PLANNING FOR A POSTMODERN ERA:
STORYTELLING, PUBLIC PARTICIPATION, AND
THE LIMITS OF ORDINARY DEMOCRACY

by

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Everyday assumptions about democracy and its limitations shape alternative public participation practices. This case study examines how participants in a multi-stakeholder city visioning process communicated to design a storytelling initiative with the aim of updating the city’s general plan based on community values. By framing public participation as a discursive practice, this analysis shows how a variety of participant discourses shaped communication design in ways that enabled and constrained public interaction in meaningful ways. This study employs discourse tracing (LeGreco & Tracy, 2009) methods to analyze how subjects (re)produced and navigated a variety of discourses to understand, design, and enact storytelling and values-identification processes. A broad data set included: (a) meeting and event observation, (b) interviews, (c) resident stories, (d) newspaper and newsletter articles and editorials, (e) planning and policy documents, and (f) professional planning white papers and reports.

Findings show that an autonomous city narrative organized attention and activity within city boundaries and downplayed resident differences. Multiple discourses about the limitations of ordinary democracy (Tracy, 2010) and about the tensions between ordinary democracy and alternative participatory practices, opened up particular communication design possibilities, while closing off others. Over time, discourses about
planning problems, ordinary democracy, and storytelling as research reinforced each other in a reticulated manner so that storytelling was understood in relationship to discursive accountability formations. This made it possible for group members to extract values from individual stories and produce aggregate city values that represented an abstracted form of citizen judgment.

Keywords: discursive, accountability, communication, planning, storytelling, values, public participation, policy, local government, ordinary democracy, community, discourse tracing
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CHAPTER I

TALKING OUR WAY TO DEMOCRATIC PRACTICE

Our ideas about democracy—how we believe it should work, how we believe it does work, and what we believe can be done to make it work better—shape how we actually do democracy. Choices most of us make about how to participate in and shape democratic practices are influenced by a range of unexplored assumptions embedded in how we communicate about democracy, about the changing world around us, and about the nature and role of publics. Although this is not, in and of itself, a new argument, we still have a great deal to learn about how these assumptions shape efforts to change or enhance public participation practices in American democracy. Over the past two to three decades, practitioners, scholars, and citizens have designed and implemented a variety of alternative public participation strategies. A significant percentage of these efforts have been related to public planning and policy arenas, and it is difficult—if not impossible—to assess the benefits of such practices without also studying the socio-historically informed contexts in which such practices emerge (Dietz & Stern, 2008).

Therefore, this study examines a city planning process to trace how intersecting micro-, meso-, and macro-level discourses about democracy, planning, and public participation shape communication design (Aakhus, 2007). My aim is to generate theoretical and practical knowledge about how situated understandings, informed by meso- and macro-level discourses, generate or close off particular possibilities for participant interaction in a complex multi-stakeholder planning process. In this study, I
adopt LeGreco and Tracy’s (2010) discourse tracing method and define these multiple levels of discourse in the following way: (a) micro-level discourses are the situated uses of talk and text within a local context, (b) meso-level discourses are texts such as policies that coordinate practices across several sites of activity, and (c) macro-level discourses are “enduring systems situated in historical context” (Fairhurst & Putnam, 2004, p. 23).

The study relies on a wide range of data sources, including event observation, interviews, resident stories, professional texts, policy texts, and news articles. In this introductory chapter, I define central concepts and outline the research problem. Then I present a brief overview of U.S. public planning practices and describe the rationale for, and significance of, the study in relationship to my own experience as a local government manager and scholar.

**Ordinary Democracy and Communication Design**

In this study I adopt Tracy’s (2010) articulation of *ordinary democracy* as the situated and observable interactions that typically occur in “local-level representative groups” (p. 4). Alternative public participation strategies are always designed in relationship to understandings about ordinary democracy and its limitations, and these understandings are neither neutral nor objective. They are formed in specific ways over time and they open up and close off possibilities for particular actions. For example, when I typed “what is wrong with American Democracy?” into the Google search engine on October 3, 2011, I found that search results from the first two pages represented a wide range of perspectives posted by citizen bloggers, scholars, and journalists. Posts generally argued that American democracy is being eroded by at least one of the following problems:
1. Poor voter turnout
2. Too much delegation to state and/or federal lawmakers
3. Excessive corporate influence over lawmakers and their policy decisions
4. Too much emphasis on ‘voting’ rather than a variety of participation forms
5. Insufficient citizen knowledge—often influenced by irresponsible or self-interested media
6. Extreme partisan conflict and/or wrong-headed partisan perspectives
7. Individual apathy
8. Excessive individual or narrow demographic self-interest

In a number of cases, bloggers called upon their fellow citizens to address perceived problems of American democracy. In each case, everyday assumptions—or theories—about democracy, and about the problems of democracy, shaped corresponding ideas about the nature of public participation and ideal communication. For example, these two women engaged in debate about public participation practices based on different assumptions about how democracy does and should work:

To the Editor: I have read a couple of letters to the editor recently from people who complain. I only have one thing I am tired of, and that is complaining … The majority in the United States have voted and their votes determine the rules. A few people believe their opinions should outweigh the majority. If you want to change the way things are done, do it through your congressmen. Write letters to those who make the decisions. Make your voice heard through the proper channels rather than complaining and trying to impose your opinions on the majority. Go to the polls and vote for people who you believe will see your side.
To Shirley: As for effecting change in our current political system by writing letters to our elected representatives or by voting for people who will actually represent our views, gimmee a fuckin' break, Pollyanna. It costs a lot of money to get elected to public office, and our office-holders are responsive to the interests of their donors, not their constituents. I hate to complain, but whenever I write a letter to either of my senators, I get a polite response thanking me for my input and explaining why I am wrong. So much for representative democracy.

Dissent—or as you call it, complaining—is the foundation of any healthy democratic system, as the citizens in a democracy share a responsibility for keeping their government in line. The fact that most Americans see democracy as nothing more than voting and occasional letter-writing is precisely what is wrong with American democracy. - Megan, Norfolk (Megan, Msg. 2, 2006)

The above authors draw on radically different discourses to articulate the nature of democracy and its problems. The first post articulates ideal democracy as the expression of individual opinion and a formal representative structure. There are proper channels for dissent but, once votes are taken, citizens should consent to the will of the majority. The problems of U.S. democracy are therefore problems with citizens who fail to perform, or to understand, their responsibilities. The second post characterizes ideal democracy as a responsibility shared by citizens and government. Dissent is critical to a “healthy democratic system” and this requires political leaders to take citizen concerns seriously. When these political leaders are more responsive to donors than they are to citizens, the problems of U.S. democracy are problems of power.
Scholars and journalists in this search sample appeared more likely to describe problems of American democracy as systemic or institutional problems of power removed from localized public participation processes. In many cases, the prognosis for improvement was bleak as demonstrated by the example below:

As I reflect on what is wrong with American democracy today, I keep coming to the conclusion that the flow of lobbyist money into the pockets of Democrats and Republicans alike is the root of the problem … My deepest concern about the American political system is that it cannot right itself. The buying and selling of Congress by special interests is too pervasive and too deep. (Gnikoski, 2010, ¶ 4) According to this professor of theology, the problems of American democracy are not so much problems of people as they are problems of money and institutional power. He expresses fear that the problems are “too pervasive and too deep” and implies that only major institutional changes will generate the kind of profound improvement that is needed.

Because people theorize democracy in distinct and often contradictory ways, they also design alternative public participation practices in relationship to differently understood problems. In their situated interactions with others, people draw on, alter, and contest a variety of already existing discourses about democracy to make sense of dilemmas and generate solutions. Therefore, new possibilities for action are always designed in relationship to particular problem articulations. For example, members of a city planning group might understand local government democracy as ‘a set of effectively functioning practices based on the rule of law’ or as ‘a charade that masks how decisions really get made’ or ‘a system that is inadequate for addressing problems in a globalized
world.’ Complex and multiple articulations of everyday democracy are constructed in practice, but always in reference to both situated experiences and larger socio-historical discourses—including scholarly discourses—about democracy and public participation. Practitioners and members of the public develop and test theories about democracy and public participation problems. Alternative public participation practices emerge out of interactive theorizing, and these practices, in turn, shape what our democracy looks like and how we come to communicate it.

I argue that studying changing public participation practices necessarily requires an exploration of the “from what” question. Scholars will be better positioned to examine alternative public participation practices if they start by studying how practitioners and publics communicate to problematize the current state of democracy they seek to enhance or replace. I agree with Rose’s (1999) claim that genealogies of government have the potential to help us reconstruct how particular articulations of problems shaped logics and tactics understood to be solutions:

If policies, arguments, analyses and prescriptions purport to provide answers, they do so only in relation to a set of questions. Their very status as answers is dependent upon the existence of such questions. If, for example imprisonment, marketization, community care are seen as answers, to what are they answers? And, in reconstructing the problematizations which accord them intelligibility as answers, these grounds become visible, their limits and presuppositions are opened for interrogation in new ways. (Rose, 1999, p. 59)

Which features of existing democracy are understood as problematic and why? To what extent are constructions of problems multiple and contested? Based on answers to these
questions, scholars can examine how particular assumptions about existing and ideal democracy shape and constrain the kinds of alternative public participation practices that emerge as viable or preferable in particular contexts.

**Overview of the Study**

This dissertation asks how participants in a long-term city planning process communicated to construct alternative public participation ideals and practices in relationship to their assumptions about ordinary democracy and a changing world. It also draws on communication and planning scholarship to examine the extent to which these new or revised communication design practices enabled—or constrained—participant efforts to involve publics in planning for a postmodern era. I aim to put scholarly theories in conversation with situated everyday theories about public participation and democracy. Since planning committee members from this case frequently engaged in metadiscourse (Craig & Muller, 2007) about their own communication design (Aakhus, 2007) I was able to construct a narrative about their ways of identifying, criticizing, and responding to ideas about relationships between democracy, public participation, and communication design. I also worked to identify broader meso- and macro-level discourses that participants drew on to narrate their process by tracing related events and evolving rationalities over time. Finally, I examined the telling of, and interpretation of, resident stories in order to say something about what purposeful storytelling accomplished in relationship to the perceived problems of public planning and democracy.

This dissertation represents stories within stories within a story. As a scholar, I have worked to render city planning process interactions intelligible to members of my academic disciplines as well as to practitioners and other city project participants. In
doing this, I recognize that my own narrative is historically contingent, and my own interpretations are shaped always by my experience as a scholar and a former local government manager born and raised in a small town not entirely unlike the city in this case. I have set out to tell the story of a group’s effort to use storytelling to enrich and supplement the city’s existing democratic practices. If readers experience parts of this narrative as confusing or disjointed, I’ve accomplished at least a small part of what I set out to do in writing this case. Stories and storytellers were not always consistent, decisions did not always make sense to me, and a variety of material and political exigencies interrupted what might have otherwise seemed like a coherent chain of events.

In this chapter, I begin with a discussion of theoretical and practical context and then provide a brief history of local planning and my introduction to the research site. In Chapter Two, I trace changing scholarly perspectives on public participation associated with the postmodern perspective and argue that these perspectives do not necessarily reflect everyday theories about public participation and democracy. I call for more empirical study of how planning practitioners and members of the public actually communicate to understand limitations of ordinary democracy and design alternative public participation practices. In Chapter Three, I articulate the appropriate context for this type of study and describe my specific research site in further detail. In Chapter Four, I outline my scholarly commitments and data collection methods along with a method of analysis. In Chapters Five through Nine I analyze data from three phases of the research site visioning process. Chapter Five focuses on how micro-, meso-, and macro-discourses articulated the problems of planning to construct competing city narratives. Chapter Six examines how site participant talk and meso- and macro-level discourses intersected to
articulate or reinforce different assumptions about the limitations of ordinary democracy. Chapters Seven, Eight, and Nine trace how changing and intersecting discourses about planning, public participation, and democracy shaped the planning group’s communication design practices. Finally, in Chapter Ten, I present overall findings and theoretical and practical implications, along with recommendations for future research. In the section below I provide some historical background on the relationship between democracy and public planning and further explain the aims of this study.

**Planning and Public Participation**

I can trace my earliest recollections of public planning back to my father’s rants about planning commission meetings. When I was 11 or 12 years old my father became a planning commissioner for our small northern California town. At the time, I didn’t understand much about my father’s work with the planning commission. I had no inkling that I would later become involved in implementing and studying city planning practices. I just knew that my father frequently came home grumpy on commission night. He would stomp around the house and complain about people whom he said didn’t know what they were doing, about people who shouldn’t have been doing what they were doing, and about his general inability to influence either. I quickly learned to stay out of his way on planning commission nights. He used unfamiliar words, often seeming to speak in code (amusing only in retrospect), and rarely described his activities with the enthusiasm he reserved for contentious school board meetings.

Recently, I asked my father to describe his work with the planning commission in more detail. What was the primary role of the planning commission? Did they work with specific goals or expectations? Were they responsible for involving the public in making
planning decisions? He said it would be fairest to say that the commission worked as a “screening committee” for the City Council, handling issues like zoning exceptions and lot splits on a case-by-case basis and making basic environmental enforcement recommendations. At that time, state and federal environmental regulations began to require more complex forms of development compliance. My father’s description validated some of my childhood memories of his post-meeting exasperation:

During the first year, meetings were sort of a joke. We each received an agenda and information packet two days before our bi-monthly meetings. We were, of course, expected to review all documentation in the packet and to complete whatever due diligence research was necessary to handle each particular lot split, boundary easement, etc. If I remember correctly we had a five-member commission. Two never ever looked at their packets, let alone do the research, and the old gentleman who sat next to me usually slept during the entire meeting. Each citizen on the agenda wishing some action from the Commission would come up and plead their case. We would question them on some detail or another just to show we knew what we were doing and then give a thumbs up or down on the petition. If the filer did not approve of our ruling, their next step would be to take the petition and our ruling to the City Council for review. In most cases, the City Council would overrule our decision and the petitioner went away happy. As sort of volunteers, we found it very hard to keep up with the stacks of material from the State and Feds that we received. There was no such thing as formal training. (A.M., personal communication, August 24, 2011)
I also asked my father about his experience with members of the public and various organizational stakeholders who interacted with the commission. He described how a series of changes and a proposed development project galvanized particular publics to action:

During my second year on the commission, things began to change rapidly. Due to problems with wastewater disposal, a meager tax base and a sudden explosion of large instant community development, we got hit with a gigantic development plan for a gated golf course community. Our City Manager at that time was definitely in bed with the developer and pushing for everything to get pushed through the planning commission with little or no opposition so that all the City Council would have to do was rubber stamp it. It certainly did not work out that way. Before we even got a look at the preliminary planning document, a very vocal portion of the community had been organized to block the development. It was a big project with many many issues primarily in the environmental areas. With very loud and large public input, we were forced to suddenly do our homework and of course we found many problems with the preliminary plans. Eventually we came to the realization that the City Management was trying very hard to push this preliminary plan through without having to require an EIR (Environmental Impact Report). A finding by us for 'need' was something the City Council could not overrule for some esoteric reason. To make a long story short, having many raucous and late meetings, we voted to require that the developer have an EIR prepared. The final result after two and a half years of
fighting, was that the project was rejected by the Commission and eventually by
the City Council. (A.M., personal communication, August 24, 2011)

In many ways, my father’s story about a proposed—and defeated—land use
development project characterizes the kind of public meeting process that Tracy (2010)
described as “a staple of U.S. democracy” (p. 2). A commission of appointees developed
advisory recommendations, elected officials gathered with citizens to talk about the issue
at hand, and finally, after much talk, the elected officials voted to reject the proposed
development. This is a story of democracy at work, but, as with all stories, it can be read
in many different ways and on different levels. For example, some readers may
understand this as a David and Goliath story—a story in which the public wins out in the
face of big money interests. It may be my experience as a local government administrator
that leads me to read this story as indicative of increasingly piece-meal planning
approaches to rapid changes that span social and geographic regions. I notice how a
decreasing tax base, associated with new California taxation legislation, motivated city
leaders to respond more positively to new developments. I notice how wastewater
disposal problems, associated with new environmental findings and regulations,
positioned a golf course as a viable environmental solution. I see potential conflicts of
interest involving elected officials and developers, and I see emerging tensions between
public planning experts, well-financed developers, and increasingly perplexed and
demanding publics.

**Ordinary Democracy**

In her study of how *ordinary democracy* is enacted by citizens, public
administrators, and political leaders in school governance, Tracy (2010) argued that
“democracy on the ground is remarkable” despite the fact that it is always “a flawed enactment of an ideal” (p. 2). I value Tracy’s emphasis on ordinary democracy, which she described as attending to the local and the observable rather than a normative ideal—it is something that “can be seen and heard” (p. 3). Ordinary democracy is “what happens in the most commonly occurring government format” (p. 4). It is “what occurs in local-level representative groups” (p. 4). I also concur with Tracy’s argument that public meeting talk simultaneously shapes decisions and the nature of actual democracy. What intrigues me most however, is what happens when public administrators, public officials, and publics decide that the existing sites or practices of ordinary democracy are insufficient to meet the needs and concerns of publics. Tracy argued that “public meetings are democracy’s litmus test” (p. 6). What does it mean when no one shows up to public planning meetings? What can we assume when public talk is not taken seriously by public planners and elected officials? Planning, like school governance, has long been characterized by its ‘localness’. Yet, now planning is arguably at once local and global. What happens when local public meeting talk is viewed as insufficient for addressing complex and rapidly changing issues that span geographic regions?

To understand the ordinary democracy that Tracy (2010) described, we also need to investigate how local government boards, public administrators, and publics communicate to construct and respond to perceived limitations of ordinary democracy. My first purpose in this dissertation is to provide a description of public meeting and event talk in one community, as its citizens, planners, project partners, and public officials seek to supplement or improve ordinary democracy in relationship to perceived public planning challenges. My second purpose is to draw on communication and
planning scholarship to examine the extent to which this community’s alternative
communication design practices enable, or constrain, meaningful responses to the public
planning challenges they perceive. This is important because it will (a) support, enhance,
or challenge existing theories about public participation, and (b) it will provide some
practical insight about the relationship between discourse, communication design, and
democracy for planning practitioners and members of the public.

**Public Participation and Experimentation in Local Public Planning**

For the past two decades, local public planning has been the subject of much
experimentation across the U.S. A variety of projects have sought to increase public
involvement in planning for future development. Intertwined material and social changes
have reshaped broader discourses about governance, and spurred scholars and
practitioners to develop new understandings of publics, public problems, and ideal public
participation practices. According to Kettl (2000), government has been transformed
incrementally and quietly in response to both globalization and devolution. Areas of
policy and administration that used to be domestic now span complex multinational
networks while, in the United States, local and state governments have more
responsibility for managing planning activities and services. Today, the state is no longer
the primary actor related to public interests. New private, non-profit, and network-based
approaches to governance have reshaped, repositioned, and in some cases effectively
eliminated publics. In the U.S., many states have come to rely on regional networks of
private and non-profit sector organizations and experts to manage resource issues that are
now considered too broad or complex to be handled by an individual neighborhood, city,
or county. Development decisions impacting critical issues such as employment,
transportation options, and environmental resource management are often made at local or regional levels, yet complex organizational networks function in ways that often make them invisible or indecipherable to many members of the public. Local services such as children’s health, fire protection, vector-control, recreation, power, and water are often coordinated and implemented by a variety of specialized and geographically dispersed organizations.

Some scholars have optimistically predicted new forms of participation and collaboration. For example, Gray (1989) posited that inter-organizational collaboration has emerged as a favored strategy for representing public stakeholder interests and addressing complex problems based on a number of factors, including: (a) increasing global interdependence; (b) blurred boundaries—especially between private and public sector activities; (c) economic and technological changes; and (d) perceptions that current legal approaches to problems are inadequate. Other scholars have argued that changes associated with globalization will have an increasingly detrimental effect on public participation. For example, Stivers (2008) argued that a previous trend to make government more accessible to citizens now faces challenges related to “devolution, privatization, networks, and markets” (p. 104). According to Stivers, these societal configurations emphasize performance at the cost of public participation and democratic decision-making.

**Personal Experience with Local Public Planning**

In the context of these societal changes—and fifteen years after my father’s experience on a local planning commission—I began my own work with local public planning. With nearly a decade of higher education and administrative practice behind
me. I returned to my home county to coordinate a comprehensive community assessment and planning project. I was hired by a consortium of nonprofit and government service providers, and the project was funded by several nonprofit organizations, including a major health endowment. We were one of many communities across the nation charged with involving the public in assessing current community conditions and making planning recommendations across a number of areas, including public health, land use development, public safety, recreation, and education. For more than a year I worked with community partners, interns, project staff, and volunteers to conduct surveys, focus groups, and planning meetings. We used a ‘train-the-trainer’ model and partnered with nearly two-dozen community members to conduct public events and meetings. We reviewed and shared scholarly and practitioner theories about public participation strategies, and worked to make changes based on ‘best practices’ throughout the project.

We met with children, high school students, parents, and seniors to ask them about their experiences, concerns, and hopes for the future. We worked to involve local political leaders and public agency staff in these sessions, and we asked all participants to tell stories, complete surveys, draw pictures, and prioritize potential community development projects. Our levels of involvement were notable, particularly in those geographic and demographic areas described as “traditionally underserved” by local organizations and funding agencies. We learned that some of the community’s poorest families lacked dependable electricity and mistrusted local law enforcement officers. Children in one of the most rural and low-income regions drew pictures of swings and slides that they knew children in other parts of the county had access to. Within weeks, three pieces of older playground equipment miraculously appeared in an unused lot. I
would find out months later that a probation officer and a law enforcement administrator had worked with local parents to reallocate this equipment ‘after hours.’ County planning staff pointed out that the equipment—and the placement of the equipment—violated several county codes, but no one took steps to remove the unsanctioned playground.

We also found that many county residents were concerned about increasing costs associated with a new boom in high-end developments supported by wealthy Silicon Valley retirees. In response to rapidly escalating real estate values, many older residents living on fixed-incomes were forced to move further and further up into the mountains and away from basic services and medical facilities. These were much thornier issues as they involved regional, state, and even national shifts in economic development and population migration. I began to gain new insight into how increasing interdependence and change characterized local policy and planning efforts. At times I became overwhelmed and depressed by the magnitude and complexity of community planning problems. Nevertheless, we eventually received accolades at statewide conferences for our high levels of public engagement. Project partners helped to distribute the final assessment and planning report to project participants, government leaders, agency staff, local schools, churches, and businesses. We printed a summary of findings and priorities in our local newspaper and posted them in town halls, laundromats, hair salons, and post offices throughout the county.

Fast-forward three years and I was about to discover that our community assessment project would have very little impact on comprehensive county planning. As Deputy County Administrative Officer, I was asked to prepare a proposal for involving the public in developing the county’s required twenty-year comprehensive plan. At the
time, I had a general sense of what comprehensive planning entailed, but I was relatively unfamiliar with specific requirements or traditional approaches to meeting those requirements. Over time I came to learn that comprehensive planning—also referred to in some regions of the U.S. as general planning or master planning—is a process by which a community works to identify community goals and priorities in an effort to guide or direct future development activity. The outcome of this process is a comprehensive or master plan that outlines public policy related to areas such as land use, housing, transportation, and recreation over a relatively long period of time. Fulton (1999) noted that since comprehensive plans have emerged as stronger policy documents, “both communities and the courts have come to demand a higher standard of technical analysis” (pg. 118).

Many elements of a comprehensive plan also involve cross-jurisdictional issues such as air and water quality concerns, transportation needs, and economic development opportunities that span county, city, and special district borders. The International City/County Management Association (ICMA) emphasized the inter-organizational collaboration required as a part of any successful comprehensive planning process: “even a small, remote city or rural county spends a great deal of time working with state and federal governments, rural councils, and local organizations in order to increase development, regulatory compliance, and grants-in-aid” (Newell, 2004, p. 181). Fulton (1999) described comprehensive planning as a complex—and often paradoxical—balancing act for local government managers. He argued that an effective general planning process would incorporate citizen feedback as well as data on fiscal conditions, infrastructure, natural resources, and community demographics. ICMA (Newell, 2004)
described this planning process as a daunting act of coordination that involves acknowledging physical, geographic, and economic interdependencies without losing sight of community ideals:

Coordinating jurisdictions’ master plans so that artificial boundaries do not hinder regional planning is a major task. Coordinated local planning that receives adequate funding, that expands and combines comprehensive planning with strategic and contingency planning to include social and environmental issues, and that unites economic development and managed growth with other planning activities is a tremendous asset for the local government manager.

Another major task is making sure that community plans are based in economic reality. Plans should express the community’s ideals—for example, smart growth and limited sprawl—but they must also take into account the market environment. A plan that ignores market realities is not likely to succeed. (p. 85)

Most comprehensive planning resources encourage the adoption of a planning process that attends to both localized interests and long-term resource and population trends. Transportation, conservation, and economic planning elements are particularly reliant on shared regional goals. If one city or county emphasizes open space and low-density development while an adjacent community incorporates major commercial development plans, the interaction between regional circulation, environmental concerns, and noise elements may become problematic.
I also discovered that comprehensive plans were costly undertakings. According to Fulton (1999), a comprehensive or general plan revision completed in the 1990s was likely to take two to three years and cost at least $200,000 to $300,000. Given the costly and challenging nature of this undertaking, the ICMA recommended that local government managers assess their resources in the following areas prior to engaging in a general planning process: (a) “human resources capabilities—the right people at the right place with the right skills;” (b) “technology”; (c) “organizational elements—adequate resources;” and (d) “interfacing elements—public support, interorganizational networks, open communication channels” (Newell, 2004, p. 113). I suspected this cautionary advice only provoked anxiety in those communities where comprehensive planning was required and regulated via state legislation.

In the midst of our early work to map out a public participation process, I began to encounter overt attempts by developers to control procedural and substantive outcomes. I received several early calls from developers asking for a preview of public participation activities and dates. On one occasion, an individual representing a well-known national development company called to ask me how much it would cost to “win a Board of Supervisor’s seat in our county.” I had to ask him to repeat his question. I finally realized that he was asking how much it would cost for his firm to bankroll a successful candidate in the upcoming county election. Local government administrators from several other California counties would later tell me this was a relatively common practice. I began to see that increasingly seamless relationships between candidates or elected incumbents and special interest groups had begun to distort public comprehensive planning processes. Our board members were being petitioned by powerful special interests on a daily
basis—they, in turn, wanted to make sure that we would provide seats at the planning
table for these constituents. In addition, some of these private developers had previously
provided services to the County on a contractual basis. Although these service providers
were locally based, they were also less clearly connected to a system of governance or
participation than the government boards and agencies.

Over time, I realized these kinds of complex public-private relationships were
evolving rapidly at local, regional, and national levels. As local government has become
increasingly fragmented, boundaries between democratic governance bodies and private
service providers have become blurred. Professor and former presidential advisor,
Chester A. Newland, stated that the turn to *reinventing government* in the 1990s and early
2000s was really more about “disguising government” in that it did not actually reduce
government expenditures, but redirected an increasing percentage of government funds to
nonprofit, private, special district, and religious service providers (personal
communication, November 25, 2008). Democratic practices have also been transformed
in relationship to private sector interests and identities. Corporations play a growing role
in shaping life choices, impacting our environment, and channeling government funds,
yet they are rarely envisioned as a part of our larger democratic process (Deetz, 1992).

Over the course of several months it became increasingly clear that our prior
community planning effort had not attended to the existing democratic practices—or
*ordinary democracy* (Tracy, 2010)—in our county. Comprehensive planning committee
members were selected by the board of supervisors, and these representatives rarely
referred to prior community planning documents. Most often, these references were used
to impugn other participants for their lack of commitment to a particular public or public
interest. Publics were used as resources in a highly politicized battle between special interest groups, and there was no clear way for the diversity of public experiences to be integrated into the comprehensive planning process. Later, I would find my frustrations echoed in work by scholars like Young (1996) and Tracy (2010). Tracy identified a disconnect between idealized public participation practices and existing representative processes as highly problematic: “ideals that fail to take account of the complexities of actual democratic processes do a disservice to ordinary democracy’s actors” (p. 198). As a local government practitioner, I saw how public participation ideals might serve as the impetus for processes that paralleled rather than complimented existing local government practices.

I left my position with the county after the first phase of the comprehensive planning process, deeply disillusioned with local government planning activities. I had learned a great deal about planning and public participation, but I felt unable to make sense of these lessons in a meaningful or productive manner. It wasn’t until I began a doctoral program several years later that I had a chance to revisit public planning processes—and my experiences with them—in new ways. I became committed to studying how actual publics might be more meaningfully engaged in enhancing existing democratic practices. Below I provide a brief historical overview of how U.S. public planning processes have developed and changed during the past century to provide a more complete framework for studying the relationship between ordinary democracy and efforts to supplement or enhance existing democratic practices. I contend that any effort to understand these emerging practices should also attend to how these efforts are situated in a rapidly changing world.
A Brief History of Local Public Planning in the U.S.

New global interdependencies and emerging technological possibilities are reshaping the ways that people think about planning. Kettl (2000) suggested that globalization is about much more than an expanding global marketplace: “it includes political, technological, and cultural forces. It is more than a description—it is an ideology that defines basic expectations about the roles and behaviors of individuals and institutions” (p. 488). It is within this context that I examine city planning as an example of changing approaches to democracy and public participation practices.

Municipal planning in the U.S. has long been characterized by a series of seemingly polarized tensions, including: (a) local versus regional planning, (b) specificity versus flexibility, and (c) expert control versus highly participatory processes. During the early Twentieth Century, planners debated the extent to which free markets should direct planning decisions. Many planners viewed coordinated city, regional, state, or national planning efforts as unnecessarily intrusive. Eventually, however, arguments on behalf of more coordinated planning practices won out on the basis of improved functionality and design. Members of the progressive movement frequently argued that the consequences of planning action—and the potential for external effects on publics—made planning critical to healthy communities (Klosterman, 2003). Institutionalized planning was also undertaken in response to major social changes such as immigration, expanded manufacturing, and a rapidly changing built environment. Modernist approaches assumed that municipalities could be improved—even perfected—through logical and technically skilled planning approaches (Beauregard, 2003). Beauregard described tensions between planning and democracy, arguing that planners were generally expected to tame social
problems by ensuring that knowledge and planning preceded any decisions and actions by publics. This modernist perspective left little room for uncertainty, change, or chaos and it assumed that: “public interest would be revealed through a scientific understanding of the organic logic of society” (p. 114).

The modernist approach to planning faced significant challenges beginning in the 1970s and 1980s when, according to Harvey (in Castree & Gregory, 2006), factors associated with globalization and postmodernity would contribute to new perspectives on planning. Planning scholars and practitioners began to acknowledge uncertainty and chaos, question the nature of expertise, and explore issues of power and new forms of citizen engagement. Political and scholarly activities during the 1960s and 1970s led some planning and policy scholars to adopt social constructionist perspectives on public(s) and public participation in the public policy and planning disciplines. deLeon (1988) argued that political and scholarly miscalculations about the Vietnam war raised serious questions about reliance on rational analytical expertise and the absence of public participation related to the ethical dimensions of war. Difficult questions about the faith in rationality contributed to post-positivist perspectives that reaffirmed “the ‘human’ aspects of policy and an expanded set of participants” (deLeon, 1988, p. 112). New policy and public participation approaches were also heavily influenced by the linguistic turn and especially by critical European scholarly work. From this perspective, social and political life was viewed as “embedded in a web of social meanings produced and reproduced through discursive practices” (Fischer, 2003, p. 12). As postmodern and critical scholarship began to emerge in certain parts of the policy and planning disciplines, the idea that reality is socially constructed began to reshape perspectives about publics.
and public participation. Both publics and the State began to take on new connotations for these scholars.

Fischer (2003) and Forester (1993) have generated some of the best-known scholarship that attends to planning as a discursive practice. They suggest that planning is a critical site of social and material production and reproduction of particular ideologies and social inequities since planning is an activity that actively constitutes our future. Both of these scholars have set about to: (a) address current cynicism about public participation and public capacity in planning processes, (b) take a communicative approach to studying public planning processes, (c) fuse critical and pragmatic approaches, and (d) explore the everyday practices of planning practitioners as they contribute to taken-for-granted power relations and normative planning practices. Forester has examined how the practices of planners subtly—and often unintentionally—shape public agendas and direct public decision-making.

Beauregard (2003) argued that U.S. planning is now “suspended between modernity and postmodernity” (p. 109). The belief in a universal planning logic or utopian city model has largely disintegrated, but it is still unclear what theories and practices might come to constitute a more postmodern form of public planning. Beauregard advised planners to focus on the situated and partisan nature of city-building and work to mediate “between capital, labor, and the state” (p. 120). Since major public planning questions are now understood to require more than technical expertise, he also urged planners to engage fully with publics in exploring contentious choices: “It is increasingly obvious that a ‘conflict-free’ public interest is not viable” (p. 117). Davidoff (2003) argued that future forms of planning should openly invite “political and social
values to be examined and debated” (p. 210). It remains less than clear, however, what new communication design this more participatory and contentious planning would require. Ultimately, planners will be called upon to make choices and act even in the face of great ambiguity. It is in this changing and uncertain context that many cities are working to design and implement more engaging and inclusive community planning processes.

**Integrating Public Planning Theory and Practice**

During my second year of doctoral work, I took both communication and public policy courses focused on public participation and everyday democracy. I also participated in a university-wide initiative designed to engage citizens in climate change discussions. In my communication courses I began to learn about a range of idealized public participation theories. Although conceptually appealing, I found that these idealized models generally failed to account for the complexity and diversity of interactions and interests I had witnessed in my local government work and in campus climate change meetings. Many of these models effectively assumed away—or bracketed out—material and temporal factors, human emotion, actual power dynamics, and the relevance of situated public participation ideals and practices. For example, Habermas’s emphasis on generalizable arguments neglected the diversity of publics and the particular and partisan nature of public interests (Hauser, 1999), while Foucault’s emphasis on socio-historical systems neglected actual micro-communicative interactions (Fischer, 2003). Alternatively, in my public policy classes I found that ‘best practice’ public participation strategies acknowledged existing practices more fully, but failed to interrogate a priori assumptions about publics or public participation. These courses
tended to favor the interests and concerns of the public manager, and this often amounted to identifying ways that public managers could reduce public conflict while increasing the efficiency of decision-making and service provision. Publics were frequently described as fickle and monolithic entities that needed to be appropriately educated or pacified.

During this period, I struggled to figure out how to integrate theoretical models, best practices, and my own experiences in my research approach. I wanted to foreground publics and public participation without neglecting the influential nature of planning practices and the centrality of existing representative processes. I intended to study intentional public participation practices, but with the assumption that even these intentional practices involved taken-for-granted—and potentially problematic—assumptions about publics and public participation. I had adopted certain postmodern commitments and I struggled to find ground from which to justify my own normative assumptions. In retrospect, I believe it was my commitment to actual publics that led me to accept an invitation to participate in a city planning process in this early—and befuddling—stage of my doctoral program. A fellow participant in a campus climate change program, familiar with my local government experience, asked me to consider serving as a participant observer in the City of Golden, Colorado’s community visioning process. I expressed some apprehension given my prior frustrations with local government planning, but she assured me that Golden’s city leaders and planners were actively involved in the project. She said they were dedicated to increasing public involvement and integrating the project with their comprehensive planning process. The project would be supported, in part, by the Orton Family Foundation, a relatively well-
known foundation committed to promoting and facilitating alternative approaches to public planning in small and rapidly changing communities. I was both excited and conflicted about this emerging opportunity. I viewed it as a chance to return to public planning with new insights and a different role, but I was also afraid my discomfort with public participation theories would be intensified by immersion in a messy, situated project. Nevertheless, I decided to meet with city and foundation representatives.

