

**Trash Talk:
A Look at Dumpster Diving Subculture in Victoria, BC**

by

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Dumpster diving is a phenomenon that has cropped up as an alternative “approach to food provisioning” in response to the alarming amount of global food waste (Carolsfeld & Erikson, 2013, p. 245). Also known as “gleaning” food from the trash, diving, and urban scavenging, dumpster diving is commonly viewed as an act and lifestyle that goes against social norms, and is reserved for individuals who are desperate for food due to lack of any better options (Barnard, 2011; Fernandez et al., 2011). However, extensive research on dumpster divers around the world shows that they collect food from the trash for more than simply economic reasons (Carolsfeld & Erikson, 2013; Black, 2007; Edwards & Mercer, 2007; Gross, 2009). In Victoria, B.C. there is a subculture of individuals who identify as dumpster divers and glean food from the trash. Through following eleven urban scavengers and filming them over the course of three months, this thesis probes the question of how dumpster divers create meaning and identity based on rescuing food from the trash. Through understanding the motivations behind digging in the trash, dumpster divers are better understood within the context of increasing food waste and subcultural identity.

This research shows that for many dumpster divers in the Victoria community, diving represents consumer resistance with ideological motivations (Carolsfeld & Erikson, 2013; Fernandez et al., 2011; Giles, 2014; Gross, 2009; Haselwanter, 2014; Kroijer, 2015; Mercer & Edwards, 2007; Wilson, 2013). Gleaning food from the trash naturally challenges normative social codes (Black, 2007). Therefore, it creates an alternative to mainstream food provisioning while establishing a new set of different social codes (Carolsfeld & Erikson, 2013, p. 256). Dumpster diving denotes a lifestyle and a reaction to “society’s failings” around food waste without causing disturbance and

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chaos; in a sense, it is a “silent rebellion” (Haselwanter, 2014, p. 104). Furthermore, gleaning from the trash becomes a means of challenging the current status quo of food production and commodification (Belasco, 2007; Carolsfeld & Erikson, 2013; Gross, 2009; Mercer & Edwards, 2007; Pritchett, 2009).

Theory

Dumpster diving, however, isn't all about actively resisting mainstream culture to mitigate food waste. Alternative acts that are rooted largely in ideological identity and political culture are collective movements by nature (Buechler, 1995, p. 422). To better understand dumpster diving as a subculture, it is necessary to examine social theory and how identity is shaped from a cultural and social perspective. Research on new social movements (NSM's) provides the theoretical foundation for this research. New social movements utilize symbolic and collective actions, value autonomy, and usually subvert consumer tendencies (Buechler, 1995, p. 442). New social movement theory also recognizes that NSM's are made up of a variety of networks, or smaller groups, that make up the greater collective of dumpster divers, rather than a centralized organizational model of action (Buechler, p. 442). Research into the social theory field, in particular new social movements, acknowledge the complex nature of reasons for a phenomenon like dumpster diving. New social movements are both cultural and political in nature, and come together around shared ideological identification with particular issues rather than a shared demographic base (Buechler, p. 453).

An ethnographic look at dumpster diving and food waste shows that its meaning is not inherent; rather, it is molded by societal codes. Furthermore, discourse surrounding the perception of cultural norms can change how behaviors “are perceived and the range

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of potential meanings they can embody” (Keaton & Bodie, 2011, p. 192). The process of defining behavior is a social one; since a behavior or action within society is not inherently defined, it is the social process of definition that gives it meaning (Keaton & Bodie, 2011, p. 192). Gleaning food from the trash has come to be defined within the social context of existing normative modes of food provisioning (i.e. grocery stores).

Urban scavenging, according to new social movement theory, heralds “a new politics concerned with quality of life, projects of self-realization, and goals of participation and identity formation” (Buechler, 1995, p. 446). Through recognizing dumpster diving as a new social movement, its nature becomes inherently anti-conventional. New social movements recognize and defend the need to create new modes of living within the existing social structures of modern society, and “attempt to build on it by expanding the social spaces in which action can occur” (Buechler, 1995, p. 448). By adopting an alternative mode to food provisioning, dumpster diving creates a unique social space within society as a new social movement.

