

**The Alternative Campus Food System at
Dalhousie University:**

Exploring the experience of participants in student-led
food initiatives on Studley campus

By

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Table of Contents

| | |
|---|----|
| Abstract..... | 4 |
| Keywords: | 4 |
| Glossary | 5 |
| Acknowledgements | 6 |
| I. Introduction | 7 |
| Differentiating food security and student-led food initiatives on campus..... | 7 |
| Research Question | 9 |
| Delimitations and limitations..... | 10 |
| II. Literature Review..... | 10 |
| III. Methods..... | 16 |
| Assumptions and Rationale for a Qualitative Design | 16 |
| The Type of Design Used..... | 16 |
| Role of the Researcher..... | 17 |
| Data Collection Procedures | 18 |
| Methods for Verification | 19 |
| IV. Findings and Analysis..... | 19 |
| Profiles | 19 |
| Themes..... | 22 |
| Empowerment..... | 22 |
| Food Accessibility; Affordability | 24 |
| Food Literacy; Veganism; Eco-literacy..... | 25 |
| Student Generated Initiatives..... | 27 |
| V. Conclusions and Recommendations | 29 |
| Bibliography | 32 |
| Appendix: Interview Guide | 37 |

Abstract

Dalhousie University has a unique campus food system. Dalhousie students have organized the Dalhousie Student Union (DSU) Farmer's Market Collective, Dalhousie Urban Garden Society (DUGS) and the Loaded Ladle. The dominant food "system" at university campuses consist largely of corporate for-profit entities; however, the above mentioned student-run food initiatives are providing an alternative (Bartlett, 2011). The purpose of this exploration is to analyze their experiences and whether they feel empowered by their participation in the student-led initiatives. I interviewed a total of six people (two people from each student-run food initiative: DSU Farmer's Market Collective, DUGS and the Loaded Ladle). This study provides the perspective of participants in student-led food initiatives at Dalhousie University, but additional research must be conducted to examine other aspects of capacity, by gaining more support for the alternative campus food system.

Keywords:

campus food systems, food activism, student activism, student-led food initiatives, sustainability

Glossary

The following terms will be defined as:

Campus food system consists of the institutions, inputs and outputs, activities and cultural beliefs within a campus with production distribution and consumption of food (Goodman and Goodman, 2001).

Corporate for-profit entities are firms that prioritize maximizing profit.

Empowerment suggests a change in beliefs and attitudes from the participation of individuals in social change and assumes the individuals will work for the collective good if they develop a sense of critical consciousness (Gutierrez, 1995).

Food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and health life (World Food Summit, 1996).

Student-run food initiatives are non-profit, non-hierarchical, open cooperative of students and community members dedicated to providing affordable, diverse, fresh, and healthy food to as many people as possible (Loaded Ladle, 2013).

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I. Introduction

Differentiating food security and student-led food initiatives on campus

Over time, the landscape of our campus food system has altered considerably. Our transportation capabilities have accelerated and we have gained the ability to source large quantities of food for easy and affordable consumption (Harvard Food Law and Policy, 2011). However with this abundance of food choice and quantity an unsustainable food system arose (Harvard Food Law and Policy, 2011). Recently, student-led food initiatives have expanded, which has demonstrated both intent and capacity to contribute to transformational change toward an alternative campus food system (Bartlett, 2011). In this study, alternative food systems range from community supported farms, from food co-ops to farmers markets. Despite their diversity, they all share a vision of an "alternative system of food provision based on a framework of social and environmental justice" (Zerbe, 2010).

There may be a correlation between food security and campus food service providers. Food security is a concept that is largely concerned with the protection and distribution of existing food systems (FSC, 2014). In contrast, I propose student-run food initiatives on campus are providing the opportunity for students to interact with their campus food system. For example learning how to grow food in the campus garden.

At the World Food Summit in 1996, food security and food sovereignty were concretely defined. The concept of food security originated in the mid-1970s, when the World Food Conference (1974) defined food security in terms of food supply – assuring

the availability and price stability of basic foodstuffs at the international and national level (FAO, 2006). According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (2006), the widely accepted World Food Summit (1996) definition “reinforces the multidimensional nature of food security and includes food access, availability, food use and stability”. Over time, food security has been analyzed and critiqued for its exclusion of sustainability and sovereignty. In my study, the leaders in the alternative campus food system describe the lack of power they feel they have over the system of food service provision on their campus at Dalhousie University.

