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What is a Food Bank?

A cultural analytical exploration of the paradoxes and potentials of stakeholder definitions and interrelations

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Abstract

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Summer 2018 I worked with a recycling coalition in the United States to investigate food waste as a topic essential in promoting environmental sustainability. We banded together with QFB, a large food bank, to focus on the problem of food waste in their food rescue process. During my time at QFB I noticed paradoxes between the practices and words of different stakeholders in the QFB system: most specifically that of paid QFB employees, volunteers, and food donor organizations (FDOs). The aim of this thesis is to investigate and identify how stakeholders define QFB, and what tensions or disconnects are created by these definitions. Due to the personal nature of the small-team environment at QFB, the methods used to explore these paradoxes were observations, participant observation, semi-structured interviews, go-alongs, and autoethnography. The collected data is primarily analyzed through Marcel Mauss' (2002) theory of gift-economy and Erving Goffman's (1990) theory of dramaturgy. These two theorists help explain the paradoxes on a societal and personal level thereby enabling an analysis of the data from different angles. In conclusion, this thesis finds that stakeholders have a multiplicity of definitions of QFB, including but not limited to: a philanthropic hub, a dumping ground, and a business. Identifying how stakeholders define QFB illustrates the social constructions which have enabled, and even encouraged, paradoxes between practices and words to exist. This thesis concludes with a discussion on how the recognized definitions can be applied to improve long-term sustainable practices through communication between stakeholders and QFB. [248]

Keywords: food bank; gift-economy; dramaturgy; philanthropy; altruism; volunteering; donations; food waste.

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1. Introduction

Boxes of carrots six feet tall and taller, unending rows of containers bursting with onions, beeping forklifts whizzing past with palettes of food for delivery, volunteers chatting as they sort food from larger containers into smaller ones while tossing the inedible ones onto a small mountain of rotten produce destined to be turned into pig food... I breathe in the sights and sounds that tell me: I am in a food bank.

Aim of the Thesis

The aim of this thesis is to investigate the question, “What is a food bank?” In my investigation, I aim to identify how different stakeholders define a food bank, what tensions or disconnects are created by these definitions, and how these definitions can be used by various stakeholders.

Background

Summer 2018 I worked with a recycling coalition in the United States to investigate food waste as a topic essential in promoting environmental sustainability. We banded together with a big US food bank in anonymized state Q, referred to as QFB in this thesis, to focus on the problem of food waste in their food rescue process. QFB is a large non-profit organization in the United States that gathers and distributes food to food distribution locations around state Q, which has a population of approximately 2 million.

Food banks like QFB have become an essential part of many communities around the world. According to QFB’s website, they feed a population upwards of 50,000 individuals every week in their state. Feeding America’s website (Feeding America, 2018) states that in the entirety of the US, 1 out of 8 people struggle with hunger. This comes to approximately 41,204,000 individuals nationwide with a third of that number consisting of children (Feeding America, 2018). In a country that throws out about “150,000 tons of food each day” (Milman, 2018), having such surplus turned *salvage*, i.e. trash, when hunger is a common problem is highly problematic. Turning *sustainable* food into *salvage* is also an environmental problem as decomposing foods in landfills release the greenhouse gas, methane, in large quantities (Milman, 2018). Additionally, the volume of *salvage* equates to the annual waste of roughly “30m acres of land, 780m pounds of pesticide and 4.2tn gallons of irrigated water” (Milman, 2018). Food waste functions as a social and environmental problem, with both waste and hunger seeming to

increase every year. Food banks work as an intermediary in this context, creating alliances with food donor organizations (FDOs) that enable the redirection of some of the foods destined for *salvage* away from the landfill and towards individuals in need. For the purpose of this thesis, an FDO is defined as a large organization such as a farm or grocery store who donate food.

The role of food banks as providers for hungry populations and as outlets for food waste has caused the question of food bank ‘sustainability’ to come into the spotlight in recent years. At the 2018 European Food Banks Federation convention the central theme was “the sustainability of food banks” (European Food Banks Federation, 2018). Emphasis was upon fundraising strategies and improving donor – food bank practices with corporations such as Unilever, Kellogg, and FrieslandCampina attending to give insight into their motivations for cooperating with food banks (European Food Banks Federation, 2018). The goal of this convention was to create “a sustainable win-win for both the partnering company and the food bank” (European Food Banks Federation, 2018) through improving collaboration techniques. To them, food bank sustainability is defined as improved monetary and food rescue (reception of donation from organizations) practices. Within QFB as a food bank, sustainability also relates to reducing internal food waste (*salvage*) so that the majority of donations is distributed to people in need.

Addressing this type of food waste, for ten weeks I went to QFB on an almost daily basis, each time spanning a few hours and split between time in the warehouse or in the administrative offices. The area of concern that QFB wanted addressed was the food waste generated in the refrigerated food sector. Any food delivered to QFB in need of refrigeration is placed into the giant refrigerator in that sector, then later sorted and correctly redistributed to other warehouse sectors by warehouse employees. At the end of each day there is always an overabundance of random foods that -for a variety of reasons- cannot be redistributed and are subsequently marked as *salvage*. Each week, approximately 3,000 lbs of food became *salvage* from this sector. For QFB whose mission is to save food and redistribute it to those in need, this is unacceptable. Focusing on the refrigerated sector, my goal in this project was to determine the main categories of foods that were becoming *salvage*, the reasons they become *salvage*, and possible ways to change the food’s destination from *salvage* to *sustenance*. It was during my time at QFB working with the tones of food in the warehouse that I noticed paradoxes between the practices and words of different stakeholders in the QFB system, most specifically that of paid QFB employees,

volunteers, and FDOs. This thesis is the result of my curiosity about those paradoxes and how they affect as well as create the social structures within which QFB functions.

Overview of the Thesis Structure

In this thesis I explore observed paradoxes existing between two QFB stakeholders (volunteers and FDOs) and QFB using data collected from observations, participant observation, semi-structured interviews, go-alongs, and autoethnography. In the following chapters I present previous research related to this thesis' topic and a discussion about the methods and methodology. A chapter presenting the field explains how QFB functions and dives into the dictionary versus social definitions of a food bank before introducing the two analysis chapters: Volunteers, and FDOs. In both chapters my collected data is analyzed primarily through Marcel Mauss's (2002) theory of gift-economy and Erving Goffman's (1990) theory of dramaturgy. The Volunteers chapter explains the process through which a volunteer comes to QFB starting from before they walk in the door to the completion of their volunteer experience. This is followed by the FDOs chapter which investigates FDO motivations to donate food and the type of donations received. At the end of both chapters are sections where the stakeholder's definitions of QFB are revealed. After the analysis chapter comes the conclusion chapter, where I restate the definitions these two stakeholders give QFB and discuss the applicability of this research.

2. Previous Research

Food banks as a social phenomenon and an intrinsic part of modern culture are a topic discussed in various manners. In order to prepare for the upcoming analysis, I will introduce a discussion about previous research pertaining to food banks.

In academia, calls for changes in the food bank system are rampant within the anthropological community (Caplan, 2017). These calls are primarily focused upon the perspectives of volunteers and the users of the food banks rather than how the food banks sustain themselves. Anthropologist Pat Caplan's (2017) stance on food banks is that they are not the answer to the problem of poverty; rather, they are a temporary solution until a more permanent and better one can be implemented. In her research she pointedly attacks the problem of poverty through the perspectives of food bank users in the UK while admitting that necessary ethnographic context of the situation is missing in the form of food donor, volunteer, and food bank employee perspectives (Caplan 2016). I believe that filling these gaps is instrumental to a

deeper understanding of the cultural foundations that create and support food banks, and that identifying stakeholder definitions of food banks will provide data upon which other research can build.

The most widely researched aspect of food banks is that of the food bank users. Using only the perspective of the food bank users, Sue Booth, Christina Pollard, John Coveney and Ian Goodwin-Smith (2018) suggest food banks provide more “active involvement, social connection and broader support” (p. 15) opportunities to empower the users rather than keeping them in a disempowered role. Sustainability, according to them, is defined by how well the food bank’s operations address the needs of their users in terms of providing social and professional services in addition to food. Michael Elmes, Karla Mendoza-Abarca, and Robert Hersh (2016) likewise explain that food bank leaders across the US are trying to be more proactive in ending the cycle of dependency upon food banks through understanding its causes. They emphasize that food banks were never a long-term solution but that because of how they have been implemented they are now one on which a large population is dependent. Solutions to this must be based on fixing the social systems which oppress this population, rather than on improving food resources (Elmes, Mendoza-Abarca & Hersh, 2016). Other researchers concur, calling for food banks to analyze who their users really are, what type of basic living needs they have outside of food, and provide nutritional education alongside their products (Fiese, Koester, & Waxman, 2014; Will & Milligan, 2015; Verpy, Smith, & Reicks, 2003). An understanding of research on food bank users is useful for contextualizing this study however this thesis will not be addressing this subject as it is already widely researched and the aforementioned gap areas are not. In order to suggest pragmatic solutions for improving food bank sustainability within an unsustainable system that produces social and financial inequality, more areas than the users will need to be researched.

Others agree that different areas of research should be addressed, such as social scientist Steve Iafrati (2018) in his paper, “*We’re not a bottomless pit*”: *food banks’ capacity to sustainably meet increasing demand*. In his paper, Iafrati (2018) defines sustainability as the food bank’s ability to meet the demand for food from a growing vulnerable population. According to him, “social purpose is a core element in food banks’ understanding of sustainability” (p. 39), with statements that this purpose needs to be examined further to promote food banks’ longevity. Laurie Sinclair-Emerson, Rebekah MacDonald, Joseph Llewellyn, and

Shamima Khonat (2017-8) make similar statements, saying that there is a dearth in research about the cultural and social systems that construct the current operations of food banks. They call for the anthropological community to focus on the relationships involved in food banks so as to improve not only their longevity but also clarify the systems within which they exist. One example of these systems is corporations using donations to food banks as greenwashing, masking the issue of food waste through their donation's positive publicity. Paradoxically, food bank sustainability is ultimately reliant on the environmental unsustainability of food waste by retailers and consumers. There is an overabundance of research on fighting poverty utilizing innovative solutions to maximize food and monetary donations to reach growing food bank user populations (Ahire & Pekgün, 2018); however, when it comes to what Marx would call parasitical labour (legitimizing food banks, food waste, and unemployment through enculturated concepts on giving) and how that structures the way food banks operate (Sinclair-Emerson, MacDonald, Llewellyn & Khonat, 2017-8) the research is woefully inadequate. Sinclair-Emerson et.al (2017-8) align with Nancy Scheper-Hughes (2017) and Colin P. Hemmings (2005) in calling anthropologists to be more proactive in providing pragmatic research that will promote practical solutions when fighting large problems such as poverty.

The previous research discussed demonstrates that 1) most research is focused on food bank users, and 2) addressing food bank sustainability from different perspectives is both culturally and socially necessary. In this thesis I contribute research to these gap areas through investigating some of the cultural and social paradoxes constructing the current environment in which food banks (as represented by QFB) exist from non-food bank user perspectives.

3. Methods, Methodology, and Method Reflections

Ethnography is regarded as a “generative and sustained conversation about world-making (Hastrup, 2014, p. 49). From July 2018 through September 2018 I employed a variety of methods at QFB to help make visible the world in which QFB exists. I chose the following ethnographic methods because they enable a co-creation of data between the informants and my own personal involvement. My field site was one where I was working closely with small, tight-knit teams of paid QFB employees or unpaid volunteers on emotionally charged topics: food and feeding people. Doing ethnography necessitates a certain amount of self- involvement. In this field I felt that emotionally immersing myself both in terms of relationships with my informants

as well as through my own autoethnographic analysis was necessary to unearth knowledge beyond what observations and interviews permit. Taking into account the different levels of formality or familiarity I felt with different informants, the emotional aspects of food waste and hunger, and the ever-moving atmosphere at QFB, I chose to use a variety of methods to enable flexibility in the field. In a dynamic such as QFB where you are either in the team or out of it, distancing myself from my informants would not have allowed for the depth of data retrieval and analysis that I felt was necessary for this thesis. Instead, it would have caused a rift between me and my coworkers, destroying the trust they gave me when opening up about life in the warehouse. At the same time, some situations such as interviews conducted in the administrative offices or observations required a certain amount of distance. This being the case, my methods range in spatial and emotional distances from the personal (auto-ethnography, participant observation) to the more formal (semi-structure interviews, go-alongs, observations). All methods were done with the approval and consent of both QFB employees and volunteers, except for autoethnography which was conducted upon myself.

Observations and Participant Observations

In order to understand the emotions and realities of being at the food bank from both an insider (employee) and an outsider (volunteer) perspective, I spent copious amounts of time at QFB diving into those roles. For a few hours each day I worked in the warehouse, helping sort foods in the refrigerated section and loading them into the trucks on delivery days. Billy Ehn, Orvar Löfgren, and Richard Wilk (2015) suggest visiting the field site at different times of day to see the locations changing moods, so for one day I volunteered to work the early shift from 5:30 am to 12:00 pm, sorting donated food that had come in the night before for future distribution. In a similar vein, Billy Ehn (2011) recommends ethnography be undertaken with a certain amount of first-hand experience, advising that some data can only be learned when the ethnographer is taking part in the observed activity or situation. Taking his advice to heart, I went through the volunteer training as if I were new to the system, volunteering in areas outside of the refrigerated section to educate myself on the volunteer perspective. Additionally, I subscribed to QFB's general email listserv to observe how the public is shown QFB's work and contributions. As QFB is an interconnected system of relationships between sections, being both a participant and an observer of the world-making aspects in each area clarified how the whole organization works together in what Alpa Shah (2017) defines as the "revealing social relations of a group" (p. 45)

aspect of participant observation. The amount of time spent at QFB working closely, laughing, and talking with employees gave me a feeling of “insiderness” (Labaree, 2002, p. 98) or closeness. I cherished this connection. In the end I feel that it both enriched my time there as well as provided an even deeper level of engagement with the field, the volunteers, and my coworkers.

