

GROWING GARDENS AND NOURISHING COMMUNITIES: THE COMMUNICATIVE  
CONSTRUCTION OF COMMUNITY THROUGH URBAN AGRICULTURE

by

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B.A., University of Puget Sound, 2008

A thesis submitted to the  
Faculty of the Graduate School of the  
University of Colorado Boulder in partial fulfillment  
of the requirement for the degree  
of Master of Arts  
Department of Communication  
2014

This thesis entitled:  
Growing Gardens and Nourishing Communities:  
The Communicative Construction of Community through Urban Agriculture  
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IRB protocol #: 13-0500

## Abstract

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### Growing Gardens and Nourishing Communities: The Communicative Construction of Community through Urban Agriculture

Thesis directed by Professor Lawrence Frey

Community gardens recently have grown in popularity, as they are viewed as a way to address many current ills in society. Community gardens also have been cited as having the ability to “grow” community among those who participate, as well as to positively affect larger communities to which they are connected. Furthermore, the study of food has been of recent interest to communication scholars, as talk about food is consequential in people’s everyday lives, and food, itself, can be conceptualized as communication. This study employed ethnography—specifically, participant observation and interviews—to investigate how community is constructed through interactants’ communicative practices at a nonprofit organization (Growing Gardens in Boulder, Colorado) that serves as both a site of urban agriculture and community gardening. The study also explored how community gardening affects, benefits, and connects to external communities in which that organization is situated. The Growing Gardens community is analyzed through four attributes of community that were identified by Adelman and Frey (2008): physical, support, meaning-making, and influence attributes. The findings show that Growing Gardens is not just creating community but that it is growing a particular kind of community that both roots itself to its members and to its external environments, and, in the process, transforms the lives of its members, their palates, and the land, as well as the larger community in which it is situated. Those findings are explained by

employing a plant metaphor to explicate how organizational participants grow a “rooted–transformative” community. This new concept contributes to the literature on the construction of communities, by expanding understanding of intersections among communication, food, and community. Furthermore, food at Growing Gardens is both a tool and a mode of communication, as people gather around food and growing food as they construct relationships and community that have the power to persuade people to try new kinds of produce.

## Acknowledgments

I first thank all of the staff members and interns at Growing Gardens who not only allowed me to pursue research at their organization but also invited me to partake in morning harvests and staff meetings, and who welcomed me into their community. I am grateful to all of the interviewees who were so willing to take the time and the energy to talk to me about their experiences at Growing Gardens; their insight made this thesis possible.

Dr. Larry Frey, your editing genius and keen insight were not only invaluable but also extremely generous. Thank you for talking through ideas with me at weekly meetings and for wading through drafts, even when I ruthlessly sent you a chapter that was almost 100 pages.

I want to thank my committee members, Dr. Leah Sprain and Dr. Marlia Banning, for offering insightful feedback throughout this thesis process. During my proposal defense, you both brought up ideas that took this project in new and interesting directions.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

U.S. Americans are putting increasing importance on how food is grown, eaten, and procured. Farmers' markets, for instance, are a recent space of social and civic investment (Eckstein & Conley, 2012), and urban farming and gardening have become trends, as more people are not only going local with their food choices but also are growing local food. According to the American Community Gardening Association (n.d.), there are an estimated 18,000 community gardens throughout the United States and Canada. Oprah Winfrey (2013) now has a gardening club, the White House has a gardening guide as part of First Lady Michelle Obama's "Let's Move" initiative (see <http://www.letsmove.gov/gardening-guide>), and growing food in smaller urban or rural farms has been part of programs aimed at eliminating childhood obesity (e.g., Corrigan, 2011; The White House, 2010; Urban Design Lab, n.d.), reducing poverty, and increasing nutrition (Armstrong, 2000; Urban Farming, 2012; Wakefield, Yeudall, Taron, Reynolds, & Skinner, 2007). Schools and children's education programs also are adding gardening to their curricula, as gardening has been found to positively affect children's health and their social and academic success; specifically, children who garden or are involved in educational gardening programs have been found to have positive environmental values (Blair, 2010) and increased positive associations with nature as an adult (Lohr & Pearson-Mims, 2005); higher academic achievement in math and science (Blair, 2010; Klemmer, Waliczek, & Zajicek, 2005, Miller, 2007); increased fruit and vegetable consumption (Lautenschlager & Smith, 2007; Libman, 2007; McAleese & Rankin, 2007; Morris, Zidenberg-Cherr, 2002); higher levels of



knowledge about nutrition (Morris, Zidenberg-Cher, 2002); better self-esteem and self-confidence (Blair, 2010; Hoffman & Morales Knight, 2007; Miller, 2007); and, through gardening programs, children learn life and communication skills, such as the ability to work as a team (Blair, 2010; Libman, 2007). Many claims also are made by both popular media and scholars about the (potential) beneficial effects of community gardening on those who participate and on surrounding communities (for a review, see, Draper & Freedman, 2010), including numerous health and quality-of-life benefits (see, e.g., Hale et al., 2011; Tse, 2010; Waliczekz, Mattson, & Zajicek, 1996); developing citizenship (Glover, Shinew, & Parry, 2005), social capital (Alaimo, Reischl, & Allen, 2010; Draper & Freedman, 2010; Kingsley & Townsend, 2006), and collective efficacy (Teig et al., 2009); bridging racial (Shinew, Glover, & Parry, 2004) and generational (Krasny & Doyle, 2002) divides; improving mental health (Wakefield, et al., 2007), solving individual and community economic problems, especially with regard to revitalizing distressed communities (Ohmer, Meadowcroft, Freed, & Lewis, 2009), with community gardening being proposed as a possible solution for solving the economic problems that plague Detroit, Michigan (Whitford, 2009); promoting social justice (Milbourne, 2012), and building or “growing” (resilient) community to which people are attached (see, e.g., Comstock et al., 2010; Muhlki, 2010; Okvat & Zautra, 2011; Teig et al., 2009; Urie, 2011; Wakefield et al., 2007).

This ethnographic research study investigates how community is produced and maintained through communicative practices at Growing Gardens, an urban agriculture organization that is located in Boulder, Colorado. This chapter first outlines a rationale for studying food, community, and communication. I then introduce the site and explicate the rich opportunity that it provides to examine connections among food, gardening, and the

communicative construction of community. I conclude this chapter by explaining the specific foci of this project and by previewing subsequent chapters.

### **Studying Food, Community, and Communication**

Over the past several decades, the U.S. agriculture system has changed significantly; that transformation includes the decline of family-labor farms and the increase of large, industrial-like operations that grow and produce food for large numbers of people (Lyson, 2004). Furthermore, cases of disease, pesticides, and genetically modified organisms (GMOs) have made people more aware and concerned about what actually is going into their bodies (Lien, 2004). As mentioned previously, increasingly, people in the United States (and all over the world; see, e.g., Greene, 2011) are becoming interested in how their food is grown, produced, and sold. People have started to respond to these large industrial food systems by engaging in what Lyson (2004) identified as *civic agriculture*; farmer's markets, community-supported agriculture (CSA), "alternative" food stores, and consumer cooperatives, for instance, have become more popular, in part, because they are ways that "communities can buffer and shelter themselves from the global food system" (Lyson, p. 6). Furthermore, community gardening has been recognized as an "international phenomenon" (Ferris, Norman, & Sempik, 2001, p. 1) that, increasingly, is taking place in urban spaces and cities (Ferris, Norman, & Sempik, 2001) as another method of civic agriculture.

The entertainment market has responded to this phenomenon with an increase in food-focused media and news coverage. According to Greene (2011), "There has been such an outpouring of food-focused television programming, magazines, films, and other aspects of popular culture that one could argue we are currently experiencing a 'food explosion'" (p. 75). Although it is unclear exactly what has caused this food explosion, the increased attention to

food, both by the media and by everyday people, suggests that understanding the relevance of food to people's lives is a meaningful area of research.

This research study is situated in a nonprofit organization in North Boulder called "Growing Gardens," which can be considered a site of civic agriculture and community gardening, and is self-proclaimed to be "urban agriculture." Although community gardens vary greatly in terms of what they offer, the definition of a community garden stands in contrast to a private garden, as community gardens have a larger degree of ownership, access, and democratic control (Ferris, Norman, & Sempik, 2001). Growing Gardens is on private land, but the structure of the organization is aligned with this notion of community gardening, as it has community garden plots and it offers various ways for the public to access and interact with the food and land.

This study explores communication that occurs within the Growing Gardens organization and among its members; specifically, with respect to its relationship to community building. If civic agriculture, as Lyson (2004) argued, is a resource for solving community problems and, thereby, meet community priorities, researchers need to substantiate these claims, not only to see *if* community problems are addressed through urban agriculture but also *how* those problems are addressed. Furthermore, it is important to explore what organizations, such as Growing Gardens, mean both to members of the organization and to other external communities. Many organizations, such as Growing Gardens, rely on community support for maintenance and funding, and, therefore, demonstrating potential community benefits through research may aid those organizations to acquire the necessary resources to sustain it.

More than 4 decades ago, Henderson (1970) implored scholars to study ways in which food communicates, but few scholars have taken that call seriously (Greene & Cramer, 2011).

As something that people consume several times a day, food is so usual and routine that it easily can be seen as unimportant. However, studying food, growing food, and how people talk about food is important, because, historically, they are taken-for-granted and uncontested aspects of everyday life that can reveal significant findings about cultural and social dynamics (Greene, & Cramer, 2011; Parasecoli, 2011). As Lindenfeld (2011) explained:

Food, in its everydayness, runs the risk of appearing so normal and uncomplicated. For this reason, it has taken decades for food studies to establish itself as an important and legitimate arena of scholarly discourse. Yet it is precisely this seeming normality that provides communication scholarship with an important push to unravel the socio-economic, political, and cultural complexities of lived experience and the ramifications of our everyday choices as citizens. (p. 19)

Hence, it is important to study how “natural,” everyday, and taken-for-granted phenomena, such as food, are consequential in everyday life. Communication about food, and choices regarding food, can serve as modes of communication that shape people in complicated ways.

In the last several years, communication scholars have turned to the study of food, and how it does much more than provide nourishment, or “mere sustenance” (Greene, 2011; Greene, & Cramer, 2011). The ways that people grow, produce, consume, and talk about food is at the center of political, ideological, and social issues (Greene & Cramer, 2011). Food has been shown to be a means by which people identify with others, for when people sit down and eat together, they are connected symbolically and emotionally (Frye & Bruner, 2012; Greene & Cramer, 2011). Eating also has an inherent social function, with Wessell and Jones (2011) arguing that eating “is the primary way in which we initiate and maintain human relationships” (p. 61). In these and other ways, food often is connected to people’s memories and emotions,

and it can serve as a source of comfort (Greene & Cramer, 2011). Furthermore, food relates to power, as the availability of food, and the ability to grow or purchase it, is not distributed equally—many people in the United States and all over the world go hungry or malnourished due to the inability to access (nutritious) food. Moreover, food serves as a vehicle of empowerment for individuals' decision making, because people can express autonomy over their lives through their food choices (LeGreco, 2011).

Scholars even claim that *food is communication*, or that food is discourse (Girardelli, 2004; Greene, & Cramer, 2011). Food is viewed as a form of communication because it is a nonverbal way of sharing meaning with others, a code that conveys patterns about social relationships (Greene & Cramer, 2011). Food relates directly to both ritual and culture, and it even can be considered to be constitutive of people and cultures, as individuals use food to construct both personal and community identities (Frye & Bruner, 2012; Greene & Cramer, 2011; Henderson, 1970). Additionally, food communicates because it can be regarded as a status symbol or as a taboo (Henderson, 1970); types of food can indicate or define social occasions—*what* people prepare for others, and *when*, carries great meaning, in itself. The literature on food and communication, thus, highlights both the power and relevance of food as a cultural, political, and social force, and it suggests that food can be a mode of communication. Thus, it is especially important for communication scholars to study this recent food revolution, as there are important connections between communication and food, and how food *is* communication, as how and what food communicates affects people's daily personal, social, and political lives.

This project centers on an organization, Growing Gardens, that grows and distributes food. Growing Gardens is a particularly rich site to conduct communication research because it offers many ways for people to learn, individually and collectively, about and interact with food.

Growing Gardens hires educational and growing interns, and, during the growing and harvesting season, it is the site of daily visits by students from local schools, from preschools to high schools. Growing Gardens also provides community plots that people can rent to grow food, and it has scheduled volunteer hours, such that students, neighbors, or anyone interested can contribute their time to planting, weeding, and harvesting produce. Growing Gardens offers a program, called “¡Cultiva!,” (Cultiva, henceforth) in which 14- to 19-year-old students are hired to plant and harvest the garden, and they then sell their shares at a weekly CSA program that is located on site at Growing Gardens (2011c).

Further details about the site are offered in Chapter 3, but this brief overview of Growing Gardens demonstrates the dynamic food, garden, and community-oriented programs that are cultivated by the organization. The proposed study, intrinsically, is related to communication because, as members of the Growing Gardens organization are nurturing, weeding, and harvesting together, or “selling” food to CSA members, they constantly are interacting with one another. At Growing Gardens, communication occurs amongst people who occupy various roles, including interaction among staff members, interns, Cultiva participants, volunteers, neighbors, and CSA members. These interactions are surrounded by and entangled in the growth, production, and consumption of food. Many communication scholars have asserted that food can be much more than “mere sustenance” (Greene, 2011, p. 75; Greene & Cramer, 2011, p. xiv), and for an organization, such as Growing Gardens, gaining various connections to food is one of the main reasons that people come together.

Growing Gardens has self-stated community-building goals, making it a particularly fruitful organization to explore connections among food, communication, and community building. Growing Gardens’ (2011a) mission is to “enrich the lives of our community through

sustainable agriculture,” and its vision is “people experiencing a direct and deep connection with plants, the land, and each other” (para. 1, 2). Hence, community is highlighted as one of the central purposes of the organization, and it is linked, specifically, to the growth of food. Growing Gardens (2011c) stated that the activities in which participants in its youth program (Cultiva) take part “gives each Cultiva participant a deeper connection to their [sic] community. Hands-on experience and activities teach youth how to care for and protect the environment, operate a small business, and create positive change for the community, the environment, and themselves” (para. 1).

Given popular news media (e.g., Muhlke, 2010; Urie, 2011) and the claim that urban gardens benefit their communities (e.g., Armstrong, 2000; Growing Gardens 2011a, 2011c; Muhlke, 2010; Teig et al., 2009; Urban Design Lab, n.d.; Urban Farming, 2012; Urie, 2011; Wakefield et al., 2007), it is important to understand what these communities look like and how they are created and maintained. Given claims about community building and the positive social and health impacts of community gardens and urban agriculture, it is important to attend to what is happening in those spaces. By employing a communication perspective to investigate community building at Growing Gardens, this research study highlights not only actual community events or attributes but also how community is created and constituted by organizational members. Furthermore, this project lends insight into whether and how Growing Gardens “enriches” communities to which it is connected.

Specifically, this study investigates community at two levels: (a) microlevel ways that a sense of community at Growing Gardens is created through participants’ and volunteers’ interactions, and (b) perceived macrolevel benefits of the urban agriculture organization within broader communities to which it is connected. This second level focuses on how participants

make sense of the role of gardening and local food in that larger context, as demonstrated in how they talk about and understand the significance of the garden to the larger Boulder communities and broader social movements to which it may be connected. Furthermore, I investigate these second level, or macrolevel, benefits through participant observation and interviews that gave me situated access to understanding how Growing Gardens interacts with other communities.

### **Overview of Chapters**

Chapter one of this thesis articulated a rationale for studying food and urban agriculture from a communication perspective, introduced the site investigated in this study, and outlined the general purpose of this research investigation. Chapter two reviews literature about communication and food, civic agriculture, and the study of community from a communication perspective; that review sets up the focus for this research study. The third chapter explains methods that were employed to conduct the study. Chapter four details the results of the study, which are explained through a plant metaphor that reveals how Growing Gardens' members communicatively create, simultaneously, a rooted and transformative community. Chapter five concludes with a discussion of the conceptual and practical significance of the findings, identifies important limitations that characterized this study, and suggests directions for further research on communication, food, and community.



## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The conceptual grounding for this research study is situated in communication literature on food and community building. I begin by outlining literature on food and civic agriculture, and research on the communication of politics and identities through food. I then examine literature on community gardens and urban agriculture from other academic disciplines, and I explain how conducting research at Growing Gardens will expand that literature and what can be added to the knowledge base via a communication perspective. I subsequently review communication literature on communities and community building, to clarify my perspective that communities are constituted through communication, and to explain how Growing Gardens constitutes a particular type of group, known as a “bona fide” group. The following sections explicate literature in these areas, and situate the project within that research. I then explain the focus of the research study.

#### **Communication and Food**

Because food is so pervasive and prominent for human life, scholars have explored connections between food and communication. For example, communication scholars have studied ways in which food and communication relate to (a) culture (e.g., Bruss et al., 2005; Cheng, 2011; Cosgriff-Hernandez, Martinez, Sharf, & Sharkey, 2011; Homsey & Sandel, 2012; Opel, Johnston, & Wilk, 2010; Zhang, 2013); (b) family dynamics (Aronsson & Gottzén, 2011; Bruss et al., 2005; Manning, 2006); (c) health (e.g., poverty, nutrition, and obesity; Bruss et al., 2005; Chapman & Wu, 2013; Cosgriff-Hernandez et al., 2011; Phillipov, 2013; Ramadurai,

Sharf, & Sharkey, 2012; Thomson, 2009); (d) organizations' behaviors, such as offer food during crises (Ballard-Reisch, 2011; Greenberg & Elliott, 2009; Pohl & Freimuth, 1983); (e) media's treatment of food movies, television shows, and advertisements, and its effects on consumers (e.g., Aronovsky & Furnham, 2008; Buerkle, 2009; Choi & Kim, 2011; Cramer, 2011; Holland & Novak, 2013; Kean, Prividera, Boyce, & Curry, 2012; Kotler, Schiffman, & Hanson, 2012; Lindenfeld, 2011; Moon, 2010; Nan, Briones, Shen, Jiang, & Zhang, 2013; Parasecoli, 2011; Retziner, 2010; Shugart, 2008; Stefanik-Sidener, 2013; Swenson, 2009; Thomson, 2011); and (d) the rhetoric of food movements, campaigns, and stakeholders (e.g., Greene, 2011; Holden & French, 2012; Kang, 2012; Malesh, 2009; Todd, 2011; Van Gorp & van der Goot, 2012 ). Food and communication about it also have been found to be important markers of identity and, in fact, to be constitutive of identities (e.g., Cook, Reed, & Twiner, 2009; Cooks, 2009; German, 2011; Karaosmanoglu, 2011; Lucas & Buzzannell, 2011; Wessell, & Jones, 2011). The food literature that is most relevant to this project is that which examines relationships among food, community, communication, and civic agriculture, as is the literature discussing the communication of politics and identities, as those will be relevant to the site that is investigated in this research study.

The connection between food and community, or food and community building, is recognized throughout the communication literature. Many studies about food make passing references to community, or they include it as one aspect; however, some scholars have highlighted connections among food, communication, and community building. Purnell and Jenkins (2013), for instance, detailed the community-building nature of ritualized weekly dinners in their neighborhood, discovering that through weekly "family dinner nights," attendees developed a sense of familial connections and social capital via the open invitation to sit down

and eat together, and through participants' shared storytelling during those dinners.

Furthermore, a rhetorical analysis by Seegert (2012) emphasized how gardens can become a space for community building, with her research at the People's Portable Garden in Salt Lake City, Utah, showing that it was "a space teeming with roots that nourish bodies and communities" (p. 121). In Seegert's research, the shared site of the garden became a place of collective imagination, and it brought neighborhood members together to form a sense of belonging that had not existed previously in a neighborhood that, typically, was referred to as "blighted." Seegert's rhetorical analysis found that the community gardening space had the power to "nourish bodies and communities" (p. 121).

Many communication scholars, who do not focus, specifically, on community in their research on food have, however, referred to the community-building aspect of food when presenting or discussing their research results. Eckstein and Conley (2012), for example, found that shoppers and diners at farmers' markets were reminded that those around them are neighbors, and that the act of consuming food with others in a public space "encourages community" (p. 185). Additionally, Wessell and Jones (2011) found that food consumption was viewed as a home-building practice in monastery colonies. German (2011) noted that food has a community orientation due to its relationship to ritual, such that "it performs identity in the act of cooking and it becomes the physical manifestation of familial and community connections in the act of consumption" (p. 146). Food can be a signal of community, as it has the power and potential to communicate ingroup and outgroup membership (Cosgriff-Hernandez et al., 2011).

Oftentimes, connections between food, or growing food, and community are noted briefly or stated by communication scholars, but it is not the central focus of the research. For instance, as Karaosmanoglu (2011) claimed:

It is also important to note that cuisine and culinary activities not only express existing community feelings but also create community. People use food to cultivate relationships and to transcend social barriers. In this respect, cuisine can be viewed as a means of connecting; not only does it articulate nostalgia for a homeland, but it also helps to compose and recompose cultural and historical boundaries. (p. 40)

Moreover, Cramer (2011) argued that “the way in which we raise and eat our food reflects how we value ourselves, our communities, and the land” (p. 318), and Spurlock (2009) stated that “although everyday and commonplace, communication about food is neither neutral nor apolitical; as performed, it is capable of constituting communities and imaginaries, simultaneously drawing and obliterating boundaries” (p. 7). These scholars have asserted that activities around food can “create” or “constitute” community as a way of connecting, and that how people interact with food indicates how much they value their communities. This study at Growing Gardens is in line with this scholarship, as the study focuses on the community-building aspect of planting, growing, harvesting, and selling food, to understand more fully connections between community and food.

Communication scholars also have explored aspects of civic agriculture, such as farms, community gardens, and farmers’ markets. In the communication literature, community gardens, small agricultural farms, and gardening campaigns often are conceptualized as sites of resistance. Seegert’s (2012) rhetorical perspective on the People’s Portable Garden in Salt Lake City, for instance, demonstrated ways in which that portable garden complicated connections between place and space. The “natural” inhabitants of that garden (e.g., gardeners working together, flower beds, and lush plants) challenged the definition of urban spaces, and the people of that

neighborhood challenged what it meant to live in and create a community that was labeled as “blighted.”

Eckstein and Conley (2012) viewed farmers’ markets as rhetorically charged civic spaces, in which dirt becomes something to be coveted instead of a mess to be cleaned up or swept away. Farmers’ markets challenge previously held values, for, as Eckstein and Conley stated, “rustic, it seems, has become chic. Dirt has become the new black” (p. 174).

Tours at actual farms also have been fruitful sites of research for communication scholars. A rhetorical analysis was performed on the Piedmont Farm Tour, in which visitors were invited to play farmer for a day via guided tours offered at several farms (Spurlock, 2009). Spurlock explained how the Piedmont Farm Tour, operated as a critical intervention that productively problematized and expanded the rhetoric of sustainability and interdependence, by showing how such farm tours function as food-centered advocacy and rhetorically demonstrate alternative ways of growing and eating food that can create a more sustainable future. In doing so, farm tours also offer an advocacy strategy in favor of cultural and historical remembering of smaller rural farms; simultaneously, they provide an alternative to traditional policy-driven arguments, as farm tours provide a new way to debate, deliberate, and protest the environmental impacts and economic pressures of the current global food system. Moreover, Spurlock viewed such tours as a compelling and even “seductive” way to counter the vision of nutrition that is offered by fast-food or “big-food” corporations, such as McDonalds and Coca-Cola (see, e.g., Lin, Mou, & Lagoe, 2011).

Campaigns that promote farming and gardening also serve as modes of resistance. For instance, Todd (2011) researched a campaign, called “Eat the View,” that focused, specifically, on increasing gardening, by getting food gardens planted in high-profile places, such as at The

White House. According to Todd, the discourse of the Eat the View campaign actively tried to change the U.S. landscape from the one of lawns to gardens, by critiquing the aesthetic of the suburban lawn and by offering a new aesthetic of edibility. Todd concluded that rhetoric has the potential to transform people's relationships with food, and that iconic images of suburban land can be changed into food gardens that are both aesthetically pleasing and provide fresh food.

Gardens and garden tours, however, do not always function as acts of resistance. McCullen (2011), exploring racial politics of agriculture at a farmers' market in California, noted that civic agriculture can function to maintain and uphold the status quo; specifically, in regards to whiteness (see also Alkon & McCullen, 2011). Although McCullen found that many people visit farmers' markets to gain a greater understanding about how their food is grown, and by whom, many farmers' markets only partially defetishize the production of food, which is inhibited when customers conflate farmers with vendors at farmers' markets, leading customers to think that the racial makeup of alternative agriculture also is White. In this case, the inaccurate notion that vendors are farmers led to a disconnect between farmers who market shoppers conceptualize as growing their food and the Hispanic population in California, who actually does the farming; in this way, farmers' markets construct what McCullen termed the "White farm imaginary" (p. 219), which perpetuates whitened myths about U.S. agriculture (see also Slocum, 2007).

### **Communicating Political Leanings and Identities through Food**

Purchasing certain food or purchasing it at certain establishments can communicate political opinions and can mark and constitute particular identities. Although food is not always political, food and food consumption behaviors seem to be associated within an entangled web of politics and identity. The research connected to food, politics, and identity is significant to the

present study because, as an organic, urban agriculture, local, community-supported agricultural (CSA) organization with community gardens, politics and identities are bound to be relevant aspects (in some way) to members of the Growing Gardens organization.

Food is associated with politics, in part, because food organizations have become heavily involved in the political system. Nestle's (2013) work explicated ways in which food companies use political processes to obtain support for their products and to sway health recommendations that are offered by public health organizations. As Nestle discovered, food companies place concerns about the bottom line and making money for stockholders over concerns regarding public health. Scholars, such as Nestle (a nutrition scholar), have started to question the voices of food organizations in the U.S. political system, but for everyday citizens, food also has become political because of the rise of health concerns regarding the safety of food, such as diseases (e.g., E. coli and Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy), use of pesticides, and GMOs (Lien, 2004; in communication scholarship, see, e.g., Blue, 2009; Fleming, Thorson, & Zhang, 2006; Greenberg & Elliott, 2009; Maesele, 2013; Silk, Weiner, & Parrott, 2005). People are becoming critical of where their food is from and how it is grow, with Lien (2004) arguing that the politics of food occur outside traditional conceptualizations of "political," and that this means food, itself, has become a political object; as Lien stated, "food is politicized, not only as a commodity for consumption, but all the way into the kitchen and the dinner table with implications for cooking and family care" (p. 3).