Although this research fits into the new social movement theory and literature, the way in which it paves its own pathway is because of its creation of organic community. This community is made up of pockets of people who participate in the same lifestyle, each for various personal reasons. In other words, the participants’ aim was not to create a community of a new social movement, although they have done so as a natural result of this subculture lifestyle, namely dumpster diving. New social movement theory is underpinned by expressions of activism in a particular community (Buechler, 1995; Krøijer, 2015; Shantz, 2010). The nature of activism is one that involves an active intention to be a part of change within culture. Although there are many divers who fit

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within the range of more explicit activist identity under the new social movement theory, nearly all of the research participants were participating in what I have coined an organic social movement. Although their lifestyles meet the qualifications for a new social movement theory, they are not expressed activists within the community of Victoria, B.C.

Perhaps the key qualifying element that delineates Buechler's (1995) New Social Movement theory with the dumpster diving subculture in my research is that of politics versus community. Most research available on dumpster diving views the social movement aspects through a highly politicized lens, as shown in work by Fernandez, Brittain & Bennett (2011); Mercer & Edwards (2007); and Pritchett (2009). Social movements are generally grounded in political roots, and this literature on the subculture of dumpster diving as a social movement largely politicizes the dumpster divers through linking them with organizations such as Food Not Bombs (Mercer & Edwards, 2007). What comes to light through this research is that Victoria's dumpster diving subculture is largely grounded in a shared organic community based around ideological, economic, ecological, and political reasons.

Cultural identity theory is another key quality for my research on dumpster divers. For the self-proclaimed dumpster divers in my research, both their involvement in the act of dumpster diving and their connection to a community of other dumpster divers creates a social and cultural identity based around shared values and behaviors. Since the values and behavior of urban scavengers goes against the dominant cultural pursuits of food provisioning, dumpster diving is considerably a subculture. Subcultures bring forth a "perhaps unintentional contribution to the deconstruction of the [dominant] concept [of] 'society'" (Jenks, 2005, p. 4). The subculture of urban scavenging is essentially a

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counter-culture that embodies alternative value systems and behavioral responses to food waste.

Literature Review

Research for this project draws from and contributes to literature on dumpster diving, social constructivist theory, new social movement theory, cultural identity theory, alternative food networks and waste. Furthermore, I draw from the body of ethnographic literature on what motivates dumpster divers to dive into the trash, when more often than not, they have other means of acquiring food (Carolsfeld & Erikson, 2013; Giles, 2014; Gross, 2009; Haselwanter, 2014; Kroijer, 2015; Mercer & Edwards, 2007; Wilson, 2013). Expounding on literature on dumpster divers and their identities within a subculture and anti-consumerism ideology (Barnard, 2011; Carolsfeld & Erikson, 2013; Fernandez et al., 2011; Gross, 2009), I show how personal and collective subcultural identity is created out of a disconnection from normative societal modes and behavior. I also demonstrate how new social movements, such as dumpster diving, actively construct and communicate their own form of power (Benford & Hunt, 1992) through community.

Dumpster diving, although sometimes an overt and explicit political statement, is “generally a combination of social critique, environmental self-responsibility, and life philosophy” (Haselwanter, 2014, p. 102). The purpose of this research was to understand how dumpster divers are essentially “modern-day foragers” (Gross, 2009, p. 57) living off the trash of others, and in so doing, create a distinct identity that counters mainstream culture. To achieve this objective, I challenged the dominant portrayal of dumpster diving as a desperate and dirty means of acquiring food, and shifted the critical lens of focus where the identity of dumpster divers are concerned into the realm of new social

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movement theory and power engagement (Barnard, 2011; Benford & Hunt, 1992; Buechler, 1995; Melucci, 1992).