When it came to the FDOs, my participant-observation took a different turn. In my research gathering I did not have the option to speak with FDOs directly; therefore, without concrete conversations about how they define QFB, I was forced to analyze my observations of their food donations to QFB and their advertisements of these donations towards consumers. My research primarily consisted of walking around grocery stores and large superstores (such as Walmart) looking to see how/if FDOs advertised their food donations. To clarify what I saw in stores such as signs at the checkout requesting shoppers to add an extra dollar to their bill in order to support local food banks, I went online and looked at news stories about FDOs’ donations from both consumer and FDO written sites. I chose this method for analyzing the FDOs to compliment my observations within the warehouse with how the FDOs present themselves to their consumers, and how the consumers themselves respond to this presentation. This provided valuable insight into the motivations FDOs have to donate and how they define QFB.

Semi-Structured Interviews

When speaking with the paid administrative staff in their private offices I utilized semi-structured interviews in order to promote myself as a professional in my field while demonstrating respect for their precious time. As suggested by Sarah Whatmore (2011) in her exploration of how to co-create data with informants, in each interview I attempted to maintain as much neutrality as possible through employing active listening and minimizing responses so as to keep my opinions from influencing the interviewee. Structured survey-like interviews are more rigid and formal, claims ethnographer Charlotte Aull Davies (2008), so they were eschewed in favor of semi-structured interviews which allow for flexibility in subject direction and a dialogic co-creation of information (Sennett, 2012). As explained by sociologist Richard Sennett (2012), dialogic conversations enable an exchange of information without overt influencing of the data, thus allowing interviewees to introduce topics I did not know were relevant to the conversation. Throughout the interview process, I remembered Ehn’s (2011)

caution to always be in doubt of what the interviewee actually means. For this reason, I constantly reminded myself that regardless of what was said, I should be careful when making assumptions.

In total, five semi-structured interviews of an hour minimum per interview were conducted for this thesis. All were with paid employees of QFB. Three have been quoted in the text (Claire, an employee who works closely with FDOs; Alister, an administrative officer; and Cordelia, a marketing manager) with the other two providing supporting information. The date the interviews were taken ranges from August of 2018 to March of 2019, and were all conducted by myself.

Go-Alongs

Due to the fast paced and constantly moving environment of QFB's warehouse, the majority of interviews were conducted using the go-along method as they are particularly adapted to "lived experiences *in situ*" (Kusenbach, 2003, p. 255). As stated before, I wanted to be actively involved in the lives of my coworkers and the volunteers in order to understand their lived experiences and how these made them feel. A go-along was perfect for this. Margarethe Kusenbach (2003) is a staunch supporter of go-alongs, saying that they enable the researcher to explore "subjects' stream of experiences and practices as they move through, and interact with, their physical and social environment." (p. 463). During these go-alongs I walked all over the warehouse with employees and volunteers while we talked about their everyday activities at QFB, growing closer to them and seeing aspects of life in the warehouse that I would not have seen otherwise. A go-along is similar to what Barbara Czarniawska (2007) calls "shadowing", i.e. following and observing informants as they go about their daily activities. During these go-alongs the questions asked focused upon food waste, but a comparison of what was said versus employees and volunteer practices at QFB demonstrated how these stakeholders defined QFB subconsciously in their normal behaviors. In this way a go-along provided both verbal and physical statements about how employees and volunteers interact with QFB.

To gather as much original data as possible I employed a voice recorder during both the go-alongs and semi-structured interviews. Taking the advice of Jennie Morgan & Sarah Pink (2013), every recording was only taken after an explanation of how the data would be used and express permission from the interviewee was received. By doing so trust was built with new acquaintances and strengthened in existing relationships. In total, seven go-alongs were

conducted ranging from fifteen minutes to two hours. Four are quoted in this thesis of which one is a paid QFB employee (Matthew, a warehouse manager) and three are unpaid volunteers volunteering for the first time (Amanda, a woman in her early 30's; Maria, a woman in her mid-40's; Josie, a woman in her early 50's). The other three go-alongs are not quoted but provide supporting information. All go-alongs were conducted by myself during August of 2018.

Autoethnography

Due to my interviews and go-alongs not focusing specifically upon stakeholder definitions of QFB, I felt it was necessary to undertake autoethnography as a volunteer in order to have a deeper understanding of that perspective. Throughout the duration of my time at QFB I flipped between being an observer, a volunteer, and feeling like (without actually being) an employee. Autoethnography allows an ethnographer to position themselves uniquely “as simultaneously the subject and the object of observation” (Ehn, 2011, p. 54). Doing so enabled me to draw upon past and current experiences of volunteering or working in non-profits as a means of bridge-building between myself and the study participants (Morgan & Pink, 2013). Accordingly, I used reflections on my own experiences and feelings as data for analysis. Focusing upon the practices of what was actually *done* as opposed what was *said* via autoethnography deepened my understanding of the situations observed and feelings expressed by participants beyond what their words alone could tell me.

Anonymization and Consent

During my research it was important to keep in mind the process of continuously checking participant consent (Ellis, 2007). Although it may seem tedious to continuously check with participants at each stage whether they continued to wish to take part in the project, doing so is crucial in demonstrating respect for the informants, maintaining relationships, and giving them control over how their information is being used (Ellis, 2007). Doing so is increasingly important when using recording devices, as I did, because these became a hard-copy testimony of their thoughts and reflections -some of which could be considered personally damaging if they are in the wrong hands- which they were entrusting to me for safe-keeping.

Ensuring that I had informed consent at all stages also meant discussing the topic of anonymity. My sense of responsibility to my coworkers at QFB and QFB as an organization necessitated that we discuss and agree upon the level of anonymity for this thesis. Only by doing

so could I, in good faith, use the data given me while protecting the trust and relationships I made during my time at QFB. Therefore, in order to prevent any foreseeable or unforeseeable negative effects, the food bank I worked with has been completely anonymized in this thesis. QFB is its used pseudonym, labels identifying QFB or FDOS in photos have been covered, and all associated with it have been anonymized by their request to protect the individuals and organization from foreseeable and unforeseeable harm. In this thesis all names used are pseudonyms unless they are large corporations at which point their original names have been kept due to their association with multitudes of food banks in the US and therefore unlikely of revealing QFB's identity. When used in the text, individuals are cited by a pseudonym and their stakeholder role. In this manner I have attempted to protect QFB while still analyzing details specific to their operations.

Ethics & Reflexivity

Working alongside the employees every day in the warehouse, making jokes with them, remembering their names and them remembering mine, calling out greetings at the start and end of each day, talking about hobbies and families... These daily activities created the illusion of my being a permanent worker who would be staying for years to come rather than someone leaving within a defined timeframe. At some point I also fell victim to this illusion, a strong sense of "insiderness" (Labaree, 2002: 98) making me feel like an intimate team member. With "insiderness" comes benefits such as revealing new perspectives and discovering hidden meanings, but it also comes with a price. Robert V. Labaree (2002), a social scientist who focuses on analyzing research methods, describes the price of "creating a bond" with informants as negotiating the "disengagement" expected at the completion of the fieldwork. I had gotten so close to my informants, my coworkers, that when it came time to begin distancing myself I found myself fighting it. I knew I was only there for a limited amount of time and that pulling away was a necessity but my heart had created such a close connection with my informants that I felt saddened at the thought of leaving them. Due to these conflicting emotions inspired by my "insiderness", I began to question: Did I compromise the integrity of my project due to my emotional proximity to different actors?

Autoethnography and reflexivity became the tools through which I analyzed my levels of professionalism, what type of professionalism was necessary in different contexts, and how to proceed in future interactions. Mats Alvesson (2009) points out that the line between participant

and researcher involves intense reflexivity, advocating self-ethnography through questioning one's own culture and basic assumptions in order to better understand the situational context one is in: "While a challenge for the ethnographer is to avoid 'going native', the self-ethnographer must make strong efforts to avoid 'staying native' " (p. 189). It is not uncommon for ethnographers to become drawn in or part of the culture they are studying (Fayard & Maanen, 2015), especially when working in an emotionally charged atmosphere such as delivering food to hungry people. Feeling the ups of physically handing food to a receiving organization who would use it to feed their neighbors, the downs of *salvaged* food being thrown away, and all the emotions in between was instrumental to my understanding of QFB's processes and the people involved within it.

Instead of being afraid of "going native" (Alvesson, 2009), I embraced it and all the rollercoaster of emotions that came along as a way of closing the distance between myself and the field. Some argue that it may even be damaging to the project for the ethnographer to keep a distance between themselves and their working environment (Fayard & Maanen, 2015). Stephanie Mazzetti (2016) reflected that there were easier and less challenging methods to research gathering than getting actively involved, but that the emotional attachments between informants and the ethnographer as well as the ethnographer's own emotional progression were invaluable in unpacking the "human" aspect of her quantitative research. Although I attempted to keep a certain level of distance in the field to maintain reflexivity on the juxtaposition between distance and proximity (Massey, 2011), I felt solidarity with Mazzetti's (2016) reflection. My professionalism was not practiced as an impartial, distant observer, but rather as an emotionally involved individual whose research was conducted from both the perspective of an insider as well as an outsider. Tasks were allocated to me with either implicit or explicit instructions to carry them out from the perspective of a volunteer but with the knowledge of an employee, demonstrating that QFB employees similarly recognized this status. Even though I continued to carry a "double agent-y" (Marcus, 2009) feeling, I decided to eschew neutrality in the field and get up to my elbows in moldy cheesecakes (literally and figuratively) alongside the employees to promote what I considered my professional duty: honesty with the data, the individuals, and the organization.

In Laura Hammershøy and Thomas Ulrik Madsen's (2012) article on business anthropology, they investigate ethical responsibilities to informants. They question where the

line between not doing harm and obstructing progress lies, and whether the superimposed ‘protector’ status does more harm in the long run than “contributing to a good project” (p. 66) would. According to them, the current guidelines for how to approach ethical interactions with informants in the field promote absolute neutrality and blanket protection for informants. Hammershøy and Ulrik Madsen (2012) argue that “in political and philosophical terms, there is simply no such thing as neutrality and to assume such a position could be construed as passively accepting the conditions presented” (p. 67). In other words, complete neutrality and informant protection has the potential to be completely unhelpful or devastating in its lack of assessment of consequences for the overall project’s outcomes. Putting our informants in such a position of being weak and in need of the ethnographer’s protection is both degrading and patronizing: deciding what is best for them does not take into account their autonomy, humanity, or what is actually in their best interests. To me, this means that ethics in the field are active, subjective, situationally dependent, and decidedly not neutral. They must be based upon honesty to yourself and your subjects at all times, as well as to the knowledge unveiled to you.

Towards the end of my project I approached what Labaree (2002) calls the “disengagement” stage of participant observation which, due to my “insiderness”, required particularly careful consideration. At this stage Zinn (1979) says the ethnographer needs to address their “obligations to their informants after leaving the setting” (in Labaree, 2002, p. 114). Carolyn Ellis (2007) reminds that this obligation is even more important if you create friendships -or the impression of friendship- with your informants as there can be the problem of “acting as a friend yet not living up to the obligations of friendship” (p. 10). Full disengagement is an impossibility as memories will stay both with the ethnographer and the informants long after the project has been completed, therefore disengagement should be done in a way that shows respect and gratitude to your informant community. Rita Astuti (2017) recommends revisiting one’s field site and informants so as to prevent exoticizing them. Although I did not fear this happening, after the completion of my project I continued to visit QFB to see how projects I had left behind were faring and to maintain the relationships I had made. My connections with QFB are ones which I hope to foster since it is an organization and team whose mission I wish to support and see flourish; therefore, my disengagement is of a soft nature which allows for future communication and interaction in the future.

4. Presentation of the Field

According to the QFB website, QFB is one of the largest non-profit food banks in state Q. Partnering with a large US based domestic hunger relief organization, its mission is to end hunger in state Q through provisioning food to those in need. To achieve this mission, it has partnered with a range of big-scale supermarket chains and suppliers, farmers (small and large-scale), and individuals who donate food to QFB. After receiving the food, QFB sorts and re-distributes it to partnering food distribution locations such as food pantries and shelters around state Q (QFB website).

Diagram 1 (below) is a representation of the system within which QFB exists. Although sourced from the European Food Banks Federation (n.d.), their process is similar to QFB’s making a comparison possible. Food flows into the food bank from food donors, is received and sorted within the warehouse by a mixture of employees and volunteers, then sent out for distribution to receiving organizations. Due to this the primary actors in the food bank system are: food donating organizations, QFB, volunteers, and the food bank recipients.



Diagram 1: Food Donation System

At QFB all pickups from donating organizations as well as deliveries to receiving organizations are done by QFB trucks. A standard day goes something like this: Todd, one of QFB’s truck drivers, brings a load in and immediately begins distributing the donations to their respective sectors: bakery, produce, dry goods, canned goods, and the refrigerated section. Hank, who has been working at QFB for ten years and has been at the warehouse since 5am, works at sorting foods in the refrigerated section while in the produce section the New Faith youth church

group chat gaily as they toss bell peppers into good (*sustenance*) and bad (*salvage*) piles. Matthew, a warehouse manager, zips from one end of the warehouse to another on a forklift making packages that Steve, another truck driver, loads onto his truck and takes for delivery to different organizations all across state Q. At QFB, trucks move constantly in and out of the warehouse docking stations as they bring or take away food, and the boxes for sorting seem endless. QFB makes a pointed effort to reduce food waste to get as much quality food out to receiving organizations as possible. Through collaborations with other businesses QFB has streamlined their processes so that *good* food (*sustenance*) goes towards feeding people, *bad* food (*salvage*) to pig and animal farmers, then the leftovers given to a state-run company to compost. In this manner they attempt to have minimal waste so that the majority of food reaches those in need.

During my time at QFB I spent countless hours in the warehouse talking with the employees from different sectors, especially those working in the refrigerated and fresh produce sectors. Every week I helped sort through incoming donations from different grocery stores, acquainting myself with the different types of food which commonly became waste, and dove into understanding the factors that defined this food as ‘*salvage*’. *Salvaged* foods at QFB, according to my research, are most often food that arrived rotten or too close to their expiry date for distribution, have too high of a sugar content (unwanted by receiving agencies), or with extremely short shelf life (ex. salads). While the majority of food arrive in good condition the amount of *salvage* that simultaneously arrives is flabbergasting, especially of the ones that were too close to expiring for distribution or which arrive already rotten.

