the spokesperson from Latino Health for All speaks of the disproportionate effects of food deserts in her community, she

might be able to build an appreciation for the common good on the principle of difference. But what if public-health advocates across the state spoke to the damage done in their own communities *and* others. To illustrate, imagine the local-food advocate from Hodgeman County in rural Western Kansas testifying that local innovation helps her neighbors *as well as* the residents of Wyandotte County in Kansas City. It now becomes harder for legislators to ignore that the market has failed to lift all boats as promised.

Alternatively, rather than allowing for the appropriateness of industrial animal slaughter in some communities PSE advocates might demand economic development driven by people and planet first. A handful of PSE advocates testifying against the Tyson Bill do this, as does Tad Kramar of Big Springs: "If you want to create economic opportunities, please vote 'no' on SB 405 and instead promote businesses that create good jobs rather than degrading jobs that produce personal injury and suffering to people, animals and the surrounding communities." Margaret Kramar more directly questions the unspoken neoliberal assumption that more business is always good: "Of course we are united in wanting to bring economic opportunities to Kansas, but how low are we willing to go to pursue that objective? Would we stop at nothing?" Margaret Kramar goes on to detail the Kansas values sacrificed in pursuit of pure profit, closing thusly: "Sometimes compassion should take precedence over profit. Please oppose this bill, if not for the people, for the animals, and if not for the animals, for the people growing and slaughtering the chickens." As did the Kramars, advocates can allow for economic needs while insisting legislators adopt policies consistent with other community standards.

CONCLUSION

This analysis considered two Kansas deliberations over who should set food and agricultural policy. We determined that some rhetorics resisting the new preemption offered populist, us-against-them understandings that failed to address neoliberalist assumptions and food-system inequities, potentially reifying public understandings that compound current crises. We also suggested alternatives to countering preemption of public-health and environmental policies. Through greater coordination and recognition of publics across locales, a discursive commitment to mutual well-being, and a reimagination what advocates ask of policymakers, public-interest advocates might cultivate more just food systems.

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Policymaking is a struggle over not just policies but also cultural values, which are shaped over time by such debates. People can act purposefully to change their shared values, and politics, "an arena of competition and struggle between conflicting and genuine values," is one means of doing so (Sleat, 2013, p. 136). While all public-policy deliberations can promote or delay social change, food systems affect the welfare of all peoples and the planet. Consequently, reordering our use of finite resources for justice and sustainability demands special urgency and ethical vigilance. We offer our analysis toward these ends.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/Supplementary Material, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

ETHICS STATEMENT

Written informed consent was not obtained from the individual(s) for the publication of any potentially identifiable images or data included in this article.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

All authors listed have made a substantial, direct, and intellectual contribution to the work and approved it for publication.

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Racialized and Gendered Constructions of the "Ideal Server": Contesting Historical Occupational Discourses of Restaurant Service

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This essay takes a discourse-centered approach to understanding the historically contingent construction of restaurant service as a devalued occupational identity, showing how service is actively constructed as low wage and organized along hierarchies of gender, race, and class. These discursive constructions shape the relative visibility and legibility of workers as fully deserving of rights, compensation, and dignity. Building on prior research on the struggle over meanings of work, occupational identity, and gendered and racialized job segregation, the essay begins by tracing constructions of the "ideal server" predating the contemporary rise of restaurants from relations of servitude within and beyond the plantation economy, to the eventual entrenchment of tipping, and the gendered and feminized constructions of domestic service. It discusses racialized and gendered relations of servitude in the Pullman Company's dining cars and the eventual white feminization of waitressing. Adopting a historical narrative built on secondary literatures, it demonstrates the centrality of race, gender, and class to early occupational formations of service. It highlights how employers have cultivated occupational hierarchies and divisions as well as efforts by restaurant workers to transform how their labor is valued and compensated.

Keywords: restaurant labor, wages, occupational discourse, food chain workers, devalued work, racial hierarchies, gender hierarchies, job segregation

INTRODUCTION

This morning, the young barista woman told me that a customer came in with a mask, but not wearing it. When she asked the customer to put on her mask please, the woman said: Why? There's no-one in here.[1]

The above re-telling of a service interaction takes place during the COVID-19 pandemic at a time when choices about the health and safety of workers were largely being determined by employers and customers. This mediated account provides a glimpse into the uneven, multi-faceted relations characterizing U.S. restaurant work. That the server is a young woman tasked with enforcing mask compliance invokes the relational, identity-based nature of privileges and vulnerabilities exacerbated within the pandemic. The statement "there's no-one in here" marks the server as invisible. By excluding her as a person fully deserving consideration and care, it summons the long reach of relations of servitude originating in the plantation economy. Combined with increasing evidence that the pandemic has only intensified ongoing problems of

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[1] Posted to Twitter by @DominicPettman, July 16, 2020 (Pettman, 2020). I am less interested in whether this account actually happened and more interested in the historically contingent discourses that circulate around the value of service workers, including the exacerbated relations of inequality during pandemic times.

occupational hierarchy, racial discrimination, sexual harassment, wage theft, and wage inequality in the restaurant industry (One Fair Wage, 2020), there is a clear need for greater attention to how unequal work relations have been constructed and maintained over time.

To that end, this essay takes a discourse-centered approach to understanding the historically contingent construction of restaurant service as a devalued occupational identity, showing how service is actively constructed within capitalism as low wage and organized along hierarchies of gender, race, and class. These discursive constructions shape the relative visibility and legibility of workers as fully deserving of rights, compensation, and dignity. Building on prior research on the struggle over meanings of work, occupational identity, and gendered and racialized job segregation, the essay begins by tracing constructions of the "ideal server" predating the contemporary rise of restaurants. Adopting a historical narrative built on secondary literatures, I demonstrate the centrality of race, gender, and class to early occupational formations of restaurant service and highlight how employers have cultivated occupational hierarchies and divisions. Historical discourses of servitude originating within the plantation were constituted through racial and gender difference and notions of (un)free labor. The essay illustrates how the logics and practices developed within slavery shaped ideas about the ideal domestic server in the racialized and feminized spaces of the household and in the railroad dining cars of the Pullman Company. It highlights how occupational formations of service within the early period of U.S. restaurants have been meaningfully shaped through Jim Crow practices and discriminatory hiring at the intersections of race and gender, discussing the eventual white feminization of public-facing restaurant service. The final sections emphasize the importance of emergent coalitional efforts by restaurant workers aimed at transforming how their labor is valued and compensated.

THE CONTESTED DISCURSIVE TERRAIN OF OCCUPATIONS

This essay is organized around key sites of struggle over how the work of serving is understood, valued, and compensated. I build on a tradition of critical scholarship aimed at unearthing the communicative processes involved with ascribing meanings, values, and judgements to occupations and their associated workers (Trethewey, 1999; Ashcraft, 2007, 2013). Taking a constitutive approach, I approach discourse as generative and powerful. Discourse not only brings objects and ideas into being but is used to delimit and govern how those objects and ideas are put into practice. A discursive approach challenges the idea that certain types of jobs or occupations have more or less inherent value than others. Rather, notions of value and worthiness are culturally contingent communicative accomplishments. Communication influences what types of jobs are considered un/desirable, and more or less "meaningful" (e.g., Clair et al., 2008; Kuhn et al., 2008; Way, 2020). The material dimensions of work like wages and working conditions are always mediated in and through discourse. My focus on discursive

struggle foregrounds the interplay between competing systems of meaning, illustrating that the devaluing of certain occupations takes constant work to produce, maintain, and justify.

Occupational identity is a key site of discursive struggle around meanings of work. "Dirty work" describes occupations that are associated with negative stigma and constructed as physically, socially, or morally tainted (Ashforth and Kreiner, 1999). Given that organizations are simultaneously raced, gendered, and classed (Allen, 2010; Parker, 2014), social identity categories like race, gender, and class play a decisive role in whether and how certain occupations gain prestige or stigma. Much of the occupational identity scholarship draws on interviews and observational research to explore how organizational members navigate stigma. A central aim involves understanding how workers are able to recast negative stigmas and reclaim or maintain positive occupational identities (Drew et al., 2007; Meisenbach, 2008; Lucas, 2011). In their comparative study of firefighters and correctional officers, Tracy and Scott (2006) illustrate how participants were more or less able to deploy discourses of sexuality and masculinity to deflect stigmas. Their findings highlight how broader discourses frame certain occupations or tasks as "morally questionable, servile, or low in status" (p. 33). Cruz (Cruz, 2015) has argued for the need for increased attention to the variances of national context, illustrating how participants leveraged both negative and positive meanings to frame the meaning of their work a shifting post-conflict context. Further, researchers highlight that one's position relative to others within a broader social and cultural hierarchy of advantages and privileges structures who bears the brunt of stigmatized occupations. For example, historically marginalized groups experience disproportionately more negative impacts of occupational stigma when compared to their privileged counterparts, even when engaged in the same job tasks (Rivera, 2015; Malvini Redden and Scarduzio, 2018). Together, this research underscores that a broader context of privileges and advantages shapes devalued occupations. Racial and gender difference is a key organizer of occupational identity where notions of value and fit are constructed and maintained.

The need to attend to the variations of macro-level discourses and practices has given rise to critical studies of how the texture and meanings of occupations are discursively maintained over time. Approaching occupations as "rhetorical endeavors," researchers pursue questions about the endurance of labor hierarchies across time and space, multiple scales of discourses, and within and across institutions and actors (Ashcraft, 2007). Intersecting discourses and practices of difference – such as nationality, gender, race, class, and sexuality—are understood as key constituting features (Acker, 2006; Ashcraft, 2007, 2013; Ray, 2019). Recently, Ray (2019) has argued for the need to replace the notion of organizations as race-neutral with a view that sees organizations as constituting and constituted by racial processes. As he underscores, racial inequality is not merely "in" organizations but "of" them, as racial processes are foundational to organizational formation and continuity" (p. 50). Bridging studies of occupational discourses with these insights, I contend that intersecting processes of gendering and racialization are similarly foundational to the formation and maintenance of restaurant service as devalued work.

While organizational researchers increasingly attend to the intersections of race, class, and gender as foundational, these approaches would benefit from greater attention to how employers have historically devalued and disadvantaged workers (Duffy, 2007). There is a particular need to shift attention to how employers have wielded racial and gender difference to their advantage. Employers are not neutral actors. Their hiring preferences and choices reflect and maintain a racialized and gendered social system of privileges and disadvantages (Branch, 2011, p. 25). An intersectional approach contends with how forms of oppressions work together as "reciprocally constructing phenomena that in turn shape complex social inequalities" (Collins, 2015, p. 2). As Branch's (2011) rich study of domestic service reveals, the "near-universal restriction of Black women to devalued work" reflects the influence of both racism and sexism (p. 8). By tracing shifting constructions of the ideal server across multiple sites, I respond to the need for greater attention to the historical processes of formation surrounding occupations and the significance of intersecting forms of racism and sexism to their very constitution. The essay proceeds with a brief overview of contemporary occupational hierarchies and wage inequalities of restaurant service before turning to a much-needed focus on the long aftereffects of slavery and its associated gendered and racialized meanings tied to the work of serving. I then turn to domestic service and the dining cars of the Pullman Company as key sites of contestation around how food service should be valued and compensated. The final section brings a focus to coalitional organizing by restaurant workers in the face of employers' attempts to exert control over the terms of service work.

RESTAURANT OCCUPATIONAL HIERARCHIES AND WAGE INEQUALITIES

The relative invisibility of today's restaurant service worker invoked by the essay's opening is a product of gendered and racialized patterns of work, employment, and consumption as they have developed over time. Widely recognized as an undesirable "bad job" within popular and academic discourses alike, restaurant work typically involves low pay, few employer-sponsored benefits, unpredictable schedules, dangerous working conditions, and limited ability for advancement (Jayaraman, 2013, 2016; Hunt, 2016). Employers largely rely on at-will and short-term hiring and scheduling practices that creates precarity for workers. Nationally, the average salary of restaurant workers averages <$30,000 a year and is defined by high levels of wage inequality and occupational segregation (Wilson, 2021). The great majority of restaurant workers—largely women and racial minorities—are much more likely to be earning poverty wages, experiencing hunger and food insecurity, and at increased risk of exposure to COVID-19 in their workplaces.

Restaurants involve a clear gendered and racialized dividing line between higher paying server and bartender positions in full-service, formal restaurants and poverty-level positions as line cooks, bussers, and dishwashers in casual and quick service restaurants (for an overview see Jayaraman, 2013, 2016; Wilson,

2021). White men remain highly concentrated in the highest paying jobs and in managerial positions, whereas women are clustered in lower paying positions. Overall, Latinos and African Americans are much more likely to be working in lower paying back of the house positions or in limited-service fast food restaurants. When compared to white women, Black women tend to occupy lower paying positions.

Restaurants typically involve a mixture of hourly, salaried, and tipped workers within one organization. However, tipping remains the primary wage relation for employees involved in service-related activities in restaurants. Unmoved since 1991, the federal tipped minimum wage remains at $2.13 an hour. It is a poverty wage, upholding wage theft. The relationship between tipping and relations of inequality, discrimination, and harassment within restaurants is well-documented. Restaurant worker narratives frame tipping as risky, exploitative, and in need of reform (Hunt, 2016). Even when tips are considered, tipped workers on average occupy the bottom quartile of all U.S. wage earners. Women comprise two out of every three tipped workers; of the food servers and bartenders who make up over half of the tipped workforce, 70% of them are women (Filion and Allegretto, 2011). Tipped workers experience a poverty rate nearly twice that of other workers (Filion and Allegretto, 2011), and 46% of tipped workers and their families draw public benefits, compared with 35.5% of non-tipped workers and their families. A host of research explores how discrimination results in lower tips for people of color when compared to their white counterparts (Lynn et al., 2008; Wang, 2013). Research also identifies links between tipping and high rates of sexual harassment. Overall, food service workers report the highest levels of sexual harassment of any other industry, with much harassment involving racism (Restaurant Opportunities Centers United, 2014). In addition, emerging research highlights the need to attend to the diverse experiences of LGBT+ populations, including transgender frontline workers, who may face abusive, discriminatory, and transphobic treatment by managers and customers alike (Hadjisolomou, 2021). Reports indicate that the COVID-19 pandemic has only exacerbated conditions of harassment. A recent study of servers found that 43% of women participants reported receiving or witnessing unwanted sexual comments related to COVID-19 protocols, such as masks or physical distancing (One Fair Wage, 2020). For example, one participant described being told by a customer: "take off your mask so I can know how much to tip you." As I discuss next, histories of servitude provide insight into how work associated with serving has been historically devalued, constituted by racial and gender difference, and primarily compensated through tips.

CONSTRUCTING THE IDEAL SERVER

Service—providing help or care—and the associated labor of cooking and cleaning have come to define restaurant work. These tasks are part of a broader category that feminists refer to as reproductive labor (Federici, 2012; Bhattacharya, 2017). The concept of reproductive labor derives from the recognition of women's unpaid housework as central to economic

production. Reproductive labor involves the many activities involved with maintaining life itself, including caring for and reproducing future generations. It names activities like cooking, child rearing, and caring for one's health that have been typically ignored by traditional analyses of the economy (Barker et al., 2021). Theories of reproductive labor critique the gendered and racialized division of labor, emphasizing its centrality in maintaining women's inequality and continued marginalization. The devaluation of reproductive labor is both symbolic and material. It is devalued symbolically as less prestigious, less serious, and less "real." It has been simultaneously devalued in material ways through stolen freedom and wages within the plantation economy and later, in the form of poverty wages, temporary work arrangements, and less benefits like health care or paid time off.

The following sections demonstrate that the question of who has been constructed as the most fit for the work of serving reflects the relational nature of race and gender privileges and disadvantages (Duffy, 2007; Branch, 2011; Branch and Wooten, 2012). In the case of domestic labor, the exploitation of Black women in the domestic sphere of the plantation and the household provided advantages in the form of increased leisure time or a better position within the formal economy for white women (Glenn, 2009; Sharpless, 2010). Historical discourses and practices of servitude originating within the plantation economy found adoption within debates over domestic service as well as within the gendered and racialized occupational hierarchies of the Pullman Company dining cars to the eventual white feminization of public-facing restaurant service. Together, these key turning points demonstrate that constructions of the ideal server are simultaneously racialized, gendered, and classed.

Relations of Servitude Beyond the Plantation

In the U.S., questions about who is considered the most fit for the reproductive labor of serving are impossible to answer without attending to the long reach of discourses and practices of servitude developed within slavery and the plantation economy (Branch, 2011; Branch and Wooten, 2012). The plantation economy was constituted by the stolen freedom and forced labor of African descended people. It was supported by supremacist and hierarchical ideologies that sought to categorize and divide certain groups as less than human according to shifting conceptions of race[2]. Slave owners materialized their ideologies of servitude through violence and routinized surveillance. These relations were also maintained through discourses that devalued the knowledge and skills of enslaved people, such as through "controlling images" perpetuating myths about Black womanhood (Collins, 1999). Relations of servitude created during slavery laid the foundation for exploitation beyond abolition.

[2]Here, I adopt an approach to gender and race as interlinked and historically contingent social constructions involving categorizations of people based on perceived differences. These categories are made to matter as they are used to dehumanize and justify violence, poor treatment, and discrimination.

Within relations of servitude, surveillance practices created forms of hyper visibility. Technologies of surveillance included the constant white gaze of the overseer, the relentless tracking by the slave catcher, and local ordinances like "lantern laws" requiring that enslaved people light their faces with lanterns when traveling after dark (Browne, 2016). The plantation kitchen itself functioned as a key site of violence and surveillance. Culinarian historian Twitty (2017) describes the kitchen during slavery as a "sinister place," a site of violence, rape, and sexual violations (p. 107). Architects designed plantation kitchens to allow white mistresses to keep constant watch over the cook (Deetz, 2017). "Southern hospitality" revolved around the use of food as a performance of wealth and status. White mistresses enlisted their enslaved domestic staff, and especially, their cooks, as a central part of this performance (Deetz, 2017). Whites' explicit showcasing of Black servitude changed as anti-slavery sentiment grew. Plantation owners turned to new kitchen technologies as a way to conceal their reliance on enslaved domestic labor when it suited them. For example, Thomas Jefferson installed a system of mechanical dumbwaiters in the White House masking his enslaved domestic staff from visiting domestic and foreign dignitaries who opposed slavery (Miller, 2017). Owners used these technologies to oscillate between the visibility or concealment of enslaved labor.

Long after the "official" end of slavery, racist songs, literature, memorabilia, and advertising maintained racialized constructions of the ideal server. Hartman (2007) characterizes the continued devaluation of Black life, skill, and labor as the "afterlife of slavery." Williams-Forson (2006) argues that the period between the 1880s and 1930 was defined by symbolic slavery involving overtly racist images and portrayals of the Old South. Popular discourses constructed an image of enslaved domestic servants as "cooking by instinct," or possessing an inherent ability to cook and serve (Veit, 2013). The idea that enslaved women were ideally suited for reproductive labor while also "cooking by instinct," and therefore unskilled, is well-illustrated by the feminized image of the Mammy. Originating in the 1880s, images of the Mammy figure functioned as a white response to the prospect of racial parity (Tipton-Martin, 2015). As Kimberly Wallace-Sanders (2011) describes, supporters of the Confederacy deployed the Mammy image in their attempts to recast relations of servitude and perpetuate a myth that the antebellum South was characterized by mutual respect and loyalty between slave owners and those they enslaved.

From film to commercial advertising and restaurant concepts, U.S. material cultures invoked racialized images of servitude like the Mammy originating within slavery (Williams-Forson, 2006; Kwate, 2019; Walters, 2021). Perhaps the most consistent commercialized portrayal of the Mammy image is found in the figure of Aunt Jemima. For 120 years, food companies have employed the figure of Aunt Jemima to sell pancake mixes and syrup. For some scholars, the popularity of Mammy portrayals like Aunt Jemima indicates white fears of the potential superiority of African Americans within the space of the kitchen (Egerton, 2015). Others have argued that the commodification of Aunt Jemima draws upon white women's racial nostalgia for a plantation economy defined by Black servitude (Manring,

1998). Activists, scholars, and consumers have long criticized the Aunt Jemima brand for its racist imagery, calling for boycotts and its removal. In June 2020 as widespread uprisings against police brutality targeting Black people were reignited after the killing of Breonna Taylor and George Floyd by police, the Pepsi-owned Quaker Oats brand announced that they would stop using the Aunt Jemima name and image[3]. Restaurants have also drawn on white nostalgia for the plantation economy by invoking Mammy portrayals in their marketing and concepts. Three such restaurants, Richard's Restaurant and Slave Market in Berwyn, IL, The Coon Chicken Inn in Salt Lake City, UT, and Mammy's Cupboard in Natchez, MS exist today (Kwate, 2019).

The Entrenchment of Tipping

The adoption of tipping and its later entrenchment within restaurants is similarly bound up in shifting constructions of the ideal server. These constructions became increasingly racialized as tipping became linked with notions of unfree labor. The earliest U.S. restaurants were elite spaces that imported a French model of professional dining service originating in master-serf relationships. These largely formal restaurants were located in hotels and employed professionally trained European male immigrants until World War I (Haley, 2011). Early constructions of the ideal European male restaurant server involved politeness, obedience, and submission. These traits were masculinized, recognized as being gained through professionalized training, and thus associated with greater skill (Rawson and Shore, 2019). However, racist ideologies naturalizing Black servitude at the expense of constructions of white free labor clashed when whites labored in these same service jobs after abolition. For employers, tipping was a way to avoid paying formerly enslaved workers a direct wage (see Jayaraman, 2013, 2016; Barber, 2019; Alexander, 2021; Wilson, 2021). White Americans adapted tipping to fit within existing racist ideologies naturalizing Black servitude. Segrave (2009) quotes a southern white journalist declaring his prejudices after encountering a white man working for tips in 1902:

> I had never known any but negro servants. Negroes take tips, of course; one expects that of them—it is a token of their inferiority. But to give money to a white man was embarrassing to me. I felt defiled by his debasement and servility. Indeed, I do not now comprehend how any native-born American would consent to take a tip. Tips go with servility, and no man who is a voter in this country by birthright is in the least justified in being in service (Quoted in Segrave, 2009, p. 11).

The quote indicates that tipping functioned to sustain relations of dominance and servitude premised on racist logics. To tip was to note and mobilize the unfreedom of a racialized other. For employers, tipping had the benefit of replacing a mandatory wage with a discretionary gift.

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[3]The announcement came one day after the artist Kirby Lauryn's viral TikTok video "How to make a non-racist breakfast," where she analyzes the racist origins and harmful impacts of the Aunt Jemima image. She is part of a tradition of artists including Freida High W. Tesfagiorgis and Faith Ringgold who have appropriated and deconstructed Aunt Jemima imagery.

At the turn of the century, an emerging anti-tipping movement reinforced a binary between white free labor and Black unfree labor. Anti-tipping groups tied tipping to the legacy of aristocracy, maintaining it endangered American republican egalitarianism (Haley, 2011). The anti-tipping movement did not challenge Black servitude, instead affirming the economic privileges of white male citizens (Glenn, 2009). As a political expression, anti-tipping sentiments attempted to ensure that white males would never be at risk of servitude. Some Progressive era reformers opposed tipping based on their belief that it encouraged women's immorality, making them dependent on men's patronage. Labor activists associated with the IWW held that tipping encouraged workers to "become servile, slavish, mealy-mouthed and beggarly: and to succumb to 'the easier way' of loose morals" (Quoted in Cobble, 1992, p. 42). By 1918, seven states had passed anti-tipping legislation. This legislation never gained wide adoption. These initial attempts ultimately fizzled and tipping came to be fully adopted by employers in the restaurant industry by the 1940s (Cobble, 1992; Segrave, 2009). Despite these early forms of contestation, tipping came to be the dominant form of compensation for the occupation of restaurant service. As a result, tipped service workers became increasingly subject to the racist and sexist expectations of those who paid their wages through tips.

Feminized Racialized Domestic Service and the Servant Problem

Histories of domestic service post-Emancipation were also characterized by discursive contestations around who was most fit for service, including how service labor should be valued and compensated. Discourses of race and gender played a foundational role in constructing the ideal server within the space of the household. The labor of cooking and domestic housework is physically demanding and time-intensive work. And before modern forms of housing and water and electricity infrastructure, this was particularly difficult and time-intensive work (Schwartz, 2019). For those with social and economic power, hiring a live-in domestic servant to perform domestic tasks like cooking and cleaning provided one way to address the problem of housework. But who actually carried out this domestic service was shaped by employers' discriminatory hiring practices that narrowed the available economic opportunities for non-native born women and the formerly enslaved. For formerly enslaved women in the South, their options were limited to working as live-in domestic servants, hiring out their services for domestic tasks like cooking, laundry, and cleaning, or working as sharecroppers alongside men (see Walters, 2021). These limited options reflected Jim Crow laws and discriminatory hiring practices and further entrenched gendered and racialized stereotypes about Black women as "naturally" inclined toward domestic tasks.

Post-Emancipation, many freedwomen sought out what limited opportunities they had to leave their former enslavers. For the vast majority, this meant leaving rural areas and entering into the paid workforce as live-in domestic servants or domestic

workers in cities. As Sharpless (2010) details, for many Black women, domestic work functioned as the middle ground between slavery and greater access to economic opportunities that would come later. By 1870, more than half of all women workers were employed as domestic servants (Dudden, 1983). By the 1880s, almost a quarter of white families living in cities employed at least one domestic servant (Veit, 2013). Foreign-born women without citizenship and the formerly enslaved faced limited job opportunities and were much more likely to be working as domestic workers (Duffy, 2007; Branch, 2011; Branch and Wooten, 2012). As part of the Great Migration, large numbers of African Americans moved to Northern cities in the hopes of greater economic mobility. Compared to African American men who were able to move into factory jobs, hotel bellhops, or train porters, African American women's occupational opportunities remained largely limited to domestic service (Walters, 2021).

At the turn of the century, the difficulty of finding good household help for those able to afford it became an internationally reported topic. Employers complained about the poor performance of their live-in domestic servants in the pages of newspapers and popular etiquette manuals and guides. The "servant problem" reflected an emerging tension within industrial capitalism related to the broader problem of reproductive labor and housework (Schwartz, 2019). The growth of the formal capitalist market solidified a hierarchy between what was constructed as "men's work" in the realm of formal market exchange, and "women's work" seen as occurring within the domestic realm of the household. Waged work done in the formal economy sat at the top of the hierarchy, with unpaid and reproductive labor assigned less value and status. Elites constructed a perceived lack of servants due to their inability to retain workers in these positions (Levenstein, 2003; Veit, 2013). The servant problem indicated employers' refusal to pay higher wages and improve working conditions for domestic servants, the vast majority of whom were recently emancipated or new immigrants. The solidification of gendered and racialized occupational hierarchies was foundational to the devaluation of domestic service.

The servant problem underscores the centrality of processes of racialization and feminization to the occupational formation of domestic service. Because whites associated domestic service so strongly with unfree labor and servitude, they were reluctant to take and stay in these positions (Glenn, 2009). For white women, domestic service was seen as a temporary work arrangement until marriage. Middle class norms of white domesticity also reflected Victorian devaluations of physical labor. These norms dictated white middle-class women should not be seen doing the actual labor of housework. This labor was meant to be done with the utmost discretion, ideally by servants or enslaved people (Veit, 2013). According to white middle-class norms of gendered domesticity, "good" white women maintained the household, and were happy to do it. "Bad" women complained or shirked their duties (Turner, 2014). The ability to choose whether to opt in or out of domestic labor was also a function of race and class privilege—then as now. Racism and gender discrimination limited opportunities for formerly enslaved women and recent immigrants to enter other occupations. As soon as these groups

were able to pursue other job opportunities, they did (Sharpless, 2010). Further, the servant problem reflected transformations in the organization of domestic service itself. In the early 1900s, live-in domestic servants were increasingly being replaced by "cleaning women" who hired out their services and lived apart from their employers (Levenstein, 2003). For the employer class, the disappearance of the live-in servant represented a loss of direct control and surveillance over service work.

The servant problem also illustrates how the devaluation of service was deeply connected to the related hierarchy of citizenship and belonging taking shape within a broader project of nation making. This hierarchy excluded formerly enslaved people and new immigrants—and the work they performed—from full participation as citizens (Glenn, 2009). The assignment of domestic reproductive labor to Black women was tied to their exclusion from the rights and privileges of full cultural citizenship. As Branch (2011) details, white southerners had the material resources to take advantage of the low wages that domestic work garnered, freeing themselves from this labor. The ability to hire domestic workers also served as a way to improve their class status. White women in particular benefited from being freed from reproductive forms of labor at the expense of women of color (Branch, 2011). Through this displacement, white middle-class women were able to pursue greater opportunities for paid employment. Freed from their domestic duties, middle class white women could turn their attention to more "meaningful work" that improved their social standing like charitable actions (Branch and Wooten, 2012). Further, women's unpaid labor within the domestic sphere "made up the deficit of living," allowing employers to artificially suppress male wages (Turner, 2014, p. 124). The relational nature of freedom and oppression is key to understanding the devaluation of domestic service labor.

The relative stability of gendered and racialized constructions of domestic service as a devalued occupation are well illustrated even in reform efforts. In the early 1900s, the home economics movement set out to transform the meanings of domestic service from its broader associations with Black servitude and unfree labor. Over the course of several decades, social scientists associated with the emerging field of home economics, social reformers, trade unionists, and the women's suffrage movement made many attempts to upgrade and professionalize domestic service by instituting standard work hours, increased training, and better working standards. Founded in 1928, the National Council on Household Employment (NCHE) cited addressing the servant problem as part of their charge. The NCHE advocated for higher wages and shorter working hours. However, such attempts to distinguish housework from servitude had ironic results. The movement's attempts to convert housework into a respected symbol of white middle-class domesticity rather than a racialized symbol of slavery and bondage inadvertently shored up its status as unpaid feminized labor (Veit, 2013). Efforts to professionalize domestic service were also no match for the economic instability and high rates of unemployment defining the Great Depression. As the 1932 *New York Times* headline read, the Depression "solved" the servant problem for the employer class by depressing wages even further. The article

summarizes this situation thusly: "domestic service wages have fallen much faster than the salaries of the "white-collar" classes employing them" ("Depression Ends Servant Problem, 1932"). While the subsequent devaluation of service may have created new opportunities to opt out for middle class white women, it continued to be devalued as Black women's work (Branch, 2011).

