

From Clients to Caseworkers:  
Women of Color in the Nonprofit Sector

by  
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A Thesis Presented in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts

Approved April 2015 by the  
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ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY

May 2015

## ABSTRACT

As a graduate student earning both a Master of Arts in Social Justice and Human Rights and a Graduate Certificate in Nonprofit Leadership Management, I have tried to bridge the theoretical and the empirical in a meaningful way. A problematic chasm between the nonprofit professional and the client being served existed, and I wanted to research this chasm. I wanted to understand what challenges a woman of color faced if she was both a client and a nonprofit professional, possessing dual identities and engaging in a sort of welfare system border crossing. There was a gap in the academic research on women in the nonprofit sector, more specifically the charitable, human services sector, and there was little to no research on women who have been both clients and caseworkers. Therefore, I conducted a series five of in-depth, semi-structured interviews with women of color working at a local food bank. As an employee of the food bank, I recorded my own observations and field notes in order to write a feminist institutional ethnography. I employed interpretive, less conventional design methods, which were aligned with my commitment to social justice. The research highlighted many negative stories about oppression and exclusion women faced in the nonprofit sector. It also confronted the problematic stereotype welfare recipients, specifically women of color, are faced with as a result of the politics of disgust and dominant myth of the Welfare Queen. The research sought to explain how and why women of color transition in and out of the welfare state, and how they manage to work within a food bank, where they are constantly surrounded by inequalities.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

As a Master's candidate in the Arizona State University New College of Interdisciplinary Arts and Sciences program in Social Justice and Human Rights, my area of focus the past two years has been around food and environmental justice. I have also gained a strong passion for researching issues of gender equality and global feminisms as a graduate student. I paired my degree program with a certificate in Nonprofit Leadership and Management because in addition to being a graduate student, I am a full time nonprofit professional. Therefore, I wanted my thesis to reflect my varying professional and scholarly interests, and if at all possible, combine them into a unique research topic. My first inclination was to study women in the nonprofit sector because this is an area where I found little qualitative research, but the topic was too broad. I was also interested in studying and learning more about women who participate in the American welfare state. As a nonprofit professional in the social services sector, I know many women who both work in the sector and participate or have participated in the welfare state, sometimes doing both simultaneously.

I have worked now for nearly 3 years as a food banker. This means I am someone who works in a food bank (see chapter 2). For the first two years I worked as a contracted service employee of Feeding America, and I was then hired on a full time employee in 2014. As a contracted service member, I worked in child nutrition where I designed, piloted, and evaluated a new program. Upon completion of my contract, I was offered a newly created position that I was able to help shape. My official title is Agency Outreach

Analyst. Recognizing my ability to critically think, write, and process, the Chief Operating Officer wanted me to take the lead on reporting, writing, research, and some grant and government compliance projects. Also recognizing my ability as a project manager and program developer, the Chief Executive Officer wanted me to take the lead on a Senior Hunger research project and program pilot. In addition to these projects, I go out into the community to conduct outreach, I serve on community coalitions, and I am working to increase the capacity of our 300+ agency partners through the administration of an extensive capacity assessment and tiering project. My favorite project I have been leading has allowed me to create an innovative pantry at a senior health clinic where we are serving senior citizens with hypertension foods that should help control their high blood pressure. We are working in collaboration with the doctors to track and record biological markers and improvements. There is an immense amount of work and not enough time to accomplish it all at the food bank.

The food bank is a hub for social services, a place where clients go to receive free food and access to other resources provided by the welfare state, most notably food stamps which are now known as SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program). The food bank is also a place where many people are employed. Rather than attempting to study all women in the nonprofit sector in Phoenix, I decided to study a smaller cross section: women who work in the food banking sector. Even more specifically, I noticed that women of color comprise a large percentage of the workplace, yet not much is written about their role in the nonprofit sector, let alone specifically at food banks.

To truly be able to engage in this research, and borrowing from Schwartz-Shea and Yanow's text, I must acknowledge my positionality as a researcher. First, and most obvious to anyone who meets me: I am not a woman of color. I am a white female with a mixed ancestry, and I was raised in a lower to middle class home. I attended St. Mary's College and the University of Notre Dame as an undergraduate, where I earned a Presidential Merit Scholarship all 4 years of college. I graduated with a BA in Political Science and Humanistic Studies, and a minor in Italian. I have been very privileged when it comes to my education, which is not to say it has been an easy road. Financially college was a burden. Although I received a sizeable scholarship, both my parents and I took out loans all 4 years, which I am still paying off and will continue to pay off for some time. Due to the fact that I attended a private, prestigious college, there is often an assumption that I hail from a wealthy family, which is not the case. My parents worked multiple jobs their entire lives in order to provide for their children. I learned from them that I would have to work hard, and sometimes work several jobs simultaneously, in order to make ends meet. In order to support myself in graduate school, I have had to work full time simultaneously. However, because the pay for my contracted position was a mere stipend, I needed to get another job. The past two years I have been working with the ASU Graduate and Professional Student Association as a side job in order to gain leadership skills and earn extra money for graduate school.

I know all of the participants I interviewed on a personal basis. I think some of them were initially confused when I explained to them that I was conducting research of women of color in the nonprofit sector. I tried to explain that while I am not a woman of

color, I wanted to engage in global feminist research, and I intended to help foster a space where critical dialogues could occur. I typically felt accepted during this process, but there was the inevitable awkwardness associated with white women conducting research with women of color. I am an outsider even if only due to my physical appearance. The other divisive aspect about me is my educational attainment, especially in relation to my age. As a millennial still in my early 20s, I have often experienced condescension in the workplace. While I never overtly experienced this during the interviews, when I spoke with Lola she made a comment about the fact that because I am educated and because I have never received public assistance, I am not, and never will be, easily relatable to the clients. I definitely understood where she was coming from, and I acknowledge that no matter how much I want to relate to the clients, my actual and apparent privileges may preclude me from doing so at certain times. I hope that through discussing my positionality I have been able to check my privileges and inventory biases I may have as a researcher and knowledge producer.

## Methodology

This thesis is my first experience in conducting a feminist institutional ethnography. It is my first experience of moving out of the traditional role of knowledge consumer into the role of knowledge producer. Because this thesis is not written strictly based on my singular experience at the food bank, but rather from the perspective of five other women in addition to me, they have shifted from being mere participants to being co-producers, or co-authors, of this research. This is important to note because my research is interpretive rather than positivist. Based upon the work of Peregrine



Schwartz-Shea and Dvora Yanow in their book *Interpretive Research Design: Concepts and Processes* (2012), I strived to create a space for research participants to shift from positivist subjects to empowered knowledge producers. They write:

That research participants are considered (and treated) as having their own agency is not problematic for interpretive researchers in the ways it would be for experimental and other positivist researchers, who depend on a level of compliance, and even submissiveness, from ‘subjects’ in order to execute their designs invariably. The interpretive focus on participants’ worlds, their local knowledge, means that the researcher cedes control to them as experts in their own lives. (p. 74)

The women I interviewed come from a variety of backgrounds and each offered her unique perspective of being a woman of color in the nonprofit sector. Each woman truly is an expert in her own life, and also an expert on her position of work at the food bank. Several of the women I interviewed have been recipients of the welfare system at one or more points in their life, and all of the women I interviewed currently work as caseworkers at the food bank. In addition to examining and critiquing the food bank as an institution, this research seeks to understand how and why it is important for women of color to cross borders from welfare clients to caseworkers in the nonprofit, social services sector.

The research you find below is a feminist institutional ethnography. My methodology is informed by global feminist and social justice theory. The text *Interpretive Research Design: Concepts and Processes* written by Schwartz-Shea and

Yanow has assisted in shaping my methodology and research design. My interpretive approach varies from a more traditional positivist approach in the following ways:

1. My prior knowledge of both nonprofits and the welfare society has been an asset to my research and was not deemed bad because it may cause bias.
2. The participants were never viewed as subjects but rather as knowledge producing agents with their own voice and contribution in the research process. They co-generated much of the data and research with me.
3. I tried to explore concepts in an accessible language that was culturally appropriate rather than attempt to operationalize concepts. What I mean by this is that I tried to avoid overly scholarly jargon in order to assure this research is as accessible as possible. This held especially true in my interviews.
4. When I evaluate my research here, I will do so using reflexivity, transparency, and I will engage with positionality rather than merely evaluating objectively (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012, p. 113).

I also borrowed from Chandra Mohanty's pedagogy that she proposes in her text *Feminism Without Borders* (2003) when she writes, "I look to create pedagogies that allow students to see the complexities, singularities, and interconnections between communities of women such that power, privilege, agency, and dissent can be made visible and engaged with" (p. 244). The methodology of my thesis has allowed me to examine the issues from this interpretive, holistic approach. I have also borrowed from Mohanty's commitment "to decolonize knowledge and practice anticapitalist critique" (p. 7). I have tried to refrain from simply analyzing existing research, and knowledge I

produce, through a positivist, liberal feminist lens. Rather, I have tried to analyze my research through a global feminist lens, one that seeks to realize solidarity among differences, a key idea that Rita Dhamoon presents in her chapter “Feminisms” (2013). The global feminist lens opened my eyes to the importance of researching non-white women who work in the nonprofit sector since this is the demographic that is typically dominant in American-centric research.

The Arizona State University’s Institutional Review Board authorized this research in 2015. Through a series of five semi-structured interviews lasting from 90 minutes to 180 minutes each, I learned about the role and challenges women of color in the nonprofit sector face at the food bank. I recruited participants through an email and in person follow up conversation (See Appendix A for Recruitment Script). I structured the participant interviews more as a conversation in order to alleviate the ever-present sense of researcher and researched. However, in Schwartz-Shea and Yanow’s text they write the positivist idea of researcher presence as a “contaminant in the research process” (p. 97) is noted as problematic for feminist, interpretive research. They write, “Interpretive researchers and methodologies dispute the possibility of disembodied research, as if all researchers were interchangeable and as if they could conduct their research without interacting with situational participants and without having those interactions affect their interpretations and knowledge generation” (p. 98). I realize I am not “outside that which is under study” (p. 80), which is why I have inserted my ethnographic notes and personal experiences alongside the knowledge of the participants. I have also written using reflexivity, meaning I acknowledged my biases and experiences.

As an example, earlier in the introduction I have engaged in reflexivity by acknowledging and presenting my positionality as the researcher in this process. During the course of the research, I took notes and asked each participant if they were willing to be recorded during the interview. I made it clear that their identities would be kept anonymous in this entire process and that their participation was voluntary. I was given permission to record the interviews by all five women, and I then transcribed the notes and processed my research with the assistance, and under the guidance, of my thesis chairwoman. At the start of each interview, after gaining verbal consent to record the interview, I invited each woman to select her own pseudonym. I did this to protect the privacy of the participants and to best ensure the anonymity of their identities.

The interviews did not answer all of the questions I posed, (See Appendix B for a listing of Interview Questions) but through strategic and intentional questioning, I sought to answer the questions to the best of my ability while simultaneously sharing the culture and stories of the participants. Because the interviews were semi-structured, and because I have committed to conducting interpretive research, not all participants were asked the same questions. I allowed the interview to evolve more organically, and strategically decided the next question to answer based upon stories and information the participant was presently sharing. I tended to be successful at maintaining the dialogue and conversational tone during the interviews, but there were some times when I felt I had to divert the subject or change the conversation's direction in the interest of time. Four of the five interviews were conducted in more public places; the fifth interview was conducted in Hollywood's home. Interestingly this was the longest interview and it lasted

more than double the length of time the other interviews lasted. I believe this had a lot to do with the fact that I entered into the home of the participant so she felt even more inclined to disclose any and all information. Hollywood even took me on a sort of field trip at the conclusion of the interview to show me the housing project her and her daughters lived in several years ago. She was insistent I witness and visit this place in order to better understand her history and background. All of the women were very open to the questions I posed, and all of the women volunteered additional information, stories, insights, and opinions. At the end of the data collection phase, I found myself with a plethora of information and stories that are truly priceless.

Concurrently, I have engaged in observations of the institution where I have worked for nearly three years. I have dozens and dozens of stories to tell and share that relate to how clients are served, how they are treated, how they are perceived, and how they are excluded in some important ways at the food bank. Likewise, I have dozens of stories about how women from varying ethnic, religious, economic, and educational backgrounds are treated in a nonprofit such as the food bank. In order to incorporate the diverse voices of women of color in this nonprofit, I paired my field notes with the in-depth interviews with food bank employees to gain a more comprehensive institutional ethnography.

### Argument and Findings

I found many interesting contradictions and a particularly problematic perpetuation of stereotypes regarding women of color on welfare from women of color who were once recipients of welfare and who currently work to enroll people into welfare programs. I

expected to learn that women who were clients and recipients of the welfare state were also the most positive and compassionate in serving our clients. On the contrary, I found former recipients victim blaming, shaming, and sometimes even falsely accusing welfare recipients of cheating the system. Likewise, I uncovered contradictions over the years as a worker and observer at the food bank that will surprise readers, volunteers, and donors alike.