From the employees I learned a common rumor at QFB: the only reason some businesses donate is for the financial or social credit they receive from donating. Although not physically present, FDOs’ presence is felt on a regular basis through the joy of the *sustaining* foods provided, but also in the keenly felt disappointment of their donated *salvage*. In many conversations with Hank, Matthew, and other coworkers, we lamented problems such as sorting through gigantic donated boxes that -due to the weight of the produce on top- have rotten middle layers. At the same time, we all worked passionately and in jolly moods because amidst our feelings of stress, discouragement, and sadness was also joy: we knew the food we were sending out was going to people in need and that what we were doing was worthwhile. Volunteers appeared to share this optimistic joy. Whether they spoke gaily with others or sorted quietly,

children, elderly couples, school groups, and other volunteers seemed to bring a light-hearted energy with them as they pushed shopping carts overflowing with breads, tossed good bell peppers into one pile and bad ones into another, and made assembly lines for packing canned and packaged goods bags. FDOs, QFB employees, and volunteers alike all collaborate together in this emotional rollercoaster to bring food in the warehouse doors, and send it out again to those in need.

All that I noted, all that I deduced, about FDOs, volunteers, and QFB came from my first-hand experiences in the warehouse, personal knowledge, observations, and research. QFB's workforce is composed of paid employees, and unpaid volunteers. My statements are not my speaking on behalf of QFB but rather my reflections on conversations with QFB employees and volunteers, observations in the warehouse, and personal experiences.

Defining a Food Bank

A noun, the Merriam-Webster dictionary defines a food bank as “a usually non-profit organization that collects donated food and distributes it to people in need” (Food bank, 2019). This is what a food bank has become culturally defined to be: a location for the gathering and distribution of food to those in need. If we parse it apart, what does each part of this word actually mean?

Food (noun):

- 1) “material consisting essentially of protein, carbohydrate, and fat used in the body of an organism to sustain growth, repair, and vital processes and to furnish energy”
- 2) “nutriment in solid form” (Food, 2019).

Biologically defined as the nutrients essential for life, food takes many shapes: soil, wood, insects, plants, fruit, and animals. For anything animate to survive it must have enough food to sustain itself; to grow, it must have a larger amount; to excel, it must have constant access to what it needs to grow and more. Food is a necessity for life.

Bank (noun):

- 1) “a mound, pile, or ridge raised above the surrounding level”
- 2) “an establishment for the custody, loan, exchange, or issue of money, for the extension of credit, and for facilitating the transmission of funds” (Bank, 2019).

Whether it is a mound piled up or an establishment where money flows in and out, a bank represents growth. Rising above what is around it, it is a collection: of money, of soil, of financial assets, of stones. What is the importance of a mound? When the rain is falling torrentially and our houses are in danger of being flooded, a mound of sand bags will keep the water back and protect the home. When choosing where to build castles or fortified buildings, architects chose the top of a mound so that gravity and the terrain would be on their side for defense. A mound creates safety. It creates protection. How does this apply to a bank as a financial establishment, and how does that definition change when combined with a necessity of life: food? Ask yourself what you do at a bank. You deposit money into a growing sum; you make withdrawals from that sum; you solicit the establishment for a loan of some of its large sum to use as your own. A financial bank is a mound of money that perpetually grows and decreases with usage where individuals and organizations alike can store or withdraw the investments they have put into it.

When put together, “food” and “bank” create a cultural phenomenon: an establishment where individuals with plenty can deposit food and individuals in need can withdraw it. It becomes a business whose commodity is charity and whose currency is food. In my observations, this is the foundation of how a food bank is defined by the culture of the United States. Definitions give power and structure to how people relate with each other and the world around them: “power is not an institution, and not a structure; neither is it a certain strength we are endowed with; it is the name that one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society” (Foucault, 1978, p. 93). How a food bank is defined by stakeholders such as their monetary donors, food donors, volunteers, and the communities in need that they serve determines the social structure it exists within as well as the power relations between itself and these stakeholders.

5. Volunteers

My grandmother loves to watch television. At least once a day she sees an advertisement by a large local non-profit asking for monetary donations to continue their humanitarian work in the community. Quite often I get an impassioned phone call about her sending a check and how wonderful the non-profit’s work is. At the end of the call she sounds content with herself that she

has done something useful for the organization. The feeling carries through the next few commercials until the cycle repeats and I inevitably get the same call again.

Like my grandmother, many of us feel our heartstrings tugged with empathy when we see or hear about philanthropic non-profit's work. This motivates some to write a check, and some to volunteer with the organization. QFB's lifeblood is the volunteers who make up their sorting workforce. They are an essential part of the organization's operation without which QFB would not be able to maintain the levels of food it receives and distributes around the state. According to Claire, a QFB employee, that level was over 30 million pounds in the 2017 fiscal year.

As an indispensable resource, volunteer definitions of QFB deeply affect how QFB runs its operations and how volunteers interact with it. This section will dive into motivations for volunteers to volunteer, how they volunteer, and QFB's interactions with its volunteers.

5.1 Motivations for Volunteers to Volunteer

The two main sights when entering QFB's warehouse are the mounds of food on all sides, and volunteers working in different stations. Sometimes sparse, sometimes (rarely) overwhelming, the amount of volunteers fluctuates throughout the year. During my observations I noted that individual volunteers are very rare; rather, people come as couples, families, school groups, church groups, and business team building groups. On a personal note, I felt comfortable volunteering alone only because I was already familiar with the QFB staff; otherwise, I would have felt very awkward going to volunteer without known company. Most organizations who do such activities are looking to promote bonding through group philanthropy. The organizations that create these types of volunteering groups, most prominently churches and small communities, "are run by retirees or people that just want to help." (Claire). School and church groups tend to consist of programs that individuals sign up for or do as part of their education. While church groups may range in age from young children to the elderly, school groups consist of young children up through high school. Businesses promoting team-building also bring their employees to QFB for group volunteering, as will families looking to do an activity together.

One family I spoke with was together for the holidays and wanted to do something for the community together, while another group with many small children was doing it as part of a day-care program. Children ran around distributing equal portions of cheese, crackers, puddings, and other shelf-stable foods to a fast-moving assembly line making bags for children's backpacks going about their tasks with great seriousness. They were tasked with distributing a certain item

to each bag, and if they failed to do so correctly someone called out to ask for it, sending the responsible child scurrying over with the missing item. From a slow working operation to an increasingly well-oiled routine, the children learned how to work together in the backpack bagging task, learning teamwork while being introduced to a way they could help others. Volunteering groups seemed to have two aims: teaching teamwork, and demonstrating how one expresses or does charity within the local culture.

In my own reflection of why I went to QFB in my youth it was because I wanted to do something meaningful – to help others. Growing up, my mother had raised me with volunteering at food banks, soup kitchens, and working with the homeless or poor. From a young age that is how I was taught to help others: call the organization, ask if they need help, and donate your time. Built on these childhood experiences, I had an expectation that organizations such as QFB always need help and would therefore be grateful for any amount of time I had to offer no matter how short. Indeed, even before volunteering I would choose the organization by what I imagined I would be doing and the impact of that work. With QFB, the expectation was that I would be sorting foods and feeling a sense of satisfaction in knowing that the food was going to people who need it. Even before going to volunteer, I could see the faces of the people who would receive the food and how much it would help them. It was apparent from other volunteers that they expected the same and were imagining the receiving faces in the way they spoke about food as going to an invisible “they.” Although not present, the recipients were clearly present in the minds of the volunteers as they talked about whether the sorted food should go in one pile or another for edibility, how this backpack or that needed one more soup or pudding, and whether or not “they” would eat this piece of fruit or not. Whether I was elbows deep in produce or putting together backpack packs, I observed how volunteer motivations play a part in how they define QFB.

A Culture of Volunteering

As stated previously, I rarely observed individual volunteers. Volunteering seems to be a social activity, one where through church groups, school, work, or one’s family life, individuals are taught a culture of volunteering one’s services for the betterment of the greater community. In Rebecca F. Taylor’s (2005) article, “Rethinking Voluntary Work”, she indicates that, as opposed to an innate desire, what determines an individual’s culture of volunteering is their “class, gender and cultural inheritance” (p. 134). Kayleigh Garthwaite (2017) offers evidence for

this by interviewing different individuals about their volunteering activities or lack thereof. In her study, she propositions that charity is conceived of between people of different social classes, and generally from the upper to the lower echelons. This results in an unintentional stigma for both those who give and those who receive with each side perceiving themselves and their actions with different levels of self-respect and moral satisfaction. When focusing on the givers, volunteers were found to feel that they had fulfilled their duties as a citizen of the community through active participation and that this validated their self-identified role in said community (Garthwaite, 2017). Community involvement is seen as a strong motivation for volunteers, and prosocial behavior the foundation for this motivation.

Prosocial behavior, defined as any voluntary action done to benefit another (Weinstein & Ryan, 2010; Dovidio, 2000), contains two categories: “helping and altruism” (Dovidio, 2000). Helping can be defined as “an intentional action that has the outcome of benefitting another person” (Dovidio, 2000, p. 324). Altruism is similar, but defined as “a special type of helping in which the benefactor provides aid to another person without anticipation of rewards from external sources for providing assistance while incurring some personal costs for taking this action” (Dovidio, 2000, p. 324-5). Volunteers most commonly purport to participate for altruistic reasons, using the time and energy they spend volunteering as examples of their personal investment. Some, on the other hand, openly admit to doing so for the *warm-glow effects*: i.e. feeling good for having done something they feel to be beneficial to others (Andreoni, 1990). In the warehouse, volunteers were very vocal about how it felt good knowing that they were helping others in their community.

In her article “Rethinking Voluntary Work”, Rebecca F. Taylor (2005) dove into the impetus of volunteers to volunteer. She found that individuals who come from households of an elevated socio-economic class are more predisposed to volunteer than those from less economically stable households. Correspondingly, her findings stated that the volunteering individuals were taught from a young age by their immediate family that they needed to be an ‘active citizen’ in their society (demonstrating prosocial motivations), while non-volunteering individuals were less likely to have that upbringing. In my own reflections, I was surprised to realize that my upbringing with volunteering had taught me that taking care of others was a necessary part of citizenry. In fact, even before setting foot into the warehouse, I took away a feeling of accomplishment and self-pleasure in the knowledge that I had taken a step towards

being an active citizen within society and in helping the community around me. This aside, it is important to clarify that the study's focus was understanding who volunteers and why, and that volunteering does not make an individual less or more of an 'active citizen'.

In her thesis about volunteers working with refugees in Sweden, Isabel Rescala (2016) also investigated volunteering motivations. Her findings uncovered that volunteers utilize prosocial behavior as a method through which they bolster their own self-image, explaining that prosocial behavior is both a gift to others and a gift to oneself. In this sense, the volunteer participates in a gift-economy with necessary giving and receiving aspects that unintentionally conflicts with their intention to give altruistically. Anthropologist Tomoko Hayakawa (2008) discusses this same type of prosocial gift economy through the term 'non-reciprocity': i.e. "giving without a return" (p. 3). "Volunteering does not fit into a traditional model of gift exchange" (p. 3), Hayakawa (2008) claims, defining it "between exchange and the gift, commercial market and one-sided giving, public and private" (p. 3). As a gift it is a selfish one where the volunteers (the givers) "do not expect a reciprocal gift from the receivers" (Hayakawa, 2008, p. 267), thus creating what is essentially a non-exchange of a selfish gift intended to provide self-fulfillment for the volunteer (Hayakawa, 2008).

None of the researchers found that volunteers were conscious or intentional in creating these non-reciprocal gift-economies, but that it was an unintentional side-effect of their desire to perform 'active citizenry' and prosocial behavior. This desire explains the motivation behind kind-hearted donors sending high-heels, woolen jumpers, and ice-skates to post-disaster tropical locations that overwhelm and flummox the receiving organizations (Brennan, 2017; Fessler, 2013), and prompt articles to be written with titles such as, "Please, don't donate trash to charities" (Board, 2018). Prosocial and volunteering behaviors are full of good intentions and complicated gift-refusing relationships.

Another important aspect of volunteer's motivations is their emotions and how volunteering affects them. Volunteering and prosocial behavior, as discussed, provides a *warm-glow* return to the volunteer that is deepened by their act of giving:

"the more we give, the more we come to care about the person to whom we are giving. We feel alive in the activity. And it is the receiver who has provided the opportunity for us to feel this good, so we feel loving in return" (Langer, 2000, p. 28).

This loving feeling is the result of taking action after the initial concern that some, like my grandmother, feel when seeing others in need. Such an emotional relationship with ‘active citizenry’ is what social psychologist C. Daniel Batson (2011) explains as the “empathy-altruism hypothesis”. He explains it thusly: feeling an emotion provoked by seeing someone in a state of need (empathy) creates a “motivational state” (altruism) whose goal is to improve that person’s welfare, subsequently appeasing the empathy felt (Batson, 2011). According to this theory, the person affected by the empathy is compelled to action due to this emotion, and that they only receive satisfaction after feeling successful in reducing the need held by the other party. John Dovidio (2000) supports Batson’s (2011) hypothesis while further theorizing that it is a combination of cognitive, social, and cultural influences which impact how a person volunteers, why they volunteer, and whether this act is starkly egoistic, altruistic or a blending of the two. Interestingly enough, when speaking with volunteers and from my own auto-ethnography, conflated with these other influences was another prevalent motivation: personal moral obligations.

Within moral obligations there are two needs: that of fulfilling a personal sense of moral obligation, and that of helping others do the right thing (Hartsock & Roark, 2015). Although not exclusive to these groups, school groups, families, and couples who volunteer together in particular exhibit these two needs. They do this through a combination of the opportunity to volunteer and of teaching the participants on how to act out charity towards others. It could even be said that in this manner charitable actions are taught to be the socially appropriate response to an arousal of empathy, leading to a social definition of altruism as an act of helping without expectance of reward (Dovidio, 2000). Michael Hartsock and Eric Roark (2015) explain that “a moral need, following from our moral nature, is the requirement to fulfill our moral obligations” (p. 237). This moral need is what volunteers seek to be satisfied through volunteering.