**A Case of Matchmaking: Meeting My Research Site**

In my initial meeting with the City of Golden’s planning process coordinator I learned that a number of city planning staff and public officials were frustrated with the city’s current comprehensive plan. In 2008, this frustration had culminated in Golden’s successful application to become an Orton Family Foundation ‘Heart & Soul’ project town. This partnership would involve an ambitious and emergent visioning process designed to engage a broader cross-section of the public in directing future growth and development. Founded in 1995 by Lyman Orton and Noel Fritzinger, the Orton Family Foundation (Orton) is dedicated to helping small towns engage their citizens in directing “the forces of growth and change” (Orton Family Foundation, 2011a, ¶ 13), in an effort to protect their most cherished and unique features. Orton is based out of New England, but they also support project towns in Colorado and Idaho. According to the foundation’s website, the Heart & Soul approach is aligned with, and reliant on a larger social movement dedicated to making planning more accessible and relevant to publics:

The Heart & Soul approach builds on innovative efforts in many disciplines across the country and around the world, including: values-based planning; consensus building; participatory democracy; citizen engagement; appreciative
inquiry; community development; grassroots sustainability and buy-local movements; digital and other storytelling; the arts as a catalyst for citizen engagement and change; economic development; land conservation; “Smart Growth”; visualization; quality-of-life indicators; landscape design; historic preservation; applied GIS and other technologies. We acknowledge our many partners—known and unknown—for their groundbreaking work. (Orton Family Foundation, 2011a, ¶ 15)

This mission is consistent with late Twentieth Century planning scholarship that called on the planning profession to “build on new and expanded conceptions of the public interest, information, and political action” (Klosterman, 2003). Once viewed as an objective, value neutral science, planning is increasingly conceptualized as complex, chaotic, and constituted by powerful interests. Orton is, in many ways, seeking to help local communities navigate these changing conceptions of planning—and of Twenty-first Century life in changing communities.

Golden was selected as one of four project towns of its type. Other Heart & Soul project towns were selected in Idaho and Maine. A consultant representing Orton told me that the foundation’s goal was to build a nationwide network or movement that would change the face of community planning (A. R., personal communication, May 7, 2009). Golden represented the only Heart & Soul project to be facilitated by city staff and integrated directly with existing city planning practices. Heart & Soul towns would emphasize storytelling to engage diverse community participants in sharing their experiences and envisioning future city developments. Foundation staff talked enthusiastically about experimenting with new communication tools to assist
communities in dealing with rapid change and uncertainty. Foundation representatives and city participants frequently described the visioning process as a relatively open-ended ‘work in progress.’ I was particularly intrigued by the project’s commitment to integrate existing representative planning practices with new public participation strategies.

Planning decisions in Golden had typically been facilitated by city staff in coordination with the planning commission. The existing comprehensive plan provided limited guidance for potentially contentious decision-making, and public input was gained through public hearings where projects were generally vetted on an individual basis. A planning commissioner contrasted a typical city planning meeting with the emerging ‘Heart & Soul’ approach:

The previous planning efforts we’ve had have been the commission chair sitting up at a table and making a few introductory remarks and staff saying a few things and then taking questions and comments … in the past when we’ve done planning or neighborhood planning it’s more narrowly focused so we kind of scope the issues what we want to talk about and get input … it was narrow scoping top-down. Tell us about what you want to see with a park or bike path or something. This [Heart & Soul process] seems to me more about broad or open-ended discussions with the citizen input. (S. R., personal communication, June 15, 2009)

The City of Golden’s planning process coordinator told me that the existing planning processes had resulted in a comprehensive plan that was far too vague: “it could be for any city USA” (W. S., personal communication, January 28, 2009). She said the city “wanted a vision that the whole community could stand behind.” In a later interview, the city’s planning and development director would tell me that the visioning process was
undertaken, in large part, as a remedy for what the city council “perceived to be a lack of fine grain policy to help them deal with the difficult type of land use decision” (N. G., personal communication, June 10, 2009). He expressed his own frustration with the perceived vagaries of the existing plan and the current land use process, telling me that it was difficult enough to try to deal with judicial issues in a public hearing, but “totally crazy to try to make policy decisions in the context of public hearings only.”

In Colorado, cities and counties are provided more flexibility in determining the substantive elements of their comprehensive plans than are municipalities in states like California where regulations are more detailed and restrictive:

Cities and counties are *authorized* to prepare comprehensive plans as a long-range guiding document for a community to achieve their vision and goals. The comprehensive plan (or master plan) provides the framework for regulatory tools like zoning, subdivision regulations, annexations, and other policies. A comprehensive plan promotes the community's vision, goals, objectives, and policies; establishes a process for orderly growth and development; addresses both current and long-term needs; and provides for a balance between the natural and built environment … Elements addressed in a comprehensive plan may include: recreation and tourism (required by C.R.S.), transportation, land use, economic development, affordable housing, environment, parks and open space, historic and cultural preservation, capital improvements, efficiency in government, sustainability, energy, and urban design. (Colorado Department of Local Affairs, 2011, ¶ 1) (emphasis added)
A high degree of planning flexibility may encourage organizational adaptation, but it also leaves city and county administrators and public officials with less explicit guidance in navigating difficult public policy issues on a case-by-case basis. More explicit state parameters may also be replaced by organizational isomorphism (Greenwald, 2008) whereby communities mimic each other’s planning documents or planning processes over time. Several public officials and planning department representatives in Golden expressed a desire for a more ‘personalized’ or ‘customized’ comprehensive plan. They described increasingly complex and rapid development pressures, and said they viewed an inclusive visioning process as a way to seek direction from community members in advance of vetting difficult policy questions. Multiple planning department representatives and planning commissioners also expressed hope that a visioning process would provide citizens a chance to learn about and discuss longer-term issues prior to formal public hearings. This interest is clearly captured in an early interview with a Golden planning commissioner:

In terms of future changes I’m just hoping that the vision itself will give us a better framework for discussing some of those big picture questions … by the time you introduce a preliminary plan and a site plan and you’re starting to show pictures of what a building or a building’s program may look like it’s very easy for people to latch on to certain details and concerns about like a building—that it’s too high or it’s too ugly and totally miss the bigger picture important questions about what the use of that land should be or what are the things we should be doing. And so it can be hard. The planning process it doesn’t always lend itself
to talking about bigger picture issues. It’s very easy for people to get
down in the weeds and not like a particular project because of some other
aspect of a building or a site plan or something else … a lot of those
bigger picture discussions by the time they get to planning commission a
lot of those other decisions you know that ship has sailed. (S. R.,
personal communication, June 15, 2009)

A number of Golden planning staff and public officials also told me they hoped a more
detailed planning document would minimize the impact of special development interests.
Planning department representatives repeatedly described situations in which their
technical recommendations were insufficient to overturn, or mitigate the effects of,
poorly planned but well-funded development projects. This experience is consistent with
scholarly findings that economic interests currently dictate the direction of much local
planning. In addition, new private-public partnerships have begun to remove planning
politics from public view (Beauregard, 2003), and highly mobile populations and
economies defy the boundaries of local planning (in Castree & Gregory, 2006).

In our first meeting, Golden’s planning process coordinator stressed the city’s
interest in motivating a diverse community population to share their experiences and
values. She described how previous citizen engagement efforts had been more focused on
disseminating information or seeking buy-in than listening to and engaging the public in
planning for future development. This consultative approach towards public participation
is echoed in recommendations from the Colorado Department of Local Affairs
Community Development Office (2011):
Citizen participation helps to guide the planning commission in making decisions and in promoting community understanding of planning needs and issues. At least one public hearing will be held by the planning commission and by the legislative body before the plan is adopted. To generate support, understanding, and active participation in planning, however, more community involvement is usually needed. Citizens who are not well informed can present obstacles to the implementation of the plan by rejecting bylaws and by not supporting or participating in local programs. (p. 2)

Despite increased attention to public participation in planning over the past two to three decades, many instances of actual participation have been relatively perfunctory or late in the development process. Davidoff (2003) argued that even recent efforts to increase citizen participation in cities typically position citizens so they are more often “reacting to agency programs than proposing their concepts of appropriate goals and future actions” (p. 216).

Representatives from Golden and Orton expressed an interest in involving citizens early in the comprehensive planning process as active contributors. All participants would be urged to share stories and identify and prioritize values to help drive future development decisions. It was unclear how these values would ultimately come to shape a comprehensive plan, but the planning process coordinator said she believed grappling with that question was a part of the “Heart and Soul work in progress” (W. S., personal communication, January 28, 2009). Orton consultants also told me they were scouring the nation and meeting with scholars to identify best practices for moving from individual stories to community values, and for incorporating these values into a comprehensive
plan. A number of planning scholars have underlined the difficulties associated with moving from a participatory process to a final comprehensive plan. MacCallum (2008) pointed out that the activity of moving from process to product is not just a technical, but also an ideological act, and Eckstein and Trogmorton (2003) argued that “urban planner-authors do not typically reveal how they convert community stories into a single plan or persuasive story” (p. 5).

The planning and development director noted that the city council was interested in “a very big push for transparency and inclusivity,” and he pondered whether this push was designed to increase planning effectiveness or “increase the happiness factor in the community” (N. G., personal communication, June 10, 2009). The planning process coordinator also explained how important it would be to try to keep residents “where they want to live” and “keep everybody happy” (W. S., personal communication, January 28, 2009). From an early point in my involvement with Golden’s planning project I began to notice the frequency with which city planners and other project participants talked about public happiness and satisfaction as primary goals associated with the project and with planning practices in general. Dissatisfied and angry members of the public were identified as problematic—and often interpreted as a sign of failure on the part of elected officials or city administrators. Several public officials expressed a belief that a more inclusive planning process and a more customized plan would increase citizen satisfaction—and even happiness—with their future planning decisions. City planning staff was more likely to interpret citizen “nay-saying” as something to be expected given human nature or the nature of publics. Still, they tended to talk about citizen negativity as
something that might be overcome with thoughtful and inclusive public participation practices.

Uncertainty emerged as another central theme in my earliest conversations with Orton consultants, Golden planning representatives, and public officials. Orton characterized uncertainty as a deeply troubling feature of modern—or perhaps more appropriately—postmodern life:

Towns everywhere struggle to cope with rapid demographic, economic and land use changes, and many are losing what makes them special. Traditional planning processes aren’t enough to respond to a dizzying array of challenges and keep our towns from becoming soulless shells of communities. (Orton Family Foundation, 2011a, ¶ 3)

The foundation also argued that there is a mismatch between today’s public planning practices and an unstable, rapidly changing, and chaotic world. Current planning processes are neither nimble nor creative. They fail to involve a broad range of citizen experiences, and they are unable to keep pace with urban and corporate growth initiatives.

Early in the planning process I noticed that the Orton Heart & Soul approach was, itself, marked by the tension between modernity and postmodernity articulated by Beauregard (2003). The Orton vision eschews the change and uncertainty that threaten the community ‘heart & soul’ while advocating a conception of publics and public participation that is at once distinctly modern and postmodern. For example, Orton urges towns to engage diverse groups of citizens and recognize ‘the intangibles’ that make public life matter at the same time that they advocate the identification of ‘shared values’ and ‘consistent decisions’:
Land use planning in America has yet to engage a broad base of local citizens to help them define and shape the future of their communities. Traditional quantitative approaches use important data about demographic and economic shifts, traffic counts and infrastructure needs, but frequently fail to account for the particular ways people relate to their physical surroundings and ignore or discount the intangibles—shared values, beliefs and quirky customs—that make a community. (Orton Family Foundation, 2011a, ¶ 9)

The planning and development director spoke of uncertainty related to changing practices. He let me know that Golden’s new visioning approach would represent a worthwhile, but major, disruption to their “business as usual” approach: “it’s worth the effort. The ‘leap and the net will appear’ attitude that we have to have with this … the upside reward for the innovation is worth the risk of not always being able to explain exactly what we’re doing, and exactly what will come of it, and when.” He expressed both trepidation and enthusiasm about working with an outside organizational partner to develop and implement new strategies for engaging the public outside of the planning commission and city council review process: “this amount of delegation is unheard of, because control freaks are control freaks” (N. G., personal communication, June 10, 2009). A Golden planning commissioner said he welcomed a planning process that “has a life outside of a traditional planning commission project,” but he also expressed concern about whether the process would provide sufficient guidance for addressing rapid community change:

I’m a little concerned about what the final product will look like … Many of us on the planning commission have said for a number of years that although the last update to the comprehensive plan was only I don’t
know five or six years ago, so much has changed with the light rail and there’s new development and all sorts of things and I think there’s been a really huge demographic shift in town. (S. R., personal communication, June 15, 2009)

Orton consultants also expressed concern that city staff and public officials would resort to traditional practices in the face of an untested and emergent planning process: “it’s possible they are nervous about the uncertainty and fall back on the way things have been done in the past” (A. R., personal communication, 2009).

In 2003, Beauregard argued that “practitioners still cling to a modernist sensibility” (p. 119) and that it will be important for them to come to terms with a postmodern world. In the next chapter I provide a more detailed description of how public participation theories and scholarly understandings of publics have been transformed by postmodern thought, and particularly by new communicative understandings of the world. I argue, however, that most scholarly theories provide limited guidance for planning practitioners and public participants who struggle to fuse existing—and largely modern—practices of ordinary democracy with communication design for a more uncertain and interdependent world. New scholarly models of public planning seek to incorporate more flexible and postmodern understandings of planning, of publics, and of public participation in order to be more responsive to uncertainty, change, interdependence, and difference. We know much less about how actual publics, public administrators, and public officials interact to make sense of democracy in relationship to changing conditions and expectations.
CHAPTER II

CHANGING CONCEPTIONS OF ORDINARY DEMOCRACY AND PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

In the previous chapter I introduced changing conceptions of public planning practices, especially as they relate to public participation. I agreed with planning scholars who have suggested actual public planning practices are typically suspended between modern and postmodern perspectives on planning and on publics. In this chapter, I claim that much scholarly research on public participation in planning has moved to embrace more discursive approaches associated with a postmodern perspective. The linguistic turn, in particular, generated a new communicative perspective for theorizing publics. Although scholars interpret discursive approaches to organizing in distinctly different ways, they typically share the belief that organizations and communities are constituted through discourse (Fairhurst & Putnam, 2004). I argue, however, that it is too soon to conclude that scholarly assumptions about the discursive nature of organizing are indicative of—or have had a significant impact on—how practitioners and publics make sense of and enact democracy, public participation, and planning. I advance an argument for more empirical study of how planning practitioners and members of the public actually communicate to design and implement public participation practices, particularly those practices meant to supplement or enhance ordinary democracy (Tracy, 2010).

Below, I begin with a brief overview of more modern conceptions of publics and
public participation. Then I show how discursive approaches to organizing have allowed scholars to reconceptualize publics and public participation as partial, fluid, and contested. I contrast modern and discursive conceptions of these phenomena, and argue that these theoretical perspectives are descriptive of real tensions at work in the world, but that it is only through empirical research that these descriptions become truly meaningful. Finally, I articulate my own definition of public participation and explain how I have drawn on related theories as well as practical experiences to pose research questions that guide my empirical study.

**Modern Approaches to Theorizing Public Participation**

Modern scholarly approaches to public participation often rely on enlightenment notions of rationality and consensus. The public and the public sphere(s) are frequently described as already existing populations rather than continuously constructed social accomplishments, and much of the scholarship in this area has foregrounded the roles and perspectives of public managers. In many cases, *ideal* democratic practices are taken for granted so that only certain types of activities are described as falling within the public sphere and the purview of scholarly study. A number of modern theorists who adhere to positivist social science approaches have sought to distance themselves from issues deemed to be political in nature (Beuregard, 2003). Over time, these modern scholarly assumptions have served as a foundation for numerous idealized scholarly models of public participation. What is particularly important for this study is the possibility that such scholarly assumptions also shape and constrain situated public participation practices.
Most modern public participation theories are constructed in relationship to systems of representative democracy that emphasize the individual and her/his relationship to institutions and laws. The representative model owes a great deal to Hobbes’s work on institutional and legal authority. According to Hobbes, humans naturally pursue individual interests in an effort to reduce their own fear and anxiety—especially in the face of uncertainty. People only prevent constant battle by submitting to the authority of an absolute sovereign power embodied by legal institutions (in Stivers, 2008). Hobbes’s work positions people as directly accountable to a sovereign power rather than to each other. Public participation is about ensuring opportunities for individuals to protect their rights within a given legal framework—particularly their rights to property. These modern assumptions about individual interests have shaped public participation practices in important ways.

An emphasis on voting and public hearings suggests that public participation is an individual and expressive phenomenon rather than a process of ongoing social interaction. This emphasis on the individual has led to public opinion systems that recognize publics as already existing, and relatively stable, aggregates. According to Hauser (1999), such approaches downplay the extent to which publics and public judgments are formed through ongoing communicative processes: “The attempt to objectify and verify ‘the public’ through opinion polls reveals a misunderstanding of publics as technological constructs rather than as rhetorical phenomena” (p. 60). Numerous scholars have also claimed that representative models begin with a negative and narrow approach to citizen capacity and to freedom (Barber, 1984; Gould, 1988; Deetz, 1992; Stivers, 2008). Deetz
argued that “the emphasis has been on the freedom from the decisions of others rather than the freedom to participate in collective decisions (p. 155).

Habermas’s (1964/1974) conception of the public sphere and his approach to deliberative democracy continue to serve as a form of universal ideal for many scholars and even some practitioners (Flyvbjerg, 2001; Forester, 1993). His work stressed the importance of communication while also maintaining distinctly modern conceptions of the relationship between communication, power, and rationality. Habermas explained the public sphere as “a realm of our social life in which something approaching public opinion can be formed” (p. 49). He described this realm as an area where all individuals have an opportunity to meet together to discuss social problems and form a collective public entity. In this way, citizens are able to influence political decisions and action. Habermas clearly differentiated the private sphere from the sphere of public authority and argued that the public sphere provides the necessary mediation between civil society and the state. According to Habermas, public opinion formation associated with the public sphere connects the state with the needs of—and criticisms from—society.

Habermas pointed out that the public sphere should not be taken for granted since it emerged as a product of a particular set of bourgeois interests during the Eighteenth Century. The public sphere relies on public talk, and the idea of public participation has become central to most contemporary public sphere studies. According to this perspective, there are relatively clear boundaries between social spheres. Below I argue that questions about private and public sphere boundaries have become more prevalent and complex in a postmodern era.
A number of scholars have drawn on Habermas’s work to develop counterfactual models of public participation in an effort to improve or enhance existing democratic processes (Forester, 1993). Habermas (1964/1974) emphasized a procedural approach to establishing ethical public participation. He posited that: (a) discourse in the public sphere establishes the terms of legitimate public debate, (b) public deliberation should be guided by communicative rules, and (c) equitable deliberation requires that certain conditions be met. Habermas’s theory suggested that collective reasoning and argumentation processes could help people to develop a more unified approach to decision-making and associated action. This ideal speech situation is ensured by the validity and truth that he argued are possible when participants follow certain processual requirements of ‘discourse ethics’. These ethics included the following commitments: (1) no party potentially affected by a topic of discussion should be excluded, (2) all participants should be equally able to present and criticize claims, (3) participants must be willing and capable of empathizing with the claims put forward by others, (4) existing power differences should be neutralized to support consensus, and (5) all parties must openly articulate their goals and intentions (Forester, 1993; Flyvbjerg, 2001). Habermas effectively established rational tests or criteria that could be applied to judge claims.

In the end, for Habermas, the force of the better argument prevails. A number of scholars have argued that Habermas’s emphasis on the force of the better argument serves to exclude already marginalized members of society who effectively exist in multiple public spheres and may rely on other modes of communication or forms of knowledge (Fraser, 1990; Young, 1996). For example, particular groups such as women’s groups, minority groups, reform groups, and working class publics have often been
neglected by traditional conceptions of the public and common public participation practices. Recent efforts to incorporate storytelling and artistic expression into public planning processes are typically founded on similar assumptions (Eckstein & Throgmorton, 2003; Forester, 2003; Ganley, 2010). I argue that more empirical work needs to be conducted in order to test how these competing claims play out in actual interactions.

Most planning scholars who build on Habermas’s work reject his emphasis on technical or scientific forms of rationality in favor of a rationality that is socially determined through participant discussion. Nevertheless, these scholars still rely on relatively stable, a priori conceptions of participant identity based on Habermas’s context-independent orientation towards the relationship between power and rationality. Habermas turned to universalistic, top-down norms to construct an ideal process, and to situated, bottom-up social interactions to determine rationality related to content (Flyvbjerg, 2004a). Therefore, scholarly work based on Habermasian communicative rationality rarely explores how power and rationality become intertwined across contexts and in systemic ways to shape identities and experience. For example, Forester attends closely to situated practices, but does less to critically assess how participant identities and associated logics about rationality are continuously produced, shaped and positioned by both micro and macro-level discourses about public participation and planning practices. Deetz (1992), like Young (1996), argued that participatory communication approaches based on Habermas’s ideal speech situation implicitly accept a common good and a particular set of power relations that participants do not necessarily explore or choose freely. Deetz argued that a process of systematic distortion often leads
organizations to reproduce themselves by projecting and responding to internally generated criteria for rationality and success.

According to Deetz, procedural problems are typically articulated as individual or technical problems so that solutions necessarily involve improved information and rely on individuals with certain forms of expertise. This means that perceived problems are not opened up to questioning and reconceptualization by a range of participants. Deetz argued that Forester’s approach to communication distortions does not attend to how communication systems actually “produce the intentions of the participants” (p. 180). Organizations become unintentionally engaged in systematic distortion and cut off from anything beyond their own rationality and products. In a systematically distorted system, what is understood to be rational is subtly shaped by human interaction that “takes place within multimessage, multilevel systems” (p. 180) that exceed the confines of an immediate structural context. Deetz argued that systematically distorted systems translate any external alternative discourses to their already existing conceptual relations in a process of discursive closure. Discursive closure is characterized by the suppression of potential conflict and it might derive from several communicative processes, including the disqualification of certain participants, topical avoidance, or neutralization. This theory is important for my study because it suggests that practitioners and participating publics interact to design alternative public participation practices in ways that may be subtly shaped by discourses occurring at multiple levels. For example, micro-level talk, meso-level policy creation and diffusion, and macro-level societal narratives may all intersect to generate, reinforce, or contest existing practices.
Above critiques of modern approaches to public participation assume that the very possibility of broad public participation relies on the discourse processes that constitute particular publics and the formation of public judgments. In recent years, an increasing number of scholars have questioned modern a priori assumptions about what constitutes publics and public participation. In this study, I interrogate the extent to which alternative public participation practices are actually informed by changing assumptions about what constitutes effective democracy, particular publics, and meaningful public participation.

**A Discursive Approach to Theorizing Public Participation**

New approaches to public participation— influenced by the linguistic turn—understand publics as socially constructed phenomena shaped and reshaped by ongoing communication practices. Communication is not just about an expression of meaning, but about how social interactions produce the particular understandings, feelings, and identities people experience. According to Eisenberg (2007), a constitutive view of communication generates a more complex and provisional understanding of how identities and communities evolve. It also shifts conceptions of individual and collective identity so that publics are viewed as socially constructed and fluid rather than as preexisting aggregates of self-interested individuals. This discursive perspective assumes publics are constructed as individuals interact with organizational and societal discourses to produce their intentions.

More postmodern discursive approaches to public participation are typically characterized by their commitment to: (a) viewing communication as constitutive of particular publics, public spheres, and associated experiences and expectations, (b)
emphasizing permeable organizational and public sphere boundaries, and (c) acknowledging difference and developing alternatives to the modern emphasis on consensus. Scholars who have adopted a discursive approach to studying public participation have also engaged in lively debates about a number of topics. Most germane to this study are debates about the value of idealized public participation models versus empirical studies and the importance of attending to *ordinary democracy* (Tracy, 2010) as well as alternative participatory approaches. At the end of this section, I will situate my research in relationship to these ongoing scholarly debates.

**Communication as Constitutive of Publics and Public Spheres**

A constitutive conception of communication has characterized much work within the communication field in recent years. This approach is generally offered as an alternative to the transmission-oriented approach which Craig (1999) described as “a process of sending and receiving messages or transferring information from one mind to another” (p. 125). This traditional transmission-oriented approach generally views communication as a thing, an instrument, or a linear process. Based on this conceptual model, communication problems are often attributed to gaps, content interpretation errors, or inaccurate information. Constitutive approaches assume that communication is about far more than a transmission of information or ideas. Even in areas of public planning that seem to involve neutral or objective data, communication constitutes particular possibilities and constraints. The constitutive approach to communication views a world in which individuals are “involved in the process of creating and re-creating their unique social order” (Jablin & Putnam, 2001, p. xxi).
Based on a constitutive understanding of communication, the public and the public sphere are not given entities, but concepts and identifications that are constructed and interpreted in specific ways over time:

If publics do appear, appear in a distorted form, or are repressed, we must look to the conditions of communication for explanations. Humans constitute their issues through communication, and communication regulates the responses of a populace with the potential to become active as judges. Our communicative environment conditions our publicness, defines how we experience ourselves in a milieu of strangers, and shapes the character of those publics that actually do form. (Hauser, 1999, p. 60)

A great deal of scholarly debate related to the public sphere involves questions about public sphere boundaries and about the ability that particular participants have to engage in and influence public opinion formation and State activities. Habermas’s (1964/1974) conception of the public sphere remains central to much scholarly work that explores how publics form and change over time, and many scholars have sought to expand—or address perceived shortcomings of—Habermas’s model of the public sphere.

Hauser (1999) addressed public sphere questions by developing a rhetorical model of the public sphere that he defined as: “a discursive space in which individuals and groups associate to discuss matters of mutual interest and, where possible, to reach a common judgment about them” (p. 61). This rhetorical model maintains Habermas’s commitment to discursive conditions that are accessible to all citizens and ensure access to relevant information and a means of getting that information to people who can be influenced by it. According to Hauser, this model differs from Habermas’s public sphere
in that it rejects an inherent association with the class-based bourgeois public sphere in favor of a discourse-based approach. This approach understands the public as “a construct we employ to discuss those individuals who are actively weighing and shaping the course of society” (p. 74). Therefore, the public is just an abstraction until it is brought into relationship with “expressions of civil judgment” (p. 74) such as political commentary, debate, or letters. This discourse-based approach also replaces Habermas’s emphasis on rationality with the “rhetorical norm of reasonableness” (p. 61) so that the success or failure of a particular appeal is about its ability to address pertinent interests or needs understood across various perspectives. Hauser claimed that a rhetorical model is always about specific issues and publics so that meanings are unstable and open to contestation. I agree with Hauser’s assumption that publics and public spheres are in flux and always in the process ‘of becoming.’ This is important to this study since I assume publics in Golden, Colorado will change, overlap, and dissolve over time in relationship to situated issues of interest and associated efforts to achieve judgment.

I argue that discursive approaches to the formation and maintenance of publics contribute to a more nuanced—and potentially optimistic—understanding of public participation. For example, discursive understandings of public formation have been influential in allowing scholars to question existing assumptions about public apathy and a loss of public sphere(s). Hauser (1999) argued that assumptions of disinterest are actually counterintuitive given the highly partisan processes associated with the formation of publics, and Asen (2004) identified new and hybrid forms of public engagement such as consumer politics. In her study of citizen groups, Eliasoph (1998) found that citizens actually constructed apathy through particular forms of ongoing talk.
She studied three groups and found that: (a) volunteers were constructing political apathy by focusing all of their attention on immediate action and constructing political talk as threatening to volunteer action, (b) country-western dancers were constructing political apathy by isolating themselves with various types of talk, especially cynical talk, and (c) activists were constructing a slightly more engaged sense of politics over time based, in part, on their ongoing social interactions with larger environmental organizations.

Eliasoph's findings suggest that publics are not naturally apathetic, but that particular ways of talking construct public apathy over time. What is important here for this study is the idea that public participation, planning practices, and democratic ideals emerge and change through various types of talk. This has significant implications for how communication design choices are made, and for how these choices potentially feed back into ongoing talk.

A discursive approach to public planning involves a shift away from a priori understandings of publics as simply voters, volunteers, or informants. Publics are co-participants engaged in ongoing interactions that establish and maintain public participation ideals and associated practices. Stivers (2008) argued that in public policy and planning disciplines, the idea that reality is socially constructed began to call “attention to the existence of community not as a thing, like a building or a machine, but a process” (p. 97). Some scholars turned back to Dewey’s (1954) conception of public(s) to consider how each new social problem generated a particular community with certain interests and features. Other scholars turned to critical perspectives to explore how “citizens and politicians are constituted as subjects with particular sorts of self-conceptions, self-aspirations, fears, and beliefs about the relative importance of events
and objects” (Fischer, 2003, p. 66). Foucault’s work played a major role in showing how government practitioners shaped publics as subjects—as benefactors, wards, clients, and so on. This suggests that communication design choices in public planning processes may subtly and powerfully shape and position publics to enact particular roles. What is important for this study is the idea that public participation scholars can gain knowledge about the formation of publics by studying the discursive resources that planners, publics, and other organizational stakeholders draw on to design their practices and respond to issues, ideas, and critiques related to public participation processes.

**Permeable Organizational and Public Sphere Boundaries**

A number of social scientists and rhetoricians have revisited Habermas’s public sphere to account for societal changes, more communicative and processual understandings of publics, and less distinct social and institutional boundaries. Hauser (1999) described the contemporary public sphere as “a web of discursive arenas, spread across society and even in some cases across national boundaries” (p. 71). According to Hauser, these myriad arenas are composed of individuals who engage in discourse on commonly shared issues and “who are able to understand and respond to the vernacular exchanges that exist outside power and yet are normative of it” (p. 71). The boundaries of these spheres are permeable so that the web-like structures Hauser described are connected to other structures in the *reticulate Public Sphere* where discourse produces society. This is not an idealized model but a mapping of actual practices. Hauser noted that access to these arenas should not be assumed since exclusion and distorted communication are always possible. Hauser’s caveat about access is important for this study in that it calls attention to how boundaries are formed and understood through
ongoing discourse. In this study, different micro-, meso-, and macro-level discourses assert community boundaries that are more or less fixed and, in some cases, function to open up or close off interactions with a variety of potential stakeholders.

Asen (2004) argued that a priori assumptions about what counts as public participation and about where such participation takes place limit our conceptions of publics and of meaningful public participation. Categories of meaningful participation potentially marginalize new, or evolving forms of public participation. For example, online political activists may make up increasingly influential publics, but fall outside of many traditional public sphere studies or polls. Asen’s *discourse theory of citizenship* calls upon public engagement scholars to move away “from asking questions of what to asking questions of how” (p. 189). He approaches citizenship as a “mode of public engagement” (p. 189) rather than a particular site or category of activity: “As a mode, citizenship cannot be restricted to certain people, places, or topics” (p. 195). Asen argued that citizenship as a mode is messy and unpredictable because it falls outside of institutional boundaries and spheres and does not rely on a sanctioning authority. Modes might disrupt or challenge existing institutions or spheres of engagement and resist efforts to direct the outcomes of interaction. Asen argued that champions of particular civic engagement norms and spheres of interaction generated impossible ideals. In recognizing multiple modes of participation, it becomes possible for citizenship to be understood, not as a possession, but as a performance: “something one can take up, rather than as a condition that is always or never present” (p. 196). This perspective also emphasizes difference rather than uniformity and it reconceptualizes citizenship as more emergent, fluid, unstable, and potentially hybrid. I believe scholars and practitioners will
be in a better position to recognize and encourage new forms of public participation when publics are understood as emerging through multiple, creative, and seemingly contradictory acts rather than through pre-established categories of behavior or sites of interaction.

Eliasoph (2000) argued for an expanded understanding of the public sphere that would account for the actual places where citizenship happens. According to Eliasoph, these places are variable and today they are more likely to involve everyday institutional settings rather than voluntary associations. This perspective collapses clear distinctions between a public sphere and other spheres of life, so that citizenship might emerge out of all life spheres. Actual conversations and emerging relationships become central to recognizing and understanding meaningful citizenship. Eliasoph suggested that this makes “the question of where politics happens” (p. 67) both more interesting and more challenging in that issues become political based on everyday conversation that takes place “everywhere, but does not happen anywhere” (p. 67). In this grounded study, I seek to understand how participants understand publics and (re)produce public spheres based on discursive conceptions of public participation.

**Difference and Alternatives to the Modern Emphasis on Consensus**

Deetz (1992) and Forester (1993) have both argued that, although Habermas has been criticized for his significant focus on consensus at the expense of conflict, his *ideal speech* model also incorporates the possibility of recovering difference and conflict as critical to meaningful problem solving. Forester has drawn on work by Habermas to analyze how planners construct and reconstruct problems and produce and maintain political relationships in ways that are both intentional and subject to unexamined
systematic distortions. Practice, viewed as an effort to achieve particular goals, is always simultaneously orienting the attention of others’ so that certain possibilities or agendas are mobilized while others are neglected. In this way, planners may knowingly or unknowingly minimize difference and close off possibilities for potentially productive conflict. Forester has been particularly concerned with addressing ways in which planners (a) set agendas, (b) control technical and factual information, and (c) manipulate trust and generate public dependency. Much of his work has focused on the micro-practices of planners—he studies how planners engage in their work and how they might help facilitate a more ideal speech situation. I am interested in how publics and planners interact to engage meso- and macro-level discourses that structure relationships and public participation design practices in certain ways. Although planners play a powerful role in shaping public planning processes, they always articulate problems and possibilities in relationship to other actors and a variety of social discourses and material factors. This study seeks to map these systemic multi-level discourses and explore how they generate particular public participation opportunities or constraints. I will also explore what alternative public participation practices suggest about existing communication theories.

Young (1996) argued that Habermas’s ideal speech model is based on problematic assumptions about communication. According to Young, deliberative, consensus-based approaches implicitly assume that interactions must begin with a shared understanding or a common sense of the good. She claimed that the ideal speech model restricts democratic discussion too narrowly to critical argument, thereby reducing possibilities for engaging difference and passion and opening up space for productive
According to Hicks (2002), this is not because of specific practices (e.g., Roberts Rules of Order), but because particular groups would be compelled to give up communication approaches that constitute their cultural identities. In response to these perceived limitations, Young (1996) proposed an alternative approach—“Communicative Democracy” that attends to differences—to differences of culture, social perspective, or particular commitments—as resources to draw on for reaching understanding rather than divisions to be overcome. Specifically, she recommended the adoption of an expanded conception of democratic communication, to include: (a) greeting, (b) emotional appeals, and (c) storytelling. Young claimed that these non-deliberative approaches open up new possibilities for public participants to question what they are told and invent alternative possibilities. By generating new discursive material, “communicative democracy” potentially fosters collaboration where common ground is scarce so that participants might have the opportunity to “feel the force of claims beyond one's own experience” (Hicks, 2002, p. 239). Numerous scholars have also emphasized storytelling as a way to involve diverse publics more actively in community and organizational planning and change processes (Faber, 2002; Eckstein & Throgmorton, 2003; Ganley, 2010; Pearce & Pearce, 1998). In many ways, the Golden Heart & Soul planning project, with its emphasis on community storytelling, is an effort to achieve this kind of expanded conception of democratic communication described by Young. This study aims to understand whether and how specific communication design strategies actually engaged different publics and increased spaces for productive conflict.

Mansbridge (Fung, 2004), however, cautioned against making a “fetish of the constructive clash of ideas” (p. 52) and argued that scholars know too little about the
conditions of deliberation that might be “most conducive to critical thinking, good outcomes (where such can be discerned), and the inclusion of many perspectives” (p. 52).

In her prior studies of public participation in a small New England town, Mansbridge (1983) showed how the commonly applied adversarial versus unitary models of public participation became far more complex and muddy at a site of actual public participation. She found that both ends of this continuum were at play, but that they were actualized based on talk that involved embedded community relationships and emotions. In some cases, fear of conflict itself discouraged particular community members from participating more actively or raising dissenting perspectives. In a 2004 interview, Mansbridge (Fung, 2004) also explained how some groups such as the Society of Friends, have been able to open up spaces for individual members to express dissent even when the group orientation is towards consensus. According to Mansbridge, The Society of Friends has a system that allows group members to veto a group decision if they believe the decision is moving the group in an inappropriate or immoral direction. The group frames this right as a responsibility to God, and a member’s veto urges the group to revisit the issue. Mansbridge also claimed that increased diversity within a group potentially reduces pressure towards group consensus since dissenters are more likely to find allies.

Tracy (2010), in her study of contentious school board meetings, confirmed some of Mansbridge's (1983) findings related to the adversarial-unitary continuum. She also found that participants appealed to this model to understand and construct democracy in their ongoing talk, and applied it based on how contentious they believed particular issues to be. Ultimately, based on her grounded practical theory approach and her identification
of situated ideals, Tracy proposed the concept of 'reasonable hostility' to account for how members of the public typically engaged in conflict. Tracy found that reasonable hostility was understood and enacted in particular ways such that it: (a) responded to face attacks, but did not initiate face attacks, (b) engaged in some token face saving activities, and (c) was rooted in a situated context-dependent understanding of what was 'reasonable'. Tracy's findings also share something in common with Mouffe's (2000) conception of 'agonism' as an alternative to 'antagonism'. Mouffe explained agonism as necessarily a shared—but never fully defined—principle of contentious interaction such that it is situationally understood and always contingent. She argued that this approach helps to frame 'the other' as someone to disagree with, or even be angry with, but not as an enemy to be destroyed. This perspective guides my understanding of productive conflict.