Racialized and Gendered Relations of Servitude in the Pullman Company's Dining Cars

The experiences of Black men working as porters in the dining cars of the Pullman Company provide parallel insight into the formative role of race and gender in constructions of the ideal server. Railroad dining cars hold an important role in the early history of the restaurant industry. In 1867, 4 years after the Emancipation Proclamation, George Pullman launched the railroad sleeping car as a luxury "hotel on wheels" centered around personalized service and fine dining. Train cars were equipped with porter call buttons, personalized temperature controls, fans, lockers, and other amenities (Perata, 1996). The dining cars functioned as traveling restaurants with formal service. But unlike elite hotel restaurants who primarily hired professionalized European men, The Pullman Company used their hiring practices to create a racialized and gendered occupational hierarchy, employing freedmen as porters and freedwomen as maids (Perata, 1996; Derickson, 2008). Porters worked as busboys, sleeping car porters, cafe/food service attendants, and private car porters. The company exclusively hired white men in supervisory roles of conductors and engineers, paying them higher wages.

Through its advertising and within its everyday workplace practices, the Pullman Company cultivated racialized and gendered service relations (Perata, 1996; Rawson and Shore, 2019). The company explicitly drew upon folkloric images of the docile, non-threatening Black male servant and stoked nostalgia for the exploitative service relations characterizing plantation hospitality. Male porters were feminized and infantilized. Advertisements featuring images of smiling Black porters each named "George" appealed to white customers' appetites for being served in a manner once reserved for privileged gentry in the antebellum South (Perata, 1996). Benjamin McLaurin, a former porter, described needing to perform the role of the stereotyped "natural" servant prescribed by their employer and the public (see Bates, 2001). The servant script involved maintaining invisibility and interchangeability. Former porters related that white women dressed in front of them "as if they were invisible" (Bates, 2001, p. 22). White conductors referred to the Black porters as "their boys," and over decades maintained the practice of referring to individual porters by "George" after the company's founder. To their white employers and customers, an ideal server was feminized as non-threatening, seen as interchangeable, and rendered invisible in comparison to those they were expected to serve. These expectations drew upon, and continued to maintain, the logics and discourses of the plantation.

By the 1920s, the Pullman Company became the single largest employer of African American men. The Company employed more than ten thousand male porters but just 200 female maids (Derickson, 2008). The low base wage increased pressure for employees to perform subservience in exchange for customer tips. In the 1904 book *Freemen Yet Slaves*, porters describe the tipping system as humiliating and their working conditions as resembling the power relations characterizing slavery. A tipped wage system solidified these relations. As one Pullman porter put it, "this tipping question is the nub of the whole situation." But in keeping with a history of corporate paternalism, the company's leaders framed their hiring and employment of African Americans as praiseworthy.

Black Pullman porters became widely recognized public figures, and for some, symbols of the possibilities of middle-class achievement (Derickson, 2008). But for advocates of Black freedom like sociologist and civil rights activist W. E. B. Du Bois, the status of the Pullman porters indicated the persistence of social relations originating in slavery that relegated African Americans to the most devalued and menial forms of work. Du Bois (1920) critiqued what he saw as the further entrenchment of the belief that Black people belonged to the servant class, arguing that the white labor union movement actively supported such assertions as they sought to avoid any comparisons between white laborers and servants.

Over several decades, sleeping car porters and maids employed by the Pullman Company contested processes of gendered racialization and asserted their status as full citizens. Through the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters (BSCP), they fought to reassert their masculinity and transform their working conditions (Perata, 1996; Bates, 2001). Through the newspaper *The Messenger*, BSCP publicized their low pay, discriminatory treatment, extended work hours and sleep deprivation. Their efforts created greater public scrutiny; a 1915 hearing by the Commission on Industrial Relations focused on the Pullman Company's employment practices. The Chairman of the Board of Directors, Robert Tod Lincoln (Abraham Lincoln's son) acknowledged that although porters were underpaid and reliant on tips, the Company would not increase wages. Such responses reflected the Pullman Company's ongoing rhetoric of corporate beneficence that held that porters should be thankful that they were employed at all.

The BSCP continued forwarding demands including a living wage, the end of tipping, and relief from extreme forms of sleep deprivation (Derickson, 2008). They fought for a reduction of hours in the form of a 240-h work month, and four to 6 h of rest each night. They connected demands for higher pay to larger issues of dignity and "manhood" and manly rights, asserting a claim to status as first-class Americans. Over several decades, they facilitated organizing, developed protest networks, and helped circulate ideas through the Black press. In 1935, the BSCP secured a charter from the American Federation of Labor, which had previously refused to recognize their efforts. They became the first union of Black workers to have done so. In 1937, the BSCP won a contract with the Pullman Company raising their wages, guaranteeing a 240-h month and overtime pay (Bates, 2001). The BSCP were ultimately unsuccessful in organizing for significant

hour reductions, a living wage and the end of the tipping system. However, as Bates (2001) argues, the BSCP developed leadership, networking, and relationship-building that proved important for the burgeoning civil rights movement.

Yet the broader adoption of tipping for food service ultimately mitigated against the achievement of a more stable higher wage for workers as a whole. As this early history illustrates, racialized and gendered discrimination played a foundational role in constituting these power dynamics. Naturalized as an ideal form of compensation for the devalued work involved with serving, tipping continues to reproduce gender and racial wage hierarchies. Minoritized workers in particular may be discriminated against on multiple fronts: from white employers who either avoid paying a base wage or pay them less than their salaried white counterparts occupying higher occupational rungs, and by customers, who exert racialized and gendered relations. Finally, because tips are determined in proportion to sales, those earning the lowest hourly wages also receive the least tips, bifurcating compensation across racial and gender lines.

The White Feminization of Restaurant Service

Restaurant service shifted from its early iteration as an occupation for European-trained waiters in elite hotels, to one dependent upon a feminized construction of servile Black men post-Emancipation. The occupation of restaurant service would go on to be increasingly feminized and filled by white women throughout the 1920s and 1930s. Change resulted in part from the 1924 Immigration Act that restricted the major source of traditional European restaurant labor (Cobble, 1992). By the late 1920s, white men occupied nearly half of waiting jobs, remaining clustered in higher paying restaurants and hotels. White women were more likely to be employed in lower priced cafes, diners, and lunchrooms while Black women were primarily employed in the private spaces of the household. Prohibition (1920–1933) also played a role in transforming hiring practices in restaurants. Prohibition hastened the shift from expensive and elite dining to the expansion of lower priced establishments (Levenstein, 2003). Cobble (1992) argues that the feminization of waitressing involved the direct substitution of white women for Black and white men, while women of color competed with white women for lower paying and less desirable jobs. By 1940, 68% of waiting staff were primarily white women (Rawson and Shore, 2019). Despite the increasing feminization of restaurant service, the absolute number of Black waitresses declined during this period (Cobble, 1992). Through Jim Crow laws and discriminatory hiring practices, Black women were largely excluded from restaurant service.

The broader shift toward the white feminization of restaurant service involved changing constructions of the ideal server. New expectations around what service should entail changed. First, the relational aspects of service became increasingly important. For women especially, this meant increasing pressure from employers and customers alike to engage in emotional labor like listening, conversation, and flirting (Cobble, 1992; Rawson and Shore, 2019). The increased demands on waitresses portended

the later shift to a largely service-oriented economy and the routinization of customer service. These new forms of control over workers centered on the self and involving the expression or concealment of emotions (Hochschild, 1983). In addition, workers were increasingly subject to multi-dimensional forms of control from managers and customers alike (Leidner, 1993). Second, the feminization of service also involved changing cultural expectations around gender, dress, and appearance. Constructions of service originating within relations of servitude held that the ideal server faded into the background. However, the white feminization of restaurant service was accompanied by employer demands for increased display (Rawson and Shore, 2019). Restaurant owners began developing their restaurant concepts to include the sexual attractiveness and friendliness of their waitresses (Cobble, 1992). Employers changed waitress uniforms from the apron and bonnets that had long associated them with domestic servants to involve increasingly feminized and sexualized styles of dress.

As Cobble argues (1992) waitresses were able to draw on an explicitly feminized occupational identity to forward their interests collectively. Reflecting the broader revival of the labor movement in the 1930s, waitress unions regained momentum in a number of key cities. In San Francisco, they organized across eating establishments, ultimately achieving near total organization of their trade by 1941 (Cobble, 1992). In comparison, Detroit waitresses took advantage of a broader coalition of active labor groups in the state, joining forces with male culinary workers. They also engaged in forms of solidarity and cross-sector alliances with groups like the United Auto Workers and the Teamsters. By the 1940s, Detroit culinary workers were successful in securing collective bargaining agreements with the majority of formal first-class restaurants, Woolworth stores, the Stouffer chain, and several cafeterias and lunch counters. In contrast, waitress unions in New York City and Washington D.C. suffered from a concerted lack of support from male culinary workers and the broader local labor movement. Employers took advantage of less coordinated groups of workers, drawing on divisive tactics such as replacing unionized white men with non-unionized white waitresses to further erode support for coalitional organizing. In addition, rigid occupational gender and racial segregation meant that the white male waiters who tended to work in more expensive, formal sit-down restaurants saw little advantage in joining with waitresses who labored in lower priced establishments such as diners or cafes.

By the 1950s, the occupation of serving had shifted to a primarily white, feminized occupation, with Black women limited by segregation and racial discrimination to domestic service and lower paying service jobs. Four out of five servers were women, with waitressing comprising the sixth largest occupation for women (Cobble, 1992). However, employers continued to enact wage disparities along gendered and racialized lines. When both men and women were employed, women were assigned lower paying breakfast and lunch shifts rather than dinner or bartending. In addition, occupational segregation meant that white men remained clustered in the highest paying formal restaurants with women working in lower cafeterias and

lunch counters. As seen in these examples, the feminization of service as an occupation for primarily white women continued to be accompanied by relational forms of privilege and oppression.

BRIDGING EARLY AND CONTEMPORARY COALITIONAL ORGANIZING

While the shifting constructions of the ideal server have been largely constituted through intersecting forms of privilege and oppression, they have also been accompanied by important moments of coalitional organizing. The Great Chicago Waiter's Strike of 1890 is an important early example of a multi-racial alliance of hotel and restaurant waiters. At the time, male waiters worked thirteen-to-fourteen-hour days and did not have guaranteed days off. Especially in the higher priced restaurants and hotels, there remained a strict hierarchy involving head waiters who supervised captains, waiters, and water boys (Garb, 2014). White waiters had previously been unsuccessful in attempting a strike in part because employers hired Black workers to replace them. The Culinary Alliance took the form of loosely coordinated member unions organized around ethnic identities, including German, Irish, Scandinavian, and African American waiters. They organized across racial and ethnic lines and the hotels and restaurants across Chicago, eventually coordinating strikes and walkouts. The Alliance was ultimately successful in pressuring restaurant owners to sign improved labor agreements (Garb, 2014).

This loose solidarity proved too fragile for employers' continued efforts to employ perceived racial differences as a wedge. Garb (2014) argues that white restaurant owners and white news coverage judged Black waiters' participation in labor activism as violating white stereotypes of Black men's servility and suitability as servants. In the aftermath of a 1903 city-wide strike, restaurant owners began hiring white women to replace Black waiters on the basis of their perceived relative docility. During the summer of 1903, employers' use of separate pay scales for Black and white waiters exacerbated competition between groups of workers. Speaking to a reporter for the Daily News, one restaurant owner provides an exemplary justification:

> I believe now and have always believed that the white man is a better worker than the colored man and is entitled to more money … the colored men employed in the lunch rooms are an inferior class of waiters (in Garb, 2014, p. 1,093).

White union leaders in the Alliance abandoned their previous coalitional strategy, refusing to organize against discriminatory pay rates. Restaurant owners targeted Black waiters for retaliation, firing their Black employees. They actively recruited white women, for example advertising in other cities for "white girls who are willing to come to Chicago" (Garb, 2014). While the Alliance had briefly created a biracial coalition that successfully coordinated a concession from restaurant owners, it ultimately was unable to transform the racial and gender hierarchies that would continue to shape service work in restaurants more broadly.

The 1890 Great Chicago Waiter's Strike and its aftermath portended an eventual broader shift from a primarily male labor force in the restaurant industry to one that included white women, discussed earlier. For some white audiences, Black waiters' prior political mobilization violated stereotypes of servile Black men (Garb, 2014). In their search for cheaper and more docile labor, Chicago restaurant owners created The Waitresses Alliance in 1910 to help staff their workplaces. Again, when compared to the perceived increased militancy of Black men, employers assumed that women would be easier to control (Cobble, 1992). In addition, restaurant owners recognized that they could also pay lower wages to women who had fewer employment options compared to men.

Over several decades, predominantly white women servers self- identified as waitresses and engaged in collective organizing around a feminized occupational identity. They created waitress organizations affiliated with the Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees International Union (HERE) as early as 1900. By the World War One era, more than seventeen waitress locals existed (Cobble, 1992). Early waitress locals in Chicago and Seattle gained concessions from their employers, including higher wages and a shift from a seven to a 6-day work week. They fought to secure these gains through picketing and strikes. Importantly, restaurant owners began forming their own alliances like the Restaurant Keepers Association in Chicago and associated employer-led waitress associations. Cobble (1992) discusses a range of tactics employers drew on to re-establish their control: bringing in Black female strike-breakers, hiring picketers to harass union marchers and advertise restaurant owners' perspectives, employing labor spies and gunmen to intimidate strikers, and securing court injunctions against unions (see especially p. 67). Their efforts were ultimately successful in tilting power back to restaurant owners who returned to longer workdays and seven-day work weeks.

Collective efforts by service workers like the Pullman Porters and waitresses to increase their power relative to employers and customers have often been thwarted through tactics of division aimed at pitting groups of workers against one another on the basis of perceived differences related to gender, race, and ethnicity. And, as Du Bois (1920) described, the history of white labor unionism involves the willingness of white workers to make use of racial animus and social divisions to elevate their own status. Restaurant employers have often taken advantage of these divisions, for example, by replacing striking workers with workers from a different ethnic identity, gender, or immigration status. In addition, the power of employer coordination is well-illustrated by restaurant owners' own coordinated action on the behalf of their collective interests as owners through associations like the Chicago Restaurant Keepers Alliance (Garb, 2014). The lobbying efforts of the National Restaurant Association (NRA), founded in 1919, would prove to be instrumental in maintaining an outsized ability to set the terms of restaurant work in the decades to come. In later decades, the NRA would go on to successfully lobby to prevent wage increases at both the federal and state levels (Leidner, 2002). Under the leadership of Herman Cain in 1996, they were successful in striking a deal with the Clinton administration that involved abandoning their

opposition to a proposed minimum wage increase in exchange for a freeze on the tipped minimum wage (Philpott, 2020). The success is indicative of how employers would go on to benefit from the nexus of neoliberal policies, logics, and practices beginning in the mid-1970s.

CONCLUSION

My analysis of shifting occupational formations of service within the early period of U.S. restaurants contends that the question of who performs the labor of serving is a significant one. Histories of service reveal the foundational role of racism and sexism to the formation and maintenance of occupations (Ashcraft, 2007, 2013; Ashcraft et al., 2012; Ray, 2019). Building on insights from historians of devalued work (Glenn, 2009; Branch, 2011; Branch and Wooten, 2012), the analysis illustrates the relational nature of privileges and oppressions across key sites of negotiation over the meanings of service. The constructions of the ideal server I've highlighted demonstrate how multi-faceted, uneven relations are maintained.

The notion that particular groups of workers are more or less fit for service based on their racial, ethnic, or gender identities has had a lasting impact, and continues to inform current debates around wages in the restaurant industry. This is particularly the case for tipping. That tipping came to be tied to the occupation of service demonstrates the foundational role that racism and sexism has played. Employers have long argued that their low wages were justified because wait staff received tips from customers (Cobble, 1992). The tip swaps a mandatory higher wage for a discretionary and voluntary gift. Tipping reinforces a subservient power dynamic, allowing customers to exert immediate and direct control over those serving them (see Hunt, 2016). The recurring themes of surveillance, control, and in/visibility that my analysis surfaces continue to find purchase within the tipping relation.

The entanglement of tipping with the occupation of serving also maintains a legacy of employer attempts to stoke divisions among those involved in the work of serving. By tethering one's income to individual performance as judged based on the whims of their customers, the tipping system works against coalitional organizing among workers within restaurants and across the food service industry more broadly. This is well-illustrated by the uneven support for contemporary campaigns aimed at ending the tipped minimum wage by some restaurant employees who argue that ending tips would decrease their take home pay. One group, The Restaurant Workers of America, have placed several newspaper editorials arguing against the removal of the tipped minimum wage. In one editorial, a co-founder of the group argues:

> So why not pay all employees one minimum wage rate and be done with it? Because most servers and bartenders earn well over the minimum wage. Many of us see ourselves as professional, commission-based salespeople. A minimum wage without a tip credit would effectively turn career servers—the most experienced of whom can earn up to $24 an hour or more—into entry-level employees (Chaisson, 2019, Jan. 14).

Such arguments reflect the surfacing of justifications aimed at maintaining occupational hierarchies among restaurant workers. While the majority of tipped service workers may be making poverty-level wages, there are a subset of higher paid restaurant workers like bartenders and servers in formal, elite restaurants who want to maintain tipping. Today, restaurant workers are largely segregated by race and gender, with white males disproportionally in higher paid, public-facing positions like bartender and servers in formal restaurants (Restaurant Opportunities Centers United, 2015; Wilson, 2021). People of color who make up the majority of the industry overall are clustered in relatively lower paying, back of the house positions in lower-cost restaurants. For women of color who face the largest wage disparities, contemporary divides are another iteration of the intersecting forms of gender and racial discrimination that previously limited them to the private spaces of domestic service.

Service is not an inherently "bad" job. Its devaluation requires constant maintenance. Characterized by evolving racial and gendered hierarchies, service has long functioned in the U.S. to further unequal freedoms (Glenn, 2009; Branch, 2011; Branch and Wooten, 2012). In the here and now, amidst the evolving crises of COVID-19 and an uprising against anti-Black racism and state violence, the meanings and valuations of service have again become increasingly contested. As soon as April 2020, 5.5 million people who had been employed within restaurants and bars had already lost their jobs (Franck, 2020). Within the broader economy, Black women have disproportionately lost their jobs during the COVID-19 pandemic (Holder et al., 2021). As in the opening quote, the pandemic amplifies already existing unequal relations characterizing service. The devaluation of the gendered and racialized service worker is perhaps uniquely exacerbated in the U.S. because of decades of neoliberal policies and practices that have left wage workers without a broader social safety net. While the restaurant industry as it existed before COVID-19 may not return intact, there is a clear need for increased critical attention and coalitional organizing aimed at transforming the multi-faceted, uneven relations that have largely characterized service to date.

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The Neoliberalization of Higher Education: Paradoxing Students' Basic Needs at a Hispanic-Serving Institution

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Millions of college students in the United States lack access to adequate food, housing, and other basic human needs. These insecurities have only been exacerbated in recent decades by the country's neoliberal approach to higher education, with disproportionately negative consequences for historically underserved populations (e.g., racial/ethnic minorities, low-income students, and first-generation college students). For each of these reasons, this study explores the organizational paradoxes faced by students attending a public, 4-year Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI) in southern California. Drawing upon 30 semi-structured interviews with undergraduates who self-identified as historically underserved, our three-stage conceptualization of data analysis revealed three specific paradoxes: (1) provision vs. dependence, (2) sympathy vs. distancing, and (3) bootstrapping vs. unattainability. We conclude with practical and theoretical implications for alleviating the repercussions of neoliberal policies on today's college students.

Keywords: neoliberalism, basic needs, organizational paradox, higher education, historically underserved

"And so, I don't go out a lot with, like, friends and stuff like that. I don't really have the money for it so much anymore just because I am focused on paying for the necessities." – Samantha[1]
(undergraduate student)

Despite being the world's eleventh richest country (International Monetary Fund, 2021), millions of college students in the United States lack access to the most basic necessities, such as adequate food and housing (Crutchfield and Maguire, 2018; Pennamon, 2018; Broton and Cady, 2020; Broton et al., 2020). A multi-institutional study of nearly 86,000 college students found 45% of respondents experienced food insecurity in the past 30 days—meaning they lacked consistent access to enough food for an active and healthy lifestyle (Goldrick-Rab et al., 2019). This same study found 56% of college students experienced housing insecurity in the past year, while a staggering 17% had experienced homelessness over the same time period (Goldrick-Rab et al., 2019). Each of these numbers appear to be even higher at public 2-year institutions, as 52% of California Community College students reported food insecurity, 60% reported housing insecurity, and 19% reported being homeless in the past 12 months (Jimenez, 2019).

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[1]Pseudonym; all names have been changed to protect participants' identities in this study.

As concerning as these figures are, such food and housing insecurities allude to an increasingly complex reality of intersecting challenges. Research in the emerging field of basic needs insecurity has found students who face one type of insecurity are likely to face other intersecting needs as well (Haskett et al., 2020). Furthermore, historically underserved student populations, including racial/ethnic minorities, low-income students and first-generation college students, are disproportionately vulnerable to experiencing basic needs insecurities (Crutchfield and Maguire, 2018). Broton et al. (2020), for example, found that one in five students faced the severest form of food insecurity, which manifests as hunger and malnutrition, while approximately one in 10 of these same students faced homelessness (p. 2).

This intersecting complexity of basic needs insecurities has only been exacerbated by the United States' neoliberal approach to higher education (Giroux, 2015). Harvey (2007) defines neoliberalism as "a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade" (p. 2). Traditional markers of neoliberalism include privatization, deregulation, competitive choice, market security, laissez-faire economics, and minimal government intervention, each of which are rooted in Western-style liberalism (Phelan and Dawes, 2018).

Contrary to neoliberal assumptions that a competitive marketplace will solve all social ills (Risager, 2016), such policies have resulted in myriad individual and organizational paradoxes for today's college students (Winslow, 2015). Since the 1980s, decreased funding for higher education has created the expectation that students are solely responsible for enhancing their own well-being (Peck, 2015). Although Americans have long been told that a higher education degree will help them secure a higher-paying job, neoliberalization has also forced students to take on exorbitant student loan debts, with the average amount ballooning from $3,900/person in 1980 (EducationData.org, 2020) to over $32,000/person today (Song, 2021). Kapur (2016) explains the consequences of this neoliberal shift by writing:

> The higher costs of college tuitions relative to family incomes, student debt, and a generation that faces the prospect of a lower standard of living than its parents is a reflection of this political and economic shift toward neoliberalism. The university has a key role to play in this transformation as it is called upon to produce a new generation of workers for an economy characterized by precarity. As jobs have become increasingly temporary and ad hoc in the midst of declining social networks that would have met basic needs such as health, education, and housing, workers face an intensely competitive environment in which obsolescence and deskilling are everyday realities.

Consequently, college students today are met with a double paradox. Students first encounter an organizational paradox where the neoliberalization of higher education has expanded the role educational institutions play in terms of providing for students' basic needs (Smith and Lewis, 2011; Putnam et al., 2016). Nested within this organizational paradox, students then face individual paradoxes as irreconcilable tensions, making it increasingly difficult for them to pursue a college degree while simultaneously trying to fulfill their own basic needs (Harvey, 2007).

In light of rising basic needs insecurities, which have only been exacerbated by the United States neoliberalization of higher education, this study explores the paradoxes faced by historically underserved students attending a public, 4-year Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI) in southern California. We focus on historically underserved students' experience because of the aforementioned disproportionate impact of basic needs insecurities upon underrepresented populations. This study also responds to previous calls for research to "provide a more holistic understanding of the educational barriers faced by historically underserved college students" (Jenkins et al., 2020, p. 9). We answer this call by sharing students' experiences of paradox, and the subsequent barriers they face within the United States' higher education system.

We begin this process, first, with a literature review on the neoliberalization of higher education and organizational paradox. Next, we outline our qualitative research methods, which included semi-structured interviews with 30 undergraduate students who self-identified as racial/ethnic minorities, low-income students, and/or first-generation college students. We then reveal three paradoxes that emerged from our analysis: (1) provision vs. dependence, (2) sympathy vs. distancing, and (3) bootstrapping vs. unattainability. We conclude with practical and theoretical implications.

This study offers significant insight for scholars and practitioners alike. Numerous studies have examined the lack of basic needs among children (Coleman-Jensen et al., 2020), families (Mammen et al., 2009; Bruening et al., 2017), communities (Bruce et al., 2017), and older adults (Goldberg and Mawn, 2015). Only in recent years, however, have researchers and policymakers turned their attention to the communicative implications of basic needs insecurity on individuals during their time in institutions of higher education (Schraedley et al., 2020). Meanwhile, a growing number of university actors have also begun acknowledging the reality of basic needs insecurity on campuses (Gupton et al., 2018). Yet few studies have explored precisely how students experience the paradoxical complexity of basic needs, and even fewer studies have explored this complexity among racial/ethnic minorities, low-income students, and first-generation college students. Therefore, this study's results and analysis shed light on the United States' neoliberalization of higher education while simultaneously addressing the repercussions of those neoliberal policies on historically underserved populations.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Unequal and unjust challenges abound for today's college students ranging from intergenerational poverty to rising costs of higher education, decreased grant opportunities for low-income

college students to complex processes and eligibility factors for accessing state assistance (Alvis and Demment, 2017). Furthermore, these barriers partly explain the root causes of obstacles to social mobility in a neoliberal society. Stein (2019) writes, "higher education is largely viewed as a site in which modern promises (in particular, social mobility) can be fairly and efficiently distributed—a role that paradoxically becomes more cemented in a context in which available opportunities are increasingly scarce" (p. 204). The challenges students face have compounded in recent years, resulting in increased reliance on higher education institutions to meet or alleviate basic needs insecurity (Watson et al., 2017). Ironically, while more and more students rely on institutional support, a growing number of these same students express skepticism of "the university's commitment to adequately and effectively address student basic needs" (Watson et al., 2017, p. 136). This skepticism of higher education—and its disproportionate impact on historically underserved college students—can be more clearly understood through the lenses of (1) educational neoliberalization and (2) organizational paradox. The present section discusses each of these theoretical frameworks in more detail.

Educational Neoliberalization

One of the earliest known references to *neoliberalism* comes from Armstrong (1884), who characterized "neo-liberals" as desiring and promoting increased economic intervention from the state; however, his definition stands in stark opposition to how this term is used today (Birch, 2017). Today, neoliberalism can be characterized as "a project of potentiality organizing economic and social process activity for the accumulation of capital," where the competitive marketplace is seen as a way to resolve social issues (Hunt, 2016, p. 381). This ideology has evolved over time to refer to a collection of specific policies and economic trends. During President Ronald Reagan's first term in office, for example, he moved to limit—or even eliminate— the US Department of Education (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). In its place, Reagan's neoliberal administration promoted educational reform through market-driven strategies of deregulation, privatization, high-stakes test-based evaluations, and weakened teacher tenure and seniority rights, among other things (Peck, 2015, p. 589). In subsequent decades, the United States' higher education system became plagued by an ever-declining revenue stream from municipal, state, and federal governments.

Neoliberal proponents emphasize individualism over collectivism, governmental restraint over governmental intervention, and personal wealth over communal welfare (Steger and Roy, 2010). Scholars have written at length about how these neoliberal ideals infiltrate and become reified through the ongoing interactions of churches, governments, and businesses, as well as by individuals and their family members (ex., Larner, 2000; Salter and Phelan, 2017; Gill and Kanai, 2018; De Souza, 2019). Vocabularies consistent with market practices, for instance, now overlay a multitude of diverse institutions and social interactions, where everyone is seen as a *customer* or *client* who should have an unlimited *choice* of individual *entrepreneurs* that they support through *purchases* and *consumption*. Concerningly, the effects of neoliberalism are

especially apparent within the United States' higher education sector, where policymakers seek to "commodify and privatize universities by asserting economic efficiency, high productivity, anti-unionism, the extraction of value from both students and instructors, and pursue a 'divide and conquer' strategy against any kind of collective resistance by the powerful means of meritocratic ideology" (Briziarelli and Flores, 2018, p. 114).

Since the 1980s, educational neoliberalization has eroded distinctions between the non-profit and for-profit sectors of higher education and corporate America (Heller, 2016). For college/university employees, this erosion has resulted in decreased raises, fewer staff, and the expanded commodification of intellectual property—while administrative salaries, athletic spending, and campus beautification projects have continued to escalate (Cloud, 2018). For college and university students, the erosion between education and profit has resulted in decreased preparedness (Butrymowicz, 2017), escalated debt (Song, 2021), and—of particular interest to this study—increased basic needs insecurity (Nazmi et al., 2019).

The consequences of neoliberalism on higher education have become even more salient in the wake of recent events: 4 years of neoliberal policies from the Trump administration, followed by the ongoing COVID-19 health pandemic. Reminiscent of the Reagan administration's fiscal assault on education nearly 40 years prior, the Trump administration proposed substantial budget cuts to the US Department of Education each year he was in office (Kreighbaum, 2018). If approved, those cuts would have eliminated subsidized student loans, removed public serve loan forgiveness, slashed federal work-study programs, frozen Pell Grant[2] valuations, pillaged the Pell Grant surplus, and altered the loan repayment safety net (Bombardieri et al., 2018; Whistle, 2020). As yet another example, the Republican controlled House of Representatives even sought to tax tuition rebates as if they were personal income—a neoliberal pursuit that would have raised each student's annual tax bill by thousands of dollars (Rousseau, 2017).

