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This article examines the connections and relationship between food insecurity and identity amongst post-secondary students in the North York Area. Through engagement with participants who are currently enrolled in post-secondary education or participants that contribute towards the production of the post-secondary student experience, I explore how each participant comes to understand and experience the impact of food security or insecurity and its relationship with identity. I use interviews, observation, and personal narratives as my primary methods. This research contributes to a greater understanding of the various consequences and effects that food insecurity may have for post-secondary students, and to further propose practical steps towards improving the rising issue of food insecurity within the North York area.

**KEY WORDS** food insecurity, identity, subjectivity, post-secondary, students, capitalism, experience

The poor starving college student has become a cliché. Clichés are usually avoided and so are hungry students. They are referred to in a jovial lighthearted manner that seems to insinuate it's not really true. It is a myth. I am a living witness; it is not a myth. I get awfully hungry sometimes, all 130 pounds of me.

—Bob Golden, *The Daily Kent Stater: Ohio's Top Collegiate Daily*

**T**he transition between high school to university or college has often been depicted in western countries as a rite of passage into adulthood, a transition from one “chapter” or “stage” of life to another, where the individual is prepared for “the real world.” For many students, this transition involves moving out of their home or leaving their country to live in residence halls, learning to take public transit, having newfound freedom, and juggling new responsibilities. However, there is a growing number of students whose transition may also involve deciding whether to have instant noodles, go to the foodbank, skip meals, grab fast food, and/or rely on canned goods. Such transitional experiences have become fragments of the “freshman 15” and the “starving student” narratives that are “so often normalized and even sometimes romanticized for post-secondary

students” (Baradie 2021). Nonetheless, such narratives speak to the current food insecurity reality many students are confronted with when entering post-secondary education.

When I first began my own post-secondary education at York University, I remember being overwhelmed by this idea of participating and becoming a member of this “modernized” form of education. During my first year of university, I always found myself in the student center acquiring food from the various food spaces being provided. Yet as the semesters went by, I found myself just buying coffees and nothing else. This realization in the ever-changing behavior I had undergone throughout the years led to my understanding that perhaps I, myself, had become part of the student food insecurity reality. However, my subjective understanding and experience of food insecurity could be interpreted in different ways.

Food insecurity has been a rising issue among the Canadian population (PROOF n.d.). While researchers and policymakers have long monitored and reported on household food insecurity, research on food insecurity amongst post-secondary students has only emerged in recent years. Within the emergent research on food insecurity amongst the student population, the focus has been on generating quantitative and qualitative information as a way of engaging and understanding the rise of student food insecurity (Henry 2017; Hughes et al. 2011; Peterson and Freidus 2020; Regan 2020). Although the emergent research further engages in the understanding of food insecurity amongst students, my research brings forth a new perspective by providing a more comprehensive understanding of how experiences of food (in)security influences students’ subjectivities. More specifically, I argue that individual self-perceptions and experiences of food (in)security has a more relational, contingent dimension than the current literature might suggest.

The theoretical background of this paper is concerned with an examination of the interrelation between the individual subjectivity of students who are food (in)secure and the clichés surrounding student food insecurity. Throughout the analysis, I aim to show how subjectivity is influenced by students’ everyday interactions with other people and their surroundings, as well as the experiences they have encountered throughout their lives. In anthropology, subjectivity can be seen as experiential, embodied, socio-culturally constructed, and singular (Biehl et al. 2007, 15). Moreover, subjectivity as a phenomenon is dynamically formed and transformed because it is a negotiation of positionalities through structural and agentic processes (Butler 2006, 197). Subjectivity can be understood as being composed of emotions, feeling, and experiences of subjects as they are embodied, connected, and projected into domestic spaces, public life, interpersonal struggles, and exchanges (Biehl et al. 2007, 15). The analysis of subjectivity and food (in)security among students is discussed further throughout the study through the brief references and life experiences of the three informants, along the themes of the formation of subjectivity through family upbringing, food consumption and evaluation of access and campus dynamics. This paper aims at shedding light on the subjective experiences of food insecurity among the student population by gathering different perspectives on the impacts and experiences individuals are dealing with and challenges they are currently experiencing. However, it is important to understand that subjectivity is always in motion, and I thus attune my analysis towards the fluidity of food (in)security as shifting subject-positions. Therefore, this paper aims at engaging with those moments/fragments of subjectivity that reject the hegemonic ideas of what it means to be a food-insecure student.