At a more macro level of analysis, Laclau and Mouffe (Torfing, 1999; Jørgensen and Phillips, 2002) and Purcell (2009) have critiqued communicative approaches to public participation for legitimizing current political systems and excluding already marginalized groups with conflicting interests. Mouffe (2000) argued that assumptions about rational talk necessarily exclude other forms of talk as irrational, and Purcell (2009) argued that, since public deliberation is typically viewed as inclusive and fair, it discourages forms of outside protest. These critiques raise questions about the relationship between conflict and the boundaries of the State and the public sphere. In what circumstances should political leaders and public administrators seek active public participation? What are the alternatives? The critiques levied by Laclau and Mouffe and by Purcell assume that all forms of problems and contexts necessitate the same form of talk. Mansbridge (Fung, 2004) argued that protest should always be a viable form of
public participation, but she also pointed out that citizens cannot possibly participate—or desire to participate—in all matters of government. Mansbridge suggested that citizens might best be expected to engage in deliberation about social priorities rather than about technical details. How these two areas are to be differentiated potentially reengages Forester’s work on the relationship between planning practices and the power to focus public attention. This study will pay particular attention to questions of difference and consensus, and trace how difference or contestation is invited, tolerated, or discouraged in communication design efforts.

**Scholarly Debates within the Discursive Approach to Public Participation**

Two common debates within the discursive approach to public participation are most relevant to this study. First, is the debate about pursuing idealized public participation models versus conducting empirical studies. A number of scholars introduced above advocated idealized models of public participation—prioritizing the “what ought to happen” question rather than the “what is happening” question. Planning scholars who emphasize social construction and highly participatory processes have also used idealized models to critique existing and emergent practices. For example, numerous scholars have critiqued New Public Management and its emphasis on efficiency based on axiological arguments about ideal democratic practices (du Gay, 2000; Frederickson, 2005; Moe, 2001). Other planning scholars have presented new recommendations and models for reviving or extending public participation possibilities. For example, Stivers (2008) has drawn from work by scholars like Follett and Arendt to foreground the importance of social connection and outline a broad vision for the future of governance:
An alternative is worth imagining—not a return to the previous version, which defined governance as statecraft on the part of government administrators, but a model built on assumptions that a shared reality already exists, one that envisions the state as the outgrowth of mutual promising, and politics as talk that brings different people together around mutual concerns. (p. 112)

Fischer (2009) developed new recommendations for transforming contemporary public policy approaches based largely on Dewey’s approach to building public capacity, and Forester (1985) has argued that particular procedural commitments potentially help to address important power discrepancies and social inequality.

Although such models arguably inspire scholars and practitioners to critically reflect on the value and impact of current practices, these models are often overly simplistic and may not hold up neatly under empirical scrutiny. Guttman (2007) argued that practitioners who employed idealized participation procedures often ended up with unexpected dilemmas. In her study of an Israeli health department planning process, Guttman showed how normative models—when implemented—led to unanticipated dilemmas or paradoxes for participants and reshaped understandings of publics and public capacity. For example, efforts to increase access to information through expert consultation also served to establish a dichotomy between expert and non-expert participants. Decisions about who to include and who to exclude led to new tensions regarding representation, and efforts to provide the public with information available to officials increased participants’ identification with official interests. Dietz and Stern (2008) also found that a wide variety of deliberation goals, participants, mandates, and timeframes across numerous case studies limited the value of predictive public
participation models and the likelihood of identifying general best practices. Many scholars who explore the "what is happening?" rather than "what ought to happen?" question have critiqued more idealized models of public participation.

McComas (2002) argued that most scholars who critique practices do so in an abstract way and with minimalist assumptions about what is actually being done or what actually counts as public participation. She noted that this can be very discouraging for practitioners who are working hard to improve actual public participation practices. Tracy (2010) and Ryfe (2005) both stated that the distance between idealized models and the representative system can lead to frustration, and Tracy suggested that this distance has actually served to undermine public faith in representative systems. In a 2004 interview with Fung, Mansbridge and Young both agreed that idealized approaches typically ignore material and economic barriers to public participation. They suggested, for example, that scholars should pay more attention to how time constraints and increasing workloads have served to limit public deliberation. Ryfe (2005) argued that these kinds of challenges have generally been left up to practitioners to sort out as though scholars are not responsible for theorizing about such mundane things. Many of the scholars in this grounded tradition seek to understand how—and whether—idealized models actually play out in everyday public participation efforts. However, Asen (2004) pointed out that even empirical studies rely on idealized models to aggregate behaviors in such a way that what counts as public participation is assumed a priori so as to exclude alternative, evolving, and hybrid forms of public participation. Therefore, I am committed to studying the relationship between idealized discursive models and actual practices of public participation, while also assuming a critically interested approach to grounded
theory that I describe in Chapter IV.

A second relevant distinction between discursive approaches to public participation involves the importance of attending to existing representative governance practices—or ordinary democracy (Tracy, 2010) in relationship to alternative participatory approaches. Tracy used the term ordinary democracy to refer to “what actually happens in groups committed to acting democratically” (p. 2). She described the features of ordinary democracy in the following way:

First, ordinary democracy emphasizes the local, prototypically school boards and city councils. Second, ordinary democracy is observable. It is not a normative ideal; it can be seen and heard. When governance groups meet, ordinary democracy is what they are doing. The communicative practices governance groups use will be affected by ideals of what it means to act democratically that permeate American public life. At the same time, ordinary democracy is shaped by a host of individual- and group-level purposes. It reflects the routine concerns of those who plan meetings, of citizens who attend and speak, and of members of the public who read the news and watch the cable broadcast. Ordinary democracy includes communicative actions that uphold the ideal of democracy, and it includes actions that challenge, appeal to, and subvert that ideal. (p. 3)

Over the past two decades, however, scholars and practitioners—often working collaboratively—have developed and implemented a wide range of public participation strategies to supplement, enhance, or operate in conjunction with the practices of ordinary democracy that Tracy described. Although Tracy’s conception of ordinary democracy does not preclude the possibility of experimentation, I attend to how advocates of
alternative public participation processes frequently construct their efforts in opposition to existing practices of ordinary democracy. Efforts to re-conceptualize or revive public participation have frequently emerged in relationship to situated concerns about unequal access and various forms of discursive closure (Deetz, 1992). I argue that planners and participating members of the public are often aware that current conceptualizations of publics are insufficient to capture the diversity of actually existing publics and complex processes of public judgment. At this point, however, scholars know little about how this practical theorizing has evolved, and about how planners and participating publics make decisions about alternative public participation ideals and practices in relationship to ordinary democracy.

I strongly agree with Mansbridge’s (Fung, 2004) claim that citizens generally cannot be, and do not want to be, involved in all matters of government. In my experience, everyday governance involves the provision of numerous services that would not be designed or delivered without technical expertise and a representative system of decision-making. I also agree with Tracy’s (2010) suggestion that some idealized models of participatory democracy fail to account for actual governance activities and even undermine representative forms of governance. Yet, I continue to see a place for theorizing about the limitations of ordinary democracy and the invention of more robust public participation practices. Therefore, in this study, I explore how participants interacted to construct alternative public participation ideals and practices in relationship to perceived problems of planning and ordinary democracy. I also employ discourse tracing methods (LeGreco & Tracy, 2009) that allow me to tack back and forth between
scholarly theories and everyday practices in an abductive process. I attend to intentional communication practices based on Aakhus’s (2007) description of *communication design*.

**Communication Design for Public Participation**

Aakhus (2007) posited that “communication design happens when there is an intervention into some ongoing activity through the invention of techniques, devices, and procedures that aim to redesign interactivity and thus shape the possibilities for communication” (p. 112). According to Aakhus, scholars can study communication design to better understand what communication assumptions are implicit in design choices (Aakhus & Jackson, 2005), and what consequences particular design hypotheses have for practice. He argued that particular designs present affordances and constraints that open up or close off interaction possibilities. Aakhus and Jackson (2005) also argued, however, that practitioners can be “unreflective about the communicative theory underpinning the knowledge of their craft” (p. 416). In 2001, Aakhus turned to work by Goodwin and Wenzel (1979) to show how socio-logic is neither a personal nor community property, but something situated in reasoning that takes place when groups or communities think and act together over a period of time. Aakhus (2007) also argued that practitioners “hold influence over the shaping and disciplining of communication in society” (p. 114) without necessarily having any training in communication theory and methods. Communication scholars have an opportunity to study the relationship between shifting public participation ideals and communication design in situated public planning processes.

Dialogue, deliberation, and storytelling are examples of broader communication design approaches that a number of governmental and nonprofit organizations have
begun integrating into alternative public participation processes in recent years (Stivers, 2008; Dietz & Sterns, 2008). In many cases these alternative communication design approaches are adopted in an effort to increase public participation and open up spaces for difference (Eckstein & Throgmorton, 2003). For example, according to Throgmorton, “stories potentially offer us the opportunity to ‘walk within places,’ to encounter people who differ from ourselves” (p. 56). In some cases, new communicative approaches are advocated as a means of adapting public administration practices to the demands and expectations of a postmodern era:

While there are significant differences among the various postmodern theorists, they seem to arrive at a similar conclusion—because we depend on one another in the postmodern world, governance must be based on sincere and open discourse among all parties, including citizens and administrators. And while postmodern public administration theorists are skeptical of traditional approaches to public participation, there seems to be considerable agreement that enhanced public dialogue is required to reinvigorate the public bureaucracy and restore a sense of legitimacy to the field of public administration. In other words, there is a need to reconceptualize the field and, both practically and intellectually, so as to build a New Public Service. (Denhardt & Denhardt, 2000, p. 553)

A number of local government planning groups across the U.S. are working to implement new forms of public participation that compliment or enhance ordinary democracy. These groups typically make choices about the scope, process, and content of community planning projects. New questions related to communication design emerge at virtually every stage of a long-range planning process. Who should be invited to participate most
actively and at what point(s) in the process? How should project goals be formulated and by whom? How can more diverse public perspectives be integrated into planning practices and outcomes? How should emerging tensions and conflicts be handled? I argue that scholars have limited knowledge about how planning group participants work together to address these questions. What are the underlying concerns related to ordinary democracy? How are new or expanded public participation ideals constructed and how do these changing ideals relate to communication design choices?

Discourses that emphasize transmission-oriented communication models and monolithic, static conceptions of the public also continue to shape and constrain public participation design practices. According to Innes & Booher (2004), practitioners still struggle with public participation methods that position publics as passive audiences, elite representatives, clients, or customers. It is not clear how, or the extent to which, actual communication design practices are adequate to support alternative public participation ideals. It is also unclear how—or even if—particular alternative public participation approaches are likely to integrate with the ordinary democracy that Tracy (2010) described. Although a more discursive approach to public participation is conceptually well aligned with the postmodern world that Beauregard (2003) described, it is unclear how—or even if—alternative communication practices will provide planners and publics with new ways of navigating tensions between modernity and postmodernity.

Although these theoretical insights are descriptive of real tensions at work in the world, it is only through empirical research that we can understand how planners, publics, and other organizational stakeholders make sense of—and seek to navigate—perceived tensions or changes. Public participation is best understood by paying attention to how
members of society engage in public talk about matters they perceive as affecting their lives (Eliasoph, 1998; Hauser, 1999; Mansbridge, 1983; Tracy, 2010). Scholars know little about the extent to which particular publics and planners—like scholars—have identified limitations associated with modern responses to a global or postmodern world. Although public participation has been a topic of interest for many scholars in recent decades, there is more that can be learned from studying how and why planners, publics, and other organizational participants interact to design and implement alternative approaches to public participation (Ryfe, 2002). To what extent are perceived limitations of ordinary democracy shaped by broader discourses about globalization, concrete local concerns, or idealized scholarly models? How are public participation ideals (re)envisioned in relationship to ordinary democracy? To what extent do communication design approaches actually enable or constrain public participation aligned with these shifting public participation ideals? All of these questions have both theoretical and practical implications.

**Research Questions**

Scholars who have adopted a discursive approach to understanding public planning processes and publics are in a good position to study how particular public participation ideals take shape and change over time in relationship to perceived problems or needs. By studying planning process talk—specifically talk related to communication design—scholars can learn more about how planning participants understand and respond to perceived problems of ordinary democracy, and draw on particular resources to (re)design their public participation practices.

I also suggest that scholars and practitioners have a great deal to learn about how
groups actually design communication in relationship to difference, particularly in light of increasing global interdependence and diversity. I agree with Flyvbjerg’s (1998) claim that “social conflicts are constitutive of valuable social ties that hold democratic societies together” (p. 6), but I share Mansbridge’s (Fung, 2004) caution against fetishizing conflict. By looking at how people engage in communication design to support situated public participation ideals, scholars have an opportunity to learn more about how people open up—or close off—spaces for difference and conflict, and how people understand and respond to the conflicts that do occur. In addition, I argue that public participation is shaped by a variety of institutional and material discourses that matter. Temporal factors, technological affordances, economies, institutional norms and expectations all shape communication design. Mansbridge and Young (Fung, 2004) argued that scholars typically neglect how temporal and material factors shape public participation possibilities. By studying communication design processes, scholars can examine how planners and publics draw on, interpret, and contest institutional and material discourses to shape and make design choices over time.

Scholars can also study how process participants identify opportunities and constraints associated with their communication design choices, and navigate perceived tensions or contradictions between ordinary democracy and alternative public participation approaches. I believe these are particularly important intellectual and social questions given the growing perception that ordinary democracy is unable to meet the demands of a rapidly changing and interdependent world. Stivers (2008) argued that an emphasis on de-regulation and privatization of government activities coupled with recent criticisms of both government and citizen capacity poses a threat to meaningful
democratic participation. Within this context, my primary purpose is to better theorize how planners and participating publics interact to understand ordinary democracy and its limitations, and construct alternative public participation ideals in relationship to ordinary democracy. My secondary purpose is to examine how planners and participating publics interact to design and implement alternative communication approaches based on intersecting discourses—and with what consequences for whom. I adopt Tracy’s (2010) definitions of ordinary democracy and situated ideals, as well as the basic assumptions and sensibilities of Aakhus’s (2007) communication design approach to pose the following research questions:

RQ1: How do participants interact to articulate the problems of planning and the limitations of ordinary democracy?

RQ2: How does the interplay of public participation and planning discourses (micro, meso, and macro) shape the ways in which stakeholders design alternative public participation practices?

RQ3: What constraints and affordances emerge in relationship to these alternative public participation practices?

**Study Significance**

Scholars have increasingly adopted more discursive approaches to understanding publics and public participation, and this scholarship has generated numerous theories about more ideal public participation. Far less scholarship has investigated how citizens and practitioners actually identify and respond to perceived limitations of ordinary democracy or make sense of disconnects between alternative participatory practices and the existing practices of ordinary democracy. Since site participants identified a perceived
rupture between existing and emergent public participation ideals, this study analyzes talk and policy texts related to a public participation change effort. By focusing on a planning initiative that engaged participants in constructing alternative public participation strategies, it opens up possibilities for better understanding how multi-stakeholder planning groups interact to make sense of and (re)produce public problems, public spheres, and public judgment processes.

By attending to communication design, this study is able to show how planning participants (re)produced particular communication affordances and constraints in relationship to their participation ideals. In designing alternative public participation strategies, planners and publics often engaged in explicit talk about how they believed communication works and about the affordances or limitations they associated with particular communication practices. By employing a discourse tracing method, I was also able to examine how power relations were shaped by organizational systems as well as micro- and meso-level discourses and interaction. Certain rationalities associated with macro-level narratives and meso-level policy influenced communication design so that difference and conflict were closed off in both intentional and unintentional ways. This study traces how that process unfolded over time and in relationship to a complex policy web (LeGreco, 2012) associated with ordinary democracy. In most cases, alternative modes of communication such as storytelling were understood and implemented in relationship to powerful discourses about the relationship between ordinary democracy and accountability.

This study provides practitioners and publics with new insights about why alternative modes of communication do not necessarily generate more community-driven
planning practices, improved community relationships, or greater public participation over time. Storytelling is neither inherently positive nor transformative—it is always carried out in particular ways and in relationship to other practices. I am not suggesting that storytelling is irrelevant to public planning practices. Indeed, I believe storytelling is capable of teaching people a great deal about public experiences and about the relationship between everyday life and community development. However, storytelling initiatives that are designed in relationship to ordinary democracy will always involve constraints and dilemmas associated with existing policy webs. Where communication design is shaped by modern logics about accountability and governance, storytelling potentially reproduces the same power relationships and planning outcomes. Where communication design neglects the practices of ordinary democracy, storytelling risks becoming irrelevant to public decision-making processes. This study provides some guidance for planners and others who hope to understand and navigate these tensions in order to make storytelling matter for publics and for planning.
CHAPTER III

CONTEXT AND SITE DESCRIPTION

To study how planners and publics interact to (a) make sense of ordinary democracy and its limitations, and (b) construct alternative participatory practices, scholars must identify research sites in which participants are openly engaged in experimental communication design. Ideal research sites would also be characterized by participants’ explicit efforts to integrate experimental communication design with existing representative systems of governance. Given these ideal site features, I sought a disruption or turn-away from traditional approaches to public participation, and a chance to study explicit theorizing about public participation ideals and communication design choices. The site for this study involved dissatisfaction with previous public planning processes and catalysts for change. By “starting with a rupture point … researchers can move both forward and backward through a case. Both researchers and participants can then illustrate the conditions that gave rise to a turning point and identify how individuals manage their current situation” (LeGreco & Tracy, 2009, p. 1524). This change or rupture with previous public participation strategies provided important context for understanding the extent to which new communication design theories and practices differed from prior understandings and practices.

The selected public planning project included access to modest resources and skills deemed necessary to carry out communication design changes, and it involved
reasonable access to financial resources to support desired activities, technologies, and consultation. It also provided me with access to ongoing talk about the communication design strategies being developed and implemented as a part of the planning process. I engaged in this research as a participant-observer in order to have access to project meetings and events held in both public and private settings. Yin (2009) argued that case studies involving a high degree of scholarly participation pose unique opportunities and challenges for researchers. This research approach allowed me greater access to interactions and a closer relationship to research participants. In some cases, I had an opportunity to help shape activities and explore changes and disruptions that might not otherwise have been apparent. Finally, since this is a study of the process by which particular realities and publics get constructed through ongoing interactions, it was important that the site offered opportunities for research over an extended period of time. Access to data over a two-year period allowed me to examine both the emergence and transformation of locally situated theories and practices.

The City of Golden’s Vision 2030 (GV 2030) planning process provides an ideal site for studying communication design because it meets the research site selection criteria outlined above. Golden’s planning process was initiated in response to frustrations with existing public participation strategies. Project facilitators and funders set out to employ a variety of experimental communication design strategies to engage a broader and more diverse public than had been involved in previous city planning efforts. Project activity costs were matched by an outside foundation—Orton—so that resource constraints were reduced. Researcher participation was also encouraged throughout the course of the two-plus year timeframe designated for the project. This was the first time
that many of the participating individuals and organizations had ever been involved in this kind of process. In the following section, I describe the GV 2030 process in further detail.

**Site Description: Golden Vision 2030**

The GV 2030 project was envisioned as a highly participatory process designed to involve community members in drafting a set of values intended to define the city of Golden and guide its future development. The process was undertaken as a partnership between Golden government leaders, administrators, residents, an outside foundation, and multiple technology and consulting firms. The multi-phase city planning process was initiated in the spring of 2009.

Golden, Colorado is located along the Front Range of the Rocky Mountains within a short commute of the greater Denver region. It has a population of just under 20,000 residents and a median household income of approximately $50,000. The majority of Golden’s labor force is made up of professional, academic, service, and sales jobs. Golden is home to a science and engineering-focused university with approximately 5,000 students, including a significant international student population (City of Golden, 2009a). The university and a growing clean energy sector both contribute to demographic shifts in a city that residents often describe as an *old west town* or a *working class community*. Golden is also an increasingly popular tourism destination known for its Coors brewery, scenic vistas, and proximity to year-round mountain sports. A proposed expansion to the Denver regional transit system may also make Golden a more desirable place to live for individuals who work in the greater Denver region.
In the spring of 2009, Golden initiated a multi-phase community visioning process to support the development of a twenty-year plan. The Golden 2010 plan was nearing the end of its term and city officials and community leaders called for a long-range plan to address new challenges associated with local and regional development. This planning process coincided with significant uncertainty in terms of economic growth, population expansion from a nearby megaregion, and changing resident demographics. A new mayor had expressed support for the implementation of more sustainable development practices and a large number of residents participated in community sustainability sessions held in 2007 and 2008. Golden planners offered to work with political leaders to facilitate a more comprehensive and engaging city planning process.

The planning and development director expressed frustration that traditional community planning practices had generally failed to engage a broad cross-section of citizens in planning for the future. In 2008, Golden planners actively pursued funding and consultation to support a more comprehensive planning process designed to engage a large number of citizens.

In March 2009, Golden initiated a community visioning process in partnership with Orton after receiving a $100,000 matching grant from the non-profit organization. Orton—with offices in New England and Denver—provides consultation and funding for small cities and towns working to address change and growth through comprehensive community planning efforts. They are particularly committed to testing new ways to involve citizens in addressing complex land use challenges:

Land use planning in America has yet to engage a broad base of local citizens to define and shape the future of their communities. Attempts to involve people in
community planning often fall short because the process doesn’t convey how citizens’ day-to-day lives and livelihoods will be affected. Meanwhile, incremental change occurs, yet its cumulative effects are hard to imagine or predict …we are committed to helping towns steer and embrace growth and change while enhancing the cultural, social, environmental and economic qualities that are the essence of what makes a place a valued home to its citizens. The Foundation promotes inclusive, proactive decision-making and land use planning by offering guidance, tools, research, capital and other support to citizens and leaders. (Orton Family Foundation, 2011b, ¶ 3)

In partnership with Orton, Golden planned to utilize community storytelling, arts activities, and technology mapping tools to engage citizens in its 2030 planning process. It was estimated that the visioning process would take just over two years, and would inform revisions to the city’s comprehensive plan, neighborhood plans, investment plans, and associated planning policies and practices. The primary 2030 planning goal is to align city policies and plans more closely with community values (City of Golden, 2009b). Golden Mayor Jacob Smith articulated the need for this initiative in the following way:

It was clear to me that we needed to update the comprehensive plan, and the trick was to do it in a way that genuinely engaged people in the community: that tapped into “what is the community’s vision for itself?” And part of the challenge is to be SPECIFIC ENOUGH that we end up with a comprehensive plan that is PRECISE ENOUGH that it really does guide the change we want. (City of Golden, 2011, p. 13)
City planners and Orton consultants were to work together with a large committee of local residents and organizational representatives to design and implement the visioning process. Planners and Orton consultants also welcomed me to engage in the process as a participant action researcher.

**Golden Vision 2030 Process Description**

During the initial months of the GV 2030 process, Golden planners worked with Orton consultants to divide planning process activities into three distinct phases. The earliest phase involved the establishment of a Local Advisory Committee (LAC) comprised of city planning staff, Orton representatives, and city residents representing various community interests and organizations. The Golden City Council charged this group with planning and overseeing the development and implementation of the two-year planning process. Approximately two-dozen members were appointed to the LAC, although the LAC’s eventual adoption of an open-door policy meant that additional members of the public could participate actively at any time. In actuality, the same 12-15 members typically attended LAC meetings on a regular basis. Two to three planners and one Orton consultant attended most LAC meetings. The group generally met on a monthly basis to plan activities, experiment with new public participation methods, identify data collection needs and procedures, and reflect on progress associated with Vision 2030 process goals. Ultimately, the group was responsible for finding a way to generate community values to guide future city planning activities. Orton encouraged the LAC to test out new ideas and seek ways of involving a broader and more diverse public in the development of values. The LAC was one important site for this study because its meetings were a time and place where participants frequently discussed, debated, and
reflected on communication design options and outcomes.

The LAC officially initiated the Vision 2030 public participation process by hosting a series of seven neighborhood block parties designed as storytelling and information gathering events. Neighborhood block parties were designed to be both informative and interactive. Free barbecue lunches were provided, informational booths featured planning and sustainability topics, and community volunteers provided free veterinary check-ups for pets and tune-ups for bicycles. Participants were asked to share their stories at a storytelling booth, and these stories were digitally recorded. Storytellers were prompted to describe how they came to live in Golden, what they liked about Golden, and what they thought about recent and forthcoming changes in Golden. Participants were also asked to visit a mapping booth where they could identify places in Golden that they perceived as being important or valuable. Attendance at six out of the seven block parties was high—with an average of 100-125 participants in attendance at each. The seventh block party, held in a neighborhood that city staff and planning committee participants described as traditionally underserved or disconnected, had a notably low turn-out of approximately 30 residents. Survey findings conducted by this researcher indicated that the majority of attendees at the first six neighborhood block parties were already involved in government and/or community activities in some way, relatively familiar with the planning process, and likely to read local newspapers, newsletters, or city announcements sent via traditional mail.

After all of the neighborhood block parties were held, the LAC began to design and implement a process that they called ‘value harvesting’. This process involved asking various groups of citizens to watch stories collected during the block parties and ‘identify’
or ‘extract’ what they believed to be the underlying or predominant values present in the stories. The values identification process was designed and implemented with significant guidance from an outside consulting firm, although this consulting relationship was not anticipated at the beginning of the GV 2030 process. For the purposes of this study, I will refer to this consulting firm as Transformations, Inc. The arrival of Transformations, Inc. corresponded with a new delineation between a subset of LAC members (the Project Team) representing the City, Orton, and Transformations, Inc. and the full LAC that included more members from the general public. Transformations, Inc. consultants attended LAC meetings to explain and test different variations of the process before facilitating approximately twenty story listening focus groups made up of Golden residents. Some of these groups were pre-existing community groups while others were made up of residents who self-selected in response to public advertisements. Participants in these focus groups wrote brief—typically one-sentence—value statements to capture the values they heard in stories. Participating focus group members were generally given limited time for discussion during focus group sessions. After each session, city planning staff collected and recorded the value statements. During this period, LAC participants talked frequently about the values identification process and several members raised questions about what might be lost in the process of extracting values from stories.

After the focus groups were completed, the LAC hosted two community summits (Summits I and II) designed to involve residents in reviewing the focus group value statements and organizing them into overarching thematic areas. This was discussed as a way to share, organize, and draft broader value statements through a collective meaning-making process. Two community summits were scheduled to take place in the spring and
summer of 2010. However, the first summit was ended abruptly due to a severe snowstorm, and an additional rescheduled summit took place several weeks later.

Approximately 75 people attended the initial snowy summit and approximately 100 people attended the rescheduled summit and the second summit. In preparation for the initial summits, city planning staff had sorted nearly 1,000 focus group value statements into approximately a dozen overarching value statement themes. Summit attendees were asked to select a value statement theme assigned to a particular seating area and work with others to ‘distill’ piles of value statements that staff had associated with that theme. They were charged with developing three to five value statements that they believed were most representative of the broader value statement theme in their area. After this, a consultant facilitated a keypad polling exercise that allowed all attendees to apply each of the dozen overarching value statements to different planning contexts and rate these statements in terms of perceived relevancy. Participants were able to review polling results immediately, but there was no time allotted for a discussion of results or participant reactions.

Summit II was designed to engage Golden residents in different methods of deliberation related to applying the identified value statements. Both GIS and keypad polling technologies were used to help residents apply values to planning scenarios—both actual and hypothetical. LAC members had not fully agreed on the desired goals or outcomes for these exercises. Some LAC members spoke about it as a values-based decision making experience, others felt that it would help residents to prioritize values, and still others viewed it as a process whereby participants could develop a greater appreciation for the difficult trade-offs facing public planners. Multiple, primarily
hypothetical, planning scenarios were related to city developments, budget shortfalls, and regional transportation projects. GIS tools were used in two scenarios to simulate what Golden would look like in the future if particular planning decisions were made. Each working group shared the results of their deliberation about a scenario through keypad polling at the end of a relatively brief period. Towards the end of this summit, eleven value themes were prioritized.

Next, city planning staff used data that emerged from the community summits to draft a Golden Vision 2030 Report. LAC members were asked to review the draft report and email comments or questions to staff or bring any concerns to the upcoming LAC meeting. Initially, there was a great deal of discussion about planning language, the description of the process, and the emerging relationship between value statements and city planning decisions. However, time constraints curtailed further discussion when the Mayor and City Council set short timeframes for plan approval. Planning staff began emphasizing rapid review at meetings and in email communications. Once LAC members agreed to a draft Vision 2030 Report, city planners conducted a brief outreach effort designed to generate public input about the draft. A handful of outreach events involved a relatively small number of residents in a traditional public comment process. Participants were invited to review various documents from the visioning process and leave comments about the report for city planning staff. City staff generally planned and implemented these public comment events. Residents were also invited to review the draft plan online and submit comments to city staff via email. The final phase of the GV 2030 visioning process took place during fall 2010, and the City Council approved the Golden Vision 2030 Final Report on December 9, 2010.
CHAPTER IV

METHODS—DISCOURSE TRACING

At the same time that no incident can be predicted from the one before it, one can nevertheless, from hindsight, trace a particular incident to the incidents preceding it ... thus, similar to the events of a narrative text, the given turn of events does not constitute the only way that events could have developed, but we can nevertheless make sense of the conclusion from retrospect. (Stone-Mediatore, 2003, p. 27)

In previous chapters I outlined my intent to examine how planners, public officials, publics, and partner-funders interacted to understand ordinary democracy and its limitations and implement alternative communication design practices. This study attends to disruption and the tangled relationships between always evolving local public participation practices and embedded socio-historical discourses that shape categories and opportunities in particular ways (Knights & Morgan, 1991). In this chapter, I outline my scholarly assumptions and commitments and explain how they inform my methodological choices, and what I think certain methodological approaches make available to public participation scholars. Specifically, I adopt LeGreco and Tracy’s (2009) discourse tracing approach to analyze “the formation, interpretation, and appropriation of discursive practices across micro, meso, and macro levels” (p. 1516) of community planning. I propose procedures for data collection, and describe my use of Aakhus’s (2007) communication design theory and Flyvbjerg’s (2004b) phronetic
planning methods to structure research questions that support a more thorough analysis of how actors manage power and change over time. Finally, I show how Clarke’s (2003) situational mapping supplements discourse tracing analysis by providing a highly visual way of tracing complex relationships, communicating messy and heterogeneous process elements, and attending to absence, patterns, and material factors.

**Researcher Commitments and Assumptions**

This study builds upon a commitment to grounded research. At the same time, it is guided by certain critical assumptions about how power relations are shaped by socio-historical structures as well as by ongoing discourse and interaction at micro- and meso-levels of interaction. Although there are tensions between grounded and critical approaches, I argue that these approaches are not fundamentally incompatible. A number of scholars (Flyvbjerg, 2004b; Kushner & Morrow, 2003; LeGreco & Tracy, 2009) have shown how grounded and critical approaches can be both complementary and central to supporting reflective engagement in applied organizational settings. In terms of more practical commitments, I am dedicated to conducting research that matters to scholars, practitioners, and publics. I don’t view this so much as a process of translation, but as an effort to identify and emphasize intersections between theoretical findings and practitioner interests and theories. To this end, I must be attentive to what I choose to ‘bracket out’ in the process of engaging in scholarly conversation. If I disregard important material obstacles, influential actors, or the actual messiness of political interactions, I risk producing something that may be theoretically interesting but practically unrecognizable. Ultimately, I believe meaningful scholarly work related to democratic practices should contribute to a larger conversation about what matters, what
is problematic, and what is possible in real communities.

**Power**

My interest in public participation in ordinary democracy and alternative public participation design is fundamentally related to how power relations are shaped by—and continue to shape—organizing processes at micro-, meso-, and macro- levels of social interaction. During my time as a public administrator, I participated in multiple planning efforts that failed to effectively engage particular interests, publics, or ways of knowing—often in unintentional or unanticipated ways. In my experience, planners work to solve difficult problems within a world of real material and temporal constraints and largely unquestioned socio-historical assumptions about both planning and public participation. They respond to numerous constituencies and work within complex regulatory systems. Planners also work to design public participation practices within a disciplinary system that has historically adhered to modern post-positivist research commitments. Within this context, it is not surprising that many practitioners seek out seemingly neutral data and clearly differentiated choices:

Objective information often counts among administrators as one of the few shreds of sanity in their working lives. To them, Hannah Arendt’s declaration that by the mid-twentieth century the pillars of the best-known truths lay in ruins can seem rather rude and unwelcome … public administration has always seen rationality as a way of countering self-interest. (Stivers, 2008, p. 56)

From a critical perspective, I believe it is important to ask *whose rationality* is being called upon to counter perceived problems with ordinary democracy and formulate alternative public participation practices. Deetz (1992) and Flyvbjerg (1998) have argued
that language and ideology continuously interact to preference particular understandings as neutral or rational. The work of public practitioners and participating publics is inescapably personal and political.

I assume, like Flyvbjerg (1998), that power relations are continuously generated and reproduced or revised through situated interactions, and that “power defines what counts as rationality and knowledge and thereby what counts as reality” (p. 227). I also view power as a potentially productive or positive force and I aim to show that negative or oppressive power relationships often evolve in unintentional or unexpected ways. Much previous work regarding the relationship between public participation and power has emphasized the purposeful and damaging aspects of power. This work understands power as centered in specific institutions and persons—it can be identified, controlled, and potentially minimized. I agree with Moufflé’s (2000) claim that we should not attempt to eliminate power or create non-political communication because: (a) this is not possible in the first place, and (b) efforts to eliminate distortion actually lead us away from an awareness and critique of power so that power is further masked.

In this study, I am committed to studying power relations, but always with a starting point in the empirical character of my research questions—“inquiries into how actual members of actual publics respond to appeals, how they themselves actually engage in discourse that allows us to infer their opinion, and the rhetorical conditions that color their interactions” (Hauser, 1999, p. 12). I actively look at how planning participants construct and interpret public planning practices, as well as how they articulate and interpret power relations. I assume that participants engage in struggles over meaning and rationality such that particular conceptions of democracy, public
participation, and publics are continuously being produced in complex and contested
to ways rather than in a central, top-down manner.

**Self-reflexivity**

Feminist and critical scholars have frequently argued that researchers have a
responsibility to critically examine how their own experiences position them in
urged scholars to recognize the always political-ideological character of research and the
associated values and assumptions that shape our interpretations. Therefore, researchers
should not assume an objective stance equated with distance or neutrality. All researchers
and project participants enter projects with existing understandings about what constitutes
value. Although these understandings are always contingent and evolving, there is never
a place from which participants can act without some reference to axiological or
normative judgment. Longino (1990) deconstructed traditional notions of objectivity as
something opposed to subjectivity and argued that “a method of inquiry is objective to
the degree that it permits transformative criticism” (p. 397). She explained objectivity as
a complex communicative process conducted in relationship to concrete experiences
rather than solitary activity. I believe this is a particularly important distinction for
scholars who study democratic practices and public participation. I agree with Stiver’s
(2008) claim that work in this area is ultimately connected to judgment about what is just
or good and, therefore, worth advocating: “the recognition that the tests of our proposals
are conducted not in theory but in life makes principled advocacy a core responsibility of
public service” (p. 136). Public participation processes and public participation research
activities evolve and change through ongoing struggles over meaning—struggles over what is worth studying, how it should be studied, and with what implications for whom.

According to S. Tracy (2010), self-reflexivity is “considered to be honesty and authenticity with one’s self, one’s research, and one’s audience” (p. 842). Scholars can begin attending to self-reflexivity from early in a research process by exploring and writing about their own interests, biases, and relationship to the topic of study. They can reflect on their own activities and their impact on research settings and look to participants for feedback on their interpretations. Since I have worked as a practitioner in the type of research site I have chosen to study, I have sought to pay particular attention to my existing assumptions about public participation practices and practitioner motivations. I address this, at least in part, by turning to participants to define and interpret their activities and choices wherever possible.

