

Cooperating together:

How the communication practices of a food cooperative create and reveal relationships

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### Abstract

Communication is constructed as a cultural practice. Cultural Discourse Analysis believes the communication practices of an organization communicate ideas about identity, values, and relationships. This paper examines a food co-op, The Second Kitchen, and how shared communication and food values create a communicative culture of “community.” By examining two key moments within the organization: how new members are welcomed, and how decisions are made, I highlight the types of relationships created within the organization. This study reveals how the coordinators of The Second Kitchen dictate whether members feel included or excluded in the organization.

## Introduction

*I am so grateful for you guys coming into my sister's life. And like being her peeps to feel grounded with and to trust to like work and stay committed and be passionate about being apart of community change. Cuz there is going to be so much growth for you guys but also for community. And that's a big thing to start at the roots of. So you guys are the roots. What's great about this also, is the hearts that are in this. The way you just want to expand to love everybody and there's such a good, the community is genuine. Because its based on something that's incontestably important.*

*I kind of see the steering committee as having purveo about what happens at the co-op. I mean its member based, the steering committee are the ones who are investing all their time. I see them more as authority.*

The first excerpt above was recorded during a coordinator meeting of The Second Kitchen (TSK) food buying club in the Spring of 2013. This was prompted by an opening circle question that asked about coordinator's "special moments of the semester." The speaker was the sister of a coordinator who helped start the buying club. What is striking about this passage are the characteristics that are used to describe The Second Kitchen. Words such as trust, commitment, passion, community, and love invoke a certain kind of organization. Typically, I would not associate those characteristics with an organization. This raises interesting questions about the nature of the organization and the relationships within it. Specifically, what is going on in TSK that would lead people to call it a community? What types of communications practices and relationships are constructed within this organization that make people feel they are apart of something? The speaker of this quote is talking about TSK in ways that mirror some of my own experiences with the co-op that initially prompted me to research TSK.

The second excerpt paints a slightly different picture. In this passage, he is talking about his view of how the steering committee (or coordinators) functions in relation to its members. According to him, the steering committee gets to decide what happens in the co-op because they invest more time than the other members. He uses the word "authority" to describe them. This word denotes a power differential between the steering committee and the members, highlighting

how the coordinators make decisions deemed more important. Placing these passages side by side draws attention to the characteristics that make TSK a complex organization. The presence of authority in a community seems to be contradictory in nature. A community is made up of people who share a common interest or characteristic (Merriam Webster, 2013). In the case of TSK, members share an interest in eating food that is organic and as local as possible. An authority has the power to give orders or make decisions (Merriam Webster, 2013).

Communities have shared ownership together- something that cannot exist when there is an authority. An authority prevents a community from sharing ownership of decision-making. An authority does not always care whether the needs and wants of the inferior are acknowledged when making decisions. However, in TSK, there seems to be the presence of both. This raises important questions about how TSK is still talked about as a community with the existence of an authority.

The Second Kitchen was founded in May 2011 by three University of Colorado students: Sara Brody, Beth Burzynski, and Sabina Bastias. Their vision was to make local, organic, sustainable foods more accessible and affordable to residents of Boulder. With careful research about food cooperatives, they decided starting out as a small food-buying club would be their best option. They believed it would allow them to achieve their goals around food without requiring the financial means or large support system necessary for a cooperative. Though it is called a “buying club” The Second Kitchen, functions as a food cooperative where people must become members to purchase food. As with other cooperatives, there is a membership deposit, annual fees, and a two and a half hour volunteer commitment every other month. In turn, members get access to more affordable food, in an organizational structure that values gives them opportunities to voice their opinions. The decision making practices in a co-op are more

democratic because every member has equal say, giving no member more power over the other. TSK opened its doors with 18 households; through word of mouth, it has grown to 60 households over the course of two years.

As a member of the co-op and a student of Communication, I found TSK's organizational structure interesting in that it produced a culture unlike any I have been apart of. This began with an Orientation meeting that had myself and other potential members, sitting in a circle introducing ourselves to one another by sharing our favorite vegetable. From there, we took turns reading the member handbook aloud informing us of the ins and outs of TSK, most importantly focusing on what being a member entailed. The language used by the coordinators exemplified group cohesiveness and alignment to a particular set of communication and food values. For example, coordinators talked about their policy about attending the first three Sunday meetings as a new member. This policy was created because they wanted members to be involved and familiar with how the organization worked. This shows how the coordinators valued active participation of the members. In terms of food values, there seemed to be a joint understanding among coordinators and members alike that all food would be organically produced, and as local as possible. I also found the coordinator role interesting in that the coordinators volunteered without payment and helped out of passion for the cause. Watching the interactions between coordinators and members during food pick-up, I could sense the relationships within TSK were special. Adding food to this equation, I believed, created an ideal environment for someone like myself to be apart of because it introduced a new type of relationship with food. It redefined the way people went about purchasing their food and altered their role from a passive to an active consumer. TSK also encouraged people to learn who was growing their food and in what ways they were doing it. I have chosen to study this site because as a new member and appointed food

coordinator, I feel TSK breeds an environment that is unique and attracts like-minded people who make conscious decisions about food. Allowing these people to come together creates meaningful interactions that are rare in today's technologically separated society.

This study will examine The Second Kitchen (TSK) cooperative as a case study to better understand how cooperatives breed particular communication practices that create and sustain relationships around food. This project explores how people create new understandings with food and relationships with each other through participation in a cooperative. By taking a closer look at the common values and organizational structure of the cooperative, I hope to highlight the tensions that exist within the cooperative model, as well the characteristics that make them enriching environments.

To guide my research, I have developed three research questions: The first, **what relationships are enacted in the cooperative?** Cooperatives offer an experience unique to most organizations today. They are member owned and operated, democratically run, and they make the needs of members their utmost priority (International Cooperative Alliance, 2011). The relationships in a cooperative are unique because members join together to work toward a common goal. The second question is, **how are relationships connected to food in the CU cooperative?** In an age where there are an abundance of "organic" food options from all over the world, one has to actively seek locally grown food. This is evident in the 50% increase of organic sales by conventional retailers in 2000 (USDA 2000). Food co-ops make it easier for people to do this because of their organizational structure, which gives members a better price, and more control over the type of food they are able to buy. Considering food is commonly treated as a commodity, it is not always understood in relational terms. The values and communication practices inherent in cooperatives also give people opportunities to construct

relationships with their food. I believe the communicative culture of TSK allows people to form a relationship with their food that cannot be achieved elsewhere because of the opportunities to meet the people growing and producing it. My third question studies this: **how do the cooperative's values and communication practices help construct new relationships with food?** With these research questions as guides, I hope to develop a better understanding of how food, relationships, and communication practices intersect.