At an organization that is nationally known for its ability to feed people, and address hunger, there has been a shocking lack of social justice in the workplace environment. I have witnessed and personally experienced managerial scare tactics, workplace bullying, and utter condescension. At a nonprofit that seeks to alleviate hunger, many employees are living on the brink of hunger and poverty themselves. At an organization that prides itself on serving a diverse clientele, there is no space where clients can engage in the decision making process or even have their voices heard. At a nonprofit where the majority of people being served identify as Latinas and/or Hispanics, there are no Latinas or Hispanics in positions of upper management or on the board of directors. Social justice cannot be realized at an organization that excludes women of color from positions of power, ignores the voices of clients, and fails to pay employees a living wage.

My findings prove that this is an area that requires more critical attention, and further research. Unfortunately, people often refer to food banks as quintessential examples of high performing, ethically upright nonprofits. As a result of placing food banks on this pedestal of goodness, they are often able to avert criticism, and tend to avoid being the subjects of much research. This is remarkable to me because some food

banks operate on the same scale as corporations, yet they tend to be more immune to any negativity or criticism than for profit corporations. They are happily sit on the pedestal of goodness, even if they do not deserve to be there. I am the first to acknowledge that the inherent mission and work food banks achieve is truly good, and very helpful. The majority of food bankers have a real passion for helping others, and a commitment to improving the community and state where they live. However, this goes beyond merely serving clients and improving the community. This research is necessary and important because it investigates and brings to light the stories of a group of women who have often been marginalized in the workplace. It provides a space where they can become active knowledge producers and storytellers. This research offers a very realistic look into the workings of a food bank. It reveals that not all food banks should be upheld as exemplary models of nonprofits where clients and employees are at the crux of the mission. It also reveals that despite the fact that there are many women in power in the organization, there is still not a sense of feminist solidarity in the workplace because the only women in power are a homogenous group of white women. Anyone who is interested in issues of social justice, nonprofit management, and/or entrepreneurship will learn from this research. It is also helpful research for potential and actual donors and volunteers to have access to, as they consider donating their money or time to a nonprofit. The analysis offered herein ties together years of research and lived experiences. It is important that the inequalities and contradictions that exist be brought to light and discussed publicly.

I continuously engaged with existing research and knowledge gathering while simultaneously moving into the role of knowledge producer. This was, and continues to be, an uncomfortable position for me to be in for a variety of reasons. Primarily, as a female student I have been a consumer of information, data, and theory my entire academic career. I have rarely, if ever, been the subject matter expert, let alone the knowledge producer. Secondly, I chose to conduct research on a topic where I am admittedly an outsider. While I identify as a woman working in the nonprofit sector in Phoenix, more specifically at a food bank and in the social services sector, I do not identify as a woman of color. Thirdly, the women whom I invited to be participants and co-authors of this research are also my colleagues. While I have known most of them for years, this by no means lessened any sense of awkwardness in the interview process. On the contrary, at times I felt it definitely heightened this because the participants were disclosing private life experiences, information, and personal opinions with me, thus making themselves very vulnerable.

One of my initial research questions was: What urges and empowers women of color to move from recipients of welfare to caseworkers and nonprofit professionals in the same system? However, during the course of my research and data collection, even more questions emerged. What is the role of the food bank in the larger welfare system, and does this organization actually work towards and achieve social justice? Does the food bank foster and develop its employees, more specifically women of color? Who has power, who is privileged, and who is penalized in the food bank and larger welfare state? These questions are not easily answered, and the content is complex. This thesis is my



attempt at organizing these ideas, questions, observations, interviews, and notes into something meaningful and useful for scholars and practitioners alike. One of my main arguments is that even in the seemingly good nonprofit sector, there is still injustice and a lack of feminist praxis.

I have embarked on this journey admitting I still have much to learn about interpretive design and institutional ethnography, but I have been eager to gain this knowledge. In *Tales of the Field: On Writing Ethnography* (2011) John van Maanen Maanen writes:

To write an ethnography requires at a minimum some understanding of the language, concepts, categories, practices, rules, beliefs, and so forth, used by members of the written-about group...The trick of ethnography is to adequately display the culture (or, more commonly, parts of the culture) in a way that is meaningful to readers without great distortion (2011, p. 13).

Ethnographies can be problematic and after reading more about the history of ethnographies in Maanen's text, I see they have, at times, been the source of colonialism. The fieldworker colonizes the subjects she studies. This is a major reason I sought to engage in interpretive knowledge production alongside the participants. In *Political Ethnography: What Immersion Contributes to the Study of Power* by Edward Schatz (2009) there is a section on interpretive ethnography, which used to be considered an unusual research methodology but is now employed by anthropologists and political scientists alike. "Their combination [interpretive approach and ethnography] allows for the reconstruction of how culture operates in practice, and how the actual production and

interpretation of meaning are practical activities, often central to both power struggles and economic maneuvers, and shot through with emotions” (p. 37). This approach, more so than a positivistic institutional ethnographic approach, best aligns with my commitment to engaging in global feminist research. I feel confident that I have been able to avoid and minimize problems that have arisen during the research process by utilizing my background in studying global feminisms and through my commitment to social justice and human rights.

### Interview Participant Introduction

The following section will introduce the five participants who helped produce the knowledge and research contained herein. While their names have been changed in an attempt to assure anonymity, it is important to share some background information about each woman in order for the reader to get to know all five women. The five women are Yvette, Tracey, Lola, Hollywood, and Talia.

Yvette identifies as an African American woman in her early twenties. She is a mother, native Arizonan, and she is the newest food bank employee I interviewed. She has been working at the food bank for just shy of one year, and she has a bachelor’s degree. She was a recipient of the welfare state when she was pregnant and a new, single mother. She spoke to me about her experience navigating the Department of Economic Security (DES), and how humiliating of an experience it can be at times. She also discussed how much welfare programs like Women, Infants, and Children (known as WIC) helped her and can benefit other women. Yvette frankly discussed the need to debunk false stereotypes surrounding women, particularly black women, who abuse the

welfare system, and offered her advice about how educational programs may play a positive role in this. She also described the importance of transitioning out of the welfare state, and crossing the border from client to caseworker. Her experiences as a recipient shape her as a professional and allow her to better serve clients at the food bank. Ultimately, Yvette would like to work in family therapy and counseling, and she sees her job at the food bank as a stepping-stone to achieve her goal.

Tracey is in her late twenties and identifies as an African American and Latina. She is married and is a mother. She has a bachelor's degree and is currently working on her master's degree in the evenings when she is not at work. Tracey has been at the food bank for going on 2 years. While Tracey never received welfare benefits, she discussed several times in her life where her family struggled to remain in the middle class. Like Yvette, Tracey is a native Arizonan who was also raised in South Phoenix. Tracey is the only participant that identified as biracial. In fact, Tracey offered a concept which I am calling triracial, or multiracial. This means she identifies as an African American, Latina, and white woman at different times and depending on the circumstance. Like Yvette, Tracey noted that some struggles working in the nonprofit sector, more specifically at the food bank, pertain to age related discriminations more so than gender or race. She offered insight into some problematic food bank silos that exist organizationally. She also discussed the need for welfare reform in order to better serve clients while simultaneously optimizing the health and well-being of clients.

Lola is a middle-aged woman in her forties who was raised in an abusive family, something that continues to impact her as an adult. She identifies as a Latina woman. She

is married and has several children. She was raised in East Los Angeles and was a reluctant welfare recipient. Lola attended college but did not graduate due to pregnancy. She has worked at the food bank for over two years in one of the most intensive direct client service positions. She helps clients enroll in welfare benefits, especially the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, known as SNAP (formerly food stamps). She credits her personal experiences as a recipient of welfare with her ability to engage in rigorous client interviews. Lola discussed fraud and abuse in the welfare state, and noted that she believes fraud and abuse to be a large problem, in addition to general laziness. She discussed the need for regulation of the welfare system, as well as organizational reform for the food bank. She frankly criticized the lack of diversity in upper management at the food bank and also discussed discrepancies in pay between employees. Lola believes she is penalized at the food bank for not having her college degree, and she noted that her salary and minimal raises over the years is indicative of this. Like Yvette, Lola described the importance of crossing borders and transitioning out of the welfare state into social service nonprofit organizations. She correlates her experiences as a recipient of the welfare state to her ability to perform her job well and motivate clients to transition off of welfare.

Hollywood identifies as a Latina and is in her forties. She is a divorced, single mom with two daughters. Hollywood is Lola's counterpart at the food bank and has been working there for over 2 years. Hollywood was a recipient of the welfare state at different junctures in her life. She currently lives with her parents and has struggled financially recently due to some illnesses and injuries which had left her unable to work for several

months. Unlike Lola, she has a quieter personality and is much less blunt when she interviews and works with clients. Hollywood has not attended college, and like Lola she believes her lack of a college degree has set her back at the food bank when it comes to ability to move up and be promoted within the organization. Hollywood discussed workplace discrimination multiple times during her interview, and noted that due to being classified as an obese woman, she is often discriminated against on the basis of weight. However, she also discussed times when she felt discriminated against for being a Latina, although those experiences were in a different sector and field of work. Hollywood has a background in human resources, so she was critical of some of the food bank's hiring, promoting, and training processes. She noted she feels bored with the work she does and hopes to go to community college soon in order to enhance her skill set and transition into a different organization. Hollywood discussed her personal experience with crossing the sometimes blurry borders from being a welfare recipient to helping others access welfare. Hollywood expressed the most frustration with the food bank out of all of the participants, and her interview also lasted the longest.

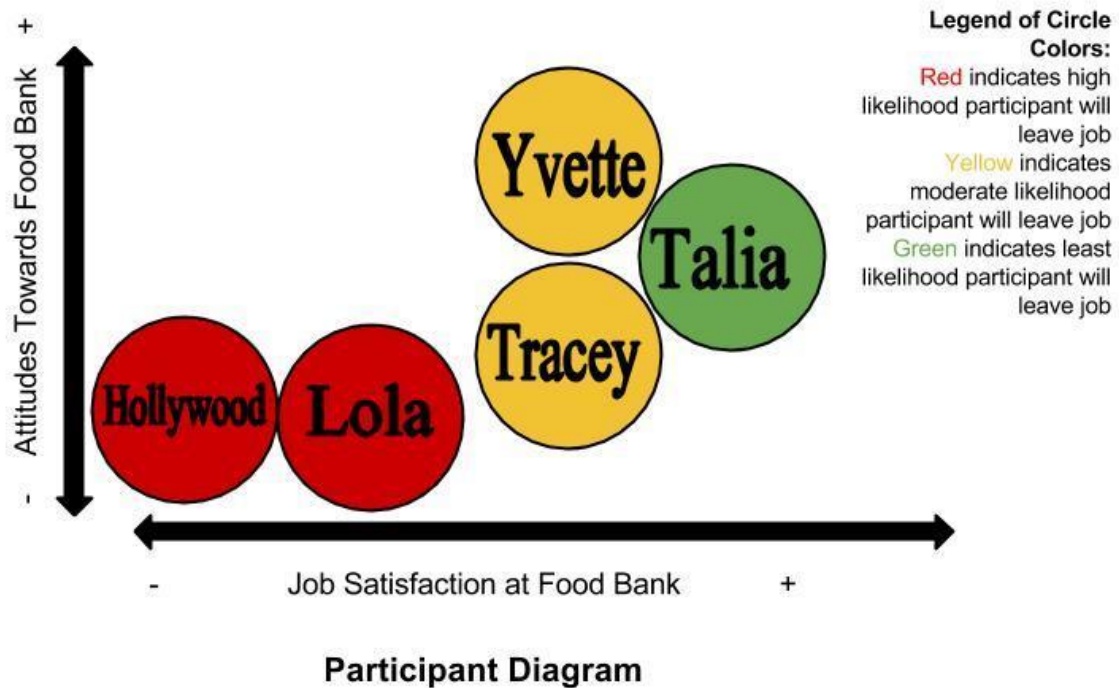
Talia is the final recipient. Talia identifies as a Latina and like Hollywood is a single mother to two daughters. Talia is in her early fifties and has both a bachelor's and master's degree. Talia has spent her career in the nonprofit sector in Phoenix, working for some of the biggest and best known organizations in a variety of positions. Talia has been at the food bank for over 4 years, and is the only management level participant I interviewed for this research. Talia works closely with, and manages, both Yvette and Tracey, although none of the women were informed of who else was being interviewed.

Of all the participants, Talia was least critical of the food bank and tended to be the most moderate in her ideas for how to combat and debunk stereotypes in the welfare state. Talia did discuss the lack of diversity in upper management and on the Board of Directors for the food bank, and she also mentioned the lack of bilingual staff employed by the food bank as being problematic. Talia has never been a recipient of welfare, though she has worked in direct social services for most of her career. She noted that although she never personally received welfare, her ability to speak Spanish has helped her cross many borders between direct client service and management. Like Yvette, Talia described the concept of border crossing as more of a sort of fluid bridge. Both Talia and Yvette described themselves as the bridge that connects clients to the welfare state and vice versa.