Flyvbjerg (2001) also stressed the importance of attending to the practice of research itself: “just as the people studied are part of a context, research itself also constitutes a context … the researchers’ self-understanding and concepts do not exist in a vacuum, but must be understood in relation to this context” (p. 33). Decisions about relevant research site interactions and the interpretation of these interactions are shaped by my own disciplinary assumptions. They are also shaped by my ongoing interactions with others. I am a social person. I think things through by talking. I have talked about Golden—about the town, my methodological approach, emergent findings, unanswered questions, my experiences and feelings—with site participants, project consultants, graduate colleagues, friends, mentors, and even strangers. In many cases, I returned to resident stories or planning group interviews because of something someone said or
suggested in one of these conversations. In fall 2010, I got into a cab in Orlando, Florida and learned that the cab driver had lived in Golden during the 1960s and 1970s. He described his time in Golden and suggested I pay close attention to the history of resident activism. Earlier this year I attended a poetry reading and discovered that the poet had once been a city planner. Our long-running conversation about the relationship between story and planning has indelibly shaped my attention, my curiosity, and the nature of this study.

Methods Description

As articulated in previous chapters, my primary purpose is to better theorize how planners and participating publics interact to understand ordinary democracy and its problems and construct alternative public participation ideals and practices in relationship to these understandings. I asked the following research questions based on these premises:

RQ1: How do participants interact to articulate the problems of planning and the limitations of ordinary democracy?

RQ2: How does the interplay of public participation and planning discourses (micro, meso, and macro) shape the ways in which stakeholders design alternative public participation practices?

RQ3: What constraints and affordances emerge in relationship to these alternative public participation practices?

I employ *discourse tracing* (LeGreco & Tracy, 2009) methods to attend more fully and transparently to how relationships across micro-level interactions, associated meso-level policy formation, and broader societal discourses emerge and shift over time. LeGreco
and Tracy (2009) claimed that discourse tracing provides a more concrete language and more transparent process for analyzing discourse and articulating it to other scholars—especially those in disciplines other than communication.

Discourse tracing is designed to help scholars explore how subjects interact discursively to manage power and change over time. LeGreco and Tracy (2009) suggested this is a particularly appropriate method for scholars who are interested in starting with a disruption or turning point in a process. The approach attends to micro-, meso-, and macro-levels of discourse and employs the concepts of *tracing* and *structured, focused comparison* to refer to how scholars “follow the use of language and text across time and context” (p. 1531) and develop and apply structured questions to facilitate reflective comparison of related circumstances, policies, or activities. The theoretical roots of discourse tracing can be found in work by both Foucault and Fairclough.

Foucault's *Archaeology of Knowledge* (1972) outlines a historical tracing process that can be used to identify what is made present and absent in current practices. His archaeological method assumes that systems of knowing are governed by rules that function beneath individual consciousness. These rules serve to establish the boundaries of thought in a given time period or social domain. This method de-centered the subject and emphasized the contingency of taken-for-granted ways of thinking. Later, Foucault introduced the method of ‘geneology’ in an effort to identify the causes of transitions in systems of thought. This extension of his earlier methods was designed to show how shifts in systems of thought uncovered by the archaeological method were due to contingent and complex, and not inevitable, trends in history (Gutting, 2008).
LeGreco and Tracy turned to Fairclough's (1992) Critical Discourse Analysis as a guide for studying micro-, meso-, and macro-levels of talk. Fairclough's three-dimensional model allows scholars to explore how texts and talk produced at the micro-level eventually cross contexts to be engaged and interpreted at the meso-level, and eventually come to interact with more enduring social discourses at the macro-level. At the micro-level, the researcher examines situated discourse in detail, while at the meso-level the researcher studies the production and consumption of the text, focusing on the enactment of power relations. The Macro-level involves inter-textual understanding, so that the researcher works to understand the broader societal discourse shaping the text(s) being studied. This level of discourse is generally consistent with what Gee (1999) termed big-D discourses. Big-D discourses refer to complex socio-historical practices such as professions or educational disciplines.

The methodological roots of discourse tracing can be found in cases studies, process tracing, and content analysis. LeGreco and Tracy advocated discourse tracing as a new methodological case study approach, and they drew on Flyvbjerg's claim that context-dependent knowledge leads to special expertise and knowledge. Discourse tracing also builds on 'process tracing'—an increasingly popular method of within-case comparison in the disciplines of political science and public policy (Bennet & Elman, 2006). Process tracing relies on chronological ordering to emphasize the identification of complex causal chains. Ruback (2010) criticized process tracing studies for relying on ontological assumptions that authors rarely acknowledged or reflected on. He argued that much process tracing marginalizes alternative interpretations. LeGreco and Tracy recognized these challenges in adopting elements of process tracing, and suggested that
critical discourse scholars need to be far more reflective and transparent in their application of these elements of discourse tracing. Finally, discourse tracing shares some features with content analysis. The key distinction is that content analysis focuses primarily on 'what' questions,' while discourse tracing focuses on 'how' or why' questions. Discourse tracing includes four phases: (a) research design, (b) data management, (c) analysis, and (d) evaluation (LeGreco & Tracy, 2009). Below I describe these four phases of discourse tracing and explain how I employ a communication design approach and situational mapping techniques to develop structured questions to guide case analysis.

**Research Design**

Research design requires researchers to identify a key turning point or rupture from which to conduct a literature review. In the City of Golden, this turning point was represented by the City’s decision to develop and implement alternative communication design in a long-term public planning process. Golden partnered with, and received financial support from, Orton to assess, identify, and implement alternative public participation strategies and associated communication designs. Therefore, an intended change in the city’s public participation design practices is the starting point for this study.

**Data Management**

During the data management phase of discourse tracing, researchers collect a variety of data from micro-level texts and talk, meso-level examples where this localized discourse has been carried across contexts, and relevant macro-level socially enduring discourses (LeGreco & Tracy, 2009). In this study, I employed a number of qualitative research methods to gather discourse data. At the (a) micro-level I engaged in participant observation at meetings, city events, and funder conferences; conducted interviews;
examined live and digitally recorded resident stories; and reviewed documents generated in meeting and event interactions. At the (b) meso-level, I reviewed newspaper articles, electronic newsletters, and online editorials and city planning and policy documents generated in relationship to the visioning project. At the (c) macro-level I reviewed planning industry reports and websites, planning scholarship, and common best practice models related to planning and public participation. Although there are no clear distinctions between these discourse levels, for the purposes of this study, I seek to distinguish meso-level discourses—especially policy texts—as capable of carrying localized meeting talk across public planning contexts. I also examine how individuals engage big-D discourses as resources for action in localized talk, and the extent to which big-D/macro-level discourses inform meso-level policy texts.

**Micro-Level Participant Observation.** Participant observation approaches vary, however systematic observation is typically sustained over a prolonged period of time, clearly focused on specific social phenomeon, and explicit about how observations are carried out (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). I engaged in participant observations of numerous GV 2030 meetings and events between February 2009 and September 2010. I observed—and often participated in—advisory committee meetings, neighborhood block parties, community summits, staff meetings, story focus groups, Orton conferences, and community events. See Appendix A for a list of specific observations that I include in this study. I entered the research site with an open statement about my research purpose (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002), and I participated in visioning activities unless they clearly required local expertise or involved a decision that would be likely to impact future
community development. At various points I found that my role was shifting precariously into the realm of unintended participant-action research.

Action researchers typically try to engage in the ongoing activities of their research site participants with an interest in full participation and potential intervention. Yin (2009) pointed out that it sometimes becomes difficult for researchers to figure out where to draw boundaries in interactions with participants. Researchers may struggle with their identities and become caught in between competing demands of participants. I experienced this in Golden when members of the public advisory committee asked me to advocate certain changes to the city's process. A city staff member also asked me to speak to her boss about perceived problems with a consultant’s request. While I worked to disentangle myself from these requests as diplomatically as possible, I was aware that it impacted my relationships with these individuals, and potentially threatened my access to future reflections from them. Therefore, my chronological fieldnotes provide not only a detailed reconstruction of events, but also reflections on my own experiences and dilemmas. When possible, I digitally recorded meetings and conversations and transcribed interactions for analysis.

**Micro-Level Interviews.** Interviews allow participants to share their experiences and interests so that it becomes clearer what individual and cultural logics they are using to make sense of their experiences. I conducted twenty respondent interviews with GV2030 LAC members (including city planners), Golden city officials, Orton consultants, and Golden community members. Five interviewees were interviewed once at the beginning of the visioning process and again near the end of the visioning process. It was not possible to interview all early participants a second time because some participants
left the process or were unavailable for follow-up interviews. Several interview questions employed in this study require an account or justifications of experiences (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002) related to GV 2030 communication design. Kuhn (2009) suggested that such accounts are best thought of as discursive resources—“concepts, expressions or other linguistic devices, drawn from practices and texts, that explain action while also providing a horizon for future practice” (p. 684). This potentially shows how actors appropriate certain discursive resources while also providing information about the subject’s positioning as a participant in a communication design process—participants might reflect on, contest, or challenge particular discursive frames or design practices. According to Kuhn (2009), the discursive resource “signifies types of identifications, making evident the social claims inherent in subject positions” (p. 684). I used an interview guide (Appendix B) to structure these interviews, although I did not limit the range of topics to questions on the guide. Interviews have been tape-recorded and transcribed for analysis. I also engaged in informal situational conversations at events and meetings to gather participant impressions of activities as they unfolded.

**Micro-Level Documents & Artifacts.** At the micro-level I collected documents and artifacts from immediate situated interactions. A number of these documents are products of the meetings and events I observed. For example, advisory committee participants frequently outlined communication design approaches on flip charts during meetings. Facilitators also used different mapping techniques at neighborhood events and summits to encourage community members to draw relationships between their experiences and interests and specific geographic places. I used these documents and artifacts to examine how micro interactions related to communication design began to
interact with other levels of discourse and transcend local talk to become meso-level policy texts or public relations material. Specifically, I asked how these documents were used to capture or reflect public participation and planning practices in relationship to other contexts. I also used documents and artifacts to confirm or revise my own fieldnotes.

**Micro-Level Resident Stories.** Members of the GV2030 LAC digitally recorded over 300 brief (5-10 minute) stories and informal interviews with residents who attended a series of community visioning events and public activities. I observed over two-dozen live stories, and GV 2030 LAC members provided me with story transcripts for 63 stories. I analyzed these stories to explore how people talked about and interpreted their experiences in Golden in relationship to spaces, places, people, built objects, and practices. I also observed how LAC members interacted with these stories throughout the GV 2030 process.

**Meso-Level Newspaper and Newsletter Articles and Editorials.** Newspapers and newsletters operate at a meso-level where local experiences become connected with larger discourses. LeGreco and Tracy (2009) called for a meso-level of analysis based on work by Hall (1987) and Maines (1982). Hall argued that we can move beyond a simple micro-macro distinction by showing how societal and institutional “forces mesh with human activity” (p. 10). Maines (1982) emphasized a meso-level or structure where social processes and practices become meaningful based on “a dialectical play of action and context” (LeGreco & Tracy, 2009, p. 1520). Publics and public interests come into being as journalists and publics speak out about their local experiences and draw connections between these experiences and larger societial discourses. For example,
Tracy (2010) found that arguments about school district issues advanced in editorials “were ‘interimbricated’ with those made at the board meetings” (p. 111). Her study suggested that each setting or level was used as a resource to support and counter arguments so that the newspaper wasn’t just covering a debate, but helping to construct and shape it. I collected newspaper and newsletter articles and editorials to analyze the constructing and positioning of publics and public interests in relationship to GV 2030 communication design. Golden city planning activities have received local, regional, and federal press attention over the past several years.

**Meso-Level Planning and Policy Texts.** I collected documents and artifacts that included GV 2030 process descriptions, partnership contracts, values statements, general planning drafts, and public policy recommendations. Such meso-level texts typically involve efforts to coordinate practices across various sites of activity (LeGreco & Tracy, 2009). For example, GV 2030 planning texts are intended to help shape future budgeting activities, development decisions, and various ongoing inter-organizational partnerships. I also incorporated relevant documents generated by individuals and non-governmental organizations. For example, documents developed in response to formal Golden 2030 planning texts include alternative recommendations or ideas, protests and petitions, and requests for clarification. At this level, emerging discourses—particularly unanticipated discourses—shaped or reshaped micro-level talk about what constituted meaningful and legitimate public participation.

**Macro-Level Planning Industry and Orton Family Foundation Texts.** Finally, I collected texts that represent some of the current macro-level/big D discourses surrounding public participation in local planning and associated communication design.
I included documents prepared by relevant planning associations and research bodies as well as texts from conferences and meetings held by Orton and its partner organizations—particularly those texts that draw on scholarly and professional models or logics about publics, public participation, and communication. In this study I seek to better understand how macro-level discourses of participation both enabled and constrained particular communication design practices for participants in the GV 2030 process.

**Chronological Data Ordering**

Next, I put these texts in chronological order so I could more effectively trace changes, common threads, and absences over time. See Appendix C for a chronological ordering of texts. According to LeGreco and Tracy (2009), this process allows researchers to identify “which discourses are operating in a given situation” (p. 1526) in order to trace how discourses emerge, change, or become absent or hidden through particular interactions. I used the chronological table to show how certain communication design practices and policy documents were adopted or changed in order to explore how these practices and texts enabled or constrained particular public participation discourses and practices over time. This chronological table assisted me in developing structured comparison questions (LeGreco & Tracy, 2009) as well as the situational map (Clarke, 2003) described below; I used both the questions and the map to trace relationships and changes throughout the GV 2030 process.

**Analysis**

Analysis is the third phase of discourse tracing. This phase requires researchers to develop structured comparison questions to guide tracing. These questions might be
philosophical or practical, and they should be guided by existing literature, participant interactions, and the chronologically ordered data. These questions are designed to help researchers "lift out patterns" (LeGreco & Tracy, 2009, p. 1522) from the chronologically ordered data. I drew on GV 2030 interactions and on scholarly literature to draft structured comparison questions. Since my research questions focused on changing practices and LAC members’ explicit efforts to redesign communication, I developed questions that allowed me to explore emerging tensions, challenges, and the ways in which participants made sense of unanticipated events. I also focused on emerging gaps between how LAC members described their aims and their actual communication practices. With this in mind, I moved back and forth between the chronological table described above and the following scholarly approaches to structure these questions: (a) Aakhus’s (2007) communication design theory, (b) Flyvbjerg’s phronetic planning, and (c) Clarke’s (2003) situational mapping (see Appendix D for GV 2030 structured questions). I drew on these other scholarly orientations and analytic tools to develop a more transparent and robust framework for developing structured comparison questions and analyzing findings.

**Communication Design Theory.** An emphasis on historical tracing allowed me to draw on communication design theory (Aakhus, 2007) to examine how communication design strategies emerged in relationship to multiple discourses and shaped or constrained public participation possibilities in certain ways. Communication design theory (Aakhus, 2007) sets out to examine both existing assumptions about communication and the consequences of particular communication design choices. Aakhus posited that “communication design happens when there is an intervention into
some ongoing activity through the invention of techniques, devices, and procedures that aim to redesign interactivity and thus shape the possibilities for communication” (p. 112). Design activities are, therefore, focused on successful design rather than specific methodological accomplishments or adherence. According to Aakhus, Communication scholars can study communication design to better understand what “formats presuppose about communication” (Aakhus & Jackson, 2005), and what consequences particular design hypotheses have for practice. He argued that “designs for communication present affordances that provide possibilities for interaction and constraints that remove possibilities for interaction” (p. 114). Aakhus and Jackson (2005) also argued, however, that “professional communities that practice communication design can be unreflective about the communicative theory underpinning the knowledge of their craft” (p. 416). Therefore, critical approaches are potentially compatible with communication design theory. By attending to Aakhus’s (2007) communication design orientation, I was able to ask what GV 2030 design “formats presuppose about communication and with what consequence the new format is taken up in communicative practice” (p. 114). Several of my structured questions concentrated on existing discourses about communication and public participation as well as on the consequences that particular design hypotheses had for practice—specifically to affordances and purposes that provided possibilities for interaction, and constraints that removed possibilities for interaction.

**Phronetic Planning.** LeGreco and Tracy (2009) urged scholars to focus on aspects of power and draw from Flyvbjerg’s phronetic science approach. Flyvbjerg (2004) called for a pragmatic—rather than utopian—approach to understanding planning practices, arguing that the concrete and the ethical have been frequently overlooked by
social science. According to Flyvbjerg, phronesis or practical wisdom directs us to examine what is unstable and that which requires judgment, choice, and experience. It moves us away from universal assumptions about what is good or right: “Choices must be deemed good or bad in relation to certain values and interests in order for good and bad to have meaning. Phronetic planning research is concerned with reflection about such values and interests” (p. 287).

Flyvbjerg (2004) argued that phronesis—in planning—has traditionally emphasized Habermasian conceptions of rationality and downplayed power and the complex political realities of actual planning situations. According to Flyvbjerg, the “principle objective for planning research with a phronetic approach is to clarify values, interests, and power relations in planning as a basis for praxis” (p. 289). He urged scholars to remain centered on four primary questions: “(a) where are we going?, (b) Who benefits and who loses and by what mechanisms of power? (c) Is this a good or bad thing?, and (d) What should we do about it?” (p. 290). Flyvbjerg reminded scholars, however, that there is no "unified we" or perspective from nowhere. I formulated structured discourse tracing questions to explore how micro-, meso-, and macro-level GV 2030 discourses attended to Flyvbjerg’s questions. I also tried to remind myself that my own interpretations were always in relationship to a community of scholars, research site participants, and planning practitioners.

**Situational Mapping.** During my analysis phase I found I needed a more spatially-oriented and flexible analytic tool for tracing relationships between human interactions and material, temporal, and institutional factors. Therefore, I developed two situational maps (Clarke, 2003) to explore relationships between actors, discourses,
practices, material objects, and technologies throughout GV 2030. Clarke introduced situational maps as *analytic exercises* that supplement traditional grounded theory by “elucidating complexities” (p. 554) and generating more rich analysis. Her approach emphasizes the whole situation of study, seeking to break down conceptual schema that position context as somehow outside of ongoing interaction. Situational analysis involves creating maps “that lay out the major human, nonhuman, discursive, and other elements in the research situation of concern and provoke analyses of relations among them” (Clarke, 2003, p. 559). My situational map for GV 2030 is included as Appendix E.

Clarke also advocated the development of *social worlds/arenas maps* so that analysts might better understand actors and the arenas of commitment within which they navigate ongoing interactions. I developed a social worlds/arenas map for the GV 2030 (see Appendix F), and found it difficult to differentiate certain aspects of the GV 2030 social worlds/arenas given the overlapping and intricately interconnected individuals, organizations, and disciplines. Finally, Clarke recommended creating positional maps that “lay out the major positions taken, and not taken, in the data vis-à-vis particular discursive axes of variation and difference, concern, and controversy found in the situation of concern” (p. 560). Although this concept is critical to my study, I found no easy way to develop this enormously detailed and messy map in a form consistent with the dissertation genre. This map exists in and across Excel spreadsheets, post-it notes and cocktail napkins, on iPhone recordings and flip charts and piles of legal pads. Although the primary concepts might fit on a conference room wall, I have no sense of how to make a map that fits in this document. In many ways, this document represents my efforts
to turn these various positional maps into the genre accepted and expected by a scholarly community.

**Evaluation.** In the final phase of discourse tracing I address the theoretical and practical conclusions from this case. Although the findings from this single case are not generalizable, I have developed propositions that are potentially transferable to other public planning sites. I have also identified practical implications that merit future co-theorizing and action research by scholars, practitioners, and publics.
CHAPTER V

PROBLEMS OF PLANNING

Figure 1. Early photographs of Golden courtesy of David Hoos (of San Andreas, CA) who had relatives among the first western settlers to arrive in Golden, Colorado.

The mimesis between life so-called and narrative is a two-way affair: that is to say, just as art imitates life in Aristotle's sense, so, in Oscar Wilde's, life imitates art. Narrative imitates life, life imitates narrative. (Bruner, 2004, p. 692)

D. T.: Wow. I bet things have changed, want to tell me about some of those changes?

T. E.: Well Denver met up with Golden, finally. (personal communication, August 22, 2009)

What changes? They’ve all been good – we’ve got the bike trails and walking trails and access to outdoor trails in the surrounding area … the way it’s changed so far has been really pleasant and I hope it stays that way. Just don’t do any advertising. (B.W., personal communication, May 16, 2009)
My aim in this chapter is to identify different GV 2030 discourses about the problems of public planning and show how they interact to produce, reinforce, or contest particular narratives about publics, community identity, and ordinary democracy. In subsequent chapters, I will present findings that show how these discourses intersected with a variety of other discourses to shape GV 2030 LAC’s communication design. In the following pages, I examine narratives from the first six months of the GV 2030 process and ask: How are public planning problems articulated through intersecting micro-, meso-, and macro-level discourses? How do these particular problem articulations shape public attention? How do they shape or position community identity? In pursuing these questions, I observed numerous discourses about the nature and scope of planning problems. However, the majority of discourses coalesced around two competing narratives about the relationship between community planning problems and community identity.

**Competing City Narratives**

The most cohesive narrative—what I have termed the *autonomous city* narrative—articulates Golden as a clearly defined and independent entity struggling to respond to external threats. An emergent and more ambiguous narrative articulates Golden as an *interdependent city* struggling to coordinate its future across regional and even global boundaries to address complex sustainability dilemmas. The narrative of the autonomous city is, at this point, stronger than the emerging interdependent city narrative. The former narrative derives power from a multitude of intersecting textual and material discourses and from its relationship to existing features of ordinary democracy. The autonomous city narrative is also stabilized by its recognizable narrative format.
associated with existing institutions (Czarniawska-Joerges, 1994; Bruner, 2004) and by associated social processes of identification (McClure, 2009). However, this narrative is neither fixed nor seamless. Narratives were not always cleanly delineated and, in some cases, the same authors articulated or invoked seemingly discrepant narratives about planning problems in the same conversation or text. Discourse theory proposed by Laclau and Mouffe (in Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002) suggests that new articulations of problems might disrupt or shift the existing narrative and associated identifications. Both narratives influenced GV 2030 communication design and have implications for the practices of ordinary democracy, for alternative approaches to democratic participation, and ultimately for the future of communities. In upcoming chapters I explore dilemmas and opportunities associated with these narratives in more detail.

Mumby (1987) and Faber (2002) argued that stories are situationally-contingent products that generate an interpretation of an organization or community while simultaneously situating social actors. The definition of what constitutes a narrative or story is hard to pin down, but Ryfe (2006) provided a commonly cited minimal definition in suggesting that stories: (a) refer to an ordered sequence of events, (b) pivot around a problem, (c) convey a moral or message worth telling, and (d) are constructed through social interaction and with discursive functions dependent on context. Stone-Mediatore (2003) drew on Barthes’s (1989) description of narrative discourse to argue that stories make experiences intelligible by providing “a pattern of identifiable actors and action-units that are qualified through metaphor and other poetic devices and that are related together within a coherent structure of beginnings and endings” (p. 3). She extended this understanding by claiming that stories perform two basic kinds of work: (a) they perform
“the work of relating together within an integrated whole an ensemble of disparate elements,” and (b) they incorporate “poetic language to convey the moral, emotional, and aesthetic qualities of a past phenomenon” (p. 34). Based on these definitions, I observed numerous discourses about the problems of community planning that most often supported—but occasionally contested—a narrative about increasing threats to small community identity and autonomy.

The majority of GV 2030 participants I interacted with described more purposeful public planning as a way for the City of Golden to respond proactively to rapid social and economic change. Discourses about planning at micro-, meso-, and macro-levels intersected to articulate a world in which resource interdependency, competition, and unstable institutional relationships potentially jeopardized community identity so that existing boundaries, relationships, resources, practices, and overall agency were called into question. This is consistent with Faber’s (2002) finding that an organization’s identity is constituted, in large part, by stories and that these stories—and therefore organizational identity—are threatened during times of significant change. However, whereas Faber characterizes organizational identity as created by internal stories, this study suggests that locally situated narratives and identity are constructed by messy interactions between micro-, meso-, and macro-level discourses.

Narratives about public planning problems were most apparent in meso-level Orton texts, LAC member interviews, resident stories, and informal event talk. Public planning problems often appeared to be taken for granted in LAC meetings, particularly during the first phase of the process. I suspect this was, in large part, due to the strong role that Orton took in articulating Heart & Soul project rationale during the first three
LAC meetings. Orton’s narrative shaped but did not fully account for a prominent GV 2030 narrative that I have termed the autonomous city. This narrative constructed Golden as a distinct entity with clear boundaries and shared interests—or the potential for shared interests. It urged community heroes to respond to externalities that threatened to strip Golden of its unique identity.

The Autonomous City: A Community Under Siege

GV 2030 micro- and meso-level discourses frequently intersected to create and invoke a narrative that emphasized the increasingly competitive nature of community planning. This discourse suggested that external threats associated with rapid social and economic change were endangering existing communities. In most cases, communities were understood in a relatively narrow sense—as small towns with long histories, common practices, and a shared sense of place. These communities were involved in a struggle to prevent assimilation and the loss of localized social and environmental resources. The Orton Heart & Soul project rationale outlines a particularly stark battle for the future of small U.S. cities and towns:

Towns everywhere struggle to cope with rapid demographic, economic and land use changes, and many are losing what makes them special. Traditional planning processes aren’t enough to respond to a dizzying array of challenges and keep our towns from becoming soulless shells of communities ... Small cities and towns across America face many challenges. Towns that are close to significant natural resource amenities face increasing development pressures from urban professionals plying their trades via the Internet and enjoying the great outdoors, and from burgeoning retirement populations seeking the high quality, low stress
way of life found in these picturesque and desirable places. Other communities suffer from youth exodus, crumbling infrastructure and antiquated economies, and they are tempted to embrace development at any cost. (Orton Family Foundation, 2011a, ¶ 8)

In Orton’s narrative, residents and their small town communities are victims of complex external processes. They are overwhelmed by shifting populations, tempted by misleading developers, and disillusioned by existing democratic practices. They are either bought out or they opt out. Small towns are threatened by powerful urban interests and their youth are lured away to other—presumably more urban—communities. However, Orton extends this story into the future, arguing that citizens can engage in collaborative and heroic efforts to “direct the forces of growth and change” (Orton Family Foundation, 2011a, ¶ 13) and, by doing so, defend their community identity. Orton is dedicated to community emancipation and it is their stated mission to help communities write their own stories. This is consistent with Bruner’s (2004) argument that the autobiography is a particularly compelling and familiar narrative format for modern storytellers.

Although Orton’s narrative clearly involves hyperbole and an aggregation of community experiences, it is no less resonant for its imaginary features. As Stone-Mediatore (2003) suggested, “although the rhetorical dimension of historical narrative does not represent objective reality, it may nonetheless give form to structures and qualities of human experience” (p. 25). This discourse about external threats to small town identity and autonomy intersected with—and reinforced—a significant number of conversations and stories I participated in and listened to during my time in Golden. Resident stories routinely included terms like unique and exceptional to describe Golden
in relationship to other cities and describe concerns about increased urban development. LAC members often drew on Orton’s discourse about the importance of a town’s individual ‘heart & soul’ and the threats of development to explain the GV 2030 project. At initial LAC meetings and in early interviews, LAC members frequently talked about getting residents involved in planning for Golden’s future before it became just like other communities. Storytellers and LAC members often associated this homogenization with large corporate chains that replaced locally run businesses. The loss of Golden’s long-time local drug store, Foss Drugs, was bemoaned by dozens of storytellers as detrimental to the town’s character:

M. R.: I’d like to see things pretty much stay the same. I’m pretty much of the opinion that if you have a few less chains, it was horrible to see Foss go, it’s hard to have something like that for 94 years -

L. S.: And have it taken out because of Walgreens down the street.

M. R.: Because of Walgreens, right down the street. And that’s where we probably didn’t give it enough forethought and we lost a 94-year old business, a local business, to a chain. (personal communication, July 18, 2009).

Here, an LAC member expressed hope that GV 2030 would prevent this continued loss of community identity by generating a more specific master plan:

My understanding of what happened in the past is that our master plan is very much based on other standard municipal master plans, and of course Golden has a very unique character and history … I’m very hopeful that we can continue to reflect our character and not just be some Mc-municipality. (S. L., personal communication, June 8, 2009).
Her use of “Mc-municipality” again shows how community discourses equated the presence of outside corporations with a loss of unique local identity. However, corporations were not the only villains in this narrative about threats to small town autonomy. Surrounding cities were also perceived as jeopardizing Golden’s community identity.

Residents frequently shared concerns about encroaching urban areas, worsening environmental pollution, increased traffic, and other perceived threats to their quality of life in Golden. A number of residents who participated in GV 2030 storytelling events described Denver as the primary perpetrator of development activities that threatened Golden’s sense of identity and its natural resources. This storyteller expressed a sense of relief that his neighborhood generally escaped the increasing pollution from Denver that other residents described as negatively impacting the air quality and smell of some Golden neighborhoods:

> The prevailing winds are out of Mount Vernon Canyon, so we don’t pick up a lot of the stink from Denver unless we get an upslope, you know in the weather … you know those big clouds of pollution that will move out across the plains. And move up north. (W.M., personal communication, August 22, 2009)

Golden residents also articulated their town’s unique identity by comparing it to surrounding communities. Storytellers frequently expressed relief that Golden was not big or impersonal like Denver, suburban like Arvada, or gentrified and expensive like Boulder. The propensity for LAC members and resident storytellers to contrast Golden with surrounding communities is consistent with Throgmorton’s (2003) argument that people simultaneously shape and are shaped by a region through a discursive process of
differentiation: “constructing a persuasive story about the region is also a matter of constructing regional identity; the ‘we’ the story constructs depends on how the story is spatialized” (p. 59). A number of LAC members and storytellers echoed Orton’s warning that excessive growth and change were threatening Golden’s identity. In many cases, they described community identity and this potential loss of identity as something ineffable—something you felt rather than observed. This resonated with my own experience. One LAC interviewee explained this in the following way at the beginning of the GV 2030 process:

G. H.: You can just feel it when you’re in a town, and you can think it just doesn’t have it. Golden does, and you just want to enhance it even more, and you don’t want to lose it by poor planning, which I think you can pretty easily do. It can be gone and you hardly realized it happened, kind of an incremental slippery slope.

S. M.: That’s part of what moved me to this project. I’ve seen it happen …

G. H.: I know, and people—I forgot what I was doing. Ah, walking and passing out information, and a couple of people said, “We don’t want Golden to turn into Boulder.” And I love Boulder, but I know what they’re talking about. (personal communication, June 11, 2009)

Other residents were even more explicit about wanting to distinguish Golden’s identity from their image of surrounding cities, and especially Boulder:

Other changes I have seen primarily are re-gentrifying the city with things like the bridges, I don’t know if that’s really necessary but on the other hand it kind of goes along with the territory. I feel like it’s been “Boulder-i-fied”, I can’t explain it… it’s like Boulder is coming to Golden, essentially. (R.G., July 18, 2009)
For a number of LAC members, the initiation of the Golden GV 2030 planning process underlined a perceived loss of local control in relationship to surrounding regions and larger social and institutional forces. Dozens of storytellers and interviewees I listened to worried that unmitigated growth would create new transportation problems, undermine existing community businesses, infringe upon valued open space, or bring increased public safety threats.

During the first phase of the visioning process, Golden’s Mayor told me that many residents had expressed frustration with the city’s “inability to have control over the type of growth occurring in Golden” (S. T., personal communication, November 10, 2009). According to the GV 2030 ‘Frequently Asked Questions’ document prepared by city planning staff and Orton representatives: “City Council has noted a feeling in the community that the City has taken a reactive role to growth and land use decisions in the past. Council wants the City to take the lead in determining the future of the community in this area. The project is starting now based upon that direction” (City of Golden, 2009c, p. 1). Several LAC members also described their desire to protect Golden from growth based, not just on their experiences in Golden, but on their experiences in other towns and cities where they believed development choices had harmed or eliminated community identity:

And what happened in Pasadena when I lived there, I lived there in about 1989, and the downtown area, some of it was pretty tough … a lot of alcoholics and homeless, and kind of tough. And they revitalized it, but in my mind, they went too far. They took it where it was just a great place to be on a Sunday morning reading a newspaper in a café, and walking around and doing some shopping, to
putting in big mega-theatres and fancy new restaurants. And before you know it, you had people coming from 30 miles away on Friday night, Saturday, Sunday night, Saturday night, Sunday, and you kind of lost your city. I mean, I feel like I wanna protect Golden. (N. R., personal communication, June 11, 2009) In this story, new businesses and people from other communities threatened Golden’s identity. More recent Golden residents often appeared as—or even more likely—to draw on discourses related to community protection and preservation than long-time residents. Dozens of resident storytellers described moving to Golden because of its beautiful natural environment or its small town feel or both. They did not want to lose this sense of belonging to something special.

Although many storytellers and LAC members expressed anxiety about rapid growth, others indicated ambivalence about neighboring cities and most expressed optimism about Golden’s ability to resist potential geographical and social assimilation or environmental degradation. They frequently attributed this resilience to Golden’s geographic boundaries, existing social capital, or its intangible sense of community character:

Golden is special because of the Table Mountains and it really separates us off from Denver, and then we have the foothills over there and most of that is never going to be built on, and so I think we have a really great place here. Even though Denver is going to reach around and eventually fill in everything on the sides. (F.P. personal communication, May 2, 2009)

I notice a lot of the other communities around the Denver area have been really swallowed up and become a part of Denver. And I like Golden—there’s lots of
other reasons why I like Golden—going back to vacations with my Mother when I wasn’t even in grade school yet. But the main thing is it’s, it’s own place. It’s not going to—I don’t see it ever being taken into the city to just become another part of the greater Denver area with a little shopping center area where you can do unique things or something like that. It’s its own city. (B.C., personal communication, July 18, 2009)

I heard this concept—that Golden is very much its own place—repeated again and again throughout the GV 2030 process. Dozens of storytellers expressed satisfaction with their proximity to Denver and its urban amenities, while also stressing the importance of geographic and social boundaries that separated these communities. Their discourse emphasized the importance of unique town identity and it imbued the GV 2030 process with a sense of early direction. This prominent narrative about threats to city autonomy is also aligned with current structures and practices of ordinary democracy in the U.S.

A system of macro-level policies related to taxes, zoning, service delivery, etc. construct states and regions out of collections of largely autonomous municipalities. This structure provides incentives for local governments to compete with one another to attract businesses, displace governance costs, and shelter local resources (Frug, 1999; Throgmorton, 2003). Golden’s city boundaries are constructed and reified by texts related to complex planning policies, tax codes, and organizational partnerships. Golden city planners frequently complained about the constraints associated with these textually inscribed boundaries, but most residents appeared to take these boundaries for granted or be generally unfamiliar with city policies. Golden’s city boundaries are constituted in more mundane and familiar ways as well—by city limit signs, logos, and visible
amenities (e.g., parks and roads) that indicate the wealth and priorities of residents. According to Cintron (1997), geographical names designate economic distinctions within modern economic systems: “the rhetoric of place-names everywhere on this map, then, is part of a network of idealizations that enable the buying and selling of property” (p. 21). City boundaries are also articulated through numerical discourses such as crime statistics, recreation budgets, and census reports. These texts often compared numerical discourses from different cities to draw attention to Golden’s distinctions and shifts in demographics and services.