Dalhousie University has mixed food delivery, meaning that the university has contracts with two food service providers, Aramark and Chartwells, which are both firms that prioritize maximizing profit. Dalhousie University and the Dalhousie Student Union (DSU) have separate contracts and thus different jurisdictions. The DSU has assisted in providing space and support for the DSU Farmers Market Collective, the Dalhousie Urban Garden Society (DUGS), and the Loaded Ladle. These student-led food initiatives are "non-profit, non-hierarchical, open cooperative of students and community members dedicated to providing affordable, diverse, fresh, and healthy food to as many people as possible" (Loaded Ladle, 2013).

According to Food Secure Canada (2014), food security is a goal while food sovereignty describes the framework to which food security can be achieved. Food sovereignty promotes alternatives to the current food system, acting as a point of inspiration for campus food systems. La Via Campesina, a movement born in 1993, aims to democratize the food system by uniting peasants, landless persons, women farmers and rural youth (Via Campesina, 2011). Food sovereignty is the right of peoples to healthy

and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods (Via Campesina, 2011). This movement emphasizes farmer's rights to define their own food and agriculture systems (Via Campesina, 2011). Food sovereignty stresses the importance of grassroots movements and decentralized structures (Via Campesina, 2011). Food sovereignty serves as an example of an alternative food system of food provision. Similar to La Via Campesina, the student-led food initiatives are based on a framework of social and environmental justice.

More and more are providing alternative food systems at universities. The University of British Columbia, Concordia University, the University of Guelph, and the University of Manitoba also provide student-run food initiatives such as community gardens, farmer's markets, and food cooperatives. Dalhousie University is unique because of the variety of student-led food initiatives that are available on Studley Campus. I propose that students are empowered by their participation in Dalhousie's student-led food initiatives because they are providing the opportunity for students to interact with their food system. I explored through the experiences of students who are the leaders in the alternative food initiatives at Dalhousie University.

Research Question

The research question is "what are the experiences of those who participate as leaders in the student-run food initiatives and do they feel empowered in the process? If so, how?" Research consisted of one-on-one in-depth interviews with two participants from each student-run food initiative: DSU Farmer's Market Collective, DUGS, and the Loaded Ladle. This study will contribute to the debates surrounding the campus food system. The perspectives of participants in student-run food initiatives are added to the

discussion in a field where much of the work is dominated by scholarly input on food security.

Delimitations and limitations

Delimitations limit the scope and define the boundaries of your study (Simon, 2011). This thesis will be delimited to the student leaders in student-run initiatives on Studley campus at Dalhousie University. The DSU is located on Studley campus which houses a variety of student-run food initiatives I studied. I interviewed a total of six people (two people from each student-run food initiative: DSU Farmer's Market Collective, DUGS, and the Loaded Ladle). My interview questions were focused upon interviewees' experience and explored why student leaders are participating in food movements. Questions also explored whether student leaders are empowered by their actions. Exploring empowerment in a university campus setting can allow the researcher to understand whether the student leaders' beliefs have changed by their participation in student-run food initiatives. Limitations are elements within a study that the researcher has no control over (Palys and Atchinson, 2008). I have decided on a sample size of six interviews due to the time allotted. Additionally, conducting interviews can be a lengthy process and it is important to be conscious of time management throughout the data collection process.

II. Literature Review

Currently, transnational corporations have great control over campus food systems. Goodman and Redclift (1991) argue that at the beginning of the twenty-first century, transnational corporations have played a major role in the global organization of food in

regard to distribution and allocation. There is much dispute among academics surrounding the disillusionment of the globalized food system.

Evans and Thomas (2011) argue that a globalized food system ultimately means that "events occurring in one part of the globe can affect, and be affected by, events occurring in other distant parts of the globe" (p. 458). According to McKibben (2010), biofuels were one of the contributing factors to the open market exploding in 2008. Food riots occurred in 37 countries, and 100 million Africans were forced back into poverty. The international trade network that was established through the process of globalization has enabled international food movements to occur. Alternatives to the corporate global food system through transnational social movements, such as Slow Food, La Via Campesina, or fair trade, were established (Siniscalchi and Counihan, 2014). The way in which one part of the globe provisions their food affects other distant parts of the globe as demonstrated by the findings of Albritton (2012), Evans and Thomas (2011), Goodman and Redclift (1991), Levenstein (1993), McKibben (2010), Mintz (1996) and Siniscalchi and Counihan (2014).