The theoretical framework for this research comes largely from Buechler's (1995) new social movement theories, Benford and Hunt's dramaturgy and social movements, and Melucci's theory on ideology and social movements. Literature on new social movement theory states that alternative activities such as dumpster diving are effectually used to assert an identity counter to the mainstream (Barnard, 2011; Buechler, 1995). New social movements are not socially ranked, and in the case of dumpster diving, they use non-traditional and collective methods of protesting mainstream culture and politics (Barnard, 2011; Melucci, 1996; Offe, 1985; Touraine, 1981). "The new movements bring with them a new politics concerned with quality of life, projects of self-realization, and goals of participation and identity formation" (Buechler, 1995, p. 446).

Barnard (2011) stresses that it is important to pay attention to elements of expression and identity in dumpster diving as well as to "strategic functions of such behavior" (p. 421). By researching content from theories around alternative social identity (Fernandez, 2011; Mercer & Edwards, 2007; Wilson, 2013), it is clear that the aim of countercultural movements is essentially to "call into question behaviours that are taken for granted by mainstream society" (Gross, 2009, p. 61). Counterculture and resistance, though inherently a piece of the makeup of dumpster diving, can be observed and acknowledged at various degrees. Especially within self-proclaimed groups who are considered among the counterculture lifestyle such as dumpster divers, there is a resistance to consumerist modes of existence (Fernandez, 2011, p. 1780). Shantz (2010) addresses the ethos of "DIY" or do-it-yourself proponents (p. 50). Dumpster divers are

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“DIYers” who seek to transform consumerist tendencies into a “productivist ethos that attempts a re-integration of production and consumption” (p. 50). In this sense, cultural theory denotes dumpster diving as a culture of resistance in relation to social and consumerist issues (Mercer & Edwards, 2007, p. 281).

A fair amount of literature exists that delves into the lives of dumpster divers to express a sense of unifiable subculture, identity, and meaning; this literature invariably comes in contact with issues surrounding food waste, and how dumpster diving culture is intimately interwoven with it (Belasco, 2007; Carolsfeld, A. L., & Erikson, S. L., 2013; Giles, D. B., 2014; Gross, J., 2009; Krøijer, S., 2015; Mercer, D. & Edwards, F., 2007; Pritchett, L., ed., 2009; Wilson, A. D., 2013). The waste niches that dumpster divers make use of essentially act a “dis-engage[ment]” from the dominant capitalist system, and in so doing, effect “new economic and social realities” (Wilson, 2013, p. 734). The ideological goal of dumpster divers as a subculture is disengagement: dumpster diving is one of many of the strategies used to create an independent and self-sustaining economy outside the bounds of mainstream capitalist consumerism (Barnard, 2011; Ferrell, 2006; Gross, 2009).

Food has been a source of cultural and political engagement for a long time, and it continues to be a site of both social and political transformation (Barker, 2012; Wilson, 719). In terms of theoretical foundations for my research, much insight can be gained by looking at Levi-Strauss’s structuralist approach to food (Barker, 2012, pp. 17). After experiencing the food culture of a society remarkably different from your own, it becomes apparent that food, just as much as manners and language, is largely culturally determined. If food is a “signifier of symbolic meanings,” then cultural codes determine

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what is considered food and the meanings attached to food consumption (Barker, 2012, pp. 17). Furthermore, what is considered to be edible or inedible is determined by cultural meaning, not by nutritive value (Barker, 2012, pp. 17). Dumpster diving exists at the intersection of political and societal issues that are centered in the traditional food system, and include problems of “inequality, over-consumption, waste management, poverty, social and environmental sustainability, and urban food security” (Carolsfeld & Erikson, 2013, p. 263). An ideology and identity exists for dumpster divers, and it is centered around how they make use of, in this case, food “waste” in western society. Dumpster divers generally uphold values around sharing food (Gross, 2009, p. 71), social consciousness, and intentionally working towards waste reduction and against mainstream consumerism (Carolsfeld & Erikson, 2013, p. 260).