Corporate discourses also contributed to this narrative about city autonomy and the importance of regional differentiation. Orton consultants provided LAC members with ESRI’s geographic information Tapestry Segmentation lifestyle data for Golden at an early GV 2030 meeting. According to ESRI, this data allows companies, agencies, and other organizations to better understand and target consumer markets. An Orton consultant also pointed out that community planning groups could use this data in designing their public participation activities. Geographic Information System (GIS) technology enables ESRI to categorize and collect fine-grain details on city, neighborhood, and individual activities and consumer and political preferences. This system incorporates a wide array of public and private data on demographics that ESRI claims will allow organizations to measure and predict aspects of community character:

Segmentation systems operate on the theory that people with similar tastes, lifestyles, and behaviors seek others with the same tastes—“like seeks like.” These behaviors can be measured, predicted, and targeted. ESRI’s Tapestry Segmentation system combines the “who” of lifestyle demography with the
“where” of local neighborhood geography to create a model of various lifestyle classifications or segments of actual neighborhoods with addresses—distinct behavioral market segments. (ESRI, 2007, p. 2)

ESRI begins with a clear theory about community formation—that “like seeks like.” Implicit in this theory is a strong sense of individual agency. In this discourse, citizens get to choose where they live based on their preferred lifestyle and, as a result, neighborhoods and cities become unique in character. ESRI’s research design is also shaped by the assumption that community differentiation at a highly localized level is critical to supporting resident/consumer/constituent satisfaction and organizational and economic development:

The most compelling feature about neighborhoods is the ability to attract residents and shape their living standards and tastes. People need to feel that they belong and will seek places where their lifestyles and behaviors fit. Conclusion: The benefits of segmentation can be clearly defined by anyone who needs accurate information about their consumers, constituents, or members. (p. 2)

ESRI’s Tapestry Segmentation report for Golden compared the city to other U.S. cities in terms of particular lifestyle categories. These categories included: “(a) Crossroads, (b) In Style, (c) Milk and Cookies, (d) Connoisseurs, (e) College Towns, (f) Boomburbs, (g) Exurbanites, (h) Trendsetters, (i) Old and Newcomers, and (j) Metropolitans” (p. 1). GV 2030 participants reviewed and discussed this report at one of their initial meetings—talking about how it confirmed or failed to confirm their own beliefs about their community. This meeting talk, inspired by numerical meso-level discourses contributed to the existing narrative about an autonomous town asserting itself in relationship to
external identity threats. With some sense of irony, a colleague of mine pointed out that outside developers and marketers are likely to use this same numerical discourse in an effort to craft narratives about future development projects in Golden.

Throughout the GV 2030 process, numerous actors constructed a narrative that made sense of the problems of planning in relationship to a constellation of discourses about an *autonomous town*. GV 2030’s narrative about threats to small town identity and autonomy was constituted in relationship to micro-level experiences and talk, meso-level numerical and policy texts, and macro-level policies and institutional structures that articulate particular understandings of community identity. This narrative is powerful, but it is neither stable nor seamless. Laclau and Mouffe (in Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002) argued that social phenomenon are never finished or total and that meanings are always subject to ongoing social struggles over definitions of society and identity. Their work is instructive in showing how planning problems in Golden are often understood in relationship to a particular *nodal point*—in this case, Golden is *articulated* as an *autonomous town*. According to Laclau and Mouffe, a hegemonic discourse is formed when meanings become fixed and naturalized through a web of signs that have certain relationships with other signs. Therefore, alternative understandings—in this case, alternative narratives—of the world are suppressed. Other possible meanings and relationships that these signs could have taken remain exterior to the discourse. But, since signs are empty in themselves, they are open to different designations of meaning. Laclau and Mouffe suggested that meaning is created within a web of processes. When signs associated with this web begin to shift, nodal points and associated assumptions about the world might be brought back into question. In Golden, I witnessed an alternative
narrative about planning problems as problems of *community resource interdependence* form in relationship to emerging discourses about sustainability.

**The Interdependent City: Shared Sustainability Problems**

A narrative about *interdependence* and sustainability began to emerge in Golden in 2007 or earlier, but this narrative was articulated primarily by a small handful of community activists and city staff. It intersected with and—in some cases—drew on recent macro-level policy discourses about regional sustainability. This narrative of *interdependence* articulated a need for greater social cooperation in relationship to organizational and societal sustainability problems. The problems themselves were described as stemming from complex systems—both environmental and social. I interviewed five LAC members who told me they were actively involved in a variety of Golden sustainability efforts. They each talked about the importance of paying attention to the relationship between local decisions and regional and global resource problems. Two of these members told me their children had urged them to start paying attention to community sustainability issues. Multiple interviewees and the city’s sustainability committee chair pointed me to a planning commission document that they described as an early outcome of community sustainability discussions. This document, titled *Golden Conversations* (City of Golden Planning Commission, 2007) was crafted based on community interactions at a well-attended sustainability event. This event was jointly sponsored by a grassroots group and the City of Golden in 2007, and several LAC members attributed the existence of the GV 2030 process to discussions at this event. The document produced after the event explained how complex external social forces were influencing local decision-making:
No matter what one believes about the larger issues of climate change and resource depletion, there is a significant consensus, in Golden and most everywhere else, that a business as usual approach to community life is not a viable option … As significant as any of the above factors, economic forces at a national and worldwide scale hold significant influence on local community decisions. Everything from the price and availability of gas and its effects on land use patterns, to the statewide push to capitalize on changes in the energy industry and the potential economic impacts of partnerships among the National Renewable Energy Laboratory (NREL) and a consortium of Colorado and national universities will impact both opportunities and limitations on community decisions. (p. 2)

The discourse in this document does not emphasize small town autonomy or a distinct tension between urban and rural or growth/no-growth sensibilities; instead, it focuses more explicitly on complex issues of interdependence between state, national, and global actors. Each of the seven city staff members and public officials that I interviewed described a complex and/or contentious economic and political system that constrained more sustainable development choices and led to poor local and regional planning. Two city managers talked about “bad tax policies” that they said incentivized competition rather than collaboration among cities in Colorado. One of these managers expressed empathy for other managers in the region, and explained how new planning problems related to transportation and economic development could only be resolved effectively with greater regional coordination.
Several LAC members also described difficult tensions among local, regional, state, national, and global interests—particularly related to the issues of environmental sustainability and economic development. In the example below, an LAC member raised questions about local responsibilities in a global world:

And so how do we have a city that is an integral part of the earth and of society, as a whole organism? So it’s almost to me, theoretically, ecological. So we’ve got this city that’s an organism, and how can it do—how can we have a great place to live, do the least damage to the environment, have it so that people enjoy being here and being around each other, and we’re doing positive things, instead of hurtful things to each other or to the environment? (D. S. personal communication, June 10, 2009)

This focus on interdependence and sustainability is echoed in Nelson and Lang’s *Megapolitan America* published in 2011 by the American Planning Association. Nelson and Lang explain that roughly two-thirds of the U.S. population lives in approximately two-dozen megapolitan areas that they define as “networks of metropolitan centers fused by common economic, physical, social, and cultural traits” (Rewers, 2011, ¶ 1). Golden is located in Colorado’s Front Range megapolitan area with Denver as its metropolitan center. According to Nelson and Lang, these megapolitan areas will experience substantial growth in population and associated jobs over the next three decades. They argue that environmental resource and transportation changes associated with this growth will generate new governance challenges, and they “see the growing convergence of major metro areas and smaller towns in between as an opportunity to promote better
regional planning and cooperation rather than leading to individual cities acting as rivals for new investment” (¶ 8).

This narrative that conceptualizes planning problems as deeply related to interdependence potentially challenges the narrative of the autonomous city. Each of these narratives articulates a different problem and calls upon communities and residents to enact planning in certain ways. However, the autonomous city narrative appeared to function as a hegemonic discourse that marginalized alternative narratives about city planning problems throughout much of the GV 2030 project. The discourse theory advocated by Laclau and Mouffe (in Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002) suggests that alternative signs and nodal points may generate tension and potentially disrupt the hegemonic discourse that constitutes the autonomous city narrative. Talk and material artifacts related to regional or global sustainability may yet function to shift attention so that interdependence becomes a new nodal point for GV 2030 participants. I argue, however, that this interpretation, guided by the work of Laclau and Mouffe, is insufficient in that it neglects the nature and power of narrative to structure meaning.

The Power of the Autonomous City Narrative

A number of scholars suggest that modern institutions are associated with particular narrative forms (Czarniawska-Joerges, 1994; Bruner, 2004). Czarniawska-Joerges argued that narratives function to organize social relationships in particular ways. For example, autobiography became appropriate for modernity given its structural ability to emphasize characteristics such as autonomy, flexibility, and self-respect. Based on this premise, the GV 2030 narrative about small town autonomy represents a compelling narrative form. It stresses autonomy as a natural community right and it presents heroes
and villains—insiders and outsiders. Bruner (2004) argued that a given culture relies on particular “narrative models it makes available for describing the course of a life” so that a kind of narrative “tool kit” provides a “stock of canonical life narratives (heroes, Marthas, tricksters, etc.)” (p. 694). This narrative tool kit allows individuals and communities to develop autobiographical narratives within a particular system of constraints and affordances. Bruner’s theory helps to explain the power of GV 2030’s autonomous city narrative—it is about narrating Golden’s autobiography and crafting a desired future. This explanation is closely intertwined with existing systems of ordinary democracy that establish and maintain local boundaries and inscribe a localized span of control. Decisive autobiographies are difficult to construct when boundaries are ambiguous, and when potentially relevant actors are hard to articulate and their actions even harder to predict.

Theories about the relationship between narrative and social identification processes can also help to explain the strength of the autonomous city narrative. McClure (2009) drew on Burke’s notion of identification to better articulate the role of narrative in constituting identity and ideology. According to McClure, narrative scholars should do more than provide a model for criticism—they should help to account for the real narratives that are constructed and accepted in our communities. He argued that it is identification that actually constitutes story acceptance—that identification is a symbolic encounter rather than a straightforward acceptance of a rational argument. McClure claimed that identification can be an end in itself where it offers up a sense of belonging. The substance of the narrative is not unimportant, but it is the social identifications—collections of discourses and experiences—associated with any particular narrative that
encourage loyalty to the narrative. In Golden, I repeatedly saw LAC members and resident storytellers identify not just with a *narrative* about small town autonomy, but with a constellation of discourses and embodied experiences surrounding this narrative.

Newcomers expressed tremendous relief at finally being part of a *real* community. Political leaders described the importance of protecting and promoting the interests of their town. Nearly all residents expressed particular connections with—and sometimes a sense of ownership over—their natural environment. Orton consultants described their own experiences living in small town communities. During the initial GV 2030 planning and storytelling phase, I often found myself commiserating with residents about lost historical landmarks or bristling at the thought of development along my favorite walking trail—a place where resident storytellers began to greet me in familiar ways. I met two former residents from my northern California hometown at a GV 2030 storytelling event and they told me about falling in love with Golden and its similarities to my hometown. I found myself wanting to protect Golden, but struggling to equate this narrative of small town autonomy with my awareness of resource interdependence and my own commitments to more collaborative regional planning.

I agree with Throgmorton’s (2003) call for communities to: “imagine a region whose boundaries are socially and spatially more inclusive than current ones” (p. 59). This is an important narrative but it is also ambiguous and less familiar. It suggests that we are all simultaneously insiders and outsiders impacting and being impacted by interrelated community discourses and complex issues of resource interdependency. Involved actors are multitudinous and the scope of the story seemingly endless. There is, as of yet, no defined narrator and it is unclear how existing social structures and practices
of ordinary democracy will account for this new sense of interdependence. Stone-Mediatore (2003) draws on work by Arendt to argue that this kind of disruptive narration is critical to supporting sound political judgment, but the narrative—in that it is less familiar—is also less tied to existing processes of identification (McClure, 2009). The prevailing narrative about the problems of planning and city autonomy is generated and stabilized by a constellation of community discourses, a compelling and familiar story format, and loyalties to the communities and texts constructed in relationship to this narrative. The narrative of city autonomy is also connected to the practices and perceived limitations of ordinary democracy. Nearly all LAC members told me they believed current democratic practices were neglecting or even exacerbating problems of planning.
CHAPTER VI

PUBLIC PLANNING AND THE LIMITATIONS OF ORDINARY DEMOCRACY

*If we assume the responsibility of government is to facilitate individual self-interest, we will take one set of actions. If, on the other hand, we assume the responsibility of government is to promote citizenship, public discourse, and the public interest, we will take an entirely different set of actions.* (Denhardt & Denhardt, 2000, p. 557)

In this chapter, I focus on how GV 2030 participants articulated various—and sometimes competing—discourses about the limitations of ordinary democracy. The majority of GV 2030 interviewees told me the ‘same old faces’ or ‘usual suspects’ showed up at Golden city planning meetings. However, most interviewees and storytellers also described an active and involved community where large numbers of citizens participated in groups focused on protecting environmental resources, promoting neighborhood interests, and increasing recreational opportunities. In story sessions and meetings hundreds of Golden residents talked about their commitments to their community, their involvement in neighborhood, school, church, or other community groups and their interest in helping to shape future city planning decisions. Yet, according to city planners and political leaders, few of these residents ever attended public planning events. If they showed up at all, it was to protest a decision already made.

In this section, I seek to understand how participants in the GV 2030 process interacted to make sense of these apparent contradictions by asking the following questions: How do
LAC members and partners articulate ideals and limitations of ordinary democracy? How do they articulate the role of the public in relationship to these ideals and limitations, and what alternative public participation ideals and practices begin to emerge?

In this study, micro-, meso-, and macro-discourses intersected to formulate divergent narratives about ordinary democracy and its limitations. I found that although people talked about improving democracy, not everyone understood the limitations of ordinary democracy in the same way. A variety of discourses articulated limitations as stemming from (a) antiquated communication forums and an associated lack of accessibility or low citizen motivation, (b) insufficient attention to everyday experience, or (c) problems of power. Although not always distinct, these discourses tended to understand the limitations of ordinary democracy and the relationship between citizens and existing governance systems differently. In future chapters I will show how both discourses about the problems of planning and the limitations of ordinary democracy influenced the LAC’s ongoing communication design process.

As Asen (2004), Hauser (1999), and a number of other public participation scholars have suggested, locally constituted articulations of public participation do not always coincide with ideal public participation models or measurement systems. Putnam’s (2000) book *Bowling Alone* warned readers that a dangerous drop in civic engagement was undermining critical political institutions and eroding valuable social capital. Asen (2004) argued, however, that assertions about civic engagement trends are often problematic for at least four reasons. First, he claimed that such evaluations typically rely on limited longitudinal data. In other words, studies of a sudden drop in service club participation might fail to capture increased participation in other community
activities over time. Second, he maintained that measurement categories make narrow assumptions about what counts as public participation—it is valuable to consider who determines whether a particular public activity constitutes civic participation and with what consequences. A third and related problem Asen identified is the possibility that such civic engagement measurements actually direct actors to a set of narrowly defined activities, thereby limiting possibilities for public invention. Finally, he argued that categorical assessment of civic engagement “characterizes citizenship as a zero-sum game” (p. 191). During the initial phase of the GV 2030 process, LAC members frequently attempted to ‘pin down’ what counted—and what ought to count—as meaningful public participation. Their accounts of effective or ideal public participation were almost always articulated in contrast to dilemmatic practices of ordinary democracy and, as Asen’s work would suggest, these accounts circumscribed GV 2030 public participation efforts and corresponding interpretations of success in particular ways.

**A Growing Demand for Citizen Participation?**

Although declining citizen participation has received significant attention in both popular and academic contexts, early discourse related to GV 2030, especially at the meso- and macro- levels, articulated a growing demand for community participation. LAC members generally articulated this demand as stemming from both the problems of public planning and the failures or limitations of ordinary democracy. Over time, their articulations of more meaningful public participation began to shape the group’s communication design and the relationship between GV 2030 practices and the existing practices of ordinary democracy. In addition, LAC members, political leaders, and storytellers did not always understand ordinary democracy or the limitations of ordinary
democracy in similar ways.

At the meso-level, citizen calls for increased participation were often described as emerging from within and across a wide range of community forums. In documents prepared by Golden grassroots groups and local government agencies, this demand was attributed largely to residents’ concerns about problems of the *interdependent city* and insufficiently coordinated governance systems. These meso-level discourses were typically articulated by individuals and groups already actively involved in a wide range of government, nonprofit, grassroots, and community-oriented for-profit organizations. In other words, these discourses were generally shaped and maintained by people who considered themselves community organizers, leaders, or activists.

*Golden Conversations*, the document produced immediately after Golden’s successful 2007 sustainability event (City of Golden Planning Commission, 2007), argued that community members were demanding improved organizational coordination to address problems of interdependence. Language in this document was not specific about what interactions constituted this demand, but it explained that the demand is visible in dispersed settings as well as in meso-level policy texts:

> The community is demanding opportunities and support for more efficient land use patterns, efficient use of resources, reduced waste stream, and effective business practices that will allow Golden to remain a vital and desirable community into the future. This community demand is beginning to evidence itself in many separate arenas and proposals. Because it is such a broad topic, it will take time for existing community organizations and agencies to determine how to coordinate efforts and projects. (p. 2)
In this text, community members demand improved organizational coordination as a way of responding to pressing sustainability issues. Coordination challenges are understood as a problem of organizing, and existing organizations and agencies are made responsible for overseeing changes. Although community members are demanding more complex and creative problem solving capacity, the proposed solution does not advocate the kind of facilitative or decentered governance that a number of scholars have predicted or encouraged in recent years (Denhardt & Denhardt, 2000; Fischer, 2009). Instead, having identified the problem, community members will wait for government intervention.

Discourse in Orton’s Heart & Soul planning documents also stressed citizen demand for improved governance, but it positioned citizens as more central actors in improved governance processes. Orton argued that citizen expectations for involvement are increasingly antithetical to traditional notions of expert decision-making. They frequently drew on macro-level scholarly and practitioner discourses and findings as well as on examples from prior Orton projects:

As we embark on the 21st century, there are signs that citizens expect to have a greater role in community decisions. In *The Next Form of American Democracy*, Matt Leighninger wrote, “[C]itizens seem better at governing, and worse at being governed, than ever before…. We are leaving the era of expert rule, in which elected representatives and designated experts make decisions and attack problems with limited interference, and entering a period in which the responsibilities of governance are more widely shared.” The Foundation has witnessed many examples of “ordinary” citizens leading the way (Orton Family Foundation, 2011a, ¶ 12).
In the above text, Orton draws on scholarly discourse to articulate the importance of citizen expertise. However, Orton’s experience with “ordinary citizens leading the way” is not fully aligned with Golden’s meso-level policy discourses that emphasize practitioner and government- or community agency-driven coordination. These latter discourses are more consistent with traditional macro-level discourses about the role of public planners. According to the American Planning Association (2011), planners are responsible for leading public planning processes and developing a plan:

> What do planners do? Professional planners help create a broad vision for the community. They also research, design, and develop programs; lead public processes; effect social change; perform technical analyses; manage; and educate … the basic element is the creation of a plan. Planners develop a plan through analysis of data and identification of goals for the community or the project.

(American Planning Association, ¶ 7-8)

Throughout the GV 2030 process, competing discourses positioned planners as more or less accountable for direct supervision and process outcomes.

According to Forester (1993), even if planners take on less overt leadership roles they are still in a position to shape expectations and beliefs through the framing of public discussion: “planners do not solve the world’s problems in their day-to-day work; yet they do serve practically and professionally to shape others’ perceptions, expectations, senses of problems and opportunities” (p. 105). Orton consultants frequently told me their organization hopes to transform the practice of professional planning at a national level—and particularly in universities—so that planners open up new spaces for democratic participation by guiding more than they lead. For example, Orton’s most recent work in
this direction involved a June 2011 forum with 10 academics who discussed how the Heart & Soul community planning might be incorporated into planning curricula, and how planners might begin to work with a more “educated citizenry” (R. B., personal communication, August 17, 2011). It is not yet clear if or how this effort will attend to the complex micro-processes of planning that may subtly shape what counts as meaningful expertise, and therefore meaningful participation and leadership.

I observed more ambivalence about citizen participation roles and expectations in micro-level GV 2030 discourses. At the beginning of GV 2030, the mayor and the planning and development director both told me a number of citizens were ready to take a more active role in determining growth patterns. However, the planning and development director also said he worried about frustrated citizens who attended meetings only to realize what little influence the commission or council had over previous development decisions and regional or state policies. Initial LAC meeting talk emphasized interest group representation and most regularly attending members were already active in community organizations. The City’s PowerPoint slide from the first official LAC meeting titled “Responsibilities of LAC Members” stated that members should “represent the interest of your board or organization” (City of Golden, 2009d, p. 1).

A number of scholars claim that continued reliance on representation-based group formation minimizes possibilities for more collaborative and meaningful democratic practices. For example, Deetz (2008) argued that ‘representation’ fails to ensure that important differences are sufficient to illuminate concealed interests or generate creativity. According to Deetz, distributed knowledge and alternative experiences are critical to effective group collaboration. Recent studies by scholars (Lange, 2003; Lewis, 2007)
have also identified tensions that members experience when they are caught in between collaborative bodies and their organizational constituencies. In a study of environmental collaboration, Lange demonstrated how multiple—and often antagonistic—constituencies shaped group relationships and decisions. He interrogated the concept of representation associated with inclusive public collaboration processes, showing how a paradox emerges when parties representing extreme constituencies are invited to participate as stakeholders. In Lange’s study, even where individual group participants built trust, absent constituents effectively enacted resistance. In GV 2030, this phenomenon was manifest in discourses about whether or not particular constituent groups would perceive the group’s visioning process as legitimate. Below I will show how this representation also contributed to ‘us’ and ‘them’ discourses about the already actively involved LAC members and the uninvolved *othered* public.

Although LAC members interacted to address perceived limitations of ordinary democracy, they rarely interrogated assumptions about these perceived limitations in their public meetings. How did these limitations come to exist in Golden? Why were they understood to be problematic and by whom and with what consequences? GV 2030 LAC members were far more likely to raise and address these kinds of questions in side conversations with each other and in interviews with me than they were in public meetings. They did not use the term *ordinary*; instead, they used terms like *typical*, *traditional*, or *usual* to describe existing city council and planning commission governance processes. I will continue to use the term *ordinary* for the purposes of clarity throughout this study.
LAC member discourses about the limitations of ordinary democracy in Golden often drew on or responded to the meso- and macro-narratives about public participation and planning problems outlined above. In other cases, members drew on personal experiences to explain what they thought was wrong with ordinary democracy. Although individuals expressed countless ideas about the limitations of ordinary democracy, I found three discourses to be especially prevalent and influential throughout the GV 2030 process. First, GV 2030 participants described communication forums associated with ordinary democracy as antiquated in light of either changing social pressures and work expectations or an inherent lack of citizen motivation. Second, participants talked about how ordinary democracy was disconnected from their everyday interpersonal, embodied, and felt lives. Finally, participants explained ordinary democracy as either inherently corrupted by power or characterized by increasing power inequities. I also found that absent and seemingly incompatible discourses were just as important to understanding perceived limitations of ordinary democracy. For example, GV 2030 participants—LAC members and storytellers—rarely expressed concerns about a lack of citizen leadership in local planning initiatives. They also talked infrequently about problems with current city leaders and government managers. When they did voice concerns about community leadership, they emphasized a sense of neglect rather than distrust.

Antiquated Communication Forums and Alternative Publics

In early LAC meetings, members communicated about the relationship between publics and public meetings in ambivalent and sometimes contradictory ways. They frequently understood ordinary democracy to be constituted by public meetings, hearings, and other formal communication forums that they described as uninviting, boring, or
frustrating. Members also cited problems with the structure, timing, location, and length of meetings. This kind of talk is captured in the following meeting interaction:

M. R.: Many people don’t like meetings.

D. S.: So the citizens are interested, the question is how do you reach them to come down to a city council meeting that can start at 7:00 and end sometimes not until 9:30, even if it is the subject that you're interested in, most people will not come. Even with a schedule where you show them you're gonna start at 9:00, sitting up there in that chair trying to decide whether we're gonna get to this subject at 9:00 is an impossible task. You have no idea who's gonna come forward and how long ________ is gonna talk or how much input you're gonna get from your councilor. So most people don't have the time and the inclination to come down here because you never hit the timeframe very well. You're either ahead of schedule or behind schedule, so you got to come early to make sure you're here at the right time, and then you got to stay.

R. S.: I think [D. S.’s] made a really good point. (personal communication, June 10, 2009)

Interestingly, it was city planning staff and city officials who did most of the talking about public meeting problems. LAC members who represented grassroots groups spoke little about these problems. I attribute this, in part, to the conclusive language about traditional public planning processes used by Orton and city planning staff early in the GV 2030 process.

Orton typically explained low levels of citizen participation in the following way: “Stories of confrontation and alienation are commonplace in local newspapers, and many
citizens simply opt out of their towns’ important discussions and decisions due to skepticism, fatigue, intimidation or a sense that their voices don’t count” (Orton Family Foundation, 2011a, ¶ 8). Official Orton documents claimed that: “traditional gestures toward inclusion are bankrupt; they engender neither trust nor common purpose” (Orton Family Foundation, 2007), and the city planning and development director told LAC members: "the public hearing model doesn't work" (N. G., personal communication, June 10, 2009). Scholars have critiqued communication practices associated with ordinary democracy in similar ways. For example, Innes and Booher (2004) outlined significant shortcomings associated with transmission-oriented public hearings and other public input processes that provided limited opportunity for meaningful public input or a joint-exploration of issues. These kinds of critiques frequently appeared in Orton’s meso-level planning documents and planners often drew on these discourses when they described problems with ordinary democracy. As McComas (2001) argued, however, many of these critiques were expressed in an abstract manner and related to few examples of what actually counts as public participation—or the range of communication strategies employed in ordinary democracy. McComas suggested that this highly generalized critique could be discouraging for practitioners who were often trying to improve public participation processes. I thought about this when I noticed how frequently city planners apologized for the limitations of ordinary democracy.

The LAC did work to learn more about how residents experienced the existing practices of ordinary democracy. At the March, 2009 GV 2030 kick-off event designed to introduce GV 2030 activities and goals to residents, city planning staff worked with Orton consultants to survey event attendees about what would make them “choose to
attend land use decision-making meetings more often” (City of Golden, 2009e; See Table 1). 104 people responded, and the results suggested that effective meeting notification and concrete, well-understood, and actionable options were perceived as more important than greater meeting accessibility. This survey was, however, completed by residents who had already proven willing or able to attend a planning event. More interestingly, respondents reported that a reduction of meeting conflict would not increase the likelihood of their attending land use decision-making meetings more often. A number of storytellers and other event attendees expressed a similar tolerance for conflict at public meetings. Their ambivalence—or even openness—to conflict challenged planner discourses that articulated meeting conflict as a problem to be resolved. It also complicated Orton’s discourse about the need to address problems of confrontation. I do not interpret this as suggesting that citizens are inherently comfortable with conflict or that conflict is somehow a prerequisite for healthy democratic practice. It does, however, suggest that citizens see a time and place where some forms of conflict are acceptable or even important to public planning. I agree with Tracy’s (2010) finding that what comes to count as reasonable hostility is rooted in a context-dependent understanding of what participants take to be reasonable during specific interactions. LAC interviewees expressed concerns about power and conflict, but their accounts of prior conflicts (described in the section below) do not suggest a broad aversion to conflict—only to conflicts perceived as unreasonable or characterized by significant inequality.

Table I

“What would make you choose to attend land use decision-making meetings more often?”
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Percent Responding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Earlier and more visible public notice</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presentation of alternative solutions/creative options</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunity to learn about background and context of issues</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decisions lead to action</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leaders committed to listening</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More opportunities to participate in meetings</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends/acquaintances will be there</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information easier to understand</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Land in question was closer to my home or along Clear Creek</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food provided</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More convenient meeting times</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better-facilitated meetings</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less conflict in meetings</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shorter meetings</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

LAC members spent less than ten minutes discussing the results of this public survey after the GV 2030 kick-off event and they attended only to the most frequently reported positive factors. In other words, members did not interrogate seemingly absent priorities to discuss how they related to the group’s existing assumptions about the relevance of meeting times, duration, or facilitation or the apparent respondent.
ambivalence about meeting conflict. In fact, although the majority of survey respondents
had expressed an interest in improved meeting content and outcomes, the majority of
LAC meeting discourse in 2009 emphasized perceived obstacles related to access and a
lack of public motivation, patience, or capacity. Existing meso- and macro-level
discourses—and their implicit assumptions—about publics and the limitations of
ordinary democracy shaped talk about how to improve upon or supplement existing
practices of ordinary democracy. Common debates about structure versus agency also
characterized much LAC talk about the limitations of ordinary democracy. These
discourses appeared to reinforce each other in a way that reified two competing
conceptions of publics—an unmotivated and uninformed public versus an overextended
public. Each of these conceptions positioned ordinary democracy in a different way and
with different responsibilities to the public. In the following example from a June 10,
2009 LAC meeting, LAC members interacted to construct a frustrated, uninformed, and
intimidated public:

S. L.: Well, how many people have ever come up and been involved in a land use
case?
N. G.: You will meet some. You will meet some folks who feel disaffected and
feel that this is not an organization that they are in control of. This is not a
community that the citizens are in control of. I predict that you will meet some.
S. L.: Okay. We want to know. Do we all have experience with this?
S. R.: The main thing that occurs at anything you're doing, whether it's land use
basics or whether it's a new design of a building or the roads—you're just gonna
get people that feel that council doesn't listen to them. And they don't have all the
facts and figures about that and a lot of the policy decisions, so frustration is part of being involved in community planning. And you can go around this table and you’ve probably all got a different vision than what they want to see Golden look like. Some people have the courage to be before City Council and express their opinions and others don’t.

Y.N.: Yeah.

N. G.: Our simplistic view is that we've got to be able to do it better than the way we do it in the past, or even right now. (personal communication, June 10, 2009)

The public made present in this interaction is described as notably different from the LAC members who had been appointed by the City Council. Members of this other public generally lacked the perception of control, knowledge, or courage to become engaged in community planning. N. G. then jumped in to connect this discourse about publics to the need for improved public participation practices. During the first phase of the GV 2030 process, LAC discussions frequently positioned the public as simultaneously marginalized but not lacking in agency:

The world's ruled by those who show up, and you guys showed up. And the people who come to these meetings show up and the people who go to the voting booth show up, and those who don't, they don't make much of an impact and so shame on them. So if you want more people to show up, you'd better communicate to them to show up, and I'd better communicate to them to show up.

(D. S., personal communication, June 10, 2009)

The public, conceived in this way, could choose to be more or less informed, more or less involved, and more or less courageous, while the city offered opportunities for
participation. Here, it is not ordinary democracy itself that is problematic, but its failure to respond to the flaws of an unmotivated, timid, or distracted public. In this discourse, public participation is constructed as an individual choice and a responsibility for citizens—people were simply choosing to spend their time in places other than public meetings. This shaped early communication design activities by generating a great deal of discussion about how public planning efforts could improve communication to compete with less threatening and more entertaining alternatives. Members talked about the importance of adopting new online technologies to distribute information more broadly and about the importance of providing entertainment, interactive activities, and food at planning events. One LAC member stated: “people want to be entertained and we’re currently just not doing that” (D. S., personal communication, June 10, 2009). On at least two occasions LAC members referenced Robert Putnam’s (2000) finding that people are less engaged in building social capital. When I entered the city building for my third LAC meeting I encountered two women talking about how everyone else was home watching TV or playing on the Internet while they were participating in GV 2030.

The uninformed and unmotivated public was not, however, the only public constructed in LAC member micro-discourse. A more sympathetic and overextended public was typically made present in lengthy descriptions about rapidly expanding social stresses and expectations. These people were not uninterested in civic issues. They were preoccupied with—even overwhelmed by—their efforts to fulfill increasingly difficult and time-consuming familial and work-related responsibilities in a rapidly changing world:
J. L.: They're either too busy with their kids' school or they're too busy with their kids and they're glad that the city is run well and there's some things they're not happy with. But I think the Man On The Street helps and our going out to these events [is important] so there's no more of, "I'm having a party, will you come to me? Will you come to the city?" But the city going out to them is huge and that's a big leap. I think that the Orton Family Foundation is watching closely, and we even cautioned having meetings that appear in City Hall … because maybe there's somebody that's wanted by the law that has something that really needs to be said but they would never come and join a group like this.

S. L.: Yeah, and just kind of piggybacking on that, and it's just an observation, it's not a recommendation. But some of the people that don't show up are working two jobs, are financially stressed, don't think that their voice counts, don't understand really what's going on in the city and think it would be too complex for them to really figure it out. So they come in disenfranchised already and if we decide not to include them because it's too difficult, that's a choice, that's a decision. But there are people who aren't showing up—for other reasons than they're not interested. Does that make any sense?

R. S.: Absolutely. (personal communication, June 10, 2009)

In contrast to the disengaged public, these citizens are saddled with competing responsibilities and resource constraints that make public meetings and events less accessible. This public is more complex since its members are contextually embedded in multiple and overlapping social and institutional arrangements. Scholars like Mansbridge
and Young (Fung, 2004) have articulated a lack of public participation in similar terms.

According to Young:

In American society, most people devote much of their time to working outside the home and taking care of their families inside it. For working mothers in particular, who do more domestic work than men on average, these activities take up a great deal of their time. It is quite understandable that the overworked American (not to mention the overworked Mexican) might not wish to take her few precious leisure hours to go to meetings. Given the pressure on people’s lives, it is quite amazing that there is as much civic and deliberative participation as there is. (p. 47)

According to some LAC members—particularly Orton consultants—this overextended public might still be motivated to participate in ordinary democracy if planners and public officials recognized and took steps to counteract at least physical and temporal barriers to public participation. Attendance could be made easier so that citizens would not need to expend a great deal of time, energy, or money to participate in planning events. In this discourse, ordinary democracy is being called upon to demonstrate greater adaptability and mobility. As in the narrative about city interdependence, citizens are being impacted by complex systemic forces that require increased attention to coordination.

As LAC members met to plan for initial GV 2030 public participation activities, they often constructed the relationship between publics and ordinary democracy as related to either a lack of individual motivation or to obstacles associated with a changing world. In each case, LAC members interpreted this to mean that public forums associated
with ordinary democracy would need to be restructured—either to be more entertaining or to be more accessible or, ideally, both. But, how did this mesh with some of the other discourses I was encountering at community events and in interviews—discourses about Golden’s motivated and highly engaged community? Over 1,000 people had signed a ‘Save the Mesa’s’ petition in a matter of days, and over 200 residents had attended a sustainability meeting jointly sponsored by a grassroots group and the City of Golden less than two years before the GV 2030 was formed. Numerous Golden residents described this meeting to me in great detail. It took place during a terrible snowstorm—people were determined to attend and they were engaged:

> We packed the City Hall, two hundred and some people. It’s probably over the fire safety limit. And people were interested in everything from garbage trucks to green building to water conservation to gardens. You can go on and on about walk-ability and bike-ability and all these different task forces that came about as part of sustainability. That has been activism … it’s ongoing. (D. S., personal communication, June 10, 2009)

These citizens were neither unmotivated nor too preoccupied to participate in this planning event. They had not been dissuaded by dreadful weather or the official location.

Where did this public go? Why didn’t LAC members—many of whom reported being enthusiastic participants at this event—seek to understand this successful case?

**Distance From Everyday Experience**

The majority of GV 2030 participants I spoke with talked about how important it was for ordinary democracy to create informal spaces where citizens could interact with each other and with political leaders to discuss their everyday experiences, ideas, and
concerns. LAC interviewees, event attendees, and storytellers talked extensively about their interpersonal, embodied, and felt lives, but many of them also talked about how these experiences did not play a role—or enough of a role—in existing ordinary democracy. Storytelling and the relationship between stories and values was central to GV 2030 talk about how to address perceived disconnects between lived experiences and ordinary democracy. According to Black (2008), stories “manifest the values and cultural worldview of the storyteller” (p. 105) so that listeners can understand and explore values different from their own. Black argued that the affordances provided by this form of interaction are distinctly different from those of other discursive interactions—that storytelling is about identity work and perspective taking rather than deliberative judgment. She did not, however, argue that storytelling should replace public deliberation about policy decisions. Instead, she advocated an exploration of how storytelling and dialogue could supplement or support deliberative practices. LAC members grappled with questions about the relationship between storytelling, values, and existing practices of ordinary democracy at nearly all of their meetings.

LAC meeting talk often focused on how a resident’s experiences—communicated through stories—could reveal his or her personal values. These values could then be synthesized for the purposes of guiding future planning decisions. This discourse typically articulated values as existing information that would emerge through the right kind of talk:

I think there’s value in this less structured approach, in trying to reach out to all groups, and in trying to use different techniques in getting the information, in hearing peoples’ stories, and pulling it all together ... I think the critical next step
is gonna be how you translate that into policy. (G. H., personal communication, June 11, 2009)

Planners were acutely interested in figuring out how government leaders could identify and apply these values in pragmatic ways to guide decision-making, shape policies, or motivate the public. According to this conception of citizen experience, government leaders needed to listen to more creative forms of expression and make policy decisions that were more responsive to citizen’s accounts of their experiences.