This paper suggests the values and communication practices of The Second Kitchen create an organizational culture that is characterized by the discourse of community even with the presence of an authority. Members share ownership of the co-op, but do not equally share decision-making practices. This creates two different ways for members and coordinators to relate to one another. The values and communication practices of TSK make members feel included and important in the happenings of the organization. Creating a culture of community in TSK extends beyond members and onto the farmers and producers that grow the food.

## **Literature Review**

### *Cooperatives*

Cooperatives, also known as co-ops, are jointly owned and democratically run organizations created to serve the economic, cultural and social needs of their members (International Cooperative Alliance, 2013). They range in size and specialty but share some specific qualities with one another that distinguish them from other organizations or businesses. They are independent from government and privately owned ventures, based on self-help, self-responsibility, democracy, equality, equity, and solidarity, and are concerned with the well being of the individuals and community as a whole (Hoyt, 2006). The International Cooperative

Alliance has developed seven principles that define co-ops: voluntary and open membership, democratic member control, member economic participation, autonomy and independence, education, training and information, cooperation among cooperatives, and concern for the community (International Cooperative Alliance, 1995). There are 30,000 cooperatives within the United States that cover almost all sectors of the economy (International Cooperative Alliance, 2013).

A core value of all co-ops is democratic member control and creating an organizational structure that allows everyone to have an equal say. “Democratic processes help co-ops decentralize power to local levels and many have shown leadership in the innovation of products and structures” (Brown, 79). Co-ops offer leadership opportunities that exemplify responsibility, requiring people to perform tasks that directly affect the success of the group.

There have been a variety of studies conducted by researchers on the motivations of people to become apart of co-ops. Birchall and Simmons (2004) studied these motivations in detail. They noted that one explanation of member participation was a believed “collective incentive” (Birchall & Simmons, 471). This means that people participated because they believed it would benefit the group as a whole. They discovered that “participants have a strong sense of community and relatively strong sense of shared goals and values” (Birchall & Simmons, 477). A sense of community is established when “people identify with and care about other people who either live in the same area or are like them in some respect” (Birchall & Simmons, 471). When compared with non-participants there was a substantial difference in these values. Although individual incentives were present for some members, collective incentive was the dominant incentive for members to participate. These rewards were identified by three variables: sense of community, shared values, and shared goals. The more that each of these



variables was present, the more likely members were to participate. Furthermore, developing a strong community is important for the cooperative to thrive. In their study, participants had a “strong interest in politics” and wished to be surrounded by like-minded people. This is especially true of a food cooperative where the food is purchased with the members’ interests and values in mind. For the co-op to be successful, members must be able to relate to one another and work toward a common goal, regardless of their differences.

A food cooperative is a community grocery store that is owned and operated by its members, (National Cooperative Growers Association, 2013). Compared to normal grocery stores that are solely focused on making a profit, food co-ops are concerned with serving the needs of their members. This means giving members a say in where their money goes, and in major co-op decisions. In most cases, food co-ops are more affordable, have shorter food chains, and provide a wider range of local goods. Food co-ops provide high quality, sustainable, food that supports the local community it is situated within. They are committed to creating strong, connected communities of people who share food values (NCGA, 2013).

Food cooperatives that utilize a short food chain offer the opportunity for people to learn more information about who is growing and producing their food. In addition, the shorter travel time preserves freshness, uses less energy, and contributes to the local economy. Within a food cooperative, members have an active role in choosing the products they would like to see in the store. Cooperatives that are particularly conscious about eating responsibly sourced, organic food can instill a sense of confidence in their members who also have the same concerns. Bearing in mind how a main purpose of co-ops is economic leverage -- people buying more together to get discounts -- the co-op can use its food buying power to source the products it believes are up to their standards for a price that cannot be matched at most grocery stores today. In this day and

age, due to the size of some grocery stores, it is hard to have faith in whether they abide by their food standards. Cooperatives on the other hand feature a higher percentage of locally sourced products than its conventional store counterparts, (NCGA).

Although there has been some research on the benefits of being apart of a cooperative, gaps in the research exist when it comes to learning about the role of cooperatives in helping form people's ideas and values about food. Though not specifically focused on cooperatives, gaps have been identified in the literature on green consumerism. In Bostrom and Klintman's piece (2009), they too call for more research on "consumers thoughts, assumptions and reflections on green consumerism" and green labels.

#### *Democracy in small groups*

In his book, *Democracy In Small Groups*, John Gastil describes democracy as more than a definition. Rather, it is an ideal that is made up of specific principles. It encompasses liberty, equality across all spectrums, diversity among lifestyles, beliefs, perspectives, and constructive conflict resolution. A small group consists of two or more people, typically less than 30, who share common goals, norms, a network of communication, a sense of wholeness, but who exhibit some form of interdependence, (Gastil, 1993). ]

According to Gastil, there is a time and place for democracy. Not all decision-making situations call for a democratic process. There are numerous factors that influence the need for democracy. Characteristics such as involvement, type and importance of decision, status of group members, ability to express interests, general goals of the group, and time constraints all influence whether small group democracy should be facilitated. When a decision involves more than one person, is important to all group members, and all interests are considered equal, it calls for democracy.

The extent to which a group displays characteristics such as power, inclusiveness, commitment, relationships and deliberations affects how democratic it is. The following is a list of these criteria: 1) Every member in the group must have some influence or control, and that in regard to group policies; all members must have equal power, (Gastil, 1993). When making the final decision, it must be divided equally among members. 2) All group members must be included who are “profoundly affected” by a decision, inviting those “significantly affected” and considering the view of people “marginally affected.” 3) Group members must be fully committed to the democratic process 4) The relationships formed within the group need to acknowledge member’s individuality, assume all member’s are competent in deciding what’s best for the group, recognize a sense of group collectiveness, and lastly, treat others in a kind manner. 5) Lastly, a deliberative decision making process must be implemented which gives all members equal speaking and listening rights and responsibilities.

After discussing the elements of small group democracy, Gastil presents a case study of a grocery co-op named Mifflin in Madison, Wisconsin. Starting in the Fall of 1990, he sat in and recorded the meetings of the worker run co-op. Using the criteria presented in the early chapters of the book for reference, he determined the behaviors exemplified in the meetings and informal conversations with staff members were inherently democratic. This was demonstrated through their power to influence the agenda in meetings, inclusivity, commitment to the democratic process, positive members relations, equal opportunities to speak, and a deliberative democratic processes. However, that is not to say that Mifflin was absent of all problems. The factors that proved to be problematic for Mifflin were their long meetings, unequal involvement and commitment, forming of cliques, differences in communication skills and styles, and personal conflicts. After publishing his study and providing the co-op with suggestions, many changes

were made which helped Mifflin become more democratic. As shown by the success of the co-op, allowing a third party to observe group meetings can help the group move in a more democratic direction.