Some consumers strategically make food-purchasing decisions to communicate a political statement about food or the environment. Click and Ridberg (2010), for instance, found that responses from survey participants who were on national food and gardening listservs consistently established that the way in which they spent money on food was a political act.

Thus, certain behaviors around food consumption and purchase are enacted because of political leanings. Where and how food is acquired, and buying specific types of food, seek to transform the current food system. Click and Ridberg (2010) explained that as “alternative food practitioners seek to change the food system by buying organic, shopping at farmers markets, aspiring to be locavores, counting food miles, eating Slow Food, joining CSAs, and planting community gardens” (p. 302). Sprain (in press) found that consumption of organic foods can (but does not always) function as political action speech, as organic food purchase is a way for consumers to vote with their money. For certain consumers, purchasing behaviors are equated to political influence and the ability to overcome problems, and political language associated with social movements creates political organic consumers (Sprain). Food also is connected to environmental movements, with Freeman (2010) making the link between eating animal-based diets and sustainability, ethics, and health, arguing that the environmental movement should take a stronger stance in favor of vegetarian and veganism. Furthermore, several scholars noted ways in which cultivating food movements rely heavily on individual choices and purchasing decisions, and that doing so can diminish the force of political food movements (Click & Ridberg, 2010; Foust, 2011; Sprain).

Collective action, or encouraging collective action, is one way that communication scholars have argued that people can make the biggest impact on food politics. Foust (2011), for example, argued that the film *The Garden* (Kennedy, Nacif, & Derrenger, 2008), about a failed attempt by South Central Los Angeles farmers to maintain a 14-acre urban plot, makes the case for a multifarious approach to dismantling corporate food systems. Unlike some other movies, such as *Fast Food Nation* (Thomas, McLaren, & Linklater, 2006) and *Food, Inc.* (Kenner & Pearlstein, 2010), Foust (2011) argued that *The Garden* encourages routes to effectively change



and critique the corporate food system by offering creative alternatives that encourage collective action, such as gardening, instead of asking people simply to change their personal purchasing habits. Click and Ridberg (2010) noted that alternative food activism is too focused on individual consumer-oriented strategies, contending that the practices and reasons for engaging in food preservation (e.g., canning and pickling) present an opportunity to move food-oriented politics from individual acts to collective action, and that doing so will help activists to better connect to the goals of food movements. Food preservation, thus, cultivates relationships and connection, and it stands in contrast to individual consumer-oriented politics that encourage people to make certain food choices independently (Click & Ridberg). Sprain (in press) also argued that framing organic consumption as collective action that is tied to social movements will elevate the political potential of purchasing organic foods.

Purchasing certain types of food can function as both voice and silence (Sprain, in press) for food and environmental political movements. Several of the studies cited above exemplified ways in which individuals use food as activism (voice), but food purchases and movements also can diminish political voices. Because people buy organic food for varying reasons, Sprain began her research from a position that did not presume that politics and consumption have a particular relationship. After analyzing texts of group discussions and promotional materials about organic food, Sprain found that organic consumption mapped onto three meanings for consumers: as political action, as tasteful consumption, and as shutting up (or as an end to political voice about food). In opposition to the viewpoint of food as a political statement, organic consumption also has been suggested as a way of keeping food activists out of broader political arenas that might affect other people's food consumption choices (Sprain); this constitutes organic consumption as "shutting up," and it indicates that buying organic is seen as a

“good enough” personal solution and, hence, that future political action is unnecessary (Sprain). Additionally, Hahn and Bruner (2012) argued that organic no longer constitutes a counterculture, which is supported by the argument that organic foods have become mainstream, coopted by the market, and that many organic consumers do not have a well-developed understanding of their organic food purchases.

The purchase of food connects to personal identities that are associated with culture, class, and status, in addition to political movements. Cook, Reed, and Twiner (2009) suggested that food purchase

is now perceived as a way of expressing identity (both individual and cultural), concern about the environment and social justice, and a political stance. Food has become an area of symbolic value indicative of philosophical and political conviction which, like religious and philosophical beliefs. (p. 170)

From a historical perspective, Guthman (2010) demonstrated how organic salad mix went from an elite, expensive food to one that, increasingly, became industrialized. Guthman discovered that although organic salad mix once was associated with politics, it later became connected to the identity of “yuppieness.” As Guthman explained:

Although only one organic commodity among many, salad mix nevertheless has borne some important changes in the politics of organic consumption. Diffused through restaurateurs, it was an elite commodity from the onset, playing into yuppie sensibilities, including the desire to control one’s body shape. (p. 55)

Guthman (2010) and Sprain (in press) both noted that food also is an aesthetic. Sprain’s research found that purchasing organic food also communicates information regarding individuals’ social status or cultural capital. The pleasure of organic food was found to be based

not only on taste but also on image, with having an “organic style” found to be an aesthetic, not a political stance (Sprain). In these cases, purchasing organic food is glorified for its cultural influence, in contrast to its environmental or political impacts (Guthman; Sprain).

The connection between communication and politics with regard to food is complex, in part, because people’s food choices do not always reflect an implied political stance, as individuals also purchase foods to achieve particular identities (Guthman, 2010; Sprain, in press). However, the opposite also is true, as people may hold political stances that cannot be determined by their food choices. Newholm (2000) demonstrated that people’s preferences or affiliations cannot be determined based solely on their purchasing behaviors; even for consumers whose food choices do not reflect activism, Newholm stated, “I am confident that all those I have studied would welcome improvements in the conditions both of “food” animals and of poor coffee farmers” (p. 159).

Although food purchases do not always indicate or reflect a political statement, it also seems difficult to separate food from politics. In line with Sprain (in press), I did not begin with the assumption that Growing Gardens is a political organization, is making political statements, or is connected to certain identities; however, because members of Growing Gardens grow food, belong to a CSA, and eat organic/local food, they may be certain political or identity-related implications to their community-cultivating practices (Click & Ridberg, 2010). Furthermore, in seeking to understand how Growing Gardens contributes to and is connected to external environments and communities, it is necessary to consider ways in which Growing Gardens may relate to communities, such as social and food movements. Because I focused mainly on communication research related to food and gardening, the following section outlines gardening literature that has been explored in other academic disciplines. In particular, I identify ways that

current research on community gardens and urban farming will benefit from a communication perspective.

### **Gardening Literature in Other Disciplines**

Gardening also has been of great interest to scholars in the disciplines of health, education, geography, and community development, among others. Several health scholars have found that community gardens have positive effects on people's health, not only because they increase the availability of produce but also because they serve a community function (Armstrong, 2000; Growing Gardens 2011a, 2011c; Muhlke, 2010; Teig et al., 2009; Urban Design Lab, n.d.; Urban Farming, 2012; Urie, 2011; Wakefield et al., 2007). In these studies, "health impacts" refer to both physical and emotional benefits of community gardening. For instance, based on in-depth interviews conducted with gardeners at community gardens, Teig et al. (2009) found that those gardens serve as a positive social influence in neighborhoods and that they are a "catalyst for other positive place-based social dynamics" (p. 1120). Interviews with gardeners revealed that community gardens foster social connections, a sense of reciprocity, mutual trust, and collective decision making. Draper and Freedman (2010) identified a number of studies that demonstrate how community gardens can improve the social development of adults and youth, such as by providing opportunities to build social relationships and to gain respect for other individuals and cultures. Community gardens also have been shown to lead to increased neighborhood organizing (Armstrong, 2000; Draper & Freedman, 2010) and they enhance community connection (Wakefield et al., 2007). Armstrong (2000) attributed the increase in neighborhood organizing associated with community gardens to the availability of physical space, stating that "a physical location for residents to meet each other, socialize, learn about other organizations and activities/issues in their local community" (p. 325).

Physical and mental benefits and access to better food also have been shown to result from community gardens. Armstrong (2000), assessing positive effects of community gardens, found that access to fresh or better tasting food was the most common reason that people in upstate New York reported for participating in community gardens. Wakefield et al. (2007) corroborated the finding that better access to fresh and nutritious food benefits those who participate in community gardens, and that children, especially, benefited from the produce. Gardening can be healing for individuals with mental illnesses or learning disabilities (Ferris et al., 2001). These indicators of “good health,” both physical and emotional, are used to argue in favor of community benefits of gardening. For example, Wakefield et al. stated that “community gardens are seen to benefit the community as a whole, by improving relationships among people, increasing community pride and in some cases by serving as an impetus for broader community improvement and mobilization” (p. 97). However, although scholars primarily have emphasized health benefits of community gardening, Teig (2009) noted that these sites can lead to various problems (e.g., interpersonal conflicts, vandalism, and theft).

Education literature has found a number of physical, mental, academic, and social benefits for children and young adults who participate in gardening activities. That research is less about community gardens and more about gardening programs that are designed to teach children about plants, food, nutrition, and the environment, through actively participating in growing plants and food. Blair’s (2010) review of U.S. literature on children’s gardening found that vegetable gardening teaches children food systems ecology, shapes their environmental values, puts science into context, and meets learning outcomes that are related to environmental attitude change, self-esteem, and life skills. Hoffman et al. (2007) found that community college students experienced positive physical benefits from a gardening program, as the physical

activity of gardening motivated them for activities they participated in the rest of the day. Miller (2007) explains that in a society where children spend more time indoors interacting with technology, gardening with kindergarten and pre-school children in an outdoor classroom, helped the children physically connect back to nature. Gardening also has been shown to improve children's competence in math and science (Blair, 2010; Klemmer, Waliczek, & Zajicek, 2005; Miller, 2007). Additionally, gardening educational programs help children to learn life skills, such as the ability to communicate knowledge about their world to others, convey and manage emotions, develop self-confidence (Miller, 2007), learn how to work as a team (Libman, 2007), improve self-esteem, and reduce ethnocentrism (Hoffman et al., 2007). Participating in gardening activities as a part of everyday education has been proposed as an effective way to help youth make healthy lifestyle changes (Lautenschlager & Smith, 2007), as these programs improve nutrition knowledge and vegetable preferences in school-aged children, and they increase their consumption of fruits and vegetables (Libman, 2007; Morris & Zidenberg, 2002). Libman (2007) found that after participating in the Brooklyn Botanic Garden Children's Garden, children demonstrated a shift in preparation of produce, from wanting vegetables that were heavily dressed or cooked, to a preference for raw vegetables, or those close to raw. Moreover, children who had an initial disposition against vegetables showed a greater shift in taste towards vegetables; they also developed the ability to recognize freshness and to connect that recognition to fact that their produce tasted better than store-bought produce.

The educational research on gardening, thus, has tended to focus on how gardening and gardening programs benefit individual children; it has been less concerned with the connection between gardening and community building. However, Hoffman et al. (2007) did show that gardening is one way to combine learning with an improved commitment to community

responsibility, as they found that gardening increased the involvement of community college students in campus and community activities. This research about gardening education is relevant not only because it demonstrates some potential connections among gardening, learning, and personal development but also because Growing Gardens offers various programs that connect to the education of children through gardening and garden visits (e.g., the Cultiva Youth Program, classroom visits, field trips, and children's summer camps).

Scholars in the geography discipline also have paid attention to how physical and social spaces of community gardens differ (Kurtz, 2001), as well as demographics of gardeners (Corrigan, 2001), varying ways that people get access to gardens, and how gardens affect the landscape (Schmelzkopt, 1995). These foci relate and contribute to discussions in geography research that focus directly on community (Kurtz, 2001), and they function as more brief conclusions about the positive effects of gardens on external communities (Corrigan, 2001). Kurtz (2001) conducted a comparative research study on three gardens to investigate the impacts of the type of garden and access to gardens, finding that community gardens provide important spaces for neighborhood residents to negotiate what it means to garden in the city, as well as the way that gardens create varying meanings of community. She found that community gardens develop various interpretations of what "community" and "garden" mean. For instance, whether the garden is enclosed or open, or whether it conceptualized as a play area for children or a working area to generate food, affects the way that gardeners understand the type of gardening community to which they belong. Kurtz advised that the way urban community gardens are organized physically can affect what kind of community is fostered at those gardens. As Kurtz (2001) concluded, "Community gardens serve as tangible and dynamic arenas in which urban residents construct and reinterpret over time the character and meaning of both urban garden, and

urban community” (p. 668). Corrigan (2002) briefly mentioned contributions of community gardens to the overall community, stating, in reference to food security, that “if developed correctly and passionately, community gardens will improve any community” (p. 1240). These contributions to community included donating produce to those in need and planting berry and bean plants, such that children and neighbors walking by could pick some of the food. Moreover, members of that garden felt that the collective force of a “community” was required to generate the interest, funding and support necessary to start a community garden (Corrigan).

Health impacts by geography scholars include research by Schmelzkopt (1995), who found that gardens gave people access to healthy food, and that they fostered a healthy social environment where children and adults could work and play together. Research by Corrigan (2001) in applied geography revealed that community gardens minimize food insecurity and reduce obesity for the gardeners and their families, and for the larger community (through donating food) because of increased access to fresh food. Geography scholars have focused on significant characteristics and effects of garden space, such as where gardens are situated, the nature of the lot (e.g., its size, shape, and existence of a fence), whether they are locked or open to the public, and how their structure leads to various experiences. Thus, these variables have been shown to affect people who garden and meanings of the garden to them, as well as the larger communities in which the garden is situated.

Scholars in community development have noted that CSA also has community-building capacities that are conducive and valuable in rural communities. Wells, Gradwell, and Yoder (1999), for instance, explained that, in addition to aiming to make a profit, CSA producers are motivated by nonmonetary things, such as education, diversity, and “modeling a community-based alternative food system” (pp. 40–41). They explained that the CSA made the community



visible again, and that it had the ability to build community.

Scholars from disciplines other than communication, thus, have emphasized ways in which the space of group gardens creates community. For example, Teig et al. (2009), emphasizing the ability of the physical space to build community, stated:

In the experience of these gardeners, the garden environment promotes more than social connection, trust, and reciprocal relationships—it provides something to which they can belong . . . [and] community gardens give rise to social connections among neighbors who otherwise might never engage with each other. (pp. 1119, 1121)

Wakefield et al. (2007) also characterized gardens as places for positive social interaction; specifically, the community garden in Toronto served as a meeting place where people came together. Wakefield et al. cited long waiting lists for people to access plots in the gardens, and their data indicated “that community gardens can be important places for building broader community involvement” (p. 98). For Wells et al. (1999), the CSA in this study “builds community capacity” (46). The present study takes a different route by focusing on how communication between members and visitors at Growing Gardens creates community; hence, instead of presuming or merely stating that the CSA creates the potential for community, I focus on how communication at the CSA (for example) constitutes community.

Although space is important and has the power to influence and shape people’s interaction, this study focuses on community building as occurring through communication (see, e.g., Underwood & Frey, 2008), and as an interactional accomplishment (see, e.g., Rothenbuhler, 2001), rather than as a space that creates or “provides.” Although I pay attention to space, I avoid conceptualizing community merely as a product of geographic land, and, instead, I explore people’s sense of belonging to a group, and ways in which a shared culture creates community

(see, e.g., Frey & Adelman, 1993), with the relationship between communication and community building explored next.

### **Communication and Community Building**

“Community” is a broad term that refers to many things. People often use it merely to indicate physical space or boundaries, with cities and neighborhoods often referred to as communities. Groups of people who are connected by space, characteristics, or interests also often are referred to as communities (e.g., the community at the University of Colorado Boulder, the deaf community, and the soccer community). As Underwood and Frey (2008) explained, community is both a noun and a verb; community is not only a thing that people are or belong to but it also is an attribute that a group can “have” or obtain (i.e., a real sense of community). Communication scholars have viewed community as an idealized (Rothenbuhler, 2001), messy (Friedland, 2001), romanticized (Adelman & Frey, 1997), overused, and even an elusive concept (Adelman & Frey, 1997; Underwood & Frey, 2008). Although the numerous meanings and application of the term, seemingly, diminish its potency, community remains, for most people (including scholars), something to be valued, striven for, and applauded. For instance, by putting community-building references on its website, Growing Gardens, likely, is seen by most nonmembers as “doing good things.” This study seeks to understand the relationship between communication and community at Growing Gardens by interrogating what community means to the people in that context, and ways in which communicative practices in that site facilitates (and/or impedes) the construction of community.

I use the definition of *community* proposed by Adelman and Frey (1997) to refer to “a web spun of space, identity, emotional connection, interdependence, common symbols, and mutual influence” (p. 5). Community is constructed and maintained by everyday interactions

and patterns of individuals in a group, and those human interactions create shared meaning (Adelman & Frey). Furthermore, it is commonalities amongst group members, the shared meaning or a shared culture, that differentiate group members from individuals who belong to other groups (Adelman & Frey; Frey & Adelman, 1993). In terms of shared symbolic construction, communities are defined and understood by boundaries that separate groups (Frey & Adelman, 1993). This notion of “boundaries” has led to people characterizing community by geographic space, which Frey and Adelman (1993) deemed unfortunate because it oversimplifies what it means to be in a community, as well as ignores how people are connected through common ways of seeing each other and the world. Oftentimes, the space is significant to individuals because of the human connections that are created there (Adelman & Frey).

As a researcher, I hold a constitutive perspective that views community as being created in and through communication, in contrast to a transmission perspective, in which community is assumed to exist prior to communication, with community seen as a tool or a resource that members use to meet particular group or individual goals (underwood & Frey, 2008). Instead of viewing community as an object that exists separate from individuals and their interactions, or as being synonymous with place and boundaries, I view community as a communicative accomplishment (Rothenbuhler, 2001). Furthermore, community is not treated as a valued ideal but, rather, as a product of people’s interactions. Therefore, I focus not only on positive aspects of community but also on differences and dialectical tensions that are inherent aspects of community life.

According to underwood and Frey (2008), there are at least four general attributes of community to which communication scholars have attended: (a) physical attributes, the site, group, and/or virtual location where community is studied; (b) support attributes, such as

psychological belonging, social bonding, and/or achieving feelings of safety and protection; (c) influence attributes, such as behavioral norms, group identification, regulation of social order, and collective action; and (d) meaning-making attributes, which include common beliefs, attitudes, and identities; collectively recognizable futures or ideals; sense of everyday purpose; and shared semiotic structure. The proposed research study at Growing Gardens examines how community is created in each of these ways.

Moreover, although typical thought promotes the idea that community, and belonging to community, always is positive, scholars have warned against presuming that community always is “good” (see, e.g., Adelman & Frey, 1997; Rothenbuhler, 2001; Underwood & Frey, 2008). Focusing only on positive aspects of community leads scholars to miss a lot of the difficulties that accompany living, working, and playing in communities (Rothenbuhler, 2001). Community life is wrought with dialectical tensions and contradictions, and, rarely, does it encompass the idealized version of the happiness and unity that are assumed to exist. Additionally, there often is a dialectical tension between individual and group needs in communities (see, e.g., Adelman & Frey, 1997; Frey & Adelman, 1993). Hence, instead of basing communication research on the assumption that community is equivalent to happiness and to the absence of conflict and tension, Rothenbuhler (2001) encouraged researchers to ground an alternative model of community in presumptions of difference and difficulty.

To do justice to both the benefits and challenges of community life, communication scholars have adopted a dialectical perspective (see, e.g., Bakhtin, 1981, 1921/1984; Baxter, 1988; Baxter & Montgomery, 1996) to explore how dialectical tensions of community groups, organizations, and life are created and massaged through communication (see, e.g., Adelman & Frey, 1997; Alemán, 2001; Driskell, Meyer, & Mirivel, 2012; Koschmann & Laster, 2011;

Kramer, 2004; Norton, & Sadler, 2006; Renz, 2006; underwood & Frey, 2008). underwood and Frey (2008) defined *dialectical tensions* as “result[ing] from simultaneously holding two interdependent, contradictory ideas that are in conflict with one another and are the underlying tendencies in a phenomenon which mutually exclude and simultaneously presuppose one another” (p. 386). Bakhtin (1981) explained that social processes result from the unity of interactions that are filled with tension and contradiction, and Baxter and Montgomery (1996) applied that perspective to understand more fully the messiness of, and the ability to live with, “relational dialectics” (p. 4). This research study takes seriously communication scholars’ recommendation to focus, simultaneously, on the benefits and constraints of community life, by employing a dialectical perspective to study community building at Growing Gardens. Furthermore, it will be interesting to see how members of Growing Gardens understand the notion of “community” that is being created there, according to the website, and the degree to which dialectical tensions are recognized and accepted.

Additionally, although communities, in practice, may entail people having both shared culture and symbolism, that sharing does not necessarily mean that they are *high-quality* communities. Adelman and Frey (1997) identified some characteristics that create a high-quality community, such as communities creating stability for their members; three attributes that do so are accepting and respecting dialectical tensions, employing communicative practices to foster the expression of multiple viewpoints, and understanding community as a continual process that is woven in both mundane and grand gestures. Adelman and Frey found these features to be especially valuable in a community that experienced frequent change and tragedy (specifically, the loss of members of a residential facility for people living with AIDS), leading them to conclude that community life cannot obviate the pain that members experience from living with

AIDS, or the frustrations and hard work that is a continual aspect of collective life. Hence, although these attributes may characterize the creation of high-quality communities, such communities, of course, are not utopias.

Furthermore, communities are also not containers, or closed entities with fixed boundaries (Putnam & Stohl, 1990). Previously, many communication studies ignored ways in which groups are embedded in and affected by their environment (Putnam & Stohl, 1990). To combat this limited perspective, Putnam and Stohl (1990) introduced the *bona fide* group perspective, which focuses on two characteristics: stable yet permeable boundaries, and interdependence of groups with their immediate contexts (see also Poole, 1999; Putnam, 1994; Putnam & Stohl, 1996; Stohl & Holmes, 1993; Stohl & Putnam, 1994, 2003; Waldeck, Shepard, Teitelbaum, Farrar, & Seibold, 2002; for empirical studies conducted from this perspective, see, e.g., Cooper & Shumate, 2012; Frey, 2003; Galanes, 2003; Lammers & Krikorian, 1997). The first characteristic emphasizes ways in which boundaries are communicatively constructed to create a sense of group membership or group identity (Putnam & Stohl, 1990). Boundaries are not stable divisions that separate groups from their environments but, instead, they are “structures that are created through interactions that shape group identity, establish connections between internal and external environments, and reflexively define group processes” (Stohl & Putnam, 2003, p. 401–402). Boundaries are permeable and group membership is fluid and dynamic, which means that groups and group members are connected to other groups, members have relationships that relate to other contexts, and membership roles and participation are subject to change (Putnam & Stohl, 1990). Permeable boundaries, thus, not only reflect a more realistic view of group membership but group survival also relies on having individuals who

span boundaries, change roles, and bring in new resources and information (Putnam & Stohl, 1990).

The second characteristic, interdependence of groups with their immediate contexts, relates to groups' reciprocal relationship with their environments (Putnam & Stohl, 1990). Groups rely on, interact with, and contribute to groups in other contexts and environments. Context is not something that exists "outside of a group"; it is embedded in group members' interactions, as these interactions refer to and negotiate interdependence with other external and internal groups (Putnam & Stohl, 1990). Therefore, I not only investigate how members at Growing Gardens create community but I also approach this organization as a bona fide group, to explore the relationship between Growing Gardens and other communities to which it is connected, and to provide a theoretical lens to understand how Growing Gardens might benefit those communities.

This research study, thus, seeks to understand more fully connections among communication, community, and food, and, thereby, to deeply explore an issue that is central to scholarship on food and communication but that has not received direct attention. The results of this research, hopefully, will generate a rich understanding of community building at a place of urban agriculture, and the importance of that place to the broader contexts in which the site is situated. The study will help to understand ways in which food serves more than mere nourishment, by focusing on how community is interactionally created by participants at Growing Gardens, and how organizational members of that community communicatively make sense of their ability to enrich the greater geographic community and its residents. Specifically, I focus on community on two levels: (a) how Growing Gardens members (staff, interns, volunteers, and CSA/Cultiva participants) use communication to constitute community at

Growing Gardens, and (b) how Growing Gardens is connected to and contributes to other external communities. These foci include paying attention to how participants talk about and make sense of Growing Gardens' contributions to other communities, in addition to contributions and connections that are apparent through participant observation of the site and interviews conducted with site members. I approach the term "community" in a broad sense to include geographic communities to which Growing Gardens is connected (e.g., the specific neighborhood in which it is situated and to Boulder), organizations to which Growing Gardens contributes (e.g., schools, nonprofit organizations, and for-profit organizations), and more intangible communities to which Growing Gardens may be connected (e.g., organic, local, and urban agriculture food movements, or wider social movements). The next chapter explains the methods employed to accomplish these research goals.



## CHAPTER 3

### METHODS

This research study employs ethnography to examine people performing/enacting community (see, e.g., Adelman & Frey, 1997; Rothenbuhler, 2001), and informant interviews (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011) to gain detailed accounts about people's participation at the research site studied (Growing Gardens). Ethnography is a particularly appropriate method for understanding community as being comprised of a web of related experiences and events, as well as a variety of spaces, roles, and situations (Rothenbuhler, 2001). Participant observation and interviews were both utilized, as observation alone would not capture members' varying views of the organization, as studied in relation to greater communities to which it is connected, and interviews alone would miss the situated, subtle, and context-bound ways that members create community and experience the enjoyments and struggles of community life. The sections below describe the research site in more depth than what has been provided previously, specific methodological procedures that were used to collect data, institutional review board approval of the study, and ways that the data were analyzed.

#### **Research Site**

Growing Gardens is a nonprofit urban agriculture organization located in North Boulder, Colorado, on Hawthorne Avenue. According to its website, "Growing Gardens unites the Boulder County community through urban agricultural projects" (Growing Gardens, 2011a); these projects include an internship and volunteer program, the Cultiva Youth Project (which supports the weekly community-supported agriculture; CSA), Horticulture Therapy (for people

with disabilities and seniors), the Children’s Peace Garden (which hosts the After School Gardening Club and summer camps for children ages 4 to 10), and community gardens. The site also provides events, such as cooking, gardening, and beekeeping classes; an annual plant sale; and a Cultiva harvest dinner that features a meal prepared with food from the garden and other locally raised ingredients. Although education and experience around food and gardening are important for this organization, as mentioned previously, the organization’s focus is on creating community. Among the aforementioned mission and vision statements that relate to community and creating social connections, Growing Gardens (2011b) is described as “a Boulder non-profit dedicated to cultivating community through urban agriculture” (para. 1).