The birth of such a moral need is attributed to social pressures in collusion with religion in some circles. British anthropologist Jonathan Parry (1986) uses examples of Hindu almsgiving and Christian sacrifice to illustrate this connect, stating that “in all the major world religions great stress is laid on the merit of gifts and alms, ideally given in secrecy and without expectation of any worldly return” (p. 467). The reward for such charity is salvation after death (Parry, 1986), supported in both the Qur’an and the Bible with statements such as: “one who is gracious to a poor man lends to the LORD, And He will repay him for his good deed” (Proverbs 19:17,

New American Standard Bible) and “If you will advance God a handsome loan, He will compound it for you and forgive you” (64:17, Qur’an, Thomas B. Irving’s translation, 1993).

The number of religious groups who appeared regularly at QFB attested to moral obligation as a volunteering motivation, amongst many others.

From my observations and experiences, the strongest motivations for volunteering is an interest in increasing self-identification, personal validation through positive feelings such as the *warm-glow effect*, and the outside society (Weinstein and Ryan, 2010; Andreoni, 1990). These get them to the door and continue to influence how volunteers participate during the act of volunteering.

5.2 How to: Volunteering



Image 1. Raspberries placed in the “Next Day” pile by a volunteer, then removed and discarded by an QFB employee.

Playing with my phone, I wait for the clock to strike 10 am, the time I signed up to volunteer. As I wait, a family of five with three teenage children and a middle-aged couple join me in the lobby. 10 am arrives, and we are met by Dorothy, a smiling QFB employee, who launches into a three-minute speech about QFB as an organization and the type of work they do. After this we are ushered into the warehouse where forklifts honk as they speed by, employees shout out to each other, and we are led to one of the many areas to sort food.

Regardless of which area volunteers work in, the intent is to make sure that inedible food is sorted out so that only edible ones will be further sorted for distribution. The produce area has

multiple stages of this with 4-day piles (food that is very fresh and will remain so for a while), next day piles (food that needs to be consumed quickly), and compost tippers (food that is inedible). The compost tippers, piled high with moldy strawberries and squishy cucumbers, become either compost or animal food at the end of the day. QFB has collaborations with animal (mostly pig) farmers nearby: they receive the rotten foods for free, and in return give QFB fresh meat at the end of the year. Amanda, a volunteer, is happy about this collaboration, saying, “it makes you feel good to see */gestures at the compost tipper/* knowing that it’s going somewhere. That the pig farmers are going to use it and then give back pork at the end of the year. Then I feel it’s okay (to throw things out).” What is left over becomes composted through a separate collaboration.

The general rule of thumb amongst volunteers when sorting produce is to sort according to what you would do in your own kitchen.



Image 2. Bell peppers waiting to be sorted.

“Bruised, slimy, moldy, that’s honestly pretty much it. Even as far as expiration it’s like my own kitchen. Sometimes things are good for a week longer, sometimes not, so you go by looks. ... You’re not going to make other people eat what you wouldn’t” (Maria, volunteer).

Yet, although it was common knowledge amongst volunteers that the food would not go to waste, volunteers often expressed feeling sad or angry about putting it in the compost tippers - that it was a pity that the food did not go to someone in need. Sometimes this resulted in them ‘saving’ food by putting it in the next day or 4-day piles instead of the compost tipper. While sorting brussels sprouts, I spoke with volunteers about how they choose to sort items such as a carton of strawberries with one or two moldy berries inside or the squishy brussels sprouts. As she cleans a few wilted leaves off a brussels sprout, Josie -a volunteer in her early 50’s- pronounces it good with a satisfied, “even if they only get two bites from it, that’s two bites that they wouldn’t have otherwise had.” In this conversation and others, the guilt of giving food to animals as opposed to people was a prominent theme causing some to taking extra time to clean produce such as the brussels sprouts, or others to question how to sort. Deciding what will be

kept versus composted is an individual and social decision: when volunteers feel comfortable making the choice they do, but if they have any uncertainty they call out to others, “What do you think about this one?” Working in a group allows volunteers to feel connected both to the invisible recipients as well as each other. As a lone volunteer, I joined preexisting groups, giving me the warm feeling of being part of a team: a team who worked together for the good of others.

In my own experience with volunteering I found that the more I worked with actual food items, the more satisfied I felt with my work. Once when I arrived for my shift, I was surprised to be put to task sorting boxes of beverages: sodas and sugary drinks in one box, waters in another. Water is a necessity for people to have but sorting it does not feel as important to sort as when I handle food items. The biggest difference between the two is the imagined faces of those who receive it. While sorting food I can clearly imagine the collage of faces and hands that I would be handing the apple, zucchini, bread to; with waters, I feel no connection at all with the recipients. I feel useful and fulfilled by my work when I handle foods, but disconnected when managing beverages or non-consumables. In an assembly line of backpack packers, putting together bags of food that children could stuff in their backpacks, I can clearly see the receiving kids, making my heart swell with joy and fulfillment. While working with waters gives me no satisfaction, knowing that the food I am physically handling will find its way into the hands of someone who needs it brings a satisfaction that left me internally beaming.

Dictating the Volunteer Experience

QFB’s warehouse may be the physical location where volunteers do their service but their participation lies within an alternative dimension of their mind’s invention in what Michel Foucault (1986) calls a heterotopia. Situated within the real world, a heterotopia is a place composed of ideas or objects that do not naturally exist together (Foucault, 1986). For a heterotopia to function the people creating and interacting with it must have a fundamental understanding of how these unnatural settings work together (Foucault, 1986). In this case, volunteers take the warehouse full of food and connect it with financial insecurity and scarcity. The food bank becomes a place where food is a currency to be counted and sorted before bank patrons can withdraw it. Even invisible, the receiving community is a vital part of this constructed space as they compose the need for which the volunteers do their service. Even if the volunteers never place an apple directly into the hands of a food bank user, never feel the warmth of the recipient’s fingers on their own or hear their voice, statements such as that of receiving

two bites of brussels sprouts over none demonstrate that these actors are ever present in the volunteers' minds.

This cognizance can be explained through Benedict Anderson's (1991) concept of an "imagined community". An imagined community is socially constructed through an association of stereotypes or connection felt towards a body of people (Anderson, 1991). Mentally conjuring images of the people I was helping, volunteers speaking about "them" (the recipients), and volunteer decisions about whether or not to keep food clearly delineated the imagined community of volunteers working within the larger charity system from the imagined community of food bank recipients. Imagined communities can draw people together -the feeling of comradery I received from working alongside a group of strangers- or it can encourage an "us" versus "them" mentality that reinforces stigmatization and territorial boundary making (Gupta & Ferguson, 1992). In this case, volunteers acted as honorary bank tellers preparing a withdrawal of food for an imaginary customer. As a volunteer myself, I noted how this distinction made me feel as if I was a benefactor to others in my community, and how this feeling inadvertently created hierarchies in my mind between myself and the food bank users. Due to these boundaries, shame, hierarchies, and stigmatization are inherent in such relationships between communities where the food bank users feel they receive a gift (Caplan 2016; Garthwaite 2017) from the volunteers and larger organization too large for them to ever adequately reciprocate.

A gift economy, as explained by Mauss (2002), contains three obligations: "to give, to receive, to reciprocate" (50). Giving a gift creates an alliance between two parties wherein a debt is put upon the recipient which must be fulfilled through reciprocation. In this way, Mauss contradicts Bronislaw Malinowski (1922) who proposed the existence of a "pure gift, that is an offering for which nothing is given in return" (p. 176). According to Mauss (2002), "a gift is received 'with a burden attached' " (p. 53). Altruism in gift giving does not exist as the gift itself puts the receiver in debt to the giver. Every time I picked up a piece of food and put it aside for distribution, I imagined giving it to someone, knowing that I was giving without asking for anything in return. This created a hierarchy of myself as the gift giver and the food bank user as the recipient as well as unintentionally left the recipient without a means to equalize our statuses through reciprocation.

Parry (1986) takes this example to the extreme, going so far as to say that a 'pure gift' can be considered poisonous to the recipient if there is no expectation for return. Using the

example of Hindu priests in India, he explains that charitable alms are given as a sacrifice from the giver -embodying the giver's sins- and that the priests who survive on the alms must accept the sins with the gift although this forces the priests to carry the heavy burden of sins from which they cannot be cleansed (Laidlaw, 2000). Denial of reciprocity creates a situation where "the sewer becomes a cesspit" (Laidlaw, 2000, p. 629), or encourages what the American cultural anthropologist Marshal Sahlins (1972) defines as "negative reciprocity." Negative reciprocity is when each party in an exchange attempts to maximize their personal gains (Sahlins, 1972). Of course, when I pick up an apple and put it in the next day pile, the last thing I am thinking about is my own gain: instead, I smile with the thought of how it will feed an invisible person and take comfort in the thought that I am helping others. Kayleigh Garthwaite (2017) stipulates that volunteers who feel comfort as I do are inadvertently doing both a service and disservice to the food bank: we simultaneously help the users and perpetuate the stigmatization they feel.

In no other area is this more keenly obvious than when it comes to sorting food for consumption by people or by animals. Volunteers I spoke to knew about the pigs farmers, and that the food going into the compost tippers would not be wasted, but from personal experience I recognized why many of them gave that piece of produce a second, third, fourth look before choosing how to sort it. Like them, I sorted with an eye that wanted to give to people -not animals. The guilt of giving food to the compost tippers as opposed to into the hands of an invisible person is a pressure that jeopardizes a volunteer's ability to supplicate their empathy (Batson, 2011). In their own kitchens volunteers carry the ability of 'knowing in practice' described by Etienne Wenger (1998) as the tacit knowledge one carries of understanding how to do a task while in the process of doing it; however, at QFB their priorities change. Instead of sorting as they would do at home for their own consumption, the question of "Would I eat this?" transforms into a moral dilemma of "Can I justify taking this out of the mouth of someone else just because I may not eat it?"

Mary Douglas (1989) discusses this type of quandary in terms of culturally ascribed definitions of dirt and pollution. Removal of dirt demonstrates a "positive effort to organize the environment" (p. 2): what is defined as dirt and how it is removed is indicative of exactly what type of environment is considered culturally appropriate in that particular context. Volunteer sorting patterns clearly delineate what they consider dirt by the item's placement in one of the three containers: 4-day, next day, or compost tipper. Side by side with 'dirt', guilt also plays a

factor in sorting processes. In one observation session I watched as time after time volunteers were encouraged or commended by their peers on putting a piece of food in the next day pile as opposed to the compost tipper. Michael Green and Matthew Bishop (2012) explain this phenomenon through the concept of guilt, stating that “giving is all too often a product of guilt, peer pressure and emotion, rather than considered choices.” Only when the food was unquestionably bad was it chucked in the compost tipper, but only after a fraction of second of expressed regret.

In these situations, the moral character of the performer (volunteer) is on display through their sorting practices and the expression of their felt regret or guilt (Goffman, 1990) about not being able to pass along the piece of food to the imagined “they.” Erving Goffman (1990) writes extensively about how dramaturgy, or the performance one gives an audience, shapes such behaviors. Influenced by acting terms, Goffman (1990) explains dramaturgy as a performance using a myriad of tricks and props through which the performer attempts to influence their audience into believing a certain representation of themselves. The gift of food in the end is marginally less about the level of recipient satisfaction as it is of emotional satisfaction for the giver and confirmation of their defined persona as someone who gives charity.

Volunteers who come to QFB have done so to feed people. Through their sorting processes and behaviors I observed that they also have specific ideas of how volunteering should be done and what they expect to receive from the experience. From my observations and analysis, I concluded that from a volunteer’s perspective volunteering at QFB should include:

- 1) working first-hand with consumable items (food taking precedence over beverages),
- 2) a clear image of who will receive the food (recipients of a certain level of need), and
- 3) opportunities to validate an image of oneself as a charity provider through social interactions with others during the volunteering experience.

These are what I personally experienced and observed to be expected during the duration of volunteering. These expectations give insight into how the volunteer’s defined QFB, but before that can be discussed there is one more obligation to be addressed. Having received the gift of volunteering, if you will, QFB reciprocates with a gift of its own: an expression of gratitude.

5.3 Total Service Volunteering

“Thank you for spending your precious time and volunteering with us!” So began an email I received after volunteering at QFB (personal communication, December 28, 2018). The message continued with stating how important the work of volunteers is to QFB’s mission, calling each volunteer a “critical team member in our work” without whose assistance QFB’s work would not be possible (personal communication, December 28, 2018). By volunteering, I had personally helped QFB “touch the lives of tens of thousands of hungry children, seniors and families” (personal communication, December 28, 2018). Before receiving this email I had already felt pride and fulfillment within myself. In my thoughts I had helped feed people, helped my community, and done my part in terms of being an active citizen. The satisfaction I felt was amplified by the pleasant surprise of receiving this email. Reception of it deepened my feeling of fulfillment while also making me feel appreciated by an outside party.

Intended as a display of appreciation and to subliminally encourage future volunteering, both this email and the act of volunteering had an unintentional side effect of creating a feeling of completion. The gift of volunteering had been given, they had received it, and it had been reciprocated through the mixture of my own pleasure with that given by the email. The gift giving cycle had been completed, but instead of continuing to cycle through again, I felt a firm completion for the moment. Rather than be encouraged to volunteer again, it was as if my citizenship quota had been internally recognized and externally appreciated, leaving me to feel that this was the end of the transaction. My dues had been paid to the bank by my time handling food. In pondering when I would volunteer again, I realized it was a question of *if* I would volunteer again rather than *when*. How long does the feeling of having completed one’s part in taking care of the community last? Does it continue indefinitely or does it eventually fade and one feels the need to volunteer again? How can volunteers be encouraged to feed back into the gift cycle more regularly rather than once a year, or less? These are all questions QFB faces on a daily basis.

QFB’s statement that volunteers are critical members of their staff was not an exaggeration. Across its two offices in state Q, QFB has a total of 69 employees and distributes millions of pounds of food a year. The 20 to 200 volunteers a day make sorting all the incoming foods feasible (Claire). Such large number differences are due to a constant state of volunteer feast or famine. During the holidays and large events run by organizations such as schools and

churches there is an overabundance of volunteers filling up every cranny of the warehouse; at other times of the year there will be only a few. The need for volunteers is consistent throughout the year beyond the holiday seasons but those are the times most volunteers feel the need to be proactive. I remember calling QFB and other organizations around the holidays, feeling the urge taught to me by my mother to give help to the community at those times, and being told that they are overwhelmed. Each organization asked me to come at a different time, even a day or two after the holiday, at which point they would be happy to receive my help. After being told this it was rare that I would go volunteer right after the holiday season -even though they still needed help- because I felt reassured that the help they received before would be consistent and my own contribution was necessary. As I came to realize through working with QFB this was a delusion but not one I carried alone. QFB is constantly in need of volunteers, and whatsmore, they are in need of consistent ones who come on more than just the holidays.