### *Cultural Discourse Analysis*

Cultural Discourse Analysis is a theory situated within the field of Ethnography of Communication. It focuses on the central question of how communication is constructed as a cultural practice (Carbaugh, 2007). This method is used to analyze cultural aspects of discourse. These include communication acts, events, styles, language, symbols and norms. Analysts not only describe these practices, but they interpret them within their specific context and examine how people situate themselves in relation to these practices. When taking on a cultural discourse approach, three research questions or problems are highlighted: What is this communication accomplishing? What constitutes this communication, and what are the cultural components? And lastly how does this play a part in larger communication sequence? These questions are all essential to properly analyzing cultural discourses and discovering how they relate to the bigger picture.

Within cultural discourse analysis there are five modes of inquiry. The modes represent different lenses for examining the studied phenomena. The theoretical mode considers discourse through a theoretical orientation and specific conceptual framework (Carbaugh, 2007). This theoretical orientation is subsequently taken on prior to fieldwork, which in turn guides interpretation of the data. The descriptive mode looks at the instances, styles, and procedures after being recorded in order to get a more accurate analysis. The interpretive mode interprets the significance and meaning of the communication practices. The belief and value system used to

interpret the practices is of importance. The comparative mode looks at the communication practices in relation to other practices and highlights the similarities and differences. The final mode used is called the critical mode. This mode takes a critical approach similar to critical theory, which asks the question of who and how certain peoples are advantaged or disadvantaged within this practice.

Interpretive analysis is reflective of participant's accounts but then takes these findings and looks at them through a distinctive light. CuDA believes people communicate about the content being discussed as well as culturally communicating things such as who they are, how they are related, and how they feel. According to Carbaugh “these cultural meanings—about personhood, relationships, action, emotion, and dwelling, respectively—are formulated in cultural discourse analyses as “radiant’s of cultural meaning” or “hubs of cultural meaning” which are active in communication practice,” (Carbaugh 2007). The goal of the researchers is to interpret this “meta-cultural commentary” that is made by the participants and discover how it is meaningful to them. In this sense, CuDA can be helpful in giving participants a different perspective on their doings. The five radiants of meaning as summarized by Carbaugh are the following: Meanings about being (personhood and identity). In this radiant, identity can be understood at the cultural, personal and social level. The second radiant, meanings about relating or relationships, focuses on how communication practices function to relate people to one another. Following is meanings about acting or action and practice, which is meta-commentary about actions. In other words, its when people discuss the kind of activity they are doing. The fourth radiant is meanings about feeling (emotion and affect). These are the feelings and emotions produced from communication practices. These can be verbal, nonverbal, explicit or

implicit. The final radiant is meanings about dwelling or place and environment. Researchers study how participants identify with a place using names, locations and directions.

### *Localizing our food system*

The birth of the “second generation” alternative agriculture was created in hopes of correcting all the issues that came with the first generation agriculture movement. In particular, localizing food production, minimizing waste, and focusing on sustainability. There has been more emphasis on the relationship between farmer and consumer and a sincere interest in knowing where the food is coming from, not just how it’s produced. Rather than focusing only on the inputs, they expand to a “broader conception of the context in which agriculture takes place” by paying attention to the “broader economic, sociological, and especially, the geographical context within which agriculture occurs” (Schnell, 2007). One avenue that has been created to reestablish this relationship is called CSA’s or community supported agriculture. As evident through its name, members buy shares of community farms and in turn get a bounty of seasonal produce throughout the season. Depending on the size of the shares, multiple households may choose to share the produce and distribute it accordingly. The fundamental values that CSA’s hope to advance are ecological sustainability, a strengthening of farmer consumer relationships, and a focus on supporting the local economy (Schnell, 2007). Growth of community ties, and accountability are additional values. Rather than associating a brand label or a picture with a piece of produce, you can associate the actual workers that grow the food. Being able to see the families that rely on the bounty of produce grown every day makes a significant differences in the accountability of the farmers. It also gives consumers more appreciation for the process and people who put in the labor to grow the produce. Depending on the structure of the

CSA and whether members pick up their produce from the farm or have it delivered, it gives the opportunity for them to see the conditions of the environment their food is coming from.

Compare this to a large-scale agricultural farm where it is highly unlikely that anyone besides the people who work there will be able to see it.

The number of CSAs around the country has seen considerable growth. According to the director of LocalHarvest.org a website that helps people find CSA's, farmers market, and sustainably grown food in their area, there were 4500 active CSA's in their system that covers the entirety of the United States as of January 2012 (Mcfadden, 2012). In addition to this number, there are many CSA's that fall under the radar and don't outright identify themselves.

Farmers markets attain the same values of CSA's but in a different form. They provide a space where farmers and local companies can come together to sell their products throughout the season. Farmers markets are a chance to reinforce community ties while eliminating the middleman, otherwise known as the grocery store. Unlike grocery stores that feature a wide variety of products that come from all over the world, farmers markets only have what is in season or preserved. Each season will vary depending on what produce had a successful season. By eliminating the middleman, prices tend to be lower and more reflective of the actual cost to grow the food and pay the workers. Both CSA's and farmers markets advance the same values: community, sustainability and most importantly the idea of "local."

Boulder County is one county of many in the country trying to localize the food economy. Their campaign sponsored by Transition Colorado, which hopes to create a 25% shift to local foods within the next decade will provide jobs and stimulate the local economy. A study conducted by Michael Shuman, an economist who has conducted similar reports for other counties, found that a 25% local food shift could create about 1,899 jobs in Boulder County

(Shuman Report, 2012). In order to achieve this goal of a 25% shift, Transition Colorado, the force behind the campaign is taking steps to increase awareness over the benefits of eating locally. They have created a 10% pledge, which encourages people to pledge to spend 10% of their food budget on local products. Their online system helps consumers input all of the food purchased and calculates where they buy most of their food. Their website also features a local food directory where consumers can see where they can buy, eat, and learn about the local food movement.