Aurelie Desmarais (2012) establishes a connection between food movements and social justice. Food movements have broadened to include "pastoralists, fishers, and urban dwellers, and to address consumption issues and gender equality" (p. 352). Dalhousie's campus food initiatives do not just serve food, they also host events related to social justice. For example, the Loaded Ladle hosts workshops on unlearning the term healthy and create zines addressing social justice. Suschnigg (2012) contributes a unique piece to the literature regarding food insecurity. Suschnigg (2012) specifies that "the anti-poverty perspective is short-sighted insofar as it conveys the impression that only poor

people are vulnerable to food insecurity: from the food sovereignty perspective the entire world is at risk" (p. 227). However, Suschnigg (2012) fails to address the importance of empowerment when analyzing anti-poverty and food sovereignty perspectives. Aurelie Desmarais (2012) establishes a distinction between the neo-liberal industrial model of agriculture and the food sovereignty model of agriculture. The differentiation between the anti-poverty and the food sovereignty perspective is valuable (Suschnigg, 2012).

The authors Bushamuka et al. (2005) research is paramount when deconstructing complex food systems. Their research highlights the importance of empowerment in regards to education and food security. In their study, they taught Bangladeshi family members how to conduct a homestead gardening program. The program enabled the selective households to generate income, as well as feed their families (Bushamuka et al., 2005). Dubisson-Quellier and Lamine (2014) address alternative food supply chains and political consumerism. Dubisson-Quellier and Lamine (2014) provide a well-articulated analysis of consumer choice in France. The analysis of the African Green Revolution provides a relevant framework in understanding food security on a large-scale; whereas, the Bangladesh and France case studies contribute concrete examples of empowerment to the literature. These case studies are operational microcosms within the large global food system.

Hassanein (2003) speculates that the sustainability of the food and agriculture system is a contested subject because "it inevitably involves both conflicts over values and uncertainty about outcomes" (p. 187). The author elaborates that the difficulty that underlies food is that it becomes political. Hassanein (2003) speculates that "even a backyard garden becomes a small piece of liberated territory in the struggle for a just and

sustainable society" (p. 187). Aurelie Desmarais (2012) demonstrates that "concepts, however revolutionary, are often misinterpreted, misused, and usurped by those in positions of power" (p. 360). As Aurelie Desmarais (2012) specifies, the concept of 'sustainable agriculture' was originally embraced as "a conscious move away from capital-intensive, high-input, monoculture agriculture... [and a] respect for ecology" (p. 360). However, the meaning of sustainable agriculture has become diluted as increasingly more international organizations and national governments integrate the "greening of the rural development discourse" (p. 360) into their policies and programs (Aurelie Desmarais, 2012). Both Hassanein (2003) and Aurelie Desmarais (2012) contribute a fundamental dialogue between the politics of food and the establishment of alternative food systems.

The notion of student activism on campus emerged in the 1960s (Levenstein, 1993 and Lexier, 2007). Levenstein (1993) provides a historical analysis of student activism in the United States; whereas, Lexier (2007) provides an account of the happenings that occurred at English-Canadian universities. For example in both the United States and Canada, students mobilized against the Vietnam War (Levenstein, 1993 and Lexier, 2007). Levenstein (1993) places historical emphasis upon the student mobilization against corporate America in regards to food. Counter cultures, such as the San Francisco's Diggers, one of the most publicized communities, emerged and distributed free food every day in a neighbourhood park as a stance against private property (Levenstein, 1993). In regards to multiple student food cooperatives, such as Carleton University's Food Collective and Dalhousie University's Loaded Ladle, the historical analysis Levenstein (1993) provides is fundamental when understanding the basis of student food activism by elaborating on the history of student activism.

Axelrod and Reid (1989), Helferty and Clarke (2009), and Lafer (2003) emphasize the mobilization of students within the university campus. Axelrod and Reid (1989) provide a historical background on Canadian student unions and radical campus politics. Helferty and Clarke (2009) provide contemporary examples of the role of student unions on campus and how they provide an avenue for institutional change that can influence larger institutions such as the university, local municipality, and national government. Axelrod and Reid (1989), Helferty and Clarke (2009), and Lafer (2003) provide several perspectives of the role that student unions can have on creating change on the university campus.