“You can never have enough volunteers... 90% of the time we could always use more volunteers... If I was telling you it's 40 to 400 a day I'll still go, ‘Man, those days we have 40 we really needed 60,’ and that's always the case” (Claire). A problem QFB faces commonly is that a large percentage of volunteers are one-shots: they come once and either never come again or they come again after an extended time lapse. In both scenarios the QFB staff have to educate the volunteers on QFB procedures and train them how to sort. To cut down on precious sorting time lost during this process QFB has streamlined this into a “Here’s the instructions, here’s what to do, here’s how we do it” (Claire) format that puts volunteers to work as soon as possible. If a volunteer only has two hours to donate, and the likelihood of that volunteer coming back again is slim, every minute spent on training is a minute less of helpful hands in the warehouse. Consistent volunteering would mean that less time would be spent on training and the sorting process would become more efficient and effective correspondingly. This said, there needs to be more consistent volunteers for this to happen.

Continuing or Finishing the Volunteering Cycle

Within lived society the pure gift is an ideal but not a reality as successful, long-term relationships are strengthened through both parties feeling “effective and capable of caring. The recipe calls for both parties to be giving” (Langer, 2000, p. 28). Additionally, a gift exchange is understood to be undertaken between “rational individuals pursuing their self-interests” (Hayakawa, 2008, p. 266). Creating a sense of equality of giving instead of letting volunteers

rely upon self-fulfillment may be one motivating factor for QFB's after-volunteering email: investing into the increase of their (returnee) volunteer base is another.

Autonomous, volitional actions are the ones most likely to fulfil a person's *psychological needs satisfaction*, of which the basic needs are defined as "autonomy, competence, and relatedness" (Weinstein & Ryan, 2010, p. 223). Prosocial activities autonomously motivated have the highest emotional *psychological needs* return (Weinstein & Ryan, 2010) to participants' investment in the food bank of time and energy. Accordingly, to encourage volunteers to continue donating time in the future QFB's after-volunteering email appeals to the volunteer's personal gratification through positive reinforcement (Dovidio, 2000). Stating that the volunteer's impact has been upon local groups stereotypically vulnerable to hunger (children, seniors, and families) connects a feeling of relatedness between the volunteer and their activity. Such connections promote "closeness to others, positive responses from others, and cohesiveness or intimacy" (Weinstein & Ryan, 2010) which are attributed directly to the volunteer's interaction with QFB. Even during the volunteering experience QFB attempts to create this type of relationship, using the warehouse as a dramaturgical front (Goffman, 1990) in which signs are posted around the volunteer sections, informing them about how much food is distributed, the number of volunteers per year, and the importance of the volunteer's service. This demonstrates QFB's recognition of the importance of reciprocation in a gift-economy.

American anthropologist John Sherry Jr. (1983), who calls the reciprocation phase the reformulation stage, describes the importance of this stage thusly: "In the process of disposition, the gift becomes a vehicle by which the relationship of the donor and the recipient is realigned. The social bond may be strengthened, affirmed, attenuated, or severed in accordance with the partners' assessments of reciprocal balance" (p. 165). As reformulation signals the completion of the gift giving cycle, it is at this time that the recipient (the volunteer in this scenario) has the choice of continuing or discontinuing the gift giving exchange. This differs from Mauss's (2002) theory where a gift economy requires an obligatory perpetual exchange of gifts as a manner of increasingly strengthening their community and interpersonal relationships. In the case of QFB's relationship with volunteers, selfish giving (Hayakawa, 2008) seems to combine with the reformulation phase (Sherry Jr., 1983) in this specific situation to create less of Mauss's (2002) cyclical gift economy and more of a start-to-finish straight line of exchange. Providing an arena within which volunteers can fulfill their internal and external *psychological needs satisfaction*

has resulted in an unexpected negative consequence for QFB. Rather than investing long-term and taking credit from QFB's reserves of *warm-glow*, volunteers seem to be content with their withdrawals and -after their exchange- put their account with QFB on hold until the next time their reserves get low.

5.4 Volunteer Definitions of QFB

A mound of deposited food. One definition of a "food bank", this is undoubtedly what awaits a volunteer when they enter the warehouse both in reality and in their mind's eye. Volunteers arrive at QFB with slightly different assumptions of what their experience will be like but all with the assumption that they will interact with food that will go to people in need. At QFB volunteers can deposit time and energy in order to withdraw moral satisfaction and personal validation. In a sense, volunteers are feeding their emotional and moral well-being through working at the food bank. They go there because, much like a bank, it is a location where ideals of philanthropy have been constructed. Through my observations of volunteers' lived experiences, I determined that volunteers generally define QFB in the following three ways.

1) A Philanthropic Hub

QFB is an area where volunteers come to practice philanthropy. Volunteers come there to actively participate in philanthropic activities, to teach others (e.g. small children) how one does philanthropy, and where one learns how philanthropy can be done within their society. It is also a place where conceptualizations of what philanthropy is are constructed, then reinforced, through the expectations volunteers bring with them and the activities they do. In this way, QFB is a place where a specific kind of philanthropy is practiced. The assumptions brought with volunteers that the philanthropic work done by QFB is with food and populations in need dictates how they expect to volunteer. This in turn influences QFB's interactions with the volunteers and what type of tasks it asks them to do.

2) A Drive-Through Good-Will Trip

From my data I identified that the majority of volunteers are single-time volunteers, or they are repeat volunteers but only during specific types of year. Instead of an area where people regularly frequent and spend time, QFB serves as a location one can visit quickly, fill up on *warm-glow*, and leave again, which leads into the next definition...

3) A Protein Bar

Much like eating a protein bar instead of lunch on a busy day, volunteers tend to have a time slot within which they sign up to do service and a certain amount of psychological need satisfaction they aim to fulfil. Their received satisfaction for the short time spent generally fulfils their need, leaving them content and uninterested in future participation until their 'hunger' returns later.

These definitions overlap each other throughout the duration of the volunteer experience. Not necessarily good or bad, they simply are what has been observed to be lived. These definitions demonstrate that volunteers are content to use QFB's services so long as their experience contains actively working with food and an immediate satisfaction of their psychological needs. This does not make their activities any less appreciated but it does illuminate why QFB's relationship with volunteers is in a constant state of feast or famine.

Having addressed the volunteer perspective, the next chapter discusses FDOs and how they define QFB. This in turn gives an even fuller definition into how stakeholders associated with QFB define this organization and the impacts this has upon their interactions.

6. Food Donor Organizations (FDOs)

How the Food Donation System Works

A walk around QFB takes you past rows of boxed bell peppers, breads and desserts in shopping carts, shelves over ten feet tall containing everything from canned soup to individually packed fruit gummy snacks, an area for repackaging dry bulk goods, and more. Where does this food come from? Some is bought, but according to one of QFB's marketing managers, Cordelia, the majority (up to 74%) is donated from FDOs.

As seen in the chart on page 17, in the EU donated food is collected by food banks, taken to the food bank's warehouse, sorted, and then distributed. This model holds true for QFB who picks up food donations from FDOs using their own trucks before continuing with the rest of the process. This donation process within the US is possible due to the Bill Emerson Good Samaritan Food Donation Act of 1996 (2010). In order to encourage businesses to increase their food donations, this act sets a standard for what constitutes negligence or misconduct in terms of donated food products. By doing so it protects food donors (both individuals and organizations) from liability when donating to a non-profit organization on the contingency that their donated

items are donated with the good faith and belief that these items are above that standard. Should it be found after donation that this product is unfit for consumption it depends entirely on whether it was donated with or without this knowledge as to whether legal action can be taken against the food donor. Therefore, the ‘good will’ aspect of this act is of the utmost importance when considering food donations.

With this in mind, the topic at hand is revealing how different stakeholders define a food bank with this section’s focus on the FDO perspective. The following sections demonstrate and analyze a variety of incentives that motivate businesses to donate food to QFB, complementarily present the different types of food donations received, and end in a discussion of FDO definitions of food bank.

6.1 FDO Motivations

Philanthropy



Image 3. A box of packaged foods received from an FDO

Looking at the rows upon rows of canned, boxed, and fresh food stacked almost to the warehouse ceiling, I sometimes found it difficult to remember that these were primarily the result of donations. According to QFB staff, one of the motivations for food donations is because the FDO believes in QFB’s mission of feeding the needy. The FDO supports this mission through food when possible. Claire, a QFB employee who works closely with the FDOs partnered with

QFB, stated that she often heard FDOs say that “We'd rather give it to you than throw it away. We'd rather do that than waste it. We'd rather see it go [to you]. You guys do a good job.” She went on to say:

"Some of them donate to us because they see our mission, what we're doing, and they go a step further and want to support us even more... A couple I know are giving food to 7-8 different organizations at the same time throughout the week. "

Philanthropy, or the act of promoting the wellbeing of others, therefore seems to be one motivation.

Philanthropy Discussion

According to Ellen J. Langer (2000), “every time we do something for someone else we feel effective, useful and generous” (28). More than this, the act of doing something for someone else makes one feel alive, receiving a *warm glow effect* which increases one’s feeling of positivity (Andreoni, 1990). In this way the FDOs are completing what Mauss (2002) specifies as the third part in a gift economy: reciprocation. In this case, the act of giving a gift altruistically wherein one maximizes the recipient’s pleasure (Sherry Jr., 1983) has the reciprocal effect of increasing the giver’s happiness with the *warm-glow effect*. The resulting symbiotic relationship formed can bypass the necessity of a physical gift in return (Parry 1986) due to the disinterested spirit in which the original gift was given. Given this case, philanthropic FDOs receive a moral and emotional boost from their donation therefore improving their own wellbeing in the venture to assist others.

Philanthropic gift-givers can also exhibit prosocial behavior. As previously discussed, prosocial behavior is widely accepted to have an effect upon both the helper and the recipient, simultaneously improving their individual well-beings (Weinstein & Ryan, 2010). Prosocial behavior’s *warm-glow effects* for the giver are reliant upon the level of autonomy mediated by the *psychological need satisfaction* (Weinstein & Ryan 2010). As would be expected, the higher the level of volitional help, the greater the need satisfaction and resultant increase in the giver’s well-being (Weinstein & Ryan 2010). Since FDOs reach out to QFB to create partnerships, I inferred that their volition level (and subsequently need satisfaction) is quite high, and that their investment in the food bank is internally rather than socially motivated.

As mentioned earlier, the two aspects of prosocial behavior are helping and altruism. Helping is the outward action taken to assist another's wellbeing whereas altruism is defined as the motivation for this helping (Dovidio, 2000). Altruism specifically relates to a type of help in which "the benefactor provides aid to another person without anticipation of rewards from external sources for providing assistance while incurring some personal costs for taking this action" (Dovidio, 2000, p. 325). Philanthropic FDOs exhibit such behavior since the food that they donate represents a sunk cost for them, not to mention the time and effort it takes to coordinate with QFB for pickups. Altruism can also be viewed through the lens of the "empathy-altruism hypothesis" (Batson, 2011) which emphasizes satisfying one's personal need satisfaction through helping others. Therefore, although it is considered altruistic, the giver (in this case the FDO) does indeed receive something back in the feeling of having increased someone else's well-being as opposed to Dovidio's (2000) definition which states that the giver receives nothing in the exchange. For FDOs who feel that their donation has had an impact, the gift they receive in return is that of the *warm-glow* feeling and their own need satisfaction for their empathy.

Overall, most theories on altruistic helping and prosocial behavior agree that behaviors such as donating food to a non-profit organization are done primarily for the *warm-glow effect* and because they are seen to be socially appropriate behaviors (Dovidio, 2000). Therefore, philanthropic FDOs, may be motivated to donate as a result of socially accepted behaviors and positive need satisfaction through the *warm-glow effect* of their prosocial behaviors. This is, of course, but one of their motivations that helps highlight FDO definitions of a food bank.

Financial Incentives



Images 4 & 5. Onions waiting to be sorted.

During a go-along with Matthew, a warehouse manager, he took me over to a long row of onion bins that were waiting to be sorted. I was shocked that there were so many of them, asking him where they came from and why they were so many. They came from farmers, he said, then shook his head in disbelief saying: “All these onions- they were going to throw. Every single one. ... Mainly because they’re too small. But I mean look at this. What the hell? It’s a great onion. And they were going to throw them all.” Matthew and I shared a moment of quiet disbelief, shaking our heads as we picked up perfectly good onions that would have become *salvage* if QFB hadn’t needed them.

As time went on and I became accustomed to the flow at QFB, I became increasingly aware of the strong emotions that myself and the QFB employees in the warehouse felt on a daily basis. Entering into the warehouse, I felt overwhelmed by the tones of food that came in each day and the never-ending rows of produce bins taller than my 6-foot head waiting to be sorted. QFB employees and I often chatted about the stressed, rushed feeling we felt of needing to receive-sort-package-distribute food as quickly as possible so as to get it into the hands of people who needed it before it became *salvage*. When our discouragement with the amount of *salvage* became too much -as it commonly did- we threw around ideas about how to reduce it with an air of determination. In the refrigerated section Hank, my closest coworker in the section, and I had daily conversations about the heavy sadness and distress we felt at the sight of beautiful food becoming *salvage*. It always came back to the question of how to get as much of the food to people as possible while it was still *sustenance*, and before it became *salvage*.

Boxes of produce such as the pictured onions are a common occurrence with the typical reason they arrive being because the farmer wasn’t able to sell the product to the broker firms they are associated with due to size, appearance, and quality regulations. From interviews I learned that these regulations are dependent on consumer quality standards and expectations of how food should look. The excess which does not fit these standards are therefore unsellable according to the grocery stores, meaning that they become donations to food banks, *salvage*, or both. Instead of letting it go to waste, the farmer then either donates the produce to QFB or sells it to them for a vastly reduced price. In the US when an organization donates food to a non-profit organization they are entitled to a tax write-off based on the weight of their donated product. This allows businesses who donate to receive financial compensation in the manner of lower taxes for their donation. Alister, one of the QFB administration officers, referenced this as the

main reason that organizations donated: “if they throw it away they won’t get any credit for it, but if they give it to us it’s called receiving.” He continued to explain:

“...and if it’s a donation that then goes in their tax records and they get credit for that as a donation. And so they’re mildly incentivized to make as many things into a donation as possible so it’s not just a straight loss.”