Grocery stores alike are making more of an effort to support local food. Places such as Whole Foods and Alfalfas place a sign or a tag next to local food which describes where and who it was grown by. These stores also feature local companies on a regular basis who sample their product out to customers. It gives a chance for these companies to gain exposure. Although these grocery stores are making an effort to carry local products, they still offer items that are not necessarily sustainable, fair trade, or in season. This continues to promote the idea that as consumers we have the right to have access to all products year round regardless of the amount of miles it has traveled to get there. This gives the wrong impression to consumers. It fails to teach uneducated consumers about seasonality and how people cannot buy strawberries while living in a place such as Colorado during the winter time because it is energy intensive to transport them. This leaves few places for consumers to become educated about eating seasonally. In addition, though grocery stores such as Whole Foods, and Alfalfas indicate where their products are coming from, we cannot be 100% sure they are keeping to their word. This is where The Second Kitchen food coop comes in.

The Second Kitchen is an outlet to learn about the production methods and origin of food. It consists of like-minded individuals who come from different backgrounds, hometowns, and



kitchens, who all share the common goal of “food mindfulness and appreciation.” The Second Kitchen proposes the construction of a food system that does not solely rely on the term “organic” instead it focuses on sustainability, locality, and fair trade. By only offering products that are organic, local, and in season, TSK is teaching their members about what it means to truly eat consciously. Through the cooperative model, members have active roles in the TSK community. They are active agents in contributing to the task of filling orders, upkeeping the cooperative space, making group decisions in which products to carry, and many other decisions which they only have access to because of belief that all members of a community should have the ability to have a voice.

### **Methods**

My dual role as Food Coordinator and researcher gave me a unique perspective on the workings of TSK. I used qualitative data collection, taking on a participant observer role. I observed the coordinator “check-in” meetings bi-weekly where they each talked about what they were working on. I also used semi-structured interviews to acquire information about what members thought about TSK and its structure. Working for TSK before and after conducting my research brought me closer to the members of the co-op I interviewed, and it also changed my perspective on the way TSK functioned. I now pay close attention to how we make decisions and whether we adequately share and explain why those decisions are made. To insure confidentiality, all names of participants have been changed.

I observed weekly cooperative meetings, which took place every Wednesday and Sunday at The Second Kitchen headquarters. Wednesday meetings were solely for coordinators, while Sunday meetings reserved an hour where members could participate. These meetings were

primarily for coordinators where co-op issues were discussed and check-ins were completed with each coordinator. I used meetings to listen to the discourse employed by coordinators when talking about TSK. Initially I recorded and took field notes during the meetings, but my role as Food Coordinator made it difficult to participate and observe. Therefore, I chose to only record the meetings using a recorder program on my I-phone to insure accurate data collection. After the meetings, I tried to complete a few field notes to give context on the topic of discussion so I could note whether the meeting was important for my research. I recorded a total of 18 meetings and transcribed five pages of notes.

I conducted semi-structured interviews in addition to recording meetings because there were specific topics that could not be addressed through meetings, which had an agenda. I focused more on interviews in my analysis because meetings were primarily made up of coordinator talk while interviews featured members. This was important because I could ask about specific research questions pertaining to my topic. My role as Food Coordinator gave me easy access to potential participants for my study. I interviewed the three cooperative founders, and ten cooperative members, only two of which were males. This was due to the demographic profile of TSK, which was majority female. The age range of the participants was 20-30 years old; only one participant did not fall in this age range. This was also reflective of the nature of the co-op. Considering TSK acquired new members every few weeks, I made sure to select participants who had been in the co-op for at least a month. This insured they had an idea of what TSK was and how it functioned. I recruited participants through emails, notes in the weekly newsletter, and announcements in cooperative meetings. Consent for participation was achieved prior to all interviews and weekly meetings. Interviews explored topics ranging from why members chose to join the co-op, to their relationships to other members, to food buying

practices. Interview questions were formulated prior to the sessions and were consistent for almost all participants. However, since some of the questions asked pertained to past events, I skipped over these questions for members who had not been present.

Once the data was recorded, I transcribed all interviews onto my computer using the program ExpressScribe. I produced 60 pages of interview transcripts and five pages of meeting transcripts. Instead of transcribing the entirety of every meeting, which was mostly filled with check-ins and friendly banter, I transcribed particular meetings and clips that touched on communication and relationships. When filtering through these meetings, I listened for explicit and implicit talk about communication and relationships, as well as descriptions of TSK or what it meant to the participant speaking.

I took a Cultural Discourse Analysis approach, analyzing the language used by participants in great detail. I took the words used to describe TSK and attempted to paint a picture of what TSK looked like from the view of members and coordinators. I made sure to acknowledge how people bring their own meanings to language and how communicating about TSK serves multiple functions for the communicator. Their discourse communicates who they are, how they feel about TSK, how they relate to others, and their interpretation of how TSK operates. After acknowledging and studying the discourse used by participants, I became interested in how members viewed the roles of the coordinators in the co-op and whether they trusted them to uphold the cooperative's values. I focused on the relationships between coordinators and members, and the types of communication that took place between them. I then looked at the values and communication practices inherent in TSK culture and looked at how they affected people's relationships to food.

## Analysis

A symbol that came up repeatedly in both interviews and group meetings was community. When I interviewed members and asked what the values of TSK were, most said the word community. Participants constantly talk about community as a key characteristic that makes TSK stand out from other groups. Community also helps explain people's relationships with food in that it allows members to know the people who are growing and producing their food and form meaningful relationships with them. Using the interpretive mode of Carbaugh's CuDA, it is important to recognize how people bring their own meanings to the word community, and also, how the word has meaning in the context of TSK.

What type of community is TSK? According to members, it is an inclusive community. Inclusion affects how people talk to one another and also how they wish they talked to each other. It is something that coordinators strive to achieve through their verbal and written communication with members. From the perspective of the coordinators, the types of relationships formed within TSK are created with inclusion in mind. To really focus on the relationships within the cooperative, we are going to look at two key moments: how new members are welcomed and how decisions are made.

### *Welcoming new members*

For TSK, acquiring new members is mostly through word of mouth. According to coordinator Julia, the co-op aspect of TSK gets people excited. In the excerpt below, Julia describes how TSK coordinators should re-work their orientation presentation to include more about what it means to be apart of a co-op and less about the details of TSK.