Background information about Growing Gardens helps to understand the organization, the land that it uses, and how the community came to be. The Long family owns the property that Growing Gardens uses for its main site at the Hawthorne location, and that family leases the 11 east acres of the property to Growing Gardens (Growing Gardens, 2011g). The Long family owns Long’s Gardens, which is an iris farm in North Boulder, founded originally in 1905 by J. D. Long (2011g). The granddaughter of J. D. Long and her husband still own and operate this family business, and they are committed to preserving agricultural land and agricultural education (Growing Gardens, 2011g), which is why they offered a long-term lease to Growing Gardens. Long’s Gardens originally allowed members of the Boulder community to start the Hawthorne community gardens on the property in 1975 (Growing Gardens, 2011d), and this garden was managed by the City of Boulder until 1998, when Growing Gardens was created as a Boulder County urban agriculture nonprofit, and the organization started its initial programming with the community gardens before adding the Cultiva program in 1999 and the Children’s Peace Garden in 2000 (Growing Gardens 2011d).

In addition to enriching lives, uniting the Boulder community, and helping people to experience a deep connection to one another through urban agriculture, Growing Gardens (2011h) claims that urban agriculture can increase food security (amount and availability of food), food safety, help the city to avoid environmental degradation, and, typically that the gardens are seen as sustainable agriculture. In terms of the economics of the organization, Growing Gardens earns some money by charging for community garden plots, Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) shares, and selling plants at a yearly plant sale; however, the organization, primarily, is funded by donations and grants.

Growing Gardens has seven full-time staff members. Some staff members, such as Chris and Jenny (all names are pseudonyms), work at the main greenhouse and garden site, and at the office; other staff members (i.e., the executive director, development director, program director, program coordinator, and operations coordinator) work only at the office, which is about a mile from the main site. Most of my participation at Growing Gardens occurred at the main garden site; consequently, Chris and Jenny were the main staff members with whom I interacted on a regular basis.

Those staff members who work in the office sometimes do harvest or plant at the main greenhouse and garden site, and they meet with board members or donors at the site as well. Staff meetings occur at the Growing Gardens office, with staff members, typically, arranging their chairs informally in a circle in the middle of the main room. Most staff members share the main room but have a separate desk, but one of the staff members has a separate office. The main office, however, it is not a permanent site, and staff members, currently, are working on relocating to a new space. There also is a kitchen area that all staff members can use.

The main Growing Gardens site, and the site that was the focus of this study, is situated in a residential neighborhood, with houses surrounding the site on three sides. Paths border and intersect Growing Gardens, and it is common to see people walking, biking, or running through the paths along the gardens. There are several main structures on the Growing Gardens site; the most prominent structures are the two greenhouses that are attached to each other and that are located near the parking lot. Next to the greenhouses is an open-air covered area that members call the “washing station,” which has large sinks, an elevated bathtub, and foldout tables that can be arranged for various purposes. The washing station is where produce is rinsed and bunched after it is harvested, and this area serves as a gathering place at the gardens. Various supplies are located at the washing station (e.g., ties for bunching vegetables and bags for bagging vegetables), and it is right by the walk-in fridge, where produce is sorted and stored in large white coolers before distributing the vegetables elsewhere.

Multiple gardens are located on the Growing Gardens site, such as the community gardens. Growing Gardens actually has 11 community garden sites throughout Boulder, and the community garden that is located at the main site, the only community garden there, is the “Hawthorne Community Garden,” which is located on the southwest corner of the site. Individuals sign up or join a waitlist to rent a community garden space there for a gardening season, and they then have access to water, mulch, tools, and wheelbarrows on site. The Hawthorne Community Garden has eight disability-accessible raised beds, and those who are under financial strain to rent a plot can apply for one at a reduced rate; the plots cost between \$43 and \$100, depending on the size of the plot, with reduced rate prices being half of that cost (Growing Gardens, 2011f). All community gardeners are required to contribute at least 4 hours of community service at Growing Gardens (per plot per year).

The Children's Peace Garden also is located at the main location of Growing Gardens. Although the Growing Gardens site is not fenced in, the Children's Peace Garden has a small, brightly painted fence surrounding it. This garden is where staff and interns run the children's camps, school field trips, and Gardening Club for preschool and elementary school children. During those school visits, students are given the opportunity to harvest produce, tour the gardens, visit the honeybee hives, and make food with produce that they picked.

Growing Gardens also has an internship program, where individuals can be hired as environmental educational instructors, greenhouse and market garden growers, or development and operations apprentices. Environmental educational instructors run events in the Children's Peace Garden, described previously (e.g., field trips, classroom visits, the After School Garden Club, and kids' camps). Environmental educational instructors and greenhouse market garden growers assist with the Horticulture Therapy program, which is aimed at individuals who are elderly or have mental or physical disabilities. Although I did not have very much exposure to that program during my time there, Growing Gardens bases the Horticulture Therapy program on the idea that gardening can be mentally healing for people, and that it can increase motor and cognitive functions (as explained by participants at the site and via the Growing Gardens website, 2011f). One of the main tasks of the greenhouse market garden growers is to work closely with Chris and the Cultiva Youth Project (described below), and the development and operations apprentice works in the main office with the development director and operations coordinator. Interns are paid, although most of them find supplemental income from a second job.

The growing interns work with Callie (the Program Coordinator) and Chris (the Market Garden Grower) to run the Cultiva Youth Project. These staff members and interns teach Cultiva

youth participants about growing organic food, and staff members and interns are expected to serve as mentors to young members of Cultiva. The Cultiva Youth Project hires participants (ages 14–19), apprentices (ages 12–15), and youth leaders to grow food in the organic market garden, which surrounds the Children’s Peace Garden and the greenhouses. This garden is planted and harvested by Cultiva participants under the direction and observation of staff and interns. During the summer, Cultiva participants work 10 to 15 hours per week, and they work four evenings in the fall. Cultiva youth participants grow, harvest, prepare, and “sell” food for the CSA that occurs weekly, in addition to preparing and delivering produce that is given away to those in need.

This past year, the CSA pick-up ran from 5:00 to 7:00 pm every Wednesday for 16 weeks. CSA members already have prepaid for all of their produce, and they stop by Growing Gardens every week (during the 16 weeks) to pick out their weekly share. The CSA pick-up, usually, occurs at the covered area near the washing station or in the greenhouse during inclement weather (in which case, it is moved into the greenhouse). At the CSA pick-up, Chris, interns (usually, Sam and Daniel), Callie (sometimes), and Cultiva participants who are working that week arrange varieties of produce on tables. CSA members show up during the allotted time frame, and a Cultiva member checks their name off a list. CSA members then go (usually, through a line) to each type of vegetable and pick out their share for that week. Cultiva participants stand behind the tables and “sell” shares to those members, telling CSA members names of vegetables and how many of each they can take. For example, as CSA members proceed through the line, a Cultiva student informs them to take an onion and two heads of garlic, and another Cultiva student tells them that they can take one bunch of kale, names the varieties of kale (e.g., red, dino, or green curly kale), and lets them know that they can have

either spinach, arugula, or braising greens. This CSA is unique because CSA members pick out their food instead of just pick up a box of food or have a box of food delivered to their house. Additionally, there is both an element of choice (two choices often are offered and they can have one or the other) and limited choice, as CSA members are instructed to take specific amounts and varieties of food (e.g., to take only four tomatoes).

Growing Gardens offers weekly volunteer hours that are run by Jenny (the greenhouse grower). During my time as a participant observer at Growing Gardens, volunteer hours occurred at the same time as did the CSA pick-up (Wednesdays from 4:00 to 6:00 pm). Individuals interested in volunteering are not required to sign up or call ahead of time; they simply can “show up” or “drop in” during the time frame. Volunteers show up for a variety of reasons. Some individuals volunteer because they are required to for a college course, to fulfill a court obligation, or because they have community gardening volunteer requirements; other people volunteer because of personal interest. Volunteers, therefore, represent a variety of ages, from college-aged to retired individuals. Several volunteers have been helping out the organization for 2 years or more (i.e., Lisa, Jeffrey, and Lu). Volunteers also sometimes work at the gardens outside of volunteer hours; for example, some volunteers help out with special projects at the garden that occur at other times. In my case, I was invited to volunteer during the morning harvest with staff and interns.

## **Data-collection Methods**

### **Participant Observation**

I received permission from Jenny, who runs the volunteer hours at Growing Gardens, to conduct research at that site, and to be involved as a volunteer with the organization. After corresponding with her via e-mail during Summer 2013, we met in person in August 2013, and

she agreed to allow me to study Growing Gardens. To be a useful addition to the garden, and to reduce the distance from which I observed, I acted as a participant-observer volunteer, interacting with and observing staff members, volunteers, Cultiva participants, and CSA program members at Growing Gardens.

I volunteered during the Wednesday afternoon volunteer hours from 3:45 to 6:00 pm. Jenny, typically, assigned me (and a group of other volunteers) to do a specific task; sometimes, she listed a few options and asked which one I would like to do. My main tasks involved weeding and harvesting in the market garden and in the Children's Peace Garden, and arranging or "selling" food at the weekly CSA pick-up. Volunteers, typically, work in groups around the garden on assigned tasks. For example, a group might be weeding kale as another group harvests tomatoes and other volunteers paint garden stakes. Volunteers do not assist with the CSA, as that is the responsibility of certain staff (Chris, Callie, and some interns) and Cultiva members, but I was given the opportunity on several occasions to observe and participate in selling food at the CSA pick-up. Those opportunities happened, in part, because I was interested in the CSA for research purposes and, sometimes, I would ask to help, and because the volunteer session on the Wednesday that it started raining and instigated the September 2013 Boulder flood, the CSA pick-up was short-staffed. When I showed up, I was asked to help out, and from then on, helping out at the CSA during volunteer hours often was an option for me.

In addition to participating during the designated weekly volunteer hours, I mentioned to Jenny that I wanted more exposure to the interaction and daily practices at the garden, and she said that I could participate in morning harvests on Wednesday mornings; those harvests were only for Growing Gardens staff members and interns, and they were a unique time, because, except for me and students on various school field trips who showed up to meet the educational



interns, only employees work those harvests. Those staff harvests gave me an opportunity to see what the organization was like without volunteers, CSA members, or students from the Cultiva program being present. Additionally, the morning sessions allowed me to interact with some staff members and interns, who, typically, do not attend volunteer hours. I got to know one of the interns, Sam, very well, who I, otherwise, would not have known because, typically, he worked a second job Wednesday nights. Chris was in charge of explaining and designating tasks during the morning harvest, and I worked closely with Daniel, Sam, and Jenny at times.

I took detailed retrospective fieldnotes immediately after volunteering each day at Growing Gardens about participants' interactions as they related to the creation and maintenance of community at Growing Gardens. Fieldnotes, typically, were organized according to activities that occurred and conversations that I had or overheard during my volunteer time. Early fieldnotes focused on learning about Growing Gardens and what was important to members; consequently, I took extensive and detailed notes on as many of the conversations/interactions that I observed and in which I participated at the gardens. I paid specific attention to any metacommunication about community, or conversations about how participants made sense of Growing Gardens' connections to the greater communities in which it is situated. Conversations about what people thought of Growing Gardens (e.g., likes and dislikes), why those individuals decided to participate in it, and what they liked or found frustrating also were of particular interest. I could not write down (many) exact quotes or jot down my observations in the field, because the volunteer hours required modest physical labor, such as digging leeks, picking tomatoes, and washing kale. Additionally, the casual character of the organization, and the fact that people, typically, never sit, write, or type made writing and taking notes an obvious and unusual activity, which would have made me stand out as a researcher in ways that, potentially,

would have been uncomfortable for participants. To manage that concern, all fieldnotes were written off-site after my volunteer hours were completed.

I volunteered for a total of 30 hours between September and the beginning of November, and took over 40 pages of fieldnotes. I was not able to conduct further participant observation after November 2013 because the growing season had ended. Volunteer hours and morning harvests are put on hiatus during the winter months, and they begin, again, in March. During the winter months, I conducted informant interviews (explained below) and was invited to sit in on a staff meeting at the Growing Gardens office. All of the staff members (except for one) and the operations and development intern (Brigetta) were present at the meeting. During that meeting, I took five pages of notes on a computer detailing what was talked about and who said what. Observing a staff meeting provided a useful perspective on the planning and problem solving that staff members discuss collectively, and it provided insight on talk about food and the community building that might occur outside of the physical location of the gardens. Due to scheduling conflicts, I was not able to attend future meetings.

## **Interviews**

As part of the data-collection process, to corroborate the observations made in the field, and to provide further information about the scene and participants' involvement in Growing Gardens, I conducted 10 informant interviews (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011) with a variety of participants at the organization. I strategically tried to gather the perspectives of individuals with a variety of experiences and who served in a range of roles at Growing Gardens. Those individuals included two staff members, three interns, a community gardener, two volunteers (one of whom also was a CSA member), and two individuals who had participated in the Cultiva Youth Program in the past year. Some interviewees were strategically chosen because they had a

significant role in the organization, whereas others were chosen because they volunteered to do an interview, or because I had developed rapport with them. I protected research participants by using pseudonyms in all reports and papers that represent my final data.

The two full-time staff members who I interviewed were Jenny (the greenhouse grower) and Chris (the market garden grower); they were important to interview because they lead or supervise most of the events and programs that occur at Growing Gardens, and, therefore, they are linked closely to community-building practices. I interviewed three interns, two of whom were growing interns (Daniel and Sam), and one who worked in the office as the operations and development intern (Brigetta), but who also had experience volunteering at Growing Gardens as part of a course being taught at the University of Colorado Boulder (CU-Boulder). Brigetta asked if I was conducting interviews as a part of my research, and she volunteered to complete an interview if I was interested in her perspective. Daniel and Sam had a lot of experience mentoring and working with the Cultiva program, and Sam had been an environmental and education intern; consequently, he had experience running kids' camps and leading field trips through the site. Additionally, I interviewed two long-term volunteers: Jeffrey, who had been volunteering for 3 years; and Lisa, who had been volunteering for 2 years. Jeffrey was chosen because interns and staff members often talked about how he goes above and beyond as a volunteer, and Lisa was chosen because she had first been a volunteer and, then, after the first year of volunteering, became a CSA member, and now engages in both roles. She also was chosen because I had developed rapport with her during my time volunteering at Growing Gardens. I also interviewed two individuals who had been a part of the Cultiva Youth Program. It was important to interview Cultiva participants who were 18 years or older because of the practical difficulty of obtaining Institutional Review Board approval to interview children.

Therefore, I asked Jenny if she had any recommendations of past Cultiva participants (who were over 18 years of age) who might be interviewed. Jenny e-mailed Callie (the program coordinator), who then e-mailed me a list of three past Cultiva participants who were over 18 and who she thought would be willing to participate in an interview. Of those three individuals, two agreed to do an interview: Ashley was a Cultiva participant for a year, and the interview was conducted at her home; and Isaac had been involved with Growing Gardens since he was 12 or 13, and had been an apprentice, a participant, and a youth leader. Isaac was away at college, but he agreed to do a Skype interview. Finally, I interviewed a community gardener (Brian) because I knew him prior to this research study.

Lindlof and Taylor (2011) explained that information interviews are especially useful for gaining in-depth information, insights, and local perspectives about scenes. Interviews were conducted using a semistructured interview protocol (see Appendix A), with a set of questions to guide the interviews. Interview questions encouraged interviewees to talk about their involvement in Growing Gardens and their perceptions of the organization. Gaining members' perspectives about the function of the organization was fruitful because there are many potential answers regarding the organization's purpose (e.g., feeding people, growing organic foods, and/or connecting to the community); consequently, it was important to hear what organizational members valued. Interviewees also were asked about the nature of their interactions at Growing Gardens; whether they viewed Growing Gardens as a community, and, if so, how they thought that community was created; and what they thought was Growing Garden's role or significance to surrounding communities. I also inquired about their participation in other food or agriculture organizations, and whether they viewed Growing Gardens as being part of any food movements. Furthermore, given that communication scholars (e.g., Greene & Cramer, 2011) have noted that

food *is* communication, and that food, itself, may serve community-building functions, I inquired about the role of food to people at Growing Gardens, and how interviewees saw people talking about and interacting with food.

Nine of the 10 interviews were audio recorded and transcribed at the utterance level, using Expresscribe transcription software. Due to a technical problem, the audio did not record one of the interviews. I had taken notes during that interview, and took retrospective notes after the interview was over. The interviews ran between 32 and 75 minutes, with an average of 62 minutes. Interviews were conducted in a location chosen by interviewees that was convenient for them and that had minimal background noise. Two interviews occurred in the Growing Gardens main office, five interviews were conducted at cafés in Boulder, one interview was conducted in the conference room in the Department of Communication at CU-Boulder, one interview was conducted through Skype, and one took place at the interviewee's home.

### **Institutional Review Board Approval**

Because this research study obtained data from human participants, it was necessary to take measures that protect those individuals from harm; consequently, the study was reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at CU-Boulder, with both the participant-observation and interviews granted exempt status. I first applied for IRB approval for the participation-observation portion of the study, and received exempt status on September 10, 2013 (Protocol #13-0500). I subsequently submitted an amendment to this IRB research protocol to receive permission to conduct informant interviews, and to approve my interview protocol, which was judged on October 30, 2013 to not affect the exempt status of the original research study. I added several questions to the interview protocol, and those questions received exempt status on February 14, 2014 (see Appendix B for all IRB letters).

Both phases of this research study posed no more than minimal risk to participants with whom I interacted, but because the study involved human participants, it was important that I protect them from any harm. The observational methods employed in the study were unlikely to subject participants to harm because I observed individuals at Growing Gardens behaving normally. The organization was fully aware of my position as a researcher, and I was honest and open with volunteers, CSA members, and interns when they asked about my participation. All staff members and interns were informed by Jenny or by me (if we had a conversation) that I was conducting research at Growing Gardens for my MA thesis in the Department of Communication at CU-Boulder. Furthermore, questions about how or why people decided to be involved or to volunteer at Growing Gardens were common at the organization; when I was asked those questions, or when people asked who I was, I was honest about my role as a researcher. The nature of Growing Gardens also meant that informal interactions were common, as people talked about their lives as they weeded and harvested; consequently, aspects of my life (e.g., being in graduate school and my MA thesis) came up often in conversation at the site.

Interview questions also were unlikely to subject participants to harm. Although it is difficult to know what topics may be sensitive to participants, it is unlikely that the questions that I asked participants about community, food, and their experiences at Growing Gardens would be emotionally or psychologically harmful to them. Moreover, before conducting the interviews, I explained the study and reasons why their participation was important. All participants signed a consent form (see Appendix C) before conducting interviews with them, and they received a packet with information about the study, my contact information, and a copy of the consent form. The former Cultiva participant who I interviewed via Skype (Isaac) was e-mailed the consent form, along with details of the study; he signed the form and e-mailed it back to me several days

before the actual interview. I informed him that I would be audio recording the interview, and he consented to it.

### **Data Analysis**

To analyze the data that were collected, I created categories and an open coding scheme (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011) to find themes and patterns that related to communicative practices associated with building community. I analyzed fieldnotes, notes taken during the staff meeting that I attended, and interview transcripts, to gain insight into specific communicative practices that build community.

I began the analysis of the data by rereading my fieldnotes, and by listening for themes as I transcribed (and revisited) the audio recordings from the interviews that I had conducted. I then started to organize the data into conceptual categories according to themes, patterns, and prominent concepts (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). These initial *invivo* codes were related to community building or to the creation and sense-making of external community benefits. For example, some of the initial codes included rituals, storytelling, talking about food/recipes, how Growing Gardens benefits others, talk related to politics or food movements, sharing food, and talk about the physical space. One thing that I set out to do was analyze Growing Gardens according to the four attributes of community; I, thus, categorized some of these initial codes in line with the *etic* categories of physical, support, meaning-making, and influence attributes of community (Adelman & Frey, 2008).

I started to notice an overarching theme regarding Growing Garden's ability to connect and invite people to be part of the site's activities, and their ability to change people's lives (specifically, their eating and food-procurement behaviors) and people's perceptions of the land. Specifically, Growing Gardens' members seemed to be creating a community that negotiated the

dialectical tension associated with maintaining both stability and change. Although the term “change” in reference to stability often refers to an organization’s ability to overcome internal or external fluctuations, what I saw Growing Gardens do was influence change over people’s social lives, behaviors, and typical conceptualizations of food and land.

To explain how Growing Gardens managed to create a community that was inviting to various types of people and gradually induced normative ideals around food and land, I incorporated the metaphor of Growing Gardens as a plant. The metaphor of an organization that both “roots” and “transforms” then was used to organize, analyze, and explain communicative practices that were related to community building at Growing Gardens. I combed back through the data and my initial categories, and placed them under the larger categories of rooting or transforming. Furthermore, this plant metaphor explained ways in which Growing Gardens is a bona fide group, as the notion of a plant with connected webs of extending and overlapping roots became a productive frame for understanding how bona fide groups have stable yet permeable boundaries, and are interdependent with their immediate contexts (Putnam & Stohl, 1990). I then integrated other etic concepts and theories to explicate how Growing Gardens roots and transforms (e.g., dialectical tensions, transaction and constitutive views of communication, and social capital). The next chapter presents the findings from the analysis of the data.



## CHAPTER 4

### ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

As explained in Chapter 2, the purpose of this study was twofold: (a) to analyze the communicative construction of community at Growing Gardens, and (b) to understand how that organization connects to and (potentially) contributes to external communities in which it is embedded. The first section of this chapter analyzes Growing Gardens according to the four attributes of community that were identified by Underwood and Frey (2008). Those attributes are useful for understanding how Growing Gardens creates community, but their primary value is in service to the simultaneous rooting and transforming that characterizes Growing Gardens, as mentioned briefly in Chapter 3. In line with that view, the remaining sections of this chapter view Growing Gardens through a plant metaphor, which first is explained and then is employed to analyze the data according to the notions of rooting and transforming, to make the argument that Growing Gardens has created an organic community.

#### **Sorting/Bundling Attributes of the Growing Gardens Community**

Growing Gardens can be analyzed through the four general attributes of community that were identified by Underwood and Frey (2008). Specifically, as described below, community is communicatively constituted through physical, support, influence, and meaning-making attributes.

## Physical Attributes

An important aspect to members of the Growing Gardens community is the physical site at which people meet and grow food. One important thing that Growing Gardens does, according to participants, is, simply, to provide a space for gardening. Several members acknowledged that it is common for Boulder residents to live in apartments, have shaded backyards, or to not have the space for a garden. Hence, on a transactional level, Growing Gardens provides access to a resource that many people may not have (a space to garden), in addition to offering a number of ways (e.g., volunteering and community garden plots) in which people can come and garden at the site. In this sense, the space constitutes the community, because tilling and harvesting the land is part of the reason that people come together.

The land is scenic and the aesthetic appeal is inviting. Daniel said that, initially, he wanted to intern at Growing Gardens because the physical location is so beautiful. Chris also expressed this sentiment about aesthetic:

The key to community is the land, the place where we are. It draws people; it's beautiful and it's peaceful, in the middle of this little tiny city. There's a lot that people can get out of that just by being there.

Chris not only viewed the land as being “the key” to the community but that its beautiful and calming characteristics have the agency to bring people to the site.

The unobstructed view of the Flatirons (the formation just before the Rocky Mountains in Colorado) and green vegetation are appealing, but the significance of the land is tied to a web of larger meanings and emotional connections for Growing Gardens' members. For instance, the land is conceived of as a rare resource. It is not just having “land” that is important for members but that specific piece of land is talked about (e.g., at the community potluck) as being necessary

for creating the type of community that is desired at Growing Gardens. Daniel, in his interview, said that it was “the last piece of agricultural land in the city of Boulder.” He also talked about the value and sense of attachment that is connected to this specific site:

The thing that makes us pretty special is that piece of land that we’re able to use. Some city gardens have a rooftop or a small little portion of a park, but we’re actually able to use this true farmland in the city, which is really awesome.

The size of the land, as Daniel claimed, allows Growing Gardens to offer programs that would not be possible at a smaller space. When asked about Growing Gardens, Jeffrey exclaimed, “It’s just like the jewel in the middle of the city . . . . It’s just this peaceful place that could very easily be a ‘condo-ville’ right now.” Members, thus, expressed their gratitude for the amount of land, its location (in the city), and the fact that it is open space instead of a “condo-ville.” Because there is limited space in Boulder, and Growing Gardens is “urban” agriculture, members noted that it would be impossible for this community to be in another physical location in Boulder. The “urbanness” is significant to Growing Gardens’ goals of bringing gardening into the city (in addition to creating community). These examples show that members develop an attachment to the physical site, viewing that specific piece of land as being precious and valuable.

Part of what creates boundaries (or a sense of us and them) in the Growing Gardens community is members’ common belief that this specific piece of land should be used for gardening and not for other things. Brian, a community gardener, understood that some people in Boulder do not want the space to be used for community gardens, saying, “I know that here have been some complaints from neighbors, just because of the land use. I don’t know for what those neighbors would rather use the land.” Although Brian was not sure what the specific complaints were about the land, he was aware that use of this land was a contentious topic.

Jenny explained that much of the debate surrounds the issue of money:

Even if people love Growing Gardens right, if people love the space and love being there, they're like, "Well, why should it just stay exactly where it is? I can give them 100 reasons why it should stay exactly where it is, how it's being operated, and the service it provides, [but] sometimes that's not enough for people.

This notion of loving the space but not understanding its significance and meaning creates a boundary, or a sense of "us" and "them." Brian and Jenny talked about the land as being special and rare, and members of the Growing Gardens community, collectively, believe that it is important for the land to be used for community gardening and not something else. For community members, the space is valuable not because it is worth so much money but because the land keeps open space in Boulder, and it provides a place for people in the city to gather around gardening.

The land represents something unique, special, and valuable, in part, because it is talked about by members as being something that they have to fight for, defend, and explain. David, for instance, claimed:

We're trying to teach people about the importance of this interesting topic that's come up about this piece of land that we lease; this whole easement on the land, and what's gonna happen to this chunk of land once the original farmers or that family dies basically . . . . That's a whole different political topic, and Growing Gardens is . . . the face of it, and we're going to bat, and it's really important for people to realize why we're fighting for that land and why that land should always be used for agriculture and education.