I created the Participant Diagram (Figure 1) to visually depict some of the relationships and connections between the participants. The circles that are touching indicate those participants who work directly with one another on the same team. The higher up vertically the circle is placed on the y-axis, the more positive attitude of the food bank the employee had. The further to the left horizontally the circle is placed on the x-axis, the more dissatisfied the participant generally was with their job at the food bank. The color coordination indicates each participants' likelihood of leaving the food bank according to her own words and my perception based upon the interviews and observations. Red indicates a strong feeling of discontent with the food bank, strong distrust in the leadership, total boredom or sense of stagnation in one's job, and/or a sense of frustration. Yellow indicates moderate discontent with the food bank, some distrust in

leadership, moderate boredom or sense of stagnation in one's job, and/or a moderate sense of frustration. Green indicates some discontent with the food bank, slight distrust in leadership, slight boredom or sense of stagnation (or a sense of contentness) in one's job, and/or a slight sense of frustration.

*Figure 1.* Participant relationships, attitude and satisfaction. This diagram illustrates negative and positive attitudes participants expressed towards the food bank, as well as overall job satisfaction and likelihood of leaving.



Hollywood expressed the most negative attitude towards the food bank in her interviews, followed closely by Lola. Both Hollywood and Lola expressed the least

amount of job satisfaction, and as a result are most likely to leave their jobs in the next year based on feedback they gave in their interviews. Hollywood and Lola also work together closely, and work directly with clients every day. Neither Hollywood nor Lola have college degrees, something they both indicated as a barrier for their ability to move up in their jobs. Both Hollywood and Lola were recipients of welfare benefits, and have therefore been clients of the system. Like Hollywood and Lola, Yvette was also a recipient of welfare benefits. However, unlike Hollywood and Lola, Yvette obtained her college degree. As a result, she was able to enter into the food bank at a slightly higher and more administrative role than either Hollywood or Lola. Yvette does work directly with clients, but not necessarily on a daily basis like Hollywood or Lola.

Yvette expressed the most positive attitude towards the food bank, and also indicated that she would like to remain in her position for the time being. Like Yvette, Tracey also expressed a moderate satisfaction with her job, however she had a less positive attitude towards the food bank and its leadership. Both women indicated that they see the food bank as a stepping-stone for them, and neither of the women indicated a desire to stay as an employee at the food bank for more than a few years. Both women acknowledged the notoriety the food bank carries as a larger, well respected nonprofit in Arizona, and thus both believe that having the experience working at the food bank will be beneficial for their future endeavors. While Tracey is currently pursuing her Master's degree, Yvette hopes to begin to pursue hers in the next year or so. Both noted that they might have greater flexibility to work on their Master's degree while working at the food bank, even though the work they do at the food bank does not apply to their area of



professional interest. Both women are interested in pursuing careers in counseling and/or therapy.

My experience at the food bank has generally been positive in regards to my simultaneous pursuit of a Master's degree. Typically, the food bank has been flexible enough with my schedule over the past two years, and has allowed me to leave an hour or two early in order to attend evening classes or meetings. The food bank also offers tuition assistance of up to \$2,000 per year for an employee pursuing higher education, including graduate education. This opportunity is not widely publicized at the food bank, however it is available to all full time employees. It is a sizeable amount of money, and has been helpful for me as I support myself through graduate school.

Finally, in reference to Figure 1, Talia is the only participant whose circle is in green, indicating a low likelihood of leaving the food bank. Talia is the only woman out of the five I interviewed who is in a position of management. She manages and works directly with both Yvette and Tracey. Talia is also the oldest woman I interviewed and she has the most experience working in the Phoenix nonprofit sector. Talia's seniority, coupled with her college degree, are two reasons she is in a position of management at the food bank. While she did not express as positive of an attitude towards the food bank as Yvette, she did note that the flexibility the food bank has afforded her as a single mother makes her job very worthwhile.

From an introductory look into the background and biographies of the five participants, some obvious themes and divisions begin to emerge around race, education, experience, and age.

## CHAPTER 2

### FOOD BANK REVIEW

#### Roles of a Food Bank

*Nonprofit or not, everything's a business. -Tracey*

Food banking began in Phoenix, Arizona, in 1967 and was also institutionalized here. When I give tours of the food bank, here is the story I tell. This is the history that has been passed down to me via oral tradition. A man by the name of John Van Hengel noticed there was a woman dumpster diving behind a grocery store and was upset by two things. Firstly, the fact that a woman would be in such need that she was compelled to dumpster dive to feed her children was shocking to him. Secondly, the fact that the grocery store had thrown out so much edible, perfectly good food was borderline unethical to him. With an initial seed funding granted to John from his home parish, St. Mary's Basilica, he opened what is now known to be the world's first food bank. While the concept of food banking was initially funded by a Van Hengel's Catholic parish, today the food bank, and most other large food banks, are non-sectarian and are no longer affiliated with a particular religion. However, to this day many of the smaller agencies that food banks serve are churches and religious institutions.

The concept of food banking is quite straightforward: people with a surplus of food make deposits into the bank, and those who are in need, or food insecure, withdraw food. Janet Poppendieck, the author of *Sweet Charity? Emergency Food and the End of Entitlement* (1998) is a sociologist who researched and wrote the seminal book on food banking and the American emergency food system. She notes that "Food banking, too, grew out of a series of accidental encounters and it was also supply driven" (p. 112). Van

Hengel's idea garnered the attention of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and John was approached by them to replicate this Arizona model across the country. He was hesitant to do so because he did not want to institutionalize his project, but from stories I have heard over the years, he was forcibly persuaded after 2 years of visits by the USDA to replicate this model of charity. He helped open and start food banks across the United States and world. Poppendieck notes that, "Food banking came first, preceding, as we have seen, the emergency food period of the early eighties. While St. Mary's Food Bank in Phoenix was, by almost all accounts, the first food bank, John Van Hengel was not the only person to come up with the idea of soliciting donations of unsalable food from the grocery trade" (p. 123). Van Hengel may not have been unique in his idea, however he was the visionary and leader who founded America's Second Harvest, which is known today as Feeding America. This is the umbrella organization that comprises some 200 food banks across the United States of America into one network where best practices, food, and funds are shared freely.

The concept of food banking was created by a man, and in all of the history I have read and oral stories that have been passed down to me over the years, there are no stories that reference women or the role they played in institutionalizing food banks. It is interesting that the only historical role a woman has played in food banking was being the impoverished, hungry mother whom inspired Van Hengel to found food banks in the first place. It is this interesting and subtle notion that women in poverty are in need of saving that has drawn me to dive deeper into this research. What makes women want to work in this sector? What makes women come to a food bank for assistance? How are borders

crossed between participating in the welfare state and serving others? How do women of color interact and relate with one another in the nonprofit sector? How do former recipients relate with clients? And how do we address this rampant national caricature of the Welfare Queen?

Initially, the programs offered by food banks were quite simple. They were intended to be places where people could go in times of emergencies to receive food. However, once the USDA and government became more involved, and food banks were institutionalized and replicated across the country and world, things naturally became more complex. Poppendieck writes about government as the silent partner of food banks. “Emergency food has successfully cultivated an image of reliance upon private sector donations and voluntarism, but government at all levels has been far more involved than such an image suggest, providing both food and money as well as crucial policy support” (p. 121). Today, the food bank continues to provide basic emergency food in the form of donated food boxes, however there are now a myriad of programs that are dependent not only on store donations and food drives, but especially on government commodities, federal funding, foundation grants, and major corporate donors in order to be sustainable. Another complexity of food banking is that rather than directly serving all clients from a centralized location, food banks have hundreds, and sometimes more than a thousand nonprofit agency partners whom they provide with food. This requires immense supply chain and logistical expertise. The food bank where I work has an entire fleet of semi-trucks and a warehouse that any food retailer would envy. The operating budget and physical space of the food bank might lead someone unfamiliar with nonprofits to assume

it is a for profit corporation. Poppendieck's book is more than just a history of food banking; it is primarily a harsh critique of this institution, which like traditional banks, has become inefficient and too big to fail.

I have worked in a food bank for nearly three years, more specifically in program implementation, research, and evaluation. I am viewed by my peers and by senior management as a subject matter expert on certain topics, which to me is ghastly because I am I still actively learning about the government contracts we hold, the policies and procedures, the reporting processes, and the implementation of certain programs. I truly think it would take at least a decade to become an expert on the workings of a food bank. A common saying that can be heard when food bankers from different food banks meet is: if you've seen one food bank, you've seen one food bank. It sounds trite, but it is true. Not only is food banking on the whole complex, but each food bank offers different programs, has different processes, and different organizational structure. Certainly there is always more to learn in any job, but the layers of complexity and bureaucracy at a food bank can be, at times, dizzying.

In addition to a variety of feeding programs, food banks also work increasingly in the arena of political advocacy and even lobbying. This is both fascinating and disturbing to me, and is a topic I will reference again later in my thesis. (See chapter 7)

Poppendieck devotes a small section of her book to advocacy, and though it is nearly 20-years-old, the message is still very relevant. Regarding the role of food banks in advocacy she writes,

On the one hand, food banking has, potentially, a great deal to contribute to anti-hunger advocacy, both the legitimacy that comes from the involvement of large, successful corporations, and the credibility that comes from day-to-day work of the member agencies with poor people. On the other hand, certain inherent features of food banking tend to limit its advocacy role. One of these is its need to maintain the cooperation of the food industry. (p. 269)

The constant need to appease large donors, especially in the food industry, means that any advocacy efforts must be noncontroversial and ultimately conservative in nature. Activists and more progressive food bankers became and remain critical of this form of “advocacy” believing it to be merely symbolic. Poppendieck writes, “Critics argued that in order to make themselves attractive to potential donors, food banks were refraining from taking positions that might be uncomfortable for corporate decision makers” (p. 269). In my experience with food banking, this is very true. Tracey’s opening quote at the start of this chapter speaks to the fact that while food banks are nonprofit organizations, they are increasingly operating like businesses. They are profiting, and the concern is that this profit might be coming at the very expense of the clients the food bank is intended to serve.

When I began at the food bank, I noticed there was nobody out of the staff of 150+ fulltime employees engaging in advocacy work. I have always been interested in politics, government, and advocacy, so I raised this questions every opportunity I had: why don’t we engage in advocacy work? It is, ironically, part of the mission statement; a part that apparently has been ignored. I have been privileged in my work in that I have

earned the respect of both my peers and my supervisors, and I have been given the opportunity and platform to speak in front of the senior staff and the board of directors time and time again. When I brought up this question, I typically felt empowered because I was asked: Kimberly, what do you think we should do? How should we go about this work? What might a job description entail? I was able to give my feedback, to schedule meetings, and to begin to educate others about the importance of advocacy. I felt empowered, and I was lead to believe that I might be the employee to lead this effort. At that time, I was a contracted employee of Feeding America in a leadership and service position. My interview and application process lasted over 6 months, and I was engaging in meaningful project management work, yet I was paid a meager stipend. In other words, the amount of pay I received was not indicative of my workload or responsibility. I was grateful for the opportunity, though, and I was very hopeful that upon the conclusion of my two-year service contract, I would be offered the advocacy job I had worked to outline and introduce.

My first career letdown came when I was informed by my then supervisor that my male team member, who was the only other person at the food bank remotely interested in advocacy work, was being given the opportunity to take the advocacy position that I thought was being saved for me. Not only did I feel immensely disappointed and angry, I also felt totally betrayed by my coworker who sat by and listened to my ideas and visions for months. I shared my hopes and excitement for this position with him; he sat back and feigned disinterest in ever changing jobs, assuring me the position would be available to me, all the while he was secretly in the process of securing the job for himself. It was a

type of political maneuvering and backstabbing I never expected to encounter working in the nonprofit sector. Even in my utter frustration, I reached out to him and asked for him to include me in his new work, and to allow me to be involved. From the moment he took the job, he avoided me, and to this day he struggles to look me in the eye when we speak. At the time, he assured me he would involve me in the advocacy work. Yet once he began the position, he took my ideas and ran with some of them, claiming them as his own, and leaving me 100% excluded.

My proposed approach to advocacy was to advocate on behalf of our clients, at a more grassroots level that is consistent with my commitment to social justice. I wanted to empower and train clients to advocate on their behalf in front of politicians. The man who was given this role approaches advocacy differently than me. He does not engage our clients whatsoever, but he does like to show them off in front of politicians and the media. He is very involved in local politics and aspires to run for office. This is not a bad thing; I too am involved in local women's politics. However, I take offense to the manner in which he has engaged in advocacy on behalf of the food bank because rather than serving our clients, it has become a very self-serving endeavor. Since he has taken the role, he has brought in every politician who is willing to visit the food bank for a photo opportunity, regardless of the fact that the majority of these politicians create and vote for legislation that cuts funding to emergency food programs. He brings in local and federal politicians who speak disparagingly about our clients; politicians who publicly perpetuate the myth of the Welfare Queen a caricature first created by President Reagan.