*But we really should throw what it means for you to join and how that affects your life, and what a co-op is, and then go in to the nitty gritty details. So they know like okay, it's not just about the nitty gritty details, it's also about something larger than yourself.*

Here Julia expresses her belief that TSK has more to offer than just food. She thinks explaining to people what it means to be apart of TSK is more important than explaining details of how distribution works or what time workshare is. Julia believes that this is not something that is apparent to everyone firsthand and that it needs to be made explicit so people see the benefit of joining. It is necessary to inform people of this because it allows them to come together around an important issue and work toward creating betterment for society as a whole. It is a sharing of a common vision with others. Informing people that TSK is more than just food makes potential members more likely to want to join. Coordinator Lara articulates a similar idea:

*And it is this community thing. I think when we started doing this, it was more about the food than about community. But now it's kind of switched. It's all about the community. And the food is so important. But the way were going to get better food is through the community.*

Lara talks about how TSK was originally started as an organization focused on food, but that over time they realized how support from the community allows them to achieve greater buying power while also creating local economies they value. This communication works to identify the importance of community within TSK in turn changing the words coordinators use when talking about TSK to potential new members. The frequency talk about community confirms its importance. According to Julia and Laura, a community is a group of people who share a common vision and work toward achieving it together.

When asked about whether TSK is inclusive, Paul, a member of less than 9 months, describes being welcomed. He associates inclusion with welcoming.

*And I think the atmosphere of the warehouse if you wanna call it that, the tone that you have always had from my perspective has been very welcoming. This is really cool, come and see for yourself, never any*

*forcing or judgments. I have really appreciated your emails to co-op members about the reasons why you're doing things.*

It is clear in this excerpt that Paul's understanding of inclusion relates to whether he, as a member, feels welcome and involved or informed on TSK happenings. He attributes this to the environment of TSK as well as written communication to co-op members. Paul highlights the "tone" as something that is consciously manufactured with the purpose of making people feel a certain way. To Paul, the feeling of inclusiveness is one where he feels welcome, can see how things are happening, does not feel forced or judged to be more involved, and given explanations of decisions. Also, an important thing to consider is whom Paul is referring to when he says "you guys." The last line indicates he is referring to TSK coordinators because he discusses "emails to co-op members." Here, Paul is implying that it is the TSK coordinators who create this feeling of inclusiveness, not the community as a whole. In contrast, member Renee talks about exclusivity in the co-op:

*Ya I would say its welcoming. I mean, maybe a little bit cliquey. I think that the coordinators are very, very, close. But I've never felt like I couldn't sit and talk and chat. But, not in a bad way. They are very close and you like sense that you can sense that they're very good friends and they've been very good friends for a long time. But its not like you can't talk to them you cant approach them.*

In this excerpt, Renee describes TSK being "a little bit cliquey." What is interesting about this, is how she describes the TSK coordinators when asked about whether TSK is an inclusive environment. She makes the same assertion as Paul- that whether people feel included has to do with the actions taken by the coordinators, not by other members in the co-op. Noting the presence of a clique asserts how it is a barrier to inclusion. However, she does a lot of work to minimize the problem of a clique by discussing how their closeness is a benefit. This could be due to my position as a coordinator and a fear that I would disclose this information to the coordinators. Considering the word "cliquey" has a bad connotation, she feels the need to follow

it up with how they aren't close "in a bad way." It is clear Renee thinks the coordinator relationships affect other members of the co-op and their closeness poses a problem for other members to feel included.

Another example of inclusiveness is illustrated through member Tori's response to whether TSK is an inclusive community. Instead of attributing the creation of inclusion as the responsibility of the coordinators, she puts the responsibility on the individual members.

*I would say that the people who choose to feel included, or choose to partake do, feel that. I feel that. I mean already. But um, it's just what we were talking about in the community. Or the definition of the co-op. If you're not going to be willing to show up and put your energy into something then you're not going to feel like you're apart of it. So for those who choose not to do that then they probably feel less apart of the co-op then others. But for people who do choose to put their energy in there they do feel included.*

Tori identifies the feeling of inclusion as a choice that members make. Through their active participation in the co-op, they choose to be apart of the community. This is an individualistic notion of access, which places the responsibility of creating inclusion in the hands of the members. Inclusion is created by the individual and demonstrated by their showing up. There is no reciprocity involved. Therefore, by showing up, one is more likely to be included in the community.

As evident in Tori's example, inclusion is a process that continually requires members to be active and participate by ordering and attending events. In contrast, member Chloe described the way in which someone comes to feel included as a onetime event. This event is the action of joining the co-op. Chloe describes how the process of getting involved with TSK is "overwhelming" and "uncomfortable" because of the manner in which orientations are conducted as well as their intimate setting- usually a group of less than ten people sitting in a circle. She goes on to describe reaching out to the group and getting involved as a "leap."

So, if people are willing to take that leap, I think that they are received with open arms. But people just have to be willing to take that step to kind of be like oh this is cool, what this group is doing is awesome. But it might be a little uncomfortable at first. But then as soon as you start talking to us you see that we're really an inclusive group and a really open group of individuals. Ya people are received well if they take that leap.

Inclusion in this sense is a reciprocal act that requires action on both ends. It requires the leap of faith from the potential member to get involved with TSK, as well as the part of the co-op to receive and welcome the potential member. The way in which the potential member comes to learn that TSK is inclusive is through talking. According to Chloe, there is something inherent in the way TSK members communicate that makes outsiders feel welcomed. This quality is universal across all members. Despite highlighting a common quality of all members, Chloe refers to TSK as a group of individuals. This stresses the personality and differences among the members.

Whereas some interviewed participants discussed feeling welcome after already joining, others discussed whether all people are welcome to join. Members who discussed the latter considered conscious actions that TSK does or does not perform and external factors that are a reality of the Boulder community. Below is the answer Ryan gave when asked about inclusiveness:

*Definitely. I'd say that um. I'd say so. I mean I think everyone is welcome to join, like I said, I think when you have people in the co-op, you're all kind of on the same page about where, what you think the whole relationship with food should be. So it kind of gets you this bond already. So I think that it's really inclusive. I have noticed that it's mostly female and mostly white. But I think that, that the race just might be Boulder. And the female- I don't know why the hell guys aren't more interested.*

According to Ryan, he believes that everyone is welcome to join. He goes on to explain it is because members have similar values surrounding food. The special relationship that is created among members because of these shared values is what makes people feel included. He assumes that all members "are on the same page" about the "whole relationship with food." As he



continues discussing inclusion he notes that the majority of TSK members are white and female. Instead of holding TSK responsible for creating these conditions, he points to the demographic of the greater Boulder community and lack of interest from males as reasons for not having a more diverse membership. Member Julia also expresses a similar idea:

*Everyone is welcome to join but I don't feel like everyone feels like everyone can join. There is always some kind of reason. Like it comes with a burden to be a member. For the people who kind of like want to join, are on the fence, but won't, like there's something missing. And I think that it's because of accessibility and legitimacy. If we had a sign out and a store that said "The Second Kitchen Food Co-op" we'd have more people that would get it and our community would grow.*

Like Ryan, Julia expresses her belief that everyone is welcome to join the co-op. The disconnect between her beliefs and how she believes people actually feel is due to the burden of being a co-op member. "The burden" is the things that are required from members. These range from attending weekly meetings, ordering food through an online system, and withstanding from buying from the grocery store out of convenience. She notes that people do not feel TSK is accessible and legitimate and that those missing characteristics are why people don't understand what TSK is trying to do as an organization. Julia thinks by moving TSK into a public space with a sign, it establishes TSK as an authentic co-op and that it will give reassurance to the potential members who are unsure about joining. Julia's idea of inclusion focuses on the people who are not currently members of the co-op and how once they "get it" they will join and feel included. Both Julia and Ryan attribute the exclusivity of TSK to external factors outside the control of the organization.