Another reason that businesses will donate is to make up for the cost of unsold produce to prevent a straight loss, or as Claire phrased it: “How do I get a little bit of something for this product I can’t sell?” Claire illustrated this point through an example of an FDO potato farm who -for various reasons- couldn’t get tax write-offs for their donations and therefore sold excess produce to QFB for a reduced price:

“[The potato farm has] overruns and they don't have a big enough facility to just throw them away. They want to try to prevent some costs and save some money. They paid some labor in the bag cost so if they can sell them to us dirt cheap then they can at least cover some of that cost with it and move product out and not throw it away. They're not looking for tax write-offs because they're not paying taxes for the most part. They're looking, ‘How do we cover costs?’”

For FDOs, excess food takes up inventory space which costs the business money (Claire); therefore, moving their product either to disposal or donation is to their benefit. “If we're going to get rid of it how do we maximize that? Let's get a tax savings by donating it versus throwing it away” (Claire). Therefore, for some FDOs donations are good business sense because it either compensates them in terms of tax write-offs or through selling the produce inexpensively to QFB, as was done with the onions. The end result is the same: inventory space is cleared up for fresh produce and there is (some) financial compensation for their product instead of a straight loss as would have been the case with straight disposal.

Financial Incentives Discussion

In contrast to philanthropic motivations, financial ones seem to be motivated by an interest in improving one’s personal well-being as opposed to focusing on improving another’s. Netta Weinstein and Richard M. Ryan (2010) ask, “do people help because they enjoy helping or care about others (altruism) or is their helping instrumental to some other goal (egoism)?” (225).

According to Batson (2011) altruism is “*a motivational state with the ultimate goal of increasing another’s welfare*” (20); the opposite of which is egoism defined as “*a motivational state with the ultimate goal of increasing one’s own welfare*” (20). Speaking with volunteers and QFB employees alike, as well as peering into myself, my conclusion is that there is no clear delineating line between these motivational states. Instead, they are a shade of grey that seesaws between the involved parties depending on whose welfare is improved in the moment.

The donation then comes back to the concept of the gift and the motivation behind its being given. QFB’s role in the gift-economy is between that of the giver (the FDO) and the recipient (people in need). It acts as a facilitator who both receives food donations on behalf of the recipients and gives back to the FDO in the form of tax write-offs or payment. Marshall Sahlins (1972) proposed that, beyond Mauss’s (2002) obligations within a gift economy, there are three types of reciprocity: generalized, balanced, and negative. Generalized allows for great flexibility in the timing and equality of the reciprocated gift, balanced demands an equal and timely return, and at the end of the exchange in negative reciprocity both parties seek to maximize their gains even at the expense of the other (Sahlins, 1972). Each form of reciprocity is located within a different level of social proximity meaning that the closer one is to the recipient the more lenient the roles of reciprocity (Sahlins, 1972). In this case, philanthropic FDOs may feel as if there are in a generalized reciprocal relationship with QFB since they do not receive a physical nor immediate gift but rather one that is found within themselves, and financial FDOs may feel a more balanced reciprocal relationship with QFB due to their exchange of physical goods (food and money).

Therefore, according to this analysis FDOs who donate for tax write-offs and/or to compensate for sunk costs can be described as partial egoist FDOs in a relationship of balanced reciprocity with QFB. I say partial because FDOs are companies who need to create revenue in order to pay their employees, therefore their actions are partially for the betterment of society and partially to provide for their staff. Neither egoist or altruist is intrinsically better than the other, as will be shown later, but for the purpose of determining what definitions each actor has towards QFB it is helpful to distinguish what motivates FDOs to donate.

Publicity

Earlier in this thesis I mentioned a common rumor at QFB being that the only reason some businesses donate is for the credit they receive from donating. Credit is defined both as

financial incentives and as good publicity. As Alister previously said about FDOs being incentivized to donate based on tax deductions, it is also profitable for the business to do so from a publicity standpoint. According to Daniel N. Warshawsky (2016), who studied the Kroger brand's combination of philanthropy and business through food donations, the Kroger brand has been using this type of publicity for years. Through programs such as the Perishable Donations Partnership and the innovation reclamation programme, Kroger donated more than 50 million pounds of food in 2012 to food banks across the US (Warshawsky, 2016). Walmart does similar programs such as its annual "Fight Hunger. Spark Change." campaign:

"Walmart today launched its annual 'Fight Hunger. Spark Change.' campaign, which this year brings new ways that customers can participate to help support the Feeding America network of 200 local food banks. For the 2018 campaign, Walmart and Feeding America are doubling their meal goal to 200 million meals and expanding supplier participation to 14 companies. In addition, customers can now use the Walmart Credit Card to contribute, and Walmart has enlisted social networking site Nextdoor to spur community discussion about the local impact of hunger in select cities" (Redman, 2018).

For Canada, the 2017 Walmart Canada "Fight Hunger. Spark Change." campaign donated 8 million pounds of food with a goal of 10 million for 2018 (Food Banks Canada Blog, 2018). Food Lion, a grocery food store chain known for its discount prices, also publicizes its donations with statements such as, "Food Lion will donate nearly \$18,000 in food and gift cards this week to local food bank and agency partners" (Food Lion, 2019) and making programs where "each time a customer scans his or her MVP savings card at the in-store MVP kiosk, Food Lion will donate one meal* to help end hunger in the customer's local community" (Food Lion, 2018) up to a total of 500,000 meals (Food Lion, 2018). Kroger, Walmart, and Food Lion are all partners with Feeding America which streamlines their donations to food banks across the country, meaning that their felt effects are both local and national. According to Claire, these types of corporate relationships require or guide affiliated grocery stores, businesses, and warehouses to partner with local food banks and food bank suppliers. "It's part of their checklist," she explained factually, "Are you donating what you can't sell? And are you giving to the right places?" Donations are a part of the accepted, regular business practices that benefit both society and the organizations.

Beyond private advertising, FDOs also use food banks to publicize these demonstrations of charity through the food banks private and public networks. As a subscriber to the QFB newsletter, I receive emails about QFB programs and updates including posts of gratitude to the agencies who are or have donated food (or other types of donations). On the QFB website, recognition of FDOs by name and specifying their donation types is spread throughout their pages, as is similar to the Food Banks Canada Blog (2018) which posted about the Walmart's "Fight Hunger. Spark Change." campaign. These understandable displays of gratitude are critical for the business' reputations as it grows their client base far beyond their headquarters through indirect means. This type of marketing is similar to that of mixing product/stores with philanthropic satisfaction. In Walmart's "Fight Hunger. Spark Change." campaign, buyers can contribute via credit card or in-store while at the checkout (Redman, 2018); similarly, Food Lion enables customer donations through scanning one's MVP savings card in-store (Food Lion, 2018). Both of these campaigns require customers to enter their stores, utilize their services, and reward them with a gift of feeling philanthropic. As a product brand, Kroger does not have such incentives however positioning itself as a socially responsible brand associated with Feeding America has markedly boosted the brand and increased its long-term profitability and market share (Warshawsky, 2016). An administrator at the Feeding America run Freestore Foodbank explained,

"Kroger's reclamation programme helps us feed hungry neighbours in our community, but it also helps Kroger in the long-run as well. If we move people to self-reliance and self-sufficiency, they are going to be consumers of Kroger. In this way, Kroger's donations are good for business as they increase the number and loyalty of Kroger shoppers as well" (qtd. from Warshawsky, 2016, p. 391).

Although Warshawsky (2016) focused upon the Kroger brand specifically, his conclusions could be applied to Walmart, Food Lion, and other FDOs as well: "findings in this study suggest that Kroger has promoted its sustainability programmes as a way of facilitating long-term profitability, brand enhancement, and cultural legitimacy as a company" (p. 391-2). Advertising donations and making schemes where customers who use their stores/products are able to help people in need help FDOs associate the *warm-glow effect* and philanthropic needs satisfaction customers feel with themselves. Analyzing these practices provides yet another insight into the way that FDOs view and interact with food banks.

Publicity Discussion



Image 6. A Food Lion Feeds food donation promotion.

It is well known that businesses, to survive, need to weigh the cost and rewards of their procedures carefully. Dovidio (2000) explains costs and rewards when helping others in two categories: “those for helping (e.g., time, danger) and those for not helping (e.g. guilt or shame)” (325). Socially, the rewards are far more for helping than for not. Additionally, once one has helped and receives such positive reinforcement, the likelihood of helping again in the future is increased (Dovidio, 2000). This being the case, FDOs are rewarded for their donations since it depicts them as prosocial. Another way to perceive this is through the lens of dramaturgy.

As previously explained, dramaturgy, or performativity, expounds that all individuals (or in this case, groups) are actors on a stage, performing a specific persona for an audience with the intention of convincing them of that persona’s genuineness (Goffman, 1990). When one encounters an audience, the actor can and will use any number of dramaturgical devices or props to produce the verisimilitude of their projected persona (Fallers, 1962). Props such as clothing, bearing, and posture will influence others to attribute certain qualities to the individual (Goffman, 1956), providing an outside image through which society can judge the actor. Designing and portraying such a demeanor is the actor’s constant task as society’s eyes are ever watching and scrutinizing to determine the sincerity of the actor’s performance (Goffman, 1956).

FDOs’ food donations are extremely susceptible to scrutiny from their audience of consumers due to their being a for-profit business. For this reason, these FDOs use stage manipulation to inform their customers about their donations in a socially acceptable fashion. Goffman (1990) explains that actors attempt to manipulate the situation within which they are performing in order to convey a specific perception of both themselves and their actions to the audience. The point of this is to influence the responses of the audience to his performance in a way that is favorable to his ending objective (Goffman, 1990). One of the tools that FDOs use for such staging is what Goffman (1990) refers to as the ‘front’. The front refers to the situational

setting of the performance both physically and atmospherically. Fronts are utilized during an interaction with the audience to give dramatic proof of otherwise invisible facts and credit to or confirmation of one's professed persona (Goffman, 1990). One example of a front is the Food Lion Feeds image at the beginning of this section. Such signs notify customers of the benefits that buying specific items will have upon their community while making visible Food Lion's position as a proud Feeding America ally and FDO. As FDOs are businesses who need customers to keep their doors open and employees paid, promoting their philanthropy through dramaturgy is seen as a win-win situation for both their business and the food bank.

Another part of the win-win cooperation between FDOs and food banks is indirect publicity. As previously stated, QFB and other researched food banks such as the Food Banks Canada Blog publicly thank FDOs for their donations on their websites -sometimes on their front page (Food Banks Canada, 2018). Such publicity is beneficial to the FDOs in bolstering their otherwise invisible work. Dramatization of one's own activities and achievements can be seen as crass and prideful (Goffman, 1990); therefore, the actor in question needs to put considerable effort into making their actions/qualities apparent while simultaneously hiding the effort expended to make the unveiling seem effortless (Goffman, 1990). In return for the donation of food, food banks advertise the actions of their partnering FDOs in a way that creates indirect but solid proof of the FDOs philanthropic persona.

At this point it becomes necessary to discuss why QFB and other food banks help in the construction of the FDOs persona. In the foreword to Mauss's (2002) book, *The Gift*, Mary Douglas states that gift giving is about "politics and economics" (Mauss, 1990, p. xiii) revolving around "the theory of human solidarity" (Mauss, 1990, p. xiii). Although the giving of a gift may be a social obligation, the act of giving in public situations is done to demonstrate "generosity, freedom, and autonomous action, as well as greatness" (Mauss, 2002, p. 29). The recipient is then burdened by the weight of the gift and can only be freed from it through reciprocation. In the case of QFB when it is not paying for the food received, the most complete return gift that they can offer FDOs is to publicly express gratitude for the gift. Doing so gives a gift to the FDO of accreditation for its actions in the public eye.

Disruptions in the Actor's Performance

Up until this point the discussion has been about the construction, performance, and crediting that an FDO manages in relation to its food donations to organizations like QFB. However, not all performances are perfect.

“An Oklahoma Wal-Mart store is holding a food drive for its own employees” (Peterson, 2014). This news reported by BusinessInsider tells the story of the backlash Wal-Mart has received when it hosted a food drive for employees suffering hardships, or “to help employees pay for Thanksgiving dinner” (Peterson, 2014). Other articles have similar stories: employees being unable to survive on their monthly wages and having to supplement with food bank resources (Kasperkevic, 2014). The intention of these stories is to bring to light the insufficient wages paid to Wal-Mart employees however their secondary effect is to display the hypocrisy of Wal-Mart's philanthropic performance as an FDO when its own employees are food insecure. Wal-Mart is one example of an FDO where a crack in its dramaturgical persona came to light; Kroger brand is another. As previously discussed, Kroger brand has a thriving relationship with Feeding America and food banks all across the USA which gives great clout to its philanthropic performance. With good reason it is commended for its prosocial business tactics; nonetheless, as was proven in the previous statement that “if we move people to self-reliance and self-sufficiency, they are going to be consumers of Kroger” (Warshawsky, 2016, p. 391), Kroger has a vested self-interest in promoting its philanthropic persona.

As carefully constructed as actor's personas are, when the audience sees into the actor's backstage area such as with the aforementioned Wal-Mart news articles, it can make them skeptical of that persona, reveal the actor's perceived inner objective (Fallers, 1962), an inspire accusations of greenwashing. At such times the display of gratitude from food banks may serve as a salve, or defensive measure, to save the FDOs defined persona (Goffman, 1990). Food banks do not benefit from their benefactors losing face so it is in their best interest to defend their gift giving partner through such defensive measures. Such interactions demonstrate that FDO definitions of QFB, and food banks, goes beyond a simple exchange partnership to an interwoven social relationship.

Motivations Discussion

“All the world’s a stage, /And all the men and women merely players”.

William Shakespeare, *As You Like It*, Act II, Scene VII, lines 139 -140.