This paper places great emphasis on bringing forth an understanding of how these factorial implications come to influence the individual's life choices and behaviors. I became intrigued in not only the student's perspective but also how certain members of this institution come to engage with the cliché of the “starving student”—the popular media trope of the post-secondary student experience, marked by instant noodles and cheap food. Why is it that this form of lifestyle has become normalized by popular media in this manner? Do students relate to this form of representation? What does food (in)security mean to students or members? How does the situation they are in come to impact their academic performance? These questions challenge preconceived ideas about students and the food (in)security experience in which they currently find themselves.

## Literature Review

### Food Insecurity

The economic recession that occurred in Canada throughout the 1980s resulted in the increased awareness of food insecurity (Tarasuk and McIntyre 2020). This was a time when food banks, charitable programs, and community organizations began to be established to collect and redistribute food among those in need. The emergent response was initially intended to be only temporary. However, the rapid growth in food banks and the increase of individuals using them led researchers and policymakers to begin taking a representative measure of Canadians experiencing food insecurity (Tarasuk and McIntyre 2020). Despite surveys around food insecurity being able to be traced back to 1994, it was not until 2004 that Canada began implementing “The Household Food Security Survey Module” (HFSSM), which was developed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, for measuring household food insecurity as part of the population-based cross-sectional Canadian Community Health Survey (CCHS) (Tarasuk and McIntyre 2020). The HFSSM, used by Statistics Canada, consists of 18 questions about the experience of food insecurity—ranging from marginal, moderate, or severe food insecurity—due to financial constraints (Tarasuk and McIntyre 2020).

Health Canada defines the term food insecurity as the inability to acquire or consume an adequate quality or sufficient quantity of food in socially acceptable ways, or the uncertainty that one will be able to do so (Health Canada 2020). If the individual lacks access to sufficient and nutritious foods, as well as being faced with running out of food, having to rely on food relief, and facing challenges to acquire their next meal, they are considered to be affected by food insecurity (Hughes et al. 2011, 27). However, it is important to acknowledge that even if an individual is still consuming calories every day, they can still be food insecure if the foods they are consuming are nutrient-poor (Henry 2017).

As of 2018, it was estimated that one in eight households in Canada were food insecure in (PROOF n.d.). This number includes households that fall under the categories of marginal, moderate, or severe food insecurity. This means 4.4 million Canadians were living in food-insecure households (Tarasuk and McIntyre 2020). According to PROOF Food Insecurity Policy Research, an interdisciplinary research program investigating household food insecurity in Canada, food insecurity is more complex than just a food problem (PROOF n.d.). Households who are food insecure tend to compromise their spending on

all kinds of necessities, including housing and prescription medications, which can lead to exacerbated health problems, especially for chronic conditions (Tarasuk and McIntyre 2020).

### **Students and Food Insecurity**

Although there has been a significant increase in awareness and monitoring of household food insecurity, there has been very limited research about food insecurity amongst post-secondary students. Nonetheless, there have been studies such as a multi-sited study conducted by a non-profit organization known as Meal Exchange. The study reported the prevalence of food insecurity in Canadian Universities to be 40%, which is four times higher than the general Canadian population of 10% (Bhat 2020).

However, studies around food insecurity within the student population have also shown that it is related to many factors such as time constraints, transportation limitations, housing situation, cooking, budgeting costs, and even stigma, which can prevent students from seeking help (Peterson and Freidus 2020, 126). Aside from the various factors that studies have found, it is important to also understand how previously, getting into universities and colleges was not an opportunity that was open for anyone. Now, attending university or colleges has become the “key” towards a successful career and financial security (Hughes et al. 2011). The growing number of students being enrolled in post-secondary education has led to a shift in demographics to include more students that are from lower income households, students of color, working, non-traditional, older, and having to undertake family responsibilities (Henry 2017,7). Lisa Henry explains how these changes are also “coupled with a decrease in state funding for universities, increasing tuition costs, and increasing costs of goods and services” (2017, 8).