It is true that communities of dumpster divers (such as the worldwide Food Not Bombs chapters) can embody strong political undertones; members who identify with these groups that engage in dumpster diving “choose to glean food for a blend of economic, political and environmental reasons within these subcultures” (Mercer & Edwards, 2007, p. 282). This more visibly political act of gleaning food for groups such as Food Not Bombs is largely a symbolic one; dumpster diving is a message against capitalist consumerism, overproduction, and food waste (Mercer & Edwards, 2007, p. 282). By peering further into the social and political underpinnings of dumpster diving, one will encounter the degree to which food “waste” is held in private, concealed, and made inaccessible to dumpster divers. The concept of a “defense of luxury lifestyles” and an “obsession with physical security systems” as discussed in Barker (2012, pp. 415), highlights a major part of why so much edible food goes to waste, and why certain people

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capitalize on utilizing it by dumpster diving. The “Fortress LA” idea that Barker (2012) speaks about explains the careful planning of city spaces to present a favorable appearance and eliminate that which is deemed undesirable by social standards.

Giles (2014) speaks about how the waste that we find in dumpsters is largely an intentional effect of keeping the market economy fit for profit. The fact that food had been discarded into dumpsters has essentially negated the value of the food (Giles, 2014, p. 106). This being the case, dumpster divers then create a niche by utilizing the trash and bringing it political, as well as nutritive value. “The threat not only of alternative forms of circulation but of demystifying the commodity form itself, as the deliberate labor of their disposal is immediately apparent in a way that their production is often not” (Giles, 2014, p. 108).

Ideological, as opposed to simply practical, motivations are what define dumpster divers as a distinct subculture. Fernandez (2011) illustrated the three main motivations for dumpster divers to dumpster dive: ideological, economical, and psychological. His research concludes that although any of these reasons can move someone to begin dumpster diving, they are all connected to each other and are all active factors in the lives of dumpster divers (Fernandez, 2011, p. 1787). Although the practical incentives for dumpster diving (acquiring free food) will inevitably always exist for dumpster divers, they believe they are primarily actualizing ideological motivations since they often engage in communal sharing, while inadvertently (though not unhappily) procuring food (Fernandez, 2011, p. 1783). In other words, necessity is not the driving force behind dumpstering. Forging values, community and ideological motivations is critical in

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forming identity based on the rejection of mainstream consumerist culture (Edwards & Mercer, 2007; Fernandez, 2011).

Methodology

The salience of understanding the culture of dumpster diving and the motives for doing so is only possible by a first-hand, intimate look at the individuals who dumpster dive. Ethnographic research is an ideal approach to exploring the lifestyles of dumpster divers in Victoria, B.C., why they dumpster dive, and to better make sense of how their lifestyle coincides with a broader societal and political identity. Ethnography uses a “process of creating and representing knowledge” (Pink, pp. 124), to develop a thick description of a group of people, providing information not just about the observable behavior but also the context behind it (Charmaz & Mitchell, 2001). As opposed to documentary or observational film, ethnographic film makes use of the contextual, and in this case, salient social elements that are critical to the research being done (MacDougall, 2011). The use of ethnographic fieldwork for this particular project is significant insofar as ethnography connects subjective cultural meaning with observable behavior (Charmaz & Mitchell, 2001) of the participants.

The narratives of the participants in an ethnographic context provide access to the personal meanings and cultural contexts behind the stories (Cortazzi, 2001; Scarduzio et al., 2011). This makes the ethnographic experience a “lived one” rather than simply a recounting of events. This is critical to my thesis, as the creation of meaning and culture through identity is most appropriately expressed through understanding the motivations and ideology of the participants. Ethnographic narratives, “share the meaning of

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experience,” (Cortazzi, 2001) and provide a basis for understanding the economic, psychological, and political motivations behind the culture of dumpster diving.

Furthermore, drawing from research on ethnographic film (Ball & Smith, 2001; Chambers & Rakic, 2009; Falzone, 2004; Grimshaw & Ravetz, 2015; Jones, 2012; MacDougall, 2011; Pink, 2012), the use of visual ethnography (film) for my research provides particular attention to the “role of the audience in the reception of the text,” (Ball & Smith, 2001) and provides “a decentralized, deregulated and cooperative approach to the creation of transcendent ethnographic film” (Falzone, 2004, p. 326).