In this section the most prevalent observed motivations for FDOs to donate to QFB has been discussed and categorized as: philanthropic, financial incentives, and for publicity. These are by no means the only motivations for food donations nor are they exclusive. Goffman (1990) proposed that all performances are compelled by two polar motivations: ‘sincerity’ whereby the performer is “sincerely convinced that the impression of reality which he stages is the real reality” (p. 28); or ‘cynical’ wherein “the performer may be moved to guide the conviction of his audience only as a means to other ends” (p. 28). In my data I found that such polarity is unrealistic. FDOs may -and often do- have multiple reasons for donating, often in combination with each other. What is important to emphasize is that FDO motivations are displayed through their collaborative performance with food banks, which results in public personas for both.

How a performance is given is dictated by what is most effective within the current social arena and what the overarching culture of the location is (Goffman, 1990). Choosing whether or not to publicize one’s donations, or whether one has the resources to spend the time and money on making donations, are indicators of an FDO’s social mobility: the more they are able to do, the better they will be perceived by society (Goffman, 1990). Big stores such as Wal-Mart and Food Lion may be able to advertise their donations with positive responses while smaller stores or farms may not have the resources to do so. Unfortunately, this means that some FDOs will be caught in what Goffman (1990) calls “the dilemma of expression versus action” (p. 43) where they have to choose between doing a task well or giving the appearance of having done well. If an FDO has the time to donate but not to sort its donations according to what is *salvage* versus what is edible, do they still publicize their donations? And if so, how do they give the semblance of having made a ‘good’ versus a ‘bad’ donation even with the inclusion of *salvage*? At QFB, Alister’s experience in business gave him an insight into how this is done:

“[For national corporations] our numbers roll up with everybody else’s food bank numbers. And you bet corporate is gonna take that and say, “Across the United States we did blah blah blah level of donation.” And you should in your head

discount part of that because there's 10-15% of trash most likely in all of those store donations they come across.”

To clarify how this aspect affects FDO definitions of food banks, the next section will discuss the types of donations received and QFB's relationship with FDOs and donated *salvage*.

6.2 Types of Donations Received

High-Quality Products to “Geeeeeenuine Crap”



Images 7 & 8. Donated watermelon chunks that arrived as *salvage*.

There are three overarching types of food donations that QFB receives from FDOs: high-quality products with long expiration dates, good quality food with short shelf-life, and *salvage*. Picking up a plastic container of half-disintegrated watermelon chunks, Matthew, a warehouse manager, explained the types thusly:

“[Store name] is great. They give us lots of things. But with the good comes the bad. We also get... I don't want to say crap, but they'll give us five pallettes of this [rotting watermelon chunks]. It's not good. Even if we wanted to we can't give it away and that takes up our time trying to figure out what to do, to find a place to throw it. It's just a pain.”

High-quality food donations are typically the result of stores overpreparing or farms overproducing. Palettes (see above photo for an example of a palette size) of these overprepared items and boxes such as the onions arrive once or twice a week. This is fantastic for QFB as it means that they have fresh and high-quality food which is not in danger of spoiling quickly and can be distributed to a wide range of partner organizations. Good-quality food is similar to high-quality in that it is still edible but due to a myriad of reasons it tends to have a short shelf that requires immediate or quick distribution and consumption. Some examples are salads, leftover berries from a supermarket, cheesecakes, and non-freezable prepared items such as potato salad and meal kits. Then there is *salvage*.

“I feel like all these stores and all these places, they use us as a dump. They walk through their shit and they go, “Oh my god. Yeah, send that to QFB” knowing that they’re looking at a palette of melons that’s leaking on the floor because half of them are rotten. We can’t give a melon away that used to be round and hard, and is now a quarter sized and squished. But that happens a lot.”

(Matthew, one of QFB’s warehouse managers)

On the first day at QFB one of the chief complaints I heard is that FDOs treat QFB as a dumping ground. Mixed in with the good food is food that is straight up *salvage*: items that were held on to for too long by the FDO before donation so that it arrives either rotten or with too short of a shelf life making redistribution impossible. Packaged and precut fruit prepared for consumer convenience arrives in stacks of 10-15 palettes per week with half either as *salvage* or on the precipice. Claire explains this to me as the result of grocery stores trying -as they must as a business- to get more direct profit from their product by holding on to it longer, using discounted prices as a buying incentive. While at QFB, standing in the warehouse and chatting with the employees, I often heard them hypothesize another theory: laziness on the behalf of the FDO. Since QFB picks up the donated foods from the FDO, it is easier to put all the food aside for donation than to sort it themselves. Sorting takes time and money therefore not sorting is the easier route. As the Bill Emerson Good Samaritan Act of 1996 (2010) extends to protect QFB’s donations to its partner organizations, it becomes incumbent for QFB to sort the food they receive so that they can redistribute it with good will. Alister, one of QFB’s administrative officers, breaks down QFB’s processes thusly:

“When we get stuff we actually sort it, clean it up blah blah blah. As long as the trash percentage is below 10, 15%, I don’t sweat it very much because there’s always going to be some trash that gets in. [Store name] is a great example. They’ll send us genuine crap. Geeeeeeenuine crap. And when it creeps above that then we’ll yell at them and they get better about it for a while.”

In order to safely redistribute foods as protected under the Bill Emerson Good Samaritan Act of 1996 (2010), any *salvage* that QFB receives becomes their responsibility. They dedicate time, energy, and money towards sorting *salvage* from *sustenance*, and disposal of the *salvage*. Waste management takes up valuable volunteer time and QFB resources, but is necessary to enable donated foods to find their way into the food bank user’s hands.

Remember that common rumor among QFB staff about FDOs donating only for the financial or publicity credit received? A substantial, but invisible, aspect of this credit is due to the amount of *salvage* ‘donated’. When FDOs give a donation, they weigh the total sum of their donation (including *salvage*) and use that number for getting credit in their tax records, with the public, or both. QFB receives that donation first as the weight stated by the FDO, then proceeds to sort it according to edibility and *salvage*, cataloguing the two weights differently in their records since -logically- *salvage* cannot be attributed towards feeding others. An example of this mechanic is Wal-Mart’s corporate statement for community impact in 2017 where they boast that the corporation “donated more than **600** million pounds of food to organizations that distribute it to people in need” (Walmart, 2017). They continue to state that they are more than halfway to their “global goal of providing 4 billion meals to those who need them. We have supported 2.4 billion meals to date, including 1.2 billion pounds of food from Walmart facilities...” (Walmart, 2017). Kroger similarly is quick to display its donation figures but does not define how it weighs its donations or how it counts meals distributed (Warshawsky, 2016). Rather, its public statements resemble that of other large-chain FDOs:

“In 2012, Kroger donated 71 million pounds (32 200 tonnes) of food to feed 200 million people, including 49 million pounds (22 226 tonnes) of perishable food through its Perishable Donations Partnership (PDP) and 6 million pounds (2721 tonnes) through its new innovative reclamation programme” (Warshawsky, 2016, p. 388).

These donation total numbers publicized by Wal-Mart and Kroger are of their total donated poundage, which includes the weight of both *sustenance* foods and *salvage*. As impressive as the above statements are, the reality is that a percentage of that food donated was already inedible and unable to feed anyone but animals and compost. In an article titled, “Please, don’t donate trash to charities” by Democrat & Chronicle (2018) about donations to charity and non-profit thrift stores, they entreat people not to donate what could be considered trash. These donations, they say, “end up costing them [the thrift stores] thousands of dollars each year” in waste disposal, not to mention the time spent by volunteers in sorting. QFB’s processes are much the same. Investigating what a food bank’s needs are shines a light upon why it accepts *salvage* and maintains the interactions with its stakeholders the way that it does.

QFB’s Need Satisfaction

When talking about food donations, QFB has two primary needs it has to satisfy: 1) it needs to have good quality, nutritional food, and 2) this food should ideally be in large enough quantities and varieties for distribution to its partner organizations. As previously mentioned, 74% of the food distributed by QFB in 2017 was rescued food (i.e. foods donated by FDOs). When I ask Claire about the rescued food numbers and why they received so much *salvage*, she sighed, stating factually: “Some of our vendors, our donors, will give us produce that they’ve gotten and held onto as long as possible and maybe 50% of it is good. That 50% is still stuff that we can’t always get a lot of times.” As Claire and these numbers demonstrate, QFB receives everything out of necessity. Asking organizations to sort their donations tends to result in either too much good food being thrown out as well or donors considering it to be too much effort and giving up on donating altogether. Leaning back in his chair, Alister presses his palms together in front of his chest and tells me that it works like this:

“I know we’re gonna get a lot of stuff that’s plain ole trash, but it’s just a matter of balancing it. It’s a cost to me too, right? But if I try to get them to sort so that it’s perfect and usable, they’ll throw more stuff away than they should too. So I bear the cost of the trash to hopefully get things that they would probably throw away otherwise that’s probably worth more than the trash was.”

In QFB’s 2017 fiscal year it distributed over 30 million pounds of food, and disposed of about 7-800,000lbs of trash (Claire; Alister). According to Alister, this is significantly better than

how the system worked years ago; however, an almost 1:5 ratio of *salvage* to *sustenance* is still a significant burden to bear in terms of time and money for any company, not to mention a non-profit. The gift-economy nature of the transactions between FDOs and QFB gives some insight into the foundation that created this unbalanced seesaw where QFB feels like it is required to shoulder the *salvage* burden. David Wooten and Stacey Wood (2004) remind that the act of giving, receiving, and reciprocating a gift is an interwoven set of performances by both giver and receiver that -if not carefully conducted- may ruin their relationship. From my experience working in QFB and conversations with QFB employees, successfully maintaining a positive interaction with FDOs is a business necessity. Even if it means that QFB is often sitting on the overwhelmingly heavy side of the gift-giving seesaw, from conversations with QFB staff I learned that they feel that following the analyzed cultural rules of gift-giving and dramaturgy is crucial if QFB wishes to pursue its mission of feeding the needy.

Returning to the foreword of Mauss' (2002) *The Gift*, Mary Douglas explains that a Malinowskian 'pure gift' is intended to be without need of reciprocity yet because of this "it wounds" (p. ix). She claims: "What is wrong with the so-called free gift is the donor's intention to be exempt from return gifts coming from the recipient. Refusing requital puts the act of giving outside any mutual ties" (p. ix). According to Douglas, the act of giving demonstrates a culture's morality while creating a perpetual cycle that upholds the society within which it exists. Mauss's (2002) gift economy, upon which Douglas builds her idea of the wounding fit, is a hierarchy making system: they who give the gift are in a position of power over the recipient, and they who receive are seen as inferior especially if they are not allowed or able to reciprocate. Gifts create social alliances which form a large social system. They are a form of contract that may seem and feel voluntary but in reality are very much so obligatory in both the giving and in the reciprocation (Mauss, 2002). The giver may affect a disinterested air when giving however the culture of a gift economy requires reciprocation; therefore, the giver gifts with the unconscious or conscious knowledge that reciprocation is expected (Mauss 2002). An FDO who gives to QFB finds themselves in a position of superiority over QFB. In order to avoid staying in this supplicant position and maintain a semblance of balance in the exchange relationship, QFB is then required to reciprocate with a gift of similar value to the FDO. This reciprocation takes the form of the *warm-glow* in philanthropy, financial incentives, publicity, and waste disposal. By taking the *salvage* items as well as the good ones, QFB provides a service for the FDO: opening

of inventory space and reduced waste disposal costs. In this case, *salvage* materials are both dirt and a gift. To the FDO, they are an unwanted product which nonetheless has value for tax and publicity reasons when it is donated. To QFB, receiving *salvage* is a financial wound to themselves but gives reciprocation by reducing the FDOs waste disposal expenses, therefore leveling their hierarchical relationship with the FDO. The gift economy is a constant search for equality that is perpetually seesawing between the giver and recipient, FDO and QFB.

In this seasick relationship, QFB has another reason for accepting the burden of *salvage*: culturally ascribed rules of conduct. Goffman (1956) explains that rules of conduct enforce direct obligations or indirect expectations upon individuals as to how they are supposed to act within different contexts. Expectations are a direct result of obeying an obligatory role which typecasts the performer as a rule-follower. The vicious cycle of obligations and expectations builds a cultural system from which there is no escape. Rules of obligation have two classes: symmetrical (similar to a gift economy with the expected reciprocity of only doing to others what you want done to you) or asymmetrical (unequal treatment of others which creates a hierarchy of action) (Goffman 1956). Although QFB may strive to have a symmetrical relationship with FDOs, the need for their food donation surpasses this desire and allows for asymmetry in receiving *salvage* and even non-food items.

This obligation is further demonstrated when reflecting upon the dramaturgical necessities of QFB's relationship with FDOs. In a performance where two parties (an FDO and QFB) work to create dual personas of themselves both as separate groups and as a team, concealment of unpleasant or disturbing aspects of the performance creation process is an implied necessity (Goffman, 1990). Private sacrifice on one or both parties' sides to create verisimilitude of the multiple personas portrayed (Goffman, 1990) is a constant and frequent occurrence. When two parties work together to create a collaborative performance, Goffman (1990) calls this a 'performance team'. Such collaboration requires the backstage to be tightly controlled so that inconsistencies in the backstage (such as FDOs donating *salvage*) do not come to light in the front for the audience to see (Goffman, 1990). Defensive dramaturgical techniques such as loyalty (the team accepting certain cultural obligations for the sake of the greater performance) and discipline (the team performing their role convincingly at all times) (Goffman, 1990) are exerted by QFB to defend FDOs' portrayed persona in their shared team performance. In the end, QFB's acceptance of the *salvage* can be characterized as them fulfilling their

obligation in both gift reciprocation and as a dramaturgical partner in the performance they collaboratively perform with FDOs for the greater public.

6.3 FDO Definitions of QFB

In this thesis I present what I observed to be the motivations of FDO to donate to QFB and the intricacies of the collaborations between the two. These are dictated by the FDO definitions of QFB according to their practices towards QFB. From my observations I concluded that businesses do not become FDOs out of the blue. Their motivations may consciously or unconsciously overlap due to an arousal of empathy mixing with a cost versus reward balance (Dovidio, 2000); similarly, their definitions of QFB are multifaceted and not exclusive of one another. One is not necessarily more or less correct as they are all correct according to the perspective of the definition giver. A gift, one must remember, is not easily or often refused regardless of how the receiver perceives it. So it is with the following FDO definitions of QFB.