Moreover, the student population is situated in a position of “expectancy” where they are presumed to become financially stable and food secure after graduation. Therefore, the cliché of the starving student, which depicts students as getting through university by subsisting off cheap or unhealthy food, also adds another factor to the acceptability of food insecurity in the student population by positioning food insecurity as a temporary and soon alleviated experience (Canadian Federation of Students Ontario 2013). With the rising costs of tuition and housing, decreases in access to healthy and affordable food options, and the overall post-secondary lifestyle, students that are struggling to keep up with these changes—even with the aid of loans and grants—are being left to deal with these issues on their own.

Although more studies have emerged on post-secondary student food insecurity, there have been very few studies that take on a qualitative methodology. There is a need for a more open-ended approach for understanding food insecurity, how it affects students, the role of stigma, and the strategies students have developed to address it (Peterson and Freidus 2020).

### **Methodology**

Fieldwork for this paper was conducted in February 2020 as part of a research methods course at York University, Toronto. I conducted three interviews with students and

student service representatives. I used semi-structured interviews to allow for flexibility and further engage with the participants. Before commencing my interviews, I provided the participants with an explanation of what is expected of them, my goals for the research, the broader theme of my research, and explained how their anonymity will be maintained. Moreover, the interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. For this study, I reached out to two of my friends, both of whom I met at York University. Caroline Frossard and Thijs Jeursen suggest that friendships in an academic setting can become a way of solving the discrepancies between available resources and performance expectations (2019, 117). One out of the two students identified themselves as being food insecure, while the other identified themselves as being food secure. I also used email as a medium to reach out to York's student services members by highlighting what my project entitled and what was expected of them if they were to consent to participating in my research. Given the small sample size of the study, I would argue that my findings could be approached as a "cartography" of the present food (in)security experience and might offer important themes that could be explored in future research (Piot 2010, 16).

My initial guiding research question for this project revolved around my subjective understanding of food insecurity and its connection with academic performance. However, as the interviews progressed, I found myself trying to search for more information about this connection. After conducting the interviews, it occurred to me that perhaps food (in) security did not play as consciously a critical role in academic performance as I had previously thought. The participants were more inclined to discuss further on the connection of family upbringing, accessibility, and healthier food alternatives within university campus. Moreover, since my research evolved around the student experience of (in)security, due to my own status as a student at York University, I was able to build rapport with my participants as fellow students. Although different students (and in this case non-student but members that focus on providing support to students) have expressed different experiences, there was a middle ground in which we could relate. Perhaps even though I may not have had the same situation, I could still relate to the embodied experience of being a student. Therefore, I could see my subjective position within the field becoming more evident to myself as I went through my interviews. Based on Foucault's proposition on how the subject is produced within discourse, I could see how this came into play in my field (Hall et al. 2013, 39). Furthermore, several parts of my research were left open due to the current pandemic from the COVID-19 pandemic that has occurred during the time in which this project took place. Some of the places such as the Food Support Centre at York University had closed, and I was not able to conduct participant observation as I had intended to.

## **Understanding the Meaning and Experience of Food Insecurity**

### **The Formation of Subjectivity Through Family Upbringing**

Whilst current studies of post-secondary student food insecurity disclose the ways that students are experiencing food insecurity on campus, students' subjective embodied experience and understanding of food (in)security throughout their childhood is often

disregarded (Peterson and Freidus 2020). Yet, all interviewees highlighted how their understanding of food (in)security were influenced by their experience of food accessibility throughout their upbringing. Although the current study is limited to three participants, the participants' experiences highlighted the demographic enrollment shift that has emerged over time and has brought forth implications of how food insecurity is perceived and understood by the student population. Erica Regan outlines in her research on food insecurity among college students, how studies suggest that already disadvantaged demographic groups, such as African American students, Hispanic students, and first-generation students, are more likely to experience food insecurity (2019, 9). Therefore, it is important to take into account individuals' bodily experience, history, and political and economic position as it relates to food (in)security (Biehl et al. 2007, 15).

Valentino, 21-year-old 3rd-year York University student is a second-generation immigrant to Canada. He self-identified as food secure now, though has not always experienced being food secure. When he was a child in Toronto, he remembers having a very limited variety of food available. Valentino's childhood food experience was significantly impacted by his parent's arrival into Canada. As new immigrants, his parents had to learn to navigate their way through an unknown country and lifestyle. However, this new transition along with other stressors, complicated his parent's situation, eventually leading to his parents' divorce. There were days when he would have little food available in the household, but his mom being a single parent was able to push through and provide for the family. Valentino noted how this contributed to the food insecurity he experienced as a child as well. Aside from his personal experience of being food insecure during his childhood, he noted how his situation was different from the one his cousins are currently experiencing:

Back home in the Philippines my cousins don't always get the opportunity to go on three meals a day, they usually just have breakfast and dinner, and me every day when I go home I know I always have food waiting for me and I feel blessed for being able to be food secure.