The COVID-19 pandemic further highlighted neoliberalism's effect on the United States' higher education system, while also placing additional hardship on its students. A longitudinal study by the University of Southern California's (2020) Dornsife Center for Economic and Social Research found that 23% of college students increased their family care responsibilities due to the COVID-19 pandemic, 23% changed their employment status, and 28% increased their desire to remain close to home. This same study found the pandemic's collateral damage disproportionately affected historically underserved populations. Hispanic, Latinx, and low-income households are nearly four times (4x) as likely to say COVID-19 affected their re-enrollment decision, as compared to their white and upper-middle-class counterparts. Asian and Hispanic/Latinx students are also eight times (8x) as likely to take fewer classes due to COVID-19, thus slowing their time-to-graduation rates and delaying their entry into the job market (see also Polikoff et al., 2020). Each of these occurrences highlight the precarious effects of neoliberalism upon higher education, as well as the need

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[2]A Pell Grant is an award given by the federal US government to assist undergraduates from low-income households.

for researchers to examine this new type of precarity more deeply—particularly the paradoxes beleaguering historically underrepresented college students.

Organizational Paradox

A paradox is the persistent contradiction between interdependent elements (Schad et al., 2016, p. 10). Lewis (2000) defines the notion of paradox as "contradictory yet interrelated elements—elements that seems logical in isolation but absurd and irrational when appearing simultaneously" (p. 760). Such irresolvable contradictions are a normal part of daily life. Indeed, the management of paradox can be seen as the inevitable result of living in a social world (Smith et al., 2017). In this study, we examine how students communicatively made sense of the complex paradoxes they experienced through their communicative descriptions.

While paradox as an explanatory construct has roots dating back to ancient philosophers, academic interest in *organizational paradox*—both as communicative experience and theoretical lens—emerged in the 1980s (Schad et al., 2016; Smith et al., 2017). Organizational paradox theory highlights the nature and management of competing demands for organizations and for people who organize (Carmine and Smith, 2021). Over subsequent decades, scholars have used organizational paradox to explore the dialectical tensions between control and autonomy (Sundaramurthy and Lewis, 2003), stability and change (Graetz and Smith, 2008), competition and collaboration (Smith et al., 2017), exploitation and exploration (Smith and Tushman, 2005; Lavie et al., 2010), to name but a few organizational paradoxes previously studied. Importantly, organizational paradoxes may not be resolvable, rather, scholars examine how paradoxes are managed in everchanging circumstances.

One framework scholars have used to explain individuals' attempts to manage organizational paradox is through the lens of *vicious* and *virtuous cycles*. Both vicious and virtuous cycles consist of event chains that augment themselves via positive or self-reinforcing feedback loops; however, vicious cycles have detrimental consequences for an organization and/or its members. Lewis (2000) writes: "As actors seek to resolve paradoxical tensions, they may become trapped within reinforcing cycles that perpetuate and exacerbate the tension" (Lewis, 2000, p. 763). When actors face uncomfortable organizational tensions, for instance, they might respond defensively to achieve short-term comfort. Yet ironically, this response only serves to heighten the tension, thus, reinforcing counterproductive thinking and behavior over the long-term (Lewis and Smith, 2014). Individuals caught in such a vicious cycle will continue to spiral downward when they persistently favor one side of the paradoxical tension over another (Huq et al., 2017). This pull from the neglected pole will continue to intensify until organizational members are eventually forced to confront underlying conflict (Pradies et al., 2020).

Virtuous cycles, on the other hand, occur when organizational actors accept the inherent contradictions and competing demands of paradoxical situations. Unlike vicious cycles, which ensnare organizational members in a destructive feedback loop, virtuous cycles can enable positive organizational change.

Sundaramurthy and Lewis (2003), for example, found that external interventions in an organizational paradox could trigger both learning and innovation. Although we do not focus on virtuous cycles in this study, it is worth noting that Pradies et al. (2020) have described how organizational members move from one cycle to another, breaking vicious cycles and engaging in cycle reversal.

In this study, we utilize the lens of vicious cycles to interpret individuals' experience of persistent and irresolvable contradictions within a university environment (Lewis and Smith, 2014). This lens helps us address several gaps in current literature. Poole and Van de Ven (1989), Lewis and Smith (2014), and Schad et al. (2016) have urged additional scholars to utilize the ubiquity of paradox as a metatheoretical tool, which we do here by investigating the complexities of paradox as experienced by individuals within the neoliberal university. Additionally, previous scholars have not addressed the experiential indignity of vicious paradoxical cycles, which reinforce the status quo without creating room for disrupting organizational dynamics or a shift toward virtuous cycles (Schad et al., 2016). We seek to accomplish this by sharing the voices of individual students entrenched in vicious cycles. Finally, within the field of basic needs insecurity, no research to date has explored its complexity among historically underrepresented college students. Consequently, this study is guided by the following research question:

> **RQ1**: What paradox(es) do historically underserved students experience within the neoliberal university?

METHODOLOGY

In order to explore the organizational paradoxes faced by historically underserved college students, this study engaged 30 undergraduates who self-identified as racial/ethnic minorities, low-income students, and/or first-generation college students. The present section further describes our specific (1) research context, (2) research participants, (3) interview process, and (4) data analysis.

Research Context

The context for this research study was a 4-year public university located in southern California, which is also designated as a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI). At the time of the study, the university's student demographic enrollment was 50% Hispanic/Latinx, 29% White, 5% Asian, and 2% African American. Meanwhile, nearly half (49%) of university's students were Pell Grant recipients, and over one third (35%) were first-generation college students (blind cite). With such a uniquely diverse student body population, this university's environment offered a particularly appropriate context to study the basic needs of historically underserved students. The exempt study received ethics approval number is IO5476 from the Institutional Review Board.

Research Participants

Following IRB approval (#IO5476), we used purposeful sampling techniques to recruit student participants. Purposeful sampling

involves identifying and selecting individuals for their in-depth knowledge or insider status with a particular group or culture (Patton, 2002). To this end, we interviewed 30 undergraduate students who self-identified as historically underserved (e.g., racial/ethnic minorities, low-income students, and/or first-generation college students). In attempt to garner a diverse sampling of majors and grade levels, participants were recruited from disciplines across campus via course announcements. Students were supplied with an overview of the study, a copy of the IRB-approved informed consent form, and definitions for the terms "historically underserved" and "first-generation college student." Students were informed that participation was voluntary, personal information would be deidentified from the data, and involvement in the study would not affect their academic standing. Those who self-identified as belonging to a historically underserved group were given at least 1 week to indicate their interest in participating. From the 30 individuals we interviewed, 26 identified as racial/ethnic minorities, 22 identified as dependent on financial aid for college, 26 identified as first-generation college students, and 24 identified as more than one category (see **Table 1**). Twenty participants identified as female, and 10 participants identified as male. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 37 years old, with a mean of 22. The 30 participants came from a wide variety of disciplinary backgrounds, including 16 different majors. We interviewed five first-year students, four sophomores, nine juniors, and 12 seniors. All participant names in this study have been replaced with pseudonyms in order to protect their identities.

Interview Process

Our interview guide consisted of 20 questions in total: 5 questions on food insecurity, 5 questions on housing insecurity, 5 questions on textbook affordability, and 5 concluding/reflection questions. The interviews were semi-structured in nature, allowing opportunity for participants to direct the conversation as much as possible. Sample interview questions included: "Can you tell me about a time when you, or someone you know, could not access healthy food, or had to make a choice between food and another necessary expenditure?," "What has been your experience with housing as a college student?," and "What ideas or advice would you offer faculty and/or administrators who hope to improve the basic needs of historically underserved college students?" (For a complete copy of the semi-structured interview guide, please see the **Table 1**). Interviews lasted between 12 and 46 min, with a mean of 24 min. Each interview was recorded and later transcribed for analysis using the transcription service Temi.

Data Analysis

Each author analyzed the interview data using Morse (1994)'s three-stage conceptualization of data analysis: synthesizing, theorizing, and recontextualizing. For our first round of analysis, the study's first author allocated four interviews to each member of the research team with two overlapping interviews between each author. We began by individually codifying the interviews via color-coded or highlighted text, in search of potential themes. After several intensive readings through the four interviews we had each been assigned, we met to share and discuss emerging

themes in the data. We first discussed emergent concepts and processes like, "navigating campus resources," "making accommodations," "lack of support," and "responsibility for burdens." These broader themes then informed the next round of coding. By being sensitized to these broader concepts that we all recognized in the data, we each read through four more interviews, clumping and recoding until a clear tree of large-order and small-order themes emerged from the data (Lindlof and Taylor, 2011).

The subsequent step in our three-stage process of analysis focused on theorizing, a procedure Morse (1994) describes as "the constant development and manipulation of malleable theoretical schemes until the 'best' theoretical scheme is developed" (p. 32). Noticing that the participants faced tension-filled challenges when trying to meet their basic needs, we employed the vicious cycles of paradox as a theoretical lens through which to view the remaining interviews and to guide further discussions about the data. To further validate our findings, we worked together to sensemake the preliminary data while also considering potential implications for research and practice. The final step of analysis consisted of recontextualizing our findings for the purpose of developing new ways of approaching basic needs insecurity in higher education.

RESULTS

In review, this study explored the vicious cycles of organizational paradox among historically underserved college students. Drawing upon 30 interviews with undergraduates who self-identified as racial/ethnic minorities, low-income students and/or first-generation colleges students, our analysis revealed the three distinct paradoxes of (1) provision vs. dependence, (2) sympathy vs. distancing, and (3) bootstrapping vs. unattainability.

Paradox #1: Provision vs. Dependence

The first paradox that emerged from this study was provision vs. dependence. In this theme, the university system was revealed to have created a vicious cycle that required students to react defensively in order to meet their needs (e.g., hunger, housing, and access to required course materials). On one side of the paradox, provision meant that students pointed to the benefits being provided for them by the university. Examples included working on-campus jobs, living in campus housing at reduced costs, or using the campus food pantry to access free meals. On the other side of the paradox, however, students saw a contradiction in being dependent upon the university for their basic needs. A majority of student participants noted this paradox of being paid by the same institution that barely provided them with enough funds for survival. Because the university's wages did not cover their cost of living, many students were compelled to seek a second or third source of employment. The resulting hunger pangs, additional workload, and long commute all took away from the students' ability to focus on completing their higher education degrees. One participant, Samantha, explained:

	Racial/Ethnic minority	Financial aid dependent	First-generation college student	All 3 categories
Racial/Ethnic minority	27	22	24	–
Financial aid dependent	–	23	19	–
First-generation college student	–	–	26	–
All 3 categories	–	–	–	19

> I have used [the campus food pantry] once for a case where I did not have groceries, and I didn't have money to buy groceries. Say we get, you know, on campus we get paid once a month. So, um, you really have to budget and then it was, you know, say you cave in and do want to hang out with friends and then realize you don't have enough money for groceries... So I ended up getting like pasta just 'cause it makes a lot and it's easy and that would feed me for the week that I needed, and then I got paid the next week.

Despite her best efforts, Samantha was unable to stretch her monthly income from the university to cover living costs. In turn, she found herself dependent upon free groceries supplied by the university's food pantry. Although Samantha only mentions using the food pantry once, her situation highlights the provision-dependence paradox echoed by other participants. Furthermore, by blaming herself for the situation she found herself in (i.e., "caving" and wanting to hang out with friends), Samantha also alluded to a certain level of self-disciplining where she had come to accept the university's neoliberal condition of debt and financial hardship.

Another participant, Daniel, was asked to make sense of why students struggle with homelessness. He replied, "The number one reason would be cost-of-living is outrageous compared to salaries offered to college students, amongst other bills, on top of living expenses." In his response, Daniel acknowledges the contradiction of struggling to earn enough money for class, while at the same time having few options to cover the expenses required to pay for those classes. A third student, Maria, noted the paradoxical relationship between being dependent on her university for healthy food while struggling to achieve the desired grades in her coursework:

> So I think like, even though you're not putting the money toward food, your education or your grades will reflect that, and in the end it's just like a double negative, I guess. Like you're not getting food, and your grades that you're putting all your money toward are not good either.

This choice between earning enough money or earning good grades creates a vicious cycle, which undermines students' academic success. Thus, Maria's experience of the paradox points to an irreconcilable situation where students work to put money toward their education in hopes of creating a better future for themselves and their families. However, the money spent on the education is not worthwhile if these students lack the time, energy, or cognitive ability to learn the concepts being taught in class as a result—a paradox that relates directly to our study's second theme of sympathy vs. distancing.

Paradox #2: Sympathy vs. Distancing

The second paradox of sympathy vs. distancing describes how participants sympathized with their peers who struggled to overcome basic needs insecurity, while simultaneously distancing from the experience of insecurity in their own lives. Several participants described an eagerness to help their colleagues by donating to the food pantry, giving someone a ride to campus, or letting a friend live in their home. A student named Nicole, for example, sympathetically described one of her friend's experience of housing insecurity. This friend could not afford to pay her share of the rent, so Nicole explains how her friend ended up living with various other friends until she was able to save enough money to move into the shared home:

> Um, so for a couple of days she was living out of a suitcase in her car because she had to work to, you know, make her money and she didn't have a place to stay. So, we offered as much as we could until we had our house available for her to like live in.

Despite their eagerness to help, these same participants were often quick to point out they were not experiencing any basic needs struggles of their own, thus, distancing themselves from those with whom they claimed to sympathize. Continuing Nicole's example from above, she distanced herself from the experience of homelessness by emphasizing that housing insecurity did not affect her:

> Um, it doesn't affect me personally. I'm thankful enough to have a roof over my head. But, ... like you never know, like the person sitting next to you in class is working their ass off and they don't know where they're going to be sleeping the next night or what they're going to be doing the next day.

Another student, Maria, was asked to comment on how her peers might experience food insecurity. In response, she was quick to clarify she had never experienced food insecurity herself:

> Thankfully it doesn't relate to me, but for my colleagues I think that could be a really big factor in why people don't succeed in college and why it could take them way longer to succeed in college, which is sad because then they're in this situation longer and I think... most importantly, it puts a really big strain on their mental health.

Maria sympathizes by placing herself in the shoes of a student who might experience food insecurity, recognizing the critical link between being able to satisfy basic needs and achieving a higher education degree. Similarly, when asked about rising

course material costs, Lucy sympathized with the hardship of paying high textbook prices, while also going out of her way to distance herself from this hardship:

> I wish they were cheaper because even though I am able to afford them, [it] doesn't necessarily mean that I want to be spending $500 on books... And I think for other people who are not in the same financial status as me, it's way harder for them to even afford books, which puts you way behind [in] courses and classes and altogether just like [with] school.

Although this student was asked about her own experience with course materials, her response focused on the hardship of textbook costs for those who have less. By first taking special effort to establish her own financial status as being able to afford course materials, she then signifies a certain level of stigma, or an unfavorable communicative marking, toward those who cannot "even afford books." Lucy continued by telling the story of a fellow student who experienced homelessness:

> Oh my God. Actually, somebody who I had political science class with openly said it to the whole class. He was like, "No, I have been homeless for some of the time while I've been here." I had political science last semester and he was like, "I have no idea where, like, some nights I don't know where I'm going to live. I'm trying to get my sister to pay for my college or pay for housing..." And he said, if he's like, "Yeah, I've had to sleep in my car, all this stuff." And I was like, "What!?" But he openly said that to the whole class. So, I was like, that's very ballsy. Also, it's very obvious nobody asked any questions because that would be very invasive. But I think it was pretty crazy how he just said that.

Lucy sympathetically made sense of this experience by communicating shock ("What?!") and possibly even respect ("that's very ballsy"). Through these same utterances, however, Lucy also indicated surprise that her classmate would publicly divulge such circumstances, yet again revealing a certain level of stigma held toward those with whom she simultaneously sympathized. Lucy subsequently seemed to distance herself from the classmate's experience via silence, justifying any other potential reply as "very invasive."

Paradox #3: Bootstrapping vs. Unattainability

In addition to provision vs. dependence and sympathy vs. dissociation, participants also framed experiences with basic needs as a paradox between bootstrapping and unattainability. Bootstrapping refers to both a mindset and action. The phrase, "Pull yourself up by your bootstraps," is a prominent Western cultural adage conjuring visions of the self-made person who rises above the social class they were born into through sheer determination and hard work—like starting a billion-dollar business (ex., Jeff Bezos, CEO of Amazon) or becoming a brain surgeon after growing up in poverty (ex., Ben Carson, former head of US Housing and Urban Development). Western cultures idolize individuals who appear to move socially upwards without assistance; however, such upward mobility is assumed to be more

commonplace than it actually is (Pew Economic Mobility Project, 2009).

With this context in mind, we found students who thought they could make it on their own by pulling themselves up by their bootstraps, while simultaneously finding it unattainable to manage their own basic needs. Unattainability refers to the overwhelming feeling that students described when they could not manage their basic needs on their own. On the bootstrapping side of this paradox, students assumed they should be able to overcome hardship if only they worked hard enough, wanted an education enough, or were devoted enough to attaining their degree. Yet on the other hand, these same students pointed to the unfair and systemic hardships that made attaining a higher education seemingly impossible. One participant named Alessandra epitomized this paradox of bootstrapping vs. unattainability by recounting her inability to work enough hours to make ends meet:

> Now that I'm on my own, I feel like I struggle the most... But [where] there's a will, there's way. Yeah, you just got to do it. Yes, if I do [eat on campus], I try not to, um, cause it's pricey, but if I do, I'll probably, if I'm really trying, if I'm really, really broke, I'll probably do like a Cup of Noodles from the [university dining hall].

Alessandra points to bootstrapping logic when she says, "there's a will, there's a way" and "you just got to do it" in reference to providing meals for oneself. At the same time, Alessandra points out the fact that she could not afford healthy meals—food security was unattainable.

A second participant, Regina, pointed to the paradox of bootstrapping vs. unattainability by telling the story of a friend who struggled to work full-time while also engaged as a full-time college student:

> Um, I haven't experienced [housing insecurity], but I do have a friend who experienced it... She ended up dropping out of school because she didn't have a vehicle to go from off-campus to on-campus. And she, um, she just had so many other things to worry about, I guess... Can't really work full-time to have a place to live and go to school. At least that was her situation. So, I just remember she couldn't continue with her education.

Regina's friend found that engaging in bootstraps behavior made her education unattainable. As she pointed out in the interview, one cannot "really work full-time to have a place to live and go to school." Instead, her friend acknowledged that the competing burdens of work, coursework, housing, and reliable transportation were unsustainable to the point that she had could not continue pursuing a higher education degree.

Samantha also explained her experience with the vicious cycle of trying to fulfill the bootstraps myth:

> Um, and then so yeah, so I didn't want to have them [the participant's parents] pay for anything. I want to start, you know, being an adult. So, I've had to take a few hours- extra hours at the [campus gymnasium] my first semester where I really was, like, separated myself. I kind of overworked myself. I was working a

full 20- which we can work. Uh, I told [my work supervisor] to up to 20 hours on campus. So, I did the 20 hours. I think at the time I was taking like almost 18 units, so it was a lot and intense. Um, and then since then, I've decided, um, to cut down on those hours. So, I kind of had to budget and figure out like how much I needed to make in order to pay for groceries and for gas. Um, instead of just like making as much as I could.

Once Samantha started college, she felt she had to engage in bootstrapping behavior to be perceived as an "adult." She tried to work the maximum number of hours allowed on campus while also taking an overloaded number of course units. This schedule eventually caused Samantha significant stress, however, as she describes the extra working hours as having taken away from her ability to succeed academically. Finally, Ariana described a similar paradoxical situation of bootstrapping v. unattainability by commenting:

It's really incredibly hard to maintain a job and go to school full time like that. Like I tried, it didn't work. It affected my grades terribly. So it, it kind of leaves them in a situation where, you know, or am I going to jeopardize my grades or am I going to find a job and, you know, just do that full time. But some people have the dedication to just say, you know, screw it. I was sleeping in my car, you know, but I needed to keep my grades up.

In the end, each of these participants referred to their perceived inability to simply "pull themselves up by the bootstraps." Instead, they discovered—often painfully—that working to successfully fulfill their basic needs only hurt their ability to successfully fulfill their educational requirements. In the next section, we bring together these three experiential paradoxes to discuss implications for historically underserved students, the neoliberal university, and vicious paradox as metatheory.

DISCUSSION

In this study, we sought to answer the following research question: What paradox(es) do historically underserved students experience within the neoliberal university? To answer this question, we interviewed historically underserved students about their basic needs, including food security, housing security, and access to required course materials. In our analysis of these interviews, three paradoxes emerged that highlight the vicious cycle of basic needs challenges faced by students in today's neoliberal university: (1) the provision vs. dependency paradox, (2) the sympathy vs. distancing paradox, and (3) the bootstrapping vs. unattainability paradox. In this section, we address each of these three paradoxes in turn, analyzing them through the lens of vicious cycles that stymie students' ability to successfully move through institutions of higher education. By doing so, we offer practical implications for university actors, while also proposing theoretical insights for paradox theory and future paths for basic needs research.

Provision vs. Dependence

In this study's first paradox of provision vs. dependence, participants discussed the ways in which their basic needs were

provided for by the university, including access to free food from the campus pantry, job opportunities, and on-campus housing. On the reverse side of this paradox, students also saw the contradiction of relying or being dependent upon the university, even while paying that university for their education. Because university stipends and financial aid did not provide enough funding to cover both their classes and their basic needs, many students had to take on second jobs, full-time positions, or resort to other extreme measures in order to stay enrolled in classes.

Within the United States' neoliberal system of higher education, the primary goal of the university is to function like a business where the accumulation of profit supersedes all other goals. When profit is materially and discursively, through language and text, placed ahead of the primary stakeholders' livelihood (a.k.a., students), those stakeholders are not the ones who benefit. In fact, students are the ones who end up suffering more than other university actors because of reinforced paradoxical cycles of regression and ambivalence (Lewis, 2000). These cycles paralyze any management or movement forward out of the paradox. We propose that university actors seek ways to help students break out of these vicious basic needs cycles, or else reverse the cycles to help lead to more virtuous outcomes for managing this paradox. In offering recommendations, we acknowledge that university actors may have to work within the confines of neoliberalism, even while advocating for upending unjust and inequitable systems (ex., free college for all, debt forgiveness).

Actors within higher education must help students to escape the provision-dependency paradox by acknowledging its presence in the following ways. As an immediate response to the crisis of basic needs insecurity, university administrators and staff must first accept that a subset of their students depend upon the higher education system to meet their basic needs. Several students suggested that university actors needed to listen, acknowledge the difficulties students go through, and express more empathy for students with basic needs insecurities. For example, Maria said, "So I think people like faculty and students just need to be more understanding and, just because you're not dealing with something doesn't mean that like someone else is or isn't." Another student, Jorge, recommended listening: Just listen to their [students'] problems and make sure that you understand that they didn't choose this, they didn't want this, but it's what's given to them and they're working with what they have to show that. Finally, Chris, echoed the sentiments of Maria and Jorge when he suggested, "Maybe have like a workshop for professors—an empathy workshop—but like a workshop you're able to, I guess it gets down to learn how to empathize."

Second, to temporarily meet students' basic needs in emergencies, universities must adopt organizational flexibility, including continuing the provision of emergency grants or funding, accessible community gardens and pantries, and open education resources. Throughout our interviews, students expressed a desire for the university to continue providing resources that would alleviate students' immediate basic needs insecurities. When asked what recommendations she had for the university, Samantha recommended:

Keep growing the food pantry and making that available to as many students as possible. I think I know, but not a lot of people know that housing actually has a program where if you need a place to say stay, they have emergency rooms that you can stay in for free.

When asked what recommendations they had to offer, Louie mentioned expanding the hours of the food pantry, and Daniel suggested putting the pantry in a more visible area or in several spaces across campus.

Third, universities should encourage more open communication about basic needs to destigmatize the status of such insecurities. In her recommendations, Eliza described the stigmatizing status of basic needs insecurity: "I think it's hard for kids to like come out and talk about this stuff because it is like very close with the heart and um, it's tough subject to talk about, especially just money. It was just really touchy subject for some people." Conversations about basic needs, at all levels, should be encouraged rather than relegated to marginal physical and discursive spaces on-campus. By making these conversations part of the organizational culture, basic needs stigma could be lessened. Students pressed for a communitarian approach to lessening stigma. For example, Louie suggested taking along another person to the food pantry to show them where it was located on campus. Bethany recommended the creation and promotion of a collaborative informational video:

If you're a first-time student, this is what you should know or like have a video of a first time student like, a collaboration of a bunch of first-time students and then have them give their advice or like something like that. Because I know that would have been when I was applying here, I loved looking at the videos so I know I would have watched that, and it would have been good to know… [The pantry] needs to be way more advertised because I have no idea where the food pantry is.

Further, raising awareness of basic needs insecurity helps university members better understand the obstacles to basic needs security that we are up against. In other words, the presence of basic needs insecurity should serve as a warning to university actors across the United States and the world of rising student precarity. With widespread awareness of basic needs insecurity, we should also encourage a broader indignation with the systems and institutions accepting *any* level of basic need insecurity. Alessandra expressed frustration with the acceptance of struggle around basic needs insecurity, saying:

I noticed it more and myself and some of my friends and then it's just kinda crazy how we've just kind of learned to live that way [struggling to access basic needs] and learned to push through it, which is, you know, isn't necessarily a weakness. We're learning to be adults and be responsible. But when you think about it, it's, you know, it should not be that way.

Fourth, universities could partner with third-party entities to address basic needs. One such example is Swipe Out Hunger, a non-profit organization which allows students with extra dining hall meal swipes to donate them to their peers. Ultimately, universities should be held responsible for helping students meet their basic needs by prioritizing students' livelihood over profit-driven food service providers, such as Compass or Aramark (Anderson, 2021; Marcus, 2021).

Sympathy vs. Distancing

In the paradox of sympathy vs. distancing, students spoke sympathetically about their peers during the interviews when recalling stories of those who struggled with basic needs. At other moments during the interviews, students even expressed empathy for their peers because they, too, had first-hand experience with the complex web of challenges that their peers faced in meeting basic needs. For example, participants were eager to help by donating to the campus food pantry, letting a friend live with them temporarily or giving a friend car rides to campus.

The sympathy vs. distancing paradox derives out of pervasive neoliberal ideology. In a neoliberal society, structures of government, higher education, and business rely upon the existence of a vast network of charities and narratives of hierarchical deservedness (De Souza, 2019) in order to explain and reify widening economic inequality (Piketty, 2020). Individuals in the United States consistently hear and subscribe to narratives of sympathy for those who have less; yet those same individuals typically view living in poverty as a stigmatized status. Therefore, individuals distance themselves from the lived experiences of those who manage the realities of poverty, which is often a complex matrix of discursive and material conditions that affect basic needs access (De Souza, 2019). Lewis (2000) discusses the importance of managing paradox to capture its "enlightening potential" (p. 763), in order to move beyond perceptual biases that become entrenched when we view the world through simplistic binaries.

To combat such binaries and vicious paradoxical cycles, we propose that actors with the most power in higher education—especially state legislators, trustees or regents, and university administrators, among others—should break dysfunctional communicative dynamics by first listening to students with basic needs insecurity. Pradies et al. (2020) have argued that breaking dysfunctional dynamics can occur in the following ways: (1) questioning persistent beliefs about the paradox, (2) revamping assumptions about one's role in the organization, and (3) giving free rein to emotions (p. 8). We add "listening" as a crucial first step to this model of shifting paradox dynamics. By starting Pradies et al.'s disruption process with listening, institutional actors will be better informed to root out dysfunction within higher education organizations.

Bootstrapping vs. Unattainability

In the final paradox, students described the individualized necessity for themselves and their peers to overcome incredible basic needs hardships. Students discursively drew upon the widespread "bootstraps" narrative by talking with the interviewer about the achievement of a higher education degree only if they could work hard enough, want it enough, and decided to devote themselves to meeting their basic needs. On the other hand, students explained that the basic needs hardships they faced were

unfair, systemic in nature, and seemingly unattainable. Specific examples included the inability to work enough hours to buy quality food in addition to an inability to balance work, life, and school. Subscribing to the bootstraps narrative served only to perpetuate the discourse that suffering alone is normal in the process of seeking a higher education degree. However, narratives can be changed.

Many know the saying, "Pull yourself up by your bootstraps" and perhaps think of the so-called self-made person accomplishing an incredible task seemingly on their own. The bootstraps narrative permeates individual, family, organizational, and national discourses in American culture. Individuals who move socially upwards, or who are talked about as doing so without assistance, are perceived as idols (Cloud, 1996). Yet the original meaning of pulling oneself up by bootstraps meant the opposite of what it means today—an impossible task:

> An 1834 publication ridiculed a claim to have built a perpetual-motion machine by saying that the inventor might next heave himself over a river "by the straps of his boots." An 1840 citation scoffs that something is "as gross an absurdity as he who attempts to raise himself over a fence by the straps of his boots. (Kristof, 2020)

While the original bootstraps metaphor paradied how foolish and impossible it was to "pull oneself up by one's bootstraps," today's college students often discuss bootstrapping as if it is a practice to aspire to—a way to urge themselves and others to work hard, but also to work alone.

This paradox is harmful because the bootstraps narrative further alienates individuals with basic needs insecurity at a time when they are particularly vulnerable. Vulnerability and alienation are part of the vicious cycle this paradox sustains in higher education. While listening is important an important first step toward breaking dysfunctional organizational cycles, creating counternarratives about college students' basic needs insecurity could facilitate alternative responses and embed virtuous dynamics in higher education institutions (Pradies et al., 2020, p. 8). We want to be clear that we are not arguing against hard work, self-determination, or the agency of students. Rather, we urge scholars and practitioners to shun any institutional complacency that connotates systemic and individual barriers as being indistinguishable from one another.

Based upon previous communication models from De Souza (2019) and Dutta (2008), we propose that university staff and administrative members engage in participatory discussion sessions with students who have struggled with basic needs insecurity. These sessions would serve several diverse purposes. First, students would have an opportunity to speak about their experiences with intersecting basic needs issues in such a way that their voices could be amplified across university sectors. Second, these sessions could serve as an entry point for creating deeper understanding of the unparalleled challenges college students face today. Third, participatory sessions may minimize social and self-stigmatization around basic needs insecurity, especially if discussions contribute to a stronger and more unified organizational identity. Engaging in participatory ways to create virtuous paradoxes might also include having administrators defer from their positions of power in order to meet students in the times and spaces where they already gather. Alternatively, university administrators could offer to pay students for the time they spend speaking about their experiences, attending conferences about basic needs, or offering ideas for communicative campaigns about basic needs insecurity on campus.