In one of my early LAC meetings, members told me the emphasis on values emerged, in part, as a response to the successful Golden sustainability meeting described above. They reported a general sense that many—and perhaps most—citizens cared deeply about sustainability, but that their values were not being reflected in the city’s planning policy decisions. This sentiment was conveyed to city staff and public officials during and after this meeting, and incorporated into meso-level policy and planning discourse about city council commitments:

The Golden City Council, beginning with the grass-roots Sustainability Initiative in 2007, has made a strong commitment to exploring new ways to engage the community and to tie local public policy more directly to a broader segment of the community than achievable in recent years. City Council has experimented with different input structures, using short-term ad-hoc task forces, as well as traditional citizen boards to broaden this participation. The next step is an attempt to explore innovative methods to increase communication directly with the community and to effectively document the values and vision of the community.
as the base of future policy decisions. (City of Golden Planning Commission, 2007, p. 2)

Similar discourses about the relationship between citizen experience, values, and ordinary democracy were present in meso- and macro-level texts referenced by LAC members during the GV 2030 process.

An American Planning Association briefing paper on community engagement summarized recent ideas about how planners can work with community partners—especially partners in the arts and culture sector—to achieve community goals based on citizen values. This document starts with the premise that current practices of ordinary democracy are at least partially responsible for low citizen participation rates and that more attention to citizen values will help resolve a disconnect between planning activities and community interests:

Traditional tools for community engagement include public opinion surveys, visioning workshops, town halls, meetings, and public hearings. These resources are useful in relaying information to the public and receiving feedback. However, traditional tools do not always elicit ample participation and can rarely explore the values and needs of citizens thoroughly. A stronger awareness of citizen values helps connect community perspectives with planning efforts. This results in more satisfied residents and leaders alike. (Beavers & Hodgson, 2011, p. 2)

This planning document then urges communities to use storytelling and arts activities to encourage the expression of community values. Orton staff explained the importance of values in a similar manner. They told GV 2030 LAC members that ordinary planning techniques “aren’t getting at values” (A. R., personal communication, May 7, 2009), and
that citizens would be most likely to express their values through storytelling and other creative communication processes. Orton’s official texts about the Heart & Soul planning process also argued that ordinary democracy’s emphasis on measurable data failed to motivate citizens and facilitate a shared sense of purpose:

> A collection of quantifiable attributes without an understanding of shared values and a sense of purpose does not motivate citizens to show up and make tough, consistent decisions. It also fails to account for how citizens’ day-to-day lives and livelihoods—and those of future generations—will be affected by change. (Orton Family Foundation, 2011a, ¶ 10)

These meso- and macro-level descriptions of values were typically abstracted from specific community planning contexts. They were rarely specific about how values might be used to shape planning texts or guide decision making related to difficult or contentious planning issues.

The planning and development director told me that city council members had also weighed in on how values could be used to shape future planning policy. They had asked planners to take a strong role in identifying public values and using these values to shape policy recommendations for the council. The planning and development director described how he thought council members viewed their own adherence to values as a way of demonstrating improved public accountability:

> Council has asked us to be more inclusive, engaging more folks more effectively, get more voices and if you can get your policies that are based on the values, remind them that these are based on the values you all agreed on last year, remember? Remember last year when you all agreed on these values, these
policies are based on those values so by definition they should be closer to what you think than if we didn't do it that way. (N. G., personal communication, June 10, 2009)

This discourse constitutes values as already existing characteristics or attributes of a community that should be identified and incorporated into democratic decision-making processes. Articulated in this manner, values are utilitarian and objective measures that can be used by political leaders and members of the public to verify right action. According to Guttman (2007), this also constitutes a “responsibility dilemma” that can be understood through the following question: “do public deliberations about difficult or unpopular decisions fulfill participative democracy ideals to engage the public in policy decisions, or do they transfer responsibility from policy makers to the public?” (p. 428).

In Chapter 10, I will argue that, in GV 2030, this is less a dilemma than a threat to democracy—ordinary or otherwise—since citizens are one step further removed from decision-making. They are no longer deliberating in relationship to a specific problem, but providing a highly abstracted form of consent. Several scholars have argued that this approach to extracting and recording story values fails to capture the nature and complexity of participant experiences. In a book directed to planning practitioners, Forester (1999) warned that simplified written texts are likely to fail at conveying the experiences and concerns of citizens:

A simple summary list of issues may never do the job of the initial storytelling, precisely because the summary list is too simple. When issues are complex, when organizational decisions involve or will affect many actors, decision makers (PAR participants) need reminders that will help them identify emergent issues that will
matter, particular issues of this new dispute or opportunity and not just more
general concerns … the detailed richness of stories, their seemingly distracting
detail, can remind participants of interests and teach them about issues that they
may not even have had in mind at the meeting’s beginning. (p. 137)

Forester’s concerns were more consistent with complex micro-level discourses about the
relationship between experience, values, and ordinary democracy that also emerged
during the first phase of GV 2030.

In several interviews and in two early LAC meetings, LAC members talked about
human experience as a messy and ongoing—even ineffable—phenomenon. They
struggled to figure out how values could be teased out of stories, and they talked about
how difficult it would be for government leaders to account for the diversity of
experiences in their community. In one example, an LAC member told me she saw no
real way of connecting community stories to public planning: “I like the storytelling
aspect from a very—totally not to do with the planning by the way. They’re like totally
separate things to me. I can understand the theory on values and bringing people together,
but …” (G. H., personal communication, May 16, 2009). She continued on to explain
how she thought a community history book or set of digital stories would create more
meaningful relationships and conversations. According to this discourse, LAC members
and government leaders could facilitate important opportunities for citizen interaction,
but resulting values and experiences were too complex and unstable to directly inform
ordinary democracy. LAC members who had been involved in the city’s recent
Walkability Task Force also talked frequently about the embodied nature of community
experience—and about how values could be shaped by these experiences.
During the past year, members of the Golden Walkability Task Force had worked with city planners to walk throughout the city and interact with residents in different neighborhoods. Task Force members told me their experiences with this group had helped them to make new connections between quality of life and social justice values and concrete land use planning policy. One member described her experience in the following way:

When I was on Walkability that was when I realized how many different neighborhoods Golden has, and how diverse they are. I had never been in some of them, and we walked everywhere, all around town, for an entire summer. On Tuesday night, or Wednesday night we walked ‘til it got dark in all these different areas ... when you walk you see more things, and you get a better feel for a neighborhood and the character of the neighborhood. Plus you get good exercise. I look at the houses. I like seeing the peoples’ gardens, and special things that they do. You’re aware of going uphill and downhill ... I think you notice the parks, and the bike paths, and the walkways, and the quickest way to get from one point to another ... you notice all those details from walking. So I can tell you where it’s hard to get across the street, and where they might need to put a crosswalk, or realign the intersection, that kind of thing. (G. H., personal communication, June 11, 2009)

This woman also told me she had started to think more about issues of accessibility when she had walked with people of different ages and encountered people with physical disabilities. She said she hoped more residents would have an opportunity to participate in this kind of direct physical planning in their community and expressed concern that
‘values’ would not capture this kind of lived experience. Recent organizational communication scholarship has argued that embodied experiences simultaneously shape and are shaped by communication processes (Ashcraft, Kuhn, & Cooren, 2009). The notion that “ideas take root or shift in response to bodily resistance; and bodies are experientially and literally altered” (p. 34) suggests that community walkability programs have the potential to change both perceptions of the body and ideas about how planning should attend to embodied experience.

Stories told by Golden residents also indicated a more complex relationship between citizen experiences, values, and ordinary democracy. In the majority of stories, storytellers described feelings, embodied experiences, and dreams that pointed to an always relational unfolding of community values. I was continually struck by how much excitement residents expressed about simply having an opportunity to tell their stories and talk with each other and with city leaders about their experiences. Golden storytellers and LAC members talked again and again about how people make a community. This is consistent with Block’s (2008) description of community creation and transformation:

The key to creating or transforming community, then, is to see the power in the small but important elements of being with others. The shift we seek needs to be embodied in each invitation we make, each relationship we encounter, and each meeting we attend. For at the most operational and practical level, after all the thinking about policy, strategy, mission, and milestones, it gets down to this: How are we going to be when we gather together? (p. 10)

Golden storytellers stressed the importance of knowing people and being known—of belonging to a neighborhood, to particular communities of interest, and to the City of
Golden. They often emphasized the value of simple greetings and a sense of shared responsibility and trust:

> It really is a sense of community, I think is why we’re here, mainly, because we know so many people and everywhere you go, people do say, ‘hey, how’s it going’ and ‘good morning.’ (S.W., personal communication, May 2, 2009)

The thing I like about it is that you know people in lots of different ways, so someone who’s your neighbor might also see them at the grocery store or at church. I like that if my kids are out without me that somebody is going to see them and they probably don’t even remember that they know that person, but that person will talk with me about whatever is going on. And, so, there’s more eyes than mine. (S. L., personal communication, July 18, 2009)

The neighbors are out and they’re willing to talk to you. And if they’re walking their dogs and you’re out in the yard, they’ll stop and greet you. So that was one of the things that impressed me was the lack of fear—the people were not afraid of their neighbors not afraid of each other. The fact that you didn’t have to bolt up your windows and your doors. The doors in our houses in Germany were fixed so that the minute you went out, they would close and lock. But now here, you can go out and water your yard and the door’s wide open and you don’t have that fear of “What’s gonna happen?” (D.P., personal communication, July 18, 2009)

A number of storytellers also talked about how a sense of community belonging or engagement was strengthened through less formal interactions with government leaders and managers. These interactions did not take place in formal public meetings:
You walk into town you know your neighbors, you know your mayor, you know your council-people. I had no idea who my mayor was the entire time I lived in Jefferson County. I wouldn’t have known ‘em if I tripped over him, or her. (L.S., personal communication, July 18, 2009)

I had a complaint this last week. I called up Mr. Hartman, it’s very nice to live and know city council people and that you know who’s running what and so I called up Mr. Hartman and said ‘what are you doing about the bicycles that are in that narrow area along 19th Street”? I had three bicyclists in my path and I waited for them. The guy behind me was a little antsy but I knew I was correct in letting them go through that narrow spot and what Dan Hartman said is that they’re going to put signs up and the bicycles are going to be invited or encouraged to come up onto the sidewalk in that space there. (H.S., personal communication, June 27, 2009)

I feel more than ever connected to the people that run the city because my wife is a graduate of the Leadership Golden. And when she’d come home in the evenings she’d tell me all about the good things that they’re doing there. She went to the jail, she went to the water treatment plant, she tells me where most of the accidents happen along Clear Creek and how they shut it down. (T.L., personal communication, June 27, 2009)

Not all Golden storytellers expressed this sense of connection with other residents and with city leaders. In fact, residents in one neighborhood frequently talked about feeling cut off from other parts of the city and its leadership. They described how roads and economic disparities separated them from the center of town and how public meetings
seemed to be oriented towards the interests of wealthier residents. Yet, even many of these disenfranchised residents talked about longing for increased connections and wishing government leaders would stop by to talk with them and with their neighbors:

Well, I’ve seen the change from a caring city council that came out quite often to ward meetings that cared about our community to being an orphan child neighborhood that we never see our council members. That’s one of the biggest things that really is. And it seems like we really have no true voice anymore, in anything, not even in our own neighborhoods. I’d like to see more meetings up in our area … it’s sorta bad, when you’re sitting out here and they don’t think you exist. (B.L., personal communication, August 22, 2009)

After this resident told his story, I noticed a couple of residents new to the neighborhood asking him questions about what, more specifically, these relationships had been like in the past. I did not get to listen to their full conversation, but this points to how stories have the capacity to facilitate dialogue—even generate a sense of connection or belonging. According to Black (2008), storytelling can promote moments of dialogue by helping participants to co-create identities and begin to imagine the experiences of another. She defines dialogue as “an experienced quality of interaction, rather than a structured interaction format designed to create conditions favorable to that experience” (p. 95). As a process of identity negotiation, dialogue allows participants to “explore ways in which they are tied to one another and a larger group” (p. 96) even as they might also recognize their differences and disagree on specific issues. In this sense, both storytelling and dialogue offer up possibilities for interaction and identity exploration that cannot be structured through the formal meeting processes of ordinary democracy.
Three LAC interviewees told me they believed that interactions with creative expression could shape our decisions about the physical world in concrete ways. One woman told me she thought values were incredibly important, but that it was creative expression and our resulting interpretations that could really improve policies and practices related to ordinary democracy. Here she describes her experience at the GV 2030 kick-off event:

You know the things that are important to people can be captured that way. For example on that big drawing that people did [a drawing created by neighborhood residents at a GV 2030 event]. At first, I was like ‘what’s that dragon about?’ And I didn’t get it, and then I realized ‘oh that’s the sculpture down in Parfet park. The memorial sculpture ... I think that’s an interesting reminder that often administrators come in from either different places or literally different physical environments and so they don’t ask the right questions. Then it’s just a lizard. What if they took that out and built a big bathroom for the bus stop? What if they took that out to put bike storage lockers there? I mean you know that would not be a good outcome. You know you don’t wanna destroy these places you know in the name of whatever progress. (S. L., personal communication, June 8, 2009)

This understanding of values suggests that there is no simple way to translate values into decisions. Values are contextual and always closely linked to our situated experiences and our interpretations of these experiences. The dragon in this narrative is more than a public art installation. Golden residents might “value the arts,” but it is quite possible that this same dragon erected under different circumstances in another neighborhood, in another park or for another purpose might have meant something very different to
community members. It is also possible that at a particular time, and for a particular reason, some residents might advocate an alternative use of public space. This more complex articulation of the relationship between stories, values, planning, and ordinary democracy underlines how the LAC’s struggle is fundamentally about hermeneutics—the study of interpretation.

A number of scholars (Arendt, 1958; Gadamer, 1960; Stone-Mediatore, 2003) have argued that stories or works of art call for endless interpretation based on both the texts themselves and the changing nature of the interpreter’s immediate world. Stone-Mediatore advocated a way of reading critically so that we might “use the other’s story to examine critically ‘common sense’ beliefs and our own lives, yet without approaching the story as an absolute truth” (p. 165). Early in the GV 2030 process, an Orton consultant cautioned LAC members not to view values as easy to translate into planning decisions: “Relations between values and priorities can be challenging. There are often completely valid priorities that conflict. Orton is struggling with this and hopes to learn from Golden’s experience” (A. R., personal communication, February 3, 2009).

Discourses about both the commitments of ordinary democracy and the hermeneutics of story reading shaped communication design decisions in important ways throughout the GV 2030 process.

**Corrupting Influence of Power**

GV 2030 LAC members rarely talked about power imbalances or concrete instances of conflict in their meetings. This was especially notable given that Orton’s planning discourses and numerous scholarly discourses (Deetz, 1992; Flyvbjerg, 1998; Forester, 1993) argue that power is a—if not the—most critical aspect of planning.
According to Mouffe (1993), a strong democracy requires that we study and understand power as an inevitable and challenging, but also critical condition for democracy:

The illusion of consensus and unanimity, as well as the calls for ‘anti-politics’, should be recognized as being fatal for democracy and therefore abandoned … a healthy democratic process calls for a vibrant clash of political positions and an open conflict of interests. If such is missing, it can too easily be replaced by a confrontation between non-negotiable moral values and essentialist identities. (p. 6)

GV 2030 discourses about planning problems and the limits of ordinary democracy often articulated power in competing ways. Despite the notable absence of talk about power in LAC meetings, both Orton and interviewee discourses understood power as central to the problems of planning. According to Orton, power is situated in relationship to city boundaries so that disempowered communities are subject to external threats. LAC interviewees told me how power shaped ordinary democracy in their community even though I did not ask questions that focused explicitly on power. Some interviewees described ordinary democracy as being easily corrupted by power or as impotent to mitigate the corrupting influences of power. Others talked about how they believed the actual practices of ordinary democracy worked to express and/or maintain power in often-subtle ways.

Orton’s discourses about planning problems, described in the previous chapter, established clear boundaries between the power of a cohesive community and the power of complex external forces threatening to fragment or erase that community. Power was situated in urban leadership, development firms, and external economic centers. This
conception of power is aligned with work by Hobbs and Locke in that it articulates power as centered in institutions and persons; it is a force that can be identified, controlled, and potentially minimized. This discourse understands power as a predominately negative force that might be controlled by more community-driven planning policies.

Orton’s discourse about power implies that ordinary democracy currently fails to support the kind of collective action communities need in order to overcome external forces related to change and growth. According to Orton, the existing practices of ordinary democracy fail to empower citizens while effectively legitimatizing or favoring powerful outside interests at the expense of local residents’ values. According to Orton, community resistance can be constructed through a process of collective visioning that generates more locally specific planning policies. Orton’s discourse is largely silent about exactly how autonomous cities—even those with a clear set of community values—might craft policy up to the task of fending off external institutional and economic power. This understanding of power becomes far more problematic if it is put into relationship with the interdependent city narrative. In this light, Golden’s shared community vision might come into reality only at the expense of other regional visions.

In some cases, LAC members engaged Orton’s discourse directly to understand problems of power in their community. Here an LAC member interprets power in a community recreation project as enacted by officials who have been corrupted by outside developers:

So a lot of things take forever, but then occasionally things can just go like this (snaps fingers) if you’ve got the right palms greased … you know if somebody’s on your side man it goes. Splash got built and the golf course because they told
them they were gonna build a satellite rec center. And they’ll tell you they said that only to get the votes from the people who live in that part of town. And they’ve said that to me. Straight out they actually said it to me, and I’m like, well we never built that … if the whole neighborhood comes out and 85,000 people say blank, are they heard? I guess if we could figure out who we are a little better or put it in something succinct to potentially tell people that they could become involved or have their opinions and voices heard quickly and easily. (M. R., personal communication, May 16, 2009)

This interviewee described a process of covert manipulation and collusion between developers and public officials. Citizens were not apathetic or uninformed—they had been lied to. According to M. R.’s interpretation, this was not a case of domination or subjectification but an example of manipulation (Fleming & Spicer, 2007). She engaged Orton’s Heart & Soul project discourse about community identity to suggest that a community with a more clearly defined identity and more accessible public opinion forums could resist this kind of illegitimate power. This aligned with Orton’s discourse about the autonomous city and the limitations of ordinary democracy, but I was left feeling uncertain about how, exactly, a more unified community identity would allow for resistance in the face of manipulative power.

As I listened closely, however, I realized that prevalent resident discourses about power were often far more nuanced in terms of articulating how power worked within and across community boundaries. I heard one story about power, planning, and democracy repeated at numerous GV 2030 storytelling events, informal gatherings, and in LAC interviews. Residents told me—often with great pride—about how an extremely
large ad hoc group of citizens had prevailed in a battle against the Golden City Council and the Nike Corporation. In the late 1990s, Nike proposed construction of a new corporate office on top of Golden’s South Table Mountain—what Golden residents typically refer to as the mesa. Residents told me this office complex would have towered over the city, destroying both the mesa and surrounding vistas. Several residents told me that Nike had planned to paint their infamous swoosh on the side of the mesa but I was never able to track down a source for this claim. Interviewees and other residents described the community’s response to this proposed development as a watershed event in Golden’s history. This was not, however, a clear story of insiders and outsiders—of a united Golden against the outside world.

In 1998, a Golden resident and the Coors Brewing Company owned much of the land on the west side of the mesa. Numerous hikers enjoyed views from the mesa, but they were actually trespassing on privately owned land. The Nike plan to build a 5,000 employee office complex ignited resident protests, and a publicly aggressive feud between mesa landowners unfolded in local papers. A representative from Coors told reporter Stuart Steers (March 12, 1998) that the company’s land was not just Golden’s land, but a “corporate asset” (p. 6). He told Steers, "we have an obligation to our shareholders to maximize the benefits of those assets” (p. 6). Golden city officials were also implicated in the planning controversy. The mayor and council members had claimed they would not take a position on the development until Nike submitted a formal proposal. However, Nike opponents obtained and published letters revealing that these city officials had been advocating the proposed land annexation for months behind closed doors:
In an August letter to Sam Cassidy, former president of the Jefferson Economic Council, Golden mayor Jan Schenck, who also serves as the president of the city council, wrote that "the potential for an environmentally conscious company to develop that location is truly awesome!" Schenck went on to say that city officials were eager "to bring this concept to reality" and predicted that the Golden City Council would support development of the mesa.

A project outline submitted to Nike by the city in cooperation with the JEC says development on South Table is "supported by the state of Colorado, Jefferson County, and the City of Golden." (Steers, March 12, 1998, p. 1)

An LAC member told me that these revelations had led to unusual hostility in Golden, but that it also generated a lot of positive collective action. Numerous attendees at GV 2030 events told me how residents of Golden had taken on their own mayor and city council and taken back their city. This was not an isolated city effort however—residents described how they had worked with regional reporters and sought state and national press coverage to tell their story and exert influence over Nike’s decision. This news story shows a struggle that cut across regional and institutional boundaries:

Just don’t do it. That’s the message a group of Golden residents has for Nike, the Oregon-based sneaker giant reportedly considering building an 800-acre complex atop South Table Mountain. Opponents turned in 1,000 signatures to the Golden City Council this week protesting the idea of a Nike campus on the site. The critics also plan to give the petitions to Gov. Roy Romer. … “I think that piece of turf should be sacrosanct,” said Portia Masterson, member of Friends of the Mesa formed to fight Nike. “They (the mesas) are an inspiration for people who live
near them. It gives a great sense of tranquility for the metro area” … the critics timed the petitions to coincide with the Super Bowl weekend, when the Nike swoosh on Broncos uniforms is on people’s minds, said petition organizer Judy Denison (Oulton, 1998, ¶ 1-5).

One resident told me that the opposition group had wanted to ‘turn up the heat’ on Nike and Coors so that they would back out of the deal to avoid bad press (J.T., personal communication, August 8, 2009). Political leaders in Colorado were also working to respond to the concerns of growing environmental interest groups. Even though the primary Coors representative had described Table Mountain as a stockholder asset he also acknowledged that the mesa was “a different breed of asset” given that it was a landmark that Coors’ “own beer bottles helped establish as a symbol of the West” (Steers, March 12, 1998, p. 6). Ultimately, Golden protesters prevailed. According to Nike representatives, their decision to locate elsewhere had nothing to do with local protests, but Golden residents tell a different story.

Multiple LAC interviewees cited the Nike case to describe how citizens could still engage in democracy even if it meant going outside of traditional public forums associated with ordinary democracy. In this case, residents worked around normal governance forums and took action without an established process for public deliberation. Despite a few objections from former city council members and local landowners, it appeared that the majority of Golden residents understood this as a necessary course of action—and an important feature of democracy. Yet, many residents also told me they had great confidence in Golden’s current city leaders. They described the case most often as either an anomaly or a wake-up call. Residents needed to remain vigilant. They
typically trusted their city leaders, but they were also prepared to engage in battle—and effectively establish ad hoc citizen leadership—if they experienced a broad sense of public betrayal.

In listening to these stories I found myself agreeing with Young’s (Fung, 2004) caution that ordinary democracy—and even more participatory alternatives—should not be designed for the purposes of excluding external and nontraditional forms of consent: “in my opinion, deliberation should not be considered an alternative to street demonstration, guerilla theater, sit-ins, nonviolent actions of civil disobedience, and boycotts, but as part of or complementary to them” (p. 51). According to scholars like Young and Purcell (2009), since deliberation is often characterized as inclusive and fair, it has the capacity to marginalize outside forms of protest and legitimate current systems of power. In reaching out beyond city boundaries, citizen activists in Golden had created new alignments with actors from other communities and organizations. Stone-Mediatore (2003) and other transnational feminists have argued that a “logic of discrete and unified ‘actors’” (p. 136) obscures the historically specific, but complex and overlapping relationships that characterize our world. Laclau and Mouffe (1985) have also advocated chains of equivalence or movements of allied groups seeking to change existing patterns of power. In the Nike case, countless groups within and across northern Colorado had distinct interests, but they also interacted around certain areas of equivalence to respond to the Nike proposal. This particular discourse about power is potentially in tension with the autonomous city discourse. I think it raises questions about the boundaries of ordinary democracy—how and when might citizen protest count as an ordinary democratic practice? To whom or what are these allied groups accountable?
Finally, in relation to the GV 2030 process, two LAC members and an Orton consultant suggested that planners and political leaders might struggle to relinquish the kind of power and certainty associated with traditional practices of ordinary democracy. One LAC member spoke explicitly about the connection between untested public participation strategies and the possibility of professional anxiety and resistance:

My concern is that the professions you know who are a part of the city are not going to be comfortable with [changes]. You know I mean you have to risk looking foolish to people who don’t understand it and they’re you know they’re going to come in for criticism from people no matter what they do and if they do anything unusual they’re gonna come in for some other kind of criticism and … but I think it’s really important that we continue to be creative like this and do it and not back down from it or downplay it um you know what’s the worst that can happen? The worst that can happen is that you know more than you did. It doesn’t mean that now we’re all about rainbows and ponies [laughter] (S. L., personal communication, June 8, 2009).

These interviewees did not describe planners as exerting overt power; they expressed concern that planners might resist the more creative and relational aspects of the GV 2030 process based on their uncertain connection to existing practices. In this account, planners were not antagonist towards the project, but worried about saving face in relationship to constituents and bosses given the power of existing practices to structure meaning. One of Flyvbjerg’s (1998) propositions about power and planning provides some insight: “power concerns itself with defining reality rather than discovering what reality ‘really’ is” (p. 227). He does not suggest that there is an existing reality to be
identified; rather he draws on work by Foucault to argue that what comes to count as reality is constructed through political processes. As S. L. suggested above, Golden city planners might resist alternative approaches to public planning given that they are embedded in a complex system of entities and practices that already articulates a particular rational approach to planning and public participation.

Several LAC interviewees expressed sympathy for the discomfort they thought planners were experiencing during the change process, and connected this discomfort more directly to absent constituencies or bosses. One GV 2030 member who had previously worked as a public manager pointed out that planners—as managers—were often caught in between conflicting interests:

Public managers may want to be very clear about implications, whereas maybe politicians don’t always … I remember telling the board once, “If voting against this initiative means that we close early at 3:00, put a big sign that says because people voted against this initiative, we’re closing early at 3:00.” Not everybody wants to do that. I might be in trouble with my my boss or my ... (B.W., personal communication, June 11, 2009)

In the above talk, an LAC interviewee demonstrated how power relationships outside of the immediate LAC group might still shape group member actions. This is consistent with Lange’s (2003) finding that inter-organizational group members often navigate difficult tensions between immediate working group expectations and the expectations of absent constituents.

Several GV 2030 LAC members also described power imbalances as constituted by material practices related to ordinary democracy. LAC meetings were typically held in
the Golden City Hall Council Chambers, and a number of group members described this as a problematic practice:

City Hall might—that room is not the most you know, it can be intimidating for people. I mean, it’s not … you’re on their turf. And if they could hold it somewhere else, I think that might help. Golden High School is good because it’s neutral turf. Yeah, it’s very nice. I’m sure there are other places. (N. R., personal communication, June 11, 2009)

The majority of LAC members I interviewed expressed reservations about the meeting location and, on at least two occasions, members requested a venue change in an LAC meeting. Orton consultants also urged city planners to help facilitate this change: “we’ve cautioned against having meetings in City Hall … because maybe there's somebody that's wandered by that has something that really needs to be said but they would never come join” (J. L., personal communication, June 10, 2009).

In addition, interviewees described ways in which they thought GV 2030 members themselves were discouraged from participating based on meeting facilitation: “I think you’re going to need some other mechanisms to really hear all the voices. A lot of people don’t speak up in a large group situation like that and so I’ll bet that there’s a lot going on with the committee that is not being captured” (A.S., personal communication, June 8, 2009). City planning staff typically facilitated LAC meetings and usually a dozen or more members were in attendance. In several cases, these interviewees told me about how they would change the process so that more people might be engaged: “if I were running something that big and I really wanted to hear all the voices I would be breaking us up into small groups” (A.S., personal communication, June 8, 2009). In these
interviews, participants frequently asked me whether I had any recommendations for how to persuade city planners to make changes to the format or location of meetings. Interestingly, these individuals rarely brought up process concerns in meetings despite my encouragement. I frequently wondered whether my silence made me complicit in a process where non-staff participants rarely made explicit recommendations about the committee’s own communicative process. Alternatively, on the relatively rare occasion where I made process recommendations during a GV 2030 meeting I was struck by the possibility that I had closed off an opportunity for someone else to speak. On one occasion my suggestion was rejected by city planning staff for being too logistically challenging and I was conscious that other LAC members seemed to be holding their breath to see how staff would respond to recommendations from a participating scholar. LAC members acknowledged power as a critical factor shaping both the practices of ordinary democracy and emerging alternatives, but they rarely engaged in open discourse about power.

**Alternative Articulations of Democracy, Community, and Governance**

Over a decade ago, Rose (1999) predicted “the emergence of a new ‘game of power’” (p. 188) and a new form of communitarianism—what he termed the *community-civility game*:

> It involves new conceptions of those who are to be governed, and of the proper relations between the governors and the governed. It puts new questions into play about the kinds of people we are, the kinds of problems we face, the kinds of relations of truth and power through which we are governed and through which we should govern ourselves. (p. 188)
Rose described a scenario in which souls are governed increasingly by mechanisms of culture and consumption and that these mechanisms are tightly tied to evolving ideas about self-governance and community governance. We—the subjects of advanced liberal democracies—are being shaped by complex institutional discourses. I agree with Rose’s speculations about newly emerging conceptions of governance, but I do not reach the same conclusions about how this process will necessarily unfold. In Golden—and I suspect in other communities around the U.S.—new conceptions of governance are messy and contested. Institutional discourses don’t simply turn people into subjects; people engage institutional discourses in their situated interactions—often reifying them, but also reshaping and contesting them by asking questions and entering into dialogue with others. Macro-level institutional discourses are also mediated by meso-level events, policies, technologies, and narratives.

GV 2030 was initiated just after a major Presidential campaign had inspired a spike in grassroots involvement and voter turnout throughout the U.S., and especially in swing states like Colorado. The newly elected Mayor of Golden was an active community organizer and the 2008 Democratic National Convention had been held less than twenty miles away. People were talking about democracy. Terms like *public participation*, *accountability*, and *transparency* were everywhere—especially in meso-level government and nonprofit discourse. In my interviews and sidebar discussions with LAC members and residents I found that people were often quite self-reflective about their situated ideals (Tracy, 2010) for everyday democracy and about how they thought particular practices were supporting or violating these ideals. They talked, for example, about what it meant to really listen and be heard, to take power and corruption seriously,
and to recognize important relational and material circumstances that shaped people’s lives. They talked about how they thought these ideals were—or were not—supported by both the practices of ordinary democracy and the LAC’s own group interactions.

Residents described working with ordinary democracy when they believed it generally aligned with their situated ideals and disregarding it or working around it when they believed it did not.

In the course of their group interactions, LAC members engaged in varying levels of reflection about their situated ideals and practices. In meetings, LAC members often drew on Orton’s meso-level discourse about the limitations of ordinary democracy to construct alternative public participation ideals. Orton articulated a scenario in which citizens were being excluded from important conversations about the future of their city because ordinary communication forums were inaccessible and alienating. They called for a more traditional form of communitarian governance—a lack of community was the problem, and the return to community the solution. LAC members also identified with macro-level discourses about the relationship between agency and structure to construct alternative participation ideals and assign certain responsibilities to publics and to the LAC; they interpreted low meeting attendance as a result of low citizen motivation or an overburdened public. Many LAC members and residents reflected on power—how it worked, what it looked like, and how it should be addressed—but they rarely interacted to construct or reflect on power-related ideals and practices in their meetings. Although countless residents described acts of resistance, they also talked about valuing a sense of everyday connection with local city leaders.
Throughout GV 2030 I sought to understand how these coexisting—and sometimes conflicting—discourses about the limits of ordinary democracy and alternative public participation ideals shaped the LAC’s communication design. Ultimately, these articulations of public planning and the limits of ordinary democracy did work in the world. They constituted different types of publics and different relationships between citizens and existing governance structures. They opened up some conversations and served to close off others. In the following chapters I will show how a complex constellation of discourses and material and temporal actors intersected with everyday theories about communication to shape the LAC’s storytelling and values-identification process.
CHAPTER VII

STORYTELLING—A CITY PLANNING EXPERIMENT

*We hear and participate in discourses that feel restrictive, like trying to express a sunset on canvas when you don’t know how to paint.* (Deetz, 1992, p. 174)

When you look at these categories here, some of these might be translated as values, but maybe not so much! They are pieces of information and so the secret of community planning and what we are attempting to do is, everybody supports values-based planning and policy making and many people claim that they do it, but what we are finding is that, it is not in any way a refined science or a refined art … the challenge we have is to turn this type of information into meaningful information. (N. G., personal communication, August 12, 2009)

My intention in this chapter is to trace how micro-, meso-, and macro-level discourses about communication, planning, and limitations of ordinary democracy intersected to shape the LAC’s storytelling design practices. I found that a more relational and transformative discourse about storytelling was largely overpowered by a storytelling as research discourse. This was due, in part, to an alignment between the latter storytelling discourse and professional practices and associated institutions and texts of ordinary democracy. Yet, underlying all of these discourses, existing theories about communication shaped assumptions about the nature and capacity of storytelling in critical ways.
**Storytelling—Towards More Inclusive and Meaningful Public Planning**

Although specific communication design approaches emerged organically throughout the course of the GV 2030 process, storytelling was introduced as the central feature of the values-based Heart & Soul project in the Golden-Orton partnership agreement:

The Partners agree to develop a robust story telling aspect to the Project, that reflects the staff capacity of the City, but which all partners agree is an important technique for listening, building trust, understanding, and capturing the community’s qualitative sense of itself and its aspirations ... The Project will include identifying and developing alternative scenarios reflecting the vision and values expressed by the community. (City of Golden & Orton Family Foundation, 2008, p. 3)

Orton did not stipulate how GV 2030 LAC members should design and implement the storytelling process, but the organization did provide a number of texts that articulated their beliefs about the characteristics and capacity of community storytelling. According to Orton (n.d.), storytelling “draws in more voices,” “creates connections,” builds empathy, “teaches us the consequences of our actions,” “can give us hope for the future,” (p. 2), and reconcile historical divides. Orton’s discourse about storytelling was consistently characterized by a number of assumptions about the nature of storytelling.

Online and hardcopy texts such as the above described storytelling as: (a) inherently more authentic than other forms of communication—particularly those associated with ordinary democracy, (b) positive or beneficial to individuals and communities, (c) naturally unifying, and (d) capable of transforming individuals, relationships, and
communities. The two Orton consultants assigned to work with GV 2030 told me that Orton was particularly interested in using stories to build community trust and relationships. This relational and transformative storytelling discourse, while not necessarily incompatible with more utilitarian discourses, is not easily connected to existing practices of ordinary democracy or to the LAC’s emerging public participation ideals. This discourse understands communication as not just descriptive but constitutive of experiences and relationships. Therefore, fundamentally different assumptions about the nature of communication are implicit in competing logics about the ideal design of storytelling practices.