Jenny further explained that "the other thing is trying to get everybody on board that the property should be there doing exactly what it's doing forever and ever." The land, and using that land

for farming, thus, is communicatively constructed as important via members' rhetorical attempts to convince others that the specific piece of land should be used for gardening. They aim to "get everybody on board," "go to bat," "fight for that land," and "give them 100 reasons" for preserving Growing Gardens. These conversations create the common notion that the land, and, more important, what they are doing with that land, is something for which it is worth fighting.

### **Support Attributes**

Growing Gardens also creates for members a sense of belonging, social bonding, emotional aid, and safety (underwood & Frey, 2008). Gardening at the site is set up as a social activity; consequently, as people plant, weed, or harvest, they engage not only with the food and the land but with each other. For instance, in the time that I observed, volunteers went from being strangers to people who were familiar and knew a lot about each other over the course of the growing season, or even a single volunteering session. As they harvested together, people asked each other many questions, shared stories, and disclosed themselves. Jeffrey, a dedicated volunteer, noted in his interview that Growing Gardens probably is one of his main social outlets in Boulder, and he shared his appreciation for the social bonding that happens at the site:

It's just pleasant interactions; it's bumping into people working on a project and then the work becomes a carrier wave to bring out other conversations and explore other things.

Holden's a good example of that, as we've worked on a lot of projects this spring. He is an exceptionally bright kid, and we'd be talking about quantum physics, philosophy, and all this stuff, and it was just great, because I love to talk about those things.

Jeffrey's statement reveals how working with plants and food becomes a route to other social interactions, or a "carrier wave," as he called it. Conversations at the garden often were about food, but gathering around food and gardening led to conversations about many other things.

Isaac explained his Cultiva experience as “hanging out talking with your friends, making vegetable puns, and doing little games and stuff, like riddles.” When I asked him about the vegetable puns, he said, “Ah, like lettuce turnip the beet.” The social bonding, thus, included making jokes while working together. A sense of social bonding is cultivated by members because they frame gardening as a social activity instead of as work, service, or chores. Growing Gardens is not a place where people are expected to be only serious; it is seen as both work and play. Jeffrey noted that when he has to weed his garden at home, he puts it off and does not want to do it but when he has to do it at Growing Gardens, as he said, “You’re doing it down there in like this social group, and people are having a good time doing it. It’s work but it’s always fun.”

Chris further explained that community gardening is social because the everyday tasks often do not require full concentration:

The work is not complex, which means that you’re not fully focused on it when you’re doing it, so there’s plenty of time to talk, plenty of time to look around, and you end up in conversations with people that you wouldn’t. . . . You connect to other people who are next to you; talk to them, which is something that you don’t always get to do.

Not only do community members provide each other with social bonding but the simplicity of the tasks, and the fact that people are working together on a shared goal, also create opportunities for shared bonding. Social bonding can mean having an in-depth conversation with someone new, and these conversations can be the beginning of friendships. Some volunteers, community-supported agriculture (CSA) members, and Cultiva participants may interact with each other only at Growing Gardens and do not have friendships that are maintained beyond that space, whereas other members create deeper relationships that go beyond that physical site. Sam, for

instance, explained that he made relationships that will extend beyond his internship at Growing Gardens.

Furthermore, members talked about the Growing Gardens community as being comprised not just of fun social interactions but emotional support. For example, the Wednesday after the 2013 Boulder flood, the CSA pick-up became a time for people to gather and make sense of what had happened. As they “sold” food and talked about recipes, staff, CSA members, and Cultiva participants checked in with each other to make sure that everyone was okay. They asked each other if they needed anything, and they shared stories about themselves, friends, and neighbors, as well as stories that they had heard on the news. As written in my fieldnotes:

The flood was a big topic of discussion at the CSA pick-up. CSA members were worried that the farm had been damaged, which it luckily had not. One woman checked in to pick up her CSA, and Maria [a Cultiva participant] asked her how she was doing. The CSA member said not good because of flood damage. The three of us then engaged in storytelling about how we were affected, and how people we knew were affected.

The CSA pick-up became a time where staff, CSA members, and Cultiva participants made sense together of what had happened. The CSA ritual gave people who had damaged homes or were emotionally or physically impacted by the flood an opportunity to talk about their experiences with other people in the Boulder area. In this way, people connected to Growing Gardens gathered to offer physical resources (e.g., food and labor) and emotional aid.

Emotional aid is provided not only during disasters but also during the routine hardships of everyday life. The theme that gardening can be healing came up several times throughout the interviews and my experiences participating at the gardens, and emotional strife is conceptualized not as something that people leave at home but that which people bring to

Growing Gardens with them. As Chris explained, “Part of the point is that gardens can be healing, so when you’re dealing with that sort of rubric, you’re ending up with people who are hurt, and that involves a certain level of compassion, sensitivity, and boundary setting.”

The fact that gardens are talked about as “healing” creates the expectation that both the land and community members are involved in that healing process. Jenny explained that one of her most powerful interactions occurred when Sandra, a volunteer, opened up to her:

Sandra is in a really rough place in her life and she’s an older woman who’s very recently gone through a divorce. One morning, it was just her and me in the greenhouse, and we were planting seedlings and just doing our thing. She just kind of came forth with it all, and she started crying, and she was really upset, and she just said there’s nowhere else in my universe where I can just really do this, cause she’s always the leader . . . . She’s running this amazing nonprofit . . . and so it was this quiet opportunity where she could talk about how hard her world was. That was really powerful, to have that sounding board for somebody. The greenhouse is really like a therapeutic place anyways, so that is up there for my favorite moments.

Jenny’s statement not only demonstrates that greenhouses are expected to be therapeutic but also how Jenny offered emotional support to Sandra. Personal difficulties could be talked about as being separate from or detached from gardening or the people at the gardens; instead, gardening together is a way for people to work through emotionally difficult times together.

Members of Growing Gardens also support each other by protecting the community and keeping it safe. Several participants mentioned that community members or visitors sometimes are asked to leave if they are threatening it. Jenny noted that her least favorite interactions are when she has to ask people to leave the community:



That's really hard because we want to be a place for everybody, and, yet, some people abuse that, or they are in such a bad place in their universe that they're not good for our community. Having to turn people away is probably the hardest, and it doesn't happen often, maybe once a year. We had a guy a couple years ago who was coming in as a volunteer and he was making people really uncomfortable . . . . I basically just had to say we don't have anything going on . . . I'm at maximum capacity.

Jenny, thus, articulated the importance that members place on keeping the community safe. One way that a sense of safety is created is by protecting members from harmful individuals, which provides community support and maintains a feeling of security.

Jenny's example also demonstrates how people connected to the Growing Gardens community experience a dialectical tension, as the people are seen as both the thing that make Growing Gardens such a positive and special community, and, simultaneously, they are what can make community life difficult. As Jenny explained:

We have our people in our community who are difficult, crazy, or hard to handle sometimes, especially if you are not in the right place but Growing Gardens does a really good job. All of the staff members do a really good job. When it comes down to it, we're very supportive.

Jenny explained that staff and interns at Growing Gardens lend support by helping one another to deal with some of the more difficult members. Members serve as positive emotional and physical resources (both as community members and as physical labor), and many participants said it is the people who make the community special. Simultaneously, however, those people can be a source of tension and cause conflict.

Growing Gardens, however, is not a community for every person who spends time with the group or at the site. Not all those who visit or are connected to the community viewed it as providing them with emotional support. Ashley, for instance, shared:

I don't feel like I would go to them [Growing Gardens' members] if I was in deep trouble or if I needed some guidance or assistance, at least not for major events. Minor events yes; major nea, not so much. It would be my mom and dad.

For Ashley, the notion of “community” applied more strictly to her immediate family; consequently, Growing Gardens was not a particularly supportive community for her.

### **Influence Attributes**

underwood and Frey (2008) explained that influence attributes relate to the ways in which a community affects its members' behaviors. This influence includes behavioral norms, creating identification, regulating social order, and collective action.

From a transmission perspective, Growing Gardens influences people to garden. In cities, it is not common or typical to garden; hence, by offering programs and land to a variety of people, Growing Gardens influences these individuals to gain knowledge and skills related to food and gardening. At volunteer hours and when working with Cultiva participants, informal knowledge is conveyed about how to use gardening tools, the best ways to harvest chard, and what it means to “double dig” (i.e., to dig up plants and turn them upside down in the ground). This information, sometimes, is given in short demonstrations or throughout conversations as people weed or harvest. Growing Gardens also conveys knowledge through classes offered where people learn gardening or cooking tips in a more formal setting.

Gardening also has a symbolic meaning that members of the community tend to cultivate. A community that grows its food is discussed as healthier because members eat produce and care

what they put into their bodies, and because they do not get sick from disease outbreaks. In this way, members saw themselves as more connected to their food, more connected to the land, and more independent compared to people who did not garden. “Growing your food” also was conceptualized by many members as being more environmentally sustainable than the alternative. Growing Gardens’ members, therefore, communicatively created a sense of identification such that insiders saw themselves as people who valued and promoted growing food, eating healthy, and being sustainable.

Furthermore, Growing Gardens also promoted conformity around growing and eating organic foods, which was done, partially, in a transmission sense. Because Growing Gardens is certified as organic, there are formal rules that all food that is grown at the main site or at any of the other community gardening locations must be organic, which means that all members must grow their food in specific way. Staff members and interns did not pressure or try to convince people to buy organic foods outside of the Growing Gardens site, but by enforcing and maintaining rules to keep the garden organic, they created behavioral norms around food that was grown and eaten from the ground at Growing Gardens.

Promoting these behaviors fostered normative ideals in the community about positive ways to acquire, grow, and consume food. There was a collective discourse that organic is a “good thing,” even if other ways of growing were not outwardly disparaged. As written in my fieldnotes:

While we were bunching and picking chard, Chris was explaining why organic Brussels sprouts are very difficult to grow, and that’s why, if you find them, they are very expensive. Sam asked Chris if he likes Brussels sprouts, and he said that he loved them, but that the aphids love them so much that you have to spray them at least every week

with nasty chemicals. Often, the organic Brussels sprouts will look nice on the outer layer, but they end up being “aphid sandwiches.” Sam asked if Chris still bought organic Brussels sprouts, and Chris said that he did, even though they cost significantly more. Hence, organic food was talked about as a “good” thing, and Chris furthered the notion that it is good to purchase organic food because he buys organic Brussels sprouts even though they are expensive. Chris demonstrated that buying organic is worth it because he avoids the regular Brussels sprouts that are laden with chemicals. When I was at the site, I never heard individuals at Growing Gardens telling other people that they should buy organic food or encouraging people to always eat organic food but they definitely constructed normative ideals that organically grown food was a good thing.

Growing Gardens’ community members also promoted certain behavioral norms by influencing each other to try new food, new varieties of food, eat vegetables, and cook at home. This is discussed more on page 105, where I explicate how Growing Gardens created a “transformative” community. As noted above, ideals about what the land should be used for is another way that a sense of identification was created amongst community members, with those who did not understand the emotional and symbolic significance of the land being perceived as “outsiders.” Furthermore, Growing Gardens is conceptualized as a community that is engaged in collective action, as it is affecting its external environment to adopt particular food consumption and procurement behaviors, as discussed further in the next section.

### **Meaning-making Attributes**

Meaning-making attributes note how the very meaning of community emerges through communication. Furthermore, meaning-making attributes include members of the Growing

Gardens community having common beliefs, identities, collective ideals, and a common sense of purpose (underwood & Frey, 2008).

In a simplistic way, everyday tasks create daily shared goals and a common sense of purpose for groups of people gardening together, such as weeding a row of lettuce, pulling out eggplants, and harvesting the ripe tomatoes. This repetition of daily tasks cultivates a common sense of purpose for members. For example, one afternoon, I was volunteering with a group of young adults (mostly college students), and the task of pulling peppers out of the ground and harvesting the remaining peppers conjured a sense of excitement in the group. Although I had never met these volunteers before, tasks surrounding the peppers brought us together, and they provided a collective goal in which members became very invested.

These common daily goals fostered a sense of cooperation that extended beyond momentary tasks. Jeffrey emphasized the notion of collaboration that he experienced at Growing Gardens and how cooperating, growing food, and bringing people together are “the basis of society.” People at the gardens would talk about how they were not only helping to plant the garlic together, but also helping to feed people and, thereby, to take part in something larger. This group had the collective belief that the term “community” seemed to collectively mean growing, learning about, and sharing food. Thus, they were not only creating community but also taking care of and feeding the broader community.

Members collectively see Growing Gardens as a community that spreads ideals about food. Growing Gardens is not just perceived to be a place to socialize or to acquire food; it also is a group that is spreading the word about urban agriculture. Although members thought that Growing Gardens was connected to various social movements, Growing Gardens actually is not connected officially to any social (food) movements; the closest it gets is that the Boulder Slow

Food group partners with Growing Gardens to sponsor some dinners during the summer.

Despite this lack of connection, participants thought that Growing Gardens was connected to the organic food movement, the CSA movement, urban farming/agriculture movement, local food movement, urban homesteading movement, the Slow Food movement, the good food movement, and a movement that is connecting people back to nutritious food. That list demonstrates that members conceive of Growing Gardens as a community that, unofficially, is connected to many other people who are working to advance particular ideas about food.

Thus, members at Growing Gardens come to collectively see that community as doing much more than just “growing”; it also is about advancing a particular way of eating or acquiring food (by growing or buying locally/organically grown food). As Daniel explained:

The word needs to get out about this whole idea of urban agriculture, and it’s really important for us as a community at Growing Gardens to spread the word and show people this is what we’re doing and why. That represents a vibrant community.

Daniel’s comment suggests that Growing Gardens signifies a way to communicate the importance of urban agriculture, and that the act of “spread[ing] the word” is what makes the community vibrant. Sam noted a similar idea when he said, “Just creating that interaction with our CSA members is important for us, and getting them to understand that there’s a broad horizon of food.” Sam’s comment demonstrates that community for Growing Gardens means impacting external members (e.g., people in the larger Boulder community) to think differently about food and to try new foods. Therefore, the Growing Gardens community also came to mean something larger for members, as they collectively viewed Growing Gardens as making various statements about food. Growing Gardens is viewed as not just an isolated group but as a group that is talked about as part of greater campaigns to get people to grow, purchase, and think

about food in particular ways. The community is furthering common beliefs that it is good when people know how to grow their food, when food is grown locally and organically, is enjoyed slowly, is cooked at home, and involves fresh produce. These things constitute a healthy community for members of Growing Gardens, and by engaging in these activities, members also conceptualize it as “good” for the broader communities in which Growing Gardens is situated.

### **Growing Community**

Analyzing Growing Gardens according to the attributes of community is a useful way to explain how community is created and what the Growing Gardens community means to people; however, there also is more going on at this site than can be explained by these attributes alone. To develop a more in-depth explanation about what the community does, how it connects to other communities, and what communicative practices create this community, I employ a plant metaphor to frame the remaining results of this study. This metaphor reveals how Growing Gardens is much like the plants and crops that are grown in its fields, and how specific communicative practices help this plant to stay rooted and, simultaneously, to transform the people and environments in which it is situated.

The Growing Gardens community is unique, in part, because it is exposed to many elements that pose risks to the community, similar to how a plant is vulnerable to many environmental elements (e.g. weather, pests, and animals). Several interviewees mentioned how one act of nature could erase many hours of time, energy, and effort, as well as lots of food. Therefore, members of this community are exposed to a lot more external elements than are members of most communities. Unlike a plant, however, the Growing Gardens community also is subjected to the elements of being a nonprofit organization (e.g., the whims of the board of directors and of donations), threats regarding the use of the land, and various people (who serve

as both a resource and a threat to the community). The need for stability and ability to adapt to change, therefore, which both are encapsulated by the term “rooting,” is important for the Growing Gardens community. Growing, simply in the sense of living or surviving, is both a challenge and a necessity when it comes to plants and to this organization. Furthermore, Growing Gardens is transforming the lives of people and communities to which it is connected, much like a plant extends through the soil and can instigate change. Both a plant growing and the Growing Gardens community alter what the Earth looks like and people who come into contact with that plant, as well as understandings of what that Earth is or for what it should be used.

### **Nurturing a Bona Fide Group**

The plant metaphor can be extended to conceptualize how Growing Gardens is a bona fide group that is characterized by stable and permeable boundaries, and is interdependent with its relevant contexts. Understanding the Growing Gardens community as a plant provides a unique way to understand how people at Growing Gardens are connected with each other and with other communities. In terms of members’ internal connections, the primary root of the community includes (a) staff members, who make up the main, most stable part of the organization; and (b) interns, who are temporary, but are highly involved in day-to-day activities and develop close relationships with staff members and with each other during the time that they are at Growing Gardens. The members of this main community interact on a daily basis, have close relationships, and see each other outside of work. This connection explains, in part, why Ashley (a Cultiva participant) said that Growing Gardens was a community for some people, but that it was not necessarily for her.



Ashley's experience contrasts with interns and staff members who talked about the close connections that they have made through Growing Gardens. As Daniel noted:

Initially, I was drawing lines, like this is my supervisor or this is my mentor . . . but, of course, it's inevitable, as you become friends with the people you spend a lot of time with. Staff members, fellow volunteers; it's the most social people I've ever really worked with . . . [and it] is really fun. It's just, like, let's go grab a drink, let's try this restaurant, or come over to my house 'cause I'm making stew, or something like that.

It's usually food related, because we love to talk about food and we love to eat. So, I've developed some friendships with volunteers . . . but more so [with] staff and interns.

Growing Gardens, thus, provided a social outlet for Daniel, but that community extended beyond the premises of the garden, and it meant both working and playing together. Furthermore, the importance of food to this community was evident, as those who are part of the main root, typically, congregate around growing, cooking, and eating food (or drinking beverages).

However, the staff and interns are not the only community at Growing Gardens, as there are secondary roots that branch off from the primary root, representing some of the secondary communities that form at Growing Gardens. Cultiva participants, CSA members, community gardeners, and volunteers all contribute to the main root/community, and they, too, have a sense of community (although not necessarily as strong as the main root) although their relationship to the main community varies greatly. For instance, there are people who participate infrequently and are a distant offshoot of the main root, but there also are those who are such dedicated volunteers or CSA members that they become a fundamental part of the community and are subsumed into the main root.

The fact that there are various roots and groups of roots at Growing Gardens, and that people can become a part of the main root, relates to the first characteristic of a bona fide group: stable yet permeable boundaries. These boundaries are permeable, because, with increased participation or dedication, one can be a part, or a closer part, of the main root. For example, as Jeffrey explained, he started as a volunteer, and, through his frequent participation at Growing Gardens over the years, he had become part of the main root:

It's community to me. I don't know if it's community to some people who come there. Some freshmen from the University of Colorado Boulder have to do some community service, so they show up, and maybe it's just okay, they got through that, like going through a class and getting out of there. But community will seep into some people who aren't looking for it. Whenever you are looking for a group, whose members, basically, are happy at what they're doing, there's a positive influence on you, even if you don't want it (laughs).

Jeffrey's statement suggests several important points that are related to permeable boundaries. First, he indicated that Growing Gardens has become a community for him but not for all people, which demonstrates that there are main roots, secondary roots, and offshoots that may come in contact with the community but that may not consider it to be their community. Boundaries exist between people who would be considered to be members and those who would not, even if outsiders, sometimes, interact with the community (e.g., through volunteering). However, Jeffrey also referenced the idea that groups have permeable boundaries, and that even people who are not looking for community may find it at Growing Gardens. That community can "seep" into someone is a good way of pointing to the fact that the Growing Gardens community

is inviting to people, and that its boundaries are not stable but fluid and changing, such that its roots may converge, get subsumed, or be separated.

Much like an actual plant, these roots are entangled in the sense that they are connected to and overlap with each other, as the various subcommunities (e.g., Cultiva, CSA members, staff members, and volunteers) interact and work together at the gardens. There, thus, seem to be different understandings of the nature of the community at Growing Gardens, with some participants talking about it as being one community, whereas others view it as both a grouping of smaller communities and one larger community. These emic understandings of community support the etic notion of bona fide groups that subcommunities intersect and overlap, which was demonstrated by Daniel's statement:

Growing Gardens, itself, is one large community. This idea of the land, growing things on the land, and understanding things about the land, generally, is the most common thread. Within that community, there are all these smaller groups, but, generally, we are all there for the same reasons. It's just a big one. Cultiva is its own little community; the core group of volunteers, I would call them their own community, but all of it is [under] this larger umbrella.

Daniel's comments, thus, show that Growing Gardens is a coherent community, or an "umbrella" community that subsumes under it smaller communities. He oscillated from talking about Growing Gardens as "smaller groups" to saying that it was "one big" community.

Stable yet permeable boundaries also explain interactions between the subroots at Growing Gardens. These smaller communities can be conceptualized as various clusters that are comprised of offshoots of roots, but they all are connected to and are sustained by the same plant. Brigetta explained these various growths of community as a Venn diagram:

I would say that it's more than one community; it is like a big Venn diagram, but with more than just two circles (laughs) . . . . There are definitely a group of people, the CSA community, and they have connections that way . . . but they may not know the families that are involved in the Children's Peace Garden. So, Growing Gardens is kind of the host to a lot of different communities that have formed.

Brigetta noted that these communities are connected by common goals or ideals, but that some of the smaller communities may not have a lot overlap.

The bona fide group perspective, thus, helps to understand ways in which distinctions between the smaller communities that make up the larger Growing Gardens community also have fluid boundaries. Some members, such as Lisa, interact with many of these groups, because Lisa started as a volunteer and then became a CSA member. The interns also often transcend smaller group boundaries because they work closely with staff members, Cultiva participants, volunteers, and CSA members. The argument cannot be made, therefore, that Growing Gardens is comprised only of smaller communities with clear boundaries, because those smaller communities overlap and make up what members consider to be one large Growing Gardens' community, or the main plant.

Furthermore, these roots are entangled with the roots of other plants, or other communities. Daniel explained that "because we're such a broad community ourselves, we pull in so many different people from different communities." Local schools have field trips to Growing Gardens, local organizations hold team-building activities there, and neighbors in the Hawthorne area also are CSA members. Furthermore, as described earlier, the site is located in the middle of a neighborhood in North Boulder, and members of that neighborhood community use the Growing Gardens open site to walk, run, or for other forms of recreation. Growing

Gardens also relies on funding from private donors and organizations, and it is connected to people of other nonprofit food-oriented organizations, such as Earth's Table (a nonprofit that grows food for the homeless) and Mountain Flower Dairy (an urban goat dairy that is down the street from Growing Gardens). These three organizations share resources (e.g., Growing Gardens allows Earth's Table to start plants in the greenhouse), have overlapping volunteers (e.g., Lisa and Jeffrey volunteer at Earth's Table, and Daniel volunteers at Mountain Flower Dairy), support each other financially (e.g., Growing Gardens' staff members buy shares of goat milk), and have close relationships with each organization's founders or directors. This interconnectedness of Growing Gardens with other groups and organizations demonstrates the second characteristic of bona fide groups: interdependence with relevant contexts.

The notion of a bona fide group demonstrates ways in which Growing Gardens is intertwined in other communities, and it exemplifies how the organization actually is fluid and changing instead of being one coherent group that exists in a container. Community often is viewed as being a single entity, or one group of people, but that is not the case at Growing Gardens; instead, there seems to be the sense that there is a community, but that there also are subcommunities (e.g., Cultiva participants being a community).

The fact that Growing Gardens is a bona fide group/organization benefits both members and the organization as a whole. Because Growing Gardens' members are involved in a number of ways, and they are connected to other organizations and groups, such interaction creates social capital for them. For example, a number of participants discussed how the organization is financially limited, but that they have resources in the people to whom they are connected. As Chris claimed:

Sometimes, it feels like we don't have enough money to buy supplies or whatever but we have lots of other resources, so there's incredibly talented people who are involved as volunteers, with lots of knowledge; there's resources in the community; and people who have businesses that can donate. Maybe they can't give us \$100 but they can give us a pitchfork, stuff like that, so [we are] learning how to be more resourceful basically.

Chris, thus, articulated how connections to members of the larger Boulder community, such as volunteers, have knowledge and connections to other businesses to which Growing Gardens can reach out.

Jenny also noted the advantage of obtaining social capital through CSA members and volunteers. She described a specific instance where she happened to be talking about a project, and a CSA member with expertise offered his help:

Like Jim Wells, who's one of our CSA members, he's an architect, and I mentioned to him one day when he came through for the CSA that we were working on an orchard and we're working on this fencing project, and he was like, "I think I can help with that."

[That was] *great*, because I have no idea how to build a fence. Perfect (laughs); you just scoop people up . . . . It's good for both people; it gets them in and it gets something off of your plate. So, we see each other as a team a lot of times.

Jenny's comments demonstrate how Growing Gardens often gets people (from the larger Boulder community) involved just by interacting with the organization's members, starting conversations with people about current projects on which the organization is working. By talking about current projects or desired projects to members outside of the Growing Gardens community (people who are not staff or interns), members find unanticipated resources or sources of help. Furthermore, Growing Gardens can create social capital for its members when

they interact with each other as they pick up their CSA or weed as a volunteer, or as they learn more about programs that Growing Gardens offers through interacting with staff members and interns.

Although Growing Gardens is a bona fide group/organization, it, specifically, aims not to be a weed that is not wanted or that takes resources from other organizations or communities. Several interviewees explained that Growing Gardens seeks to be a healthy plant in the Boulder community by collaborating and not competing with other organizations. Brigetta expanded on that point by saying:

Boulder is kind of a unique place, where Growing Gardens isn't the only organization doing some of the things we're doing. I would say we're definitely unique, but there are other organizations in Boulder, which is awesome, so we are kind of careful. If somebody's already doing a great job in something, we don't also want to do that—just let them do it. We'll do what we do best, and so that's an interesting thing to consider.

Brigetta, thus, identified ways in which Growing Gardens is a bona fide group/organization, but how it also tries to be a unique plant that is coveted in the garden rather than a weed that gets in the way or that replicates plants that already are in the garden. Although groups are not containers, groups that seek to make a positive community impact must supplement what already is being done instead of being a plant that is in competition with other cultivated plants.

### **Growing a Rooted-transformative Community**

The roots of the community are strengthened by specific community practices, such as rituals; sharing food, recipes, and giving food away; sharing enemies; and fostering interactions that create an inviting and accepting community. In doing so, Growing Gardens is a community that is “rooted” to the people in it and to external communities to which it is connected. Rooting

creates a sense of stability that helps Growing Gardens to survive and stay strong through change, turnover, and elements it is exposed to that, sometimes, are harmful. Growing Gardens is not just rooting and connecting but, through communicative practices, it also is transforming the lives of people who are connected to the community, the land, and what people expect out of their food and the land. Like a seed that gradually transforms into a plant that produces food, Growing Gardens' communicative practices gradually transform people's eating practices and the land. Furthermore, the food also is transformative, and it fosters and animates the practices that Growing Gardens' members encourage. Below, I demonstrate how, through interaction, Growing Gardens constitutes a rooted-transformative community, creates a sense of an organic community, enacts community change, and expands the connections between food and community building.