Pradies et al. (2020) have proposed that facilitating new responses to paradoxes can enable trustful relationships and foster emotional equanimity. Our findings expand upon these previous scholars' work by explaining the ways in which the paradoxes communicatively maintain indignities when and where students cannot meet basic needs. We urge future scholars to examine how virtuous paradoxical cycles build the emotional confidence of organizational actors in positions of precarity.

CONCLUSION

The neoliberalization of higher education occurs not only in the economics of tuition, housing and course materials costs, but also through organizational communication and personal interactions. Thus, this study's research context—a public, 4-year Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI) in southern California—offered a unique opportunity to examine how historically underserved students made sense of their experiences with basic needs (in)security. While this case provided a glimpse into the barriers college students face, the context we examined may be quite different from other institutions of higher education. For example, private universities and 2-year institutions may have other mechanisms in place (or a lack thereof) for addressing basic needs insecurities. The same can be assumed for non-HSI campuses, as well as colleges and universities located beyond the United States. Nevertheless, this study's context still provides scholars and practitioners new information about how students experience organizational paradoxes at the individual level—particulary among racial/ethnic minorities, low-income students, and first-generation college students.

Neoliberal policies have an outsize effect on historically underserved students. We encourage future researchers to continue examining how students manage basic needs over time as universities adopt patchwork solutions to address widening inequities. Further, we would like to see examples of universities who have broken or reversed vicious paradoxical cycles by creating virtuous cycles via long-term commitments to students needs. Future researchers may consider conducting an analysis of institutional responses to students seeking financial aid or help alleviating basic needs. Our proposed recommendations for listening, participating in discussions, and moving toward participatory solutions should not be an invitation to further burden students with tasks on top of the needs they currently manage. Instead, those in positions of power should bear the onus of creating or empowering existing spaces for dialogue.

In sum, exploring paradox from an individual perspective answers previous calls from basic needs scholars to "provide a more holistic understanding of the educational barriers faced by historically underserved college students" (Jenkins et al., 2020, p. 9). Qualitative studies like this one also allows for participants to describe the complexity of their lived experiences. By sharing the participants' voices, we hope to dignify the difficult experience of managing basic needs while pursuing higher education—an issue that is particularly salient for today's college students who are trying to make their way in neoliberal colleges and university systems.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The datasets presented in this article are not readily available because the full interviews gathered reveal personal information about the participants, the IRB has asked us not to share their information with others outside of the study. Requests to access the datasets should be directed to Megan Schraedley, mschraedle@wcupa.edu.

ETHICS STATEMENT

The studies involving human participants were reviewed and approved by Institutional Review Board (IRB) of California State University Channel Islands. The patients/participants provided their written informed consent to participate in this study.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

All authors listed have made a substantial, direct and intellectual contribution to the work, and approved it for publication.

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Bodies and Documents: The Material Impact of Collaborative Information-Sharing Within the Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program

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This study examines information-sharing practices within the Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program (SAWP), focusing on the program as it is administered within Ontario. I analyze 61 documents for their content, codification of stakeholder relationships, and discourse regarding the program. Documents were selected based on their creation, use, or circulation within Ontario, and based on the likelihood that at least one stakeholder group would look to the document for (what they perceive to be) reliable information. Documents include, for example, SAWP contracts, webpages describing program requirements, and e-pamphlets on workplace safety and accessing services. Document analysis was supplemented by interviews with industry and service provider experts, which guided interpretation of documents' significance. I argue that documents function as material actors, alongside (and sometimes beyond) human actors, and make physical impact on SAWP bodies and realities. Documents construct and uphold neoliberal structures surrounding the program by contributing to the creation and sustaining of incomplete, labour-centric individuals. Through consistent sharing of narrow, "work" information, and the rare inclusion of more well-rounded, "non-work" knowledge, documents subtly discipline the boundaries of acceptable and unacceptable communication. In doing so, material actors (alongside other SAWP actors) perpetuate a foreign worker program which does not consider the varied, complex needs of whole persons but, instead, treats them as disposable labouring bodies.

Keywords: migration, labour, agriculture, disciplinary power, discourse, information, access

INTRODUCTION

This article examines information-sharing within Canada's Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program (SAWP) as it relates to long-standing flaws within the program's ability to foster effective communication with (and among) workers and other SAWP stakeholders. These flaws include: language barriers (Mysyk et al., 2009; Paz Ramirez, 2013), inadequate translation services (Mysyk et al., 2009), unclear program processes (Vosko, 2018, p. 902), insufficient job training (Paz Ramirez, 2013; Caxaj and Cohen, 2019), constrained access to information on worker rights (McLaughlin and Weiler, 2019, p. 3), weak inter-governmental and cross-agency communication (Nakache and Kinoshita, 2010; Braun, 2012), minimal communication with the public on key issues (Nakache & Kinoshita, 2010), and lack of support in understanding formal and informal infrastructure (Basok et al., 2014; McLaughlin et al., 2017; Caxaj and Cohen, 2019). Though access to information finds

mention in several scholarly works on SAWP, few, if any, have dedicated study to knowledge-sharing as the main question. Yet, migrant workers have been speaking to these issues for a number of years (Paz Ramirez, 2013; Basok et al., 2014; McLaughlin and Weiler, 2019), and have highlighted the importance of clear and comprehensive information to their safety and wellbeing (United Food and Commercial Workers Canada and Agricultural Worker Alliance, 2020).

My study intervenes in this literature, and aims to include information-sharing more fully among scholarly discussions of SAWP's varied harms—understanding it as a significant concern (Caropresi, 2013) along interrelated spectrums of oppression (Thomas et al., 2016; Strauss and McGrath, 2017). Extending SAWP literature on the prevalence of neoliberal structures within program spaces (Paz Ramirez, 2013; Preibisch, 2010; Braun, 2012; Basok, et al., 2014), I argue that SAWP's discursive practices represent another dimension contributing to the disciplining of program bodies towards neoliberal ends. Documentation perpetuates de-collectivizing and the minimizing of labour-social intersections (McLaughlin et al., 2017; Paz Ramirez, 2013) through its representation of relevant program stakeholders, needs, and dimensions of life. These representations invariably favour labour and industry concerns over social, familial, and communal wellbeing. As with other areas of SAWP,[1] this inattention to "whole workers" (Jane McAlevey, cited in McLaughlin et al., 2017) contributes to the creation and sustaining of disposable labouring bodies, as we "import workers, not people" (Preibisch, 2010, p. 432).

Given these discursive harms, I discuss the possibilities of attending to information and its tools. Information represents a shared and collaborative need among stakeholders (Participant 3, farm-owner, 2019; Participant 4, NGO, 2019; Caropresi, 2013) amid a historically polarizing program, and may reinvigorate principles of shared responsibility. Documents represent a meeting place where, ". . .as one writes about oneself to others, and as others write back, what one can say of oneself transforms, until one contests the limits of one's discursive position" (Sheldahl-Thomason, 2018, p. 131). Further, I suggest that consideration of how documents act within SAWP spaces encourages relational and ethical interactions with all program agents (human and non-human), which allows us to consider what "good information" and "good documents" might mean for future SAWP realities—that is, the program we hope to see.

Background on SAWP

SAWP began in 1966 as a pilot project intended to combat (real or perceived) labour shortages in Canada (Preibisch and Hennebry, 2011, p. 20). Under SAWP, Canadian farms (growing produce from a list of specified commodities) can apply to host and employ SAWP enrollees from Mexico and eleven Caribbean countries as follows: ". . .for a maximum period of 8 months, between January 1 and December 15, provided they are able to offer the workers a minimum of 240 hours of work

within a period of 6 weeks or less" (Government of Canada, 2020a, para. 2). In 2014, SAWP accepted 35,000 workers (Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council, 2017), with 17,968 of those workers labouring in the province of Ontario (Agri-Food Economic Systems, 2015, p. 6).[2] SAWP workers are concentrated predominantly in Ontario[3] and Quebec, with British Columbia and Alberta holding the next highest populations (McLaughlin, 2009; Preibisch, 2012). The majority of these workers travel from Mexico; in 2013, 18,499 enrollees from Mexico worked in Canadian provinces (Consulado General de México en Toronto, 2016). The administrative structure of SAWP carries distinct challenges and vulnerabilities. Workers travel to Canada under employer-specific work permits, meaning that loss of employment, whether through dismissal or resignation, necessitates deportation (Basok et al., 2014). Worker housing is a farm-owner responsibility, typically located on-farm or on an off-site employer-owned property, and amounts to a totalizing environment for working, living, and socializing. This system implies, even if employers do not explicitly exercise, control and surveillance (Paz Ramirez, 2013; McLaughlin, et al., 2017). Workers contribute to various employment benefits on a mandatory basis, but are unable to collect some (e.g., employment insurance) as they cannot remain in the country if they are unemployed (MacLean & McLaughlin, 2018). Importantly, the program is administered within contexts of neoliberalism, which require disposable, cheap, racialized labour to sustain contemporary capitalism. Following scholars like Brown (2015), I conceptualize neoliberalism as a normative rationale that permeates the everyday (p. 30). Through discourses of economization spread throughout all spheres of life, neoliberalism enables the production of subjects in the form of these disposable, labouring bodies (p. 21).

As SAWP impacts a vast number of life and labour concerns, relevant documents included in this study are similarly varied. Documents may be created by government agencies, non-profit groups, service providers, health organizations, workplace organizations, or other local groups. Information within documents may be aimed at supporting farm-owners, service providers, and/or SAWP enrollees in fulfilling their various roles within the program.

METHODS

In this study, I employ a conceptual framework which blends theories on non-human agency, materiality, and power, both within and beyond Foucauldian thought, and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). Following other scholars, I understand CDA to

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[1]For example, the physical disciplining of intra-workplace socializing. See Paz Ramirez, 2013.

[2]With the introduction of a new temporary foreign worker program (TFWP) structure, statistics for SAWP admissions have been combined with other agriculture programs (e.g., primary agriculture stream). However, in 2018, Statistics Canada reports that 54,734 temporary foreign workers (TFWs) were employed within the agricultural sector (Statistics Canada, 2020, para. 7).

[3]In 2017, Ontario's agricultural sector employed 97,800 people, 28% of Canada's agricultural workforce (Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council, 2019, para. 2).

function as both theory and method (Knezevic, 2011). Foucauldian and non-human agency theories bring important insights on the interrelated existence of documents, bodies, and power, where documentation is understood as a disciplinary and self-disciplinary action on bodies and spaces. CDA bolsters the Foucauldian framework with its long history of thought on neoliberalism and (new)capitalism. In addition, CDA tempers Foucault's penchant to get "caught up in the verbal" (Meyer & Wodak, 2001, p. 20) and occasionally fail to acknowledge the physicality and physical impact of text (Butler, 1990). Each framework is discussed below.

Foucault, and Other Theories on Materiality and Agency

Foucauldian theories are well-established within SAWP studies for their pertinence to issues of power, governance, and nuanced or indirect expressions of violence (Preibisch & Hennebry, 2011; Braun, 2012; Paz Ramirez, 2013; Basok et al., 2014; Basok & Bélanger, 2016; McLaughlin et al., 2017). In Foucault's work, "complex documentary organization [s]" (Foucault, 1995, p. 214) are often instrumental in discipline and control. He argues that the practice of recording can tangibly shift the trajectories of lives (2000, p. 161). Here, documentation is an exercising of power that alters physical realities. Discursive practices create categories, indexes, and observations that render bodies and their actions visible or invisible, normal or abnormal, with important consequences for bodies (Foucault, 1995; Foucault, 2000). Though scholars have noted that Foucault's work is at times devoid of "thingness" (Butler, 1990; Elden & Crampton, 2007, p. 56), in some of Foucault's work, there is a sustained engagement with documents as "things" acting on and with bodies (Elden & Crampton, 2007; Sheldahl-Thomason, 2018). The mobilization of documents to discipline populations is thus crucial to questions of labour[4], migration, and the expression of rights, resistance, and life within these spheres.

Non-human and textual agency, more broadly, adds to conceptualization of materiality, power, and action in this vein. Theories within these areas allow for a hybridity of human and non-human action, where organizational texts display levels of agency by "…participat [ing] in the channeling of behaviors, constitut [ing] and stabiliz [ing] organizational pathways, and broadcast [ing] information/ orders" (Cooren, 2004, p. 388). The idea here being that texts contribute to, or go beyond, human action with their particular abilities to mobilize across space and time, legitimize authorities and standards, and mold behaviours (Cooren, 2004; Kuhn, 2008, p. 1236, p. 388). Texts structure the values, knowledge, roles, and duties of human actors within specific organizations and

organizational settings through the creation of "authoritative texts" which come to represent the whole (Kuhn, 2008, p. 1236).

Critical Discourse Analysis

As mentioned above, CDA is discussed both as theory and method. Updates to Fairclough's tradition which, influenced by post-structuralism (Robinson, 2016, p. 117), acknowledge that reality shapes and is shaped by language have been conceptually useful to SAWP (and related) studies. There is a fairly substantial body of work within labour/migration fields which employs CDA to examine "…interrelated elements such as social relations, power, institutions, and cultural values…" (Cheng, 2016, p. 2513), as well as neoliberalism (Bennett, 2018), construction of the Other (Vickers and Rutter, 2018), and similar themes, as they are co-constituted within text. Following works like these, within my study, CDA offers ideas on the physical realities of capitalism, neoliberalism, and power as they relate to language and texts. These are discussed below.

As with a Foucauldian framework, CDA asserts that documents, text, and language are significant, even when they appear insignificant, objective, or "dry" (Foucault, 2000). This is particularly crucial when examining administrative program documents, which seek to provide "just-the-facts." On their surface, and for some intended uses, these documents do not (appear to) communicate meaningfully about the program's political or social significance. CDA provides a toolbox for illuminating the impact of subtext and absences within language. As Fairclough notes, CDA claims to "help correct the widespread underestimation of the significance of language in production, maintenance, and change of social relations of power" (Fairclough, 2014, p. 45).

Further, CDA brings a rich tradition of capitalist, new capitalist, and neoliberal critique. Those utilizing CDA have sought to analyze "narratives of progress" which center capital growth (Fairclough, 2000, p. 148). Within labour studies broadly, CDA is often used to analyze discursive and textual tools employed for the creation of individualized and productive citizens within a neoliberal context of privatization, responsibilization, and deregulation (Bennett, 2018; Shin and Ging, 2019). CDA studies have situated migratory labour within capitalist systems which increasingly require flexible, disposable workforces (Preibisch and Hennebry, 2011; Basok and Bélanger, 2016; Bennett, 2018), and are characteristic of governments which outsource and download responsibility (Franck and Anderson, 2019) to maximize economic benefits. These themes are crucial to the study of SAWP broadly, and are additionally useful in understanding its discursive world more narrowly, as scholars note program language possesses a disproportionate economic focus (Satzewich, 2007; Bauder, 2008; McLaughlin et al., 2017; Vosko, 2018).

As some scholars have noted Foucault's tendency to get "caught up in the verbal" (Meyer and Wodak, 2001, p. 20), CDA lastly provides some necessary conceptual counterparts. In understanding relationships between discursive practices and realities, CDA assumes a relatively material (but not deterministic) perspective. CDA allows for "the mediation between grand theories as applied to society at large and

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[4]Importantly, these are issues of racialized labour. This study is not able to fully address issues of race across information-sharing and documentation networks, as these dynamics involve nuanced and heterogenous racial identities. Studies which successfully examine race as it relates to SAWP (Braun, 2012; Vosko, 2013) typically focus on one racialized identity, sending country, etc.

concrete instances of social interaction" (p. 18). This approach, alongside Foucault, allows for examination of the material impacts between documents and realities without assuming a totalizing perspective.

Data Collection

Data was collected under a Grounded Theory (GT) and Critical Grounded Theory (CGT) approach. Briefly, relevant to my study, GT and CGT[5] data collection methods: 1) construct data categories and coding from within the data, rather than through pre-established criteria and 2) allow data collection and analysis to occur simultaneously, and inform each other (Belfrage and Hauf, 2017, p. 260). Professional experience in the agricultural sector[6] and initial literature review informed data sources, but, as in GT and CGT, the process was in large part inductive (Belfrage and Hauf, 2017, p. 260). Data collection was a two-pronged approach consisting of 61 documents (primary data) and 5, in-depth, semi-structured interviews (secondary data). These interviews were not a representative sample and were thus used under a GT and CGT approach as the "field work" that guided my "desk work" (Belfrage and Hauf, 2017, p. 260). As mentioned above, this simultaneous/cyclical relationship opened new avenues for data sources (as they were revealed in interviews) and interview participants (as they were included in documents).

Documents were initially located using keywords in a Google[7] search query[8]. Documents were added as they were discovered through, for example, cross-referencing within documents, and recommendations during interviews. Document selection was based on the following criteria: documents must be explicitly created for, or used within, SAWP contexts; documents must have been circulated in Ontario[9]; the intended audience of the document must (appear to or explicitly) be a SAWP stakeholder; and the document must be "official." For the purposes of this study, "official documents," were considered to be those which SAWP stakeholders would seek out for (what they perceived to be) reliable information on SAWP, related processes and issues,

and/or life in Canada. Op-eds, news media, personal blogs, etc. were excluded from the "official documents" criterion.

Document data collection took place from September 25, 2019 to October 25, 2019. A total of 61 English-language[10] documents of varying lengths (anywhere between 1 and 76 pages) were collected from online sources and by request from relevant stakeholder groups. 68 documents were originally collected and, after initial analysis, seven were excluded from the data set. Reasons include: incompatibility with coding software (n = 4), the data source did not meet the collection criteria (n = 2), and relevance to SAWP was low (n = 1). Documents ranged from SAWP employment contracts to government review of the program, to info-documents on services for SAWP workers, to name a few.

Five, in-depth (30–90 min), semi-structured interviews were conducted between October 20, 2019 and December 5, 2019. Potential participants were identified during literature review, initial search engine queries, by recommendation from stakeholders, and based on well-known organizations within the field. These interviews took place by phone or in-person with civil servants (n = 1), farm-owners and collectives (n = 2), and community, non-profit, or rights groups (n = 2) who have experience with SAWP and communicating about SAWP. Interviews related to participants' (and their organizations') information-sharing networks, practices, experiences, and recommendations; what they communicate about SAWP, to who, and how; what currently works well, and what still requires attention. The workers themselves were not recruited given the risk of research fatigue, the commonly documented fear of repercussions from employers and officials, and the extensive history of worker interviews which creates redundancy in the context of this study. These interviews were the "field work" that guided my "desk work" (Belfrage and Hauf, 2017, p. 260), and were not intended or used as primary data. Given increasing calls to generate research which uplifts, complements, and centers community voices (McLaughlin and Weiler, 2019), these interviews ensured that my data analysis was informed by and remained cognizant of the interests, concerns, and desires of those with lived experience.

Data Analysis

Documents were coded in nVivo (version 12), first, for descriptive findings and second, for critical implications of these results under a CDA approach. Descriptive findings were crucial in formulating and codifying the scope of SAWP's information barrier, and provided a landscape to begin CDA interpretations within. Further, descriptive findings, which generated specific percentages for each code reference, were useful in quantifying any absences or lacks in documents.

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[5]The term CGT is intended to acknowledge that grounded theory rarely claims to be purely inductive in its modern uses (Belfrage & Hauf, 2017, p. 258). Both theories employ similar data collection techniques.

[6]For many years, I worked in the fields and in packing facilities alongside SAWP workers. In later years, I worked in various administrative roles, with SAWP documents (LMIAs, contracts, work permits), living conditions (inspections, repairs), training and orientation (health and safety, explanation of fees, processes), transportation (to appointments, clinics, work, bunkhouses), communication facilitation (between workers and community members, organizations, and other staff), and English education (writing, reading, and speaking).

[7]As one of the most popular search engines.

[8]Keywords: "health SAWP workers" "SAWP explanation" "SAWP information" "SAWP organizations" "SAWP resources" "SAWP regulations" "SAWP requirements" "SAWP worker things to know" "SAWP" "Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program" "seasonal agricultural workers Canada" "seasonal farm workers Canada" "transportation SAWP" "how does SAWP work" "migrant rights activist groups Ontario".

[9]Analysis concentrated on Ontario for its high concentration of SAWP workers, and accessibility for interviews (as I was located in Ontario).

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[10]SAWP enrollees are from both English-speaking and Spanish-speaking countries. SAWP enrollees from Spanish-speaking countries have varying levels of English literacy. Several documents collected for this study had translations in Spanish (e.g., those distributed by Justicia for Migrant Workers, 2021). The English versions were analyzed within this study.

However, I will focus on CDA results, given the scope of this article.

For clarity, results have been presented in this article as three main analytical themes. As in GT, these themes formed from emerging patterns during the analytic process. First, *program representation.* This theme refers to how the program is represented and marketed nationally and globally. Existing research (Satzewich, 2007; Vosko, 2018; Binford, 2019) on the subject establishes "successful model of migration management," "economic success," "Canadian-first," "labour shortage solution," and "triple win" as key phrases within public-facing discourse on SAWP. This category primarily establishes the existing landscape of SAWP discourse and confirms previous literature.

Second, *stakeholder representation.* This theme relates to specific stakeholder mentions. Stakeholder references in the texts belonged to fourteen job categories: F.A.R.M.S., sending country, receiving country, worker, employer, liaison, consulate, NGO or service provider, industry representative, third-party representative, civil servant, workers' family, employers' family, researcher, and settled community. Given an expansive number of stakeholders found in existing research and in my interview data (Preibisch, 2004; Vosko, 2018; McLaughlin et al., 2017; Participant 4, 2019, NGO; Participant 5, 2020, NGO), this stakeholder list is not exhaustive–however, it represents all job identifiers present in these documents after coding.[11] References to these stakeholders were analyzed according to the depth, frequency, and relative importance given to their mentions within documents. In addition, this theme examines the representation and potential disciplining of relationships and collective responsibility within SAWP landscapes. Collaborative relationships are understood to be key in determining how well, if at all, information is shared.

Stakeholders who are not legally authorized (e.g., in contracts) or government-supported (e.g., through inclusion in program review) are referred to throughout as "non-work" and "unofficial" stakeholders. "Official" stakeholders are the employer, the employee, the sending country, and the receiving country, as determined in the SAWP contract (Government of Canada, 2021), as well as industry associations, labour representatives, and similar, as in some program reviews (Government of Canada, 2019). Non-work and unofficial stakeholders may be NGOs, community members, educators, and so on.

Third, *information topics.* This theme encompassed twenty-nine categories related to knowledge subjects. These include, as a few examples, professional communication needs, personal communication needs, workplace health and safety, rights and responsibilities, family and home life, mobility and transportation, enforcement and review, and administrative challenges. Sub-themes were informed by existing literature on key areas of worker safety and wellbeing. Analysis under this

category examined the variety, depth, and relative importance of their mentions within texts. Topics were analyzed according to "work" and "non-work themes." Wages and workplace conditions, for example, are considered "work" topics, while family and home life are considered "non-work" topics. These separations are understood to be artificial, but nonetheless prevalent in SAWP discourse (McLaughlin et al., 2017), and thus remain useful in analysis. Given literature on program gaps regarding non-work areas of life (McLaughlin et al., 2017; Caxaj and Cohen, 2018), absences were expected to be key in analysis. In results sections, particular attention is paid to topic omissions, rather than specific discursive phrasing.

RESULTS

In this section, CDA results for categories *program representation, stakeholder representation,* and *information topics* will be presented. Results are particularly significant for their absences, rather than the presence of specific problematic discourse–especially in the case of *stakeholder representation* and *information topics.* Initial descriptive analysis (see **Figure 1**) quantified the absences detailed in the below sections; the percentage of mentions related to labour, industry, and economy concerns overwhelm text related to personal, familial, and community wellbeing. For example, less than 2% of total references pertained to the personal communication and social needs of workers. CDA results are thus concerned with how absences act within SAWP's discursive spaces to the program's detriment.
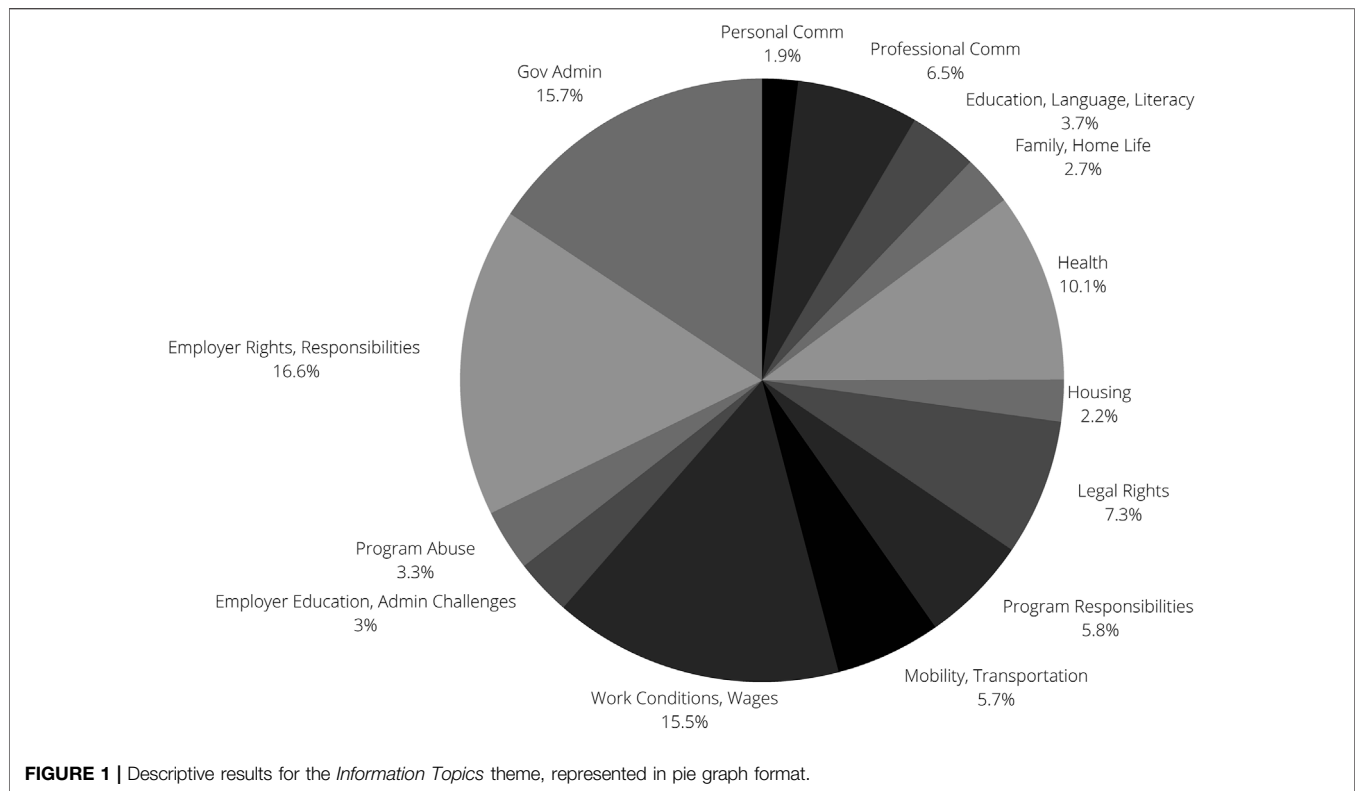
Program Representation

Often, documents avoided normative arguments about SAWP or the viability of its future. For example, documents by a health organization, rather than opening with statements about SAWP, opened with FAQs like "what is the general profile of migrant farm workers?" (Health risks and issues among migrant workers: faqs, 2021a, para. 1). As organizations hope to build more fruitful relationships with other SAWP stakeholders, who often work from differing motivations, navigating value-based discourse on the program may be difficult.

However, where present, overt discourse on the program centers around phrases like "successful model of migration management" or "triple-win", and constructs SAWP as the necessary solution to Canada's labour shortage. Documents typically read, "[SAWP] has proven to be a successful labour mobility program...it is a model of international cooperation that has demonstrated the possibility to maintain an effective and regulated flow of migrant workers..." (Consulado General de México en Toronto, 2016, para. 1). Phrases like "...SAWP...is instrumental in filling [Canada's] critical labour gap..." (Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council, 2017, p. 6) were also exceedingly common.

Though government-produced documents have recently begun to explicitly acknowledge program flaws (Government of Canada, 2019), the national and international reputation of the program remains strong in many industry contexts and,

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[11]Further illustrating this study's conclusions (i.e., an absence of varied, expansive, and well-rounded stakeholder resources in documents). The implications of this limited list of stakeholders (as it departs from research and personal accounts detailing the vast number of stakeholders involved in SAWP and in enrollees' lives) will be discussed in the results section.

FIGURE 1 | Descriptive results for the *Information Topics* theme, represented in pie graph format.

importantly, documents did not often challenge SAWP's sustainability as a "labour shortage solution." Notable exceptions include a local migrant rights group which engaged in counter-discourse on the matter: "we need an overhaul of our food systems...we must build communities that prioritize the needs and humanity of migrant farm workers..." (Migrant Rights Network, 2019, para. 6). In addition, interview participants did occasionally speak to the deconstruction of this type of discourse. One participant, reading from their official statement, shared that "an expanded Temporary Foreign Worker Program should at no time...and in no way be viewed as the solution to labour challenges facing Canada's agri-food system" (Participant 2, 2019).

Documents frequently utilized market improvements as a justification for SAWP's continuation. For example, documents stated, "the SAWP benefits the Canadian economy" or "horticulture producers who use the SAWP...are well positioned to help the federal government achieve its budget..." (Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council, 2017, p. 3–4). However, as above, some documents suggest that economic improvements are not a sufficient marker of success, and downloading labour burdens to under-protected and over-worked populations (Preibisch and Hennebry, 2011; McLaughlin and Hennebry, 2013; Vosko, 2018) is not a sustainable or just solution. Counter-discourse from these documents recognizes that the choice to outsource labour to vulnerable and racialized populations who rely on SAWP indicates the sector is not equipped with well-supported systems in a broader sense.