Recently, the food bank hosted a Hunger Heroes luncheon to honor corporate food donors and major monetary donors. My coworker in charge of advocacy spent weeks arranging to bring Senator John McCain to the food bank to speak at this event and to honor him as a Hunger Hero, despite the fact that he consistently votes for federal budgets (and is currently, actively supporting a budget) that would greatly reduce SNAP funding and other welfare benefits. Most conveniently, this visit to the food bank occurred one day after the Senator announced his bid to run for reelection, and was one of his first public appearances. How does the food bank benefit from this type of advocacy, other than the free media coverage and prestige? Does this really advance the mission of the food bank? Is this the advocacy role the food bank should be playing? These are some of the questions I ask my coworkers and myself every opportunity I have. In her interview, Tracey made an observation about the work of the new advocacy position at the food bank. She spoke about John Van Hengel, who her family knew when he was alive through their church, and his commitment to servant leadership. When discussing this flashy political approach to advocacy Tracey said, “I think he [Van Hengel] would have a problem with some things going on [here]. Those people would probably not be where they’re at if he was still here.” She noted that much of this advocacy work has been done privately, and she often finds out about these types of luncheons and visits via Facebook photos or media coverage after the event. This speaks to a larger, recurring theme of the exclusivity at the food bank, and the various silos that exist within the organization.

## Roles in a Food Bank

*“We will never run out of people who need food.” -Lola*

The previous section gave a brief history of the role of food banks and an overview of some of the work they engage in. This section will provide information about roles in a food bank, and the jobs people do. Food banks can and do employ hundreds of people and utilize thousands of volunteers every year in order to carry out the work of the mission. When I completed my two years of contracted service, I was very happy and fortunate to be approached by my current supervisor, the Manager of Agency Services, the Chief Operating Officer, and the CEO who all wanted me to stay at the food bank as an employee in a newly created position. I was able to sit down with each of them and help draft the job description, which was a thrilling experience for me as a young professional. In the end, my job description was influenced by several people and continues to evolve on a weekly basis. My primary functions at the food bank are to conduct research on food insecurity in Arizona, to conduct program evaluations, to outreach in the community, to lead and manage specific projects, and to write reports. I currently supervise two nutrition education interns, and am managing an innovative project where we have collaborated with a local primary care physician’s office to launch a pantry specifically for food insecure senior citizens with hypertension. I love the work I do because I get to serve and interact with clients very often. I am entrusted with lots of information and data about them, and I feel obligated to be a good steward of this information. I have also valued the opportunities people like my supervisor, the COO, and the CEO have afforded me over the years. They have mentored me and given me freedom to implement my ideas. I have been privileged in my work, and sometimes find

myself at an advantage over others because I have been able to work with a few of these senior members. There is no doubt that I have benefitted from these positive interactions with senior managers. Still, while I love the work I do, I oftentimes find myself disappointed and frustrated by internal politics and mismanagement. I am astonished by the lack of cultural competency and workplace professionalism that some of my coworkers exhibit on a routine basis.

There are lots of administrative roles in the food bank. This is because, as I discussed in the earlier section, the food bank administers so many different government programs. As a result, sometimes the organization feels very top heavy, from an organizational perspective. Talia manages the child nutrition feeding program, which is a multimillion-dollar program because it is fully reimbursed by the USDA. Talia is one of only a handful of women of color in management at the food bank. She is also one of only a few people who is bilingual in English and Spanish. Talia spoke about some gaps she has seen from a managerial level at the food bank and said:

The bilingual people are not necessarily the ones working with the clients. And seriously, we're a border state. We should have people in senior management and the board [that reflect this]. And maybe cultural competency needs to be part of the strategic plan. Not just in race and ethnicity; but poverty as a culture. We're working with mental health and also people with addictions.

For being such a large nonprofit organization, I think the food bank should have these types of trainings in place for employees and volunteers alike. It would not only benefit

the employees in their roles, but it would also benefit the organization by having a better trained workforce.

In addition to administrative roles in the food bank, there are also more direct providers of service and labor intensive roles. Firstly, the food bank employs dozens of drivers who pick up, transport, and deliver the food around the state of Arizona. The great majority of the drivers are men. Secondly, the food bank employs dozens of warehouse workers who operate heavy machinery, intake, process, and physically move the food, and build orders for delivery. Again, the majority of warehouse employees are men, though interestingly the Manager of the Warehouse identifies as an African American, lesbian woman. I was unable to interview her for this research, however it is important to note that she holds the highest managerial role out of all women of color in the organization. Finally, there are direct service employees who work and serve clients on a daily basis. Both Lola and Hollywood work with clients directly, every single day, to enroll them on SNAP and any other welfare benefits they might qualify for. Lola said in her interview, “Here’s the beauty of my job. I am doing direct client services. Sooner or later that person is going to come and see me. [Someone who has been on the welfare system for 10+ years] I am that tenderizer: I’m gonna chop you up and put you back together again.” Lola here is referring to the interview process. Before a client can receive any benefits, they must go through a lengthy application process and then be interviewed. Lola prides herself for her motivational interviews of the clients. She believes she relates to the clients because she was once in their shoes, sitting in the same seat. Having witnessed some of Lola’s interviews, I will note that she does relate to the

clients well, and she is able to get across to them. At the same time, her definition of motivational and mine are different. Sometimes in interviews, or in other settings where I have been with her before, she tries to shame clients as a means to motivate them. This is especially true when she encounters clients who pride themselves for knowing the system because they have been on it for years. My approach would be to use cases like that as a time for education, however Lola tends to disagree. This theme of shaming welfare recipients is something I will explore later in the thesis, as it is a pervasive problem not just in society, but also in some of the interviews I conducted.

Lola spends a lot of time with each of her clients, but in her role at the food bank, she is increasingly being pressured to enroll higher numbers of clients on to SNAP. Lola and Hollywood know that much of their salary is paid for by a SNAP grant, and part of the grant reporting is to show how many individuals clients are enrolled on a monthly basis. It is a reasonable way to measure impact, however it might not be the best way. Lola said, “It shouldn’t be about numbers. It should be more about, you know, how effective am I being? It’s not about quantity, it’s about quality.” When I interviewed Hollywood, who works directly with Lola, one of her frustrations was the Lola is not accountable with her time. She disclosed to me that she is worried that sometimes Lola does not keep appointments she makes with clients, which is problematic. Hollywood also noted that she typically has to complete reports both for herself and on behalf of Lola, because Lola does not always keep to deadlines. “I’m accountable. You ask me for something and I will deliver” Hollywood said.

Like Lola, Hollywood also spends a good length of time with each client she interviews. A major difference I noticed in the times I observed her interviews was that Hollywood was a bit more professional and business oriented. She did not try to get too involved with the personal life of the client, nor did she try to motivate or shame them. Hollywood takes a pragmatic approach to her job, and does whatever it takes to accomplish a task. However, she finds herself frustrated with management and the politics of the organization. Hollywood said, “Me working there, I know I’m never going to move up. I love what I do, I like what I do, but I’m beyond what I do, Kimberly. I don’t want to say it’s boring because it’s not. There’s never a dull moment.” I related to Hollywood’s statement a lot because I too love what I do, but I see how the work becomes routine, and I also see that there is little room to advance or be promoted. There are many roles one can take within the food bank, however there is little room for professional growth or development.

## CHAPTER 3

### WOMEN OF COLOR IN THE NONPROFIT SECTOR

#### Dominant Approaches

There is a lack of research around the topic of women of color working in nonprofits, specifically women of color who have transitioned from clients to caseworkers in the social services. Part of my research studies the transition women of color make from recipients of welfare to caseworkers who assist others in the welfare state. All too often, research classified as feminist research only takes into perspective the world of the middle upper class white, American woman. I have noticed an absence of diversity and representation of women of color in more traditionally heralded feminist works, such as Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*, which many credit as being the book that spurred the second wave of feminism. While this brand of feminism appeals to the white, often privileged masses, it is not representative of all feminists. As a result, the literature that has informed my research can be broken into the following categories: Black feminist theory, Chicana feminist theory, third world, or postcolonial feminist theory, and other research they may not fit into one of these categories.

#### Black Feminism

In the chapter "Feminisms" Dhamoon writes, "In the United States, black feminists such as bell hooks, Audre Lorde, Patricia Hill Collins, and Evelyn Simien have also refused universalizing assumptions about sisterhood" (2013, p. 95). The research and writing of Black feminist scholarship "examines white privilege, classism, and sexism" (p. 95) that exists in white women's, liberal feminist research. Black feminist theory also looks at patriarchal oppression and white privilege. This pertains especially to my

research because all of the women who participated acknowledged at least a subtle sense of oppression and white privilege in the nonprofit workplace. *Black Feminist Thought* by Patricia Hill Collins helped shape my ideas into a thesis topic. Her research around Black women and welfare will help position and inform my research. Collins' critiques of capitalist labor markets, white privilege, and patriarchal systems of oppression are important and relative to my research. Collins calls the reader to "analyze how these new structures of oppression differentially affect Black women" (2009, p. 75) which is one objective of my thesis. I have extended her challenge to also encompass Chicana women and how structures of power and patriarchy adversely affect them.

Collins writes across her text about the perception of the welfare queen, which is the stereotype of African American women who live luxurious lives all thanks to their dependence on the federal welfare system. This stereotype has become ingrained in American society and popular culture, which means there is a good deal written on the topic. Ange-Marie Hancock's *The Politics of Disgust: The Public Identity of the Welfare Queen* (2004) writes about how these stereotypes of African American women lead to the ultimate creation and adoption of a national politics of disgust towards women in the welfare state. This negative caricature of women of color in the welfare state manifested "during the recession-plagued 1970s, elite and dominant-group frames of the welfare reform issue associated single, poor African American mothers with the decline of the American way, especially with the regard to the political value of economic individualism: charting one's own path without the help of government" (p. 50). As I learned through my discussions, and even, at times, my observations of the food bank,



people who rely on welfare in times of need feel isolated and othered from the rest of society because of their need.

Bounds' *Welfare Policy: Feminist Critiques* (1999) describes the American welfare state, however it approaches the topic of welfare from a Christian, biblical perspective. I interpret this to be a liberal feminist perspective. Chapter 7 "Uprooting a National Policy of Morally Stigmatizing Poor Single Black Moms" explores the topic of women of color and welfare more in depth than some of the broader resources I have found, but it does not do so through a Black feminist theoretical standpoint. Bounds' agenda appears to focus more on the ways churches can rescue black women from this stereotype. Bounds' liberal feminist approach is especially problematic because not only is the woman viewed as needing saving, but the woman of color in particular is in need of saving. Mohanty (2003) writes, "The rise of religious fundamentalism with their deeply masculinist and often racist rhetoric poses a huge challenge for feminist struggles around the world" (pp. 229). In my experience in Arizona, Christian fundamentalism has proven to be problematic at times. It is a challenge for feminist struggles because it tends to coopt the work of social service organizations, such as food banks. An example of this is the fact that many of the agency partners that distribute food to clients in Arizona are churches. While they are not legally allowed to force people to pray, I have visited several such sites where religion is heavily pushed on clients in order for them to gain full access to social benefits. One such partner of the food bank is a residential treatment center for women with addictions. Many of the clients are women of color. At the center of the complex is a chapel where the women go to pray, even if they are not religious.

The notion that women are in need of men to save them is egregious to most people, yet fewer people find the notion that women of color are in need of white, Christian men and women to save them egregious. Bounds' work merely perpetuates the myth that women of color in the welfare state are in need of salvation. It does not look at the root of the problem, nor does it offer a critique of white privilege, supremacy, or patriarchal systems.

### Chicana Feminism

Dhamoon writes that Chicana feminism “refers to a critical framework that centers the relationship between discourses of race, class, gender, and sexuality inequality as they affect women of Mexican descent in the United States” (p. 96). Given the demographics of Arizona, as well as its proximate location to Mexico, it is highly important for my thesis to employ Chicana feminist theories. Cherrie Moraga's text *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings By Radical Women of Color* (2015), which was also edited by Gloria Anzaldua, is now in its fourth edition and was originally published over thirty years ago. This hallmark feminist theoretical text is one of the first to explore the concept of intersectionality between feminisms, sexuality, class, and race (among other things) which I noted as being an important concept for engaging in feminist ethnographic work. Moraga's text is also one of the first to introduce the concept of US third world feminism and is also unique in that it challenges white women's traditionally held notion of solidarity as a sisterhood. This is something Dhamoon expands upon in her writing as she challenges feminists to find solidarity amongst differences. Thus, *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings By Radical Women of Color* lays some of the foundation upon which Anzaldua and other Chicana and third world feminists build their theories.