**Communicatively creating a rooted community.** Through certain communicative practices, Growing Gardens is rooting itself to the Boulder community. The term “rooted” is useful for conceptualizing how Growing Gardens is connected to, supported by, and supports other people and communities in Boulder. For Growing Gardens, community is an organic thing that grows and expands; it is a web of roots that connects people, and that is connected to other larger and smaller communities. The organization seeks to strengthen and deepen those roots by growing the community in certain ways, and by making it a community that welcomes and is inclusive of many types of people. Members want Growing Gardens to be firmly established, which means that they want stability and growth, and they are trying to root inside the community by inviting people to participate. Being rooted explains how the organization is able to feed and educate the community, and to cultivate relationships.



***Cultivating community through rituals.*** *Rituals* are “organized symbolic practices and ceremonial activities which serve to define and represent the social and cultural significance of particular occasions, events or changes” (O’Sullivan, Hartley, Saunders, Montgomery, & Fiske, 1994, p. 267), and there is a wealth of literature that shows how community is constructed, in part, through rituals in which members engage, and how communities use rituals to maintain connections among members (in communication scholarship, see, e.g., Adelman & Frey, 1997; Aden et al., 2009; Hutchison, 2012; Kim, 2000; Rothenbuhler, 1998). As explained below, rituals employed at Growing Gardens that invite people to the gardens for the CSA pick-up, weekly volunteer hours, and annual dinners and potlucks cultivate community and root that community to external communities to which it is connected.

*CSA pick-up.* The weekly CSA ritual of picking out food shares and having the same people come by every week for 11 weeks creates a sense of community. Although the CSA pick-up is a weekly event that distributes food to CSA shareholders, it also functions as a ritual that can cultivate community. Many CSAs involve the dropping off or picking up of a weekly box of food, with little or no communication between those purchasing the food and people who grew it. The physical set-up of Growing Gardens, however, requires CSA members to come and pick out their food (arranged in baskets on tables and “sold” by Cultiva participants), which creates opportunities for interaction with those who produced the food. The CSA at Growing Gardens is designed such that staff members, interns, and Cultiva participants interact with CSA members who financially support the Cultiva program. This event, thus, creates opportunities for interaction between various groups (or sets of roots) at Growing Gardens that, in other sites, would not overlap.

The CSA pick-up was framed more as a social event than as chore by Growing Gardens' members. The atmosphere of the ritual often was very lively and energetic, which stood in strong contrast to the typical ambiance and experience of going to a grocery store. The CSA pick-up was located outside, surrounded by the gardens from which the food was grown. Chris, interns, and Cultiva participants set up beautiful displays of the produce in baskets on foldout tables, and Cultiva students spritzed the vegetables throughout the evening to keep them fresh. Sometimes, if it was hot, Cultiva students would spray each other with the water, which was acceptable as long as they did not have CSA clients to whom they needed to attend. Growing Gardens' staff members and some Cultiva participants knew many of the CSA members by first name, and they often knew the names of their children, as it was common for CSA members to bring their children and dogs to pick up their weekly share. Cultiva participants, staff, and CSA members chatted with each other and engaged in frequent small talk as they went through the line to pick out each item. CSA members asked for recipe recommendations, shared recipes, and discussed what they cooked with last week's shares. The CSA ritual, consequently, had a very jovial and animated energy. Furthermore, the fact that CSA members already had prepaid for their food meant that there was no exchange of money, which also promoted the view of acquiring of food as bringing people together, constituting a communal space, and that it is not just about profit making. The CSA ritual, thus, fosters Growing Gardens' goal of community building because it makes acquiring food more of a social gathering instead of a financial transaction.

The CSA pick-up had routine practices, such as gathering the produce, setting up the tables and displaying the produce, handing out (or "selling") the food, and cleaning up. Furthermore, before the CSA pick-up hours started, or during a slow moment, a staff member

gathered Cultiva participants together and helped them to review names of each variety of produce, and they gave them suggestions of things to cook with each vegetable. These routines furthered the notion that the CSA event was not just about socializing but that it is a ritual that also is about learning and educating people about food. The CSA pick-up, thus, encouraged the reciprocal sharing of information about food and recipes between Growing Gardens' members and visitors.

The CSA pick-up also symbolically communicated support for Growing Gardens, in general, and for the Cultiva program, in particular. In an interview, Isaac, a Cultiva participant, said that he felt "supported" by the CSA members:

The CSA is so supportive. It's a really good community, because all the CSA members really do like what we're doing, and they're not just doing it for the vegetables or whatever. They're doing it to support everything that's going on here and to support the students, the wages, and all that sort of stuff.

Isaac explained that the CSA is not just about food; it is about symbolically showing support for the high school students and for "everything" that Cultiva does, which, likely, includes growing food, local food, organic food, and education about food. Although Isaac could not identify a specific instance that made him feel supported, he did explain that CSA members demonstrate support through their interactions:

Just the way that they interact with you. At a regular food market, if you're just selling at some fast-food chain, people get in and get out with their food, but with Cultiva and a lot of other farmers market-type of stuff, it's more of a community, because there's interaction. Their choice of Cultiva shows that they're interested in the community, because if they really wanted cheap groceries, they could just get it at Whole Foods, but

the fact that they're actually going to some local farm shows that they appreciate community.

Isaac, thus, saw, the purchasing of food at Growing Gardens as an act of support and appreciation for that community. Isaac also recognized that CSA members might be spending more money than they would be if they had gone to the grocery store; hence, individuals deciding to be part of the Cultiva CSA is perceived as an intentional act. Growing or purchasing food through Growing Gardens is conceptualized as participating in the community, and as a social activity, whereas shopping at a grocery store is viewed as a transaction.

I also witnessed many CSA members supporting Cultiva students. Some CSA members treated Cultiva participants as experts, asking them for the names of, or cooking suggestions for, that week's produce. They gave positive feedback to Cultiva participants who were learning the names of produce varieties by asking them to recite all of the names (e.g., all six kinds of squash) or by helping them with things, such as pronunciation. CSA members' support of Cultiva students is demonstrated in an excerpt from my fieldnotes:

Right when the CSA started, I was helping Maria with the squash. Maria learned and practiced all of the names of the squash. Some CSA members would quiz her, asking, "Do you know what all of these kinds of squash are?" Other times, Maria prompted the naming ritual, asking, "Do you want me to tell you the names of the squash?" Most times, CSA members would say "Yeah!" clearly excited either to learn names of the squash or excited that Maria was willing and interested in learning them. When Maria recited the names, she said things like, "Ka-KaboCHA, I think," or "butter, butter?" making it clear that she was just learning names of vegetables. The CSA member would

help her out and say, “Butternut!” CSA members seemed to appreciate this, and would encourage her, tell her she was doing a good job, and look impressed.

This description shows the supportive nature of the CSA pick-up. Moreover, as discussed earlier, during the Boulder flood, the CSA pick-up became a place for individuals to gather and show emotional support for one another.

The significance of the Cultiva program to participants, and of the CSA pick-up, in particular, was demonstrated on the last CSA pick-up of the year. Several CSA members and interns said that they were sad as they went through the line. At one point, during the middle of the CSA pick-up, Daniel sulked in front of the CSA tables and talked about how much he was going to miss it. Pablo, a youth leader in the Cultiva program, came to the CSA that night, even though it was not his night to work. When other Cultiva students made fun of Pablo for voluntarily being there that evening, Pablo laughed, and said that he came for the last CSA. That evening, Pablo hung out with the other students and interns, took pictures of the produce, and seemed to just want to be there. These examples demonstrate the meaning of the CSA pick-up and the CSA community to some members (i.e., CSA members, interns, and Cultiva participants). Although it is not possible to know fully what members were feeling internally at that last CSA pick-up, the discourse about being sad showed that the CSA pick-up was a significant time for members. Moreover, for Cultiva participants, it was their last day in the program for that year, and their reactions showed the attachment that some members had to the Growing Gardens community.

The CSA ritual provided a weekly time and a space for people to gather as they picked out their food, representing a social event, where some people still were working (and Cultiva participants were learning how to talk and interact) with the public. Furthermore, it was a ritual

where people came together with other individuals in Boulder to discuss and make sense of wider events that happened in the community (e.g., the Boulder flood). Belonging to the CSA represented community support to members, whereas purchasing food at the grocery store did not. Furthermore, having the same, reoccurring weekly pick-up was a ritual to which people looked forward, and one that they did not want to end when the season was over. The CSA pick-up, thus, fostered the notion that acquiring food can be a meaningful, ritualistic, social event that is connected closely to the people and the land that grew the food, which helped Growing Gardens to become more of a rooted community. Growing Gardens' participants extended their roots to CSA members, giving individuals in the Boulder neighborhood an opportunity to be involved in the organization, and the organization then roots to those members by offering them a fun, supportive, and intimate way of purchasing fruits and vegetables.

*Volunteer hours.* The weekly volunteer hours are a ritual, especially for those individuals who attend those hours religiously. During the growing season, Jenny designated a set of regularly scheduled hours, and people who were interested in volunteering just showed up. This ritual for members symbolically represented the notion of “giving back.” Lisa, for instance, focused in the interview conducted with her on how she volunteers because she likes to give back to the community. Furthermore, Lisa talked about them as “playing” instead of working or volunteering, because it was fun to be with the staff members, and they got to be outside. Viewing volunteering at Growing Gardens as fun and framing it as play instead of work was common, as demonstrated in an excerpt from my fieldnotes where I discuss picking peppers with a group of, mostly, college volunteers:

There was a lot of enthusiastic discussion about what color each pepper was supposed to be, and when people found peppers that were large, or slightly ripe, they would comment

that they got a “good one.” Volunteers kept bringing more buckets, and saying, “I think we need even more buckets!” They were excited about the sheer number of peppers that we had collected and that we still had to collect. Volunteers also talked about things that could be done with the peppers—you could stir-fry them, you could eat them raw.

The afternoon that I spent pulling out peppers with other volunteers revealed the excitement and energy that sometimes is generated during the completion of a rudimentary task, such as “pulling out the pepper plants from the ground and putting the remaining peppers in this bucket.”

Conversation and social interaction were encouraged during volunteer hours, which cultivated the feeling that it was supposed to be fun instead of service or labor. One time, I showed up to volunteer, and Jenny gave me a list of possible tasks. Because I was not sure which one to do, she told me to join the group where she and other members were putting stamps on donation letters, because they were “having a good conversation.” Staff members and interns, thus, encouraged friendly interpersonal interactions at volunteer hours. Hence, the weekly ritual of volunteer hours represented giving back to the broader community through gardening, and that gardening and growing food are social group activities rather than solitary task actions. This ritual helps Growing Gardens to become rooted, because visitors are not just being invited into the community during the weekly volunteer hours but volunteers are being connected to at the individual level. The organization is making the volunteer hours a fun, social environment, and, consequently, volunteer hours enable secondary roots to get drawn into the main Growing Gardens community and to become part of the primary root.

Through volunteer hours, some individuals, such as Jeffrey, Lin, and Lisa, became more closely rooted to the community, and they became subsumed into the main root of the community. For example, Jeffrey volunteered at Growing Gardens every single week and had

done so for years. During my participant observation, Jenny and Chris both mentioned to me that he helps out so much, even completing larger projects of his own. Jenny mentioned in her interview that it would not be possible to have a greenhouse without Lin:

He makes it possible for us to have a greenhouse. Without him, I'm not sure I could do it. He does all the mechanics and helps me understand what's going on, and if something's broken, he fixes it. He's a bit of a curmudgeon, but he's also very warm if you get to know him, and that's a really unique sort of relationship. Some of my favorite times are just with him when he comes in and he's got the tomatoes are all looking perfectly trellised, and he's really excited about it; that's really rewarding.

These volunteers are not only crucial to Growing Gardens because of their physical labor and knowledge about greenhouses but Jenny's relationship with Lin was meaningful. Furthermore, these community members see each other on a social basis. Lisa mentioned during her interview that she had just recently had lunch at Jenny's house with Jeffrey and some of the other interns and volunteers. Volunteer hours, thus, draw people from the external community in and strengthen Growing Garden's roots and connections to them.

*Dining rituals.* Growing Gardens facilitates several events where community members are invited to gather around food, and these dining rituals also root community members to each other, and they extend Growing Gardens' roots to external environments. These dining rituals include monthly staff happy hours and larger annual dinners at the garden. Furthermore, dining rituals foster community norms that eating is a social activity and that food should be valued.

Staff members host a monthly happy hour where they and interns engage in an early evening of eating and drinking together. Typically, happy hour is hosted by a staff member at his or her house on a weekday from about 4:00 to 6:00 pm. Staff members and interns discussed



happy hours at the site, and several mentioned them in their interviews. Chris said that he saw Growing Gardens' community members

at work and then some of them I'm friends with outside of work, so I see them socially.

The organization builds in the community elements to the staff, so we have a staff happy hour every month. The people who work at Growing Gardens . . . are in it because they believe in it and they enjoy it, and it's part of their lives. The disconnect between personal and professional is much thinner than it is in most professions.

Chris perceived the happy hour to be a "community element" of the organization that minimized the distinction that, typically, is drawn between work and play. Brigetta also claimed that happy hours are social and "not work related." This ritual also brings staff members and interns together, which is important because some of them work mainly in the office, whereas others spend more time in the gardens. These happy hours prevent the main root from fragmenting, and they let each new set of interns get to know staff members in an informal, social setting. The happy hour ritual, thus, strengthens the main root and keeps these individuals connected.

Growing Gardens also hosts several dinners every summer and a potluck dinner, which serve as rituals that both draw people into the Growing Gardens community and strengthen their roots to the other members. My second week of participant observation occurred during the volunteer and community potluck dinner. The week before, as I was about to leave the gardens, Jenny let me know that next week was a volunteer appreciation potluck dinner and that I should come. However, the next week it became clear that this was not just a volunteer appreciation event; it was a potluck for anyone who was connected to Growing Gardens. The potluck was on a Wednesday during the weekly CSA pick-up, and was held in place of weekly volunteer hours that week. It was a casual, informal gathering around food and people, and it brought all of the

various clusters of roots together in one space. That evening, because it was raining, the greenhouse functioned as a gathering space where CSA members stopped by for some cider and cheese after picking up their weekly produce, and where neighbors, volunteers, children, and pets filtered in and out of the greenhouse. Participants spent a lot of time talking about Growing Gardens, and discussing or sharing their food and recipes. As I wrote in my fieldnotes:

By 5:15 or 5:20, the greenhouse began to feel busy, and very full. It was an environment with lots of food and eating. Children walked around and played with each other, some of them barefoot or just learning to walk. Some people greeted each other familiarly; others were meeting for the first time. As more community members showed up, they brought their homemade treats, and the conversation oftentimes was centered around food. One man brought a whole tray of jalapeño peppers stuffed with cream cheese, with a piece of bacon on top; one woman brought a home-baked rhubarb pie.

This ritual, thus, brings various clusters of roots to gather in the same space, to talk about their involvement in Growing Gardens and why it is a special place to them, to share food, and to share stories about gardening and cooking food. Everyone on the e-mail list was invited: neighbors, CSA members, volunteers, Cultiva participants, and community gardeners. Hence, the potluck helps to root all individuals who are connected to the organization.

Growing Gardens also facilitates yearly dinners where members partner with chefs from the Slow Food movement to cook meals with Cultiva students. These dinners also function as a ritual at Growing Gardens, as the meals not only bring Cultiva participants together to eat together and provide something memorable for them but they also show younger community members how to actually cook the food that they are growing. Chris explained that Cultiva

participants, who learn to garden through the Cultiva program, may not know how to cook the food they are growing, and that the harvest dinner closes this gap:

One of the coolest programs that we have is Cultiva, and we partner with Slow Food, and local chefs come in and make a meal with kids out of produce from the gardens. They get that whole circle, cause, normally, it's stuff they planted, weeded, picked, washed, and packed . . . . If their parents aren't into cooking, they might not even cook with the food that they grow. They get an important experience, but, on some levels, an incomplete experience. When they come to this class, they've not only planted, weeded, picked, washed, packed but now they're dicing, sautéing, serving, and eating.

Chris explained how Cultiva students learn a lot from these dinners on a very practical level—they gain skills and experience with food that is beneficial. Although this practical significance is important, these dinners also served as a memorable and comforting ritual for them. For instance, as I was working with Maria, she told me a story about a squash soup that they made last year. She said that it was “so yummy” and that they whipped up some cream to put on top. By the time that it was finished, she said that it had cooled down outside, and, hence, the warm, freshly made soup with the cream on it was very warm and delicious. Not only did Maria tell this story to me but I also overheard her tell it to a CSA member later that night. This event, thus, was meaningful, as soup and eating together with everyone was warm and comforting, and her positive feelings toward the dinner were evident as she told and retold the story multiple times. These harvest dinners, consequently, root Cultiva participants to the Growing Gardens community, and they root Growing Gardens to people in the Slow Food movement. The ritual also shows that members are growing the food for a greater purpose (cooking and eating) and that food from the garden can be transformed into something completely new.

*Extending roots through food.* Growing Gardens also extends its roots by giving away food, sharing recipes, and sharing food with community members. Food can be understood both as transmitting information and as constitutive of community, social relationships, and social interactions. The food, itself, and how people interact with the food help Growing Gardens to become a rooted community.

*Giving food away helps root.* A simplistic, but, in many cases, important way that food communicates or that people communicate through food at Growing Gardens, is by giving away food. Giving food from the garden to the people, from a transmission communication perspective, involves sending messages to those receiving the food. Specifically, freshly grown produce is exchanged for money (e.g. with the CSA), but, in other moments, food is given away to volunteers, staff, and Cultiva members to show appreciation for their work at the gardens.

Giving food away and, thereby, appreciating and nourishing both the internal and external community helps Growing Gardens to root to these individuals. Because the organization does not pay interns a living wage, it shows appreciations for their work by letting them eat and take home some of the produce that they grow. Food also is given away to anyone who helps out or volunteers at Growing Gardens on a particular day. During Jenny's interview, she said that one of her favorite interactions at the farm was when she gave Jeffrey a bag full of tomatoes, and Jeffrey, who is not very effusive, called her later that day gushing and raving about the tomatoes. This story demonstrates how gratitude is mutually expressed, but also how the giving away of food, simultaneously, points to the constitution of relationships that does more than just show gratitude.

Although volunteers do not always get free produce, if a particular volunteer has been especially helpful (such as Jeffrey), Growing Gardens' staff and interns will send him or her

home with some vegetables. In those instances, giving food only to certain people, or giving certain people more food, communicates gratitude for their extra efforts. When food is given to interns or “especially helpful” volunteers, it communicates that these individuals are a part of something, and because they contributed to the growing or picking of the food, they should have a part in eating it. In these instances, giving food away communicates recognition, gratitude, and a closer connection to the main root of the organization.

*Rooting through sharing recipes, food, beverages, and meals.* At Growing Gardens, food constitutes an opportunity to share something with others that builds community and closer relationships. Sharing recipes and favorite food discoveries is one way that people at Growing Gardens connect to each other, which I often overheard and participated in at the gardens. CSA members shared recipes with each other as they went through the CSA pick-up line and asked for recipes, and Cultiva participants, interns, and staff members offered recipes as well. In the interview, Jeffrey explained the recipe sharing that occurred during volunteer hours:

I had never eaten those little white turnips before, and now I just love those things, and now that I know about them, whenever I meet someone, I always introduce them to the things that really made me happy to find out, and pass that on and hope they'll like them, too. I'm sure some of them will do this, keep passing it onto others.

Jeffrey's comments indicate how common it is for individuals at Growing Gardens to “pass on” information about their favorite foods, and that people are happy to receive those suggestions. When I was at Growing Gardens, we often would talk about how we liked preparing various food that we were harvesting or weeding, which was a gateway to sharing stories about food (e.g., dinners that we had with friends), and that led to other conversations. Sharing recipes is

understood certainly is a form of transmitting information, but it also leads people to connect and, thereby, contributes something positive to their life.

Sharing actual food was another way that Growing Gardens created a rooted community. Staff, interns, and Cultiva participants tell stories about sharing food or meals, and people shared food at the site. Sharing food not only shows how passionate and excited people are but, in these cases, food and gathering around food aids the development of a sense of community. As an example, one afternoon, I was talking to a volunteer and community gardener who was speaking positively about Growing Gardens. I prodded him as to why he liked the organization, and he said very generally that he “likes the community aspect of it all.” He then told a story about how people garden and get to know each other, and then one day, someone brings his or her brewed beer to the gardens and shares it. His example demonstrates how sharing food created a sense of community for him, as sharing beer was a “community aspect.”

Sharing beverages also was a way of promoting closeness amongst staff and interns at Growing Gardens. For example, during the morning harvest, Chris, Sam, and Daniel often made tea for me and for each other. One morning, Daniel made tea, and about 5 or 10 minutes after I got my tea, Daniel asked “Did you get tea?” and I responded that I had. He said that he just wanted to make sure that everyone was taken care of. Although Daniel said that statement in an almost joking manner, the frequency that members made tea for each other, drank tea together, and made sure that everyone had a cup of tea demonstrated that this ritual functions as a way of “taking care” of each other. Sharing tea in this context functioned as more than hospitality, as it was an event that occurred not with guests or visitors but only during the morning harvest hours with staff members and interns who saw each other every day.

Staff members and interns at Growing Gardens also created closeness by eating meals together and sharing food. During his interview, Sam often explained that “having lunches all the time” and eating together create and are a mark of the close relationships formed among him, Daniel, and Chris. Food also was described as creating or framing an activity as social, with food seen as play. In his interview, Sam further discussed the social and fun nature of their lunches by explaining how the *way* that they eat lunch together is especially significant: “So we always cook. We always cook different ways, and then we’ll share it together the next day, so it’s always a food exchange.” Hence, eating food together is a social, shared, collaborative activity, even if members are at work. Food, in this context, thus, blurs the distinction between work and play at Growing Gardens, as sharing and eating food together creates a sense of belonging to a friendly group and organization.

*Growing food together roots.* Growing food together, and activities involved in growing food (i.e. harvesting and bunching produce) fostered interactions among people who never had met. The ability for food to connect and root people at Growing Gardens was demonstrated one morning as I was trimming leeks with Sam, and a high school student rode his bike up to the washing station and explained that he had arrived early for a field trip. As we were trimming leeks, the high school student seemed interested and came over. Sam asked him if he liked leeks, and, if so, how he or his parents cook them. The high school student informed Sam that his parents do grow leeks and that he really likes them. Sam asked him where they usually cut the leek, and the high school student showed him about how much of the stalk they use. As I left the site that morning, Sam and the high school student were trimming roots of leeks together and chatting. This example reveals the range of age groups that interact at the gardens, and the way that food is accessible for so many people. Although Sam and that high school student had not

met previously, they started a conversation and created a connection through their discussion about, and the activity of trimming, leeks.

Food also builds a rooted community because growing it successfully is a common goal for members. The idea of a large number of people working towards the same goal of growing food also builds a sense of mutual influence and emotional connection to the food, which can be seen by how people cooperate and work together on the farm. As Daniel claimed:

Growing food, sharing food; that's the coolest, most amazing thing. We've all come together and worked very very hard to grow food together, and then we share it, and that's huge. We don't even necessarily have to eat together. Everyone harvesting tomatoes one afternoon, and then we all take some tomatoes home. Sharing what we've all worked together on is really incredible and it builds a huge sense of community.

Daniel's comment demonstrates how, in growing food together, community members are sharing it and "com[ing] together," even if they do not eat together. By growing food on the same land, participants at Growing Gardens are mutually taking part in something and rooting to each other.

*Food roots and cultivates community.* Food brings people together at Growing Gardens and is a very important factor in creating a rooted community. Members organize around food, and conversations exist in and around food. Jeffery explained that food is something "real" (not superficial) that they can talk about, but that talking and working in and around food leads to other meaningful conversations:

They're about real things, and they go off into other subjects. You can be talking about kale one minute and the meaning of life the next. It's always important to have a way to get to real conversation, and these things lead to bigger items. Obviously, gardening and



farm working is a metaphor for everything else that we do, so it's easy to lead from that to other subjects and just to go on. You can draw people out and be drawn out by that. Jeffrey, thus, noted ways in which the food they are working with and conversations about food lead people to engage in other conversations that are more genuine or are "bigger items." Hence, food roots people at Growing Gardens because it has the potential to instigate interaction and to draw out people.

At Growing Gardens, food, thus, serves as a mode of transmission and is constitutive in multiple overlapping ways, as it communicates appreciation, creates social relationships, indicates meaning about one's role in the organization, and fosters a sense of community. Growing food, talk about food, and sharing food all help Growing Gardens to become a rooted community, connecting itself to the people who are a part of it, and holding the plant more firmly to its external environment.

***Strengthening roots through sharing enemies.*** Roots also are strengthened at Growing Gardens because those who gather there to garden share similar enemies and are affected similarly by external elements, leading them to root closer to each other through sharing stories about those enemies or hardships that they have gone through together. For example, a rat had been getting into the greenhouse and, as Jenny said, "demolishing" the pumpkins. Jenny explained that one of her favorite interactions was a text message that she received from Lin with a picture of a dead rat:

One morning, at about 6:30, I get a text message from Lin and it's just a picture of the rat caught in this rat trap, and it's, like, "wahoooo," and he's so excited, and it made me laugh really hard. That's a really good example of who gets excited about that sort of thing—we do.

Jenny's comment show that confronting common enemies of Growing Gardens brings community members closer together. Her comment, in part, is about overcoming challenges together, but it also has to do with barriers, as not everyone would get that excited about catching a rat but people who belong to Growing Gardens do. The excitement over catching the rat also is symbolic of having a larger understanding of what constitutes a threat to that community, as people there understand how threatening a rat can be, and they will be angry or frustrated with the destruction that the rat caused, whereas those who are visitors or are more secondary roots likely will not have the same reaction.