Therefore, for Valentino, his childhood experience and witnessing the reality that his cousins were facing during that time, shaped his perception and understanding of what food (in)security is, creating a standard of food insecurity against which to compare his current experience.

Sophia, a 20-year-old 3rd-year international student at York University from the Dominican Republic who identifies as food insecure, shared a very similar upbringing. She recounted how growing up her mother was the one that provided for her family and had to provide both food and shelter for not just her kids but also for her parents. Sophia also mentioned how her mom has also been able to pay for her schooling by working in more than one job and taking out a loan. She explained that she grew up in an environment where food was never wasted, where if someone in the family did not finish their meal, it was given to another family member to finish or saved for later. After leaving her home country to study at York University she noted how people's relationship with food is different compared to her home country. She was surprised by the amount of food people threw out when they are done eating and in certain cases, she had offered to finish the food to prevent any from going to waste.

Mike, a member of York's student union in a position focused primarily on student food services, also shared his struggles growing up in a single parent household. Although he grew up having both his mother and father around, his dad passed away when he was young. After losing his father, his mother took on another job and worked hard to provide for him and his sibling. He mentioned how he and his siblings were fortunate because his mother managed to get paid sufficiently to support her children, but since she was always busy working, they only got to see her on Sundays. However, she always reminded them — “you are lucky to be able to have food at your disposal because many kids do not have the same opportunity you do.” For this reason, since entering post-secondary education, he has been helping with food services on campus and trying to help students who are facing challenges in food accessibility.

All three participants came from families whose roots are not from Canada, they were either first- or second-generation immigrants or international students. As Tina Moffat et al. highlight, immigrant families experience more food insecurity than non-immigrant families in Canada, though immigrant families tend to adapt and change their diets to the host country they are in (Moffat et al. 2017, 16). In this case, both Mike and Valentino witnessed the challenges and obstacles first-generation immigrant families can face when adapting and navigating life in a new country. Although they learned to “adapt” to living in a new country, it had a significant impact on their subjective understanding of what food insecurity is. They developed a reference point of what it feels like to be food insecure. Conversely, for Sophia, this has been an ongoing challenge she has encountered during the time she's been at York University.

Alternately, all three of the participants expressed their subjectivity through the embodied reflection of their life experiences. Throughout the interviews, family was brought up when discussing their understanding of food (in)security their situation. Henry argues that food insecurity amongst college students is usually caused through a combination of events, of which divorced and single-parent households became reoccurring factors (2017, 12). Valentino and Mike expressed how their mothers became single parents, either through divorce or the loss of their father. Although, during the time the interviews took place they were food secure individuals, they grew up in a food-insecure household. Furthermore, Sophia was also very outspoken about the importance familial relationships and how her perceptions of what food insecurity means through her upbringing has changed as she got more involved with the York University community. It is worth noting that even though she identifies as food insecure, back home her family can afford sufficient food, which she described as being healthier than the food she can acquire here for the same price.

These findings also show that experiences and perceptions of food (in)security are influenced by family experiences, and it was more likely for participants to understand food insecurity based on their own experiences. In many cases, food insecurity among the student population has been linked to family experiences of low socio-economic status and what Henry calls “tipping points” (combination of events that prevented students from being able to manage for themselves), which was evident in the experience the participants encountered as kids (2017, 12). Moreover, many students who are food insecure get motivated to keep attending school by making it a goal to get a degree, with the priority being aimed at securing a better job and career so they can financially assist a family



member. This “prioritizing” outweighs the hunger many students are faced with (Henry 2017, 6). This reflects Sophia’s experience when she mentioned that, “there is this need to give back to your parents and you cannot mess it up now. That is the only thing keeping me up right now.” This further illustrates the significance family plays in influencing the student’s subjective understanding of food insecurity and through that understanding, how they develop methods of overcoming the challenges.