**Storytelling—Discourses about Authenticity and Validity**

Interest in the relationship between storytelling and planning is evidenced in numerous scholarly and practitioner work throughout the U.S. (Eckstein & Throgmorton, 2003; Popper & Popper, 1996). Popper and Popper claimed that stories have long been influential in shaping community planning activities and decisions. According to these planning scholars, stories “highlight a region's distinctive, valuable features, defining what is worth protection” (p. 18). They argued that community stories can produce a new collective vision by providing both metaphors and concrete practices to help planners facilitate change. Popper and Popper referred to this approach as ‘soft-edged planning’ and explain how stories have shaped public understandings of particular places and the value of these places:

> Soft-edged planning is more inclusive and less technical, and it allows more people to take part. Its comparative vagueness, seemingly a defect, in fact gives soft-edged planning a broad political base. These days, almost no one has to
explain the environmental value of the Everglades or the Adirondacks. People may differ about how but not about whether these regions should be maintained. Their virtues became common knowledge through the stories told about them. (p. 18)

Popper and Popper advocated community storytelling initiatives and described the storytelling process and associated effects in positive terms. They did, however, warn that storytelling methods matter—that new technologies might distort stories that would otherwise reflect a more truthful or transparent reality:

Take, for instance, the long-running Coors beer ads on TV. The commercials, which may be the biggest influence shaping the country's concept of the Rockies, portray a place of abundant, glittering streams coursing by lushly forested mountainsides. Not a word of environmental degradation or suburban intrusions. (p. 19)

Popper and Popper’s concern about new media distortion or inauthenticity implies that direct oral or written stories describe the world as it really is. Although numerous scholars and practitioners, including Orton, have embraced new media to support storytelling, I found similar assumptions about story authenticity prevalent in planning literature and in LAC member talk. An emerging LAC commitment to collecting authentic stories spurred LAC members to question how they could interpret stories with fidelity—so that authentic expressions of experience or desire were not distorted. According to a number of poststructuralist (Barthes, 1989; White, 1975) and feminist scholars (Stone-Mediatore, 2003), this effort to assess narratives as a representation of reality or authentic experience is problematic since “the structure and metaphors of the
narrative text generate a content that exceeds factual determination” (Stone-Mediatore, 2003, p. 19). Stories are produced always in relationship to certain ideological and material factors such that storytellers never just provide facts—they elaborate, evaluate, and organize statements of fact so that “extrafactual meanings” (p. 20) are always present. This is not to suggest that there are no facts in stories, but rather that stories are far more than collections of facts. Consider, for example, the following story told by a Golden resident:

I graduated and then came up to Golden High School, and graduated from Golden High School in 1935 … when I got to high school and made new friends of course, it was a different life than it was in the country. We country bumpkins came up to high school and we were accepted but there was always a difference between the city boys, city people and country. And I have to think back at that time … nearly all the families along 32nd were milking cows and sent their milk to Coors. Prohibition had set in so Coors made the milk, made malted milk out of the milk—but I rode in the back of a pick-up truck, one of my neighbor’s truck—I rode in the back of the truck to high school and then on the way home we’d stop at Coors and pick up mash, which was the leftover residue with everything out of it and they fed it to the cows and it stunk to the high heavens but nevertheless that’s the way I got to school and now looking back… here I was riding in the back of a pick-up truck, horses were a mainstay with me from the time I was able to walk; and the very area that we lived in was definitely country and not too many people. Now, anybody with a pick-up truck and horses and living in that
area—you don’t get more prestigious than that so that’s how things have changed.

(C.M., personal communication, June 27, 2009)

This storyteller provides plenty of factual information about his life and about Golden. Readers could take steps to verify the date of his graduation from Golden High School or confirm that Coors made malted milk during the U.S. Prohibition. However, I read his choice of narrative elements and terms like ‘country bumpkin’ as imbuing this story with a strong sense of socioeconomic class distinction. I immediately noticed—perhaps given my own country upbringing—that he assumed natural distinctions between country and city people. He also focused on ‘pick-up trucks’ and ‘horses’ to explain how slippery material reference points were in relationship to social class. I found myself wondering whether the nation’s economic downturn had inspired this storyteller to explore class distinctions. This contextual and contingent approach to narrative does not correspond to apolitical understandings of story authenticity. C.M. used particular analogies, actors, and descriptors to tell a story that is about more than a boy, a school, and a city. It is also about more than Golden—his references to Coors, the U.S. Prohibition, and class distinctions position Golden as an already interdependent city.

**Storytelling—A Constructive Form of Communication?**

Orton was not alone in understanding storytelling as a fundamentally positive form of communication. Most planning-specific discourses about storytelling assumed that stories were largely—even inherently—constructive. Stories had the power to connect, to create, to enrich, or to preserve healthier communities. A recent briefing paper prepared for the American Planning Association (Beavers & Hodgson, 2011) urged planners to incorporate storytelling activities into various community development
activities. According to this paper, storytelling is capable of addressing key limitations of traditional public participation tools. Community members may be able to express and explore their needs and values more fully through storytelling, and stories have at least two major benefits as an engagement tool: “first, it appeals to the participants because it enables them to share in their own voices. Second, it has benefits for planners because it results in personal feedback and can be conducted with minimal materials” (p. 3).

The Center for Digital Storytelling (2011) has been particularly active in promoting storytelling as a way of supporting positive civic engagement in communities and organizations. They acknowledge that people experience the world in different ways, and that listening can be difficult, but they express a belief that the ritual of storytelling can build confidence, spark creativity, and break down social barriers:

We encourage our storytellers and collaborating partners to share their stories in ways that support positive individual and collective change. (Center for Digital Storytelling, ¶ 1)

Personal narratives in digital media format can touch viewers deeply, moving them to reflect on their own experiences, modify their behavior, treat others with greater compassion, speak out about injustice, and become involved in civic and political life. Whether online, in local communities, or at the institutional/policy level, the sharing of stories has the power to make a real difference. (¶ 7)

Throughout the GV 2030 process, I heard many LAC members, Orton consultants, and Golden residents talk about stories as more inherently constructive than other forms of communication. During the second year of the Heart & Soul town projects, Orton commissioned a white paper to promote storytelling, and the author described the act of
storytelling in the following way:

As we lean in to listen, we extend our capacity to encounter difference without being threatened by it. We begin to recognize others as not all that different from ourselves … In listening to and telling stories, we are learning to understand the grammar of connection. When we sit together, we have the story, the teller and the telling to learn from. We respond as much to the language, the tone and rise and fall of the voice, the body language as to the words and details chosen, the scenes narrated, the arc of the story. When we listen intently, with humor and empathy, our focus shifts from what separates to what unites us. (Ganley, 2010, p. 27)

The above text, like many other descriptions of community storytelling, emphasizes the unifying nature of the storytelling process. Still, several scholars have urged people to be cautious about viewing stories as inherently beneficial to communities, organizations, and individuals.

An alternative and more cautionary discourse generated by critical and feminist scholars acknowledges the value and power of stories while maintaining that stories should be evaluated critically. According to this discourse, stories unite and construct, but they also divide and distort. In this case, distortion does not refer to a distortion of an essential truth or reality, but a distortion of experiential claims. Even empirically valid stories can evoke hatred, position people as victims, or obfuscate social inequities (Stone-Mediatore, 2003). Stories are valuable, but these scholars suggest people who use stories have a responsibility to evaluate and work with them in cautious ways. Ryfe (2006) provided more specific critique and guidance in his analysis of narrative and deliberation
in small group forums. According to Ryfe, participants often built upon one another’s stories and used stories to soften conflicting positions where an argumentative approach might have escalated conflict. Although this could be beneficial, he also found that stories closed off potentially important discussions, and that facilitators played a key role in determining the extent to which forum participants were motivated to engage in intentional reflection. I found little attention to critical story evaluation and facilitation in mainstream planning discourses and LAC talk.

**Storytelling as Research**

Much literature on the subject of planning and storytelling urges planners to turn away from their numbers—at least briefly—and pay attention to relational and creative experiences that cannot be measured by traditional planning tools: “we’ve forgotten that creating a sustainable future isn’t just a simple matter of drawing better plans, or gathering ever more precise numbers” (Ganley, 2010, p. 4). Ultimately, according to a recent APA report (Beavers & Hodgson, 2011), effective storytelling processes should allow planners to improve their understandings of community values by listening to how community members express their experiences. Like Popper and Popper (1996) and numerous other planning scholars, this report emphasized the distinctions between story-based planning and traditional planning, but provided little guidance on how planners or communities might consciously integrate these activities. According to Popper and Popper: “soft-edged planning does not substitute for hard-edged planning; it first undergirds it and then amplifies it. Planners ought to listen more closely to their region's storytellers and to find ways to invent and tell such stories on their own” (p. 19). The implied ‘what then?’ question proved difficult for GV 2030 LAC members to negotiate.
During the first phase of GV 2030, LAC professional identity discourses reinforced concerns about validating story authenticity to produce a powerful ‘storytelling as research’ discourse.

Several LAC meetings were dedicated to discussions about how stories should be elicited and about how members imagined Golden residents responding to storytelling activities. LAC members periodically described storytelling as a way of addressing perceived limitations of ordinary democracy—of attending to relevant experiences more fully or engaging people in more meaningful and accountable activities. However, this talk was frequently coupled with expressions of uncertainty or anxiety about the storytelling approach. How would it tie in to discourses about public accountability? Would residents be motivated enough to participate? Could storytelling activities really be integrated with the practices of ordinary democracy? In interviews and meetings a number of LAC members began describing the storytelling approach as an experiment—they used words like risky and nebulous, and frequently referred to storytelling as Orton’s project or experiment. In several cases, LAC interviewees told me they were relying on Orton’s experience to guide the storytelling approach. For example, an LAC member told me she was thankful that Orton had experience with storytelling in other communities and that Orton had “lots of the tools and ideas” (G. H.). This LAC member told me it was his ‘faith’ in Orton that kept him confident about the process:

It’s a little fuzzy out there. A lot of trust is involved in this heart and soul process. I said at a meeting—they were talking about trying to find our heart and soul values—I’m going well, could somebody define what you mean by values? I thought the room got a little quiet, and the Orton people were quiet, and I think
part of it is because we’re supposed to take and, in my perception, muddle through with this ... So we go back to the question, how are we doing? I think that—I think we must be doing all right. You know how the guy jumped out of the skyscraper and said about halfway down, so far so good. So I don’t know how we’re doing, but I have faith that the family foundation has done some of the stuff before, and they’re taking a risk on this interesting city of Golden. (D. S., personal communication, June 10, 2009)

Ironically, this innovative storytelling approach appeared to exacerbate the very reliance on expertise that Orton sought to counteract.

For their part, Orton representatives said little during LAC meetings—they occasionally asked general process questions or responded to specific inquiries from other LAC members. An Orton consultant (J. L.) who I talked with often throughout the process told me she was struggling to figure out how to establish her role as an outside facilitator without intervening too much in a process that belonged to the community. She noted that, although she lived in a nearby town, she was not a Golden resident. This resonated with my own experience as a participant observer. I wanted to provide some helpful insights without inadvertently directing process activities based on my own scholarly interests. J. L. and I talked about the problems with ‘expert’ language—about how even well intentioned technical assistance could limit group participation and curtail more creative discussions. It was only when I began my own data coding process that I began to notice how many times most LAC members—myself included—drew on our own professional backgrounds to understand GV 2030 storytelling as a research process.
Several LAC members acknowledged their scientific backgrounds in seeking to make sense of an otherwise messy and uncertain activity:

I'll express my background. It really was I'm a statistician of data research. Taking all of this qualitative info and hearing things like 12 stories or 12 videos and 20 maps and extrapolate—is the next step then to try to somehow quantitatively see if the other 95 percent of the people in the neighborhoods feel that way? (B. E., personal communication, June 10, 2009)

Well I’m really interested in the qualitative methods um the Orton Foundation’s using to get at what’s important in Golden … to establish what are our values and what are what are the things that are important to us as citizens that might not come out of a more traditional planning process … so I work with climate change a lot. I talk about it. I write about it. I do education about it. I’m in the university, right? (S. L., personal communication, June 8, 2009)

I just say the whole thing’s vague. I mean, what are we doing? The basis of – my perception of the basis of Orton’s efforts are on storytelling, and on people talking about their ideas, memories, and all this stuff. Now, my Masters in public health is in epidemiology, so I don’t mind subjective data. But this is very subjective. So you usually try to get—somehow quantify things. Okay, so here you are, you’re a researcher doing all this subjective stuff, and somehow, you’re going to have to quantify something ... So, what’s going on is a lot of subjective data gathering that, somehow, they’re going to have to put in to buckets or barrels or measurable things and say, this city likes connectivity and trails and the creek and
places to visit for talking or something. (D. S., personal communication, June 10, 2009)

As GV 2030 LAC members identified a variety of ways to elicit and work with community stories, their micro-level talk engaged research-related terminology with increasing frequency. These members were not selected for their scientific training—they were picked largely based on their leadership in various outdoor recreation and activity groups—but they drew on their scientific disciplinary backgrounds to help understand and enact the GV 2030 process. It was only after I left the process, that I learned the majority of LAC members had performed technical professional work even if some were now retired, staying home with kids, or running their own businesses.

Some of Orton’s language also articulated GV 2030 storytelling as part of a larger research process. For example, J. L., told LAC members that Orton welcomed new ideas and wanted to treat each project town as an opportunity to study values-based planning and the role of storytelling:

A.O: And nothing necessarily has been developed by us, it's just that we've done all this research and we're just this umbrella of all these things and methods and tools. Golden has done some things, though, that some of the other project towns are just beginning. Some of the others have done story circles already and so we can learn from them and apply some of those lessons learned here …

B.R.:  A little laboratory?

J. L.: Yeah. And just to give you a bigger context, the Orton Family Foundation is working on a heart and soul manual … so we don't have that manual created yet. It's kind of like raising kids: There's no book that tells you how to do it. We're
hoping to create a book that will help people sort of guide them along that way. And so that's why I think Golden is very experimental. (personal communication, June 10, 2009)

In the above meeting talk, J. L. used a number of terms related to learning and research. In reassuring LAC members that Orton is not expert at storytelling and values-based planning she also framed GV 2030 efforts as part of an experimental project. She equated the process to the often mystifying and controversial activity of raising children but explained that work by Golden and other Orton project towns might provide important lessons to others. When asked, she confirmed that GV 2030 is a “little laboratory.” In retrospect I can see how my own scholarly talk contributed to this research process discourse:

So I'm looking particularly in this early part of the process at engagement and participation and unique strategies for collecting people's experiences and figuring out how they develop a sense making process with those experiences. And so I'm also really interested in the experience of members in this group and I'm interviewing folks around the table. (S. M., personal communication, June 10, 2009)

J. L. and I had both suggested that GV 2030 and its public were under the microscope. LAC members were simultaneously researching their community and being researched by practitioners and researchers who would also be researched.

During the initial months of GV 2030, city planners drew heavily on this storytelling as research discourse while simultaneously engaging Orton’s discourse about the relational and transformational capacity of storytelling. In most cases, they did this by
articulating parallel storytelling goals and processes. In the following meeting excerpt, a planner explained how LAC members should address two storytelling goals in distinct ways:

And so storytelling, the general concept with it is definitely twofold. One is definitely to bring people together, to enhance I think the community that Golden has. And the other goal is to in some way—when you ask people about their values, it seems as though the best way for values to be identified is by telling stories. Through people's stories, and it's documented in projects all over the country, all over the world, by telling stories and listening to those stories, the values of the people telling them float to the top. And so that concept is now we're trying to make it a technical exercise in the mining of or the extraction of values, which is such a technical set of terms to apply to something that's very fluffy, but it's very esoteric, very heartfelt, all that soft stuff. (R. S., personal communication, June 10, 2009)

This planner’s description of “a technical set of terms to apply to something that’s very fluffy” engaged assumptions and emerging tensions about the nature of stories, values, and the relationships between the two. She also drew on macro-level discourses about storytelling and planning “all over the country, all over the world” in order to assure other LAC members of the legitimacy of the project—that values could naturally be ‘extracted’ from stories no matter how challenging or improbable it might seem. Discourses related to legitimacy and accountability were prevalent throughout GV 2030 meetings, interviews, public outreach announcements, and policy documents. As some LAC
interviewees had predicted, planners expressed particular anxiety about being able to
demonstrate progress to their constituencies and superiors.

Most LAC members expressed a belief or hope that the right storytelling
collection and translation process would allow planners and city leaders to mine public
stories for the values that would guide the development of clear and specific policy texts.
A GV 2030 community event handout articulated the benefits of this ideal: “if we can
collectively identify what matters most, then public policies can be tailored to honor our
heart and soul and align with what we want for the future of our community” (City of
Golden, 2010a, p. 1). In meetings and interviews, members placed increasing emphasis
on the need to develop valid or accurate procedures for ‘extracting’ values from stories
and translating these values into data that could be incorporated into texts they associated
with the practices of ordinary democracy. LAC members generally equated public
accountability with the need to interpret resident experiences more fully and accurately—
after all, residents had expressed a belief that ordinary democracy did not account for
their lived experiences. Here, I began to trace how LAC members’ existing theories about
communication contributed to the storytelling as research discourse. If they viewed
stories as apolitical and authentic expression, than this authenticity could presumably be
captured more accurately with the right research methods. This accountability could be
achieved, in part, through a more accurate understanding of stories and embedded public
values: “This project is really focused on engaging the public for a better Golden Vision
2030 Plan that accurately reflects the values” (W. S., personal communication, June 10,
2009). The storytelling as research discourses shaped GV 2030 communication design in
specific ways.
LAC meeting agendas prepared by city planners began to include text that drew from this research process discourse. Agenda items for the May and June 2009 LAC meetings included topics such as ‘quality of input’, and ‘block party data discussion’. Stories were articulated as data and storytellers as informants. Talk about story collection design invoked both the storytelling as research discourse and the autonomous city discourse described in Chapter Five. The autonomous city discourse shaped the storytelling outreach practices during the story collection phase. At the first two meetings, LAC member discourse assumed that all storytellers would be Golden residents. In the middle of a discussion at the third meeting, an LAC member asked if the group should consider inviting non-residents to tell stories—those people who “care about Golden but might not live within the city limits” (G. H., personal communication, February 26, 2009). A few members nodded their heads and a city planner pointed out that some Golden business owners did not live within the city limits. Other members argued that this would be a slippery slope—inviting anyone to participate might open the door to those who did not have Golden’s best interests at heart. An Orton consultant said she thought it would be fine to include some business owners who lived outside of Golden, but that Orton’s intention was to see this be a city project (J. L., personal communication, February 26, 2009). After this discussion, I never heard LAC members discuss any outreach strategies that might encourage non-residents to participate in storytelling sessions although they did not actively exclude any interested storytellers at community events.

LAC members drew on the storytelling as research discourse to explore how story collectors—or story catchers—might get more accurate or useful information from storytellers. After the first couple of storytelling events, the primary story collector
reported that some residents seemed uncomfortable telling stories, especially at public events. The story collector—who had a great deal of experience with storytelling and oral history projects—suggested that she might provide a few general prompts to help people become more comfortable with the process. Several LAC members expressed support for the idea, and the group began discussing how important it would be to ask the right kinds of questions. A planning staff member pointed out that stories about pets or feuds between neighbors did not seem particularly useful. The right prompts or questions might be helpful in ‘pulling out the information’ needed. One member asked whether a prompt or question would be biased if it asked about values or planning too directly.

Ultimately, the group encouraged the story collectors to ask relatively general questions about how they defined community, experienced change, or thought about the future. I did notice, however, that the story collector incorporated a handful of additional prompts about embodied experiences related to community smells, sounds, and activities in some story sessions. All of the prompts recommended by LAC members drew on and served to reify the autonomous city narrative by referring only to resident experiences within the city.

Towards the end of the storytelling collection process, LAC members repeatedly stressed the importance of ‘validating’ public input in order to ensure accuracy and thereby make the process accountable. They discussed strategies for engaging the public in listening to stories to identify and validate story values. A great deal of talk about values validation took place even before LAC members discussed the nature of values or the relationship between stories and values. Validation was generally understood to involve ‘going back to the community’ to check the accuracy of story interpretation:
“after the storytelling phase and you start the extraction, we're gonna be going back to the community and saying, ‘Great. Here's what we think you told us, did we get it right? Is this how you really feel?’” (W. S., personal communication, June 10, 2009). The following meeting excerpt shows how the storytelling as research discourse shaped this process:

N. G.: But going back to the, "This Is What We Heard," if you still haven't voiced some kind of concern, whether you were part of that process in the beginning, if you're coming in saying, "Yeah, that's what I would say." Or, "I agree with that." It's the hope. I mean, it's not –

B. E.: Would you think it would be valuable, after going through this inclusive bringing everyone in, to do a statistically significant validation?

N. G.: For the last half hour we’ve been trying to figure out how to try to –

B. V.: But I mean we could attempt to validate statistically. I don't know if we could ever hope to get more than a few percentage of the folks involved … We have high hopes for some of the events, but we still keep talking about that snowy night when 200 people came to this room to talk about sustainability when they weren't necessarily mad at something. Two hundred out of 18,000 is not a lot.

J. L.: And I hate to use the MIT example, but they are dealing with the exact same thing where stories, they've got them all in these matrices and they're trying to figure out what are the values and are these enough stories? Have we heard enough to know that these are the right values we should focus on? And so I think everywhere everybody is grappling with the same thing, but I guess the fundamental piece of it all is that it's something new and you are definitely
hearing from more people than you ever have before. (personal communication, June 10, 2009)

This micro-level talk abandons Orton’s initial discourses about the relational and transformational nature of stories in favor of a storytelling as research discourse. Here, stories are articulated as data and their tellers become future evaluators. B. E. also foregrounds the importance of public sample size and downplays the legitimacy of a public sustainability event that many interviewees had offered up as an indicator of highly successful public participation. The Orton consultant reinforced this storytelling as research discourse by explaining that MIT was struggling with a similar dilemma related to validating community stories and values.

**Storytelling as Relational and Transformative**

This storytelling as research discourse was not totalizing, however. On multiple occasions, LAC members questioned or complicated the discourse that positioned stories as data and publics as sources of data. This often involved a more relational and transformational discourse about storytelling as a community sense making process rather than a research process. A participating leader from a local church expressed an alternative discourse in interviews and during the August 12, 2009 LAC meeting:

T. E.: Just the whole idea, yes a lot of feedback has been given and data collected and I am wondering—if there is any place in the discussions between the planning department, and the foundation, that kind of thing, where somehow the elements of what makes a community are discussed? I guess it feels like we’re interviewing people … it’s like we’re catching a snatch of “Well I like this about Golden and I
don’t like that”, which is not bad information to have. I think it’s good information, but there’s nothing, no background behind it, I’m not sure.

N. G.: No, I think the whole table is with you.

T. E.: How people relate to each other is to me an element of this. How we think about those who live differently then we do … we can say everybody. I firmly believe everybody in a community has something to offer. That is a belief of mine and I try to live in relating to other people in that way. Given my occupation I’ve had the opportunity a lot to do that … I’m just wondering, is there a way to, I don’t know if it is too late or if we can start talking about that among ourselves and look at the data that’s gathered and maybe draw something out from that particular—coming at it from that point of view as one of the ways we look at and listen to what people are saying … like what you need to have a community—it contributes to a community. Whether it’s positive or negative, you have different things. I don’t know if I’m explaining myself well. It seems like that’s where you would get the richness. (personal communication, August 8, 2009)

A number of people around the table nodded while T. E. was talking. T. E. had also drawn on her professional experience to articulate a particular discourse about storytelling. A couple of minutes later, however, she made a point of noting that her ideas were from someone who was “not a scientist” (personal communication, June 10, 2009).

The participating Orton representative expressed agreement with T. E.’s above comments, and pointed out that this was the “Pandora’s Box piece” that Orton was “trying to peel apart and understand” (J. L., personal communication, August 12, 2009).
simultaneously acknowledged the alternative discourse about storytelling while engaging
the storytelling as research discourse by reminding LAC members that Orton wanted to
study and learn from the process. She then drew on a recent Golden resident’s story to
open up questions about the scope of community planning and about the subjective
nature of story interpretation:

I remember hearing one of the stories at one of the block parties where one
gentleman talked about how he really relies on his neighbors and he loves that he
can walk down to the bowling alley and just watch the kids play bowling. So that
kind of statement, we try to think of, okay what’s a value statement that envelops
this person’s ideas about the community? It’s about them being able to relate to
the community and how can the community foster those kinds of opportunities.
There may be a million different ways. It may be better lit sidewalks that help
him do that. It may be connection groups that do neighbor to neighbor checks, it
could be a variety of things that come from this that aren’t just city planning. (J.
L., personal communication, August 12, 2009)

J. L. suggested that, through listening to stories, LAC members might begin to change or
expand their own conceptions of what it meant to engage in community planning. She
also pointed out that there might be a million different ways to understand and respond to
stories and values. When LAC members stressed the relational and transformational
capacity of storytelling they frequently drew on their direct experiences with GV 2030
storytellers and other residents to articulate an alternative discourse that challenged or
paralleled the storytelling as research discourse.
T. E. talked about her experience in working with homeless community members and asked: “Wouldn’t it be incredible if this whole process actually changed the community?” She expressed excitement about this possibility: “This whole process will actually change us as a community. That’s something to think about. Wouldn’t that be incredible!” (personal communication, August 12, 2009). Much of the remaining talk in this meeting was about how stories might actually lead to community change. Towards the end of the meeting, city planners began working to navigate perceived tensions between this relational and transformational storytelling discourse and the storytelling as research discourse:

B.L.: I’ve never been to one of these meetings, aren’t we trying to eventually build things into the community that then change what people do that then reflect these values. Is that right or not? We are trying to make new patterns in Golden. Or at least keep the ones that are here. So that will allow us all to change everyday as we go about the things that we do.

R. S.: So in your example, what do we do in the city so that people could be friendly? Wider sidewalks so that you could wave, you know I don’t know, what that is, but figure out what it means to be whatever we determine these values are and then steps to take.

N. G.: To be effective though, it must be not only directed at what the city government would do, then it gets real squishy because we are accountable to have a plan and achieve a goal … we get worried about what our report card’s going to look like at the end. Another one of the significant failings of our profession is to think that the built environment is the only thing that planning a
community means … I would think the majority of the things that need to happen, the community needs to do itself. One of my theories is the city government’s job is to … provide enough services that there are enough levels up the pyramid so that you the community can be the wonderful community you want to be. You don’t have to spend your time worrying about crime, police, why the hell did they let that person next door to me build that thing that I hate? So yes, what you said.

(personal communication, August 12, 2009)

Above, N. G. articulated a complex relationship between public accountability and professional accountability. As a planner, he is responsible to a number of powerful actors—a city council, a planning commission, citizens, and professional associates. Not all of these actors were present in the room, but they clearly shaped what he understood to be possible. N. G. suggested that public planners could be more accountable to public interests by expanding their conception of planning—to factors beyond the built environment. Yet, he also made it clear that he is, if sometimes grudgingly, a member of the planning profession and therefore subject to its disciplinary standards. Ultimately, city leaders would evaluate planners for their professional accomplishments as manifest in the built environment—in the sidewalks that R. S. described. Planners are also accountable to a complex regulatory system. The ‘report card’ that N. G. mentioned would be constructed at the intersection of numerous planning policies. Rose (1999) argued that “the shadow of the law” (p. 155) constantly shapes professional practices:

Professional activity in a whole range of fields has become structured by the obligation to documentation—the maintenance of information systems, registers, notes of all meetings, written statements of grounds for decisions and the like—in
the hope of making judgments defensible in an imagined future court case.

Professionals must now act in such a way that that action might be, at some future moment, defensible in terms of the criteria and evidentiary requirements of another profession and body of expert knowledge, that of the law. (p. 156)

This powerful discourse about professional and legal accountability reinforced the *storytelling as research* discourse and exerted significant influence during the remainder of the GV 2030 process.

**The Power of Discourse**

Throughout the storytelling process, LAC members grappled with questions about the nature of stories and about how to navigate relationships between conflicting discourses. On one occasion, I described some of what I thought I was observing in an LAC meeting; LAC members appeared receptive—many nodded and murmured words of assent. As I described what I saw to be competing discourses about the nature and purpose of storytelling I realized that I was engaged in scholarly behavior I had hated as a practitioner. I had deconstructed something in a way that clearly surprised some LAC members and likely confirmed the experiences of others. I had articulated a dilemma with little ability to facilitate a constructive conversation or provide practical advice. Since that meeting I have participated in countless conversations about this subject with LAC members, Orton consultants, and with colleagues—both practitioners and scholars. I have read more and thought more about the emergence of these disparate understandings of storytelling. In doing so, I have concluded that the appeal and power of the *storytelling as research* discourse is complex, but also fundamentally related to how people think about the relationship between communication and experience.
More complex transformational discourses about storytelling gave way to the *storytelling as research* discourse, in part, because this latter discourse was more aligned with professional practices and the associated institutions and texts of ordinary democracy. Yet, underlying all of these discourses, are existing theories about communication. Numerous scholars have heralded a postmodern era and people are talking about forces of globalization and change, but everyday theories about communication may not be changing much. The storytelling as research discourse assumed that talk still signifies a relatively fixed and certain meaning. In the following chapter I will examine how this discourse intersected with other GV 2030 discourses to shape the values identification phase.
CHAPTER VIII

MOVING FROM STORIES TO VALUES

*I suggested that we tape them all [value statements] to the wall and magically we'll know what it means, and she wanted to be more research and methodically-based and look at it.*

[laughter] (N. G., personal communication, June 10, 2009)

In the course of any communication design process, members engage in varying levels of reflection about their situated ideals (Tracy, 2010) and practices. As I described in earlier chapters, LAC members interacted to construct situated ideals in relationship to perceived limitations of ordinary democracy and numerous intersecting discourses about planning, public participation, and communication. In Chapter Six I described how LAC members and residents reflected on problems of power in interviews and sidebar discussions, but rarely in their meetings. During the values identification process, LAC members’ tendency to disregard ideals and practices related to power was heightened by the use of external consultants and the introduction of new accountability discourses constituted by means-end rationality, material expectations, and temporal constraints. As a result, a self-designated subset of LAC members interacted to design the values identification process. They drew heavily on the storytelling as research discourse and their particular communication design choices began to close off opportunities for participant dialogue and reflection.
In Search of Shared Values

All LAC interviewees expressed at least some anxiety about how—or even whether—the group would be able to use GV 2030 stories to identify community values and draft corresponding planning texts. For over six months, LAC members engaged in communication design talk to support what they typically referred to as a values identification, harvesting, or extraction process. They rarely talked explicitly about the rationale for values-based planning; the overall approach was largely taken-for-granted and members periodically referred to it as a best practice or as Orton’s approach. Orton’s emphasis on shared community values reinforced—and was reinforced by—the autonomous city narrative described in Chapter Five.

Orton texts were explicit about the importance of values-based planning, and they argued that communities with shared values would be in a better position to respond to—or even direct—forces of growth and change. Orton claimed that "telling a story, in its broadest sense, brings to life residents’ experiences and their values including their shared heritage, sense of place, motivations, and goals (City of Golden, & Orton Family Foundation, 2008, p. 3).” Although this text also attends to the importance of revealing “important overlooked values and unresolved issues” (p. 3), Orton discourses typically exhorted project towns to focus on identifying pre-existing attributes of a shared community identity. Specific discourse about Heart & Soul project towns urged participants to identify and uphold the characteristics that make their community unique. Orton’s emphasis on shared community identity reinforced the narrative of the autonomous city. Implicit in this logic is the assumption that shared values would, in turn, reinforce the boundaries of this city. Orton’s Heart & Soul language was often nostalgic
and it invoked a loss of community discourse that Rose (1999) argued has been prevalent in western cultures since the Nineteenth Century. Associated assumptions about a shared heritage and sense of positive connection were reflected in some, but certainly not all Golden resident stories. Several residents in one geographic area of the community talked about feeling isolated or abandoned by the City:

WM: Well, I don’t feel really that much a part of the Golden community as defined by downtown, where all the action is, the GURA and all that. The people that are development on the north end of town, I don’t think the residents here feel all that much a part. We got a Golden address and that’s about it.

DFT: Would you say you feel integrated with the rest of the city?

B: No. _______, who also has been on the Home Owners Thing, he says it right: “We’re the orphan child of the City” because we’re here, we’re still paying our taxes, we’re still trying to be a part of the City and people ignore us. That’s just very discouraging. (personal communication, April 22, 2009)

At the level of micro-discourse, however, Orton consultants expressed greater ambivalence about the notion of community consensus around values and planning policy.

One Orton consultant told me Orton staff was reviewing literature on values-based planning and public participation to try to figure out how to “come closer to informed consent since you never really get full consensus” (A. R., personal communication, February 26, 2009). In an early LAC meeting, A. R. also emphasized how identifying values was likely to be a tricky process: "relations between values and priorities can be challenging. There are often completely valid priorities that conflict."
Orton is struggling with this and hopes to learn from Golden's experience" (personal communication, February 3, 2009). These comments contributed to the ongoing discourse about Golden’s role as both partner and subject in an experimental research process. They also indicated an emerging tension over how LAC members should address seemingly conflicting story values or values that appeared to be in conflict with Orton’s discourse about the importance of shared community identity. Orton’s discourses about the overwhelmingly positive nature of storytelling and the importance of shared community values helped to constitute a communication design approach that often resembled the Appreciative Inquiry change model proposed by Cooperrider and Whitney (2005). Appreciative Inquiry advocates asking questions about the best in people and in their organizations and communities. It is about crafting positive questions and building future capacities so that “intervention gives way to inquiry, imagination, and innovation” rather than “negation, criticism, and spiraling diagnosis” (p. 8). Multiple Orton consultants told me they were familiar with this kind of change model, and that it had informed their thinking about community storytelling and values identification.

LAC members talked frequently about engaging Golden residents in telling positive stories about community experiences and Orton consultants emphasized the positive: “the idea is not to go through and create a bitch session, it becomes an opportunity to go through and say, ‘Well, what did you like, et cetera?’” (A. R., personal communication, June 10, 2009). At this same LAC meeting I encouraged LAC members to explore ways of acknowledging or discussing perceived conflicts rather than setting them aside or voting to exclude them. After this, planning staff would occasionally joke about how I wouldn’t let them get away with making nice or ignoring conflicts. The
planning and development director also expressed an interest in figuring out how to explore and reflect community differences while still producing sufficient consent to guide policy decisions. This tension remained throughout the GV 2030 process, and efforts to smooth over seemingly conflicting values—and to resist this ‘smoothing’—were apparent in several community focus groups and summits. By late summer 2009, however, LAC members—especially planning staff—were becoming increasingly focused on the need to produce a visioning/values report and associated planning policies in a timely and accountable manner.

They had collected an enormous amount of data that they were admittedly uncertain about how to work with and they talked about growing tensions between creative and collaborative process goals and material, temporal, and political project constraints. I was beginning to notice strong parallels between their research process discourse and my own. They had engaged approximately 1,200 Golden residents in GV 2030 events and collected over 300 stories. I had participated in many of these events and recorded dozens of meetings and stories. We were all engaged in a big muddy sense making process and now project deadlines and external expectations loomed large. What would we have to share with our respective constituencies? How could we begin to articulate the complexity we were encountering without smoothing over confusion, conflict, and paradox? How could we construct something meaningful out of this sea of experiences? One of my committee members reminded me that ‘the best dissertation is a done dissertation’ and city planners received similar messages from city leaders in respect to their role in completing planning texts. In retrospect, I noticed that LAC members who expressed a strong professional responsibility for the success of GV 2030
began to engage in at least three simultaneous communication design activities: (a) seeking outside expertise and moving away from a more collaborative group process, (b) specifying project design activities, desired outcomes, and end products in much greater detail and in writing, and (c) planning and facilitating fast-paced and highly structured public interactions. A newly formed LAC project team drew on discourses that reinforced each other in a reticulated manner to construct what they often referred to as an

*accountable* values identification process.

**Seeking Outside Expertise**

In July 2009, all LAC committee members received an email from LAC city planners explaining that the “project team”—a term I had not noticed in use before—had decided to enlist the services of an outside consulting firm for the purposes of designing and implementing the story listening and values identification process of GV 2030:

> Since we last met, the project team (thanks to the Orton Family Foundation) has enlisted the professional services of a consulting firm called [Transformation, Inc.]; gifted in facilitation of discussions on values. We have high hopes that our coordination with [Transformation, Inc.] will result in improved and more focused story listening skills, better positioning us for future exercises in the use of the values we are in the process of identifying. (W. S. email, July 22, 2009)

This planner told me she was relieved that the LAC would receive guidance from a firm that had helped other communities—including a nearby Colorado city—with data extraction processes. The City had, with Orton’s guidance, entered into a contract with the Denver-based firm, Transformation Inc. LAC members spent little time discussing the contract and its ‘scope of work,’ and it appeared that non-city members of the LAC
had not been consulted in the decision to enter into the contract. The contract’s ‘scope of work’ language that was distributed to LAC members clearly engaged the LAC storytelling as research discourse:

The project team seeks input from [Transformations, Inc.] on a set of techniques/approaches specific to each of the gatherings listed below. The purpose of each of the events is to get at "data," sorted by categories/titles with an end goal of creating themes that can form the basis of a values-based policy direction in the next phase of the project. These themes must be discussed and put through a rigorous testing to validate what was gathered is accurate to the best of our knowledge and efforts. Important to consider is the question of goals for this endeavor in either avoiding the leap from categories to full-fledged themes developed by committee or, as an alternative, doing much of the identification of themes through work with the Local Advisory Committee, which are then vetted through heavy public involvement, particularly from the missing voices we have collectively identified with the Local Advisory Committee. (City of Golden, 2009f)

Transformation, Inc. was charged with developing and implementing communication design that would rigorously test and validate story data and ultimately lead to a values-based policy direction. As a new partner in the GV 2030 process, Transformation, Inc. had not participated in storytelling events or prior LAC meetings. Their consultants were not familiar with competing discourses about storytelling or with how situated ideals and practices had been constructed during the first phase of the process. This contracting decision reinforced the storytelling as research discourse and emphasized the importance
of policy direction as an end product. Transformation, Inc., in order to fulfill its contract with the City, was now at least partially accountable for this end product.