Other common threats and problems also help Growing Gardens' community members root to each other. Jenny explained a situation faced recently when there was a deer in the field and Chris threw a rock at the deer's feet:

Chris picked up a rock from across the field and he tossed it at this deer--it was not on a sling shot or anything—to scare it out of his lettuce, which is a very okay thing to do in an agricultural setting; it's really quite acceptable to most individuals. But this man saw that and got really upset, wrote letters, and was offended. He thought that it was unfair to the deer, and wrote things like the deer were here first, and he was really mad. We wrote back to him and said we're really sorry, this is the reason we did this, and these are the regulations, ordinances, around what we did . . . . We wish no harm upon the deer; we are all animal lovers, but they can't eat our crops.

Jenny's statement demonstrates, again, that people who are not connected closely to the Growing Gardens community may not understand who its enemies are or what it takes to keep those threats away from the community. Jenny's comment also suggests a dialectical tension between wanting to connect people to gardening who never have had the opportunity to do so and what

happens when people without an agricultural background do not understand why Growing Gardens' staff members act in particular ways.

Even in the community gardens, where everyone is growing food for personal use, there was the notion that they had a common sense of understanding, because they all were involved in the same activity and faced similar hardships. As Brian explained:

Because everybody is kind of facing the same problems. Oh, it's a drought; well, how can we deal with that together? Everybody's kind of going through the same thing.

There's commiseration to be found in that hailstorm that wiped out my cabbage. That's definitely an aspect of it, too, so it's just the ideals that people tend to generally share.

This comment demonstrates aspects of creating a supportive community, but it also shows how community gardeners share a common sense of purpose because they can commiserate together when elements destroy their crops, and that they share similar ideals about their purpose at the gardens (to successfully grow food). Although Brian explained in his interview that there is an element of competition amongst community gardeners, as they will compare crops, there also is the sense that they are in this situation together.

***Creating an accepting and open community expands roots.*** Growing Gardens also creates a rooted community by being accepting and open to a diverse group of people. As explained below, this culture of acceptance is created by not taking an (overtly) political stance, creating interactions across generations and across other “plants” in the community, and by keeping the physical space open to the public.

***Rooting by avoiding an overtly political stance.*** Staff members and interns at Growing Gardens make specific efforts to create an “apolitical” organization, and to not take a political stance on issues about food or gardening. This position was explained by several interviewees,

although none defined, exactly, what makes something a political vs. an apolitical stance on food. Sam said that providing information is one way to talk about food such that it is “apolitical.” Therefore, the notion of food and choices around food that indicate political stances revealed an important dialectical tension for members of the Growing Gardens community, as they navigate ways to make food seem “apolitical” and, simultaneously, make choices about how to engage or diffuse political conversation that is brought up by other visitors or members (e.g., Cultiva participants, volunteers, and CSA members).

Staff members and interns complimented and encouraged people to engage in certain behaviors, such as eating vegetables, cooking at home, trying new foods, and sharing recipes, but they would not criticize behaviors that did not align with those values. They also never would tell people that they should not do something, and they did not encourage or compliment people who took an extreme position on food. Hence, there was no normative discourse at Growing Gardens about how people should buy only organic or local food, how they should only grow their food, or how they should eat only a plant-based diet. What was absent is very significant, because a lot of the advocacy around food centers around what *not* to do. A Cultiva participant, Isaac, explained it as “there’s outreach programs, but it’s not like they’re in your face trying to get you to do something all the time.”

Interviewees mentioned how the organization intentionally tries to maintain a sense of neutrality. As Sam said:

Educating people on organic foods, we’re not taking a political stance on any of that but just teaching people the importance of where their food comes from, how it’s grown, and just getting people to understand that this is an important issue for our area.

Charles further commented:

I try to stay away from politically charged things because I just don't know where people are coming from, and I have opinions about everything, so I'm willing to share them if people ask, but I try to be aware of my role as a representative of an apolitical organization. It also depends on how well I know people; usually, if I don't know them, I'll just let them steer the conversation and they ask me questions, 'cause I'm a professional, so they ask, "What do you think?" "How do you do this?" or "What does this mean?" . . . That's always a really interesting thing in trying to figure out how to present information in a way that's accessible to people and not offensive. . . . I feel really comfortable talking about the technical aspects of how you grow a tomato, and that's what a lot of people want, so I spend a lot of time talking about that, versus more political things, which I do talk about a lot in my personal life.

Sam indicated that teaching people where food comes from is different from taking an activist or "political" stance on food. These examples show that Growing Gardens' interns and staff create an atmosphere that seems apolitical to provide information and techniques about growing food, and, specifically, about growing organic food, instead of trying to persuade members and visitors to adopt more extreme positions toward food. Chris also said that people in the main root of the community are not necessarily apolitical but that they try to separate personal politics from their role in the Growing Gardens community. This idea further shows how trying to make the organization seem apolitical also causes dialectical tensions for members regarding what topics they can engage and how they engage those topics.

One communicative act that helps community members to construct an apolitical organization is by disapproving of people taking a judgmental attitude toward the food choices of

other people in the community. Chris contrasted his experience at Growing Gardens to another agricultural organization in which he was involved that was more political:

I was part of a really tight group of friends in Fort Collins who were all young farmers, and we were pretty extreme in our work habits and in our opinions. There were a lot of judgmental attitudes toward anybody who wasn't doing what we were doing agriculturally, [and] big farms, even big organic farms, conventional farms; people who were driving too much. A lot of extreme viewpoints. That can be great on one level because you have a lot of passion and a lot of energy, and you can get a lot done, but comparing that to where I'm at now and the voice I take in the community that I'm in is way different. That leaves a lot more space for a lot more people to be involved, and to not feel rejected or excluded. That's real important to me now.

Chris characterized the organization that he worked for previously as promoting “judgmental attitudes” toward people about their choices related to food and to the environment. The extreme positions that Chris said that organization took is juxtaposed to Growing Gardens, which does not take extreme positions and, therefore, creates a community where a lot more people can be incorporated into the roots.

Sam also discussed his dislike of judgmental attitudes about food:

That's my least favorite interactions, having to explain to people you shouldn't judge people just by the very basis of what they eat. This is like a movement, and we're trying to have everybody involved here. We're not trying to turn anybody away.

Sam explained how speaking pejoratively about foods of which people in this social movement, typically, would disapprove can exclude those individuals. He said that people (often older volunteers) criticize someone else's lunch, indicating that it is gross if it includes processed food,

or they will refuse cookies that someone brought because they are not organic. As Sam explained, “Maybe their family can’t afford organic food or maybe that’s just what’s convenient for them. You shouldn’t judge people on what they eat. There’s a lot more things that go behind that.” Because food is deeply related to social and economic status, and because it is cultural for people, talking about specific foods in a negative way, or criticizing people’s eating habits, ignores many other factors in people’s life, and they should not be excluded from participating in Growing Gardens. These individuals still should have the opportunity to eat freshly grown produce or produce without pesticides.

This idea of “not know[ing] where people are coming from,” as Chris said, is a large part of why Growing Gardens wants to be apolitical. The organization wants to be an inclusive community that invites people in (is “rooted”) instead of one that is exclusive. When I asked Chris if he thought that people at Growing Gardens had a unique relationship with food, he said that he hoped not because, in his words, “‘unique’ has an isolationist feel to it. What we’re trying to do as an organization is include more and more people in that.”

These normative expectations about avoiding “politics” are related to the fact that more extreme or activist positions about food exclude people from eating certain food or from participating in current food movements. For example, organic and local food, as well as CSAs, are expensive, and, therefore, large portions of the population are excluded from participating in those activities. One day, Chris said that the thing he hates the most about the local food movement is that it is expensive. This was said during the morning harvest hours as Chris was weighing the benefits of raising the price of the CSA shares to allow the organization to donate five shares every week to families that needed it. Organizational members were collectively discussing whether raising the price created the opportunity for more people to be involved

(because shares could be donated to families that needed them), or whether it would exclude people who currently were involved. Sam explained this notion of avoiding being an exclusive organization, and further explained his understanding of being apolitical:

My least favorite interactions at Growing Gardens will be with the people who are very extreme about this organic food movement—the Boulder-esque people who believe that everybody should eat organic or that everybody should be supporting organic farmers. For me, it's not really about that; it's about just connecting people with fresh produce, and not everybody can afford organic foods. Not everybody is as privileged as we are here in Boulder, to be surrounded by six Whole Foods and Alfalfas [high-end grocery stores], and a farmers' market; there's areas where the closest grocery store is the corner store.

Sam's statement reveals how Growing Gardens tries to include everyone in the community and not just people who can afford it or who already are involved. Sam explained how Growing Gardens is breaking down the exclusionary aspects of such social movements (interviewees mentioned local, organic, urban agriculture, Slow Food, and CSA movements) to which Growing Gardens informally is connected.

However, Growing Gardens is a bona fide group, and not a container, and, therefore, it is difficult to create a space that is void of politics or political discussion. In certain circumstances, such as with Cultiva participants, staff and interns were expected and encouraged to quell political discussion. For example, as Daniel said:

It's an even more interesting dynamic with Cultiva, the high school kids, because we try to keep the conversations relatively neutral. It's our job to jump in and say, "Okay, this is



not appropriate here; this is something you can talk about elsewhere, but we're not gonna talk about that here."

Daniel explained how, when Cultiva participants started having political conversations at the garden, he would diffuse them. Such interactions show that politics cannot be kept out of Growing Gardens, and that staff and interns were expected to mitigate such political topics when they were brought up by Cultiva participants.

For a variety of reasons, politics cannot be conceptualized as completely separate or compartmentalized from the Growing Gardens community. Conversations among volunteers often were political, and staff and interns did not feel comfortable intervening at those times. One afternoon when I arrived, some volunteers were having a conversation about growing food, and why it is so important to make the move to eat more local and organic food. That conversation stood out, specifically, because it was not something that I likely would hear from interns or staff members. Daniel explained some of the volunteers' political conversations:

GMOs [genetically modified organisms], you hear that a lot, just 'cause that's a hot topic in Boulder County. Fracking, huge. So, yeah, I would say politics related to agriculture, food, things like that. Organics, like why we've chosen to grow organically, and what are the differences, and that can get pretty political.

Part of the reason that some volunteers get involved in Growing Gardens is because they consider themselves actively part of food politics, and they interact with people who have similar interests. Hence, for some members, they connect and discuss how political aspects of food relate to what Growing Gardens is doing. However, volunteers who have political conversations often are not a part of the main root of the community because they do not understand the norm that aims to create an apolitical organization.

As mentioned previously, things such as organic, urban agriculture, local food, and CSAs often are associated with certain political and personal identities (see, e.g., Click & Ridberg, 2010; Cook, Reed, & Twiner, 2009; Guthman, 2010; Sprain, in press). Ashley demonstrated a good example of such identities during her interview when she called interns “hippyish” because they ate food that they pulled right out of the ground. Furthermore, although staff and interns are trying to create an apolitical organization, they cannot control how they are perceived by outsiders. Chris even recognized that what the organization does is and still can be seen as a political act:

We still represent, in a lot of ways, an extreme. In a lot of ways, doing what I do is a political act, but everyone in the organization tries to make it apolitical. It’s just a good thing that we’re doing, and anything that you do in the public eye has some political overtones. There’s that, but I think that communication within Growing Gardens . . . and then [communication] from Growing Gardens to the greater community is much more balanced and productive, ultimately.

Chris’s statement demonstrates how difficult it can be to separate food from politics, but Growing Gardens tries to make that separation. Staff and interns want to neutralize political overtones of organic, gardening, and local food, not to make it less powerful but to be more inclusive of people. Growing Gardens, thus, tries to make its organization more like the plants that it grows in the field—that is, just being a plant.

By working to create a community that does not encourage extreme behaviors around food, Growing Gardens roots itself to a diverse group of people, and, therefore, roots itself more firmly into external communities to which it is connected. For example, Lisa, who is one of the more dedicated volunteers, said that she hardly cooked before she retired and started

volunteering at Growing Gardens. She never had grown food before, as she focused on her career, but cooking was something that she wanted to do more, and she was hoping that she would learn more about it at Growing Gardens. If Growing Gardens adopted more extreme positions about people needing to cook all of the time or that people purchase only organic food, Lisa, and many others, might be deterred from participating in the community. Such positions would detract from the organization's goal, which is to connect people through urban agriculture. Hence, taking a more advocacy stance might prevent the organization from including people who do not already consider themselves to be part of a food social movement. Moreover, many of the activities that are promoted—eating food without pesticides, growing one's food, eating fresh produce, and cooking at home—are healthy for all people, regardless of whether they take an extreme political stance on those issues. In this way, Growing Gardens takes a social justice stance on (healthy) food as something that should be available to everyone rather than keep healthy food in the hands of the wealthy and privileged.

*Connecting different plants and roots.* Growing Gardens also stays rooted by creating a community that encourages diverse people and perspectives to come together. Diversity is talked about collectively as one of the community's assets that makes it special. The gardens and programs offered draw a varying demographic of people, such as abled and disabled bodies (horticulture therapy), and preschool and elementary school aged children, high school, and college students, all the way up to volunteers who are in their 40s, 50s, and 60s.

Growing Gardens' staff and interns are seeking to get as many people as possible to try new food and to grow food. The theme of being "accessible" was very common, as interviewees articulated how they view Growing Gardens as a place for people who earn low incomes, have physical or mental disabilities, and have many different interests, or for people who range in age

and level of interest in food and gardening. Chris, for instance, explained the diverse congregation of people at Growing Gardens:

There's a lot that people get through the interactions with people who are here, and one of the cool things is that there's all kinds of people. There's a lot of college kids, retirees, high school students, and little kids. There's people with and without autism. Tons of people you normally wouldn't [interact with, but they] have in common an interest in gardening, which spans everybody.

Chris pointed to the collective community belief at Growing Gardens that people are positively affected by interacting with people from whom they differ. Sam explained in his interview that at Growing Gardens, individuals work together toward shared goals, even if they are at different life stages.

Furthermore, several interviewees explained that Growing Gardens tries to make its programs inclusive of individuals who have less financial resources. As Brigetta said:

They take care of the people who are in the community by offering good programs, trying to offer them to people who might not otherwise have the opportunity. They do lower prices for community gardens if you can't afford the full price, and they have scholarships for programs, like classes and kid's programs, and they do the Cultiva program. Obviously, they're paying the teams to participate. All of those actions send the message that we're not here to make a buck off the community. If we were, we would be doing other things, but we really want people to have the chance to participate.

Brigetta noted various ways that Growing Gardens reaches out to incorporate individuals in the community who are in difficult financial situations, which is important, in part, because food movements, such as the local, organic, Slow Food, and CSA movements, frequently are

characterized as being expensive or they are linked to identities that are related to wealth or privilege (see, e.g., Guthman, 2010; Sprain, in press). By offering cheaper plots, cheaper CSA shares, and donating food to individuals in need, Growing Gardens attempts to be friendly toward individuals who are of lower income instead of being hostile or out of reach to them.

Although Growing Gardens has an eclectic group of people with varying perspectives, there are collective goals about food and gardening that connect them. For instance, Jenny said:

Growing Gardens allows people to have different opinions and, yet, also tends to coax people towards this greater vision of having a community that is empowered in feeding itself, feeding its neighbors, and teaching its children. Something that makes communities really rich or sustainable is that they are built with many types of people—different ages and perspectives. One of the reasons my family never really did belong to a church is because we could never figure out how it was accepting enough. Growing Gardens does that, and it's a really crosscultural experience for people.

Jenny went on to say that there is openness to differences of opinion, but that Growing Gardens' members still maintain a similar vision about sharing food and educating children about food. Sam echoed a similar sentiment, saying that having different perspectives is what makes the community strong. This point relates to one of the attributes of a high-quality community, as outlined by Adelman and Frey (1997): accepting varying perspectives. This position stands in contrasts to a more activist-oriented community (such as the one in which Chris participated previously), where individuals may be encouraged to cultivate similar perspectives.

The food, itself, produces unique social interactions among people who do not interact ordinarily, such as Sam and the high school student who never had met but were immediately able to converse about leeks. Because food is something that everyone must partake in eating, it

provides a commonality to which all people can relate, at least to some degree. The interactions and programs at Growing Gardens, thus, are designed deliberately to incorporate a diverse group of people, with the food nourishing their interactions.

Encouraging diverse perspectives and creating programs that draw in a diverse group of people extend the Growing Gardens community roots further, to connect to more people. Being rooted leads Growing Gardens' members to create an inclusive environment that invites in many kinds of people.

***Rooting through avoiding physical barriers.*** The physical site is open to the public, which roots and connects the organization and its members to surrounding neighborhoods, as a garden with no fence but with paths running through it allows Growing Gardens to be part of those neighborhoods. People run or bike along the paths, and women walk through with strollers. Interns and staff members recognize and greet many neighbors who walk through the gardens. Chris explained how being an open space exposes him to interactions with people:

I have very interesting interactions with members, community garden members, young people, and members of the public. We're in a very public space, even though it's privately owned land. We're surrounded on two sides by bike paths and on all sides by some walking paths and people, neighbors, community members.

These interactions occur because the space is so open and lacks physical barriers. Hence, Growing Gardens roots to the community by having an open site, allowing the organization to foster and cultivate relationships with individuals who are not involved directly in the community or to the main root. Furthermore, those conversations help people to understand what the organization is, what it does, and how they can get involved.

Chris also often explained to people that the strawberries in the garden are not there for anyone to eat (they are for the CSA), or why it is not okay for them to walk through certain areas of the garden (because they trample crops). Therefore, the openness of the site produces a dialectical tension, in that it roots and extends the organization's connections to the community but there are some people who the community wants to keep out. Jenny demonstrated this problem when discussing the volunteer who was asked to leave because she said that he was making people uncomfortable: "That was concerning because we're a very public space." When Chris told the story about the community gardener who had to have his plot revoked, he expressed fear that the gardener easily could come back:

I was worried is he going to destroy all of my crops just cause he's angry? There's nothing I can really do about that. . . . There's all kinds of funny stuff that happens when you have an open space that anybody can go in.

There, thus, is the fear that being such an open space makes the organization more vulnerable to people who are not good for that community.

Having an open site both roots Growing Gardens to the community and makes it more inviting to neighbors or to people who are walking and driving by, creating a dialectical tension when individuals who are not good for the community need to be kept out. In the examples offered, the individuals did not return to Growing Gardens but community members still felt at risk. However, being open to the public, the physical site makes it inviting and it furthers relationships with individuals both inside and outside the community. Therefore, the lack of barriers promotes Growing Gardens as an inviting community instead of an exclusive community, and it roots members to each other and to outsiders.

***Staying rooted through change.*** Staying rooted is especially important for an organization, such as Growing Gardens, that goes through frequent change. Typically, a new set of interns comes in every year, and it is rare for them to have had much previous involvement with Growing Gardens. Jeffrey noted in his interview that he liked the sense of transience that Growing Gardens has, “It is and, in a way, it’s my favorite type of community because of the transience of it. It’s like a flowing community where the energy is there but the parts keep getting replaced, but it’s still grinding forward.” However, Jeffrey later noted how a change in staff members could negatively affect the community:

There’s a chemistry that’s going on right now. I’ve been there for 2 years, and Jenny and Chris have been there for 2 years, and there’s been this really good chemistry. If either one of them should suddenly take off and do something else and change, the chemistry could change. I’ve been in groups through the years, and it only takes one personality to change things in any direction. Since things are going good, there’s always the possibility it could go the other way, so I’d hate to see a change.

Managing the dialectical tension around change (as something necessary that can be good and bad) was a theme that came up often in the Growing Gardens community, and it made being a rooted community even more important. Jeffrey pointed to that dialectical tension, as frequent fluctuation of community members can keep things interesting and exciting, but not enough stability can harm the community.

During the time that I was there, the community felt stable, people were familiar with each other, and people seemed to work toward collective goals and purposes. However, the understanding that change is common and expected was present at Growing Gardens. I was



working with Preston, a volunteer, and he kept speaking about two previous staff members named Jane; my fieldnotes said:

Preston asked me if I had seen Jane in a while. I didn't know who this was, so I said, "No," but that I had not been coming here all that long. He said that they had been coming to Growing Gardens for about 3 years now, and that there used to be two women named Jane who were staff members. He said one of them worked in the greenhouse, and then she had a baby, but he said some people say she stops by every now and then.

Preston's comments point to how community members are affected when staff members come and go in the community. He brought up Jane a couple of other times that evening, saying how she was an important part of the community for him, and that she had impacted his time there.

Staff members and interns talk about their time working at Growing Gardens as being limited; therefore, the turnover of staff is one way that Growing Gardens community is subject to frequent change, as the roots may get damaged or cut off, and, then, they must regrow and incorporate new members into the main root. Both staff members who I interviewed discussed how their personal involvement in the organization may be limited because they do not earn a lot of money and Boulder is expensive. As Jenny said, "I'm almost 30 years old and I make under \$30,000 a year, and I'm trying to figure out if I'm ever gonna be able to have a family and live in this city." Chris corroborated this sentiment, saying, "I worry about how long I'll be able to be involved in the organization; for personal financial reasons, how sustainable is it for me personally." Brigetta also mentioned that it can be difficult dealing with the lack of continuity with interns, which makes rooting to the Growing Gardens community and its members even more important. Communication that roots, thus, can create a sense of continuity even though change is common and people's participation in the community fluctuates.

**Communicatively creating a transformative community.** Growing Gardens seeks to be not just stable and “rooted” but also transformative. From my interviews and participant observational experiences at Growing Gardens, the organization was not just attempting to root into the people in and around Boulder, and to the land, but the community also is about transforming habits and activities of people who live in the Boulder area. Through various communicative practices, Growing Gardens transforms people’s eating practices, the land, and people’s connections to the land. Furthermore, the food also is transformative in that it has the ability to enact change, persuade people to try new things, and take risks. Thus, aspects that help Growing Gardens to root also help it to be transformative. Growing Gardens is transformative in that it seeks to be inclusive and open to a diverse population, and because of its aims to avoid polarizing stances on food and environmental causes; that transformation is as subtle as the daily growth of a plant. A lot of the time, a plant just grows, but like a seed that eventually produces fruit, Growing Gardens slowly and subtly enacts change in people who connect to it and in external communities to which it is connected.

***Transforming eating practices.*** At Growing Gardens, conversations about food are transformative, as they alert and persuade people to try new foods and to adopt new eating habits. The food at Growing Gardens also is transformative in that it has the power to expand people’s palates and to get people to try new things. Growing Gardens provides an opportunity for people to explore new foods and new ways of eating, which was expressed by interns, volunteers, CSA members, and Cultiva participants alike. These communicative practices around food and by food contribute to the overall construction of Growing Gardens as a transformative community.

Growing Gardens, and the individuals who work there, seek to introduce lots of people to fresh produce, organically grown food, and atypical varieties of produce. In this way, the communication about and around food is transformative. For instance, as I was volunteering at the CSA, Chris kept encouraging CSA members to take the (less common) purple bell peppers. He would tell them, “The little purple peppers are great as a garnish on a salad, really colorful. They have a lot of flavor like green peppers.” Encouraging people to try new foods becomes such a normative practice that individuals in all roles end up educating each other about recipes for many varieties of food, and they encourage each other to try new things. I once heard Maria, a Cultiva participant, encourage a CSA member to try tomatillos for the first time; that week, the member grabbed a bag of tomatillos instead of cherry tomatoes. In these examples, it also is the colorful nature of the peppers and the unique lantern-like appearance of the tomatillos that has communicative power that entices individuals to try them. In another instance, Daniel said that one of his favorite interactions was when he tried to turn a CSA member into a fennel lover:

I was like, “No, you really, just please try [fennel], and this is exactly what you’re gonna do with it. You’re gonna keep it raw and make a really simple salad, and come back next week and tell me how it was.” . . . She went home and made the salad, and the next week came back, and I was like so excited to see her, and I made a point of being there that Wednesday, and she didn’t like it at all (laughs).

This narrative is a great example of how people are encouraged to try new foods, and it demonstrates the communicative power of the food that is present physically right in front of CSA members, and, therefore, difficult to refuse. Although in this specific instance, Daniel did not turn the CSA member into a “fennel lover,” he successfully got her to try a new food. Daniel

explained that when she came back and said that it was “horrible,” she still asked for a new recipe to see if she would enjoy fennel more if it were roasted or sautéed.

Therefore, this encouragement to try new things sometimes is done intentionally by organizational members. As Sam explained:

We’re just building a dialect. We’re creating a little bit of a commotion amongst some community, like a campaign for people to try new things and to step out of the box . . . moving so that people are willing to engage in different types of food.

These examples demonstrate that staff and interns “campaign” to expand people’s palates and their understanding about produce. As Sam said, “People just need a little extra push to try new things.” Engaging various types of food, thus, is one transformative goal of Growing Gardens. It was important for Sam because he wants to make people more informed consumers, and because he thinks that they actually might like a new variety of food better than what they currently eat. These interactions about food reveal that Growing Gardens’ members find eating produce, and eating a variety of produce, valuable.

Participants often discussed how much their palates had changed since being a part of Growing Gardens. For example, one afternoon, I was pulling eggplants with the volunteers, and a volunteer mentioned his new love for tomatillos, which he had not eaten before he was involved in the CSA at Growing Gardens. In the interview, Sam shared, “I’ve diversified my palate in my kitchen so much more after working here.” Sam said that he never used to eat tomatoes, kale, and chard until he started working at Growing Gardens, partly because things taste better when they are picked off the vine. Jeffrey explained how he was encouraged to try a recipe suggestion for turnips, and now they are one of his favorite foods:

I love [turnips] now. I love to make those. My personal diet has changed a lot in the last 2 years because of things I've picked up from people there. Someone told me how to cook the turnips . . . and they're like the best home fries you could ever have.

Jeffrey's personal diet, thus, has been transformed through his experiences at Growing Gardens.

It is the presence and positioning of the food, and not just the transformative communication by staff members and interns, that "pushes" people to try new things and to appreciate locally grown organic produce. As Jeffrey said:

They don't have the usual blinders on; they're not numb to food there because it's active. They're seeing it grow out of the ground and they're tasting it; they're ripping food out of the ground, sampling it, and seeing what it's like. So it isn't like being at the supermarket, where everything is just kind of distant; this is the real thing in your face.

Jeffrey conceptualized the food at Growing Gardens as "active" in contrast to the distant and passive food at the grocery stores. This notion of food as having agency helps Growing Garden to transform people's eating habits. Food becomes persuasive and transformative in this sense; it becomes a way of convincing people to try new produce and educating people about its taste. The limited options at the CSA (and fact that people already have paid for the food) allows people to notice each variety offered instead of unconsciously skipping over it at the grocery store because it is unfamiliar. For instance, Lisa said that it never had occurred to her to cook squash, but after receiving one in her CSA, she said, "Why not cook a squash?"