### **Food Consumption and Evaluation of Access**

Above I demonstrated the influence childhood upbringing can have in participants’ subjective understanding of food (in)security. However, Valentino and Sophia’s embodied experiences throughout their childhood also had a significant influence on their conceptualization of food access in terms of quantity and quality. Furthermore, students expressed how the way they navigate university grounds when it comes to acquiring food, reflects the influence family learned behaviors have had on them. While both students spoke about the impact of lack of money on food access, Sophia focused on the issue of healthier food options on campus while Valentino stressed the issue of accessing sufficient quantities of food.

Valentino explained how food insecurity has come to affect his personal life by rendering him more “open-minded” and understanding of people’s food insecurity reality. He explains this affect on his personal life:

Well, honestly I understand that I’m one of those people that are blessed to have access to all those foods, but I would say that this topic impacts me not directly because I do not need to worry about whether I’m going to have three meals a day, but I understand there are people that are struggling and its helped me become open-minded and understand why people are going through those situations.

For Valentino, accessibility to a variety of diverse food options and ability to consume three meals a day illustrates his conceptualization of food access and (in)security based on quantity. It is also noteworthy that in Valentino’s experience, the opportunity to acquire meals from his household is always an option, and if he wakes up early enough, he brings a “Nutella sandwich” to campus. However, he emphasized that he sometimes gets meals on campus, but usually he only spends money on cheaper items like chocolate milk from Tim Hortons or the occasional hotdog from the stand outside the student center.

On the other hand, Sophia expressed her conception of food insecurity on criteria distinct from Valentino, mainly because she is still experiencing the harsh reality of having to face the challenges and difficult experience of food insecurity. Throughout the interview, she expressed her concern and experience with food quality and health. She brought up how “back home healthier alternatives are cheaper than here,” and how her parents taught her to appreciate the journey of going to their local supermarket where food is always fresh and less processed than the food options she has access to at York. She noted how the way she navigates school grounds, social relationships, and family relationships are greatly influenced by her situation. In her case, she is struggling to maintain her previous life-style due to her being an international student and having to adapt to new societal norms.

Although she experienced food insecurity even when she was living in the Dominican Republic, she was able to have access to healthier alternatives and a greater variety of food options, but now she had to adapt to the resources that are available within York University grounds.

York University has a food support center that aims at providing food and basic needs available to students who are in a position where they can no longer afford to purchase these items for themselves. In contrast to Henry's claim that students avoid seeking help due to "overwhelming feelings of shame from the inability to provide for themselves" (2017, 11), Sophia saw the food support centre as a helpful resource. Yet, Sophia did try to avoid the food centre when she could, not out of shame, but distrust. She explained that "there is something about getting food for free that I do not like. It makes me wonder if there is something wrong with the food." She made the remark after explaining how the food support center had meat and vegetables available in the food center and how she never really trusted it. Usually when she went to the food center, she reached for the canned foods and easy-to-make meals. While she struggled to hold on to her previous lifestyle, her experience of going to the university food center, discussing food insecure issues with colleagues, developing coping mechanisms, and even acquiring food has been greatly influenced by her food accessibility within York University grounds. It has become part of her daily life, a situation that has become embedded within her current lifestyle.

Furthermore, when asked what York University can do to provide students with more accessible food and healthier food options, Mike responded by saying "that is something that York is really behind on, so if you look at Ryerson and UofT, over the last few years they have studied and remodeled the food that they provide on campuses." He emphasized how Ryerson University and University of Toronto have begun approaching the emergent issue of food accessibility and healthier food alternatives by either hiring "professionals" to investigate the food supply and food services for their school campus or canceling previous contracts with suppliers.

In contrast, York has an agreement with a large food services corporation Aramark and most of the restaurants outside of the student center are owned by them. They have a monopoly on the food that they are providing, which Mike suggests are providing things that the company thinks will sell the most or have the highest profit. Therefore, he suggests that York needs to investigate how they can provide a healthier food model for the school. He also outlines how there are small organizations within York that help provide healthier alternatives for students, such as the farmers market that is available every Wednesday, which sells fresh fruit and vegetables so students can obtain these items at cheaper prices. However, he feels York should follow Ryerson and UofT's steps and at least conduct a study as to how they can improve the food services on campus.