Within TSK, inclusion becomes something that coordinators strive to create among all members of the cooperative. Coordinators go to great lengths to make sure people feel they are important, informed, and a part of the decision-making procedures. For example, coordinators held a meeting to discuss whether to source eggs throughout the winter season. They emailed members prior to let them know the meeting was occurring, and also emailed after to inform

members of the decision. In the meeting, members were able to give their opinions, and ask questions. Meetings are held on a weekly basis where members have the opportunity to speak their mind, emails and newsletters that inform and explain current happenings, and encouraging members to attend co-op events. Making members feel they are apart of the decision making process is the second key moment I will be discussing.

### *Decision-making*

As evident in the root word cooperate, which according to Merriam-Webster's dictionary means to work together, members within a co-op must learn to work in compliance with one another. It is important that all members have a part in making decisions. Since the steering committee has a more pronounced role in TSK compared to other cooperatives (partly due to the fact they do not have legal cooperative status and are technically considered a food buying club), members mentioned on various occasions the importance of giving equal weight to all opinions. When asked if TSK does an adequate job of functioning as a cooperative, coordinator Lara divulged that coordinators primarily make decisions and this makes TSK less of a cooperative.

Just because I think, I think the steering, if like the co-op I guess it depends on how the co-op steering committee is defined because I think we make like decisions about food and stuff. I don't know if in a co-op it should be like everybody puts in their equal share about what food we should get. But that would be dumb because we would get avocados. So I think everybody has a part, everybody can have a say, but we kinda put our foot down. If we don't like it, were not gonna let it. That's not very cooperatively.

Lara's role as a coordinator gives her insight on whether the steering committee listens to all member's opinions and whether they have influence in the decision making process. Lara thinks having a group of members that have the authority to make the decisions (steering committee) is not characteristic of a cooperative, but that it's necessary to make the right choices when it comes to what food TSK chooses to sell. These choices are made according to the standards established by the steering committee rather than the standards of all members. She

believes giving equal decision-making power to all members would cause TSK to source items that are not aligned with the food values of TSK. An item like an avocado is an example of that. This implies that convenience and self-interest could take over without careful control. Another point worth noting is how the labeling of whether a food is approved or not approved is dictated by the values and how it is the responsibility of the coordinators to uphold these values. Lara believes everyone should have their opinions heard but if TSK coordinators do not like the ideas proposed they would prevent the ideas from being put into action. This comment highlights the inequality between members and coordinators and how they serve as authoritative figures in the TSK community. Further, this tells us that the presence of authority in community is often necessary and that decisions are shared only up to a certain point. Therefore, the coordinators ultimately make decisions.

Members identified how the steering committee does most of the work when it comes to making decisions about the co-op because of an absence of member participation. Ryan recounted how TSK's decision to stop selling eggs in the wintertime was made and he was asked whether he believed the coordinators went about the correct way in addressing the issue.

Well, I think if you wanted to be totally member based it might have been a vote? But you know again a lot of the members aren't the most present at stuff. So, and the steering committee is really responsible for representing the values. And I think they. I had absolutely no complaints with their decision.

Ryan believes conducting a vote would have represented everyone's opinions more than the way TSK coordinators chose to make the decision. But, he suggests that members aren't really informed and active enough to have a role like voting. Ryan then addresses how the coordinators are responsible for embodying the values of the members. This idea contrasts with how Lara described the role of the coordinators in TSK. Ryan views the coordinators as people

responsible for representing the views of the members where Lara views the coordinators as authoritative figures that make sure the values are upheld.

The unequal labor distribution between members and coordinators in TSK is not standard of a working cooperative where all members equally contribute. Through my interactions with members in interviews and group meetings, there is equal agreement that TSK coordinators do most of the work. This is due to a lack of participation from members, an unwillingness to get involved, as well as too much control over decisions on the side of the coordinators. The coordinators possess more authority, which creates an unbalanced power relationship.

Complete consensus among all members of TSK about decisions relating to food sourcing was viewed as a negative and a characteristic that should not be present. Debate between members is a sign all members' voices are being heard and all sides of the issue are being represented. As a member of the steering committee, Chloe explains her thoughts about member involvement.

But people, I don't know if its that they don't have any problems with TSK or that they are just not outspoken if they do and so ya. So I guess I just wish people were more vocal about changes they would like to be seen. Because I feel like just a lot of times it ends of being the steering committee that does all the work like as far as decisions that are made. Which is fine, I am fine like debating and we have like special issue topics like the eggs for instance where members I feel like really had strong opinions about if we should be getting eggs or not. So we came together as a cooperative and decided on the best decision for our egg supplier. So that was really cool. And I think that really shows how we do operate as a cooperative and that we have um, ya.

Having strong opinions and debating those opinions brings the members of the TSK community together. Strong opinions signify that people identify with the underlying values being debated.

It means members care and aren't passive towards the decisions made around food sourcing.

According to Chloe, TSK is a place where all opinions are heard and considered and the process of discussing those opinions is how the community becomes more cohesive. In other words, the act of discussing differing opinions strengthens the bonds between members of TSK. In this

excerpt, the only distinction Chloe makes between members and coordinators is how coordinators end up making decisions for the co-op. She does not highlight the power differential or how TSK coordinators have more authority over the members to decide what food to get. She instead highlights her belief that members and coordinators have equal say in the cooperative. This matters because it brings to light her exaggerated notion of what TSK is and shows how she would like TSK to operate as an organization.

Member Paige also discusses the importance of having multiple opinions present when decision-making is taking place.