Campus sustainable food projects have expanded rapidly (Bartlett, 2011). Campus food projects show both intent and capacity to contribute toward an alternative food system (Bartlett, 2011). Bartlett speculates that students have taken the lead on many campuses, but administration is "essential for continuity" (p. 101). However, Bartlett fails to identify the motivations of students and administration in the creation and continuation of these campus food projects. Whereas Gibson-Graham (2006) explicitly identifies how "food can be a strong locus for campus sustainability efforts because of its economic clout, corporate connections, and emotional resonance with family traditions, place, and identity" (p. 206). Similarly, Bartlett (2011) and Gibson-Graham (2006) speculate on the rise of student food activism on campus.

There are issues of food affordability and access on the university campus. In 2013, the Ontario Association of Food Banks reported that post-secondary students were among the largest growing group of food bank users in Ontario. According to the Good

Food Centre's (2015) report on Ryerson University, student food insecurity has increased due to high cost of tuition, competitive job market, and inadequate student loans.

While there is already a great body of research on food security and food sovereignty, there is little research pertaining to the campus food system. This gap of literature could result in an inaccurate understanding of the issues pertaining to campus food systems. However, some general conclusions can be drawn. Corporations have fundamentally altered the landscape of food globally, nationally, and locally (Schlosser, 2001; and McKibben, 2011). Corporations' technology and infrastructure have accelerated our transportation capabilities and have gained the ability to source large quantities of food for easy and affordable consumption (Harvard Food Law and Policy, 2011). Our food choices have enormous and often surprising significance in every sphere of life whether economic, environmental, or social (Goodman and Redclift, 1991; Levenstein, 1993; McKibben, 2010; Mintz, 1996; and Evans and Thomas, 2011). University student hunger and food insecurity in Canada is more a life phase than a permanent state of hunger as it is in the Global South (Negin, Remans, Karuti, and Franzo, 2009; Bushamuka et al., 2005; and Dubisson-Quellier and Lamine, 2014). Food sovereignty acts as counter-narrative to the dominant neo-liberal model (Aurelie Desmarais, 2012). Student unions and the university campus have the capability to provide alternatives to the dominant food system (Levenstein, 1993), including Carleton's Food Collective and Dalhousie's Loaded Ladle.

III. Methods

Assumptions and Rationale for a Qualitative Design

Qualitative research allows a researcher to explore "life-worlds" that are unique to the individual (Berg, 1998). Whereas, quantitative research allows a researcher to test a theory and pose it in terms of questions or hypotheses (Creswell, 2003). For my study, qualitative research is necessary as it explores the meanings individuals assign to experiences, and enables the researcher to explore a relatively unstudied topic (Berg, 1998 and Adler and Clark, 1999). There is limited knowledge documenting the experience of student leaders who are participating in student-run food initiatives and the ways in which they may feel empowered by the process. This study will allow me to engage in real-world settings to generate rich narrative descriptions to construct case studies (Patton, 2005). I am using a qualitative design because I am exploring the experiences of leaders in the student-led food initiatives.

The Type of Design Used

For my study, I will be conducting qualitative interviews to capture the experiences of participants in student-led food initiatives. I interviewed a total of six people (two from each student-run food initiative: DSU Farmers Market Collective, DUGS, and the Loaded Ladle). DUGS is "a student-run collaborative project and space" (DUGS, 2015). DUGS is funded by a 50 cent student levy, which was adopted in 2014 (DUGS, 2015). DUGS coordinates the local garden, grows food, hosts workshops and weekly garden work parties in the spring and summer semesters. The DSU Farmer's Market Collective is a non-profit student-run Farmers Market in the Student Union Building that occurs weekly

from September to April. They sell fresh, local produce and baked goods, as well as local art (DSU Farmers Market Collective, 2015). The Loaded Ladle is "an open cooperative of students and community members fighting unjust global food systems who cook, serve, and eat meals together" (Loaded Ladle, 2015). The Loaded Ladle hosts workshops and coordinates solidarity servings with student or community groups that share a common goal of social and environmental justice (Loaded Ladle, 2015).

It is also important to note that my main study subjects are people, which means that I submitted an ethics application to the Dalhousie Research Ethics Board. Fortunately, my ethics application was accepted. Before the interview, participants signed a consent form with my contact information as well as information about the study. This consent form stated that participants have the right to confidentiality and the right to withdraw from the study at any time before the end of April, when the thesis will be submitted. All participants were aware of their right to confidentiality and knew they could ask to stop the interview process at any time.