## **Campus Dynamics**

The campus accessibility to food became another common theme described by the three participants, which brought forth unique subjective experiences. Campus food access has come to affect many of the students, especially the ones living on campus. Although universities have aimed at creating programs and services, such as meal plans, to increase access to food options for students, Peterson and Freidus found that many of the students

they interviewed who had meal plans still expressed concerns on food accessibility (2020, 133). Additionally, they found that student meal plans are usually limited and forced students to ration their meals near the end of the semester. However, programs and services are only fragments of the spatial and temporal reshaping of students' food accessibility on university campuses.

Like many students who live in residence, Sophia had to acquire the meal plan to get access to food and in her case, she acquired the bronze meal plan, which she explained was the cheapest of the options available. However, she mentioned meals increased in price in comparison to the previous year, which created further implications for her and her family. She explained how most students, like herself, that acquire the meal plan usually run out of funds around February, short of the end of the semester in April. Sophia also noted that the moment her meal plan ran out she inclined to use the food support center as a way to cope with the lack of food she experienced. She also obtained a job on campus to cover, amongst other things, her food expenses, but most importantly she obtained a job because she did not want her parents having to worry about sending her money all the time.

When it comes to on-campus foods, many students experiencing food insecurity develop coping strategies such as buying cheap fast food, sharing food with roommates, suppressing hunger with excessive fluid intake, and downsizing meals (Henry 2017, 14). However, when it comes to fast-food restaurants, one of the factors many of the studies failed to address was the relationship between meal plans and access to quality foods. As mentioned before, Sophia had the bronze meal plan, but she explained many of the food options available to purchase through the meal plan are, for the most part, fast-food restaurants. Yet, even without a meal plan, the food available in both the Food Support Centre and York University is not always the healthiest option. Within York University many of the restaurants available are fast-food chains, in which Wendy's, Popeyes, Pizza Pizza, Bubble tea, etc. become widely used spaces for students to purchase food due to their cheap prices.

Moreover, York's campus is divided into two complexes which includes different faculties. Sophia pointed to how the two complexes provided different food options. Within complex 2 students had more access to healthier alternatives such as salads, healthier breakfast options, and even the option to buy edible grass. Meanwhile, complex 1 provided cheaper and more unhealthy options such as pizza and fast-food items. The distinct groups of food options between the complexes illustrates the uneven spatial distribution of food quality across the York University campus.

Furthermore, Mike discussed throughout the interview how usage of the Food Support Centre has grown over the years. During the time the interview took place they had experienced exponential growth of customers with an average of 2000 students a month. Moreover, emergent studies on student food insecurity have noted the rise of tuition cost to be a rising factor in implicating student's food experiences within the campus. Besides the rapid increase, Mike suggested that since the Ontario Student Assistance Program (OSAP) had decreased their financial aid for students by 20-30% while tuition prices only decreased by 10%, student that have depended on OSAP funding were left with 10% less funding. As Mike mentioned, this 10% could harm those students that relied on that money for food or rent, which could explain the increase in Food Support Centre

usage. However, in response to my question about whether the food provided by the Food Support Centre was healthy, he replied saying:

Well we try our best to have healthy choices, but what happens is we end up getting what students request, and most of the time the students that use our service live in the Village (right off campus), and those are not ideal spaces because there around 8–12 students living in the same house and you have those students sharing one kitchen, so must students request easy to prepare meals, whether that is mac n cheese, easy to prepare noodles or canned vegetables because they do not have the time to prep a meal.

In some cases, students living in residency often aim at obtaining quick, easy-to-prepare meals because most of them do not have access to proper kitchen appliances to store and cook food (Henry 2017). Correspondingly, Sophia mentioned not always being able to buy healthy foods because of the price or because there is one kitchen that resident students must share, which means she had to adjust around others' use of the kitchen to prepare her meals.

Moreover, when talking about the OSAP and tuition changes with Mike, he mentioned how he feels that the “powers at play” (whatever level of government) do not have cohesive understanding of how policies impact marginalized folks. They do not realize how these changes to policies can affect a student's decision on whether to eat or not eat. Furthermore, emergent studies on student food insecurity have noted the rise of tuition cost to be a rising factor in implicating student's food experiences within the campus (Henry 2017; Hughes et al. 2011; Peterson and Freidus 2020; Regan 2020).