*I really trust that there are important conversations that are held by the steering committee that are conversations that I would want to be held. I'm not necessarily always apart of those conversations about whether we should get this or that or that. But um I think that one of the things that's really important for me is that many different perspectives are being raised and that people aren't being shut down if they are voicing an opinion that's important. Because it gets like sticky? Do we get eggs? Do we get eggs when its not egg laying time? But ya I do, I guess I do trust. I guess I think it would be, I do think its rad. Like, I do trust it. I just think that it would be even better if it would somehow were more transparent and inclusive.*

Although Paige wishes the conversations were more transparent and inclusive- meaning they are talked about both before and after they take place, as well as open to all members of the co-op, she identifies her trust in the steering committee. According to Paige, it is important that multiple perspectives are brought to the table and given equal thought- though they might not be adopted in the long run. When it comes to complicated issues such as whether to provide eggs in the offseason, discussion among people with different opinions assures all sides are considered and the best decision is made in the long run.

The communication practices of welcoming, keeping members informed through emails and newsletters, explanation of decisions, opportunities to voice ones opinion and get involved, all affect the way in which members relate to one another. These practices serve to make members feel included in the organization, show how the co-op is there to serve their needs, and make them feel like they are integral in the functioning of the organization. By working together,

they can achieve their shared vision. In this sense, TSK is all about the members. However, the decision-making practices of TSK do not align with this notion because coordinators are able to make decisions based on what they want. There is a shared understanding between coordinators and members that they hold the power to make important decisions. Giving the coordinators this power changes the way in which they relate to the members, and creates an unequal relationship.

Although this decision-making structure could potentially be problematic in an organization that is supposed to serve the needs of its members, the communicative culture of TSK is primarily characterized by its sense of community.

The communicative culture of TSK also affects people's relationships with their food. This is because coordinators provide food that is from local farmers and producers and give opportunities for members to meet and visit their farms. This is unlike a typical grocery store where customers are often unaware of who grew their food. Creating a culture of community allows people to relate to the people who produced their food, ultimately changing their relationship to their food. A tomato is no longer just a tomato. A tomato is a fruit of a friend's labor.

### **Relationships with food:**

People initially join TSK because they want access to items they cannot buy elsewhere and prices that are cheaper than most grocery stores. But as they become integrated into TSK, they also develop meaningful relationships with the people within the cooperative. Therefore, food acts as a medium to bring people in Boulder together, creating a more cohesive community.

Whether it be new friends, education, or an appreciation for food and the people who produce it- members understand that TSK has more to offer than just good food. The members of

TSK share an understanding that quality food is vital for the well being of their bodies, environment, and community. TSK is a group of individuals who all have similar ideas about how their food should be procured and believe it's important to have a more active role than the typical consumer. Though TSK members usually don't have a relationship with the farmer/producer directly, they have the opportunity to seek out those people and get to know them. This is either through farm visits, and/or workshops. With that said, a main reason why TSK is different than a grocery store is the high levels of trust members have with coordinators to form those relationships themselves and find the best food out there. When asked what the values of TSK were, I found similar answers about food sourcing from all members. For member Ryan, the word "mindful" appeared more than once to describe the attitude we should have when it comes to food.

*I think kind of getting back to eating how were supposed to you know. Stuff that's really more mindful. Seasonal. Ethical. Um, really kind of elevating the importance of food I think like the last quarter century was all about fast food and busy and just kind of going back to like this is something so essential to our bodies and our being. And it's very important what we put inside ourselves. Just being more mindful about what you're eating, where it comes from.*

According to Ryan, TSK values a return to an ideal about how food is supposed to be eaten. This requires giving food more attention and thinking about all the particularities of it. He references fast food and the notion of busyness and how that type of mentality does not consider food as being important. The manner in which Ryan talks about food highlights how it affects our spiritual and physical being rather than just being fuel for our bodies. By returning to the way food was thought of before, TSK is striving to change people's relationship to food.

Member Cara describes a similar notion when talking about the values of TSK:

*Educating about how to cook food from the very scratch to um, how to home make everything instead of going out and buying hummus like how to use garbanzo beans to make hummus is super amazing and having all those ingredients provided for you and so like I would say um back to basics, environmental consciousness and community.*

Cara describes education as an important piece to changing people's relationship to food.

Through education, TSK can teach members how to take basic ingredients and create something that most people buy at the store out of convenience. This quote again highlights that TSK more than a place to buy food, because it also educates members how to use it.

Tiffany discusses forming connections with others who are doing similar things as TSK in the surrounding community:

*I think another value of the co-op would be sustainable growth and like local sustainability I guess, and trying to seek those that are kind of doing the same thing we are maybe in a different way but on the same path and connecting with those people which I think is important.*

Here Tiffany touches on a value that is of high importance to TSK coordinators: establishing connections with farmers and producers in the community who have similar values as TSK. Reaching out and forming these connections with like-minded people brings the community closer.

Evident throughout this analysis section- community is the common theme among these excerpts. Members and coordinators alike constantly use the word community when describing what TSK is and what it has to offer to people. Community means working together towards a common goal. Community also changes people's relationship with their food because they are able to relate to the people growing it. As demonstrated through two key moments of welcoming and decision making, TSK is an inclusive community where coordinators dictate whether people feel involved, and what decisions eventually get made.

Having access to humanely grown food at an affordable price is a major incentive for food conscious individuals to join TSK. For members of TSK, food is much more than fuel. Food nourishes our souls, connects us to others, and teaches us the importance of slowing down



and taking time to cook meals with others. In TSK, food acts as a vehicle to bring people together.

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

Community is both a characterization and a value of The Second Kitchen. According to members, TSK is an inclusive community. Whether members feel included is influenced by the actions of the coordinators. The communication practices utilized by coordinators create meaningful relationships within the organization. The welcoming of new members is a key moment in recognizing the specific communication practices that make members feel included in the organization. These communication practices are emails to co-op members, encouraging members to get involved without forcing or judgments, transparency about co-op happenings, and thorough explanations about decisions. To some members of the co-op, the coordinators have a varying degree of responsibility over whether they feel included. They placed more of the responsibility in the hands of the members, leaving it up to them to be active in the organization. Inclusion was also talked about outside of the organization and whether all people felt included to join. Interviewed participants recognized that the demographic of TSK was not inclusive but that this was due to external factors such as the make-up of Boulder, people's own misconceptions of what TSK was, and what it had to offer.

The decision-making procedures of TSK revealed a tension between how coordinators make decisions and how the procedures should be in a horizontally structured organization. Coordinators disclosed how they have the ultimate authority when it comes to making decisions and recognized how that made them less cooperative as an organization. One coordinator justified the authority because of a need to enforce the food standards. She worried that convenience and self-interest would take over without coordinator monitoring. This highlights

the lack of trust in the members to uphold the food values. This differs from how members trust the coordinators to represent the values. There is also a difference in opinion when it comes to the role of the coordinators in the organization. Some members blamed the decision making structure of TSK on the lack of participation from members instead of on the need of the coordinators to have ultimate authority. The lack of involvement from members was brought up a few times as an issue that prevented TSK from fully functioning as a co-op.