Although there are a fair amount of academic works that study the phenomenon of dumpster diving and the subculture it entails, the films around dumpster diving and food waste as far as I could find, though well produced and knowledgeable, had not taken an ethnographic lens. Academic literature on dumpster diving has used mainly qualitative and ethnographic interviews as the method. The films on dumpster diving produced have been mostly centered around food waste, which does not address the critical social (or ethnographic) lens.

Film has the ability to produce a much different stylistic than written data findings; i.e. the dynamic appearance and tone of the participants and subject matter according to MacDougall (2011) can only be described in words to a limited extent. Ethnographic film has a methodological benefit here in terms of being able to capture a fluid experience of the subject matter, which includes the research benefit of full documentation of audio and visual material.

Film more freely “reach[es] across cultural boundaries through those aspects of life that are common” among various groups in our society (MacDougall, D., 2011, p.

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111). By using ethnographic film as a medium, the filmmaker is able to “embed themselves in a network of dynamic relationships” (Grimshaw & Ravetz, 2015, p. 261), therefore exposing the culture of dumpster diving by means of the relationship between the dumpster divers and the greater society. Ethnographic film stays away from recounting narratives of participants to simply “exemplify cultural truths”; it offers a broad space for themes to emerge (Grimshaw & Ravetz, 2015, p. 262). For an audience who will have mixed perceptions about dumpster diving culture, the medium of out is able to portray the more visceral landscape of the participants.

Films express the personalities, body language, and responses of those on camera and by doing so, begin to follow the narrative of their life story (MacDougall, D., 2011, p. 111). Through displaying this visceral information throughout the film (please see Appendix A to view), the values and behaviors of the dumpster divers begins to paint a more colorful portrait of dumpster diving culture. Each participant within this film expressed verbally a passion about salvaging food from dumpsters; however, the emotional language displayed on film is captured not only by a verbal account but also through expressionistic exhibition and nuances.

The mechanism of ethnographic film gives literal “voice” to cultures that may go otherwise largely unheard of and are oftentimes misunderstood (Grimshaw & Ravetz, 2015). Film acts as a “legitimate way of enlarging previously unexamined subjects and increasing anthropological understanding” (MacDougall, D., 2011, p. 102). Ethnographic film is optimal for presenting multiple “cases” or narratives for exploration and comparison to the audience (MacDougall, D., 2011, p. 101). Considering the integrity of

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my ethnographic goal rests in portraying narratives of both individuals and how they comprise a culture of dumpster divers, ethnographic film is best suited for this topic.

Ethnographic film, in particular, according to MacDougall (2011) is optimal for presenting cases for exploration by the audience, which was my intent in using ethnographic film as a means to present my thesis. I want the audience to be able to observe first-hand (as far as that goes) the participants, and what their dumpster diving physically looks like. Ethnographic film is a means to portray the colourful narratives of the subculture of dumpster divers, and the vibrant community that has emerged from this lifestyle in Victoria, B.C. Beyond these practical reasons that I decided to use film, I find a high importance in the dissemination of research results within the academic community. By producing a film within an academic environment, I am essentially able to procure a wider audience for my research.

Method

For the 22 minute ethnographic film on dumpster diving, I drew upon data (footage) collected from eleven people who have been dumpster diving regularly and self-identify as dumpster divers in the community of Victoria, B.C. For the purposes of this research, dumpster diving is defined as a lifestyle that involves seeking out food in the dumpsters of grocery food stores that is intended for storage, and not immediate consumption. I recruited participants for my film through research in the community on dumpster diving, word of mouth, and networking. Qualifications for participants were outlined, and once participants were selected and wanting to be a part of the film, consent forms were signed. For each interview, the participant and I made a date to meet and set-up an interview at a specific location. All interactions with participants were either

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interviews or dumpster diving excursions, and all activity was captured on film. I chose to use semi-structured interviews because of the importance of allowing the participants' viewpoint to be as fully present as possible, while still remaining generally on track with the ethos of the film. For the filming itself, I recruited a film student from the University of Victoria to take on the job of cameraman as well as editing the footage with Final Cut Pro video editing software. The film equipment was rented through Royal Roads AV department.