Gloria Anzaldua's text *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (2012) greatly informs much of the Chicana feminist theory I seek to employ. Anzaldua's concept of the Borderlands as both a literal and metaphorical place interests me from both an academic and nonprofit professional perspective. Similarly, the notion of border crossing is both literal and metaphorical in Anzaldua's work, yet here I employ it more metaphorically when I discern why welfare clients who are women of color cross the border and become caseworkers. Anzaldua's poetry also inspired my research, more specifically her notion of living in the borderlands. In "To Live in the Borderlands Means You," (1996) she writes:

To live in the Borderlands means knowing  
that the india in you, betrayed for 500 years,  
is no longer speaking to you,  
that mexicanas call you rajetas,  
that denying the Anglo inside you  
is as bad as having denied the Indian or Black (1996, 4).

Not only is there a physical border crossing in this state, there is also a cultural border crossing. In my observations at the food bank, one of the more disturbing, recurring notes I have is there are very few employees who are bilingual. Three of the self-identified Latina women I interviewed made at least one reference to the lack of bilingual employees at the food bank during our discussion. This is disturbing because at least half, likely more, of the clients that the food banks serves are of Latino or Hispanic descent with Spanish as their first language. By requiring people to operate in English, a

language that may be foreign to them, clients are isolated and othered. They are forced to stay on their side of the border as a privileged English speaker slides them some food through the linguistic fence that divides them.

This notion of border crossing can be conflicting and confusing as Anzaldua alludes to in her poetry. I think given Arizona's geographic location it is essential to examine the role border crossings play. This is especially important because I am interested in how women transitioning from the welfare state to careers as caseworkers experience border cultural, economic, political, and emotional border crossings. Several of the women who participated in my interviews acknowledged that this border is fluid, and one noted, "I am only 1 paycheck away from serving people here to being served."

### Third World Feminism

Third world, or postcolonial feminist theory, has helped shape this research. While the ethnographic research I have conducted occurred in a specific city located within the United States, it does not necessarily mean my research must uphold and reaffirm Western traditions, misconceptions, and/or stereotypes. Dhamoon upholds Mohanty as the thought expert on third world, postcolonial feminist theory. Dhamoon writes that Mohanty "warns against universalizing women's experiences because this decontextualizes the specific historical and local ways reproduction, the sexual division of labor, families, marriage, and households are arranged" (p. 95). While Chicana and Black feminist theories are much more specific, third world feminist thought is broader and can encompass and represent women of color from around the world "with the intention of building noncolonizing feminist solidarity within national borders and across borders" (p. 95). In her book *Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory*,

*Practicing Solidarity* (2003) Chandra Talpade Mohanty writes, “I think feminist pedagogy should not simply expose students to a particularized academic scholarship but that it should also envision the possibility of activism and struggle outside the academy” (p. 243). Mohanty was one of the theorists that inspired me to conduct this research that combines my graduate scholarship with my activist work as a nonprofit professional.

This third world feminist approach also critiques capitalism and other Western traditions, which is crucial to my research. I have learned that even the charitable, nonprofit sector in the United States still operates very much like a corporation. The fundraising and development employees at the food bank are awarded the most profitable salaries. This is a clear indication of the high value that is placed on fundraising and monetary donations. Unfortunately many other nonprofits I have volunteered for in Phoenix are growing increasingly more concerned with bringing in money than achieving their mission. Certainly fundraising is critical in order for an organization to sustain itself and fulfill its mission, but should it be the central role? Individual donors and corporate donors stand to benefit a great deal from their donations. Not only are there tax incentives for food and monetary donors, but also there is notoriety and free publicity associated with donating to a large charity such as a food bank. Your family or company name can be featured on a building or conference room if the price is right! Additionally, given that specific government funded programs offer reimbursements to the food bank on a “per person served” basis, unfortunately the clients the food banks serves sometimes are viewed and valued in dollars and cents. The capitalist system in which the food bank

operates has created a society where benevolent giving and true charity no longer exist; in this way the richest people always stand to benefit over those in poverty.

*Social Welfare Policy: Regulation and Resistance Among People of Color*, written by Jerome Schiele (2011), takes a third world, international look at the problems associated with the welfare state. It examines the role people of color play in this larger system, however it does not specifically examine the role of women of color in the welfare state. Schiele writes, “These chapters conceptually link the focus on how American social welfare policies have racially controlled people of color with an analysis of how people of color have resisted these policies” (2011, p. 16). This research generally informs the topic of people of color in the welfare state. During my research there was not a lot of discussion about overt resistance to welfare policies in the United States, however there was a recurring theme that certain policies are purposefully put in place to discourage participation in the welfare state.

*So You Think I Drive a Cadillac? Welfare Recipients' Perspectives on the System and Its Reform* written by Karen Seccombe (1999) elevates welfare recipients and “the researched” to empowered knowledge producers. For this reason I believe this text employs a third world feminist approach, even if the author never suggests this outright, she writes about solidarity among differences, a Dhamoonian idea, when it comes to her feminist research methodology. She writes, “there is no single meaning or given experience of being a woman. Feminist theories acknowledge difference in women’s experiences” (p. 8). Seccombe’s research, collaboration with participants in the research process, and commitment to what I perceive as a global feminist methodology are pivotal

examples that have informed my research. The topic I have researched is somewhat controversial because I have invited my coworkers to be participants in the process, which means I have invited them to open up about some of their most personal life experiences and share their stories for the purpose of global feminist knowledge production. There is a lot at stake in this research given the commitments made by the participants, and my personal commitment to share the stories and experiences I have had over the past 3 years. While it has, at times, felt difficult producing and sharing this knowledge publicly, it is truly information that I feel will be beneficial if nonprofit organizations such as the food bank wish to grow and achieve social justice.

#### Liberal Approaches

*Under Attack and Fighting Back*, written by Mimi Abramovitz is a historical text that examines women's history within the American welfare state. It discusses the labor market, unions, and ways feminist movements have fought back against patriarchal systems. This research, like Bounds', is informed by a liberal feminist theory and values capitalism as a means of improving the lives of women. While Mohanty writes that capitalism must be explored as a root cause of poverty and oppression, this text sees capitalism as a potential way for the cycles of poverty to be alleviated. I encountered many other pieces of research not cited in this thesis that looked at women in the American welfare state from a positivist, liberal feminist perspective. In fact, I would say that the abundance of this type of research is another reason I was inspired to approach my thesis from a different perspective.

A good amount of global feminist research exists, which has laid the theoretical foundation for my research. Yet, there is a clear void when it comes to research about

women of color who have been active participants and leaders in both the welfare state and the nonprofit sector.

Global Feminisms at the Food Bank  
“If you saw me, do you know my name?” -Tracey

As noted in the introduction, the participants in this research come from a variety of backgrounds and diverse experiences. One thing they all hold in common is they identify as women of color working at a food bank. Some of the women noted this was a positive characteristic, while others thought it hindered their abilities to advance in the organization. There are many other factors, in addition to race, at play when it comes to the work of these women at the food bank. Some of the other major points that were discussed in tandem with race were: weight, age, educational attainment, and geographic origins. Tracey’s question at the start of this paragraph still disturbs me. She asked that question when discussing her feeling of anonymity at the food bank. Although she has worked there for several years, she wonders if any people in senior management or on the board of directors even know her name. The intent of this section is to inform the reader about the possibility of evidence blindness, a real problem that is discussed in *Feminist Inquiry* (2006), written by Mary Hawkesworth. She writes that:

Despite the continuing underrepresentation and underutilization of women and people of color in positions of high power, pay, and prestige, despite numerous studies documenting race and sex bias in evaluation, and despite job audits that demonstrate discrimination in hiring, opponents of affirmative action insist that no discrimination exists in the contemporary United States. (p. 119).



Through this feminist institutional ethnography, I have sought to challenge everyday evidence blindness that exists in the food bank and other nonprofit organizations. One discussion I had with my supervisor has remained with me for months. As a self-identified African American male, he told me that he did not believe racism or sexism existed in our organization because so many people of color were in mid-level managerial positions. In fact, this made the food bank seemingly progressive. However, this comment was easily disproved when I noted that there are no Latinas or Latinos in positions of high power within the organization. The evidence is right there, yet some people prefer to remain blind.

In the interview with Talia, she noted that being a woman of color in the nonprofit sector was “an asset” for her. She discussed the fact that her ability to read, write, and speak the languages of most our clients allowed them to better relate to her. She also noted that due to her decades of nonprofit experience, she had acquired the skills to present herself to management and the board of directors at various organizations. While her race and gender was noted to be an asset to Talia when working with her clients, it was her extensive experience, not necessarily her race, that brought her credibility in the eyes of upper management and the board of directors. Talia’s major critique of the food bank was “There’s no people of color in senior management. We don’t reflect the population we serve. And that holds true for the board of directors. Making decisions on what the clients ought to be receiving or getting; without knowing their backgrounds.” I have voiced my criticism of the lack of racial diversity on our senior staff, as well as our lack of gender and racial diversity on the board of directors, for nearly three years. When

I bring this topic up with my boss, who identifies as an African American male, he tells me not to mention it to senior staff members. When I asked Talia what she believes will lead this change, she was unsure. The lack of representation is not due to a lack of applications, as people of color have applied in recent history to serve on the senior staff, and have not been selected. Talia did tell me that she thinks any sort of systemic change will occur if enough noise is made, or if pressure was put on the current senior staff and board of directors to increase diversity.

The lack of diversity in senior management was one of the major issues that both Lola and Hollywood acknowledged too. Like Talia, both women saw being Latinas as an asset for their jobs. Unlike Talia, they also both saw their experiences as welfare recipients as further enhancing their ability to serve clients. All of the women I spoke with referenced how they were able to bring in experiences from other jobs to shape their work in the nonprofit sector. Lola previously worked in dentistry, and prior to moving to Arizona, she worked in Beverly Hills. Lola acknowledged that as a result, she was used to working around rich, white people. However, she expected things to be different at a social service nonprofit organization in Phoenix. She said:

All of the senior staff all have education and they're all white. Why is there not color? And why is there not a chance? Throw me a bone! A white person who doesn't have a bachelors in this or that. Nobody. There is no reality. Thus, there is a lack of professionalism in management...They need to be working for Barney's [New York] and not here. That's Barney's, I'm sorry. Hey I worked in Beverly Hills, I know. I'm not stupid.

Much like Lola, Hollywood noted frustration at the lack of diversity in upper management at the food bank. While she acknowledged that she did not have a college degree, she referenced her diverse experiences and hard work ethic as something that could make up for that lack of formal education, if only she wasn't subject to race based discrimination. Hollywood said:

I feel that if I walk into a place and there's a white person versus me, they're gonna think that person has more education for one, they're gonna think that person is smarter, they're gonna think that person has better communication skills, and that that person is better. But I'm sure their jaws would drop if they sat there and had conversations with me.

Hollywood went on to openly acknowledge that she has not applied for any management level positions due to poor health, and furthermore, she is not sure that she would even be interested in such a position at the food bank due to the overwhelming lack of diversity. Hollywood blatantly discussed the discrimination she senses against Hispanics, especially Latinas when she said:

People are climbing up the ladder. You've got black people moving up and white people moving up. Where are the Hispanics moving up? To the warehouse or to the forklift? That's what I'm seeing there...For a while there, oh my God girl, it was jungle fever and I hate to say it that way. I do. I'm not prejudice girl. Some of my best friends were black. But when you start seeing that, you know they're relatives.

Hollywood's comment caught me off guard in the interview, and she later apologized for referring to the food bank's promotion of African Americans to managerial roles as "jungle fever." This interview is the perfect example, though, that even in dialogues about global feminisms and solidarity among differences, there is still innate bias and institutionalized racism working right below the surface. In Hollywood's case, she was able to pass her comment off as permissible because 'some of her best friends were black.' Collins would warn us against this sort of color blind rhetoric "that reproduces social inequalities by treating people the same" (2009, p. 121). Even as we seek to engage in social justice work, we must be constantly cognizant that we are not employing language that can perpetuate oppression.

After discussing the lack of Latinas in leadership positions at the food bank, Hollywood shared an interesting insight into her life experiences that none of the other women did. She discussed her weight as a major factor for being discriminated against in job interviews at both for profit and nonprofit organizations. "I'm a Hispanic woman. I have to be honest with you: I feel I was discriminated not because of being Hispanic, but because of my weight, my size. That right there is a discrimination. However, being Hispanic added to it as well. They never called me back." More specifically at the food bank, Hollywood has been assigned to jobs by her new supervisor that she is physically unable to perform. She was so taunted by her supervisor that she has had to take the issue up the chain of command to senior management in order to have it resolved. While I am widely ignorant on this topic, I think it is important reference another school of feminist thought that Hollywood's discrimination would fall under. Dhamoon (2013)

references critical feminist disability studies as being important because “like gender, disability is a socially fabricated idea rather than a biomedical condition that demarcates disability in terms of otherness” (p. 98). Hollywood does not consider herself able bodied due to her weight, yet she is able to function and succeed at work. However, in our conversation she made several references to discrimination she has endured over the years as a result of her weight, therefore this is something that warrants further discussion.