Overall, analysis of *program representation* finds that, consistent with existing SAWP literature on neoliberalism within these labour programs (Preibisch and Hennebry, 2011; Binford, 2013; Basok and Bélanger, 2016), documents emphasize economic success over other, more robust indicators of success. In the next two sections, I suggest that the prevalence of these discourses of economization within SAWP documents lays the foundation for the valuing of labour knowledge, roles, and duties over "whole worker" and communal approaches to program participation. The discourse outlined in this section perpetuates the privileging of economic concerns within organizational texts, contributing to gaps in knowledge and program roles, and ultimately participates in channeling behaviours towards narrow economic goals.

Stakeholder Representation

This section outlines discursive practices surrounding SAWP stakeholders, as present in official documents[12]. Results here pertain to the stakeholder roles, duties, and knowledge included or excluded from program documents, on the understanding that documents participate in valuing, devaluing, aiding, and/or impeding specific stakeholder groups within SAWP spaces through these texts' non-human actions. Communication between stakeholders, mediated by and produced through text, "...control both their own and others'

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[12]See *Data Analysis* section for more information on relevant SAWP stakeholders.

activity and knowledge..." (Kuhn, 2008, p. 1232) within SAWP spaces.

Broadly, results suggest that documents privilege industry and labour stakeholders, their expertise, input, and resources, over non-work stakeholders. Further, instead of encouraging dialogue and community participation (Giroux, 2009) within program spheres, document references typically excluded the collaborative and community-level approaches that interview participants (e.g., Participant 4, 2019, NGO; Participant 5, 2020, NGO) and local activists (Migrant Workers Alliance for Change, 2019, p. 4) identify as crucial to supporting workers. Specific examples will be discussed below.

First, the variety of stakeholders was limited. Worker, employer, and the receiving country made up well over half of stakeholder mentions within the documents. Mention of unofficial stakeholders was relatively rare. When included, they were typically cursory. For example, on healthcare, analysis often found only brief mentions such as: "...the employer shall take the worker to obtain health coverage in a timely manner" (Government of Canada, 2021, p. 7). Short references like these do not delve deeply into the roles and services of these stakeholders, but rather focus on minimal and bare necessity contact, despite SAWP workers and activists who consistently identify the importance of increasing awareness of and access to routine check-ups, mental health, and general wellbeing health services (Paz Ramirez, 2013; Justicia for Migrant Workers, 2021). Similarly, mentions of stakeholders working in the realm of safer sex, HIV awareness, and related services were absent in all documents examined, despite increased risks in this area (Rapid Response Service, 2013) and anecdotal evidence regarding the need for and benefit of this work (e.g., Participant 4, 2019, NGO). References to education professionals were often limited to basic workplace translation, such as "employers must provide copies of contract in English or French and Spanish" (Government of Canada, 2020b, para. 22). Documents did not include reference to long-term educational opportunities, despite the availability of and desire for educational opportunities tailored to SAWP workers[13]. Fluency, conversational English, educational classes, and professional development were not referenced in documents, despite lower literacy and education levels among some workers (Health risks and issues among migrant workers: faqs, 2021b), and anecdotal evidence to suggest workers desire increased access to these services (Health risks and issues among migrant workers: faqs, 2021a).

As such, discourse around roles and duties do not represent the full range of services unofficial stakeholders provide, can provide, or hope to provide to the program. Stakeholders in these realms have long-established histories of supporting worker needs and contributing to the healthy participation of SAWP enrollees as they attend, not just to their employment needs, but to the wellbeing of "whole workers" both in and out of work. Local groups, religious organizations, non-profit services, teachers, family, friends, and other community leaders play pivotal roles in providing well-rounded information to workers in their areas of expertise[14]. These areas include social events, accessing spiritual and religious needs, navigating racist and anti-immigrant sentiments, locating safe transportation, practicing safer sex, advocating for themselves, accessing learning and language initiatives, and coping with isolation and family separation. However, documents rarely addressed their critical roles in any detail.

Here, documents define boundaries as they help decide how stakeholders are conceptualized within SAWP's organizational spaces, the extent of their roles, and the value placed on their range of knowledge. Consistent exclusion of non-work stakeholder groups from official documents minimizes their roles, value, and knowledge within program spaces. As one example, consistent reference to healthcare professionals' roles only insofar as physical and workplace health then structures the authoritative conception of the program—which areas of healthcare are considered acceptable, appropriate, or necessary for SAWP workers to be made aware of, and have access to. Documented lack of awareness around varied and non-work healthcare options (e.g., Participant 4, 2019, NGO; Rapid Response Service, 2013; Justicia for Migrant Workers, 2021) suggests that SAWP texts do participate in directing attention and disciplining actors towards limited physical and workplace health. The impact of this can potentially be felt in the documented prevalence of mental, sexual, and overall wellbeing concerns among SAWP workers (McLaughlin, 2009; Rapid Response Service, 2013; McLaughlin et al., 2017) in more nuanced ways than a focus on "workplace accidents" invokes (Wolkowitz, 2006).[15]

Second, collaboration between community stakeholders, though well-established among these groups (e.g., Participant 4, 2019; see Health risks and issues among migrant workers: faqs, 2021a), were absent in these official documents. The many community support systems, including joint efforts, groups, and events, were not typically documented. Meetings, collective mobile applications, and support sessions were common among the NGOs interviewed, but remain largely unrecorded in official documents. Participants agreed that cross-stakeholder connections were under-documented in any large-scale, regulated, or easily-accessible way (Participant 4, 2019, NGO), making it more difficult to establish and maintain the collaborative information-sharing that they consider essential to their work (Participant 4, 2019, NGO; Participant 5, 2020, NGO). In addition, resource lists, which may facilitate these stakeholder connections, were fairly scarce and outdated. Interview participants (e.g., Participant 4, 2019, NGO; Participant 3, 2019, farm-owner) shared that collaborative work was important to the program, and that they, as program stakeholders, rely on the support and knowledge held within cross-stakeholder connections in several areas of daily program

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[13]For example, Frontier College in Ontario.

[14]For example, see McLaughlin et al., 2017; Basok et al., 2014; Caxaj & Cohen, 2019; Vosko, 2018.

[15]Material and bodily impact will be discussed further in *Document Agency and Material Impact* section.

administration. Participants (e.g., Participant 3, 2019, farm-owner) noted that local collaboration and shared knowledge were especially important given the program's unclear program processes (Vosko, 2018) and poor inter-governmental communication (Nakache and Kinoshita, 2010). Increased presence of these collaborative actions at macro-levels would thus improve the ability of stakeholders to share information, build knowledge, and support workers in fuller ways across their life and labour in Canada.

Information Topics

This section discusses which areas of life and areas of work, relevant to SAWP, are included or excluded from the examined texts[16]. Information topics are understood to be important given that these texts represent the organization as a whole, direct stakeholders' attention, discipline their actions, and link their practices together towards a standard (Kuhn, 2008, p. 1237). In doing so, non-human actors impact which issues, needs, and desires are acceptable, normal, or desirable within SAWP spaces.

As Caropresi[17] notes, "while work is the main reason why migrant workers are in Canada, around it [are] a series of apparently unrelated needs…that are not usually mentioned or appreciated, perhaps because…they become invisible…" (2013, p. 1–2). Indeed, current activism and writing notes that these needs are not unrelated, as SAWP workers see personal and work spheres intermingling regularly (e.g., McLaughlin et al., 2017)[18]. As such, non-work elements are widely understood to be relevant, and crucial, within SAWP spaces, program processes, and information practices. Leaving these non-work elements out of SAWP documents risks exacerbating worker vulnerabilities; many stakeholders are left desiring guidance on navigating these concerns (e.g., Participant 3, 2019, farm-owner), or must handle enrollees' non-work information needs in the absence of any educational documents at a program level (e.g., Participant 4, 2019, NGO).

Within the above context, CDA results demonstrated that SAWP documents continue to maintain boundaries between life and work, which invariably favour the labour side of the dichotomy. Documents typically covered non-work topics with much less detail, nuance, and variety–favoring labour and industry information over subjects related to personal wellbeing through a consistent arranging and displaying (Sheldahl-Thomason, 2018) which grants visibility to labour information and consistently omits other information needs. Some interview participants (e.g., Participant 3, 2019, farm-owner) agreed that documents were not a substantial source of information on expectations for navigating workers' personal needs and, further, expressed that the program was negatively affected by the absence of clear information around these

dynamics (Participant 3, 2019, farm-owner; Participant 4, 2019, NGO).

Absences were perhaps most succinctly and tangibly demonstrated by descriptive analysis results, available in **Figure 1** below. These results found that, for example, 15.5% of references were to workplace conditions and wages, while only 3.7% references were to language, literacy, education, and translation. Similarly, only 1.9% references were to personal communication needs (including socialization). Specific examples around these absences will be discussed in more detail below.

As is demonstrated in the coding results from **Figure 1**, within the documents, work conditions, wages, workplace injuries, employer liabilities, and related labour concerns were mentioned most attentively within documents. For example, whole documents were dedicated to workplace injury claims (e.g., Community Legal Education Ontario, 2009), and whole paragraphs dedicated to "recoverable costs" deducted from workers' pay (e.g., Program related costs, 2021). Documents on the programs' mandate (e.g., General principles for SAWP, 2021) were typically comprised of labour shortage[19], wage, and hours of work topics, with only occasional and cursory mention to guiding principles like "…workers…are to be treated in a fair and equitable manner by the farm employers" (General principles for SAWP, 2021, para. 2).

Overall, then, results suggest that the same attention and care are not paid to social, overall wellbeing, non-labour, and community topics. For example, through avoiding explicit mention of SAWP workers' personal or leisure time, which often occurs on-farm (Paz Ramirez, 2013), documents ignore the realities of SAWP enrollees' living arrangements. Mention of language like "personal," "social" "visitor," "off-work," were scarce or entirely absent from SAWP contracts and documents outlining program requirements (e.g., Government of Canada, 2020b; Government of Canada, 2021). Reference to "personal" (items, expenses, domestic circumstances) were found a total of n = 8 times within the 2021 contract. A typical reference to these elements within the contract might look like "the employer may pay the worker in advance so the worker can purchase food and/or personal items" (Government of Canada, 2021, p. 5). These and similar references did not sufficiently address the above complex concerns regarding personal and leisure time. Recent SAWP reviews (Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council, 2017; Government of Canada, 2019), as another example, contained no references to terms such as "social," "socialization," "isolation," "community," and similar, as they may pertain to worker needs.

Similarly, healthcare text related to general wellbeing, mental health, sexual health, or healthy lifestyles was much scarcer than their physical and workplace injury counterparts. Only a few documents included discourse such as, "other prominent concerns we have heard from…workers include…depression" (Justicia for Migrant Workers, 2021, p. 2), or "…life [for workers] revolves solely around the farm…" (p. 1). Increased and

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[16]See *Data Analysis* section for examples of relevant information topics.

[17]Caropresi is a former Consulate employee.

[18]For example, workers' access to town centers, socializing and visitors, and other personal activities are mediated by their housing on-farm, and by their reliance on employers for transportation.

[19]See *Program Representation* section for more on "labour shortage" discourse.

increasingly-nuanced mentions in this vein would document mental health and social inclusion issues and, importantly, legitimize counter-discourse which rejects the idea that migrants are "just here to work" (Caropresi, 2013; McLaughlin et al., 2017). Non-work transportation, personal mobility, social opportunities, community relationships, and family and home life were similarly absent or lacking. References to family, for example, were largely limited to brief program logistics like, "the government...shall take any or all steps necessary to...pay [outstanding] money...in the case of death of the worker [to] the worker's lawful estate" (Government of Canada, 2021, p. 5) which, again, emphasize economic relations. Discourse which frames familial relations as a significant form of (proactive) worker care (McLaughlin et al., 2017) is notably absent.

Consistent with *Program Representation* and *Stakeholder Representation* sections, neoliberal themes structure the inclusion and exclusion of certain information topics, and sustain an uneven privileging of labour and industry information across the frequency, depth, and nuance of document text. On practical terms, these absences place constraints on SAWP stakeholders' ability to access crucial information[20]. Further, under theories of documents' agency, these texts contribute to the constituting of the organization itself through the legitimizing of certain practices over others. A disproportionate focus on labour concerns[21] within official documents reifies common neoliberal conceptions around the program, many found in *Program Representation* section, where SAWP enrollees are identified by and related to through their labour alone. Further, it legitimizes the notion that SAWP need not share responsibility for the familial, social, and communal aspects of the program (McLaughlin et al., 2017).

As this standard is solidified within discourse, actions and spaces are disciplined accordingly. Interview participants (e.g., Participant 3, 2019, farm-owner; Participant 4, 2019, NGO; Participant 5, 2019, NGO) and worker accounts (e.g., Justicia for Migrant Workers, 2021) confirm that communication around mental, spiritual, and sexual health, social inclusion, family, and community are often treated as inappropriate and undesirable within the program. For example, Participant 4 (2019), a sexual health worker, spoke to the difficulties in accessing SAWP spaces, the frequent resistance from other stakeholders, and the high rates of SAWP enrollees' with little to no existing information on sexual health topics. Participant 3 (2019, farm-owner) spoke to a personal lack of information on navigating social and community issues with workers. Additionally, this participant spoke to the perception that, within the program, social and leisure time topics were a "bit of a touchy issue" (Participant 3, 2019, farm-owner). Research suggests that SAWP enrollees, in particular, may fear discussing and accessing services related to sexual health (Rapid Response Service, 2013, para. 18), depression, and isolation (McLaughlin et al., 2017).

Under non-human agency theories, this authoritative image of SAWP as a one-dimensional labour program[22] disciplines stakeholders to align with these boundaries of acceptable communication. We can posit that, for example, the devaluing of social topics within official documents contributes to the above exclusionary behaviours, where stakeholders are uncomfortable, unwilling, or unable to discuss these issues within SAWP spaces. As information-sharing is constricted, important topics remain absent from texts (and other communications), and workers experience continued information barriers. Poor communication on these necessary elements of SAWP impact the wellbeing of workers on real terms. In the above examples, both sexual illness (Rapid Response Service, 2013) and mental illness (Preibisch and Hennebry, 2011; Justicia for Migrant Workers, 2021) have been identified as an increased risk within SAWP communities. The material implications of these discursive absences will be discussed in more detail in *Document Agency and Material Impact* section.

Resistance Through Information

Theories on counter-discourse and textual agency suggest stakeholders' own definitions and actions within organizational spaces need not always coincide with official texts, "...in part, because, as part of generating influence over conversation, texts are (re)appropriated and (re)contextualized, such that their influence across practice sites may vary" (Kuhn, 2008, p. 1235). This section discusses tactics community stakeholders employ to actively and creatively engaged in counter-discourse through information. Here, stakeholders can re-define themselves, their roles, and their relationships outside of official discourse (Foucault, 2000; Sheldahl-Thomason, 2018).

Some documents demonstrated positive work to inform enrollees of an expansive spectrum of resources from a vast number of stakeholders. For example, through extensive contact and resource lists ranging from pesticide safety to gender resources, tax explanations, language supports, and contact information[23]. In addition, interview participants spoke to counter-discourse occurring in non-traditional document formats. For example, a group of stakeholders launched a mobile application for the dissemination of flexible, changing[24] information relevant to SAWP enrollees. Here, relevant information is defined much more limitlessly, and may relate to educational opportunities, social media resources, recreational events, shopping discounts, and more.

Interview data did suggest that much of SAWP's information-sharing network continues to rely heavily on bodily, verbal, and in-person communication. Here, implied and community-based

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[20]As demonstrated by interview participants (e.g., Participant 4, 2019, NGO; Participant 3, 2019, farm-owner), as well as SAWP enrollee accounts (e.g., Basok et al., 2014; Government of Canada, 2019).

[21]E.g., wages, workplace injuries, work conditions and hours, etc.

[22]Under a distinct binary between life and labour.

[23]However, many of these resources (especially hyperlinks and contact numbers) were not current. Rather than reflecting an organization's ability to service SAWP workers, these outdated documents may reflect the urgent need for macro-level support in their efforts.

[24]Flexibility in information-sharing is noted to be important by SAWP stakeholders in interview data (e.g., Participant 4, 2019; NGO), and documents (e.g., "Healthcare and insurance for migrant workers: faqs, 2021b; Caropresi, 2013), given the mobility issues and unpredictable working schedules of SAWP workers.

knowledge about SAWP was more evident than in official documents. One participant shared that:

> ...we go to where the workers are...we'll go to the grocery store and just literally hand out condoms as they're walking off the bus. That way we're reaching a lot of workers at once...(Participant 4, 2019, NGO).

Other interview participants shared similar sentiments regarding their own communicative work. However, overall, document data still demonstrated that information-sharing by these organizations[25] often provided realistic, transparent, and nuanced information on a much fuller range of concerns.

Documents attempted to mitigate official discourse on the blanket success of the program by providing on-the-ground information, based in research and workers' accounts, on program processes and their extension into personal and non-work areas of life. For example, "migrant workers are covered under most of the same protections as Canadian farm workers...however, in practice, many workers are unaware of their rights or fear exercising them due to loss of employment, income or work permit" (Background on migrant farm workers in Ontario: faqs, 2021, para. 3). This kind of information may be difficult to engage with, and may contribute to anxieties around the program. For instance, many farm-owners' fear that, among the general public, "...growers may be perceived to have ulterior motives..." (Participant 3, 2019, farm-owner). However, when accomplishments and setbacks are shared transparently, and in balance, these honest experiences may encourage collaboration and solidarity as they increasingly shed light on SAWP's structural oppressions. Indeed, some farm-owners are increasingly acknowledging their positionality, in statements like "the system is set up to make it difficult to be anything but exploitive" (Gerber, 2020, para. 10), and "...as much as [we] try to be a respectful and caring employer [s], they still have fear because of the system" (Gerber, 2020, para. 9). Thus, counter-discourse within program networks has the potential to strengthen bonds between SAWP stakeholders as they "...contest the limits of [their] discursive position [s]" (Sheldahl-Thomason, 2018, p. 131), reject dominant discourse on individualized responsibility, and frame their program participation in mutually beneficial ways.

DISCUSSION

Neoliberalism and Access to Well-Rounded Information

The prevalence of neoliberal structures within SAWP spaces is well-established within existing literature (Preibisch and Hennebry, 2011; Binford, 2013; Basok and Bélanger, 2016). These find that SAWP prioritizes economic motivations, measures success by market values, and "de-collectivize [s] employment relationships" (Peck et al., 2015; cited in Preibisch, 2010, p. 423). Several scholars have linked these and

other factors to the creation of disposable and precarious workforces. For example, Preibisch situates Canada's agricultural work programs within a "commitment to a neoliberal ideology" which "erode [s] social protections" (2020, p. 423) and ultimately "import [s] workers, not people" (2010, p. 432). When we expand these arguments to examine how neoliberal values affect other aspects of the program, as they relate to information-sharing, we see an extension of neoliberalism into SAWP's knowledge landscape. Important non-work stakeholders and information topics are obscured and de-emphasized as they, too, are caught up in these processes.

Stakeholder Representation Section found similar de-collectivizing of employment relationships, as both specific text and broader communication tools (e.g., contact lists, databases, forums, etc.) related to communal work were lacking. Instead, weak communication bonds across at least some stakeholder groups (Nakache and Kinoshita, 2010; Participant 4, 2019, NGO; Participant 3, 2019, farm-owner) were perpetuated by official documents through key absences. These stakeholders are well-established as essential to worker wellbeing (Preibisch, 2004; McLaughlin et al., 2017; Vosko, 2018), and their lack of inclusion in official documents threatens to obscure and discursively discourage their input. Documents simultaneously reflect increased worker self-reliance, and decreased inclusion of stakeholders who address social problems—mental health workers, sexual health workers, community leaders, and so on. Stakeholders who align more closely with market value (i.e., labour and industry stakeholders) are given most attention, nuance, and relative importance when recording their roles and program input.

Information Topics Section demonstrated a similar privileging of market values over social needs. This is potentially related to the de-collectivizing of employment relationships in *Stakeholder Representation* section, if we understand SAWP as a networked phenomenon which relies on collaboration to share and build well-rounded knowledge (Participant 3, 2019, farm-owner; Participant 4, 2019, NGO). Recalling results under this theme, selective information-sharing rendered social, familial, and community topics largely invisible, while industry and labour subjects received significant detail and nuance. Employer and employee program expectations (22.4%), and workplace conditions and wages (15.5%), for example, dominated SAWP's discursive spaces.

These failures in information-sharing are particularly significant when we understand them within continuums of harm, coercion, and unfree labour (Thomas et al., 2016; Strauss and McGrath, 2017). As has been argued throughout, labour and life are inextricably intertwined (McLaughlin et al., 2017), the social, familial, and communal are vitally important, and under current ideologies, these dimensions are fatally underserved within SAWP populations (Preibisch, 2010; Horgan and Liinamaa, 2012). Workers experience subpar conditions related to their familial wellbeing (McLaughlin et al., 2017), mental health (Justicia for Migrant Workers, 2021), personal mobility (Paz Ramirez, 2013), social autonomy (Horgan and Liinamaa, 2012; Paz Ramirez, 2013), among other areas of life. The invisibility of these needs within documents risks

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[25]For example: Justicia for Migrant Workers, Healthcare and insurance for migrant workers: faqs, 2021b, Migrant Workers Alliance for Change.

perpetuating notions that SAWP workers should not have, or do not need, non-work relationships, lives, and fulfillment (Participant 4, 2019, NGO). This has implications for workers' ability to express themselves as "whole workers," to discuss their needs, and access these services, and is potentially linked to these increased risks to their overall wellbeing (Horgan and Liinamaa, 2012; Rapid Response Service, 2013; McLaughlin et al., 2017).

Instead, as seen in *Resistance Through Information* section, documents can hold information, resources, and tools related to these various harms noted in literature, and to self-advocacy against them. In this way, access to information is conceptualized in this study as a right, "a fundamental need" (Caropresi, 2013, p.2) in knowing, feeling, and doing in the world, with interrelated impacts on other aspects of life.

Document Agency and Material Impact

This section will touch more on the material and bodily consequences of incomplete or inadequate documents. In this section, I agree with current research which argues that inattention to the fullness of SAWP workers existences and needs co-constitutes "workers, not people" (Preibisch, 2010, p. 432). Within the information-sharing context, this refers to a consistent omission of important, non-work information[26], which fails to communicate value or attend to needs beyond workers' labour.

As discussed in *Information Topics* section, documents participate in activities like defining boundaries, representing organizational values, directing attention, and disciplining actors. As one example of these impacts, Participant 4 (NGO, sexual health, 2019) recounted an experience during a local information fair:

> ...[we were told that] if we want community members to be on board with welcoming the workers
> ...we don't want the community thinking that they're
> ...just here to have sex with everybody, and [so, when they turned down our involvement] we were like, "um, ok" (Participant 4, 2019, NGO).

Here, stakeholders internalized notions around (un)acceptable behaviour exhibited by SAWP workers. Healthy social interactions, under this discourse, are reframed as antithetical to their success within the program. Instead, SAWP enrollees are expected to invoke imagery of the hardworking labourer, even in their personal time[27].

Social, non-work needs may thus be increasingly silenced as stakeholders define their roles within program spaces according to neoliberal values. These disciplinary techniques may have significant consequences for worker wellbeing. Here, we might

take a specific example. Results found a complete lack of mentions related to safer sex and similar topics, as well as extremely limited mentions regarding socialization and social wellbeing. Research and advocacy have highlighted complex concerns in these areas. For example, severe isolation (Horgan and Liinamaa, 2012), depression and loneliness (McLaughlin et al., 2017), as well as an increased risk of HIV among workers (Rapid Response Service, 2013). This has this been explicitly linked to lack of awareness and information on practical terms (Rapid Response Service, 2013, para. 9–17). In addition, on several other information topics, absences identified here correspond with existing and longstanding calls for increased supports to combat ongoing program failures. For example, community belonging[28] (Justicia for Migrant Workers, 2021), legal rights (Participant 2, 2019, NGO), and educational tools (Justicia for Migrant Workers, 2021). Limited mentions to safe transportation options for workers within documents (see **Figure 1**) can be examined within a context of frequent vehicular accidents among SAWP workers (CBC News, 2012, February 6; Saylors, 2019, July 19; Simon, 2016, September 5; Wilhelm, 2013, May 6). In each of these areas, documents potentially contribute to the exclusion of these topics and needs from the authoritative understanding of the program through similar processes.

In considering embodiment, we can ask what attention to SAWP bodies only insofar as productivity, labour skill, and workplace accidents means for worker wellbeing. Not only does this approach ignore the social, emotional, and collective experiences of labouring bodies (Wolkowitz, 2006; McLaughlin et al., 2017; Paz Ramirez, 2013), it also avoids program responsibility for these bodies' wellbeing at structural levels (Wolkowitz, 2006, p. 114)[29]. For example, we can consider the impact of a mind-body binary (p. 174) within SAWP, which divorces stress, isolation, and depression concerns from the healthy working body[30]. We can consider the consequences of an understanding of the body which is disconnected from networks of community, so that it is no longer considered a "...social body, but naturalised...as the merely 'physical'" (Wolkowitz, 2006, p. 175). In this way, we can ask what SAWP's current construction of the body (Wolkowitz, 2006) is missing, particularly as constructed through these documents, and with what consequences for worker health, safety, and subjectivities.

Notably, under non-human agency theories, we can also ask what an ethical and relational engagement with SAWP knowledge would look like, and consider such a relationship's impact on what is documented, how, and with which intentions. This will be discussed in more detail in the following section.

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[26]Well-documented as relevant to the program (McLaughlin et al., 2017; Caxaj & Cohen, 2019; Caropresi, 2013; Justicia for Migrant Workers, 2021; Participant 4, 2019, NGO; Participant 3, 2019, farm-owner).

[27]More analysis of bodily action (e.g., as in Paz Ramirez, 2013) and of personal accounts (e.g., as in interview data) would solidify and deepen discussion of particular moments of disciplinary and self-disciplinary action.

[28]Including anti-racism supports.

[29]For example, by ignoring the structural and long-term factors underpinning so-called accidents (Wolkowitz, 2006, p. 114) but also by upholding the notion that social, emotional, and communal needs are beyond the scope of SAWP (Paz Ramirez, 2013; Basok et al., 2014; McLaughlin et al., 2017; Justicia for Migrant Workers, 2021).

[30]Despite the fact that these emotional experiences carry interconnected physical experiences and symptoms with them (Wolkowitz, 2006, p. 174).

Theoretical Implications

The main theoretical implications of this study's results are, first, to suggest information-sharing as an important practice of labour in embodied and emotional ways. Embodied labour is often discussed around the physical field and farm work of SAWP enrollees (Perry, 2018; Perry, 2019), but not often, as yet, with regards to knowledge practices occurring within program spaces. The second goal is to extend theories on non-human agency[31] to realms of SAWP and information-sharing studies. These theories pre-suppose non-human agency and, importantly, understand the relation between human and non-human agents to be "working *with* rather than working *on*" (Pettinger, 2015, p. 284).

First, results demonstrated that information-sharing was a significant labour, particularly in SAWP contexts. Stakeholders spent substantial time and effort understanding, fulfilling, and troubleshooting information needs, especially in the face of heavy information failures (Nakache and Kinoshita, 2010; Paz Ramirez, 2013; Caxaj & Cohen, 2019). Though information is in many ways immaterial (Elden and Crampton, 2007), there were distinctly embodied, personal, and emotional dimensions to this work, as has been theorized regarding other forms of labour (Wolkowitz, 2006; Paz Ramirez, 2013; Pettinger, 2015; Perry, 2019). Interview participants attest to the emotional and bodily aspects of this labour, standing in parking lots all evening (Participant 4, 2019, NGO), or experiencing the frustrations and joys of the work (Participant 4, 2019, NGO; Participant 5, 2020, NGO). Similarly, document text produced by NGOs demonstrated significant care and effort in implementing information-sharing practices which were grounded in real experience and labour in their fields. For example:

Many migrants are outside the reach of. . .typical methods of communication and promotions. . .To be effective, promotional efforts should target the areas which workers frequent or partner with organizations with well established channels of accessible communication for the workers (Health risks and issues among migrant workers: faqs, 2021b, para. 8).

Excerpts like these, additionally, point to the collectiveness of this knowledge labour. Stakeholders pass good practices amongst each other—one's which, not only conform to SAWP's organizational expectations, but, more importantly, achieve the safest and most successful outcome for workers (Wolkowitz, 2006).

Though not included in this study, interviews with SAWP enrollees might demonstrate that, similarly, information labour is a significant aspect of their program work—especially given the information barriers and inaccuracies outlined in results here, and in literature (Nakache and Kinoshita, 2010; Paz Ramirez, 2013; Caxaj and Cohen, 2019). In this way, framing knowledge-sharing as a labour process gives increased attention to its weight within program spheres. Here, information is not just a thing produced, but an inextricable part of the bodies, materials, and relations that hold them. Understanding knowledge as labour, as a process, and not just as objects, does justice to the role this labour has in their program lives, and provides an avenue for critical analysis of where these relations create tension, need support, and so on.

Importantly, activist efforts demonstrated that information-sharing practices are a potential avenue for embodied resistance. For example, the efforts of community stakeholders to collect and share information which protects worker bodies (Wolkowitz, 2006, p. 63), or the importance of physicality to stakeholders' labour with workers, even in emotional or social roles (p. 2) demonstrates the persistently embodied aspects of information-based resistance. Stakeholders ". . .carve out a space for themselves that allows some degree of control. . ." (p. 32) through the creation of small moments of "play as [a form] of resistance," (Wolkowitz, 2006, p.16, p.16)[32], the reappropriating of official texts, and the carrying of innovative and subversive knowledge within their bodies[33].