The semi-structured interview questions for the participants provided the basic skeleton for the meat of the film. I posed seven short questions to each of the participants, and encouraged them to give as much or as little detail as they wished on each; I also allowed room for adding anything else either at the end or during the interview that they wanted to speak about in regards to their dumpster diving experience. The questions ranged from factual data about each participant such as how long they have been dumpster diving for, to more personal questions such as why they choose to engage in dumpster diving, and what they would like to see changed in regards to dumpster diving and food waste in general. Bearing the objective of the film in mind – to draw out and showcase personal reasons for why each participant dumpster dives and how/if at all they relate to a like-minded culture of dumpster divers – the questions and recorded footage of dumpstering excursions created an inductive process all the way from participant selection to when viewing the finalized film. To promote reflexivity throughout the filming process, leaving participants space to open up and express themselves on the camera became my main objective. Through allowing participants to take the reins in

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dumpster diving outings and leaving space on the camera for them to speak freely, I was able to reflect on themes and experiences I was not able to predict before.

Findings

The final presentation of this research was aimed to give a deep space to the voices of the participants by piecing together individual narratives and dumpster diving footage into themes around culture and identity. Due to the film being largely inductive in nature, data analysis began by watching and editing footage of the interviews and dumpster diving excursions. The basis for the film came through the interview questions and presenting the answers and experiences of the dumpster divers in a meaningful way. The main themes that emerged through the footage were around what started the participants dumpster diving and what made them continue to do so.

As shown in the film, the incentive to dumpster dive is initially driven by a variety of reasons, including economic savings, worldviews around food waste, and sustainability practices. The organic creation of a community essentially is born of these practices, which tends to go against the more practical or competitive view of dumpster diving. Other similar research on dumpster diving (Fernandez, Brittain., & Bennett, 2011) tends to expound on the more “competitive” nature of dumpster diving, and how that is managed among the dumpster divers. A strictly political standpoint would stress the importance of the fact that dumpster divers are technically partaking from the same limited resources. This would insinuate that there would be an antagonistic quality felt among the dumpster divers, which was not found at all in my research.

Shared values surrounding sustainable living practices like dumpster diving were motivating factors to dumpster dive. Economic savings were brought up by most of the

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participants, but what proved to be one of the most salient motivators for continuing to dumpster dive was the sense of community and camaraderie felt among their fellow dumpster divers. Though the participants may have arrived at dumpster diving to save money and for alternative ideological and political reasoning, what has kept them going is the fellowship that has been created in the process. This community sustains a powerful sense of belonging and meaning, and becomes an intrinsic part of dumpster diving itself. This is shown through the rituals such as getting ready to dumpster dive, going out to the dumpster together with supplies, enjoying conversation and laughs during the dive, bringing the food home, cleaning it, and either storing it or preparing it together for a communal meal.

Through my literature review on dumpster diving and similar social movements, I noticed something missing from these works that was overwhelmingly present in my research findings. It was this overarching sense of community that binds the participants together in a new social movement and gives them the impetus to continue. These community bonds create a powerful and even political voice when brought together in action through my film.

All of the participants expressed that one of their reasons for dumpster diving was because of the harsh reality around how much food is wasted in our society. Motivations for gleaning food from the trash were generally due to two distinct reasons. Participants expressed that it “just made sense” to dumpster dive simply based on how much good food is thrown away everyday, and many of them also commented on the economic advantages where grocery waste becomes free food for them. The common sense reasoning given by most of the urban scavengers is a reaction to a heavily wasteful

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consumer society in their opinion. Economic reasoning, or “free food” was shown to be largely a more secondary motive. How the issue of food waste motivates the dumpster divers to dumpster dive became apparent through the footage and was a common basic thread throughout the interviews.