Although the organization, clearly, has normative values about eating and growing food, organizational members discuss and recognize the financial and ideological constraints of buying only local and organic, and, therefore, they avoid telling people to make these extreme choices.

Members seek to transform people and eating behaviors by encouraging them to make small incremental changes. As Sam claimed:

It's adjusting to the culture of this organic movement, just getting people to take baby steps and not make leaps. It's a huge turnoff for a lot of people to make that leap from frozen food to just eating red peppers or zucchini.

Sam explained how Growing Gardens' staff and interns are making local and organic food movements inclusive instead of being available only to particular members of the population (as is a frequent complaint about both organic and local food). Growing Gardens is not interested in making people diehard organic food purchasers; instead, it tries to persuade volunteers, visitors, Cultiva participants, and CSA members to take smaller steps—to taste a new vegetable, try a new recipe, or learn the name of a less common form of produce. Doing so creates a community that encourages branching out and taking risks to try new food, and not conforming to typical U.S. notions of food and cooking. The organization wants the plant's roots to extend and include everyone, which is viewed as being more transformative and more sustainable than other approaches. Growing Gardens wants people to want to be connected to it, as members seek to make this a food revolution instead of an isolated rebellion. Extending roots by making encouraging small changes helps Growing Gardens to transform the people to whom it is connected and the broader communities in which it is situated in on a wider scale.

***Transforming the land.*** Because Growing Gardens is in an urban environment, there is the sentiment that members need to get people to reconceptualize how they think of urban space. Just by being in and maintaining that land, members are transforming what is expected from land in Boulder. Jeffrey explained earlier how the gardens easily could have become “condoville” but, instead, members and the land are transforming and challenging urban landscape, and what

many see to be the “typical” use of land in this North Boulder neighborhood (i.e., for housing).

Chris and Jenny each said in their interviews how they have to explain to people why it is important that the land is used for gardening. The land is characterized as valuable, but also something that needs to be cared for, cultivated, and to which people need to be connected. As Chris said:

It’s an incredibly rare resource; it’s unique. To be able to [scour] that land, to care for it, to share it; all of that is really valuable for a litany of reasons. One of them is because we have so many ways for people to get there and to interact with that land.

Growing Gardens, thus, creates a community that shares and cares for land through gardening and, thereby, makes a distinct and visible impression on the space. Using that urban space to garden, the organization challenges what is valued and possible to do with urban space.

Planting an orchard is one way that Growing Gardens intends to transform the land in the near future. Participants were excited not only about the food possibilities that would be created by an orchard but many of them noted ways in which trees create a more visible transformation of the land. As Jeffrey said:

I’m really looking forward to the orchard. There’s a permanency about trees. It’s another level . . . . It’s like you can’t make friends with lettuce because it’s here and it’s gone, but if there’s a cherry tree, you can come back in 10 years or 20 years, and you can still come back to that thing.

Trees, of course, are more permanent than crops and, hence, the orchard will transform the space in a more permanent way. Trees also root the community and provide something tangible to which individuals can connect. Daniel corroborated this sentiment:

I wanna see a big orchard pop up, which we're working on now. That's huge because it's an orchard and they're big old fruit trees, and people right now, when they go to Growing Gardens and they look around the fields, they just see all this land that could be developed. Why is this just sitting here? I can't believe this land is in this prime spot in Boulder, but if we plant a bunch of fruit trees, and have big old trees growing, it's just something that's gonna keep us even more rooted, for lack of a better term, in that actual piece of land.

Daniel's comments, thus, revealed how trees will change the land and, possibly, detour individuals from contesting the use of that land for a garden. Daniel even used the term "rooted" to point to how an orchard is one way that Growing Gardens can transform and connect to external communities. Members can transform the land through the growth of plants, which, simultaneously, transforms beliefs about use of that land. As noted previously, the land still is contested, as members still have quite a few people left to convince that Growing Gardens site should remain gardens.

Members are trying to change the landscape both materially, by growing food and trees in urban space, and symbolically, by transforming the people of Boulder and their views about land. As mentioned in the methods section, the Growing Gardens site has been agricultural land for a long time (Growing Gardens, 2011d, 2011g), and, therefore, members did not take an urban space and make it agricultural. In this sense, they also are maintaining and preserving this land. Although "maintaining" does not initially indicate transformation, part of this maintenance means that members constantly are fighting for, explaining, and defending to outsiders why the land is used the way that it is, and why it should continue to be a community-oriented agricultural space. By engaging in such behavior, and by inviting people to the gardens to



experience growing food in the city, members symbolically transform what people think of urban space, especially with regard to what they consider to be possible and normal in that space.

Although members did not take urban space and make it agricultural, Boulder, itself, continues to become more urban, which, increasingly, makes Growing Gardens an anomaly. By growing food on this land, inviting outsiders to grow food with members, and by explaining the importance of the agricultural space they root in, members symbolically transform people's ideas about land.

*Transforming lives through connecting to the land.* Growing Gardens conceptualizes its community as not just transforming the land through gardening but that gardening can transform people's lives in a positive way. I mentioned previously that growing and being around the food seemed to have the transformative power to help people taste new foods, but gardening also is understood by members to affect people's personalities and emotional well-being. For example, the notion that gardening and greenhouses are healing also demonstrates ways in which connecting to the land is talked about as having the power to change people in a positive way. Jenny, for instance, explained her belief that growing food can make people healthier: "There's actually a physiological thing that happens to us when we are doing physical labor, when we are outside and we are growing things. It's scientifically proven that it makes us healthier and happier." Jeffrey also explained that working the land is good for people:

I always go there. One of the things I like about Growing Gardens is whenever you meet people who are working with the soil, I don't know what they're like when they're not working with the soil, but it brings out their best nature while they're there. The more times you bring out someone's best nature, the better it is.

Working the land and, thereby, gaining an appreciation for it is one way that Growing Gardens affects people on a personal level. In a lot of ways, the organization encourages interaction with other community members, but it also is creating a community that is more physically and emotionally attached to the Earth. As Chris maintained, “The main thing that is really important is the chance for people to connect to the land.” Brigetta also said that “the purpose is really just to reach people in the community and provide opportunities for them to connect with each other and connect with the land.” Brigetta and Chris, thus, believe that people have lost their connection to the land and to where their food comes from, and that, through gardening the land, people can regain that connection.

Participants, thus, believe that engaging the physical site through gardening develops a more complete understanding how their food is connected to the land. Growing Gardens’ members, therefore, believe that they can transform lives by making people happier and more emotionally healthy, and by helping them to form a closer connection to food and to the Earth.

***Subtle transformation or just growing?*** Growing Gardens promotes behaviors that are not considered to be “typical” in the United States, such as growing (organic) food, knowing who one’s farmer is, buying local food, and participating in a CSA, but in an important sense, these practices are not new. Growing Gardens is not coming up with new kinds of food or inventing new eating behaviors. Organic produce is “revolutionary” only in the context of current farming procedures, which have normalized the use of pesticides; all foods used to be organic and local. In that sense, the transformation that Growing Gardens is creating exists in the context of current practices. The notion of urban space is connected to understandings that are related to urban development and to concrete, and it is these beliefs that the Growing Gardens community challenges. Furthermore, that specific piece of land has been agricultural

for many generations; Growing Gardens did not take a piece of land that was urban and make it agricultural. Hence, many of Growing Gardens' transformative aspects challenge and transform current notions of what is typical and usual, and they are not necessarily brand new per se.

Furthermore, although the way that Growing Gardens cultivates a community around interaction, inclusivity, and gardening is novel, it does not ask people to choose a radically new alternative. The organization offers an alternative in the context of what currently is available (mostly, large industrial food organizations), but it is not revolutionary in the context of history. Jeffrey talked about how many young people believe that they invented gardening because it is new to them:

I see a lot of it in Boulder, in general, but that's sort of a focal point in Boulder, of people in their teens, 20s, and 30s who are going back to growing their stuff, and a lot of them think they're reinventing it (laughter). In a way, it wasn't passed down to them, so it is a new invention for them.

Jeffery explained that growing food is not new at all; hence, Growing Gardens is not "inventing" gardening or behaviors around food; instead, it is creating a community that both roots itself to people in it and to external environments to which it is connected, and it transforms typical present-day eating behaviors, connections to the land, and understandings of urban space.

This transformation is slow and subtle, as the Growing Gardens community does not encourage or ask for big changes. Growing Gardens offers another possibility, or another option, to acquiring and eating food, but it represents more of a return to basics rather than a radical transformation. Jeffrey explained his hope for subtle transformation:

I see it in one out of 10 kids who goes there. Maybe they're in high school, maybe they're one of the little kids going over the Peace Garden, and it makes enough of an

impact on them so that somewhere down the road, they decide to have their own garden or they decide to look at more of the organic side of things, knowing about where their food's coming from and how much work it actually is to produce the food they eat.

Jeffrey, thus, maintained that members of Growing Gardens do not even expect to have large effects on every person who comes to the gardens. Even transforming how one child decides to interact with food in the future is conceptualized as making a positive impact. Hence, Growing Gardens expects to transform people's lives in slow and gradual ways.

Transformation at Growing Gardens is subtle, and, most of the time, the community is just growing. Like a plant grows and traverses through various lifecycles, sometimes, Growing Gardens is just growing, and not in the sense of growing larger but in terms of the everyday, dull necessities of living. The weeding at Growing Gardens never ends, and a lot of gardening is repetitive and void of highs and lows. Ordinary day-to-day interaction characterizes much of the communication that takes place in the community. Ashley explained her day-to-day activities, "We do it about 3 days a week and my work would vary. Sometimes, we would be harvesting; other times, we'd be cleaning the harvest or we'd be weeding—there was a lot of weeding." Hence, activities and actions at the garden often are routine.

A lot of the things that people described doing were very ordinary, and much of what happens at Growing Gardens does not appear to be remarkable. Most conversations are about what people did last night or what they are going to cook for dinner, which is a reminder that community building is not an obvious or necessarily intentional set of extraordinary communication activities. Several people mentioned that "creating community" is not necessarily something they are trying to do at any given moment. The construction of community often occurs through small actions that seem ordinary, but that become meaningful

for members. This notion of the “just growing” suggests that to get something to grow, many small activities are necessary. These community-building practices weave themselves into the larger garden without necessarily being that prominent. Furthermore, Growing Gardens is intentionally subtle; to fit into society and to create an inviting community, it takes a low profile and extends its roots surreptitiously, wide and far below ground. There is a lot of rooting and transformation going on below ground, but from above ground, it is apparent only minimally.

### **Creating an Organic Community**

Through communicative practices that root and transform, a type of organic community is being constituted. Growing Gardens is talked about as one of the first of its kind, and that there is no precedent for creating this rooted-transformative community. Members are doing it organically, and adjusting as the crop grows. Several staff members talked about how there is no other organization that does all that they do; for instance, Jenny said:

The fact that we have as many programs as we do is very unique. A lot of cities have a community garden and a few of them have a Cultiva-like program. There's only a couple others like us that do that, but none that I know of do all of it. A lot of that's land, as it's very rare to have the amount of land that we have. We get a lot of inquiries about how do you guys do that? . . . It's like, well, you gotta find the land first.

Jenny indicated that Growing Gardens has created an organic community by expanding the notion of a “community garden” to include a number of programs that extend roots to external environments. Growing Gardens does look to other gardening organizations for models of certain programs (e.g., Cultiva) but the fact that it offers so many programs, and that it has created a rooted-transformative community through its communicative practices, shows that it has developed as an organic community.

Growing Gardens tries to be transformative, but it also seeks stability, and a deep connection to the people of Boulder. Members are not looking to be radical; they are trying to be inclusive of all people and not just people who are interested in challenging notions and behaviors regarding food. Transformation occurs because members are making gardening, organic food, and CSAs more accessible, and because Growing Gardens is extending far-reaching roots into the surrounding communities. Transformation also means having roots that are wide and connected to many people. By introducing people to new things and by changing eating practices, Growing Gardens makes an impression on people's lives. Therefore, being rooted helps Growing Gardens to be transformative, and vice versa.

Political ideologies often are entangled in alternative organizations and in purchasing or growing organic or locally grown foods, and that connection is both a risk and a resource for Growing Gardens. Members do not want growing food to be seen as a political act, yet many recognized the food movements of which Growing Gardens (unofficially) is a part. Some members, likely, are a part of the activist community because they are passionate about these food choices. By purposefully avoiding taking political stances, staff and interns try to make Growing Gardens a place for people with varying opinions about food. An apolitical orientation allows Growing Gardens to root to individuals who, typically, might be deterred by a political or activist stance, and doing so gives the organization opportunities to transform those people's lives, as well as those who seek out food politics. Aiming to create an apolitical stance relates to stability, as the more people who are involved, the stronger the connection that Growing Gardens has to the Boulder community. Therefore, the desire for the Growing Gardens community to remain apolitical helps it to be transformative and rooted, which can be difficult, because people associate certain behaviors or notions (e.g., growing organic, eating vegetables) with certain

identities (e.g., liberal, extreme, health nut). However, a plant has no political affiliation; it just is a plant, which is what Growing Gardens is trying to be.

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION

This research was designed to explore and understand the communicative construction of community at Growing Gardens, whether and how Growing Gardens benefits the external communities in which it is embedded, and how participants make sense of these benefits. As explained below, this study adds to our conceptual and pragmatic understanding of communication, community, and food. Those findings, however, need to be interpreted in light of limitations that characterized the study, which suggest some directions for future research on communication, food and community.

#### **The Significance of Communication, Community, and Food at Growing Gardens**

“Community” is an elusive concept that has inspired many metaphors, such as a web, family, or a team. This study adds to those metaphor conceptions by advancing the metaphor of community as a plant. In the case of Growing Gardens, this organic metaphor explained how communicative practices enable this community to first survive and then to flourish, and, thereby, to create a rooted–transformative community that, simultaneously, is stable and promotes change. The concept of “rooted” exemplifies how communicative practices (e.g., rituals, sharing food and recipes, gardening together, sharing enemies, and creating an inviting and accepting community) help the Growing Gardens plant to stay alive, and to create the foundation for the plant to thrive. Such rooting enables the Growing Gardens plant to transform the lives of people who come into contact with that community, and to transform the land, both



in material and symbolic (e.g., people's views of the land) ways. Furthermore, via "rooting," Growing Gardens creates the groundwork to change the organization internally, such as remaining stable through turnover of personnel, and generating support for new developments (e.g., the orchard). Therefore, the plant metaphor explains well how community survival leads to communities thriving and transforming (internally or externally).

Rooting and transformation, thus, exist simultaneously, and stand in a reciprocal relationship, but that also means it is a central dialectical tension that members of Growing Gardens have to manage, navigating the delicate balance between, simultaneously, stability and change. Stability, certainly, is needed to develop the community's roots, and trying to change itself or its external environments too quickly or aggressively could make it difficult for the community to survive. Therefore, the concept of a "rooted-transformative" community explains how long-term sustainability and change are woven together. By integrating practices that root the Growing Gardens community with those that transform the surrounding Boulder environment (both land and people), Growing Gardens has achieved long-term sustainability. Being rooted, in many ways, thus, is about navigating the balance between stability and change: gaining enough stability to engage in change.

A rooted-transformative community integrates these views of shows that community, simultaneously, or at least in stages, can maintain stability, growth, and social change. Hence, members of the Growing Gardens community are growing the group/organization to stay rooted, but also to transform the current landscape of food and people's relationships to food. The organization is transforming and challenging current food systems by encouraging people to eat more vegetables and teaching them how to grow food, and by connecting Boulder residents and Growing Gardens' community members to food, gardening, and to each other. More

specifically, Growing Gardens seeks to make fresh produce, gardening, and organic foods more accessible to people (and not just for those who can afford it), and, in the process, it seeks to transform people's palates and relationships with food. This transformation is slow and subtle, and is initiated through the discourse about food and interpersonal interactions that occur at the gardens. Growing Gardens opposes dominant food practices, but that opposition is framed and understood as creating positive change by creating community. The organization is not just surviving but it is also growing and promoting positive social change. Thus, a rooted-transformative community does not just maintain the status quo but it also can change society for the better.

Although social justice is not the main goal of Growing Gardens, as it does not focus, specifically, on intervening to change unjust social practices or unjust systems, the organization is oriented toward social justice in a number of ways, such as helping members and visitors to eat more fresh, organic produce, and wider varieties of produce, and by making produce available to more people (even those who cannot afford it) and, thereby, helping people to cultivate a healthier diet. Furthermore, by challenging the current food system, Growing Gardens is transforming current injustices in food growth and production (e.g., that fresh or organic food is available only to people who can afford it and that food that is grown with chemicals or food that travels long distances has negative impacts on the environment). Moreover, Growing Gardens demonstrates a social justice orientation by offering specific programs for those with physical and mental disabilities; working collaboratively with similar organizations, such as giving Earth's Table (which donates food that it grows) greenhouse space to start plants; offering low-priced community supported agriculture (CSA) shares and community gardening plots; and by promoting a collective discourse that can overcome barriers to growing food and accessing

produce that is fresh, local, and/or organic. A rooted–transformative community, therefore, is something that goes beyond maintaining the status quo to promote systemic change.

Although Growing Gardens’ goal is to promote systemic change, members intentionally attempt to create an “apolitical” organization; however, the frequent political discussions (about food choices) engaged in by the volunteers and community gardeners demonstrate that there are messy, interlaced connections among food, politics, and identities. Food easily can communicate political leanings or ideologies, and this study reveals how the members of this community do conversational/interactional work to distance themselves from those ideologies to appear “neutral.” Such conversational work at Growing Gardens, typically, involves awareness about what conversations to get involved in, diffuse, redirect, or reframe, and, thereby, to create ideologies about food at Growing Gardens, but ideologies that are more implicit rather than explicit.

The findings from this study, thus, further suggest that food is intertwined with politics. Some scholars have suggested that framing food choices (e.g., purchasing organic food) as collective action can be beneficial for dismantling large corporate food systems (see, e.g., Click & Ridberg, 2010; Foust, 2011; Sprain in print). Growing Gardens does engage in collective action, but collective action that explicitly tries not to take an activist stance, which runs counter to some scholars’ recommendations. Freeman (2010), for instance, argued that activists in the environmental movement need to take a stronger stance than they do currently against eating animals, but Growing Gardens takes a different approach, because the goal is to get more people involved in food activities that the organization is promoting, and not to cultivate a community of people with extreme beliefs and behaviors. Growing Gardens is doing more than providing a “buffer” or a “shelter” from global food systems (Lyson, 2004); however, unlike communication

enacted by typical activism politics (see, e.g., Todd, 2011) and food campaigns (see, e.g. Freeman) that some groups use to change aspects of the current food system, Growing Gardens fuels the momentum for positive change through implicit rhetoric. Through implicit rhetoric, Growing Gardens enacts a form of covert activism that takes place “underground,” much like the roots that it has planted. Members, thus, invite people in and persuade them subtly, through experiences and suggestions rather than via overt rhetoric that promotes radical or exclusive behaviors. Growing Gardens’ stance does not necessarily contradict what Freeman advocated, as there are many benefits to a strong activist orientation, but it demonstrates that there also can be benefits to using subtle persuasion; in this case, to make food seem “apolitical.” Food and food practices at Growing Gardens are not apolitical but the organization tries to make them seem that way by taking a low-key approach.

Growing Gardens believes that strict ideologies about food can limit and divide communities, creating community boundaries that keep certain people in and others out. Such boundaries around food choices have important implications for social justice because of who is able to access what kinds of food, who has opportunities to grow food, and who can afford certain food. In particular, people in the United States who have low income, live in urban areas, and/or are minorities often have a difficult time accessing fresh, affordable produce (Bauer, 2011; DeBenedette, 2013; Gillette, 2014), in part, because they are surrounded by fast-food restaurants and convenience stores (Kolata, 2012). Therefore, ideologies that view growing and eating organic food as having to be an explicit political act, or as an elite aesthetic might limit the potential for people who cannot afford those political acts or who are not interested in certain identities (e.g., being seen as elite, yuppie, and/or extreme). Framing food purchases as an overtly political act, or as a way of engaging in activist politics does have benefits, but, again,

these identities do not necessarily appeal to everyone. Growing Gardens tries to further the notion that anyone who has an interest in growing food, eating fresh produce, spending time outside with the plants, and eating organic food should be able to be involved. As Sam, an intern, said, “We’re trying to, have everybody involved here. We’re not trying to turn anybody away.” Growing Gardens, thus, seeks to be inclusive and to root to a diverse range of people by creating a seemingly neutral political ground on which to grow its food and its community. Growing Gardens seeks to create a community that does not appear dogmatic or rigid about the food choices being encouraged, in the belief that doing so will have a larger impact on more people than would be possible if it employed more extreme rhetoric.

One way that Growing Gardens creates an inclusive community is through food and the way that food is framed. Food is framed as an equalizer at Growing Gardens, as it brings people together who share its importance in their life. Because everyone needs to eat, and fruits and vegetables (as well as other foods), literally, nourish people, food can bring together a diverse group of people of all ages and abilities to grow, eat, and talk about food. Growing Gardens’ position that “food is for everyone” flips the ideological views that food is linked to particular identities; most notably, that it communicates class (see Click & Ridberg, 2010; Cook, Reed, & Twiner, 2009; Freeman, 2010; Guthman, 2010; Lien, 2004; Sprain, in print). By showing that food from its garden is for all people, Growing Gardens seeks to level the playing/planting field.

Additionally, Growing Gardens is a bona fide group/organization, and not a container, which is part of the reason why creating the impression of it as a neutral political ground is important and a constant communication negotiation. Political connotations and implications of food, and identities that are tied to food, cannot be kept out of the community; people outside of the community, undoubtedly, make assumptions about the organization’s identity because it

grows organic food, has a CSA, and provides community gardens. Although Growing Gardens attempts to communicatively construct an “apolitical” organization, as Chris, the market garden grower at Growing Gardens, noted, what members are doing, in many ways, still is a political act, and it is likely that there are individuals, both inside and outside the community, who view it that way. Therefore, the key to creating the image of an apolitical organization, or one that appears to be less political than are other organizations that promote causes that have political implications, is through members’ discourse. Through communication practices, such as talking about gardening techniques and not about food ideologies, encouraging people to try new foods, avoiding critical or judgmental statements about other people’s food, and talking about Growing Gardens as a place for everyone and not just certain people, members create a community that is subtly political, in a way that does not deter people from joining and that encourages diverse perspectives.

This study also suggests that the communication about and through food is transformative, as food and growing food operate as a discourse that can lead people to try new things. People talk about how the food that is grown at Growing Gardens “tastes better,” is more beautiful, and is “active,” in comparison to food purchased at grocery stores. Thus, growing food can transform people’s food behaviors, and interaction with food can constitute a discourse. It is not just how food is talked about or the talk that occurs around food; food, itself, can exert agency in certain situations, persuading and transforming people’s palates, their decision to try new foods, and their views about food and land. The conclusion about Growing Gardens’ attempt to transform people’s food behaviors is based on comments that were said at the gardens as people were weeding and harvesting, or that participants mentioned during interviews conducted with them, but I never asked participants to talk about whether and how their eating

behaviors had changed; instead, participants voluntarily shared that information. That these comments were made without being prompted demonstrates that people view Growing Gardens as an instigator of change in their lives. People often formulated that view by saying, “Before Growing Gardens I had not tasted \_\_\_\_\_, and now I love it.” Hence, this study adds to the literature on changing eating habits and on campaigns that encourage healthy eating, by demonstrating that participation in community gardening not only can transform people’s palates but that people also seem to be fully aware of such behavioral change that occurs at Growing Gardens. Even though tactics that enticed people to try new foods were subtle, people’s exposure to new food and suggestions to taste it were pervasive and persuasive. At Growing Gardens, people were conscious and excited about these eating changes in their lives, to the point that there was a collective discourse about it in the community.

The food at Growing Gardens was persuasive and transformative, and trying to frame their organization as “apolitical” does seem to make it inviting to many people. However, the goal of avoiding politics or presenting an apolitical ideal raises some important issues, such as whether Growing Gardens promotes suppression of conflict or of political discussion that could lead to positive change. Although I did not necessarily see evidence of this when I was there, the avoidance of politics, potentially, could lead to a lack of discourse about contestation, which raises the question of whether change (or profound change) is possible without contestation. The discourse at Growing Gardens is not political but the practices are political. Future research, therefore, should examine whether these discourses about contestation (that could lead to greater transformation) are cultivated or suppressed. Suppression of conflict and contestation may make it more difficult to further the transformation and normative ideals that Growing Gardens’ members are trying to promote (e.g., eating vegetables, cooking at home, and growing one’s

food). It is possible that Growing Gardens does not need to be as afraid of political discussion and contestation as it is, and that these conversations can be engaged in without extremism, and, if so, that may lead to greater transformation and positive change. This is not to suggest that the data led me to the conclusion that Growing Gardens' members are suppressing conflict or that they are avoiding contestation in an unproductive way but this issue of avoiding politics raises the aforementioned questions and is a topic for exploration in future research.

This study also sheds light on how food can be a foundation of community in a number of overlapping ways. The results showed that food is both a tool that is used by this community and that it is constitutive of social interaction, relationships, and community. Food functions as a tool in the sense that it can be a method of payment or a symbolic demonstration of appreciation or gratitude, but food at Growing Gardens (and elsewhere) also produces interactions that create interpersonal, group, and communal relationships. By gathering around food, sharing food, and giving food away, food at Growing Gardens constitutes a discourse that fosters and facilitates a route to deeper interpersonal and communal relationships.