Role of the Researcher

I have interacted with food policy and advocacy throughout my personal, academic and work experience. I grew up with a parent who was a part of the local food movement in my rural community. Additionally, I have previous experience working with student unions and non-governmental organizations. I am currently the Campus Food Strategy Coordinator for the Dalhousie Student Union Sustainability Office. Throughout my time working on campus food, I have created a DSU Food Board policy and have used collaborative processes from multiple stakeholders. I am also volunteering my time as a Youth Caucus Coordinator for Food Secure Canada and as the Food Policy and Advocacy

Coordinator at the Ecology Action Centre's Food Action Committee. To conclude, I am extremely passionate about food and I am grateful to complete my thesis on this topic.

Data Collection Procedures

I conducted semi-structured one-on-one in-depth interviews. Semi-structured interviews are interviews with an interview guide containing primarily open-ended questions that can be modified for each interview (Adler and Clark, 1999 and Berg, 1998). With permission, I recorded the interview as it allows the interviewer to make eye contact and show interest and help the interviewer concentrate on follow-up questions (Berg, 1998). I also made an effort to use probes as they draw more complete stories from subjects (Berg, 1998). Creswell (2009) identifies that qualitative researchers tend to collect data in the field at the site where participants experience the issue under study. With that in mind, I interviewed participants on Studley campus, as the DSU is located on Studley campus and has a variety of student-led food initiatives.

I analyzed qualitative data, which required me to identify, tag, code, generate and compare themes (Creswell, 2009, Adler and Clark, 1999 and Berg, 1998) and I transcribed my interviews. Additionally, I coded my interviews and used Microsoft Excel and Word to do so. My methods generated data pertaining to the campus food system and assisted me in identifying the experiences of students who contributed to the student-run food initiatives mentioned previously. I looked for similarities between the interviews and whether the motivations are similar. I recognized these patterns by using coding for data analysis with reference to Creswell (2009), Adler and Clark (1999), and Berg (1998).

Methods for Verification

Qualitative researchers use inductive data analysis to build their patterns, categories, and themes from the bottom up, by organizing the data into increasingly more abstract units of information (Creswell, 2009). Creswell provides a broad overview of research methods and verification that is of use for my verification methods. Adler and Clark (1999) elaborate on the qualitative research process and assist in analyzing interview data. Berg (1998) explores qualitative research methods for the social sciences. Berg (1998) goes into an in-depth analysis of how to document themes (and sub-themes) when collecting interview data. Therefore, Creswell (2009), Adler and Clark (1999), and Berg (1998) will be useful literature to consult when verifying and analyzing my data.

IV. Findings and Analysis

Profiles

Molly is a second year Biology and Environment, Sustainability & Society (ESS) student at Dalhousie University. For Molly, the DSU Farmers Market Collective is a way to meet friends who have similar values. Molly became interested in food issues when she was young. She really wanted to have a trampoline or a pool as a kid, but her parents said they had to get a vegetable garden instead.

“I was really resentful and now I am really glad I grew up with a vegetable garden, knowing how to garden and knowing where my food comes from is important to me.”

Since Molly became vegan three years ago, she has had interest in food security. She originally started eating vegan “for sustainability related reasons,” but soon became interested in issues related to food security and food access.

Helaina is currently studying to become a registered Holistic Nutritionist at the Canadian School of Natural Nutrition. She began her studies and plans to return to Dalhousie University for Nursing. In her first year at Dalhousie, Helaina attended an ESS student society meeting and met Mel (the co-founder of the DSU Farmers Market Collective). Helaina was very excited about the market and began volunteering almost immediately. Helaina grew up in Bathurst, New Brunswick where they recently tore down their farmer’s market. She was heartbroken and felt there should be a market on Studley campus. She really felt motivated by the co-founders of the market and the energy surrounding the market:

“You meet the [student founders of the market] and they are so genuine on being interested in food and are excited by food. They are excited by local food. You feed off of that. I don’t know, just the culture of it. The culture of local food.”

Mel is a fourth year ESS and Environmental Science student at Dalhousie University. She was the co-founder of the DSU Farmers Market Collective last year and is now a DUGS Executive Member. Mel and her friend started the market last year with support of students, faculty, and staff. “There was a lot of support... [And] there was no reason not to do it.” Mel decided to help out with the garden because she wanted to learn more about gardening and how to use power tools. She is motivated by doing things that

connect her with people that she finds inspiring. Mel feels motivated when she sees something that has a positive impact on the campus community:

“I feel I am motivated when I see something that would have a positive impact. If it is not happening and I want to see it happen, I will do it. That usually manifests in different ways, like being able to identify what is lacking in the community and the campus and starting it – because why not?”