Tracey shared very interesting information about her experiences with race in work and outside of work. Tracey identifies herself as Hispanic, African American, and Caucasian. She said:

I do put that I am Hispanic because my Dad’s side of the family is from Spain. It depends on how it benefits me. If I am applying for a scholarship then yeah, I am African American or Hispanic. If it benefits me then yeah, I am Caucasian...When someone is trying to make me as a minority or single me out I am Caucasian.

Tracey did not indicate that her multiracial identity confused her, on the contrary she was proud of her background, and she acknowledged that she has turned something that might ordinarily penalize a woman in life into something that has privileged her. Tracey’s ability to cross racial borders with ease is something Collins would be very interested in. In *Black Feminist Thought* (2009) she discusses the fact that while her book is concerned with Black feminisms, the discussion of race is more than just a black and white conversation. Collins writes, “Other groups ‘of color’ must negotiate the meanings attached to their ‘color.’ All must position themselves within a renegotiated color

hierarchy” (p. 98). There is a constant repositioning of people in power at the food bank, as jobs and positions seem to constantly be in flux. While the senior staff remain white, privileged, and wealthy, the rest of the organization is a part of the always-changing color hierarchy. I do not think these different groups need to be in conflict with one another, but rather, it is my hope that the diverse group of people in the food bank might work together across differences, in solidarity, to accomplish the mission of alleviating hunger. However, as it stands now, there is still much work that needs to be done to achieve solidarity. This research has revealed overt participant racism and deeply embedded biases exist and operate every day at the food bank. There cannot be solidarity among differences when even basic concord and respect is absent.

## CHAPTER 4

### THE WELFARE STATE

#### The Politics of Shame and Disgust

Three of the five women who participated in the interviews have personal experiences receiving welfare benefits, and all three of them explained some part of the process as being shameful and embarrassing. Two of these three women engaged in a sort of recipient shaming during the course of the interview, as they perpetuated the very stereotypes they fought to overcome when they were recipients. In Ange-Marie Hancock's book *The Politics of Disgust: The Public Identity of the Welfare Queen* (2004), she discusses the political history and implications of how public opinion tends to perpetuate a politics of disgust in America. She writes "Part of the enduring strength of the public identity of the 'welfare queen' and the politics of disgust emerges from the idea that most Americans do not identify with welfare recipients" (p. 157). I believe this is true and that the average American is lead to believe, thanks to media, politics, and popular culture, that fraud and abuse dominate the welfare state. My hypothesis was further validated during the interviews with the participants, several of whom disclosed that they believe abuse among welfare recipients is a rampant problem.

My first piece of evidence is disturbing and graphic. As I searched for a book on food stamps on Amazon, I stumbled upon the following book. I was so astonished I thought surely Amazon had been hacked, and someone was selling this book in order to make a mockery of welfare recipients. The cover of the book, which you can view in Appendix C, is highly sexualized and resembles that of an erotic book. The title of the book is equally offensive: *Food Stamp Bitches*. I couldn't believe my eyes, so I closed

out my browser. The next day, I searched and found this book again on Amazon. I took a moment to read the book summary, as well as several of the reviews, and was no less horrified than the day before. This fictional book perfectly depicts the modern stereotype of the politics of disgust, and the perpetuation of the Welfare Queen. It glamorizes a lifestyle that few people actually lead, and it leads readers to believe this lifestyle is commonplace. Appendix D illustrates a few less offensive, yet equally problematic popular cultural cartoons of the Welfare Queen in society. You'll notice the hallmark cartoon of the Cadillac buying Welfare Queen is rendered twice. In one depiction, the Welfare Queen is a white woman. In another depiction, the one more commonly found in a Google search, the Welfare Queen is depicted as a black woman. While these offensive caricatures are problematic, I believe it is important to acknowledge their existence, and the role they can play in perpetuating the politics of disgust.

Hollywood described her experience in the welfare state as follows, "I had to go on public assistance, which was another embarrassing thing because I never had to be on it. So I was on public assistance, and of course I had a roof because of my parents." Hollywood did not want to focus a lot on her experience in enrolling in or being a part of the system, but rather she focused more of the discussion around how empowered and happy she felt when she exited the welfare system and earned a paycheck. I could tell by the way she avoided the topic that she did not want to recall her past stories in great detail.

On the other hand, Lola was descriptive in her account of receiving welfare for the first time. Lola said:



I was extremely ashamed of being on the system because growing up our father always said: we will never get welfare! We will never be on welfare because welfare recipients are losers and that's not us. So I'm a first generation welfare recipient...I knew every time I needed to renew, I was gonna be there 4 hours. As a way to remind me that I didn't wanna be on the system, I would take a book with me to read. And I remember sitting in the waiting room and being the only one with a book. Everybody else was helping each other out and working the system. I remember ladies saying: say this and they'll give you that. Bring them this and they'll give you that...I remember a lot of abuse being discussed in the waiting room, and I didn't like it because I always knew I wasn't one of them.

Lola also described the humiliation associated with redeeming the welfare benefits, more specifically food stamps. She said:

I remember when I was on welfare and I had food stamps I made sure I went to that market super-duper late where nobody would see me. Because I didn't want to piss off people. It pisses people off. All the time! When you go to the supermarket and you see that food stamp card whip out; if you're somebody who is not on the system, or who has never been on the system, right away your mind goes to: 'Ughh, every time my taxes get taken out, I am paying for that.' And then the next thing you do is you look at that person, you see what they're wearing. You analyze what they're wearing: their jewelry, their clothing, their shoes. Then eyeballs go to that shopping cart. What are they buying? Nothing but junk. Fritos, um cookies, sodas. I mean...how do you eliminate the welfare recipients from

making bad choices like that? You don't help the person that's looking at you and having that stereotype about you. All you're doing is enhancing that stereotype.

Lola described the immense benefit she received from public assistance, the chief of which she described was good health and improved nutrition. She noted that having constant access to fresh food allowed her to be stronger, and to provide these items to her children. Yvette was also a new mother when she applied for health insurance benefits and Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) welfare benefits. She noted a similar stigma that Lola faced when it came to actually redeeming her benefit at the store. Yvette said:

WIC did help. I kinda felt that it was my way to help and contribute to the house. You do feel stigmatized because you're at the grocery store with your blue book and everyone knows what your blue book looks like. You have people in line behind you, and sometimes you have really rude people, who are breathing all hard and are like 'why are you taking so long' type thing. And you're like, first of all I have to use this service. In the U.S. in general it is hard for us to say we need help because our society is so individualistic. You do you; you handle you. It is not about community and family here. I think you find that more in years past in Phoenix, like communities taking care of their own. But you don't really see that too much now. First, saying you need that help. Second, to go and you feel people are looking at you some kind of way. People don't think: 'Oh, that's so dope that we have that to give to a mom and her kids,' instead of 'Look, she doesn't work, she has to use WIC.'

What stood out to me most was Yvette’s final line about the fact that Americans are not proud of the fact that there is a social safety net available to all Americans should they ever fall on hard times. This relates back to Hancock’s politics of disgust in that the majority of Americans are angered by welfare recipients, rather than proud to live in a country where everyone has their most basic needs met. The politics of disgust is so rampant in this country that state agencies must now offer recruitment materials for welfare recipients in order to debunk myths that are perpetuated by the media and popular culture. Figure 2 illustrates a recruitment chart that the Arizona Department of Economic Security created and placed on their website for potential clients to read.

*Figure 2.* Commonly held myths about welfare assistance. This table was borrowed from the Arizona Department of Economic Security website and seeks to debunk commonly held myths about welfare programs.

|   |
|---|
| <b>Myth:</b> Nutrition Assistance is welfare.   |
| <b>Fact:</b> The Nutrition Assistance program is designed to help low-income people add more nutritious foods to their diets.   |
| <b>Myth:</b> People use Nutrition Assistance benefits to buy cigarettes or alcohol.   |
| <b>Fact:</b> Nutrition Assistance benefits may only be used to purchase food that is going to be prepared. They cannot be used to buy cigarettes, alcohol, or other non-food items, |

such as clothing and toiletries.

**Myth:** Only unemployed people can get Nutrition Assistance benefits.

**Fact:** Most people who work at low-wage jobs can get Nutrition Assistance benefits; in fact, 36 percent of the more than 451,000 families receiving Nutrition Assistance in May 2014 were working.

### The Contradicting Welfare Queen Myth

The myth of the Welfare Queen was born in 1976 during Ronald Reagan's presidential campaign, and has lived on thanks to media, divisive politics, and popular culture depictions. According to David Zucchino's book *Myth of the Welfare Queen* (1997), Reagan is quoted as describing her as "Having 80 names, 30 addresses, and 12 Social Security cards...She's got Medicaid, getting food stamps, and she is collecting welfare under each of her names. Her tax free income alone is over \$150,000" (p. 65). Reagan's caricature of the Welfare Queen has lived on in infamy for decades, with no sign of dying off. Zucchino notes that Reagan did loosely base his campaign stories of the Welfare Queen off of a real woman who was convicted of welfare fraud, but she was "charged with defrauding the state of \$8,000, not \$150,000" (p. 65). The Welfare Queen is still a dominant caricature in today's society where many conservatives refer to President Barack Obama as the Welfare President due to his work to protect the social safety net from heinous cuts during America's second worst economic depression.

The negative image and rhetoric around the Welfare Queen is further stereotyped by the fact that she is often portrayed as a single, Black mother. Collins (2009) writes:

The welfare queen constitutes a highly materialistic, domineering, and manless working-class Black woman. Relying on the public dole, Black welfare queens are content to take the hard-earned money of tax paying Americans and remain married to the state. Thus, the welfare queen image signals efforts to use the situation of working-class Black women as a sign of deterioration of the state. (p. 88)

As I entered into my research on women of color at the food bank, specifically women who have themselves crossed the border from being welfare recipients to caseworkers, I did not imagine I would encounter any controversial opinions of welfare recipients, nor did I anticipate that I would receive stereotypical anecdotes of women who cheated the system. I was wrong. In my interview with Lola, after having heard about her highly personal experience receiving welfare, I never anticipated her harsh critique of the very clients she serves. Lola said:

If you know how to work the system, it absolutely is [luxurious]. Because you've got women, who buy pills. They're on welfare and yet they're getting the Beverly Hills drugs. And yet, they're selling those pills on the street. It's those women that know how to work the system all the way around. They have nothing but time to think about it. That community is so close knit that if you're willing to compromise and sign that paper with the devil, you can absolutely be well off while you're on the welfare system...25% percent, major, hardcore female cartel abusers. I have a personality that allows an individual to open up to me and tell me what the truth is.

Lola was not unique in her belief that a large chunk of welfare recipients are proud Welfare Queens, although she did have the most extreme examples. Tracey had a conflicting opinion about Welfare Queens. As it related to her personal family, the myth was busted. However, when speaking more generally about people in her neighborhood and community she said:

I feel, just from my experience, it's African and Hispanics or Mexican people.

Majority of black people that I know...my aunt, it was embarrassing for her to get food stamps. When we went to the store she would be like: hurry up, swipe the card or use the card. And she is white...There are other people who I know, who don't care. They say: I got food stamps, who wants to buy food stamps from me? Majority of black people I know are not ashamed of it, and it's in a 5 mile radius so they know everyone.

Tracey and Talia both offered some tangible solutions about how to address the rampant myth of the Welfare Queen. This was particularly interesting to me because Tracey had just perpetuated the stereotype, but she was also genuinely eager to confront and dismantle it. She offered that "Maybe public service announcement or a series on the real faces of welfare" would be a helpful first step.

Talia did not believe that fraud was a rampant problem in the welfare system, and she expressed the need to dismantle the myth of the Welfare Queen. She said:

I think one of the best ways to de-stigmatize or debunk the myth would be to get to know...hear the stories rather than just make them up based on what you see.

And it could be, they borrowed a neighbor's car. It could be they're trying to do

something better and maybe they're in cosmetology school so they're practicing their own nails...And I guess, you know, it's not easy to stand in line for a food box. In the summer especially here. It's not easy to stand in line for a hot meal. And if you really don't need it, would you really waste your time doing that? And if you put a value on the food, it's not that much. So the people that are there, in my opinion, need it...I've heard 'they're gonna get a food box and they're gonna trade it for drugs.' Well, how much you gonna get for peanut butter and beans? And pasta?

Similar to Talia, Yvette offered an even more personal solution. She acknowledged that as a former welfare recipient herself, she could easily fall into stereotyping others. She challenged herself and she challenged me to check our biases. She said:

We have to be more aware and be more diligent about the way we are thinking so we don't start to generalize or stereotype. If we see enough of something, or we hear about it we latch on to it. Hold on, maybe that's not how it is, or maybe that is not something I should say because it is stereotypical...I think it does suck because there are people who use the system in that way and ruins the reputation for people who need it.