On another level, activism emerged as a poignant theme throughout the footage. “Divers have not just found an alternative to the marketplace; they are clearly resisting the market’s power and control” (Fernandez et al., 2011, p. 1783). Although dumpster diving activism appears on the surface as the behaviour of gleaning food from dumpsters, it can be wrought with more political motivations (Barnard, 2011). This theme of a more activist nature was especially prevalent with “Lee,” a participant who is connected with more politically-minded activists in the community. Lee uses the phrases “self-empowered,” “liberating food from the trash,” and “trapping food” to describe his dumpster diving experiences, which has a powerful activist and political connotations. In contrast to this level of activism and ideology, most of the other dumpster divers focused more on ecological and economical reasoning (preventing waste and saving money) as their motivation for dumpster diving, and the sense of community to maintain their lifestyle.

It became clear that there is a stark difference between politically based movements that incorporate dumpster diving, such as Food Not Bombs, and pockets of dumpster divers such as Community Cabbage. Community Cabbage, a group of around 40 core University of Victoria students, have created a community around dumpster diving. Community Cabbage is a good example of what would likely happen if the other smaller pockets of dumpster divers were to grow in size. They host informational events

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on proper etiquette around dumpster diving, gleaning and cleaning food, and also prepares meals weekly that are available to the public for free. When asked about why this movement began, it was for reasons around food waste and economics, mixed with some political views. What I found about why they continue to hold such events and engage in this lifestyle, the reasons were mainly due to the creation and maintenance of a community around dumpster diving.

New social movements such as dumpster diving tend to point out issues that can be taken for granted in mainstream society, such as food waste. Community Cabbage is a group of students at the University of Victoria who get together and dumpster dive, hold informative events, and make free meals together weekly.

The purpose of Community Cabbage is not to actively advocate for a more sustainable society, but to inspire sustainable activities and create and maintain a community of individuals who also participate in sharing food. Research into new social movement theory shows that new social movements utilize some form of political channel to assert an identity culture; my research on dumpster diving in Victoria, B.C., had shown that this was generally not at least an initial motivator for the participants.

Perhaps the strongest theme that emerged throughout the course of this research was how important a sense of community can be to dumpster diving culture; this was then portrayed in the film since it came across as such a salient quality. Fernandez et al. (2011) raise the question of how marginalized groups in society can construct a positive social identity; the theme of community as well as communal sharing of the gleaned food appears to be a solution to this question.

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Within the literature and research available on dumpster diving, I found a strong theme around the self-identified “types” of people who dumpster dive. For example, Carolsfeld and Erickson’s (2013) study on dumpster diving in Vancouver listed “freegans” and “homebums” as examples of some of the terms that the dumpster divers call themselves and others. Throughout my research, I observed that there were no “labels” that were given to me to use through the participant’s self-identification in the dumpster diving subculture. In other words, they did not directly refer to themselves as freegans, hippies, activists, etc.; therefore, the only terminology that was ethically appropriate for me to use was “dumpster divers,” which they self-identified with.

It is important to recognize that self-identification plays a large role in defining placement within a social movement. It is for this reason that I have used the term “organic social movement” to describe my research, since although the participants do not necessarily self-identify with terminology such as freegan or activist, the qualities of such may be there, but they can manifest in a much different way. In this case, the dumpster diving “movement” had common threads of shared value systems and behavioural practices, not group or demographic identification.

Not only did the dumpster divers express a strong sense of community, but their actions also embody a motivation to share the food with others. This theme of sharing became especially apparent with the potlucks hosted by the Community Cabbage, but was also apparent during interviews with dumpster divers outside of this group. All participants expressed that their encounters with other dumpster divers in the community were positive ones, many of them making friends and bolstering the dumpster diving community ties while digging through the dumpsters together.