Hugo is a third year ESS and Economics student at Dalhousie University. He is an executive member of DUGS. In high school, he was involved at an organic farm and the following summer the farmer assisted Hugo in finding a summer job at a non-profit in Peterborough, Ontario. Becoming the assistant at the community garden was life-changing for Hugo.

“We drove around Peterborough and [he would] tell me how much it makes sense to have community gardens instead of grass on all the lawns. This idea was revolutionary for me.”

It struck Hugo how gardens could have so many different effects on a community. That it can bring people together and make better use of public space. More importantly for him, “it was a way to grow food, bring people closer to food, and closer to the land.”

Theresa is a first year ESS and Music student at Dalhousie University. Theresa is a board member of the Loaded Ladle. Originally from Mississauga, she has moved to Halifax and have gotten involved at the student union almost immediately. In Mississauga, she spent a lot of time in studios with other musicians, who were vegan. Their veganism inspired her to alter her diet, as well as her experience in high school:

“Throughout high school, we are forced to watch animal rights videos. I remember in Grade 9, it was in a geography class, we learned about the agriculture and food industry. That scared me away from eating meat.”

Soon after, Theresa realized she was lactose intolerant, which made it easier for her to shift to veganism and ultimately enable her to learn more about her health and food issues.

Gabe is a fifth year ESS and Sociology and Social Anthropology student at Dalhousie University. Originally from Calgary, Alberta, Gabe came to Dalhousie in first year to study Marine Biology. He first heard of the Loaded Ladle in his department and soon became involved. Past-board member and current volunteer, Gabe appreciates the space that the Ladle kitchen provides to discuss food solidarity, food activism, and social justice issues. Gabe confided with other people in the group who shared similar values and interest, which ultimately compelled him to get more involved:

"I volunteered last year a couple of times in the kitchen, and I knew some people that were there. In general those people interested me. That was the main motivation to help and feel like I was helping out, that was valuable to me. Even if it was a small impact, just to feel less guilty in living in our capitalist society. Feeling like you were a part of something."

Themes

Empowerment

Empowerment for the participants in my study meant a variety of things, whether it was “making other people’s lives easier,” increasing food literacy on campus, or

volunteering in student-generated initiatives, they all feel that they are making an impact on Studley Campus at Dalhousie University.

For Helaina, empowerment means “the right to make your own decisions.” The power to choose what foods you eat is important to Helaina. When asked if she feels empowered by her participation, Helaina replied with an enthusiastic yes. When Helaina sets up the market she feels that they are “doing [their] own little protest every week.” Hassanein (2013) mentions the feeling of liberation “in the struggle for a just and sustainable society (p. 187). When you can choose what you buy, instead of going to a conventional grocery store, you are voting with your dollar, and that for Helaina, is empowering.

For Molly, empowerment means “knowing that [she is] having a positive effect on the world around [her] and [her] immediate community.” Molly feels empowered by her participation in the market, but did not feel so for a long time because she felt she was not making “much of a difference” on campus. Over time she realized that “people are noticing and are very grateful” and it makes her feel empowered knowing that she is making other peoples’ lives easier.

For Mel, empowerment means “being in a space where you feel like you are free to make decisions and be your best self.” Mel is learning a lot from volunteering with the garden and feels empowered when she learns practical skills, like how to use a power saw. “None of us are experts, I think that is empowering for people to come.”

Gabe and Mel mentioned how privileged they feel attending a post-secondary institution. Mel questioned if her perspective of empowerment is very different because she is a part of a privileged population:

"I find [empowerment] as a place where I feel like I'll be supported in my choices. But I also think that for me, as pretty privileged white person from a very privileged easy life, that has probably quite a bit of a different significance than someone who has to fight for their right for empowerment in their life. Because I felt like I never did not have it. For a lot of people that is not the case."

Traditionally, the process of empowerment means that one gains control of their life. For some, it is easier to take control due to their life circumstances, which Gabe and Mel touched upon in their interview.

Food Accessibility; Affordability

Participants were largely concerned with food access on campus. The issue of food security was mentioned on several occasions as their main motivation for joining their initiative. Many felt that their initiative was providing an affordable and environmentally sustainable service, which they felt was missing on campus. Helaina said she “meet[s] so many people that could be feeding themselves better and they just don’t have the money.” According to the Ontario Association of Food Banks (2013), post-secondary students are among the largest growing group of food bank users. Helaina is proud that the market can provide accessible and affordable food on campus:

“We provide local, sustainable food to students once a week. We do it because there is no farmer’s market close to campus. A lot of students go to the grocery store and do not know a lot about food security or where their food comes from. We are trying to educate students why it is a better option.”