Second, and relatedly, theories on non-human agency can be extended to the study of documents as a means to apply relational and ethical perspectives to our work with documents, communicative tools, and knowledge. Within this study, agency can be seen, for example, in the way information moves across context, time, and place. Document data found acting within the program was produced in the United States (e.g., California Division of Occupational Safety and Health, 2011), was produced over a decade earlier (e.g., Occupational Safety and Health Administration, 2005), was produced for non-agri-food sectors (e.g., U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2001), and so on. Yet, these pieces of information were active within current SAWP spaces, indicating their ongoing, new, or changed importance within SAWP spaces. Here, then, documents are able to move, act, and impact beyond their initial production (Foucault, 2000; Sheldahl-Thomason, 2018). In particular, creative work with unexpected[34] documents in the face of information failures are illustrative of, not only the agency of these non-human materials, but the relationality of that agency. Stakeholders have interpreted, adapted, and re-imagined documents which were not originally intended for SAWP contexts to combat lack of information. Here, the necessity to co-create knowledge—to interact with texts and shape knowledge expression alongside them—to address information needs indicates the potential for what performance studies has called "working *with* rather than working *on*" (Pettinger, 2015, p. 284). Stakeholders are not using static texts, but are engaging with them for their

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[31]This study has relied primarily on Foucauldian thought for analysis of document agents, given the relevance of disciplinary techniques. However, there are numerous theories on non-human agency (e.g., in performance studies, see Pettinger, 2015; in new materialism and Indigenous theories, see Rosiek et al., 2019). Some of these are explored here, in addition to Foucauldian theories, particularly for their explicit writings on ethical and responsible relations to non-human agents.

[32]For example, Participant 4 (2019, NGO) shared that an important aspect of the work is seizing small opportunities to connect with workers, create moments of carefree expression, and release stress and tension from their bodies.

[33]See *Limitations and Areas for Future Research* section for more on bodily records of knowledge.

[34]Unexpected, here, refers to these out-of-context, out-of-date, out-of-location, etc. documents described above.

possibilities, and the interconnected knowledge they bring together.

Non-human agency theories understand that, while we must document worker selves, lives, needs, and desires accurately, we must also consider the future possibilities we open up when we engage with information and information materials. This necessitates moments of intention and responsibility in relations with materials, and a focus on situated instances where there is an ethical responsibility within these relationships. In the case of SAWP information, a responsibility to relate to information and its tools, giving them proper significance, and to collaborate with them towards an ethical information-sharing practice—in what we choose to impart on documents, what they choose to impart on us, and what this means for the realities we then co-create. Recalling the example of sexual health (see *Document Agency and Material Impact* section), we see these specific, situated examples where documents exercise their ability to act and impact, and these theories of non-human agency allow critical examination of how relational and ethical engagement with knowledge can be achieved, in that moment, towards enabling spaces we hope to see.

These approaches are complementary to current SAWP research interested in illuminating interconnected and networked processes, and in expanding our understanding of relevant agents within program spaces (Horgan and Liinamaa, 2012; McLaughlin et al., 2017; Vosko, 2018). The implications of non-human agency can be deepened in future research, and my results are an initial indication that they may be useful—particularly in their emphasis of networks, and their possibilities for fostering ethical relations which, in this context, implies a shared responsibility towards good knowledge-sharing alongside non-human materials, towards the bettering of SAWP workers' experiences.

Practical Implications

Recommendations for practice and advocacy largely pertain to uplifting current work, and echo sentiments shared by experienced stakeholders in interview settings. Recommendations here share the sentiment that advocacy regarding SAWP should involve the continuation of the program (as a vital source of livelihood) without disregarding the many and varied areas which require improvement (Silverman and Hari, 2016, p. 92).

Results demonstrated poor documentation of networks and collective work that foster shared responsibility. Related to this, there was poor documentation of the non-work information topics held within these stakeholders and stakeholder relationships. As interview participants shared:

I think that there are a lot of really great people doing frontline work. . .that we don't hear about. . .it seems like everyone's doing great work, but they're all kind of doing it individually, and then once a year we come together. . .but once a year isn't really that much. It would be nice to have something that was ongoing" (Participant 4, 2019, NGO).

Interview participants suggested that these aims could be met through the development of national online forums for resource

gathering and professional networking (Participant 4, 2019, NGO), or through the increased prevalence of mobile applications and similar projects (Participant 5, 2020, NGO).

In terms of subject areas, my results, previous research, and personal accounts suggest that SAWP can still benefit from increased attention to non-work aspects of the program, and the acknowledgement that these are not inherently separate from labour concerns. These areas relate to, but are never limited to, social life, belonging, family and community ties, personal mobility and transportation, educational opportunities, sexual health, spiritual health, and mental health. To that end, increased structural and governmental support for the sharing of current, transparent, and in-practice information is needed. Further, while stakeholders engage in creative information-gathering, increased documents created and circulated specifically with SAWP in mind may be helpful. Indeed, Caropresi, working in the realm of information-sharing, notes that the tailored production of information materials was of marked interest to farm-owners, as ". . .some of them have stated. . .their desire to learn more about the subject. . .to adapt or create. . .materials for migrant workers. . ." to better fulfill their specific needs (2013, p. 3). Many documents contained information specific to other countries, or relating to migrant workers more broadly, so their applicability to SAWP enrollees may vary depending on the context. Documents which address the experiences of SAWP workers as a distinct group may be beneficial to education, awareness, solidarity, feeling heard, and feeling prepared.

The data for this study demonstrated that information represents a shared need among all stakeholders. Documents contained potentially useful information for a variety of program agents—and interviews illuminated the possibilities for deepening this information network. All interview participants expressed that they rely on information at one point or another in fulfilling their roles. When considered from a networked perspective, information-sharing can represent a meeting place, within documents, where workers can "contest the limits of their discursive positions" (Sheldahl-Thomason, 2018, p. 131) as disposable, labouring bodies. Further, stakeholders note the collaborative possibility to "include what [each] party need [s]" (CBC News, 2013, april 3) and improve common ground among stakeholders. As SAWP literature has demonstrated (Basok et al., 2014; Cohen and Caxaj, 2019; McLaughlin et al., 2017; Vosko, 2018), the well-being of SAWP enrollees encompasses a multitude of interconnected and inseparable issues (health, employment, socialization, education, etc.). As such, stakeholders across these areas are inherently related, and are most effective when working collaboratively.

Limitations and Areas for Future Research

This study did not examine verbal and bodily communication (i.e., "bodies-as-texts," see Chávez, 2009), Spanish-language documents, or the heterogeneity of racialized and gendered experiences within information barriers. Interview data demonstrated a persistence of verbal and bodily communication within SAWP spaces, particularly given literacy levels, access issues ("Health and insurance," n.d., para. 8), and related barriers. Additional research here would

be extremely beneficial. Work on "bodies-as-texts" (Chávez, 2009) may illuminate processes through which bodies act as their own documentation of knowledge. This is a potential avenue for further exploring embodied resistance. Though many documents were English-Spanish translations, there are potential nuances in Spanish-language texts which would provide additional insights. Lastly, studies on the way (differing) racialized and gendered identities intersect with information barriers and information-gathering processes would add important nuance to these discussions.

CONCLUSION

This study has focused on discursive practices within the Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program (SAWP), with implications for the creation and sustaining of disposable, labouring bodies under neoliberalism, and for the practical improvement of information-sharing practices within program spaces. I have argued that, alongside other disciplinary techniques (Preibisch, 2010; Braun, 2012; Paz Ramirez, 2013; Basok et al., 2014), discursive practices contribute to the creation and sustaining of "workers, not people" (Preibisch, 2010, p. 432) through the discipline and control of (ab)normal communicative practices. First, labour and industry stakeholders, and their input into program spaces, are given relative importance within documents, through the frequency, nuance, and detail given to their mentions. Non-work stakeholders' roles, though crucial, are not documented to communicate their significance. Second, labour and industry information are given overwhelming priority within SAWP's official documents. Significant absences were noted across social, familial, and community wellbeing, which impact workers' valuation and self-expression as "whole workers."

 In resistance to this, community stakeholders are engaging in "radical writing" (Sheldahl- Thomason, 2018), a task of "...painstakingly restructur [ing]a discourse from within..." (Sheldahl-Thomason, 2019, p. 235), as they use their own methods to document important non-work agents and information. Mobile applications, websites, and cross-stakeholder networks give visibility to the social, economic, communal, emotional, and cultural needs of SAWP enrollees,

and to the networks of support that work to meet them. In this way, information-sharing represents a collaborative need among all stakeholders (Participant 3, 2019, farm-owner; Participant 4, 2019, NGO; Caropresi, 2013), and may open up new possibilities for communal responsibility which resists neoliberalism's individualizing ideologies. To this end, I have suggested that learning to relate to documents as non-human agents may foster ethical and relational interactions between all program agents, as we consider what "good documents" and "good information" may contribute to the program's future possibilities, and we continue the task of "painstakingly restructuring" SAWP spaces.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The raw data supporting the conclusions of this article will be made available by the authors, without undue reservation.

ETHICS STATEMENT

The studies involving human participants were reviewed and approved by the Carleton University Research Ethics Board. The patients/participants provided their written informed consent to participate in this study.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

The author confirms being the sole contributor of this work and has approved it for publication.

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Tracing the Story of Food Across Food Systems

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This paper addresses the impulse to render systemic food systems issues into stories in light of ongoing challenges such as food scares, food fraud, and the COVID-19 pandemic. Such stories about food systems are seen as embodying the ideal of supply chain transparency currently in vogue and regarded as key to solving food system inequities by shedding light on them. Read in the context of documentary cinematic unveilings of unethical production practices, transparency initiatives of various types, particularly those dependent on the real-time, crypto-ensured storytelling of blockchain and digital twinning technology, would seem to provide a new model of indexicality, a new contract with social reality. However, such tracing systems and the questions they raise instead describe the way in which food—and the land, people and animals who are involved in its production—becomes fodder for various power plays.

Keywords: food systems, food stories, documentary, supply chain, transparency, blockchain, indexicality

INTRODUCTION

A recent piece on the satirical website *The Onion* speculating on the future of farming proposed several absurd solutions for increasing the food supply such as "slightly more futuristic rakes," "robot meat," "VR asparagus," as well as "supply-chain tracking that enables consumers to know where their food originated and what adventures it had along the way" (What the future of farming looks like, 2019). The inclusion of a rather realistic form of "supply-chain tracking" in a list of otherwise risible inventions destined for the uncanny valley suggests that supply-chain tracing is somehow suspect in its ability to document food systems conditions. In line with other Big Tech interventions into agriculture, supply chain tracking in this guise appears to be little more than a Silicon Valley pipe dream that places food systems governance where it belongs: into the hands of predictable (and predictive) machines, not of pesky humans.

To a certain extent, the *Onion* piece is accurate in terms of where Big Food is headed in its use of supply chain tracing. Big food players such as Walmart, Cargill, and the IBM Food trust are hopeful that technology such as blockchains could help secure and identify the various nodes of the vast and decentralized supply chain of food. Blockchains are designed to distribute trust across an entire system of players all with the same shared information. Each transaction is secured by blockchain miners who use inordinate amounts of energy (approximately 1.5 households daily energy use per transaction) to compete in the solving of a mathematical puzzle for which they are awarded cryptocurrencies (Iansiti and Lakhani, 2017). Because of the costs involved, it is difficult, though not impossible (you need to have a 51% stake), to change the ledger, which nonetheless have become increasingly subject to hacking (Orcutt, 2019). The security offered by blockchain prompted Walmart to initiate a pilot project for food traceability in response to the 2019 E. coli Romaine recall in the U.S. (Banker, 2019). The IBM Food Trust since then has partnered with many food companies seeking to use blockchain to help minimize their risk in the face of devastating

food recalls (Nestlé Carrefour partner with IBM for blockchain food traceability for instant mashed potato, 2019).

Future Market, a food innovation and branding firm that uses brand design to help companies anticipate future food trends conceived of a concept food called Block Bird, a chicken that provides consumer with a complete, blockchain-verified story of itself, from ovum to oven. Touted as the "world's most transparent chicken," Block Bird's packaging features a removable touchscreen label that tells you everything you'd ever want to know about the chicken that you're about to cook for dinner: where it was raised, what it ate, which vaccines it received, its environment, even its birthday, if one chose, in macabre fashion, to celebrate it postprandially (Block Bird's, 2019). That imaginary concept chicken in fact has a real-world counterpart sold in China as the GoGoChicken (Wang, 2020, p. 48). Developed by the village of Sanqiao and Lianmo Technology, GoGoChicken relies on blockchain to assuage concerns about food fraud and supply chain inconsistencies (p. 50). Selling for about $40 a chicken, many times the market price, GoGoChicken appeals to the urban elite consumer who can certify their own ethical purchasing practices with a quick scan of the QR Code (p. 48). That price is justified in part by all the certifications, stamps, and rigorous standards the GoGoChicken has passed through before arriving on the consumer's plate, emblazoned with its prominently displayed QR code.

While there is food industry excitement about blockchain technology, it has been seen as a necessary, but not sufficient element of digitizing. When applied to the material exchange of goods, blockchains have the potential to make transparent the entire supply chain. But skeptics argue that it's not enough for a few limited, proprietary blockchains to exist; instead, they argue that system-wide transparency and food safety would require a public utility-type infrastructure allowing for global standards about food to be interpreted locally among all players (di Ferrante, 2018). Critics of the use of food blockchains, moreover, find that their focus on commodities and an anonymized proof-of-work encrypted infrastructure obscures the role of human labor in ensuring quality (Splitter, 2018; Wang, 2020, p. 60).

Others see blockchain as valuable not so much for food safety, which can be fulfilled by existing databases, as it is for documenting the various attributes of a certain food item that make it palatable to consumers' food preferences. Food industry players such as Ripe.io, the self-styled "Blockchain of Food" boasts the tagline "Transparency in Every Byte" (Transparency in every bite, 2009). They want to apply blockchain to anticipating consumers' personalized food needs and preferences and being able to catalog the qualities of specialty food items into "product libraries" (Ramachandran et al., 2018). The blockchain would be used to aggregate information about a given food item into a "food bundle" that captures "the journey of food along the supply chain" (Galvez et al., 2018, p. 225; Ramachandran et al., 2018). The CEO of Ripe.io, Raja Ramachandran, describes the company's mission as not about "food safety and risk management" but "curation, quality, sustainability, and understanding of the food" (The potential role for blockchain in food, 2019). For example, one of Ripe.io's collaborations, a project called the Internet of Tomatoes, seeks to hack the

ineffable qualities of *terroir* through "seed-to-signal" analog-to-digital sensors that track all specifications involved in the growing of a plant (Lamb, 2018). By making the tomato's conditions of growth transparent, the company sees its role as "tell[ing] consumers and businesses where their food comes from, how's it made, how's it distributed... effectively the story of food" (Lamb, 2018).

The intersection of story, truth, and transparency in the discourse of food blockchains resonates with the mandate of documentary film and media, a reality-based medium frequently used as a forum to engage, not simply inform, viewers and have an impact on public policy (Nisbet and Aufderheide, 2009, p. 450). Documentary viewer engagement, particularly in food documentaries, often relies on an affective connection with subjects, which filmmakers hope leads to ethical engagement with the issue at hand (Richardson-Ngwenya and Richardson, 2013, p. 344). The documentary film is traditionally understood as the ultimate vehicle for truth-telling for activists due to its historical alignment with radical decolonial and feminist assemblages, a status that has in recent decades waned due to the corporate alignments of big budget documentary film and the ubiquity of storytelling across sectors in the service of market-based logics (Juhasz and Lebow, 2018; Sarlin, 2021, p. 38).

The descriptive unit of food system transparency—the food story—is part and parcel of what Hockenberry et al. (2021, p. 3) describe as the "logistical imagination", which they argue encompasses the "representational and imaginative modes of logistical activity, as well as the aesthetic and performative practices that have emerged to grapple with logistical transformations." The protagonists of these stories are most often commodities as well as the people behind the commodities. As Anna Tsing argues, such protagonists in "narratives of capitalism" act as "exemplary figures through which we come to understand capital and labor" (2009, p. 152). This mediatization of the "food story" across activist, corporate, and nongovernmental domains is simultaneously indicative of a widespread rise of the "political economy of storytelling," which peddles easily digestible units of information and testimonial within a neoliberal societal frame (Fernandes, 2017, p. 10). A particularly surreal example of the ubiquity of stories in the food space is Walmart's suite of YouTube videos designed for its suppliers, one of which is called "The Secret Life of Sliced Turkey." The video lays out the optimal conditions for producing the cured meat sustainably and cheaply using research into life cycle assessment (LCA) (Freidberg, 2017, p. 24). LCA analysis is compelling to large corporations largely because it produces massive amounts of data about production, the "authority" of which, Freidberg (2017, p. 25) argues, "mirrors the vast geographic scope of many product supply chains". LCA analysis allows corporations to optimize (as well as justify) their operations on a scale commensurate with the supply chain of which they are a part.

Construed in corporate circles as a value-add to their products, food stories are in turn secured through a blockchain. In the case of Ripe.io, the blockchain is regarded as a "digital twin of an existing item to tell the truth of that story" (Galvez et al., 2018, p. 225; Lamb, 2018). As virtual doubles of complex

physical system, "digital twins" contain a documentary impulse to replicate the real. Based in the engineering subfield of product lifecycle management (PLM), digital twins are virtual aggregates of real-time data about physical systems (Grieves, 2019). The concept has been extended to the biosphere itself, as the European Science Agency recently launched Digital Twin Earth as a way to eventually create a real-time model of planetary systems (Digital Twin Earth, 2020). One of the first projects for Digital Twin Earth is to create a digital twin of global food systems to be able to predict food system shortages (Working towards a Digital Twin of Earth, 2021).

Read in the context of activist-leaning documentary cinematic unveilings of unethical production practices, corporate transparency initiatives of various types, particularly those dependent on the real-time, crypto-ensured storytelling of blockchain and digital twinning technology, would seem to provide a new model of indexicality, a new contract with social reality. However, such tracing systems and the questions they raise instead describe the way in which food—and the land, people and animals who are involved in it—becomes fodder for various power plays.

In what follows, I will begin by reviewing the literature on transparency and why it matters to food stories, then show the reliance of geographers in the early stages of globalization on reflexive cinematic models for giving voice to commodities and their makers, and, finally, show how these same reflexive cinematic models, in distancing themselves from access to the real, severely constrain the terms of agency in food stories. In contrast, blockchain's reliance on just-in-time technology, which doubles down on the physical relation between signs and referents in order to exert control over the story of food, generates unexpected results, especially in the current advanced stage of globalization.

THE DREAM OF "RADICAL TRANSPARENCY" IN FOOD SYSTEMS

During the 1970s food crisis, there was a dramatic shift in the growth of the food system which contributed increasingly, according to Clapp (2016), to "our lack of awareness of the conditions of its production and the skewed nature of power differential along agrifood supply chains". Since then, with the mainstreaming of organic foods and sustainability, activists and savvy consumers have come to demand more knowledge of the food they buy, a stance that Opel et al. (2010) have argued is "fundamental for new kinds of global citizenship."

In an age of highly publicized food scares and recalls, the goal of using blockchain to organize the global food supply— what some call "radical transparency" (Gardner et al., 2019, p. 165)—is supposed to comfort consumers about the safety of their food supply. The use of transparency as marketing strategy (Broad, 2020, p. 1591; Edwards, 2020) is a mirror image of the "right-to-know" governance characteristic of democratic societies, but within proprietary, corporate silos (Lockie et al., 2015, p. 124; Mol, 2015, p. 160). This mirroring is not merely a corporate sleight-of-hand, but points to the

way in which transparency and publicity are intertwined and interdependent (Edwards, 2020) due to their embeddedness in networks of "communicative power" (Wood and Aronczyk, 2020, p. 1533). The GoGoChicken, for instance, draws its communicative power from the transparency of the distributed ledger recording the various transactions that made it possible. That sense of transparency, in turn, is communicated through publicity campaigns or marketing tools such as the prominently displayed QR code that announces that chicken's exploits in the supply chain.

In the wake of COVID-19 and its disruption of global supply chains, governmental agencies, NGOs, and policymakers have been doubling down on digital, automated, IoT solutions, all focused on keeping those chains intact. Being able to tell the "story of food" through digitized traceability was by far a major goal, as in, for example, the Obama-era FDA Food Safety and Modernization Act (FSMA) and its recent "New Era of Smarter Food Safety" program, aimed at "leveraging technology and other tools to create a safer and more digital, traceable food system" (U.S. Food and Drug Administration, 2021). Such measures are in line with the Obama administration's overall interest in using digital means to render the workings of government more transparent to the public (Fallon, 2019, p. 115). Yet, as in the case of the GoGoChicken, governmental and NGO initiatives are often in collaboration with corporations, which have the necessary capital to invest in tracing systems. The 2021 U.N. Food Systems Summit, for example, has been criticized for its prioritizing of corporate interests over those of subsistence farmers (Canfield et al., 2021; de Wit et al., 2021).

While certain uses of blockchain, particularly in mobile technologies, can mitigate "information asymmetry" (Lin et al., 2020, p. 673), generally, there has not been enough evidence to justify such optimism (Feng et al., 2020, p. 121033). As such, the transparency that blockchain promises is more of an ideal or even a commodity in itself, not unlike the status of geographically diverse foods in 1990s London, which were subject to "double commodity fetishism" because of both their far-flung provenance and their difference from more widely available mainstream foods (Cook and Crang, 1996b, p. 132). Goodman notes a similar trend in fair trade networks, where the legibility to Northern consumer markets of growers of foods from the Global South ironically depended on the commodification of foodstuffs, a process that was as material as it was semiotic (2004, p. 894–895). Transparency, moreover, being linked to blockchain platforms, is like the cold chain standard of "freshness" that Freidberg (2009, p. 5) argues "depends less on time or distance than on the technology that protects it". Of course, the ubiquity of the discourse of transparency in food systems and wider environmental governance makes it appear more absolute and less context specific.

The literature on transparency in food systems varies in its assessment of this trend of a naturalized transparency in food governance. Among players up and down the supply chain, including the state, the public and corporate entities, transparency is seen to remedy mistrust (Gupta and Mason, 2014, p. 5; Lockie et al., 2015, p. 124). In terms of ethical standards in labor and environmental governance, more transparency is

presumed to lead to better conditions, based on the precedent of public right-to-know efforts concerning pollution (Mol, 2015, p. 154). But the reality is different. In the case of corporations, when disclosure is even an option given the prevalence of trade secrets, voluntary disclosure often is motivated by wanting to avoid governmental regulation (Gupta and Mason, 2014, p. 6). This preemptive disclosure often biases government in favor of liberal economic policies which ultimately benefit large businesses with the capital to invest in traceability systems (p. 8). Such policies often reinforce existing power and wealth inequities rather than remedy them, which is what transparency was intended to do (p. 10–11). In essence, an impulse that was intended to restore trust and instill equity does the opposite: creating distrust and privileging companies already possessing a lion's share of the market (Lockie et al., 2015, p. 124). Moreover, the shift in blockchains toward interoperability and standards across platforms will further privilege Big Food entities able to meet those standards (GS1 US: Supply chain blockchain has evolved, 2021). Transparent stories about food therefore do not seem to be sufficient for transformative change on the ground without the targeted deployment of those stories and the involvement of stakeholders directly affected by whatever is at issue (Broad, 2016, p. 58; Gardner et al., 2019, p. 164–166). As Gupta and Mason maintain as part of their "critical transparency studies perspective," transparency is a "fundamentally contested political terrain" (2014, p. 9) rather than a sure vehicle for truth-telling.

COMMODITY ANALYSIS, DOCUMENTARY FILM, AND THE PROMISE OF BLOCKCHAIN INDEXICALITY

A recent editorial in *Nature Food* addresses the tensions and contradictions in the uses of blockchain for food systems: "Though big data has the potential to reduce narratives of food provenance to issues of supply chain processes—multinationals have begun to explore the capabilities of distributed ledger technology in rooting out issues of land rights, child labor and forced labor along the food supply chain. The potential of blockchain as a tool of food justice is immense" (The hands that feed us, 2020). In touting the value of blockchain as a tool of food justice, *Nature Food*'s editor buys into a common deployment of transparency as a response to a moral failing (Harvey et al., 2013, p. 295). Calls for transparency in the food system seem to build on the cachet of what Goodman calls the "moral economy of food" that began to emerge in the "political ecological imaginary" of fair trade networks in the 1990's (2004, p. 894). In this vein, food stories enabled through blockchain resonate with earlier attempts in food justice movements, such as that of fair trade, to reveal the on-the-ground conditions of the commodity chain.

Documentary films often have played a role in revealing the injustice of such conditions. Food documentaries such as *Black Gold* (2006), *Bananas!* (2009), and *The Dark Side of Chocolate* (2010) critique industrial agriculture by tracing the trajectory of its resulting commodities across "logistics space" (Baron et al., 2014; Cowen, 2014, p. 2). In this way, documentary film is itself a logistical medium that transports and translates

specific social realities for an imagined public. Like supply chains, documentaries possess an internal logic of moving assets. Kahana (2008) describes documentary as a "transitional medium" that "carries fragments of social reality… and in transporting them *translates* them from a local dialect to a lingua franca" (2008, p. 2). This process of translation is not unlike that which occurs in the "moral economy" of fair trade networks, as described by Goodman, where the commoditization of a food from Southern countries to Northern ones involves both a physical and semiotic transformation that Goodman (2004, p. 894-5) argues ultimately is a necessary condition for Northern countries' ethical consideration of Southern food producers.

Cook and Crang (1996b), following Marcus (1990), are invested in a distinctly cinematic approach to commodity systems analysis: one that embraces the contrasting juxtapositions of montage (especially parallel intercutting) to describe the global circuits of commodities from point of production to point of sale. They are invested in the parallels between the "New Ethnography" of the early nineties and the "'New Documentary' movement" of the same era, both of which questioned the objectivity of its representations of the world, particularly the worlds of cultural others (Cook and Crang, 1996b, p. 18; Williams, 1993). In reference to food systems, the "others" in question are the people who produce the foodstuffs that eventually circulate as commodities. Cook and Crang (1996b) argue that commodity driven films often rely on the unveiling technique, which gives too much importance to the place of provisioning and none to the place of consumption (p. 148). Instead, Cook and Crang argue for leaning into the commodity form by "roughing up" its surface (p. 147) in order to attend to uses and abuses of the commodity form itself as it circulates (p. 148). Cook and Crang sees their work as giving voice not only to the "mute" grapes of David Harvey's analysis (Cook and Crang, 1996b, p. 135; Harvey, 1990, p. 423), unable to attest to the conditions in which they were produced, but also to the commodity fetish itself, which takes on various guises as it circulates in the market (Cook and Crang, 1996b).

Amos Gitai's documentary film *Pineapple* (1984), which tracks the journey of a can of Dole-brand pineapple from a grocery store shelf to a Hawaiian plantation, resonates for Cook and Crang (1996a) as an example of filmic commodity analysis par excellence because of its interest in not merely exposing labor violations but for reflexively using the film medium itself to explore power structures in that industry. In telling the story of pineapple, they argue, Gitai's film questions the stories that the captains of industry tell themselves, as well as those of middle management and field workers. Unlike the blockchain chicken, for example, which aims toward a story of complete transparency, Gitai's canned pineapple is rendered in many ways more opaque through the film's cinematic ambling, counterintuitive editing choices and dissonant soundtrack. The viewer is left with more questions than answers, but with perhaps a higher fidelity recording of the actual ways in which commodities generate meaning.

The reflexive documentary film, in providing a model to geographers for mediating and framing access to the real as a function of ideology (Williams, 1993, p. 13–14), however,

belies its counterintuitive legacy of naturalizing cultural others through the gesture of giving them a voice. Film scholar Pooja Rangan has dubbed this tendency in reflexive documentary film, particularly participatory documentary, which gives subjects the chance to participate in the documentary process, as the discourse of "immediation" (2017, p. 7). Such a move is problematic according to Rangan because it denies "agencies that elude the coordinates of liberal selfhood" (p. 176). These contours of liberal selfhood are the same values underwriting the anthropomorphic "political economy of storytelling" (Fernandes, 2017, p. 10), the same values that equate increased transparency in the food system with gains in social justice rather than questioning the terms of the transparency itself. Similar to the reflexive documentary film, such transparency would, in Rangan's assessment, make entities in the food system who typically are invisible to consumers and have borne the brunt of its excesses—working people of color, animals, and the biosphere as a whole— "visible by 'giving' them selfhood or a voice" (p. 176). Such visual and logocentric renderings of agency, in Rangan's estimation, do not allow for other understandings of the world, which is limiting especially when it comes to characterizing food and food systems. A similar point has been taken up recently by critics of the 2021 U.N. Food Systems Summit, who argue that the Summit prioritized smart technologies for meeting the U.N.'s Sustainable Development Goals over more culturally relevant agroecological, Indigenous and traditional agricultural knowledge (de Wit et al., 2021).

Rangan argues that the "antimimetic enterprise" (p. 177) of reflexive documentary, especially in light of the rise of digital film and media (Doane, 2007), ultimately denies the indexical connection of film to the world (Rangan, 2017, p. 180). Recalling that the index as described by Charles Sanders Peirce involves the physical proximity between sign and referent (famously, the relationship between foot and footprint, and in the case of film, light and film stock), Rangan argues for a documentary signification marked by touch rather than sight (Rangan, 2017, p. 179–180). Drawing on Laura U. Marks notion of "haptic visuality" (Marks, 2000, p. 162), the examples Rangan draws on in this alternate mode center on projects showcasing the incidental interactions of animals with various recording apparatuses that are otherwise illegible to humans (p. 180). More pertinent to food systems, Marks theorizes food as inspiring a particular form of "haptic visuality" in intercultural films that helps exiled viewers of those films remember culturally relevant "gustatory epistemologies" (Marks, 2000, p. 225–226). In such films, senses such as taste and smell structure thought and models of agencies outside the liberal mold.