Secombe (1999) dedicates an entire chapter of her book to the stigmas and discriminations of welfare recipients, and she encountered a similar problem as I did in her research. She explains this as the "distancing" of welfare recipients from one another as a strategy recipients employ to avoid and minimize personal stigma. Secombe writes:

Clear distinctions were drawn between “me” and “them.” Many women believed that other women did not deserve to receive welfare, were bad mothers who neglected their children, or in other ways committed fraud or deliberately abused the system...They subscribe to the common perception of welfare mothers, even though this perception contradicts their own personal experience, and contradicts the lives of other women they know personally. (p. 63)

This distancing mechanism might help explain the contradictions of two of the women who participated in interviews, however it does not hold up for Tracey, given that she was never personally a recipient of the welfare state.

The interviews with three of the five participants proved even more complex than I had anticipated because two of the women in particular contradicted themselves when they discussed the importance of welfare as a means of serving our clients and providing them with a safety net. The participants simultaneously perpetuated unfounded stereotypes of the Welfare Queen who is guilty of selling her SNAP (food stamps) for money and drugs while living a luxurious life. It is disheartening to me to consider that even the women most intimately connected with the welfare state, women who have been recipients and women who work to enroll people in welfare each day, buy into these damaging stereotypes. Similar to the discussion of global feminisms at the food bank, this portion of my research found that there is little solidarity among differences in the welfare state.



## CHAPTER 5

### PARTICIPANT INTERVIEWS

#### Analysis of Food Banking Issues

*“The thing that keeps you sane [working in a food bank] is knowing one person won’t change the whole world, but one person can make a change.”-Tracey*

The Participant Diagram (*Figure 1*) indicates that there is a varying degree of positive and negative attitudes of the food bank, as well as a varying degree of job satisfaction at the food bank. Overall, Talia seemed to be the most content in her job, which is most likely due to the fact that she is a manager. On the contrary, Hollywood seemed to be the least happy with her job and the organization, due to burnout, physical limitations, and distrust of leadership, among other things. However, regardless of any negative feedback, all five participants, at some point in their interview, noted the good work of the food bank. Yvette noted the inherent good of the food bank when she said, “At the end of the day, what we are trying to do is feed people.” Yvette had the most positive attitude towards the food bank out of all five participants, which may be attributed to the fact that she is the newest to the job. Of the five participants, she also tends to be the most upbeat, energetic, and idealistic in the way she presents herself and her attitude. Her positivity came across in her interview.

However, not all of the feedback about the food bank was positive, as all of the participants discussed areas they are most concerned about. Hollywood was both the most dissatisfied with her job and had the most negative attitude towards the food bank based on her interview. A major issue she pointed out was the internal politics she has encountered over the course of several years. Hollywood said:

You want information about nonprofits? Here's my thought of this nonprofit. I have never, ever come across so much politics like I have at this nonprofit organization that I work for...There's politics everywhere. But St. Mary's? Girl, you are never ever going to move up the chain of command unless you're related to somebody, you know somebody, you're screwing somebody, or you're kissing all the ass. You can kiss all the ass you want and at the end of the day, if they don't want you there, you're gone.

Lola expressed a similar belief when she was describing her experiences at the food bank and frustrations with the organization. Lola said:

I don't know who is choosing management. But the people who are choosing management are not making wise decisions. It's almost as if the only compassion that anybody gets are the people that come in and ask for food. When it comes to the company, there is favoritism...They have detached themselves completely from being nonprofit to for profit. It's all about donations.

A theme that emerged strongly in three of the five interviews was the notion that this nonprofit organization was acting, more often than not, in a way more consistent with a for profit corporation than a nonprofit organization or charity. Tracey was succinct in her thoughts on this topic and said: "Nonprofit or not, everything's a business." For the record, the food bank is consistently ranked, by several different local and national organizations, as one of the top nonprofit organizations in Arizona. The tension between the public perception and the employee experience proves interesting. Yet again, the food bank is placed on a beneficial pedestal of goodness. It is beneficial because having

the notoriety of being a top nonprofit allows the food bank to attract even wealthier donors and more media coverage. The media coverage increases credibility. The public brand and image of the food bank is strong because of this credibility, and therefore it ranks high. The corporatization of food banks is cyclical and problematic. Unfortunately, outside of this research, there is not really time or space for the voices and experiences of employees to be brought to light, therefore this cycle and these rankings are never challenged.

Another common theme and complaint that emerged in the interviews was the pay disparities that exist between regular employees and members of management and senior staff. Hollywood and Lola work directly with clients, however because neither of them have obtained a college degree, they can expect to earn less not just at the food bank, but also at most other nonprofit organizations. As a result, low pay was something they both discussed with me. Lola said:

I'm worth more. I am one of the forgotten workers, where I take home a lot of this emotional letdown from the system, from everyday life, from these people who come to the food bank depressed. I take home these problems. They're always in the back of my mind. I do not get paid what I am worth...Last year I refused my raise. When I was told I was only going to get measly cents, I told them: do not put those in my paycheck. My family is worth more than that so I said: keep your damn money.

Lola went on to tell me she was chastised by her direct supervisor and instructed to take the raise. Again, she refused the raise because to her, it was an insult. She was brought

in to speak with her supervisor's boss, and he instructed her very simply to take the money. She felt threatened, so she obliged and walked quietly out of the office.

Recently, Hollywood experienced some health problems and had to take a leave of absence. She disclosed that some of her health problems were related to stress she experienced at work:

When I went on my leave, part of it was so much stress. I was furious. [Her boss] wanted to put me in the warehouse working with Juan. Due to medical issues I can't be in the warehouse. She was literally gonna put me there knowing I couldn't...She knows I physically can't do it. Right then and there I got a bad taste in my mouth.

Hollywood returned to work a few weeks prior to our interview. She had to take several months of work off, and she returned to work against her doctor's wishes because she was out of money and in dire need. Hollywood shared with me that if she had not returned to the food bank, she would not have had any money for her or her daughters. In the past few months, Hollywood had to sell some of her furniture in order to have money to eat. She is no stranger to having to sell her belongings to make ends meet, though. She recalled several times in her past when she had to sell her car, clothing, and other personal belongings just to survive. Hollywood was emotional when she told me, "I've lost so much, but every time I lose something, I get something better." It was hard for me to fathom the fact that my coworker was on the verge of going hungry when we work at a food bank. This is another major tension point I identified through my research. Most people would not expect to discover that some food bank employees are at risk of food

insecurity and poverty due to low wages. It contradicts the mission of the food bank, which is to alleviate hunger through food, education, and advocacy.

I felt equally guilty when I considered the only reason I even knew about it was because of the interview for my thesis. How many of my other coworkers struggle to pay their bills or to feed their children each month due to the low wages that manual laborers and caseworkers earn? My research opened my eyes not just as the researcher, but as the coworker to the participants who are shared their struggles with me. The words from Lola echoed in my mind: I will never relate fully to this struggle because I have never lived it myself. I feel empowered to share this research and create systemic change to improve the wages of all workers at the food bank. However, I am penalized by the fact that I am a mid-level, non-management employee with no decision-making authority. I find solidarity with the interview participants in our shared frustrations, in our mutual gridlocks, and in our sense of powerlessness when it comes to the bureaucracy that controls our wages and thus our livelihoods.

As I listened to Hollywood's story, I instantly thought of an interview I had conducted a few weeks prior with Yvette. She was discussing the balancing act that many nonprofit professionals face due to smaller pay in the sector:

A lot of us are 1 paycheck away from being a client, or that person. So who are we? Are you one check away from paying house payment or car payment? We don't live in that way. We get comfortable. You really don't know. You have no clue. In all the things you do, prepare yourself. Be humble now, so you don't have to get humbled. Don't let life humble you, get humbled before.

The participant interviews opened my eyes to even more problems than I envisioned and recognized in my daily life. These are pertinent issues that one may encounter at other nonprofit organizations too, but the reason hearing about these inequalities is especially disturbing is likely because the food bank is always portrayed by the print and news media as one of the best nonprofits in Arizona, and an organization whose moral compass always points due north. The food bank is put on a pedestal, and many people in positions of power within the organization are quick to say we are the “world’s best.” I am proud of the work I do, and that the organization is able to serve so many people, however I am not sure that I can agree with the sentiment of being “world’s best” nonprofit when it is simultaneously one that excludes women of color and minorities from positions of leadership, is embroiled in constant internal politics, and does not pay all workers a fair and living wage.

## CHAPTER 6

### ETHNOGRAPHIC POEM

#### **White Woman's Wedges**

A Free Verse Poem by Kimberly Roland

What's wrong with wedge heels? Or hair highlights and manicured nails?

Maybe there is nothing wrong

If you work at a corporation, or office where the intent is to increase wealth.

But imagine a fancy white woman, dressed up

Nose turned up

Walking across a parking lot, arms folded, pacing back a forth.

Observing the poor people in need of emergency food;

Judging everyone.

Judging employees, coworkers, clients, women.

Too good to wear sneakers like the rest of us.

Too good to roll up her sleeves and work. Too good to serve.

Much too good to need assistance. Too good to need saving.

This white, privileged, wealthy woman is an executive in an organization

We call a nonprofit.

Surely she profits, though, from the oppression and need of others.

Their poverty keeps her in wealth.

Their need creates her luxury.

Their struggle her opulence.

Their emergency makes for an ideal photo opportunity,

The perfect time and place in which to tour a major donor and  
To humiliate a client during a week when the stresses of life reach an apex.

So what's wrong with these wedge heels?

To me, they symbolize an in-your-face wealth.

An excuse and reason why she cannot roll up her sleeves and work alongside

Her fellow employees and coworkers, clients and women.

These peep toe wedges serve as both a literal and metaphorical

Reminder that because she can afford these designer shoes

She is better than me. Better than you.

She is white, rich, and powerful and

She will not walk next to us as a peer or colleague,

She will not walk behind us as a follower or observer,

She will not walk in front of us as a leader,

She will walk above us.

She will trample us with her wedge shoes of power.

She will belittle her employees and embarrass the clients.

But nobody will say anything to her because

Her position of power safeguards her against criticism.

Her position of power puts her on a pedestal that is beyond

The reach of the ordinary worker. This same position

That puts her luxury automobile in a front row, reserved parking spot daily

Puts her above reproach.



If she has never heard of white privilege  
How can she know she benefits from it?  
How can she know she perpetuates it?  
How can she know when nobody can call her out?  
Even the bravest know better  
Than to disrupt the order,  
Than to disturb the system.  
Even the bravest know better  
Than to speak to her fellow executives.  
For they are all white and wealthy and privileged.  
Equally guilty of the same crimes of apathy.  
Equally comfortable with the status quo  
With their luxury automobiles and reserved parking spots.  
Equally excited as she was to meet the  
White and wealthy and privileged governor of the state  
Who will continue to oppress our people  
With his policies and welfare cuts.  
And when he wanted to fabricate a food packing assembly line for a photo  
opportunity  
You can bet those peep toe wedge shoes  
Walked next to HIM as an equal.  
Stood beside HIM for a photographed handshake and smile and small talk.

There is power in these shoes alone  
Yet power also flows from the woman who wears them.  
But does this power truly serve the mission  
To alleviate hunger and poverty?  
Does this power truly seek to serve  
Others who are othered?  
Others who are other than  
Herself?  
Or does this power oppress  
Symbolically and literally?  
Does this power ensure her paycheck remains padded with six digits yearly?  
Does this power make other feels powerless?  
She is a perfectly dressed woman,  
White and privileged,  
Rich and fashionable.  
In vogue,  
But so out of touch.

#### Ethnographic Analysis

I wrote the above poem after an overwhelming Thanksgiving week experience in 2014. The poem was used as part of a larger feminist activist assignment for a JHR course titled Global Feminisms, which inspired much of my thesis work here. I felt overcome by this draining work experience where food bank employees serve thousands

of clients in a drive thru model for three straight days during Thanksgiving week. The work is labor intensive and exhausting due to being in the warm sun, in between lanes of hundreds of cars, at times choking on exhaust fumes. Most clients I served were very grateful for the food they received. Some of the clients were angry for the wait, or angry at other cars that cut them off in line, and would thus express their anger at you, the employee. Some yelled, some cussed, but most were very nice and respectful of the work we were doing. Sadly, one of the most taxing aspects of these few days was the presence of senior women chauffeuring donors and politicians around on the site as we tried to serve clients. Something felt innately wrong to me in all of this. It was like pimping out our clients; putting them on public display so wealthy, powerful people could feel good about themselves.

As a student of JHR 598 I had an assignment to participate in activism outside of class in order to better apply the feminist, NGO theories learned from this class to the world of the nonprofit sector. As a nonprofit professional, this assignment excited me greatly. However, the work I have engaged in at the food bank, while immensely rewarding, certainly falls short in many ways of embodying feminist praxis. I let this assignment simmer in my heart and head all semester, and I recorded notes of brief stories and encounters I had with both clients and people in power. The writings of Patricia Hill Collins, Mary Hawkesworth, Gloria Anzaldua, Victoria Bernal, and Inderpal Grewal jumped off the paper, and many of their critiques became real to me. I was a firsthand witness. Still, I felt anxiety because there were so many stories I wanted to write

about. How could I select the most powerful one? I have encountered similar anxieties as I have written my larger thesis.