Molly, since she became vegan, has always had an interest in food security and has found working with the Market she has been able to make local, sustainable food more accessible to the student body. The organizers really wanted to have something “so accessible on campus because not every student can go to the Seaport Market every Saturday.” What makes the DSU Farmers Market Collective unique for them is that they sell their produce for the same amount they purchased it for, so “[they] are the cheapest veg in town.”

Food Literacy; Veganism; Eco-literacy

Participants from the Dalhousie Farmers Market Collective, DUGS, and the Loaded Ladle said they would like to see an increase of food literacy on the university campus. Every participant said educating students is a major component of their student food initiative. For Gabe, experiences at the Garden were unique because he felt he knew nothing about gardening, but still organized events and learned as he went along:

"The thing for me is that I don't know that much about gardening itself, most of the time I was asking [Mel]... The beginning of this year there was this one first year, who knew everything about gardening. That's what I like about it, because everyone comes in with an 'I don't know' headspace."

Mel joined DUGS because she wanted to learn more about gardening and felt that she would hold herself more accountable if she spent more time there. The Garden enabled her to use tools, like power saws, to build "something really useful, practical and rewarding, which is food."

The Loaded Ladle stresses the importance of education in their core mandate (Loaded Ladle, 2015). They specifically focus on educating "the public about food politics on campus and in our community, as well as the broader social and environmental justice

issues which surround the production and distribution of food globally" (Loaded Ladle, 2015). Theresa thinks that education can change behaviour:

"The Loaded Ladle has talked about trying to get into the different residence buildings and maybe do a serving once a month. It is important to start with the younger generation, so they can inhabit new lifestyles earlier on. It makes me feel more empowered that I can influence more people because I live with hundreds of people in [residence], as opposed to a house."

Similar to the research study that taught Bangladeshi family members how to conduct a homestead gardening program (Bushamuka et al., 2005), Gabe from the campus garden also felt empowered by learning how to grow his own food:

"Being able to go through that process with the community and then come out with food and be able to go through a semester without buying a specific type of vegetable because you are growing it yourself - to detach yourself from the greater system - it is really great."

Gabe, Molly, and Theresa all mentioned their experience of becoming vegan and how that really impacted their lives. For Gabe, he liked that the Loaded Ladle served only vegan food:

"I was vegan for five years and I learned to cook with my two roommates (my old partner and best friend). It was so much fun. All three of us were vegan and made so many beautiful meals together and were creative in the kitchen. When we started eating at the Ladle as a group, it is the same

cooking we do with random dressings made out of thin air. What do we have today that is local? Okay this. For dressing? A little bit of that. Let's throw something together, it will be good because it is a group and we made it together"

Similar to Gabe, Theresa was influenced by her friends to learn more about veganism. They both felt that the Loaded Ladle was the outlet they needed to learn more about veganism, but also provided the opportunity to educate others on food politics.

Student Generated Initiatives

All of the participants are volunteers in their student food initiative. Many said they value that their initiative was non-profit. Every participant mentioned all three student-led food initiatives on campus and how they play an important role on the university campus. Hugo, who is a core organizer of the campus garden, thinks of the impact that the initiatives have created on campus:

"I think that a big part that is really important about the Garden, Ladle, and the Market, is that they are helping to foster the community of sustainability, environmentally conscious students at Dal. Even if those students can't eat a 100% local based diet... it still gives them a way to think about how they can do that."

Gabe, Hugo, and Mel mentioned the importance of the market and their non-profit operating structure. The non-profit structure of the market is something both Helaina and Molly are proud of. "Money is not success" for Helaina, "success [for her] is seeing customers come back every single week and being excited about it." Many mentioned the closed loop that they have created with all three initiatives. If the garden has extra produce

they give it to the market and if the market has extra food at the end of the day the Loaded Ladle purchases it from them, and the Loaded Ladle cooks it and serves it for the student population to consume. Mel comments on her experience:

"DUGS gives me a deeper connection with the Ladle by talking to them and providing them food and a deeper connection to the Farmer's Market by buying food and donating food [from the garden]. It gives me something to think about."