1) A Place to Act Out or Demonstrate Philanthropy

As an establishment whose currency is philanthropy, FDOs define QFB as 1) a place where they can feel gratification through a philanthropic act, and/or 2) as a place where they can complete a culturally defined 'act of philanthropy' which then rewards them with social praise.

2) A Dumping Ground

According to the Bill Emerson Good Samaritan Act of 1996 (2010), donations of food must be with good will about the food's quality and safety for consumption. As has been shown, this is not always the case though whether that is intentional or not must be assessed on a case-by-case scenario. Regardless, the 1:5 ratio of edible food to *salvage* donated in fiscal year 2017 and the palettes of food that arrive already as *salvage* plainly illustrate that one of the definitions FDOs keep of QFB is as a dumping ground where its *salvage* joins a growing mound of inedible food in the warehouse center.

3) As a Business

A bank is a place of business, and accordingly this is how FDOs regard QFB. The transaction between the two parties is conducted through the currency of food: the FDO gives QFB food, and QFB receives it. The FDO profits financially, socially, and culturally through the transaction of food and publicity, and QFB profits through the receipt of much needed food and a

strengthening of their business relationship. Each party receives a benefit even if it can be argued that QFB pays a larger cost in return for their benefit due to the price of processing *salvage*.

With a smile, Claire tells me with hope that QFB is constantly looking towards serving the greater good. “Like any business or any nonprofit,” she says, “what that meant last week, 2 years, 3 years, 10, 20 years ago, today, versus a year, 5, 10, 20, or what in the future, has to continue to evolve at all times.” Continuously changing, FDOs’ and volunteer’s fluid definitions provide structure and insight into how they currently define their interactions with food banks. Understanding the now helps stakeholders make predictions for the future. Additionally, if their current trajectory does not lead to where they want to be in the future, this knowledge educates them on how to evolve to create the future they want.

7. Conclusion

7.1 Defining a Food Bank

A depository for food, a mound of edibles piled high, a location where food goes in and out through perpetually revolving doors... For FDOs a food bank is a way to put unused produce to good use, for volunteers it is a way to exercise philanthropy, and to the receivers it is a source of comfort and *sustenance*. The sum of this thesis boils down to answering the question: What is a food bank?

In the previous sections of this thesis, the relationships FDOs and volunteers maintain with QFB, and vice versa, were analyzed in order to determine how these two stakeholders define QFB. Diagram 2 demonstrates the different definitions and their areas of overlap. Definitions closer to the center (Philanthropic Hub & Place to Act Out or Demonstrate Philanthropy) overlap between the three stakeholders. Definitions between one stakeholder and QFB demonstrate their personal interactions (Drive-Through Good-Will Trip & Business), and definitions closest to the center (Protein Bar & Dumping Ground) are specific to the stakeholder alone.

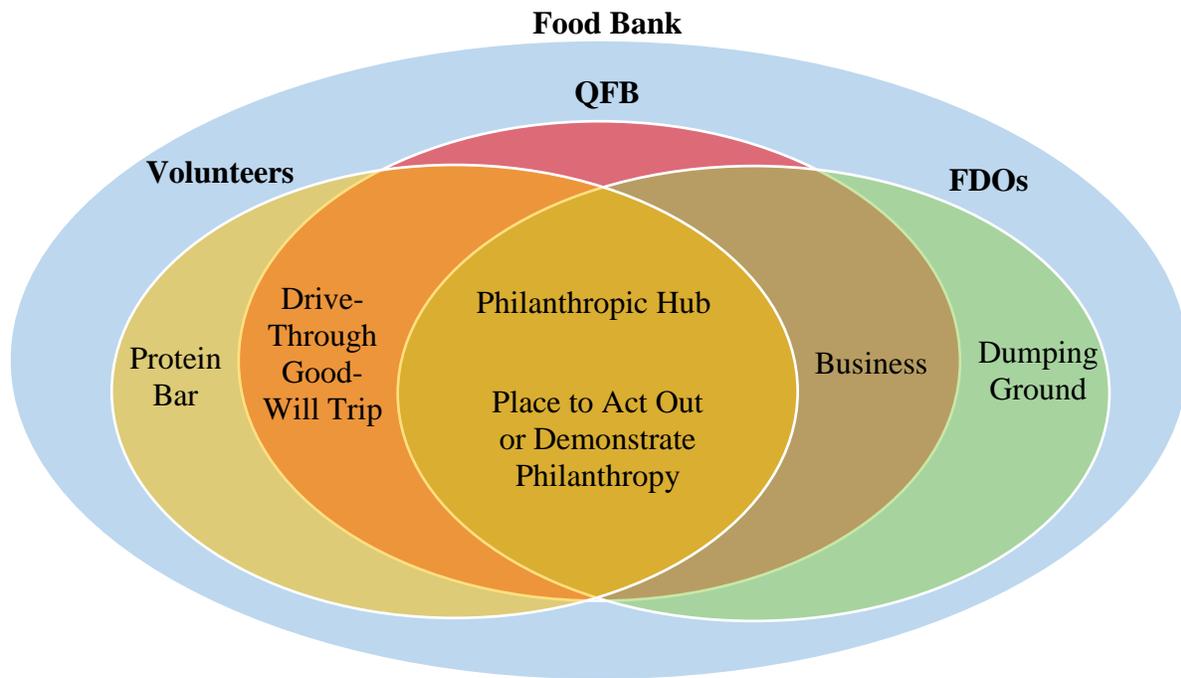


Diagram 2. Areas where stakeholder definitions do and do not overlap.

There is no simple definition to what a food bank, or QFB, is. A food bank has a multiplicity of definitions, ranging from the emotional to the logical, the individual to the societal, and the personal to the professional. These definitions are not static nor are they definitive; rather, they are dynamic in how they overlap, weave together, and exist in layers. Defining a food bank relies heavily upon what each stakeholder needs it to be. This includes QFB’s employees, who have separate ideas of what QFB is and how it should be interacted with. FDOs, volunteers, QFB employees, and other stakeholders all invest different currency into QFB, meaning that their returns will similarly differ.

A bank is an establishment where people store their money, withdraw it, create checking and savings accounts, and put trust into. Food banks function in much the same fashion. FDOs give food to the employees at QFB who compensates them with combinations of charitable feelings, money back in the form of actual money or tax write-offs, and social appraisal for having been charitable. Volunteers invest time and energy at QFB, counting and processing the food currency as a service to the food bank; in return, they are rewarded with a charitable glow. Within this, QFB employees orchestrate the functions of the food bank while investing their own time, energy, and emotions in return for a mixture of payment and a consistent warm glow effect.

As a food bank, QFB promotes investing in charity through food donations and volunteering. It exists as an establishment, a philanthropic hub, through which people can invest food, time, and energy in return for the loan of a charitable feeling or prop in their social persona.

At the same time as these investments help the food bank, they also come with a cost. Food banks exist in a seesawing, uneasy cooperation with society where the food bank takes considerable losses in order to continue running. Two examples of losses are: 1) accepting a revolving door of new volunteers looking for a drive-through exchange of time for a quick and satiating charitable glow, thus leaving QFB with an inconsistent and untrained volunteer base, and 2) enabling FDOs who deposit *salvage* to make withdrawals of social or monetary capital while QFB spends time and money sorting and disposing of the *salvage*. In my observations, neither volunteers or FDOs are conscious of the effects their interactions with the food bank have upon it. Instead, they seem to be doing what they feel is best for the greater society and are either unaware of the losses QFB is accepting or are vaguely aware but do not know the details.

Defining a food bank exposes how stakeholders' good intentions to help the greater good (i.e. the community served by the food bank) can unintentionally create debt for the food bank. Some of the definitions are expected, such as a food bank being a philanthropic hub or place to demonstrate philanthropy, and some are not, such as it being a dumping ground or drive-through. In my analysis of stakeholder definitions of a food bank I show that there is a lack of communication of needs from both the stakeholders and QFB. Stakeholders have different needs than QFB, and vice versa, therefore they use each other in an attempt to fulfil their needs. What they get out of the food bank depends upon what they have invested be it time or physical goods. For both FDOs and volunteers, the type of goods donated or how they sort produce demonstrates that their actions are less about what they think QFB needs and more about business gain or personal satisfaction. Food banks' flexibility in definition facilitates interactions with different stakeholders, but also demonstrates a disconnect between themselves and their stakeholders. As food banks are an important part of the social system, recognizing, understanding, and addressing that disconnect can strengthen the communication and collaborations between food banks and their stakeholders.

7.2 Applicability & Suggestions for Future Research

“We [non-profits] are businesses too,” Cordelia tells me, “Most people don’t realize that and view us solely as a charity.” The versatility of a food bank in the eye of its stakeholders, and how this affects stakeholder and food bank interactions, is the most important takeaway of this thesis. One of their perceived definitions is as a business whose purpose is to serve the community. In their role as a business, food banks have an economic impact in their community through the buying services and products, and generating jobs (Cordelia). This means that the more a food bank knows about its stakeholders the better it can work with them, and vice versa. Stakeholders interact with a food bank for a multitude of reasons but ultimately because -in some way or another- it benefits them. Emotionally, financially, socially, stakeholders benefit from their interactions with the food bank and the food bank benefits from its stakeholders. For all parties, it is important to know why and how they interact with each other in order to develop an understanding of their social relationship and facilitate clear, open communication about specific needs and needs fulfilments. FDOs tend to have more business and financial needs as opposed to volunteers whose needs are more individually and socially defined. How a food bank interacts with an FDO is different from its interactions with a volunteer according to these differing needs. Defining needs enables easier and more open communication between stakeholders and the food bank. A food bank is a necessary provider of *sustenance*, philanthropy, and social and financial reimbursements in communities. Improving communication is to the benefit of all stakeholders from the individual level to global corporations.

This model of identifying and understanding definitions can be used for various aims and purposes. For example, QFB could use its informed knowledge about volunteer needs to address the problem of inconsistent volunteer numbers. The definitions of QFB that I identified corresponding to volunteers are: a philanthropic hub, a drive through, and a protein bar. These definitions demonstrate that volunteers need an area where they or others can find philanthropic fulfilment, but also shows that volunteers are overly satisfied by their time at QFB thus reducing their chances of being a frequent volunteer. By knowing this, QFB can experiment with ways to provide an area for philanthropic fulfilment that leave the volunteers satisfied but interested in coming back more frequently. Working with volunteer needs thusly can be useful in sustaining the current volunteer workforce while increasing the future one. The same approach can be taken with FDOs. FDO definitions (a place to act out or demonstrate philanthropy, a dumping ground,

and a business) suggest that FDO needs are that of running their own separate businesses. Understanding FDO needs could be applied towards improving business relationships between QFB and the FDOs in terms of the amount of *salvage* received and general donation types. At the same time, QFB as an organization may want to highlight some of its definitions such as being a business while deemphasizing others, such as being a dumping ground. Identifying these definitions gives QFB the tools to implement these changes with the analyzed stakeholders as well as within their social system. These definitions could even be applied towards different nonprofits, giving insight on areas to emphasize or deemphasize in order to affect the perception and the type of stakeholder interactions they wish to have within the larger society.

Regardless of how this model is applied, understanding the definitions and identifying the needs of different stakeholders is an important tool for food banks and stakeholders alike. This thesis illuminates the current social structures that all parties exist within and identifies suggestions on how to improve effective communication with each other. This is a good start, but food bank sustainability, as discussed in the Previous Research chapter, requires more interdisciplinary research on food banks' role in society. For future research, I believe more interdisciplinary research is necessary on the topic of how food banks function from perspectives other than their users. One area of investigation could be an emotional analysis on stakeholder emotions, providing rich knowledge about the social system within food banks and individuals function. Another area of interest could be a semiotic analysis of FDO signs and campaigns connected to their food donations, to investigate the relationship between FDO and consumer needs. Unfortunately, I did not feel like I had the data necessary to do these types of analysis justice in this thesis.

7.3 Final Reflections

In a perfect world food banks would not be necessary. Indeed, they were never meant to be a long-term solution, however they have become a staple in many communities around the world. In my experience and observations, food banks are taken for granted as a part of the social system but not given much thought until someone has a need for them in one capacity or another. This being the case, the majority of research in academia focuses upon food bank users rather than the food bank's role within the greater society. I believe that understanding how people interact with food banks gives valuable insight into how we as a society have normalized them

and brings them into the forefront of our minds, thus making them an area of interest beyond passive interaction.

From early childhood, I have seen first-hand the good food banks do and am proud to have worked alongside QFB as closely as I did this past summer. In writing this thesis I have gained a new perspective not only upon how the society I exist in interacts with and perceives food banks, but also how I do so myself. I come away from this with a deeper sense of humility and reflexivity than when I entered. It is my hope that this thesis has enriched the academic knowledge within anthropology concerning donating organizations and volunteerism, and that it will have practical applications for food banks such as QFB.

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List of Images and Diagrams

Diagram 1. Retrieved from <https://www.eurofoodbank.org/en/mission-vision-values>

Image 1. Photograph taken by Hannah Brown during fieldwork.

Image 2. Photograph taken by Hannah Brown during fieldwork.

Image 3. Photograph taken by Hannah Brown during fieldwork.

Image 4. Photograph taken by Hannah Brown during fieldwork.

Image 5. Photograph taken by Hannah Brown during fieldwork.

Image 6. Retrieved from <https://www.foodlion.com/in-our-community/food-lion-feeds/>

Image 7. Photograph taken by Hannah Brown during fieldwork.

Image 8. Photograph taken by Hannah Brown during fieldwork.

Diagram 2. Created by Hannah Brown.

Individual Interviews (Quoted)

Alister (August 2018), Personal Communication. Interviewed by Hannah Brown

Amanda (August 2018), Personal Communication. Interviewed by Hannah Brown

Claire (January 2019), Personal Communication. Interviewed by Hannah Brown

Cordelia (March 2019), Phone and Email Correspondence. Interviewed by Hannah Brown

Josie (August 2018), Personal Communication. Interviewed by Hannah Brown

Matthew (August 2018), Personal Communication. Interviewed by Hannah Brown

Maria (August 2018), Personal Communication. Interviewed by Hannah Brown

Personal Communication

HFB email (December 28, 2018), Personal Communication. Received by Hannah Brown

Other References

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