Therefore, these findings show how campus spatial factors such as the separation of healthy and less healthy food options into the two complexes, kitchen access for students, and engagement with the Food Support center come to reshape student's food access within the university. Additionally, students experience food accessibility and thereby food insecurity within university campus on a temporal dimension as well. For Sophia, this was emphasized through the pressures she had to overcome when her meal plan ran out before the end of the year. Peterson and Freidus also noted in their findings how “despite the potential for campus meal plans to increase access to food, students with and without meal plans are equally vulnerable to food insecurity” (2020, 132). For Sophia, not only did she have limited access to food quality and quantity within university campus, but she had to find alternative method of food access when her meal plan ended early. This brings to light how other students may find themselves in similar situations based on the spatial and temporal effects university grounds can have on student food accessibility.

## Conclusion

Recent efforts towards understanding food insecurity among the post-secondary student population has revealed the complexity of this growing issue. In many cases, students are faced with several different factors that come to shape their own lived experiences and understandings of insecurity that research has yet to explore in depth. For instance, Regan

argues that to understand the stratification implications of food insecurity among students, more research should be done to understand if the case of food insecurity is a “pre-existing or college-specific phenomenon” (2019, 8). However, the stories and embodied subjective experiences of food (in)security among the participants paper bring forth a different understanding on how students perceive food insecurity within university grounds and in their daily lives.

Through this article I have shown that individual self-perceptions and experiences of food (in)security have a more relational, contingent dimension than the literature might suggest. The analysis based on the interviews illustrates that individual and moral concerns created by family/ childhood upbringing, economic situations, intersubjective experience, and campus dynamics (both spatial and temporal) influence the social and subjective experience of food insecurity. The findings of this study emphasized how family and childhood upbringing had a significant impact in influencing participants’ food consumption and formation of subjectivity. All three participants discussed their understanding of food insecurity to be influenced by their childhood experiences such as living in single-parent households, growing up in a food insecure household, and having family members in other part of the world that are currently food insecure. Mike and Valentino perceived the difficulties and challenges they experienced throughout their childhood as opportunities to help and understand others who are currently facing similar situations to what they went through. Yet, such experiences have also shaped the way they navigate food consumption on campus and the ways they engage with campus services and food programs for students. For Sophia this was highlighted in her comments on access to healthy food options (quality) on campus based on her experience of food accessibility when living in the Dominican Republic. Furthermore, Valentino’s comments and experience emphasized the importance of quantity and diversity of food accessibility when addressing discussion on food insecurity

Moreover, throughout the university campus, students are faced with spatial and temporal factors that reshape their food accessibility. The spatial factors were further illustrated by Sophia’s experience in both the distinguishable food option availability based on geographical locations (complex 1 and complex 2) within campus and the constraints of sharing dorm room kitchens. However, the temporal factors outlined by the pressures and “longevity” of meal plan usage within campus, and shift towards Food Support Center engagement throughout her semester(s), has also further impacted students experiencing food insecurity. Participants stressed the need for York University to contend with the effects of food insecurity on marginalized students. The lack of engagement by these “powers at play”—whether enacted by government or institutional level (such as York University)—to the issue of food insecurity and its effects on the marginalized students is something that all three of the participants perceived as an issue that should be acted upon.

Therefore, the conflicting narratives of “the starving student”—capturing the experience of food insecurity through the insufficient access to food—and “the freshman 15”—capturing the challenges of accessing healthier food options—that often get recognition among post-secondary students highlight the fragmented subjective experience students face when entering post-secondary education. Food (in)security in the context of subjectivity can only be understood as always being in motion and transforming; it is not something that can be understood as a whole, but through fragments of the subjective experience.

This ever-transforming subjectivity comes to shape the performance and awareness of one's behavior within a given space, driving the construction of identity through agentic acts that participants evaluate and remake (Homewood 2015). Each participant has become aware of who they are and how food insecurity has come to take shape in how they navigate their social relationships, food acquisition, knowledge production, educational grounds, and family relationships.

Through this research, I have demonstrated that there is a need to attend more to post-secondary students' relationship to food (in)security and the complexities that shape it. There is a need for more research on the role institutions play in the reinforcement and co-production of food insecurity amongst university students. Therefore, I hope this research points to where such research might focus and how future work might improve post-secondary student's current challenges. Without addressing student food insecurity on campus, universities perpetuate systemic inequities and thereby, further replicating the conflicting narratives of the freshman 15 and the starving student.

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