This study, therefore, suggests that how a group of people (in general) frame food through discourse (and other actions) has important implications for the symbolic creation of community. At Growing Gardens, members frame food as a fundamental aspect of creating community, instead of as being about "making profit," which stands in contrast to most commercial food industries (e.g., grocery stores, restaurants, farms, and processed food companies), where the purpose of producing food is to make money. Members talk about food as creating and maintaining connections between people (as a practice and process), in contrast to framing food as a product, where food is a means to increase an organizations' financial bottom line. Many members of Growing Gardens (e.g., staff, interns, and Cultiva participants)



receive money for their participation in the community, and the organization charges money for CSA shares and garden plots; hence, money is not irrelevant but the fundamental purpose of this organization is to bring people in the area together around food and gardening. The CSA, for example, is designed to reframe picking out produce as a social activity rather than as a chore or business transaction. This view of food is a rare concept for organizations in the United States, where food often is produced for profit by large, globalized corporations (Lyson, 2004), such as grocery store chains, factory farms, and fast and processed food companies. Growing Gardens reframes food from something that is produced by and delivered from large corporations for the purposes of making a profit, to a practice, process, and product that is cultivated by local people to feed, teach, and nourish their communities, and not to “make a buck” (as stated by Birgetta, an intern). In this way, food is both a material and symbolic way of taking care of people and of nurturing community. Hence, this nonprofit organization that grows and harvests food as a way to create community adds to the communication literature on community building and food, by showing, specifically, how food is talked about (e.g., as giving back or as nourishing the community) not only creates community but that it creates a specific type of community that (in the case of Growing Gardens) cares about what people put in their bodies, and what access people in the area have to food and to growing it. By framing food as nourishing the community, Growing Gardens sees food as a means by which people take care of one another. Growing Gardens, thus, views food as a discourse that creates and sustains community, with that discourse created and sustained through specific communicative practices. Food and gardening, therefore, have the ability to bring people together, and members discursively create the kind of community that sees itself as nourishing both members and its external environments, but these community

attributes do more than just nourish the community or the group; as explained below, they also can produce social and interactional capital.

**Growing social and interactional capital.** In addition to framing food to create and sustain community, through gardening and interactions at the gardens, members gain personal benefits; specifically, social and interactional capital. *Social capital* is defined as individuals' resources, social norms, patterns of information exchange, work opportunities, and occasions for social or organizational participation (Cattell, 2001). Social capital is related to and can expand other forms of capital because those to whom people are connected can help them to find opportunities (Crowell, 2004). Members of and visitors to Growing Gardens increased their social capital in that they gained resources, information, and opportunities for organizational participation through working together at the site. The Growing Gardens' organization and staff members also developed social capital, as they benefited from the resources possessed by CSA members and volunteers (e.g., their extra gardening tools or knowledge about building fences), resources that were uncovered during informal interactions that occurred during volunteer hours and at the CSA pick-ups.

Although social capital is an important resource, it cannot fully explain the skills, knowledge, and resources that people develop in interpersonal relationships because it is limited to amount, types (e.g. weak vs. strong ties), and quality of relationships. In contrast, *interaction capital* is a type of capital that is created through people's interactions with others, which demonstrates that interactions, themselves, are important and constitutive of relationships and community. White (2012) explained that interactional capital "privileges capital at the interactional level, meaning capital that is produced between people (e.g., between two interactants) and among people (e.g., among members of a social network or community), not

just within people” (p. 228). White focused, specifically, on how interactional capital creates connections across class divisions (in her study, to aid people living in poverty); at Growing Gardens, members gained interactional capital by creating relationships across age, class, stage of life, and ability boundary divides. Through those interpersonal interactions, people learned about growing food, recipes, and eating healthy; Cultiva participants even learned how to behave appropriately at jobs and how to be student leaders. Such knowledge was generated through interpersonal interactions between community members and visitors to the community, not in formal settings where one party delivered knowledge to the other party who absorbed it. Oftentimes, staff members did teach Cultiva participants and visitors about food and gardening, but staff members also asked visitors to share their information about food (e.g., Sam asking the high school student how he prepared leeks), and young Cultiva participants were asked to share their knowledge about food (e.g., Maria’s tomatillo recipe), demonstrating that information was shared and co-constructed across divisions in organizational roles and age. Although the purpose of this study was not to assess the creation of interactional capital at Growing Gardens, the findings suggest that interactional capital produces and is produced through community gardening in this case. The results from this study demonstrate that social and interactional capital can be grown and harvested at Growing Gardens, and it is possible that these forms of capital also could be harnessed or cultivated by other gardening organizations. Although Growing Gardens is an organic community that cannot be replicated, as explained below, this research could be used as a case study to help other groups and organizations to grow.

**Helping other groups and organizations to grow.** Growing Gardens, potentially, provides a model for other urban agricultural groups and organizations to follow. Communicative practices that create a rooted–transformative community (e.g., the CSA’s social

atmosphere and volunteer hours, including diverse perspectives, and encouraging people to try new foods) could be employed by other organizations that are attempting to make food and gardening about creating community rather than solely about growing food or earning profit. Urban agricultural organizations that primarily are about growing food might find it fruitful to incorporate some of the communicative practices that also build and transform community, as those practices also are effective in getting people to expand their palates and to try new food. Because people can gather around food and gardening, it might benefit some urban agricultural or community gardening organizations to realize the powerful community-building potential of what they already are doing, and to expand their organization to create a more “rooted” community. Rituals, such as community dinners or potlucks, are additional communicative practices that root community members. As discussed previously, how members at Growing Gardens talked about and interacted with food framed food as growing and nourishing community, and other urban agricultural organizations could incorporate that communication framing in their practices as well.

Furthermore, Growing Gardens demonstrates that food can be grown together with a group of people not only to feed people but also to create a sense of community. Although people have been growing food in groups for centuries, this is not a common contemporary practice in a city, neighborhood, or urban space. Therefore, neighborhoods and cities that are looking to create a greater sense of community might find that group gardening (e.g., community gardens) and group gardening programs (e.g., local CSAs) can bring people together, cultivate social and interactional capital, and accomplish collective goals. This research, potentially, can benefit other groups or organizations that are looking to connect people together, and are interested in growing a rooted–transformative community.

### **Practical Recommendations for Growing Gardens**

The results of this research study suggest some practical recommendations for Growing Gardens. For instance, one of the themes that staff members brought up is that outsiders to the community often do not know about Growing Gardens, and that they do not understand how Growing Gardens benefits Boulder or why growing food is something that is important to the city of Boulder. Growing Gardens' community members, even the secondary roots, assert that there are many ways that Growing Gardens benefits its external communities, but there is the sentiment amongst those members who are a part of the main root that those who are not a part of the community do not see or understand those benefits. Therefore, one recommendation for Growing Gardens is to realize that the largest difference it makes on individuals, and the place that rooting and transforming occurs, is through interpersonal interactions with other members and food at Growing Gardens. The most convincing way to persuade people about the benefits of Growing Gardens is likely done by inviting them to the gardens, where they will connect and root to members, and to the food and the land. Enacting subtle change through interactions with food and with members of the Growing Gardens community is part of what makes the organization strong. Individuals may not understand the benefits of Growing Gardens without firsthand experience at Growing Gardens; consequently, inviting people to engage with the food could lead people to perceive Growing Gardens as an asset, a vibrant plant, instead of as a weed or as a nuisance. Therefore, when Growing Gardens engages in outreach to its external environments, it should invite and connect members of the Boulder community to the garden and its members.

Growing Gardens also might benefit from empirically demonstrating that it benefits its members, as well as external environments to which it is (e.g., Boulder). For example, the

organization might be eligible for more sources of funding if it could show that participation at Growing Gardens does lead people to increase their consumptions of fruits and vegetables.

Similar research could be conducted to acquire evidence for emotional or physical benefits of gardening at the organization. Growing Gardens, potentially, could collect such data at little or no cost by connecting to resources at the University of Colorado Boulder, as the benefits of gardening are of interest to scholars across many disciplines (e.g., communication, education, and geography). Such information, potentially, could prove to be a financial resource for Growing Gardens, such as by earning grants (for example), which also would help the organization to stay rooted.

Moreover, if Growing Gardens aims to benefit the external environments to which it is connected, it is important for the organization to continue to consider and reconsider ways in which it might be excluding certain people. Exclusion already is a concern at Growing Gardens, as demonstrated by staff members' discussion about whether to raise the price of the CSA. I encourage Growing Gardens to continue to make efforts to include individuals who, typically, are excluded from food movements (e.g., organic/local food, growing your food, and urban agriculture) to which the organization is connected, as part of what is so powerful about Growing Gardens is that it brings together diverse groups of people. Furthermore, Growing Gardens should consider additional ways to further social justice systematic change. For example, Growing Gardens is great at finding ways to donate excess food to individuals who need or cannot afford it. Doing so is good because it means that food does not go to waste and that it goes to people who need it, but Growing Gardens likely could provide more than a band-aid solution to poverty and/or class divides. Instead of just donating food, the organization could offer free gardening classes to people who have low incomes or donate some of the plots to these

individuals to grow food. Although social justice is not one of the main goals of Growing Gardens, it is possible that a couple of courses or donating several gardening plots could continue to break down barriers associated with (access to) food/certain foods and provide additional benefits to the organization's external environments.

### **Limitations of the Study**

Although this research revealed important findings about communication, community, and food that have significant theoretical and practical implications, those findings need to be interpreted in light of some salient limitations that characterized the study. For instance, because this was an MA thesis, time was a limitation, and spending more time observing interactions and daily activities at Growing Gardens would have been beneficial. Ideally, participant observation should have been conducted from the beginning of the spring (and the beginning of the Cultiva Youth Program) until the beginning of winter, to be present for an entire growing season. Doing so would have provided more extensive exposure to the community and relationships that developed there over time. However, I was limited to participating in the organization from the end of summer to the beginning of winter. Although the increased time would not have changed the results about Growing Gardens creating a rooted–transformative community, I would have seen rooting process more extensively, as new relationships develop when new members (e.g., Cultiva participants, interns, and volunteers) join the community. This research also was conducted only at one urban agricultural organization in one small city, which limits the ability to generalize the results to other organizations or other cities. However, these results could inform the practice of other urban agricultural organizations, and may help them to find ways to create a community that, simultaneously, is rooted and transformative.

Another limitation is that I did not acquire data that could demonstrate how and to what extent Growing Gardens transforms people's eating behaviors. The connections and interactions that occur in and around the organization's programs create community, and they seem to change people's eating behaviors, but those conclusions are based on members' discourse at the gardens. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2013) noted that nutrients from fruits and vegetables are essential to maintaining a healthy diet, but that consumption of produce in the United States is very low. By growing food at Growing Gardens, those in Boulder got excited to take risks and to try new food. Affecting people's food consumption is incited by more than marketing, labels, and discourse about food in the public sphere; Growing Gardens demonstrates how connecting physically to food and land can motivate people to try new produce and to expand their palates. This study, thus, demonstrates that community gardening programs might be a productive route to encourage the consumption of fruits and vegetables, but I did not measure consumption of fruits and vegetables before and after people's participation at Growing Gardens; hence, I cannot say with certainty how much people's eating habits changed as a result of their participation in this community. A future suggestion for research is to conduct pretests and posttests for people who participate in Growing Gardens to see whether, in fact, such participation does affect them and, if so, to what extent.

Another limitation is that I did not interview any residents of Boulder or the Hawthorne neighborhood who visited the gardens but did not consider themselves to be part of the Growing Gardens community, as all interviewees were staff members, interns, volunteers, CSA members, or Cultiva participants. It, certainly, would have been good to interview people who are physically near but not part of the Growing Gardens organization (e.g., neighbors), or people



who were just visiting Growing Gardens. The lack of doing so means that it is not possible to make claims about the effects of Growing Gardens on people who are not members.

Finally, the Growing Gardens organization has many facets and I focused, primarily, on what occurred at the main gardening site; consequently, there are aspects of the organization, especially related to its internal workings, to which I was not privy. I did attend a staff meeting, which offered a general sense of how things operate at that organization, the feel and set-up of the office, and how the organization, typically, runs staff meetings, but there still is a lot about the organization that I did not learn. For example, I do not know very much about the way in which the organization is funded, and how much money is received by the programs, or clusters of roots. As mentioned in Chapter 4, Growing Gardens tries not to be a weed in the Boulder area by providing unique programs (not replicating what, already, is being done), but I do not know if some of the internal programs thrive at the expense of others. Therefore, it is difficult to know if any of the programs might be a weed within the Growing Gardens community, although I did not get the sense that this was the case.

### **Suggestions for Future Research**

The results of this study also suggest several directions that would be fruitful to pursue in further research on this organization and on the study of communication, community, and food. Clearly, more research should be conducted on communities that, simultaneously, are rooted and transformative, and how the balancing of that dialectic is managed through communicative practices and processes. Additional research could be conducted on food and the way that it is a foundation of communities, and on how food has the power both to connect and divide people.

Future research also needs to be conducted about communication that is designed to affect people's eating habits, such as encouraging greater consumption of produce. Food

campaigns, books, and other media, as well as more formal nutrition education programs, seem to be prominent ways that are employed to influence people's eating choices, but this research study demonstrates that significant change occurs through people's interpersonal interactions surrounding food. Accordingly, suggesting a recipe for fried turnips as people harvest or bunch turnips may be more persuasive than a campaign or newspaper article that encourages people to eat turnips. Hence, more research needs to explore differences between interpersonal and other forms of communication with regard to influencing people to eat more produce.

Additionally, future research needs to be conducted at Growing Gardens to understand how it benefits external environments to which it is connected. Interviewing more visitors and more people who interact with Growing Gardens on a peripheral level (e.g., neighbors and teachers who take courses to visit the gardens) could demonstrate a greater level of understanding about such benefits.

The final suggestion for future research relates to the notion that Growing Gardens is a type of community that also is a business. As a business, Growing Gardens is going to make some profit, as it charges money for the Community Shared Agriculture (CSA) shares and for community gardening plots, and there is a plant sale every year. One of the members, Chris (the Market Garden Grower), explained that the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) provides some coaching for the Growing Gardens organization, and one thing that the YMCA said was "no money, no mission." The YMCA's idea is that even if members' hearts are in the right place, they have to make the organization financially sustainable to further the mission. Moreover, almost every participant interviewed in this study mentioned money and financial resources as a limiting factor of the organization, and as something around which the organization and its members experience tensions. Such tensions reveal the business–social

dialectic at Growing Gardens, with the organization needing to navigate the tension between being a community and, simultaneously, a business. Furthermore, this dialectic also raises questions about how Growing Gardens fits into the larger landscape of neoliberalism. Future research should examine whether Growing Gardens adapts neoliberal ideals or offers a radically different (transformative) model of food economics. For example, Spurlock (2009) found that food-centered activism through the Piedmont Farm Tours invited visitors to prevent the economic collapse of small farms, and to participate in an act of cultural remembering that has been lost and devalued due to large corporate food organizations and the narrative of neoliberal development. Those farm tours, according to Spurlock, demonstrated that progressive economic change is possible, with the tours inviting the general public to participate in this economic change. In contrast, however, McCullen (2011) found that a farmer's market in California furthered the White farm imaginary by concealing who actually is doing farm labor; specifically, customers thought that they were directly exchanging money with people who grew their food, but because the Latino farm workers who actually grew the food were absent, this, in fact, was not the case. Although the economics of Growing Gardens was not the focus of this study, a future study could examine dialectical tensions related to economics at the gardens, how members manage those tensions, and ways that Growing Gardens maintains or transforms the larger economic landscape of food.

### **Conclusion**

This research at Growing Gardens documents and demonstrates how, through communication, an organization creates community around food and gardening, as well as how this organization seeks to affect people's eating habits and their ideas about land and urban space. Participant observation and interviews revealed that Growing Gardens communicatively

cultivates a community that, simultaneously, roots people to each other, to food, and to the land, and that it can transform people's eating habits and relationships to land. These findings not only led to the new concept of a rooted–transformative community but they also provide insight into how communities can stay stable and, simultaneously, promote systemic social change. Hopefully, this new concept will prove useful for communication scholars who study groups, organizations, and community building. This research adds to the literature on communication and food by identifying how food is a mode of communication that can constitute interpersonal and communal relationships. In the final analysis, the plant metaphor and the notion of a rooted–transformative community show how communicative practices around and through food can build an organic community, challenge current food systems, and cause a community to thrive and foster positive social change for its members and for the larger communities in which it is situated.

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### Appendix A: Proposed Interview Protocol

Interviewee Name:		Pseudonym:			
Interview Location:		Date/Time:			
Daytime Phone:		Email:		Informed Consent Signed?:	<input type="checkbox"/>

#### History/Involvement with Growing Gardens

How long have you been involved with Growing Gardens? What has your involvement looked like over that time?

Imagine that you were explaining Growing Gardens to a friend (coworker, neighbor, etc.) who was unfamiliar with it. How would you describe Growing Gardens? What do you see as the purpose, or purposes of Growing Gardens?

As a communication scholar, I am interested in the interactions and conversations that people have at Growing Gardens.

What interactions do you have at Growing Gardens?

Can you tell me about your favorite interactions at Growing Gardens?

Can you tell me about a specific interaction or experience that affected you positively?

Can you tell me about your least favorite interactions at Growing Gardens?

Can you tell me about a specific interaction or experience that affected you negatively?

#### Growing Gardens as community

What do you associated with the word “community”?

Would you consider Growing Gardens to be a community? If so, why and how does Growing Gardens build community?

Do you see staff, volunteers, or CSA members from Growing Gardens on a social basis?

How would you define a strong or vibrant community? Are there ways that Growing Gardens meets this definition? Are there ways that Growing Gardens does not meet this definition?

What is the relationship of Growing Gardens with the surrounding community? (e.g., the neighborhood, schools, or Boulder as a whole). Do you think Growing Gardens is important to Boulder? If so, why? If not, why not?

Do you think Growing Gardens is a part of any food movements or social movements? If so, which ones?

Do you read (or write) blogs, books, or watch movies about food, farming, or urban agriculture?

What are the names of these movies, book authors, blogs?

Are you a part of any other food organizations or agriculture organizations?

In what ways could Growing Gardens be stronger?

What do you see or hope for Growing Gardens in the future?

What is your favorite part about Growing Gardens?

What is your least favorite part about Growing Gardens?

What challenges do you face at Growing Gardens?

What barriers to success do you face at Growing Gardens?

Have you been involved in other urban agriculture organizations? If so, is how does that organization or experience compare to your experience at Growing Gardens?

### **Food and Communication**

How do see people interact or talk about food at Growing Gardens? Can you provide an example?

What conversations have you had (or overheard) about food here? What do you think is important or significant about these conversations?

Can you compare the ways that people talk about and interact with food at Growing Gardens to the way that is done in other places or other communities?

Do people have a unique relationship with food here, or a unique way of talking about food here?

I had a conversation with Sam (one of the growing interns) one day as we were picking chard, and he asked if I considered Growing Gardens to be a farm, a garden, or something else. How would you answer that question? Is this distinction important, and, if so, why?

## Appendix B: IRB Letters



University of Colorado  
Boulder

Institutional Review Board  
563 UCB  
Boulder, CO 80309  
Phone: 303.735.3702  
Fax: 303.735.5185  
FWA: 00003492

10-Sep-2013

### Exempt Certification

Ivancic, Sonia

**Protocol #:** 13-0500

**Title:** Growing Gardens and Nourishing Communities: The communicative construction of community through urban agriculture

Dear Sonia Ivancic,

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed this protocol and determined it to be of exempt status in accordance with Federal Regulations 45 CFR 46.101(b). Principal Investigators are responsible for informing the IRB of any changes or unexpected events regarding the project that could impact the exemption status. Upon completion of the study, you must submit a Final Review via eRA. It is your responsibility to notify the IRB **prior** to implementing any changes.

**Certification Date:** 10-Sep-2013

**Exempt Category:** 2

Click here to find the IRB reviewed documents for this protocol: [Study Documents](#)

The IRB has reviewed this protocol in accordance with federal regulations, university policies and ethical standards for the protection of human subjects. In accordance with federal regulation at 45 CFR 46.112, research that has been approved by the IRB may be subject to further appropriate review and approval or disapproval by officials of the institution. The investigator is responsible for knowing and complying with all applicable research regulations and policies including, but not limited to, Environmental Health and Safety, Scientific Advisory and Review Committee, Clinical and Translational Research Center, and Wardenburg Health Center and Pharmacy policies.

Please contact the IRB office at 303-735-3702 if you have any questions about this letter or about IRB procedures.

Douglas Grafel  
IRB Admin Review Coordinator  
Institutional Review Board



Institutional Review Board  
563 UCB  
Boulder, CO 80309  
Phone: 303.735.3702  
Fax: 303.735.5185  
FWA: 00003492

30-Oct-2013

### **Amendment Acknowledgement - Exempt**

Ivancic, Sonia

**Protocol #:** 13-0500

**Title:** Growing Gardens and Nourishing Communities: The communicative construction of community through urban agriculture

Dear Sonia Ivancic,

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed the amendment described below and determined that it does not affect the exempt status of this protocol.

**Acknowledged Date:** 30-Oct-2013

**Description of Amendment:** Procedures updated to include subject interviews.

Click here to find the IRB reviewed documents for this protocol: [Study Documents](#)

**Note:** Some formatting and information changes were made to the IRB-reviewed version of the Consent Form.

The IRB has reviewed this amendment in accordance with federal regulations, university policies and ethical standards for the protection of human subjects. In accordance with federal regulation at 45 CFR 46.112, research that has been approved by the IRB may be subject to further appropriate review and approval or disapproval by officials of the institution. The investigator is responsible for knowing and complying with all applicable research regulations and policies including, but not limited to, Environmental Health and Safety, Scientific Advisory and Review Committee, Clinical and Translational Research Center, and Wardenburg Health Center and Pharmacy policies. Approval by the IRB does not imply approval by any other entity.

Please contact the IRB office at 303-735-3702 if you have any questions about this letter or about IRB procedures.

Douglas Grafel  
IRB Admin Review Coordinator  
Institutional Review Board



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563 UCB  
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13-Feb-2014

### **Amendment Acknowledgement - Exempt**

Ivancic, Sonia

**Protocol #:** 13-0500

**Title:** Growing Gardens and Nourishing Communities: The communicative construction of community through urban agriculture

Dear Sonia Ivancic,

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed the amendment described below and determined that it does not affect the exempt status of this protocol.

**Acknowledged Date:** 13-Feb-2014

**Description of Amendment:** Update to interview questions.

Click here to find the IRB reviewed documents for this protocol: [Study Documents](#)

The IRB has reviewed this amendment in accordance with federal regulations, university policies and ethical standards for the protection of human subjects. In accordance with federal regulation at 45 CFR 46.112, research that has been approved by the IRB may be subject to further appropriate review and approval or disapproval by officials of the institution. The investigator is responsible for knowing and complying with all applicable research regulations and policies including, but not limited to, Environmental Health and Safety, Scientific Advisory and Review Committee, Clinical and Translational Research Center, and Wardenburg Health Center and Pharmacy policies. Approval by the IRB does not imply approval by any other entity.

Please contact the IRB office at 303-735-3702 if you have any questions about this letter or about IRB procedures.

Douglas Grafel  
IRB Admin Review Coordinator  
Institutional Review Board

## Appendix C: Interview Consent Form



### Permission to Take Part in a Human Research Study

**Title of research study:** Growing Gardens and Nourishing Communities: The Communicative Construction of Community through Urban Agriculture  
Protocol#: 13-0500

**Investigator:** Sonia Ivancic

#### ***Why am I being invited to take part in a research study?***

I invite you to take part in a research study in order to further understand your experiences as a member, volunteer, or participant at Growing Gardens.

#### ***What should I know about a research study?***

**Your participation in this research study is voluntary.** Please think about the information below carefully. Feel free to ask questions before making your decision whether or not to participate. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to sign this form and will receive a copy of the form.

Sonia Ivancic will explain this research study to you.

Whether or not you take part is up to you.

You can choose not to take part.

You can agree to take part and later change your mind.

Your decision will not be held against you.

You can ask all the questions you want before you decide.

#### ***Who can I talk to?***

If you have questions, concerns, or complaints, or think the research has hurt you, talk to Sonia Ivancic at [sonia.ivancic@colorado.edu](mailto:sonia.ivancic@colorado.edu) or (206) 310-8304.

This research has been reviewed and approved by an Institutional Review Board (“IRB”). You may talk to them at (303) 735-3702 or [irbadmin@colorado.edu](mailto:irbadmin@colorado.edu) if:

Your questions, concerns, or complaints are not being answered by the research team.

You cannot reach the research team.

You want to talk to someone besides the research team.

You have questions about your rights as a research subject.

You want to get information or provide input about this research.

#### ***Why is this research being done?***

You are asked to participate in a research study conducted by Sonia Ivancic from University of Colorado, Boulder. This study consists of an interview that will be administered to individual

participants. The purpose of this study is to explore the ways that community is created and understood at an urban agriculture farm. This study will contribute to the researcher's completion of her Master's Thesis, a Qualitative Research Method's course in the graduate school, and possibly future research in graduate courses. There are no direct benefits to you from completing this study.

***How long will the research last?***

Participation in this study may take up to two hours of your time. A 30-90 minute interview will be conducted at a time and location convenient to you. A follow-up interview may be scheduled in order to clarify questions and confirm interpretations.

***How many people will be studied?***

We expect about 5–10 people will be interviewed in this research study.

***What happens if I say yes, I want to be in this research?***

Participants who decide they want to participate in this research will be administered an interview. The interview will be audio and/or video recorded. It is only after you provide consent that you will be asked a series of questions related to your experience at Growing Gardens.

***What happens if I do not want to be in this research?***

You can leave the research at any time and it will not be held against you.

***What happens if I say yes, but I change my mind later?***

You can stop the interview at any time it will not be held against you.

***Is there any way being in this study could be bad for me?***

There are no risks involved in completing this study.

***What happens to the information collected for the research?***

Efforts will be made to limit the use and disclosure of your personal information, including research study and medical records, to people who have a need to review this information. We cannot promise complete secrecy. Organizations that may inspect and copy your information include the IRB and other representatives of this organization. All names in transcripts and papers will be replaced and identifying information will be excluded from the final study. All data will be kept on a password protected computer.

The results of this research will be used in a final class paper. The results of this project will be coded in such a way that the respondent's identity will not be attached to the final form of this study. The researcher retains the right to use and publish non-identifiable data. While individual responses are confidential, aggregate data will be presented representing averages or generalizations about the responses as a whole. All data will be stored in a secure location accessible only to the researcher. Upon completion of the study, all information that matches up individual respondents with their answers will be destroyed.

These are some reasons that we may need to share the information you give us with others:

- If it is required by law.
- If we think you or someone else could be harmed.
- Sponsors, government agencies or research staff sometimes look at forms like this and other study records. They do this to make sure the research is done safely and legally. Organizations that may look at study records include:
  - i. Office for Human Research Protections or other federal, state, or international regulatory agencies
  - ii. The University of Colorado Boulder Institutional Review Board

### **Signature Block for Capable Adult**

Your signature documents your permission to take part in this research.

Signature of subject	Date
Printed name of subject	
Signature of person obtaining consent	Date
Printed name of person obtaining consent	11-10-2013
	IRB Approval Date