The food bank hosts a huge turkey drive the Saturday before Thanksgiving, and then a huge distribution of said turkeys to our clients the Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday before Thanksgiving. I could write a dissertation on this distribution alone. The operations and logistics of it are impeccable. All employees are required to participate and work a few grueling, long days outside in the thick of the cars and clients. While our CEO exhibited a great deal of servant leadership and humility, (she wore jeans, sneakers, and worked alongside us all day in the hot sun) some of her peers did not lead by example. The poem attached outlines my observations during this distribution. It is not a personal attack against a singular woman, but rather a critique of the entire organization, which favors white, wealthy, middle, aged executives. Unfortunately the incident I wrote about in my poem did not occur in isolation; I have witnessed (and sometimes experienced) this patriarchal system of oppression on a routine basis.

Upon completing my participant interviews, I realized that I was not alone in my observation of this rampant white privilege. Tracey commented on a similar incident without any knowledge of the existence of this poem. She said:

I feel that because of rich, white women...there is always one person who will smile. It is a power thing. That 'I am a woman and I am in charge of all of these people' [attitude]. There is a reason why our dress code here is not formal, but yet it's very rare that I see you not in high heels and a pencil skirt...

Her observation, coupled with my experience, indicate a theme of oppression and privilege among the senior staff at the food bank.

My overarching question is: who is in power, who holds privilege, and who is oppressed as a result? At a quick glance it would seem the food bank is leading the way because many of the people in power are women, including the CEO. However, a closer look reveals all of said women are white, middle aged, wealthy, and privileged. Bernal and Grewal write in *Theorizing NGOs: States, Feminisms and Neoliberalism*, “It may not be realistic to expect that all women will rise equally and simultaneously” which may “contribute to (re)producing inequality” (2014, p. 305). Bernal and Grewal are realistic in their critique and acknowledge that it is not enough to merely have women in power in organizations. After my experiences I agree with them and now realize that if the wrong women are in power, other women and minority groups may actually be penalized more.

The men in leadership are just as homogenous. I want to avoid gross generalizations or misrepresentations with a disclaimer that I believe with training, education, and commitment, people of privilege can (and should) engage in feminist praxis. Yet, from my direct experience, these leaders lack the training, education, commitment, and sensitivity to these issues. There are many Latino and African American employees at the food bank, and none of them seem to ever attain meaningful promotions. In *Black Feminist Thought*, Patricia Hill Collins writes about the “persistent racial discrimination” (2009, p. 72) black people, particularly women face in both the working and middle class. A black, female manager at the food bank has disclosed to me that she believes she will not move up in the organization because she is black and does

not have a college degree. She therefore is subject to multiple penalties: being a woman, single mom, black, working class, and not highly educated as other powerful people are. Social justice and equality can never be achieved until such blatant oppression is overcome in the workplace.

Additionally, the board of directors is rather homogeneous as well, consisting of predominantly white men, with one African American at my last check. The board of directors consists of wealthy business leaders who are predominantly conservative. I have interfaced with several different members, on different occasions, who have made inappropriate, rude, stereotypical comments about people in poverty. What Hawkesworth writes in *Feminist Inquiry* applies to the sentiments several of them believe: “the poor remain poor because they are unwilling to accept jobs available to them” (2006, p. 191). When the then Governor Elect of AZ visited, he seemed disgusted by the lines and crowds of needy clients and stated he will bring better jobs to Arizona so people can literally work their way out of poverty. Hawkesworth is spot on in her assessment that conservatives like this are very apt to cut welfare spending and are reluctant to address the real causes of poverty. The governor elect is staunchly against welfare, so why were we so willing to tour him and tout his visit across all forms of media? The perpetuation of white power and politics is sickening.

My observation is that all of the people in power at the food bank: executives, board members, and even the Governor of the state, are white and wealthy. The absolute lack of diversity in a state, country, and world as diverse as the one we live in is utterly appalling. These powerful decision makers are entirely unrepresentative of the clients we

serve on a daily basis. We live literally in the Borderlands that Anzaldua writes about, in a place where many powerful people want clients and leaders who are “smelling like white bread but dead” (1996, p. 5). If you are not white, perhaps you can attain power if you assimilate. Let the feminist, person of color, person of poverty inside die; become plain and like white bread. Abandon your past and present, embrace this patriarchal whiteness. It may be dismal, but this is the way power is attained in many organizations. I truly believe that these systems of power will continue until we begin to rise up and live across all borders. We must demand more for ourselves and our society. The best way to do this is through intentionally engaging in feminist praxis.

## CHAPTER 7

### CONCLUSION

This research initially sought to tell the stories of women of color in the nonprofit sector who have transitioned from clients in the welfare state to caseworkers. In the data collection process, many additional themes emerged. This thesis delved into the history of food banks and the roles employees, particularly women of color, play in the food bank. Next, the research was positioned in the context of feminist theory, and existing research was explored. The participants shared their experiences of being women of color at the food bank, and we learned that race cannot be pinpointed as the singular discrimination women face in the workforce. On the contrary, the women I interviewed faced problematic encounters, and at times discrimination, based upon their age, educational attainment, weight, gender, and abilities.

While the first few chapters laid the foundational knowledge of food banking and feminist theory, the chapter on the welfare state, specifically the myth of the Welfare Queen, sought to bring together both worlds of food banking and global feminisms in an attempt at telling the story of welfare recipients, while simultaneously working to dismantle infamously false stereotypes. The final two chapters explored more food bank specific critiques, as presented by the participants, and coupled that research with an ethnographic poem I wrote to challenge white privilege in the work place. So where does that leave us now?

The final question I asked all five participants was about the importance of border crossing, in the sense of Anzaldua's actual and metaphorical borders. I wanted to know



why they thought border crossing from being clients to caseworkers was important.

Their concluding words tie together this complex, multifaceted research succinctly. The responses I received from the participants were inspiring. Yvette eloquently noted the importance of border crossing when she said:

I think that it's important. When you're on that side, there should be a time when you cross that border because it builds a bridge. People make a joke like: they got outta the hood and they never came back. I think it is important and is something that needs to happen. I am a firm believer that people are not supposed to stay stuck in social services. Either we are not doing our job, or the government is not doing their job to build that bridge. You should not be on welfare for years and years and years. It was not created for that reason. It is not supposed to be something you live off of. It is supposed to help you when you're having a hard time, to get back on your feet. Are we equipping people with the resources to cross that border? And part of those resources are, do these people believe in themselves that they can cross the border? Are we helping them? It's gonna get better but you have to push yourself. Are we doing our job? Firmly, I don't believe we are because there are so many people stuck...When you cross over you are able to give back because you've lived it, you've experienced it.

In my opinion, Yvette had the most moderate and realistic approach to both border crossing and the welfare state. She acknowledged the need for changes and reforms, and in a feminist way, she was self-reflexive when she asked: what can we do to fix this system? Yes, it is important to cross these borders, but what might be more important is

what you do when you get to the other side. Are we improving and strengthening each side of the border so there is a sense of social justice and human rights on each side?

The other participants all shared similar responses with me regarding the need to transition across borders, and they asserted that the borders might be fluid, or temporary. As Yvette noted in an earlier chapter, the absence of one paycheck might send a seemingly well off nonprofit professional across the border, into the front door of the food bank. As we learned from Hollywood, an unexpected illness or injury can cause a person to seek help from the welfare system. Lola said that “that is what welfare is for: to fill that gap. That time when you lost your job, that time when your husband died, that time when you are in a situational depression moment.” The welfare system can be a lifesaving hand up, not just a handout. This is an important discussion that I believe we must continue to have both internally at the food bank, and externally at academic and research institutions.

Dhamoon’s notion of global feminisms is about bringing diverse women together, not in a sisterhood, but in solidarity. This is a solidarity among, and in spite of, differences. While many critiques and problematic aspects of the food banking system have been brought to light through this research, there are also many positive aspects of this work. All five of the participants noted, even if briefly, the positive impact the food bank has on the community and state. It is undeniably a fantastic resource for people who are at risk of food insecurity. Likewise, the American welfare state offers many solutions and programs for clients who are in need of assistance. While the participants held varying views on the welfare state, I believe that there is a unifying solidarity among

these differences. This solidarity stems from the fact that while we all play different roles in the food bank, we are connected by even just a thread, to the mission of the work, and the inherent goodness of the nonprofit organization. If we are able to come together and work through our political and ideological differences, if we are able to acknowledge and address our biases and prejudices, if we are able to address the problems presented herein, than we will truly be successful feminist practitioners, advancing and ensuring equality for all.

However, solidarity is hard to achieve, and even in a space as inherently good as a food bank, it has not yet been realized. Yes, there are women in positions of power, but not all the right women, and none that are representative of our clients or our workforce. Yes, there is some feminist praxis of women of color working together, yet there is simultaneously still racism, prejudice, and biases. Yes, some people at the food bank make a comfortable salary, yet not every employee makes a living wage. Yes, there is an acknowledgment of the effectiveness of welfare benefits such as SNAP, but there is also a perpetuation of myths, a paranoia of rampant fraud, and a strong distrust in recipients and the system. Yes, we serve a diverse group of clients on a daily basis so they may put food on the table, yet we preclude them from having a place at the food bank's table; we stifle their voices in the decision making process. Yes, the food bank is a nonprofit organization, yet it operates in a capitalist society and is dependent on government and corporate funding to the point that it operates more like a for profit business than a charity. Yes, the food bank distributes millions of pounds of food to people in the community each year, but it does not always do so with social justice or equality in mind.

This research revealed a myriad of tensions and contradictions that are both problematic and interesting. The conversations that interview participants engaged in were productive first steps in working towards building a solidarity among differences, but there is still so much work to do in order to truly realize the goals of global feminist theory and the mission of the food bank. Through the critical conversations, knowledge production, and idea dissemination this research achieved, I believe we have laid the foundation for social justice and shed light on the importance of border crossing at both the nonprofit and academic level.

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APPENDIX A  
RECRUITMENT SCRIPT

Greetings \_\_\_\_\_,

I am a graduate student under the direction of Professor Behl (Natasha.Behl@asu.edu) in the New College Master's Program of Social Justice and Human Rights at Arizona State University. I am conducting a research study to learn more about women, welfare, and nonprofit organizations.

I am recruiting individuals to participate in interviews, which will take approximately 90 minutes. For research purposes these focus groups will be recorded, although participants will remain anonymous.

Your participation in this study is voluntary and will be greatly appreciated. Participants will receive a small gift card for sharing their time. If you have any questions concerning the research study, please email me at [Kimberly.Roland@asu.edu](mailto:Kimberly.Roland@asu.edu).

Thank you for your time!

Sincerely,

Kimberly Roland

**NOTES:** If data collection involves audiotape and/ or videotape of activities, any consent form, assent form or information letter must advise subjects that the activities will be audiotaped and/or videotaped. The researchers should also describe storage and disposition of the tapes (such as "the tapes will be erased upon completion of the study" or "the tapes will be kept for ...period of time").

If there are certain inclusion/exclusion criteria, these should be mentioned. If participants must be 18 and older, this should be mentioned.



APPENDIX B  
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

To maintain anonymity throughout the process, please change the names of any person you may reference in the interview.

1. Why did you decide to participate in this interview?
2. Can you please talk about what your childhood/early life was like?
  - a. Home life?
  - b. Family stability?
3. Can you please provide background information about when you began working in the nonprofit sector?
4. What was the reason you decided to begin working in the nonprofit sector?
  - a. Did you seek employment in this field so that you could assist others as they navigate the public benefits process?
  - b. Did you set out to help people because someone good helped you and you wanted to “pay it forward?”
  - c. Did you set up to help people because someone bad did not help you and you wanted to improve the process/experience for future women?
5. Can you please discuss ways you think being a woman of color have impacted your work in the nonprofit sector? This can be positive, negative, or a combination of both.
6. If possible, please share a story of a time when you were made aware you are a woman of color in the workplace.
7. Can you please share a story or experience you had applying for and/or receiving public assistance?
  - a. How did this make you feel?
  - b. What was the process like?
8. Can you please discuss ways you think being a woman of color impacted the assistance you received in the process? This can be positive, negative, or a combination of both.
9. Do you think it is important to transition out of the “welfare state” into another sector? If so, why?
10. What advice do you wish someone had given you regarding either the public assistance/welfare process and/or the nonprofit sector?
11. How would you change/improve either of these sectors?

APPENDIX C  
FOOD STAMP BITCHES



APPENDIX D

WELFARE QUEEN DEPICTIONS IN AMERICAN POPULAR CULTURE



<https://heidyfd.wordpress.com/2012/09/23/76/>

Thanks for showing up to the state-funded health-care clinic with your Louis Vuitton purse, fresh mani and pedi, MAC lipgloss, hair weave and Medicaid card.



your  cards  
someecards.com

<http://apainandapleasure.com/2013/09/>