Finally, the communication practices and relationships that create community within the co-op help construct new relationships with food, by teaching members how it is possible to have a relationship with their food and the people who grow it. This is the missing piece from the first generation alternative agriculture movement. People not only wanted food that was grown more sustainably, they wanted to buy food from people they could trust and form relationships with.

This research reveals how important leaders are in creating the culture of an organization. The practices and procedures that leaders use have the ability to make people who have less priority in an organization feel like they matter. When people are given a role in an organization that keeps them informed consistently about what is going on, is transparent, and allows their opinions to be heard, their outlook on the organization is better. The improved outlook encourages them to be more involved in the organization because they know they are valued. They are able to form relationships, and relate to the coordinators of the organization because they are thought of as equals all using their equity and volunteer hours to provide local, organic food for one another. More participation from members strengthens the organization and creates community. This is fulfilling for members because they feel like they are apart of a group working toward a common goal. Furthermore, being apart of a community is something people aspire to do because it makes them feel like they belong somewhere.

It is important that leaders set the tone of the organization from the beginning for new members who are just joining. The way in which they go about leading is also significant. Taking full control and being completely authoritative is not an effective mode of leadership for a group that values having a role in the direction of the organization. It is important for the leaders to create opportunities for members to voice their opinions and for members to acknowledge and consider those opinions seriously.

This research reveals important tensions in horizontal organizations about decision-making practices. It reveals how horizontal organization decision-making is difficult without a smaller authoritative group to uphold the values of the organization. However, the creation of a smaller decision-making group can pose a problem for members who feel like the group has too much power and is not listening to the needs and wants of the other members in the organization. It can also prevent members from voicing their view if they know the final decision is not up to them. Therefore, it becomes a balancing act between staying true to the values of the organization while also considering what the members want and need. Members need to feel like their voices are heard and the decision making group needs to check their power and make sure their own personal interests and opinions do not get in the way. This brings up an important point in horizontal organizations; members need to be active for it to work. If members take a passive role in the organization and don't participate, it defeats the purpose of having a horizontal organization. Horizontal organizations require that members are invested and care about what the organization is trying to do. In TSK, the inconsistent participation from the members forces the coordinators to play a bigger role in the functioning of the organization. As evident in this research, people like being apart of an organization where they can get their hands dirty and help out. It gives them a sense of fulfillment and makes them feel like the organization is their own.

When people take ownership of an organization, they feel more committed to helping the organization prosper.

Comparing the findings of Gastil about Mifflin food co-op to the nature of TSK brings to focus the characteristics that prevent TSK from being fully democratic. For example, he mentions the forming of cliques, and unequal involvement and commitment of members as factors that proved to be problematic. All of these factors exist in TSK, therefore preventing TSK from being as democratic as it could be.

The research on communication practices and relationships is significant because culture has the ability to change people's relationships with their food. It gives them a different perspective on the role of food in their lives. Instead of thinking of food as solely a source of calories, food is thought of as spiritual and cultural nourishment. This research also shows how important it is for people to develop relationships with the people who grow and produce their food. By knowing the people personally it makes eating the food more meaningful.

This research serves as a model for other organizations when they are designing their organizational structure. Considering members feel more fulfilled when they are included in the doings of the organization, it is important to design a structure that allows them to be involved. A good way to do this is to allow opportunities for members to openly voice their opinions on important matters through weekly meetings. This allows members to discuss issues as they come up for the organization. The drawback of this is that people could disagree with one another, making it difficult to come to a consensus. To insure the decision-making practices are productive, and the values of the organization are upheld, a smaller, leader group is helpful. It is also important to keep members updated on what is going on in the organization when they are not able to participate themselves. This should be done on a regular basis through email. The

more an organization is able to reach out to its members, the more the members will take ownership and want to be involved in the organization.

It is in the hands of any leaders of an organization to create the desired culture of the organization. If creating an organizational culture of “community” is desired, it is the responsibility of the leaders to make the members feel welcome, to keep them informed, and to give them opportunities to contribute and make an impact. So, when setting up the organization, do it thoughtfully. Think about the consequences that the particular structure will bring. By creating an organization that makes members feel apart of bigger than themselves, working towards a common goal, it will be much more meaningful for all parties involved.

This research also serves as a model for organizations that want to create awareness around sustainable, local food. The whole concept behind local food is to support the people in one’s own town who are growing it. It allows people to have a more active role in their relationship with their food. They are able to meet the people, ask questions, and volunteer. Creating an organization around sustainable food educates people about food and helps them recognize how important it is to know where their food is coming from. It allows members to place this trust in the hands of the coordinators who do a lot of the work themselves.

### **Limitations and future research**

As with any study, there are limitations to the research. Firstly, my sample size was relatively small and taken from the most active members in the organization. I did not interview members who were not semi-involved in the organization because they would have not been able to answer the interview questions as they pertained to recent events. Also, my role as Food Coordinator might have prevented people from sharing their true thoughts about TSK such as Renee when talking about how the coordinators are “cliquey.” My role as Food Coordinator

could have also prevented me from achieving an objective view of the culture of TSK.

Considering I was invested in the organization as a coordinator, my idea of what I wanted TSK to be might have took the place of what it actually was.

Taking into account how TSK was still technically a food-buying club at the time I collected my research, future research could study the culture as a legal food cooperative and how that changes how TSK operates.

## **Afterword**

Since collecting my research in the Spring of 2013, The Second Kitchen has gone through some monumental changes. In the Summer of 2013 they launched a Kickstarter campaign and raised over \$37,000 to move into a storefront located in the University Hill Neighborhood. They also became a legal cooperative, appointing a board of directors and creating bylaws. They opened their doors to the public on September 5<sup>th</sup> of 2013 and have expanded their membership to over 140 households. Sara Brody, Beth Burzynski, and myself are the only staff members of TSK. As the membership coordinator it is my responsibility to coordinate the volunteer work share hours and to be the point of contact between the staff and membership. My research has helped me work more effectively in this position by keeping members updated on the happenings of TSK through consistent emails and weekly newsletters. I make sure to let members know how much they are valued by thanking them for being apart of the community. The way in which I conduct myself in the store is also different. I make an effort to know everyone's name and relate to him or her on a personal level. My goal as a Membership Coordinator is to build a strong sense of community among members and I thank my research for teaching me the importance of that.

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