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Personal narratives, which are most abstractly defined as “structures of knowledge and storied ways of knowing” (Cortazzi, 2001), and visual experiential documentation of dumpster diving provided the make-up for my film. Furthermore, since no visual ethnographic footage can actually be completely objective for the researcher, it was imperative that both subjectivity and reflexivity took center stage within this project (Chambers & Rakic, 2009, p. 256). Incorporating reflexivity, or the ability to mitigate researcher bias, throughout the process was accomplished through partially involving myself in the activities of the divers. For example, I would help carry groceries if needed, and get into some of the dumpsters to immerse myself in the visceral experience of urban scavenging. Especially since this research was conducted on film, my level of participant observation was critical to procuring “an open-ended, suggestive, and reflexive account...knowledge is generated in a peculiar state of awareness that is mediated through the camera and recording equipment” (Chua et al., 2008, p. 59). Through reflexive practices such as partial participation in dumpstering activity, I was able to lessen the effects of research objectivity.

The use of ethnographic film for my project was relegated to giving voice to the participants; film as a mechanism acts as a viable means of enlarging topics and voices that have previously gone unnoticed and also developing social awareness (MacDougall, D., 2011, p. 102). Perhaps the greatest advantage to using the medium of ethnographic film for this project was the ability to capture the incentives and motivational drive behind the divers. Strong community ties, expressed passions around shared ideology with other divers, and sharing food with others in the community were all themes that

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came to light during the filmic process to produce a visual ethnography on a subculture of dumpster divers in Victoria, B.C.

Conclusions

This research has taken an ethnographic look at the personal food related lifestyle choices of a group of dumpster divers and how that situates them among a subculture in Victoria, B.C. Their shared values around food consumption and waste are what identify them as socially differentiated from mainstream culture. A salient conclusion that arose from data analysis of the interviews was that the practical reasons for dumpster diving (food waste) are connected to deeper ideological beliefs around lifestyles and ways of existing in the world (Giles, 2014; Mercer & Edwards, 2007; Wilson, 2013). There is an overwhelming sense of community through shared values (especially within the University of Victoria's Community Cabbage collective); dumpster divers' are able to construct their social identity to counter mainstream Western culture through repurposing and redistributing food waste in their community (Mercer & Edwards, 2007, p. 288). The creation of an organic social movement and community was a critical aspect to understanding why the participants continued to engage in a dumpster diving lifestyle.

Shifting public perspectives around dumpster diving both as a physical act and as a subculture is a realistic goal of this film in the future, as it highlights the diversity of dumpster divers and creates connection on a personal, emotional, and ideological level between the participants and the film audience. Dumpster diving as a mode of activism and social change invites people to "create alternative social spaces within which liberatory institutions, practices and relationships can be nurtured" (Shantz, 2009, p. 106). Issues around identity and collective power within the dumpster diving subculture

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showed up among the participants, as they self-identify as dumpster divers who engage in an alternative lifestyle connected to their value systems. In other words, narrative is the modality through which language and meaning becomes expressed and understood between cultures (MacDougall, D., 2011, p. 111). The activist lifestyle of the dumpster diving community promotes “the beginnings of economic and political self-management ... which can encourage a broader social transformation while also providing some of the conditions for personal and collective sustenance and growth in the present” (Shantz, 2009, p. 107).

Contributions

The goal of my research is to raise awareness and promote critical reflection and discourse around dumpster diving as an alternative lifestyle in western society that generally promotes specific values and is tied to a political and cultural identity, while at the same time defying social normalcy around perceptions of who engages in dumpster diving lifestyles. My hope is that this film will shift social perceptions of dumpster divers, and shed light on the misconception that those who essentially form a collective and lifestyle around the “waste” of capitalist economy do so out of pure material need. Through a process of relation and identification, the audience then will draw connections between what is being shown on the film and their own experiences in the past (MacDougall, D., 2011, p. 111). Last though perhaps not least, part of the incentive to produce a film has to do with the expansion of dissemination of research results. “By developing a trust in instinct...and the naturally expressive and moral potential of [film], social-science research can become richer and more human, if we only are willing to

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jettison some of the baggage of the old academic rigor and dry procedural ethics” (Jones, K., 2012, p. 17).

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Appendix A

Link to 22-minute ethnographic film, “We Eat Garbage”:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_CryFV-xrEo&t=45s