Theresa talks about the struggle to eat vegan in residence and how a lot of the foods that she can get nutrition from are just not there. Molly shared a similar sentiment when she lived in residence. For Hugo, he mentioned the struggle of his friends living in residence and being vegan, and how if you live in residence you have to purchase a meal plan even if they do not accommodate for your food choices. When asked about the state of the campus food system at Dalhousie, all mentioned the importance and impact student-led food initiatives have made on their lives. For Hugo, the Garden is a great alternative to DivestDal, which is an organization focused on campaigning to have Dalhousie University's endowment fund divested from the world's top 200 fossil fuel companies:

"I have also been involved in DivestDal One of the things I struggle with that is does not seem to get anywhere most of the time, we are going to write this email or report or write this speech. The garden is much more concrete, the work is much more concrete. It is a lot easier to not feel bogged down, by not going anywhere with this active work. When I am involved in the garden, when I am just involved in DivestDal, it is really

good for me, as a sustainability student and activist, it helps keep me sane a little bit. I go to the garden, I want to turn the compost and plant a bunch of things, and it actually happens!"

Gardening is a type of activism from which Hugo can see progress after a couple of hours of work. For Gabe, "the food initiatives on campus, the market, DUGS, and the Ladle are the first steps of change within the university."

V. Conclusions and Recommendations

The participants interviewed for this study are volunteering their time to operate student-led food initiatives on Studley campus at Dalhousie University. These individuals have expressed a variety of motivations for joining their initiative, whether it was growing up with a garden or becoming vegan, they all had a passion for the environment and food. Many became interested in food because of their friends or role models. All student leaders hesitated when they were asked if they were empowered by their participation, but came to the conclusion that their participation has empowered them in their everyday lives. The experience of leaders in the student-led initiatives varied significantly, but there were some commonalities. Many struggled with involving more students to volunteer. Connecting with other student-led food initiatives was an important way for their initiative to not generate food waste. All of the participants were displeased with the state of the campus food system on Studley campus, but felt that the student-led food initiatives were a start to create change. All participants did not feel they had enough expertise on the subject matter, but in fact had a breadth of information and experience to speak to. Finally, the participants advocated that the campus food system needed to be altered and

determined that participating in the DSU Farmers Market Collective, DUGS, or the Loaded Ladle was one way to do so.

This study illustrates the importance of involving students in the campus food system. One of the strengths of my study is that I interviewed students. I would recommend future studies to investigate other student-led food initiatives nationally and how they compare to the experiences explored in this project. I am interested in exploring how student-led food initiatives impact different concerned parties (administrators, food providers, professors, students). I would also like this research to expand beyond the campus. How do alternative food systems impact communities? How do food initiatives contribute to our understanding of food security? This research would contribute to other scholarly works on the alternative food system.

This study explored student's experiences in the alternative campus food system. Each participant had their own unique narrative. Despite the variety of their stories, all said they were empowered by their participation. Future work is needed to determine whether the process of empowerment can fit in a model. The students in this study are leaders in the alternative campus food system. The student-led initiatives on Studley campus focuses primarily on social and environmental justice, which contrasts the dominant food service providers on campus as they produce food only for profit. Another suggestion for further research is to explore the dominant hegemonic powers in the campus food system and how the counter-hegemonic powers affect them. This study provides the perspective of participants in student-led food initiatives at Dalhousie University, but additional research must be conducted to examine other aspects of capacity, by asking how to support and gain more volunteers for the alternative campus food system.

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Appendix: Interview Guide

1. What compelled you to join _____ (DSU Farmer's Market Collective, DUGS or the Loaded Ladle)?
2. Could you walk me through what a day looks like when you are participating with _____ (Dalhousie Community Garden, Loaded Ladle or DSU Farmer's Market Collective)? What you do, why you do it etc.
3. What does empowerment mean to you? How would you define empowerment for yourself?
 - a. What motivated you to act? What were the interests and passions that drove you?
 - b. Do you feel empowered by your participation in your student-run food initiative?
4. How would you describe the state of the Dalhousie campus food system?
5. How would you describe a successful student-run food initiative?
6. Do you have a sense that students are using the service? Who are the users? Faculty, community members, professors, students, etc.
7. Are the Dalhousie student-run initiatives successful alternatives to the corporate providers on campus? Why or why not?
8. What keeps you motivated to participate with the _____ (DSU Farmer's Market Collective, DUGS or the Loaded Ladle)?
9. Do you have anything you would like to add?