Blockchain, with its contractual claim to truth ensured through just-in-time sensor signals certified by anonymized proof-of-work systems, would seem to similarly reinstate a form of indexicality focused on the physical relationship between referent and sign. Smaill (2018) argues that the regimes of spatialization and duration within the realm of data-driven, real-time visualization technologies provide both a challenge to and opportunity for rethinking documentary mediations of the environment (p. 2). While she analyzes real-time tracking software of sharks, her assessment of the "documentary impulse"

of such digital technologies given their "dynamic and durational representation of the real" (p. 2) could potentially be applied to food blockchains. As such, blockchain food stories point to a lesser known aspect of cinematic indexicality that draws not solely on a physical connection to the real world, but the spatio-temporal framing of the real, in this case, through real-time updates along the commodity chain (Malitsky, 2012, p. 245–256). What is called the deictic sense of indexicality communicates presence and immediacy by pointing or indication (Doane, 2007, p. 133–134; Malitsky, 2012, p. 246). In this vein, traditional commodity chain analysis, and its more recent blockchain-secured iterations, establishes the truth of something by pointing to its arrival at various points on the supply chain, movements which are registered by sensors, third-party certifiers, and individuals. Truth in blockchain depends on the fidelity of the sensor and the ability to aggregate signals to create a picture of truth with potentially emergent properties. The true power of blockchains, according to its promoters, is not to unveil or render transparent the truth, as in earlier commodity systems analysis, nor to show that reality to be a function of ideology, as in the work of Marcus and Cook and Crang, but to predict the truth or discern second order emergent properties of the system in which the food circulates.

The purported emergent properties of blockchain food stories are in tension with their restoration of a physical connection or proximity between sign and referent. Blockchain food stories in the current stage of late globalization call attention to the fact that the relationship between the index and its referent is never a straightforward one of representation, but instead is marked by an uncanny haunting by the referent that merits further scrutiny (Doane, 2007, p. 124). Researchers of globalization in its early stages were encouraged to "follow the things" (Appadurai, 1986; Cook, 2018, p. 5) in order to better understand them. But, in the current conditions of advanced globalization, as Hulme argues, not being able to follow things seems a more likely scenario given the complexity of supply chains and their tendency to break down (Cowen, 2014, p. 2; Hulme, 2017).

The early 2021 blockage of the containership the *Ever Given* in the Suez Canal brought to light the utter dependence of global supply chains on the smooth sailing of their shipping vessels. An image distributed by the PR arm of the Suez Canal Authority of-the-little-excavator-that-could, earnestly trying to dislodge the outsized vessel from the banks of the canal, was reappropriated in a slew of anti-capitalist memes riffing on the theme of the futility of individual effort in the face of global, systemic catastrophe. In a kind of self-fulfilling prophecy of the lures of the neoliberal championing of the individual, the operator of the excavator, in defiance of the memes, said he was motivated to work harder than ever (Jankowicz, 2021). And yet, the release of the vessel itself did not mark the end of this supply chain snafu. As of the writing of this article, nearly $1 billion of goods are still stuck in administrative and legal limbo (Wackett, 2021). On a local scale, the preponderance of selectively empty grocery store shelves in the early stages of the pandemic in the U.S., when, for example, toilet paper and dried pasta were nowhere to be seen, but gargantuan tubs of mayonnaise and sheaves of shelf-stable flour tortillas were there for the taking, prompted

the author herself to wonder about things like the differences between retail and institutional supply chains and the collective food procurement values of a community. The unpredictable effects of supply chains, despite being ruled by tracking and tracing systems and figured by relatable, anthropomorphic food stories, suggests that the fantasy of control posited by blockchain and other digital twin technologies is an elusive one.

CONCLUSION

I have discussed the rise of the conceit of the "story of food" as regards the recent calls for the use of blockchain and digital twin technology in light of ongoing disruptions to the food system. Such food stories are seen as communicating ideals of food system and supply chain transparency, which serve purposes as diverse as value-adds for corporations, governmental oversight and activist calls to action.

That stories as a unit of description are being used at all to describe the food system is on one level an indication of the ubiquity of neoliberalism and its subjectification of systemic issues and championing of individuals. But if we consider stories and characters about the food system as uncanny doubles or dopplegängers of that system rather than authentic replications of it—just as digital twin technology was originally conceived— then the emergent properties of these food systems, particularly in this late stage of globalization, could shed some light on the unpredictability of life under capitalism.

In the early stages of globalization, simply denuding commodities of their aura and revealing the conditions of their production was perceived as sufficiently illuminating for consumers engaged with the fair trade movement. There, the food story became an arguably essential aspect of enabling consumers from northern countries to both connect with and ethically compensate southern producers. The reliance of those food stories on the cinematic experimental and reflexive aesthetic of the New Documentary is further evidence that formal innovation was considered a necessary if not sufficient means to decenter liberal Western modes of reference in ethnographic studies of globally connected commodity chains.

But in the current, advanced stage of globalization, no such easy circuits exist. Blockchain seems to promise a way to distinguish signal from noise in supply chains. Its reliance on physical and deictic senses of indexicality through both its underlying proof-of-work infrastructure, which is dependent on electricity expenditure, and its aggregation of data through just-in-time analog-to-digital sensors creates innumerable instances of contact between sign and referent. The closeness between blockchains (aka digital twins) and the systems they emulate make them more like dopplegängers than straightforward representations. Maybe at times too close for comfort, the digital twins that claim to tell the truth of food systems ignite the logistical imagination by promising producers and consumers the fantasy of absolute control while leaving some room for the emergent properties of those food systems to disrupt those truths.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/supplementary material, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author/s.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

SK: undertook all research and writing of this article.

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Cover Stories: Concealing Speciesist Violence in U.S. News Reporting on the COVID-19 "Pork" Industry Crisis

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With a focus on journalistic discourse, this paper argues for a re-envisioning of food-system communication that takes non-human animals into account as stakeholders in systems that commodify them. This is especially urgent in light of the global pandemic, which has laid bare the vulnerability to crisis inherent in animal-based food production. As a case study to illustrate the need for a just and non-human inclusive orientation to food-systems communication, the paper performs a qualitative rhetorical examination, of a series of articles in major U.S. news sources in May of 2020, a few months into the economic shutdown in the U.S. in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. At that time, millions of pigs were brutally killed on U.S. farms due to the impossibility of killing them in slaughterhouses overrun with COVID-19 outbreaks. The analysis finds that media reporting legitimated violence against pigs by framing narratives from industry perspectives, deflecting agency for violence away from farmers, presenting pigs as willing victims, masking violence through euphemism, objectifying pigs and ignoring their sentience, and uncritically propagating industry rhetoric about "humane" farming. Through these representations, it is argued, the media failed in their responsibility to present the viewpoints of all sentient beings affected by the crisis; in other words, all stakeholders. The methodology merges a textually-oriented approach to critical discourse analysis (CDA) with social critique informed by critical animal studies (CAS), and the essay concludes with recommendations for journalists and other food-system communicators, which should be possible to implement even given the current capitalist, industry-influenced media environment and the demonstrated ruthlessness of animal industries in silencing voices inimical to their profitmaking.

Keywords: speciesism, media, animal agriculture, critical animal studies, animal-industrial complex, pigs, journalism, humane myth

INTRODUCTION

At the university where I teach, I offer a course on animal ethics each year. As part of the course, students visit local animal sanctuaries where they meet and interact with cows, chickens, turkeys, ducks, sheep, pigs, and other non-human animals who have been rescued from the usual fate of members of their species, which is to be killed by humans for food. One of the sanctuaries is devoted entirely to pigs, and students frequently discover that, despite pigs' abysmal status in society and the stereotypes humans deploy to justify our oppression of them, they are highly social, clean, playful, and intelligent animals with all the cognitive and emotional capacities of the dogs and cats idealized

in Western society. Students reach these realizations through interacting with pigs in a safe place where they are not being commodified or made to serve human interests and are able to express some natural behaviors.

This student's reflection upon visiting Better Piggies Rescue is representative of the majority of 48 students from my classes who have toured the sanctuary:

> I had never gone to an animal sanctuary before because I never really knew they existed. Being around hundreds of pigs, all of whom have names and distinct personalities made me realize that these animals are commodified and pushed out of consumers' visibility. Beyond the sanctuaries, it is so easy to eat bacon without feeling much guilt; however, after spending an hour looking into all of their eyes and petting them it's very hard to rationalize it.

Another student recounts:

> The most fun part of going to this sanctuary was getting to see the baby piglets, since I had never really seen any in person before, and I had definitely never gotten to pet them or play with them. Many of them were really curious and explorative…It reminded me a lot of the behavior that is associated with puppies…Getting a first-hand experience with pigs seems to make people realize that pigs do have feelings and emotions, and do not want to feel pain.

Students were able to develop these perceptions about pigs due to factors they mention such as the pigs' having names and thus individual identities, and being allowed to freely play and socialize with humans and with each other, all of which is denied them in animal farming operations. Part of the reason for students' previous lack of awareness of pigs' cognitive and social capacities is that dominant cultural forces, including media communications about food systems, keep exploited non-human animals invisible. When they are presented in media stories, it is almost always as incidental figures in narratives centered on anthropocentric concerns, so that they are objectified as "mass terms" (Adams, 2000) rather than portrayed as individuals with subjectivity. In other words, they are presented solely in the context of their commodification.

WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT PIGS?

In order to be comprehensive, a re-imagining of food system discourse should take into account not only human participants, but all sentient food-system stakeholders. The most vulnerable of these are the non-human animals whose lives and deaths are entirely inscribed within capitalist logics of domination, objectification, and violence. As Constance Gordon and Kathleen Hunt explain: "Although food justice is an orientation to the food system, it is also an orientation to the people, places, non-human animals, and the economic and ecological relations by which the food system is organized" (Gordon and Hunt, 2018, p. 6). Taking this insight as a point of departure, I argue that that non-human animals should be included as sentient subjects, rather than mere commodified objects, in a food-justice approach to environmental communication.

A large and growing body of scientific literature on the sentience and sensitivity of pigs provides evidence that communicating about them as subjects is warranted. A recent article by cognitive ethologists Lori Marino and Christina M. Colvin Marino and Colvin (2015) synthesizes and builds on over one hundred ethological studies on pigs. Their findings include the following:

> All of these studies point to the presence of stable individual behavioral traits that reveal a complex personality in pigs that overlaps with that of other animals, including humans. As with any comparative scientific issue, the study of personality in pigs and how it interacts with their other characteristics is critical for a full understanding of who they are (p. 18).
> Pigs exhibit behaviors and patterns of interaction with one another that may be comparable to what has been observed in primates and some birds (p. 11).
> Common object play behaviors in pigs include shaking or carrying an object such as a ball or stick or tossing straw…Locomotor play includes waving/tossing of the head, scampering, jumping, hopping, pawing, pivoting, and gamboling (energetic running), flopping on the ground, and hopping around…Social play in pigs includes play fighting, pushing and running after each other…Many of these categories of play are combined and the behaviors are similar to play behavior in dogs and other mammals. Play in pigs not only satisfies a need for exploration and discovery, it also is critical for healthy development (p. 9).
> Emotions tend to influence more than one individual in a group. For instance, they can be shared through a process known as emotional contagion, the arousal of emotion in one individual upon witnessing the same emotion in another... Emotional contagion is considered, by some investigators, to be a simple form of empathy, the ability to feel the emotional state of another from the other's perspective... Emotional contagion has been demonstrated in many socially complex groups such as dogs …wolves…great apes…and only a few other non-human species, including pigs (p. 15).

When commodified in food systems, pigs are deprived of all opportunities for play, family relationships, and other essential healthy behaviors, and their empathetic emotional capacities, still intact, lead them to feel overwhelming fear, boredom, and depression. Psychologist Melanie Joy (2011) notes:

> Most pigs…spend their entire lives in intensive confinement and never see the outdoors until they are packed into trucks to be sent to slaughter. Shortly after piglets are born, they are typically castrated, and their tails are cut off, with-out anesthesia. Ranchers are told to remove ("dock") their tails with blunt, side-cutting pliers because the crushing action helps to reduce bleeding. Tail docking is necessary because under extreme stress and when all their natural urges have been thwarted, pigs develop neurotic behaviors and can actually bite each other's' tails off. This psychological reaction is one of the symptoms of what is referred to in the industry as porcine stress syndrome (PSS), a condition that is remarkably similar to what we call in humans post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (p. 42–3).

This morally problematic treatment of sentient individuals is inevitable in a system in which humans consume and commodify

other animals. Joy (2011) uses the term *carnism* to refer to the "violent ideology" that undergirds this system, and argues: "Contemporary carnism is organized around extensive violence. This level of violence is necessary in order to slaughter enough animals for the meat industry to maintain its current profit margin" (p. 32). A food-justice approach can fruitfully embrace a critical animal studies perspective by elucidating the reinforcement of carnism in dominant modes of food-system communication such as mass journalism.

Coronavirus Crisis

In May of 2020, a few months into the economic shutdown in the U.S. in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, millions of animals exploited for food, particularly pigs and chickens, were "depopulated" (an industry euphemism)—in other words, violently killed by the millions—on U.S. farms due to the impossibility of sending them to slaughterhouses, as would usually be done in order for the farmer to turn a profit. These conditions did not result in a higher number of pigs being killed than usual; the difference between this ostensible crisis and standard farming operation is that in May 2020, millions of pigs were killed in the places where they had been confined and exploited rather than being transported to the slaughterhouse in crowded trucks (trips that often take many hours or days, during which the pigs are deprived of food and water and linger in their own excrement). At the slaughterhouse, they are either hoisted upside down by a back leg and conveyed down the line until their throats are slit and they bleed to death, or they are forced into CO_2 gas chambers where their bodies essentially burn from the inside out as their lungs fill with carbon dioxide—both agonizing deaths.

While many North Americans were pointing an accusing finger at the Asian "live markets" to which the genesis of this particular pandemic is traced, they failed to condemn equally abominable practices in the U.S., or to note the many zoonotic pandemics that have originated from Western animal-exploitation food systems, such as influenza and swine flu (Gregor, 2020). Also largely escaping moral scrutiny was the fact that U.S. slaughterhouses are a hotbed of communicability of the COVID-19 virus, which is what led to the shutdown of slaughterhouses and thus the need for farmers to kill pigs themselves.

The U.S. media attention given to the mass killing of pigs in May of 2020 was therefore not due to the number of pigs killed or the violence visited upon them (since such atrocities are routine), but rather to the news peg (Benedict, 1992) offered by the human drama of farmers having to pay to kill pigs themselves rather than having them trucked off at a profit. The opportunity to interview animal farmers, who are generally idealized in the U.S. public imagination, is a sellable media moment. It is well-documented that pigs were killed in the most vicious and agonizing ways during the May 2020 "depopulation": the most common mode was "ventilation shutdown," in which oxygen supply to the pigs' confinement building is blocked at the same time that the temperature is raised. Most pigs slowly die over as long as twenty four hours as they suffocate while roasting alive. Those who survive this are shot or beaten to death (Greenwald, 2020).

Seen in light of the information about pigs' sentience and sensitivity conveyed above, this can be seen as a mass atrocity. And yet the media coverage of this event, as my analysis will show, generally adopted a glib tone and ignored the violence endured by the pigs, focusing solely on anthropocentric concerns such as the farmers' financial losses or, in a case of reverse victimology (a concept explained forthwith), the emotional suffering of the farmers who perpetrated the violence.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Other analyses of the representations of sentient beings exploited for food in U.S. media include communications scholar Carrie P. Freeman (2009/2016) seminal study of how farmed animals were represented in US national print and broadcast news from 2000 to 2003. Freeman highlights a predominance of "anthropocentric news frames" that marginalize animal rights as a topic of public debate (2016, p. 169). She finds that "American news media largely support the speciesist status quo," and that "news media often objectify non-human animals discursively through: (1) commodification, (2) failure to acknowledge their emotional perspectives, and (3) failure to describe them as inherently valuable individuals" (2009, p. 78). As will be seen below, this is consistent with the findings of my analysis of the mass extermination of pigs during COVID.

Along similar lines, independent scholar and activist Karen Davis (2018), in her analysis of journalistic discourse on sentient beings exploited for food, found with few exceptions a disturbing "moral disengagement" on the part of journalists (p. 73). The news articles she examined reinforce the nonhuman-animal-consuming status quo while superficially purporting to attend to the interests of these beings. She provides evidence that "journalists do not always feel obligated to adhere to standards of precise language where farmed animals are concerned" (Davis, 2018, p. 75). Congruent with Freeman's (2009/2016) findings, Davis discovered that anthropocentric concerns, such as financial loss or gain, predominated in stories on farmed animal exploitation and suffering (Congruent with Freeman, 2009/2016).

Sociologist David Nibert (2002, 2013, 2016) documents the history of speciesism in mass media, which dates from this media's very inception in the early twentieth century. "Speciesist ideology and oppression, like other exploitative social arrangements, are so pervasive, and so pervasively promoted and normalized in both advertising and the content of the media, that it takes considerable effort just to become aware of it, much less to understand the institutional arrangements that compel it" (2016, p. 85). These institutional arrangements involve the political economy of corporate media (which is all U.S. media) as the major communicative arm of capitalist profit-taking entities, many of which are part of the animal-industrial complex, or the network of diverse and interdependent industries (food, pharmaceutical, chemical, and vivisection, among others) that profit from the exploitation of non-human animals[1].

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[1]On the network of industries forming the *animal-industrial complex*, see Noske (1997), who coined the term. On the commercial corruption of media

Communications scholar Garrett M. Broad (2016), in evaluating the rhetorical effects of ag-gag laws devised by animal industries to suppress eyewitness accounts of their daily operations and to intimidate activists, notes that the harmful practices of animal agriculture "have generally occurred out of sight of the eating public." Moreover:

> Mainstream public discourse tends to further reinforce the structural power of the animal production industry. State-level agricultural disparagement laws, for instance, lower the barriers to entry for food producers who aim to initiate lawsuits against critics of their products…[T]hese frivolous "food libel" lawsuits subvert traditional legal standards and can have a chilling effect on media discussions related to animal production processes (Broad, 2016, p. 47).

What these industries have to hide, with the help of an intimidated and compliant media, is the systemic violence at the core of their activities. Critical animal studies scholar John Sanbonmatsu (2017) explains: "Today, non-human animals born into the industrialized agriculture system spend their whole lives in entirely artificial environments where their bodies, behaviors, and minds are forced to conform utterly to the needs of the administered world of capital" (p. 2). Thus it is not just the killing, but the entire lifespan of these oppressed beings that is characterized by violence, since they are treated as disposable units of production. Sanbonmatsu continues:

> The fact that pigs are curious, affectionate beings with needs and interests is…not of concern to the farmer who raises and sells them…When commodified non-humans are deemed no longer to possess commercial value within the system of exchange, they are thus liquidated, in the same way a shoe manufacturer might dispose of last season's shoes by sending them to a landfill (Sanbonmatsu, 2017, p. 9).

This is exemplified by the mass annihilation of pigs during the COVID slaughterhouse shutdowns, during which, as discussed below, pigs were murdered and literally dumped in landfills.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Examining a purposeful selection of news texts, this essay employs "textually oriented discourse analysis" (Fairclough, 2003, p. 2), a form of critical discourse analysis (CDA) that focuses on detailed examination of small selections of carefully chosen texts rather than examining large corpora of material on a more general, quantitative level. The objective of textually-oriented discourse analysis is to "transcend the division between work inspired by social theory [such as Foucauldian analysis], which tends not to analyze texts, and work which focuses upon the language of texts but tends not to engage with social theoretical issues" (Fairclough, 2003, p. 2–3). From a similar methodological orientation and specifically in the context of news media analysis, John E. Richardson (2007) proposes that since discourse contributes to producing and reproducing social

inequalities, CDA should aim to impact upon social relationships, "particularly on relationships of disempowerment, dominance, prejudice, and/or discrimination" (p. 26). To effectuate this, he advocates for an "interpretive, contextual, and constructivist approach" to textual analysis, elaborating: "What this means is that critical discourse analysts offer interpretations of the meanings of texts rather than just quantifying textual features and deriving meaning from this" (Richardson, 2007, p. 15).

My goal is to merge this textually-oriented approach to CDA with social analysis informed by critical animal studies (CAS) in order build upon existing research about the textual representation of non-human animals in journalistic food-systems discourse (outlined above in the literature review). In focusing on hegemonic media discourses, the analysis gives "more attention to "top-down" relations of dominance than to "bottom-up" relations of resistance" (Van Dijk, 1993, p. 250), concentrating on elite media like *The New York Times*, National Public radio, and other high-circulation U.S. news sources with the rationale that because of their high social and economic capital, these outlets have a substantial influence on public sense- and decision-making, including among elite social actors. The analysis adopts the principles of, and contributes to, the fields of CDA and CAS, both of which enact a commitment to politically engaged scholarship that addresses power relations and how they are perpetuated in discourse, and eschew any pretenses to "objective," disengaged inquiry (Van Dijk, 1993; Best et al., 2007).

In order to analyze media coverage of the violence inflicted on pigs on farms during the COVID-19 pandemic, I will examine in detail three representative examples from a set of 32 articles and broadcasts by major US news outlets in May of 2020, and provide a synopsis of the other texts. Because media coverage of the mass pig extermination lasted for about two weeks, this sample is comprehensive and can be considered representative of how major, high-circulation news sources reported on the event. I will look at these texts in terms of the following analytical categories: (1) framing, or the perspective from which the narratives are told; (2) agency, especially as concerns the question of who inflicts and is victimized by crisis; (3) euphemism to conceal violence; (4) objectification of animals that denies them subjectivity; and (5) the humane myth, or rhetoric that presents exploiters of non-human animals as benign caretakers. In compiling relevant texts for analysis, I searched for the terms "pigs," "farmers," "COVID-19," and "pandemic" in the online editions of the *New York Times*, National Public Radio, the *Washington Post*, the *Chicago Tribune, CNN*, and NBC News. The date range of the search was 1 May 2020 through 31 May 2020. These news outlets were selected for their public image as credible, professional, and mainstream U.S. news sources, and included a mix of traditional newspapers, one radio outlet, and one major TV news network. Of 32 total news texts examined, three were selected as representative for analysis because they were devoted entirely to the mass extermination of pigs (rather than mentioning it tangentially), and because they were long and detailed enough to provide rich opportunities for analysis. These texts are as follows: a May 14 article in the *New York Times* with the headline "Meat Plant Closures Mean Pigs Are Gassed or Shot Instead" (Corkery and Bellany, 2020); an NPR story, also from May 14, titled "Millions of Pigs Will Be Euthanized as Pandemic Cripples Meatpacking Plants" (Mak,

under capitalism, see Chomsky (2002), Stauber and Rampton (2002); and McChesney (2015).

2020); and a piece by NBC news, dated May 28, headlined "Coronavirus Crisis Puts Hog Farmers in Uncharted Territory: Killing Their Healthy Livestock." The three texts are from different news genres (print, radio, and television, respectively). An analysis of them now follows, with an examination of other texts in the overall sample included in the section "Additional Texts" immediately preceding this essay's conclusion.

Analysis
Framing
There is extensive literature on news framing, i.e., how news stories selectively present particular elements of a reported event as most salient while neglecting other perspectives (Gamson, 1989; Fowler, 1991; Iyengar, 1991; Entman, 1993; Mills, 1995; Price et al., 1997; Fairclough, 2003; Kuypers, 2010; Patterson, 2013). To examine framing in terms of imbalanced power relations, feminist linguist Sara Mills (1995) has employed the concept of "focalization," adopted from narratology and concerned with how highlighting the voices of particular characters "slants the emotive and ideological content of a text" (Mills, 1995, p. 185). Focalization shapes what Mills calls the "dominant reading," that is, the kind of audience-subject a text conjures and constructs.

The discourse of the news articles examined for this study assumed an audience that is socially conditioned to accept violence against pigs in food systems as morally unproblematic. It was focalized from the perspective of farmers, that is, those who profit from the exploitation of sentient beings. Because events were presented as an economic and human-interest story, this framing might initially seem justifiable. However, considering that the pigs who were the direct victims of the crisis are sentient individuals, excluding their interests and subjectivity from the narrative is an oversight and violates the press's social responsibility to reflect relevant viewpoints of all those affected by the issues on which it reports. Freeman (2009/2016) calls for the press to adhere to its obligation to represent the perspectives of all groups affected by the issues on which it reports; this mandates including the perspectives of non-human animals in new stories on agricultural practices in which they are exploited (2016, p. 169).

Even when a purely anthropocentric frame is adopted (which is standard in media and other dominant cultural spaces), citing only the viewpoints of farmers is still an oversight in that it excludes other relevant voices, such as those of animal advocates or experts in cognitive ethology. The narrow, industry-focalized framing of these news stories is seen in the fact that every quotation in all three representative articles contains the words of a pig-farming industry representative. These voices include the those of the "head of a pork producers association" (Solon, 2020, para. 1); "Mike Patterson, a hog farmer from Kenyon, Minnesota" (Solon, 2020, paras. 4, 7, and passim); "David Preisler, CEO of the Minnesota Pork Producers Association" (Solon, 2020, paras. 8 and 9); "Brad Kluver, a third generation pig farmer in Lake Crystal, Minnesota" (Solon, 2020, paras. 17 and 19); "Terry O'Neel, a pork producer from Friend, Nebraska" (Solon, 2020, para. 24); "Third generation hog farmer Chad Leman" (Mak, 2020, para. 1), also identified as "a farmer from Eureka, Ill.,

and a board member of the Illinois Pork Producers Association" (Mak, 2020, para. 11); "Heather Hill, a multi-generational hog farmer living in Greenfield, Ind." (Mak, 2020, para. 13); "Greg Boerboom, a second-generation pig farmer in Marshall, Minn." (Corkery and Bellany, paras. 5, 20, 24, 32, 34, 35–37, and a photo caption); "Steve Meyer, a pork industry analyst" (Corkery and Bellany, 2020, para. 12) "Shane Odegaard" who has a "farm in South Dakota" (NYT, paras. 16-17); and "Dean Meyer, a farmer in northwest Iowa" (NYT, paras. 23, 26, and 27). These personalized, geographically situated, and family-oriented (e.g., "third generation" and so forth) attributions focalize events from these industry profiteers' perspectives, inviting readers to identify with them as individuals. (Pigs, on the other hand, are presented as a depersonalized mass)

Framing involves more than simply whose voices are included; it is also a matter of how the problem is presented, and from whose perspective readers are positioned to see the issues at hand (Patterson, 2013). This excerpt from NBC news is representative of the texts examined in its exclusive emphasis on the economic struggle and ostensible good character of farmers:

> Facing rising costs and increasingly cramped conditions for their herds, some hog farmers across the Midwest have taken drastic action: killing their perfectly healthy pigs. "This goes against everything we do," Mike Patterson, a hog farmer from Kenyon, Minnesota, told NBC News. "We realize these animals are going to be killed, but we take great pride in knowing we are putting food on Americans" tables and trying to give the animals the best care we can to ensure they are healthy and thriving every day. To see that go to waste is difficult (Solon, 2020, paras. 3–4).

In contrast to the personalized representation of farmers shown above, pigs are identity-less "herds." Framing the mass killing of "perfectly healthy pigs" as "drastic action" obfuscates that this is what farmers do on a routine basis; the only difference is that they were economically compelled to perform themselves what slaughterhouse workers customarily do to the pigs from whose deaths the farmers profit. To say that this "goes against everything" they do is therefore a misrepresentation, making it sound as if their work is usually violence-free and that they are purely benign caretakers. Equally misleading is the implication that the pigs' deaths, which the exploiters allegedly find regrettable, is for the higher purpose of "putting food on Americans' tables." The objective, of course, is to turn a profit, and the clichéd narrative that farmers are altruistic providers for both non-human animals and human consumers is what Brian Luke (2007) identifies as a common industry "cover story" utilized to maintain public support and stave off criticism prompted by the work of activists. Luke explains:

> Industry cover stories work to disincline us from sympathetic intervention. They all say in effect, "Well, there may be animals being harmed here, but what we're doing is so important, you better let us continue." The cover story for the animal farming industry, of course, is that they are providing food for people. Human consumption of animal flesh is portrayed as an unremarkable given, leading to a consumer "demand" for meat that simply must be met…This story obscures the crucial facts

that the taste for meat is culturally variable, not innate, that animal flesh is not a nutritional necessity for humans (indeed, the standard North American flesh-based diet is unhealthy), and that the animal farming industries do not passively respond to some mass insistence for meat, but rather actively construct markets for their products in order to accumulate profits (p. 138).

Seen in this light, the press's uncritical conveyance of this industry narrative constructs a narrow, one-sided depiction of events that fails to offer readers a more probing, critical lens through which to analyze the crisis. Such a critical lens—which would question the healthfulness and necessity of eating pigs' flesh, and the precarity of a food system that requires such extreme violence and can so easily be disrupted—would provide a more balanced depiction of the crisis and would offer tools for creating sustainable solutions.

This excerpt from NPR demonstrates further the uncritical, industry-aligned framing insofar as it characterizes the pig-flesh industry as an efficient and practical food production system which has only become problematic due to COVID-19:

> Before the Coronavirus crisis, pork production was a finely-tuned, just-in-time supply chain. During normal times, this led to efficiency and the reduction of the cost to produce pork. Now, it is a significant burden to hog farmers who will have nowhere to sell their ready-for-market pigs (Mak, 2020, par. 12).

Unmentioned here are potentially resurfacing, previous pandemics that have been directly caused by the pig-flesh industry, such as swine flu, and that non-human animal agriculture in general is a disease-generating industry due to the fetid conditions in which sentient beings are forced to live, the prevalence of excrement, blood, and other bodily fluids at every stage of the "supply chain," and the transmission of these biohazardous substances to and among slaughterhouse workers and into the resulting products. In fact, the reason for the slaughterhouse closures that triggered the very crisis being discussed is that slaughterhouses are hotbeds for disease transmission, including COVID-19 (Gregor, 2020; Molteni, 2020; Reuben, 2020; Taylor et al., 2020). Also evident in the above excerpt is a portrayal of "hog farmers" as the victims of the crisis, with no moral concern for the violence they inflict on the crisis's true innocent victims, the pigs. I turn next to this deflection of agency.

Agency

Although pigs are direct victims in this system, media coverage of the crisis presented farmers as the only legitimate victims, focusing not only on their economic hardships but also on their emotional distress at having to do, at a cost to themselves, work from which they usually receive remuneration when done by others (i.e., slaughterhouse workers). This kind of semantic reversal can be interpreted within the framework of *reverse victimology*, a concept that has been used in studies of gendered, human-to-human violence to describe a reactionary rhetoric in which perpetrators of violence become the ostensible victims, and the actual victims' interests and experiences are neglected or

dismissed (Stringer, 2014; Barca, 2018). Although the human-to-non-human violence discussed in the present essay is different in important ways from human-based gendered violence, the structures of domination and the valorization of perpetrators are similar enough that the concept of reverse victimology may be applied.

There are many examples of this reversal in the news sample; for instance, the *New York Times* recounted:

> "There are farmers who cannot finish their sentences when they talk about what they have to do," said Greg Boerboom, a second-generation pig farmer in Marshall, Minn.… The obligation to kill the animals themselves, and then get rid of the carcasses, is wrenching… "The economic part of it is damaging," said Steve Meyer, a pork industry analyst. "But the emotional and psychological and spiritual impact of this will have much longer consequences" (Corkery and Bellany, 2020, paras. 5, 9, 11).

While the inherently predatory non-human-animal-based food system can be seen as indirectly victimizing some human participants to a degree, including some farmers, there is still no doubt that they profit from exploiting sentient individuals while staying in that line of work at least somewhat voluntarily, and routinely carrying out atrocities such as confining mother pigs in cages so small they cannot turn around, killing unprofitable baby pigs by blunt force trauma, and removing pigs' tails, testicles, and teeth without anesthesia. Therefore, when the quoted industry representatives speak of "not being able to finish their sentences" and "the emotional and psychological and spiritual impact" on themselves, the discourse omits reference to the routine violence they perform. The journalistic discourse omits any inquiry into why this particular crisis is so much more "wrenching" than business as usual, and whether it has more to do with financial loss than empathy for pigs[2].

These statements from the *New York Times* are particularly vivid in terms of reverse victimology and ignoring the impact on those violated:

> Mr. Boerboom attended one of the presentations [by "pork industry groups"] and listened to a farmer talk about the emotional strain of killing about 3,000 pigs in a single day. After the call, Mr. Boerboom learned that the farmer had used a gun. "It was an all-day process," he said (Corkery and Bellany, 2020, paras. 35–36).

The journalist does not draw attention to the emotional and psychological impact upon each individual pig who watched as her kin were shot one-by-one until it was her turn (imagine the terror at the sound of the gunshots, the cries of pain and fear of the others, and the smell of their blood). Or, under the "ventilation shutdown" technique, of simultaneously being deprived of oxygen while her flesh roasts in temperatures above 140 degrees. These facts are omitted, while farmers are portrayed

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[2]It is important to note that a number of farmers voluntarily exit the business and many former farmers now speak out regularly about the cruelties of the industry. See Free From Harm (n/d).

as worthy victims burdened with the "emotional strain" of carrying out these actions.

Many other instances of reverse victimology were present, with farmers quoted as saying: "It keeps me up every night" (Solon, 2020, par. 19); "The emotional and financial impact of the pandemic on farmers is devastating" (Solon, 2020, par. 24); and, in a particularly glib exclamation that belies the claims of emotional devastation: "My wife and I have a longstanding joke between us. She always says, 'well Chad, it could be worse,'" Leman told NPR. "And I say, 'I know, but it could be better!'" (Mak par. 23). The journalists emphasized that farmers were "forced" (or other language signaling that they were compelled) to carry out violence (Corkery and Bellany, 2020, lead and paras. 2, 4, 9, 26; Mak, 2020, paras. 1, 4-5, 7, 12; Solon, 2020, paras. 19, 20). This emphasis presented "farmers" as passive victims and ignored the grisly *force* they literally and constantly enact upon the sentient beings under their control.

Willing Victims

Not only were farmers presented as the true victims of the crisis, but non-human animals were subtly portrayed as consenting to their own exploitation, a common trope in industry rhetoric[3]. For instance, news texts implied that pigs were eager to go to the slaughterhouse (italics have been added for emphasis in each excerpt below):

> Coronavirus outbreaks at meatpacking plants have created a backlog of *animals ready for slaughter but with nowhere to go*. Farmers are having to cull them (Corkery and Bellany, 2020, lead).
> Meat processing plants have shut down across the United States as the coronavirus has spread among workers, creating enormous bottlenecks in an inelastic supply chain. The result has been empty shelves in grocery stores and millions of *pigs that are all fattened up with nowhere to go* (Solon, 2020, para. 2).
> *Hogs ready for slaughter* cannot be easily held on farms because of their fast rate of growth (Mak, 2020, para. 10).
> Before the Coronavirus crisis, pork production was a finely-tuned, just-in-time supply chain. During normal times, this led to efficiency and the reduction of the cost to produce pork. Now, it is a significant burden to hog farmers who will have nowhere to sell their *ready-for-market pigs* (Mak, 2020 para. 12).

The rhetoric of pigs "ready" for slaughter reinforces the speciesist myth that animals consent to their oppression and willingly submit themselves to the objectives of humans. High-profile media outlets such as the ones cited might do well to update their framing to be more consistent with contemporary ethological knowledge about non-human sentience; they might even cite abundantly available scientific evidence that pigs and other exploited animals resist and suffer greatly under these conditions and are not willing victims. More accurate phrasing would convey that the farmers are the ones "ready" to benefit from their deaths.

Euphemism

In her analysis of newspaper opinion pieces, Dunayer (2016) found that euphemisms masking speciesist violence were rampant (see also Stibbe, 2001, 2012). Among these euphemisms was use of the term "euthanasia" in situations other than those that coincide with its definition: "killing someone who is experiencing incurable suffering" (p. 98). Following Dunayer's analysis, "euthanasia" is an inaccurate characterization of the murder of pigs for reasons of human economic interest and food-system malfunction. All of the news articles in the May 2020 sample nonetheless used the term, often prolifically. It was used as either a noun or a verb six times in the *New York Times*, seven times by NBC news, and nine times in the NPR story. This terminology obfuscated the severity of violence and failed to convey social reality to audiences.

While "euthanize" was the most prevalent euphemism in the news texts examined, others were present; for example, several are seen in combination in these passages, to which emphasis has been added:

> Some [farmers] have found smaller butcher shops to handle the slaughter and *processing* of a small proportion of pigs, but many of those are now booked up for months, Preisler [a pig farming industry executive] said, and are no substitute for the industrial-scale *harvesting* of pigs provided by large *meat processing plants* of companies such as JBS USA, Tyson Foods and Smithfield Foods (Solon, 2020, para. 12).
> *Depopulation* means losing the approximately $130 it takes to raise a pig to market size on top of having to pay to *euthanize* and dispose of the animal (Solon, 2020, para. 14).
> With meatpacking plants reducing *processing* capacity nationwide, U.S. hog farmers are bracing or [sic] an unprecedented crisis: the need to *euthanize* millions of pigs (Mak, 2020, para. 1).
> He [third generation hog farmer Chad Leman] means [the pigs should be] gone to the *meatpacking plant to be processed*. But with *pork processing plants* shut down due to worker safety concerns, he's faced with a grisly task: He needs to kill the pigs to make room for more. / And Leman isn't the only one. With *meatpacking plant* closures and reduced *processing* capacity nationwide, America's hog farmers expect an unprecedented crisis: the need to *euthanize* millions of pigs (Mak, 2020, paras. 4-5).
> This [high incidences of COVID spread in slaughterhouses] has led to a significantly reduced capacity for *processing hogs into pork,* which is forcing farmers like Leman to make the difficult (Mak, 2020, para. 6).
> Coronavirus outbreaks at *meatpacking plants* have created a backlog of animals ready for slaughter but with nowhere to go. Farmers are having to *cull* them (Corkery and Bellany, 2020, lead).
> In Minnesota, an estimated 90,000 pigs have been killed on farms since the *meat plants* began closing last month (Corkery and Bellany, 2020, para. 5).

Using the innocuous-sounding term "plant" to refer to slaughterhouses deemphasizes that these are sites of continuous killing and dismemberment. The terms "cull" and "harvest" also deflect this reality. This kind of morally-obfuscating terminology is often recommended in "meat"-industry literature (Luke, 2007; Stibbe, 2012) and was uncritically adopted by journalists.

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[3]On the myth of nonhuman-animal consent to exploitation, see Foer, 2009, p. 113; Cole, 2016, pp. 99-101; Grillo, 2016, pp. 24-27; Stănescu, 2017, pp. 121-123; and Stănescu and Stănescu, 2020, pp. 164-167.

"Depopulate," another industry locution (Greenwald, 2020), serves a similar obfuscating function. Another industry term widely adopted in the news sample, as seen above, is "pork," used to refer to the flesh of pigs, sentient creatures reduced to a food commodity. This kind of objectifying language is discussed next.

Objectification

In her seminal study of the representation of non-human animals in mainstream news, including during times of crisis due to zoonotic disease, Freeman (2009/2016) discovered: "Objectification was found to be a result of three discursive methods by the media: (1) talking about farmed animals as commodities; (2) failing to critique the ethics of the situation from the nonhuman animal's perspective and ignoring emotional issues they face, and (3) denying farmed animals individual identities" (2016, p. 172). All three of these forms of discursive objectification were prevalent in the news texts analyzed for the present study, as demonstrated by the following: "'Each load of pigs we can't sell, it definitely creates a domino effect, where we have a backlog of pigs,' she [Heather Hill, a "multi-generational hog farmer"] told NPR… But without meat processing, you can't turn pigs into pork" (Mak, 2020, paras. 15, 18). As seen earlier, "meat processing" stands in euphemistically for the murder via which the industry to "turn[s] pigs into pork." The presence of the commodity term "pork," its proximity to "pigs" in the phrase, and the nonchalant tone conveyed that this commodification is an unproblematic given. Pigs are referred to in terms of "loads" of which there is a "backlog," as if they were inanimate commodities rather than sentient individuals. *The New York Times* also referred to a "backlog" of pigs (Corkery and Bellany, 2020, lead and paras. 4 and 5).

Similarly objectifying references appeared in the sample. The *New York Times* informed readers: "Older, larger pigs have to be sold to the meatpacking plants to make room for younger *batches*," using a term more properly applied to inanimate objects like pastries (Corkery and Bellany, 2020, para. 19, emphasis added). NBC narrated: "The ordeal isn't over once the animals are euthanized. Farmers then have to find a way to transport and dispose of those 350 lb. carcasses" (Solon, 2020, para. 20). This highlights the "ordeal" of the "farmers" but not that of the pigs, who are reduced to a mass of carcasses to transport and destroy. The nation's paper of record declared: "The waste of viable pigs at a time of great need is causing both deep economic loss and emotional anguish across the nation's pork industry" (Corkery and Bellany, 2020, para. 4). The implication that humans' "great need" for food can best be satisfied with pigs' flesh is misinforming, while sociable beings with diverse personalities, who care for their families, love to play, have excellent problem-solving skills and a strong will to live are reduced to "waste." They were considered "viable" not as living beings with intrinsic worth, but as sellable bodies. The "anguish" is not theirs but that of the "pork industry." The *New York Times* reported: "'Every animal has a purpose,' [pig farmer Greg Boerboom] said. 'Every being has a purpose. We have raised these pigs to go into the food supply. And now so many are being wasted'" (Corkery and Bellany, 2020, para. 38). The claim that pigs' "purpose" is to become commodities in the human

supply chain ignores their status as sentient beings whose species preexisted *homo sapiens*. Overall, pigs were presented in the news texts as de-individualized objects for whom no ethical concern need be mobilized.

The Humane Myth

The idea that sentient beings may be exploited and killed "humanely" has permeated the commercial landscape in recent years, assuaging consumers' consciences and making veganism appear unnecessary. This notion has been challenged by a range of researchers (including but not limited to Francione, 1996; Stănescu and Stănescu, 2020; Stănescu and Stănescu, Stănescu (2011, 2017); Adams, 2013; Bohanec, 2013; Borkfelt et al., 2015; Grillo, 2016; Canavan, 2017). As a communicative arm of industry and a capitalist enterprise in itself, the press frequently promotes the commercially-profitable myth of "humane" animal farming, exemplified by reporting on pig extermination during COVID-19, in which for industry representatives promoted the cover story of "caring" commodification.

Before looking at this rhetoric, it should be noted that the killing of pigs on farms during COVID-19 was particularly cruel, as is well-documented thanks in part to an undercover video procured by the activist group Direct Action Everywhere. Those willing to watch the video will see and hear undeniable signs of the pigs' suffering[4]. The day-to-day experiences of beings exploited for food, apart from this crisis, are also filled with constant violence, deprivation and suffering, even on farms that are certified "humane" (HumaneFacts.org)[5].

It is therefore a distortion for farmers to claim that they are "trying to give the animals the best care we can to ensure they are healthy and thriving every day" (Solon, 2020, para. 4). This "care" includes harsh confinement, mutilations, removal of babies from mothers, and premature death (as the new articles themselves explain, pigs are killed at six months of age, when they are children; the natural lifespan of a pig is 10–15 years). Another farmer claimed that the industry was trying to "figure out how can we most efficiently and humanely do this" (Mak, 2020, para. 19). The CEO of the Minnesota Pork Producers Association claims, "It's not nearly as gory as a person might think" (Solon, 2020, para. 23). One farmer "wouldn't say how his pigs were euthanized, only that it was done 'humanely'" (Solon, 2020, para. 7). Yet another laments, "I spent my whole life taking care of these pigs" (Solon, 2020, para. 19), a puzzling claim given the six-month lifespan allotted to them.

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[4]The video may be viewed here. Viewers are warned that it is disturbing: https://youtu.be/UhavFP9f6b4 (Intercept, 2020). In lieu of watching the video, the account by veteran investigative journalist Glenn Greenwald, co-founder of independent news organization The Intercept, may suffice. Greenwald describes the most common killing method, "ventilation shutdown," noting that millions of pigs in Iowa alone were being "depopulated" (the industry's term, as previously noted): "by sealing off all airways to their barns and inserting steam into them, intensifying the heat and humidity inside and leaving them to die overnight. Most pigs—though not all—die after hours of suffering from a combination of being suffocated and roasted to death. The recordings obtained by The Intercept include audio of piercing cries as pigs succumb" (Greenwald, 2020, para. 3).

[5]Humane Facts. Overview of "Humane" Meat, Dairy and Eggs. Available online at: https://humanefacts.org/overview/ (accessed May 31, 2021).

This emphasis on "care" was also conveyed in the claim that "It's totally against our nature… The natural thing is to keep everything alive, and give the best care we can." (Corkery and Bellany, 2020, paras. 25–26). Unfortunately, there is little that is "natural" about this industry, and maintaining in salable condition animals who live distorted, thwarted existences for a small fraction of their natural lifespans cannot plausibly qualify as "keep[ing] everything alive." The "best care" possible would be akin what the animals receive at the sanctuary mentioned at the beginning of this essay, where pigs live out their natural lives in a space where they can freely roam, choose and stay with their friends, and experience daily kindness from humans who want nothing from them but their well-being. At the most basic level, the industry's rhetoric of "care" is discredited by the mere facts of the crisis under discussion: farmers clearly cannot care for all the animals they have committed to "raising" if in a crisis the only solution is to kill them because farmers cannot afford to "care" for them once they are no longer profitable. This situation reveals that the relationship is more exploitative than caring, despite the farmers' professed that their role is that of benign stewards.

The misleading use of "euthanize," as discussed earlier, itself promotes this myth of humane exploitation. Statements of this kind included: "Farmers try everything they can to avoid euthanizing the pigs they have cared for over many months, including reducing the animals' calorie intake to slow their growth, raising the temperature in the barn to reduce their appetite…(Solon, 2020, para. 11). In other words, they starved the pigs and made them so uncomfortable they didn't want to eat, and this is framed as "care." Readers also learn: "For years, farming groups and state agencies have published guidelines on how to euthanize the animals humanely" (Corkery and Bellany, 2020, para. 30). Such statements betray that the discourse is misusing the term "euthanize": true euthanasia, done painlessly for the benefit of the euthanized individual, is by definition "humane." By contrast, it is a stretch at best to apply the term to what pigs endure in the "pork" industry.

Additional Texts

The three texts analyzed above were selected for detailed analysis; the others examined were consistent ideologically and linguistically with them in terms of the analytical categories applied in this paper. A cursory look at their headlines evidences speciesist framing, euphemism, objectification, and reverse victimology. For instance, a *Washington Post* headline reported: "Being a pig farmer was already hard. Then came coronavirus" (Bailey, 2020). It followed this anthropocentric framing and obliteration of the true victims with the sub-headline: "This Iowa farmer loves his work. But amid meatpacking plant disruptions, he's fighting to keep his pigs from being euthanized" (Bailey, 2020). This personalizes and individualizes the farmer, presented as a besieged hero kindly fighting to avoid "euthanizing" his commodified beings. This piece also, like those examined above, uncritically accepted a glorified version of animal farmers' work: "You're essential because you're trying to feed the world," the interviewed farmer proclaimed, unchallenged by the journalist (Bailey, 2020, para. 1).

Similarly, CNN released a piece headlined, "Even as grocery stores limit meat sales, US farmers may have to euthanize 10 million pigs." (Kallingal, 2020), which reported that "pig farmers around the country are having to make the unthinkable decision of having to euthanize their livestock (Kallingal, 2020, para. 1). This was followed by typically anthropocentric framing and reliance on industry representatives as sources: "The National Pork Producers Association estimates up to 10 million hogs could be euthanized between April and September. And this could lead to some farmers facing financial disaster" (Kallingal, 2020, para. 1).

Although still exhibiting speciesist scripts, an article in the *Chicago Tribune* was unique in including some voices of non-human animal advocates. The headline euphemized violence ("Slaughterhouses reopen but farmers still euthanizing pigs"), and the lead objectified sentient beings and trivialized moral objections by calling them "complaints" ("..production backlogs are forcing farmers to euthanize thousands of hogs that can't be processed, drawing complaints from animal welfare advocates" [Pitt, 2020, para. 1]). However, the piece cited the exposé by Direct Action Everywhere mentioned earlier in this essay, including a screenshot from the undercover video. "In the video, pigs can be heard squealing," the journalist relayed (Pitt, 2020, para. 9). Matt Johnson, identified as a Direct Action Everywhere leader, was quoted saying "the longstanding systemic abuses of animal agriculture have been openly exposed for the world to see" (Pitt, 2020, para. 11). Also quoted was Ingrid Newkirk, president of People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals: "'Steaming pigs alive and roasting them to death show that cruelty to animals is a part of pig farmers' way of life, and the only way to stop this—given that pig farmers have made themselves above the law—is for people to run from buying pork, screaming as loudly as the pigs scream in the barns,' Newkirk said in a statement" (Pitt, 2020, para. 13).

These statements in favor of animal rights were followed by the claims of industry members deploying a rhetoric of in reverse victimology by blaming animal activists for allegedly targeting farmers unfairly: "It is no surprise that, at this most difficult moment, an animal activist group is attempting to use this to promote their own agenda…We are in tremendous pain knowing that this awful decision had to be made. Recording and releasing video of the euthanasia process only reinforces the hurt our team feel," declared Iowa Select Farms owner Jeff Hansen, who promoted the humane myth by claiming that "his company worked with animal welfare experts, veterinarians and technicians to oversee the process after making 'the painful decision to euthanize some of our herd'" (Pitt, 2020, paras. 16-17). State Agriculture Secretary Mike Naig concurred, lamenting: "I think that our producers are experiencing an unprecedented disruption in their business and their way of life and we've got folks with a clear agenda and they're kicking our farmers when they're down" (Pitt, 2020, para. 20). It is common for mainstream discourse to accuse animal activists of having an "agenda" (as if that were a moral failing in itself), while neglecting to highlight the much more monetized and culturally propagandized agenda of the animal farming industries to cajole consumers into purchasing ever-larger quantities of the products that result from their undertakings. In sum, while this *Tribune* article

stood out in the sample for quoting two activists, it ultimately reverted to reporting patterns that reinforced the legitimacy of the "pork" industry.

CONCLUSION

The U.S. news media's reporting on the COVID-19 "pork" industry crisis reproduced speciesist ideologies and legitimated violence against pigs. The media thereby made themselves complicit in non-human oppression. They did this by framing narratives purely from oppressor perspectives, deflecting agency for violence, masking atrocities through euphemism, objectifying non-human animals as commodities and ignoring their sentience, and propagating industry-created falsehoods about "humane" exploitation. Although the present essay is limited in scope to one incident unfolding over 2 weeks of news reporting, and therefore may not be taken as representative of the press on a wider basis, it nonetheless can be said that based on this sample, there was no discernable improvement in the press's coverage of issues affecting non-human animals exploited for food since earlier, related studies were published (e.g., Freeman, 2009/2016; Stibbe, 2012; Davis, 2018). The media's May 2020 representation of pigs as examined above is inexcusable in light of abundant data about pig sentience (compiled in Marino and Colvin, 2015), including in the popular press (e.g., Bekoff, 2015).

A justice informed approach to food-systems communication may with reason call the news media to account for such representations. Scientific evidence of the multifaceted mindedness of non-human beings is easily accessible and includes public affirmations such as The Cambridge Declaration on Consciousness (2012), a statement by hundreds of world-class scientists asserting non-human animals' advanced cognition, emotional complexity, and capacity to suffer on par with humans. Non-human animals, including the mammals, avians, and fishes commonly used for human food, have sophisticated inner worlds. To deny that their experiences matter, either overtly or by omission, is inconsistent with both moral and scientific reasoning, and such denial can only be maintained through the irrational ideology of speciesism, propped up by the commercial entities that profit from its perpetuation.

To reflect more broadly on the analysis undertaken in this essay, one may evaluate the May 2020 "pork" industry crisis through a food systems (deep structural issues) rather than an episodic (dramatic focus on individuals) lens[6]. Although systems are made up of individuals, food-justice perspective can fruitfully extend beyond the claims of individual farmers in order to aid public understanding of the advantages and weaknesses of various facets of the existing food system. Indeed, the COVID crisis put into relief the flaws of an animal-based food system, which generates disease and facilitates its transmission and is extremely vulnerable to supply-chain disruptions. It is also inhumane, as some of the interviewed farmers' statements seemed to recognize (for instance, speaking of the "emotional" and "spiritual" consequences of the crisis, Corkery and Bellany,

2020, para. 11). Farmers regularly kill pigs on a limited basis, but they do not typically perform routinized killing directly. That task is allocated to some of the most marginalized food-system workers in the U.S., many of whom experience PTSD and physical impairments from the dangerous and grueling work of slaughterhouses. Unlike farmers, slaughterhouse workers are not idealized by the public and are unlikely to be interviewed in mainstream media. That farmers were reportedly shaken by briefly experiencing an approximation of slaughterhouse work affirms the mentally unhealthy effects of committing violence against other animals[7]. When consumers buy the resulting products, they are paying for others to experience these deleterious effects. What is more, "pig farming"—and all animal agriculture—has severe environmental costs and negatively impacts humans who consume sentient beings like pigs. Such consumption is conclusively linked to increased risk of cancer, heart disease, diabetes, and a host of other illnesses prevalent in societies that consume meat-heavy diets (Esselstyn, 2008; Fuhrman, 2012, 2016; Gregor, 2015; Campbell and Campbell, 2016; Barnard, 2018).

Perhaps some of the farmers affected by the 2020 crisis have or will transition out of the non-human-animal-farming business into plant-based sectors of the food system. Others have done so before them and now speak out about industry's cruelties (Free From Harm, 2018), and organizations exist whose mission it is to assist farmers who want to shift from animal to plant-based agriculture, such as the Rancher Advocacy Program. Beyond the decisions of individual farmers, evidence is strong that mass veganism is a necessary precursor to a sustainable food system. The COVID-occasioned crisis simply displayed in more-vivid-than-usual ways the severity of the defects of animal-based food systems[8].

It has been well-established that humans do not have to consume the flesh and reproductive secretions of other animals in order to be healthy,[9] and that doing so is in fact linked to many health risks.

Whether it is in stories on animal agriculture or in other contexts, representing the interests of non-human animals is obligatory if the press is to adhere to its social responsibility to include relevant perspectives of all groups affected by the issues on which it reports. Carrie P. Freeman and Debra Merskin call for such inclusion, citing the United States' Society of Professional Journalists' code of ethics, which mandates that journalists "give voice to the voiceless" (qtd. in Freeman and Merskin, 2016, p. 205)[10]. Freeman et al. (2011) argue: "As part of journalism's

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[6]The media framed the crisis episodically, or in terms only of individual social actors rather than deeper structural issues, as they do with virtually all social issues. See Iyengar, 1991, pp. 14-16 on episodic vs. systemic or "thematic" framing.

[7]See Joy, 2011, for an overview of the post-traumatic effects experienced by slaughterhouse workers, and their higher propensity to commit family and other human-to-human violence because of this.

[8]If it were not for government subsidies and bailouts, the animal food industries would already economically unviable. See Fortuna (2016) and Sewell (2020) for a discussion of the approximately multi-billion-dollar yearly U.S. taxpayer subsidies to these industries and its political underpinnings. Solon (2020, paras. 20-22) references the USDA government assistance provided to bail out "pork" farmers during the 2020 crisis.

[9]Mainstream health organizations such as the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics have deemed vegan diets healthful for all life stages; see Melina et al., 2016.

[10]Merskin and Freeman's (n.d.) website on the topic of media representations of animals in media is also an excellent resource for media practitioners and activists alike.

commitment to truth and justice…journalists have an obligation to provide the perspective of non-human animals" (p. 1). I concur with these arguments, and it should be possible to implement more careful and informed representations of non-humans even in the current capitalist, industry-influenced media environment, at least to a limited extent. For instance, based on the analysis provided in this essay, it is recommended that journalists:

1. Consider and include the experiences of non-human animals and the viewpoints of humans who advocate for them, rather than only quoting individuals with a financial interest in the continued oppression of sentient beings.
2. Make agency and accountability clear when reporting acts of speciesist violence, rather than engaging in reverse victimology and implying that non-humans consent to their exploitation.
3. Avoid euphemism and other inaccurate semantics that normalize or conceal violence. For instance, only use the term "euthanasia" according to its proper definition: painless killing of a being experiencing incurable suffering, and only for the benefit of that being and not of the one doing the killing.
4. Present non-human beings as the sentient individuals that they are by granting them subjectivity rather than objectifying them with industry terms and other degrading language forms.
5. Question agriculture industry representatives' claims that what they do to non-human animals is "humane."

These recommendations have meaningful overlap with those of Freeman and Merskin (2016), who recommend that "[non-human animals] and their perspectives should be routinely covered and included in news about them" (p. 210); and that journalists should "avoid primarily using industry terms (especially euphemisms)" (p. 213) and instead represent non-human animals "as sentient individuals (fellow species who share the planet) rather than presenting them primarily in human-centered terms" (p. 211). Similarly, advertisers should "avoid 'humane-washing'", i.e., presenting exploiters' practices as benign (Freeman and Merskin, 2016, p. 213). They also suggest that media authors "balance industry and government sources with activist sources" (Freeman and Merskin, 2016, p. 212), which was done in only one of the news items on pig massacres examined for this study. Moreover, my analysis of reverse victimology and the obscuring of agency where speciesist violence is concerned builds on Freeman and Merskin (2016) observation: "Privileging human interests can give the impression that [non-human animals] do not also have interests at stake" (p. 211). Indeed, not only did journalists almost universally not take non-human interests into account: they went so far as to represent human oppressors as the victims of the very violence they perpetrated on millions of defenseless, sentient individuals.

The imbrication of capitalist media with speciesist institutions and most journalists' own ignorance about non-human issues are currently impediments to more just and accurate approaches to food-systems communication in mass media. Another obstacle is the litigiousness of the animal exploitation industries, who have a history of using any legal or extra-legal tactics available to them to silence those engaged in communication that might impede their quest for profits (Foer, 2009; Andersen, 2015;

Broad, 2016; Sorenson, 2016; Greenwald, 2017, 2018, 2020)[11]. Under these repressive conditions, journalists willing to form a vanguard of conscientious and informed reporting on non-human animal exploitation may have to assume personal and professional risks. Should such a vanguard arise, it will correct current journalistic deficiencies by taking the perspectives of non-human animals seriously through personalizing them and portraying their emotions and experience whenever possible, rather than dismissing their moral significance through a wholly anthropocentric discourse. Conscientious reporters would also balance any viewpoints of those who profit from speciesist exploitation with commentary by those who advocate for non-human rights. Animal exploitation and rights are social justice issues with weighty moral, environmental, and public-health implications, and the media should display effort to inform the public about them.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

The ethics of our treatment of other animals was a long-neglected topic in media studies, discourse studies, and even in traditional animal studies, which generally adopted a disengaged approach that ignored humans' political marginalization of and moral obligations to other animals. The emergence of critical animal studies (CAS), and more recently, the subfield of critical animal and media studies (CAMS), have redressed this oversight through scholarship that examines the human-non-human relationship in ethical, political, and discursive terms. The present study applies close readings approaches from critical discourse analysis (CDA) in order to add to work in CAS and CAMS, and brings a needed focus on non-human animals to CDA. By examining the prevalence of speciesist ideology in news reporting on the "pork" industry crisis in the U.S. during COVID-19, during which farmers brutally exterminated millions pigs on farms, this study adds to and updates previous CAMS work on the news media's role in manufacturing consent for the oppression of non-human animals. By bringing close attention to semantic features such as euphemism and the misplacement of agency, the study adds not only to CAS, CAMS, and CDA, but also to the study of discursive representations of violence and power more generally.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/supplementary material, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding authors.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

The author confirms being the sole contributor of this work and has approved it for publication.

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[11]As an example of the intimidation enacted by these industries: Investigative journalist Glenn Greenwald, who provided a candid report on the May 2020 "pork" industry crisis, wrote that the industry whistleblower who provided details about cruelty to pigs "originally wanted to speak on the record but changed their mind due to fear of reprisals from the industry that dominates their state" (Greenwald, 2020, para. 16).

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