On July 22, 2009 LAC members met with a Transformation Inc. consultant (Susan) to begin the process of “extracting values from stories” (W. S., personal communication, July 22, 2009). I was unable to attend the meeting but I watched a video recording and received meeting field notes from a university colleague involved in another aspect of the project. I also attended the follow-up LAC meeting where LAC members talked about their experience in the Transformation Inc. session. The consultant used the term ‘data’ frequently and she introduced the concept of ‘values extraction’ by talking about ‘brain science.’ Susan reassured LAC members that Transformation Inc. had a great deal of experience in working with this kind of extraction process, and that the application of ‘brain science’ concepts could help them interpret stories in a more meaningful and objective manner. She shared a number of presentation slides and handouts designed to show how individuals’ cognitive biases can prevent them from identifying a storyteller’s values, hopes, concerns, and deeper assumptions. She then facilitated a series of story value extraction exercises where LAC members were asked to work individually and in groups to listen to stories, identify values, and sort these values into categories. At the next LAC meeting, the city planning and development director described the Transformation, Inc. meeting in the following way:

We kind of thought it was fun, we got great comments that night about the four different ways we listened to the five different stories. For those that weren’t there … they vary from write down your own impressions, talk with your neighbor and then talk with a larger group, to immediately you talk with
neighbors and talk it through; typical exercises you would like to use where you are asked to distill what the three most important things you heard, what’s the dominant theme, or whatever. It some ways the experiment was with starting by yourself and then working up to a larger group and starting with a group and then there was a little visional aide where you were to write different types of things in different parts of the paper. That worked really well. (N. G., personal communication, August 12, 2009)

After the meeting, my university colleague told me several LAC members had expressed relief at having an expert to guide the values identification process. She said she was happy to see the group creating a conceptual system of categories (A.P., personal communication, July 29, 2009). A city planner sent me an email update that echoed this increased sense of comfort with the new guidance from Transformation, Inc.:

> We sure missed you last night with the process we went through with the group [Transformation Inc.] on story distillation/value extraction. It was incredible and I really hope to work more with them in the future. The ease with which they ran the meeting was really comforting to me in that we're going to see real results from all of the gathering of stories (and other information) we're in the throes of right now.” (R. S., personal communication, January 30, 2009)

According to Guttman (2007) this kind of effort to increase competence in participatory processes often generates a paradox: “the more procedures are proffered to enhance competence (i.e., various information resources, simulation activities, consultants), the more occasions there are to frame the issues according to those in power” (p. 426). Guttman is not suggesting that consultants will necessarily enact power in overt or
purposeful ways, but that typically well-intentioned expertise potentially shapes and
directs group attention and closes off possible conversations. In Golden, LAC members
frequently deferred to the ‘best practice’ recommendations offered by Transformation,
Inc.

**Specifying Project Design Activities, Desired Outcomes, and End Products**

A discourse about results and final products emerged in a number of similar
communications about Transformation, Inc.’s role in the GV 2030 process. From this
point on, Transformation, Inc. consultants met regularly with LAC planning staff and
Orton consultants as a project team to develop communication design plans related to
story listening/values extraction sessions. I was invited to some, but not all, of these
meetings. I wondered whether planners were, at some level, uncomfortable with their
turn to a less collaborative approach and anxious about having an outside researcher
present. As far as I know, other LAC members were not invited so it is also possible that
planners struggled with how to constitute a smaller more action-oriented group. As the
project team began to work closely with Transformation, Inc., LAC meetings began to
take on a different tone. LAC planners began to present more specific process design
activities and expected outcomes for review by other LAC members. LAC interactions
became less openly collaborative and more focused on gaining member input on
communication design plans proposed by the project team. Three LAC members told me
they were no longer clear on what role they were expected to play in GV 2030.

In August 2009, a city planner told me that some city leaders were pushing for
more details about GV 2030 progress. Another city staff member told me that a planner
who was not serving on the LAC had called the GV 2030 project ‘frivolous’ and
expressed skepticism about the process. All of this micro-level discourse tied back to discourses about accountability—not just accountability to the public, but accountability to a wide range of stakeholders and policies. This is consistent with Rose’s (1999) argument that government practitioners are accountable not just to people but also to the logic and methods of government audit systems. Planners frequently expressed frustration at being caught in between competing expectations and accountability mechanisms. Orton wanted them to design, implement, and assess innovative storytelling techniques and technology tools and demonstrate broad public involvement in GV 2030. Planning commission members wanted more explicit planning policies. City council members wanted less contentious public planning meetings and long-term land use and fiscal development plans that would comply with a complex web of meso- and macro-level legal requirements. Now, a growing number of community members were expressing a desire to see their interests reflected in the outcomes of GV 2030. City planners told me they were being asked to meet these expectations with limited resources and little additional training. During this period, they produced a number of documents that explained how GV 2030 would produce at least some of the expected outcomes.

Golden planning staff prepared a document titled “What happens after story telling?” to help LAC members “understand the bigger picture” (R. S., personal communication, July 29, 2009) and “better define the next and later stages of the project” (City of Golden, 2009g). This document included the following ‘problem statement’:

It appears that the primary challenge at this stage, is not the identification of value or attribute categories from the stories, but the need to push ourselves to assure that the next effort can lead us to a truly useful and integrated articulation of core
values in a manner that seamlessly bridges to value or scenario testing and then to policy, and then to innovative decision making models to implement policy. (p. 1)

Planning staff distributed this document at a GV 2030 meeting and talked about it extensively. Although the group was just entering the values identification phase, the city planning and development director pointed out that the real measure of success would be in figuring out how these values could be used to construct an innovative public policy decision-making model. I felt my stomach tightening as I contemplated the complexity and enormity of this charge, and I could only guess at how other LAC members were experiencing this articulation of the problem. I wanted to ask a dozen questions at once: What exactly did they mean by ‘decision-making models to implement policy’? How could models themselves implement policy? Was this kind of decision-making model viable? Was it even desirable? I decided I should wait for other LAC members to raise questions before I spoke. A couple of women sitting next to me looked at me pointedly but I looked away, unable to read their expressions. LAC members remained uncharacteristically silent.

Planning staff explained that the storytelling activities had provided so much rich data that it would be more challenging than originally predicted to translate stories into values and meaningful policy change. According to their handout:

Initially, we may have expected that the story listening activity would result in a highly organized system of value statements or community attributes, or themes, and in actuality our outputs from story listening may become more sophisticated as we proceed. However, it does appear that there will need to be a step whereby the more generalized listings and groupings of values are consolidated into a
format that can be discussed and tested by the community. (City of Golden, 2009g, p. 3)

Planners explained that they had worked to develop potential strategies for organizing story outputs into *usable* value statements. All of these strategies involved some form of story listening activity or focus group designed to ‘extract’ information from stories. According to the handout, “the most legitimate process to accomplish this task would likely involve an inclusive public participation process. (p. 3). However, the design and structure of this process would be determined, at least in part, by temporal and material constraints outlined in the handout:

- **Time** - Creating a new public participation step before moving on to the next activity where we report back to the public about what was heard in the stories and begin to test the validity of values and themes that resulted from the stories would probably add about two to three months to the schedule.
- **Loss of Momentum** - With the length of the process already, we should be cautious about any further delays in moving from one phase to the next, and the strong potential of losing interest and confidence of the public.
- **Resources** - A large scale public value organizing project will undoubtedly need to be carefully orchestrated and facilitated, requiring a level of resource allocation that may not easily be absorbed into the project budget. (City of Golden, 2009g, p. 3)

In retrospect, this handout signaled at least two major shifts in micro-level talk about the GV 2030 process. First, the process was now articulated more formally as part of a larger city process, subject to the resources and constraints associated with city bureaucracy and
the practices of ordinary democracy—and therefore governed by a complex accounting system (Rose, 1999). Rose argued that government procedures, forms, policies, and evaluations shaped patterns of accountability. Golden planners were not just accountable to people, but to these types of accounting technologies. Planners’ reports, resource requests, and project outcomes were all subject to evaluation based on existing local government policies, metrics, and deadlines. Second, the storytelling as research discourse worked to further eclipse the relational and transformational discourse about storytelling. A discourse about *storytelling as research* had initially been destabilized by a competing ontological discourse that articulated stories as relational and transformational. The former discourse had also been weakened by epistemological and methodological uncertainties related to story interpretation. Now, outside experts promised to provide the necessary methods for translating stories into values and values into policy tools. With some notable exceptions, most future LAC meeting talk would be about story distillation, value categories, validation, and prioritization rather than about new relationships or possibilities for dialogue and community transformation.

It would be easy for me to suggest that planners and consultants dictated this shift in discourse based entirely on their own disciplinary training or professional interests—that other LAC members might have contested the overwhelming articulation of storytelling as research—if only they had greater authority. I myself might have spoken up and encouraged them to remain open to multiple discourses. Yet, I also found this shift prophesied in co-constructed LAC discourse and in my own inclination to produce a professionally acceptable dissertation format. In an early interview, a LAC member who was not a city planner articulated his assumptions about the final phase of GV 2030:
So there’s all kinds of stuff going on. And so I think that we’re going to have enough things going on, necessarily, that it will—it will work out ... this is more social science than structured, prioritized, matrixed decision making. Now some day they’re going to have to get to where they go to decision making with buckets, by squares, by weighing, or something. (D. S., personal communication, June 10, 2009)

This LAC member drew on accounting discourses to articulate necessary components of the GV 2030 values identification process. During the initial weeks of the GV 2030 storytelling phase, LAC planning staff frequently distilled story transcripts into spreadsheets, charts, and draft value statements based on examples from other cities. Other LAC members had also requested this kind of clarity and information. I sensed that this provided a measure of progress, particularly for LAC members who needed to report directly to outside constituencies. LAC meeting talk was increasingly focused on generating an end product consistent with the existing texts of ordinary democracy.

According to MacCallum (2008), this kind of means-ends rationality is due, in large part, to the “conservativeness of the plan as a genre” (p. 325). MacCallum, like Rose (1999) and Benoit-Barné and Cooren (2009) suggested that texts themselves exert authority over human actors. Norms and societal ideologies—even those that have been challenged by alternative discourses—may retain their power in textual genres and in the patterned relationships between texts and practices.

Designing Story Listening/Values Extraction Focus Groups

LAC members often used the concept of translation to talk about the GV 2030 values identification process: “I think the critical next step is gonna be how you translate
that into policy, and making sure that what you’re hearing is really how people feel” (G. H., personal communication, June 11, 2009). After the LAC’s initial meeting with Transformation, Inc. several members, including planning staff, expressed uncertainty about this process of translating stories into written values:

That was fascinating I think for a lot of people to say, ‘wow, there is some filling in the blanks from some types of assumptions that we may make in these stories and need to try to guard against that.’ She [Transformation Inc. consultant] used terminology that is so cold and hard and scientific, when we are talking about such soft, esoteric type concepts like storytelling and community values, but using terms like data and sorting and that type of language I think was helpful in kind of getting the crowds’ perception of what they were listening to. (R. S., personal communication, August 12, 2009)

Here, a city planner expressed uncertainty about moving from a relatively ambiguous and messy form of communication to a data-oriented model she described as “cold and hard”. A number of LAC members described stories as more authentic—or more inexpressible—than what the values identification process could account for, and an Orton consultant told me she worried that the data process was reducing stories down too far (J. L., personal communication, August 12, 2009). The planning and development director also told me he worried that emerging values were too vague to provide policy guidance. He elaborated on this concern in an LAC meeting:

The challenge we have is to turn this type of information into meaningful information. One of the comments we hear and are guilty of saying is what you get—and I’m going to pick on another city in a few minutes—is the mile wide
and one inch deep content that we are getting. ‘Small town character’, I love it, I love friendly, and well what community in the country doesn’t love friendly? (N. G., personal communication, August 12, 2009)

LAC members briefly talked about how to differentiate values from interests or goals. It was clear that, even after meeting with Transformation, Inc., LAC members did not share a common definition of values. I suggested that something like ‘open space’ was not necessarily a value, because people might value open space for different reasons. Meeting participants asked how they should go about articulating values from stories that were primarily about negative events or experiences. They also raised questions about how particular stories would be identified and edited for story listening groups. I noticed that one LAC member (M. R.) frequently asked questions that city staff said they would discuss with Transformation, Inc. consultants. In an earlier interview, she had asked me questions that she continued to raise throughout the process:

I guess I’m most uncertain about how we’re gonna take these stories or the things people tell us in whatever manner … how do we turn these statements that people make or these stories or whatever? Who determines which are valuable ones or—that’s a really good story. That family was so good. Why? Does that make our town look really good? Are they—you know—I mean who is determining? We’re not going obviously to be able to use everything in that video I mean … if we get a lot of these—and we’re gonna have forty hours—how is it gonna be pared down and who’s selecting? Who is determining what our values are from all of this? I don’t know. (M. R., personal communication, May 16, 2009)
In response to questions and concerns that emerged at LAC meetings, the GV 2030 project team worked with Transformation, Inc. consultants to develop definitions and instructions that planners said would be used to guide the work of nearly twenty story listening/values identification focus groups. Again, a critical aspect of communication design was discussed—and determined—outside of the LAC group.

Planners distributed the story listening/values identification guidelines to other LAC members on written handouts and posted them on meeting flip charts. These guidelines articulated a value as: “a principle, standard, or quality considered worthwhile or desirable.” They went on to explain that a value “contains a noun (the subject of value), a verb (is active in stating a preference), a direction (is either positive or negative).” The examples provided were positive: “1. She likes activities, open space, scenery, and wildlife. 2. He values calm, quiet neighborhoods, but a vibrant downtown” (City of Golden, 2009h). I had a number of questions about these guidelines. What if I didn’t feel like I understood enough context to interpret story values? What if a storyteller seemed conflicted about whether a particular value was positive or negative? In cases where multiple storytellers were involved, should I try to capture multiple—even competing—values? I decided to stay silent and participate in and observe focus groups as they unfolded.

Most of the story focus groups were held in the Jefferson County administration center. A few LAC members objected to this location—arguing that it wouldn’t be welcoming to a lot of community members. But, according to planning staff, this was the only site that was available for so many sessions at little or no cost. In my experience, locals, including city staff, referred to this building as the Taj Majal. The building was as
intimidating as any state capitol building I’ve been in. PCL, the construction firm that
built the Taj Mahal described it in the following way:

The Jefferson County Government Center is known as the ‘Taj Mahal' of
Colorado. Constructed with a steel tension ring atrium, a dome is the centerpiece
of the building with a skylights and a 125’-high rotunda. Not only is the
government center beautiful, it is technologically advanced. (PCL, 2005)

I found it difficult to figure out where to park when I attended my first GV 2030 story
focus group as there were several large parking structures surrounding the Taj Mahal.
Once inside, I found that the main entrance opens into a grand atrium several stories
high—conversations echoed off the atrium windows and marble floors. Several people
who entered with me appeared visibly unsure about how to proceed. I had to ask for
assistance at an information kiosk. When I entered the conference room I saw city
planners, a couple of other LAC members and four women I didn’t recognize. They were
the citizen participants. The conference room was quite formal, and fancy fruit and
dessert trays sat next to coffee and Styrofoam cups.

The Transformation, Inc. consultant (Linda) entered the room, introduced herself,
and told us that we would be working together to ‘harvest’ or ‘extract’ values from
stories. She defined values and introduced the story listening/values identification
guidelines. I joined LAC members and community focus group participants in story
listening and values identification activities. Linda asked us to watch three to five stories
at a time, write down values we heard from each story and then meet in small groups to
summarize our values into a few statements. During our first group break-out discussion,
I asked Linda’s advice on articulating a tension we had identified in one of our stories—a
storyteller had said she valued dense, mixed use neighborhoods and that she was thankful to live in an isolated, rural neighborhood. How should we articulate this in one positive or negative statement of desire? Linda encouraged us to discard themes that were unclear or contradictory. She facilitated in a brusque style, looking at her watch frequently and cutting people off when they started to engage the full group in dialogue. It became clear that focus group guidelines, timeframes, and facilitator style all shaped the way that participants talked about and articulated value statements.

At another, larger focus group meeting Linda began explaining the story listening/values identification guidelines, and a community participant cut in to ask "when do I have a chance to voice my views if I don't like or don't understand some of these values?" (personal communication, January 26, 2010). A planning staff member stepped forward from the side of the room to let her know she would have a chance to do this at an upcoming community event. The woman said she wanted to make sure she had this chance because she had “some pretty different views.” I didn’t ever witness a clear opportunity for talk about conflicting values at any GV 2030 event. One of the first stories the group listened to included a woman describing the benefits of diversity in Golden. A focus group member whispered in an easily audible voice, "but we have a pretty white culture here." Linda moved the group on to another video, but a couple of focus group participants continued to whisper about the subject while others nodded and exchanged glances. The next story emphasized sustainability, but two participants near me were still whispering about diversity: "look at all the white blond haired people around this table. What do you think that story meant about diversity? Was she talking about a diversity of view points?"
A listener pointed out that the stories were all positive—expressing no disappointments. She asked whether others did express some negative experiences or concerns. Linda said "some" and urged the sub-groups to continue their discussions. At least three participants frowned. Subgroups summarized 'values' from the sustainability-related story and Linda told them they were "spot-on in capturing the essence of what they said." Next, the group listened to stories told by a couple in their early 80s. The couple described feeling like they were perceived as "trailer trash" and said they didn't feel like a part of Golden. The man said they wanted a park, but that parks were always put on the other side of town where the rich people lived. He said he felt like he had no voice in government—that government officials didn't listen and that a park, or even some sidewalks, would show that people cared. After the story recording ended, Linda encouraged group members to turn this into a positive value—a statement that showed how much this couple valued relationships and responsive government. A participant asked "but doesn't it anchor their values to give background or demographics? What about their full story?" Linda said that level of detail wasn't necessary during this part of the process. Another group member asked "shouldn't we acknowledge that this couple feels disconnected?" Linda said ok, but it wasn't clear if or how that would be done. I never saw this concern reflected in future values, but I have no way of knowing whether this was an intentional absence, or simply a lack of follow-through by Transformations, Inc. consultants or city planners. Another listener said "I feel bad for them." Linda moved the group on to the next story, and planning staff did not comment. I felt like the definition and structure of the final outcome—in this case, value statements—had been particularly influential in shaping focus group communication. Opportunities for
dialogue, and particularly dialogue about contentious community issues, had been closed off by communication design.

According to Deetz (1992), “discursive closure exists whenever potential conflict is suppressed” (p. 187). He described this closure as the communicative mechanism by which participants are precluded from contesting particular claims or practices. For example Deetz, argued that *disqualification* excludes non-experts from making assertions about particular subjects. Disqualification can be enacted in numerous ways, but it is often structured and maintained through a system of professional specialization and status.

In the LAC focus group, the consultant’s professional credentials, her declared knowledge about the values identification process, and her affiliation with the City allowed her to close off procedural contestation. Another discursive closure process outlined by Deetz—*topical avoidance*—can also be seen at work in these interactions. The consultant persistently discouraged participants from discussing the subject of negative or conflicting story values. She emphasized the identification of positive story values and encouraged participants to choose a singular interpretation when faced with complexity or uncertainty.

Deetz’s *naturalization* process is perhaps most useful in understanding this focus group interaction. According to Deetz, naturalization occludes the socio-historical processes involved in producing particular objects—in this case, stories—from view. Interestingly, the consultant urged focus group participants to participate actively and materially in this process of naturalization. In excluding story context, listeners naturalized values so they appeared as distinct and stable objects. The couple that lived in the trailer park now valued responsive government in any context. A situated description
of alienation and a loss of voice had been abstracted and transformed into an affirmative value statement. In this instance, three different processes of discursive closure intersected in a powerful manner. The consultant’s expertise had worked to close off participants’ procedural concerns, the Heart & Soul project’s emphasis on positive values had led to topical avoidance, and a process of naturalization had been generated through the use of particular values identification methods.

It would be easy to simply blame the Transformations, Inc. consultant for exerting unnecessary authority or failing to support more ideal participation, but I believe a host of other discourses, as well as temporal and material factors, also shaped and constrained her facilitation approach. Transformations, Inc. had been charged with facilitating events based on a *storytelling as research* discourse. They were asked to design “rigorous testing” to “get at ‘data,’ sorted by categories/titles with an end goal of creating themes that can form the basis of a values-based policy direction” (City of Golden, 2009f). This *storytelling as research* discourse did not account for more complex discussions about the nature of values or about the relevance of context. The consultant’s avoidance of negative topics was likely informed by Orton’s Heart & Soul approach and by underlying interpretations of the Appreciative Inquiry model (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005). Grant and Humphries (2006) found that appreciative inquiry approaches facilitated by researchers and practitioners sometimes closed off important opportunities for dialogue:

> In deflecting attention away from the seeming negative issues shared by participants, we may have lost valuable opportunities: to learn something unexpected; to demonstrate our commitment to participant directed research; and to deepen trust! … Unwittingly, the researcher bias could have exacerbated
participant perceptions of a relative power imbalance within the research group and the de-valuing of local knowledge. (p. 413)

These scholars did not oppose more constructive approaches to change, but they did suggest that appreciative inquiry should not be conflated with consistently positive or consensus-based talk. They argued that important appreciative discussions might still pertain to differences and participant experiences—both positive and frustrating.

The GV 2030 project team had also established a relatively ambitious timeline for project completion based on the expectations of city leaders and Orton consultants. A discourse of accountability emphasized end results and accountability to a wide range of constituents and accounting practices. Transformation, Inc. consultants had entered into a contract with tight deadlines, clearly specified outcomes, and multiple stakeholders. In addition, I believe Transformation, Inc. consultants had listened to several LAC members express relief at receiving clearer expert direction. The kind of discursive closure present in GV 2030 focus groups was not accomplished in discrete interactions or only via the power of an individual or organization. Rather, it was accomplished through the process by which planning and public participation discourses intersected and reinforced one another.

**Shaping Community Values**

During the GV 2030 values identification phase, Golden planners began to direct LAC activities in a more overt way. A few LAC members talked with me about this, and one LAC member emailed me to ask whether I could—or would—help give voice to their concerns about a lack of role clarity. After all of the talk about participatory democracy, I realized alternative public participation ideals and practices were generally
articulated as something that happened ‘out there’ rather than in LAC meetings. City staff, as recipients of Orton Heart & Soul funding, had taken an active role in leading meetings and coordinating activities. During this second phase of the project, they established a project team made up of city staff, Orton consultants, Transformation, Inc. consultants and a community story collector. This team engaged in communication design with limited input from other LAC members. The resulting communication design was not intended to close off opportunities for participant dialogue and reflection; rather it was designed to meet the expectations of constituents and integrate with existing government accountability systems in a timely manner. The *storytelling as research* discourse also reinforced a means-end rationality. In the following chapter I will trace discourses through the final phase of the GV 2030 process to show how they shaped communication design to generate particular ‘official’ meso-level values texts.
CHAPTER IX

CITY VALUES—FIXED FOR THE FUTURE?

The challenge of community building is this: While visions, plans, and committed top leadership are important, even essential, no clear vision, nor detailed plan, nor committed group of leaders have the power to bring this image of the future into existence without the continued engagement and involvement of citizens. (Block, 2008, p. 78-79)

If the first phase of GV 2030 was characterized by ambiguity and experimentation, the final phase was marked by urgency and a growing sense of inevitability. In this chapter I show how material and temporal dynamics were instrumental in shaping communication design choices by examining how micro-level LAC and project team discourses made sense of emergent resource constraints. Accountability discourses also presupposed a certain type of planning product accountable to constituents and to a conventional planning genre. However, I argue that influential government accountability discourses were not just generated and reinforced through the institutions and professionals typically associated with ordinary democracy. Orton’s Heart & Soul project practices subtly reinforced a deficit-based accountability discourse at odds with the foundation’s stated intentions.
Wingspread Project Town Convening

In anticipation of the final Heart & Soul project phase, Orton invited community members, political leaders, and planners from all of their project towns to participate in a working retreat at the Johnson Foundation’s Wingspread campus in Racine, Wisconsin. I was invited to attend on behalf of the City of Golden along with two city planners, the sustainability director, and the LAC’s primary story collector. At this retreat, I observed tensions between Orton’s Heart & Soul communication design discourses and the discourses of local planners and political leaders. Whereas the stated goals of the retreat were focused on community sharing, capacity building, and celebration, a number of project town attendees expressed a desire for more specific direction and planning tools. They expressed appreciation for Orton’s commitment to longer-term community changes, but they also emphasized their ongoing efforts to respond to demanding constituencies, deadlines, resource limitations, staffing problems, and perceived public and funder expectations related to the production of planning products.

At the beginning of the Wingspread retreat, Orton leaders and the retreat’s facilitator introduced an emergent process that would allow retreat participants to identify the issues they would like to address during the approximately two-day working retreat. Retreat participants called out topics of interest and the retreat facilitator listed them on flip charts in front of the room. The topics of interest included a high number of questions or concerns related to integrating Heart & Soul activities with existing practices:

1. Reassurance
2. How others have used stories
3. How to keep stories looped in
4. What distinguishes Heart & Soul
5. How to pull in diverse community members
6. How to maintain energy levels (staff, volunteers, community)
7. Peer connections
8. New engagement technologies
9. How to explain Heart & Soul to skeptics
10. How to build local capacity after Heart & Soul staff leave
11. Testing whether this can be replicated minus funding
12. Bridging gap between story gathering to action phases (moving from stories to values to master plans)
13. Fuel for taking risks
14. Examples of effective small actions—success stories
15. How local government is adopting
16. Are foundation’s expectations reasonable?
17. What language works and doesn’t
18. What are different community goals/ways of framing stories (researcher)

At least one-third of the requested conference topics related to resources—to overall community capacity, funding, skills, tools, or human energy. Throughout the conference I heard attendees express enthusiasm for the project and its goals while using terms like meeting fatigue or project burnout to describe their own experiences. Participants also wanted ideas or techniques for connecting stories to government planning practices. Even in those communities where Heart & Soul projects were being facilitated by non-profits and other non-governmental organizations, representatives raised questions about how to
connect storytelling and values with existing planning practices and documents. Attendees frequently used terms like *best practices* and *replication* to describe what they believed they needed to successfully navigate the next phase of the Heart & Soul process, especially in light of resource limitations.

I was impressed with the conference facilitator and with Orton’s commitment to providing strategies for supporting more direct community member participation. The facilitator listened to attendee interests and concerns and provided a variety of tools and techniques for facilitating meetings, clarifying and delegating responsibilities, and opening up spaces for dialogue. Like Forester (1999), she suggested structuring spaces for unpredictable dialogue and learning. She also talked about power issues and pointed out that it can be problematic to have city or community organization leaders always serving as meeting facilitators. Several conference attendees, including members of my Golden cohort, said they were grateful for these new ideas, but also concerned about where they would find time to test out alternative facilitation and delegation practices. They talked extensively about the time and energy it took to build new community relationships, improve their own facilitation skills, and train volunteers. Several attendees pointed out that the Heart & Soul project’s scope of work and funding plan did not account for these time-intensive relational activities.

Orton staff was not unaware of these challenges. One evening I talked with an Orton consultant about how project town committees were equating stories with data and interpretation with data ‘extraction.’ He told me Orton was also worried about what would be lost in this process, and that he would welcome an opportunity to examine the Heart & Soul process together. I liked the Orton staff I met. They were warm, optimistic,
and proactive. They were often concerned about issues of power even if they were not always able to identify their own role in maintaining power relationships. While my scholarly community generally deconstructed, Orton designed and invented. Yet, like my fellow Golden attendees, I felt constrained by professional and temporal expectations. I wanted to collaborate more directly with Orton and the LAC, but I fretted about the pitfalls of participatory action research, the conservative dissertation genre, my graduate funding limitations, and the expectations of my dissertation committee. During the final GV 2030 phase, these anxieties and associated discourses would shape our communication design as well as the texts we generated.

**Community Summit I: Values Distillation**

The LAC project team designed and coordinated two GV 2030 community summits with some input from other LAC members. At the first summit, they said they hoped to involve as many residents as possible in sorting through the value statements produced in story listening groups in order to identify broad value themes. Transformation, Inc. helped to develop and refine a process that the project team tested in an LAC meeting. A project team member explained that residents would be asked to sit in groups of 10 people to “boil down” approximately 40 value statements that planning staff had already organized into very loose thematic areas. She said they hoped groups would come up with no more than three to five value statements at most and that the goal was “to build consensus” and “validate values”—that this was not about “elimination” but about “consolidation” (R. S., personal communication, January 13, 2010). Project team members did not suggest what might happen if groups were unable to come to consensus or validate values. LAC members generally expressed support for this process.
and several of us agreed to help facilitate group work at the summit.

The initial Summit I—which some of us would later refer to as the “snowy summit”—was held in late March, 2010. Snow was already beginning to fall as residents started filing in to the Golden High School cafeteria. They huddled in small groups and some individuals looked anxious as they stood around the sign-in table. It was hard to tell whether they were anxious about the nature of the event or the impending storm. I wrote my name on a nametag in blue and opened a red pen to help my university colleague with her nametag. The pen exploded in my hand making it look as though I’d just had a gruesome incident with a meat cleaver. A young boy standing near me gasped and I had to explain that I wasn’t actually bleeding. I rushed to the bathroom, but couldn’t get the red off my hands. I scrubbed and scrubbed for nearly five minutes with hot water and soap; it still looked peculiar when I finally gave up. This added to my anxiety about facilitating a values breakout group as a non-Goldenite.

The event space was set up with eleven tables lined up in two rows and an aisle in the middle. At the end of each table around the outside of the room were laptops and large black flat screen monitors. A projector screen and recording equipment sat at the front of the room. I told my university colleague I didn’t think I was a technophobe, but that the technology felt overwhelming to me. She said it seemed ominous and somewhat militaristic. Later, an LAC project team member told me they hadn’t accounted for how all of this technology would feel once it was set up in the same space. She said city planners had received conflicting technology advice from various consultants over the past year. One consulting group had encouraged them to use cutting-edge technology tools for community events while another had urged them not to use professional
formatting or electronic documents since it might give participants the impression that decisions had already been made: “You know don’t use pre-printed things, you know write them on the fly, use those posters and people’s natural handwriting you know, ‘cause it represents what they said in their own words” (W. S., personal communication, December 3, 2010).

I was impressed that several dozen residents had already taken their seats by the time the Mayor initiated the event at ten minutes past the hour. He spoke in an uncharacteristically hesitant manner and asked residents to participate in the 2010 census and help plan for future changes that would inevitably impact Golden. The primary Golden story collector then started a brief video about GV 2030 with little introduction, and it became clear there was no official event emcee from the community. The video showed work that had been done by city staff, integrated short clips from Golden resident stories and interviews, and used altered graphics—including an enormous Nike Swoosh emblazoned on South Table Mountain—to show how negative changes might impact the future of the community. Parts of the documentary were humorous, the footage was professionally edited, and a Denver news anchor provided narration. The video introduced Orton and its mission and welcomed summit attendees to the next phase of the GV 2030 project.

After the video ended, a Transformation, Inc. consultant, dressed far more formally than event attendees, stepped forward to welcome the group. She spoke rapidly and noted that her Denver-based ‘strategy firm’ worked with both a public and private sector clientele. She passed out a facilitator instruction sheet that provided value statement wording from nearby Loveland, Colorado; Microsoft; and Lockheed Martin. I
noticed that Lockheed Martin emphasized *citizenship* while Loveland described their commitment to *customers*. The consultant reviewed instructions for breakout groups in a rushed manner. It was hard to tell whether this was her normal facilitation style or whether she was feeling pressured by the storm.

I elected to facilitate the table focused on “governance” given my own interest in governance, and eventually five residents joined me. I provided a brief overview of our goals related to organizing value statements on cards into related piles. After another facilitator passed out the cards, a couple of group members wanted to work more informally and collaboratively to share cards, and I didn’t discourage this. An LAC member at the table expressed concern that we weren’t following the directions provided by Transformation, Inc. I started to feel constrained by the process and frustrated that so many value statements seemed like they might fit in different thematic groups. I was also concerned about the weather and worried about what would happen if the roads were impassable—I had a morning flight out to San Diego. The weather outside had been growing steadily worse—the snow was falling hard, and the wind was creating what looked like ‘whiteout’ conditions. Just as our group was starting to get more engaged in what several LAC members had referred to as ‘the values game’ the city manager stepped to the front of the room to cancel the event. I worked with participants at our table to try to organize some of the piles of value statement cards and maintain some record of what had been accomplished, but it felt like a losing battle as people began to rush away from the tables around us.

I wondered how the LAC project team would handle the unexpected cancellation—would the event be rescheduled with changes? Rescheduled as planned?
Cancelled in favor of some other process? I also wondered how this might impact residents’ decision to attend a rescheduled summit. The drive back to Boulder was one of the most frightening experiences of my life. My university colleague from Texas told me she felt like we had suddenly been thrust into a National Geographic special about Alaska’s frozen tundra. I was definitely out of my comfort zone. It was only later that I realized how much the event’s communication was shaped and reshaped by how people interacted with both intentionally-designed and unexpected material, technological, and temporal relationships.

* * *

I had a disconcerting feeling of déjà vu when I entered the Golden High School cafeteria for the rescheduled GV 2030 Summit I in mid-May. It was starting to sleet, and snow was predicted for the evening. I entered the foyer and stopped to sign in at the front table. I engaged in small talk with an infrequent LAC meeting attendee and—having forgotten his name—tried surreptitiously to catch a glimpse of his nametag with no luck. Thankfully, an Orton consultant pulled me aside to talk about the event schedule. She also expressed disbelief that Golden could really have such bad luck in terms of timing—apparently a winter storm warning had just been issued for the region.

There were approximately 60 adults and a dozen children in the main room just before the event was set to begin. I noticed that the room set-up was similar to that of the initial event with one significant difference: laptops and computer monitors were noticeably absent from tables. This technology had been replaced with flip charts and pens. A City Councilwoman opened the event a few minutes after the hour and the planning and development director was present to emcee the summit this time. Again,
they showed the brief GV 2030 video and a few people at the table in front of me exchanged knowing looks and nods when the image of the Nike swoosh appeared imposed on the mesa. There were other people, however, who looked confused and whispered about what that meant. Clearly, not all residents were aware of the Nike development controversy. Most people clapped enthusiastically at the end of the video.

After the video, the planning and development director talked about the GV 2030 process—about wanting to hear other voices and start at the ‘core’ of the community with values. He said that values generally work better than policy practices to guide decisions and that stories carry value. He said that policies are tactical while stories and values produce a sense of what is important—what is the right or good thing to do. I watched residents nodding all around me and thought about how this claim seemed to make intuitive sense to people. Again, the Transformations, Inc. consultant introduced herself as a planning consultant in a hurried way and received a tepid reaction from the crowd. Again, she wore a suit and appeared quite formal relative to most event attendees. She introduced breakout group sessions and asked participants—now approximately 80-90 adults and 10-15 kids—to work in 11 groups to organize different value statements that focus group participants had culled from community stories.

I decided to sit at one of the tables that initially had few participants. Our group was focused on ‘Sense of Community,’ and our job was to sort through approximately 100-125 cards with value statements of varying levels of specificity in order to come up with four to five concise value statements that captured what we were seeing. There were initially five of us and eventually seven. I talked the most to the two people sitting next to me—a gregarious male sociology professor from a nearby university and a friendly, if
slightly caustic, self-described long-time Golden resident and construction worker. He reminded me of ranchers from my hometown. Other members included a Councilwoman, an LAC member’s husband, and two men in their late 60s or early 70s. This time, a Transformation, Inc. facilitator gave us some initial direction about working individually first, then in groups of two, and finally as a full group to coordinate our work.

As I started to go through my cards I developed eight piles related to themes such as social familiarity/intimacy and public spaces to facilitate social interaction. I also noticed some key tensions—approximately half of the cards related to diversity expressed support for existing community tolerance or diversity and roughly another half called for a more tolerant community—sometimes in strong terms: ‘don’t treat working class people like second-class citizens.’ I started to arrange these in two different stacks. I waited for someone else to speak first, and finally one of the men across from me—the Golden construction worker—brought up a similar finding related to diversity. He said he was uncomfortable lumping all diversity value statements into one pile. Three of us voiced agreement. The Transformation, Inc. consultant heard us, and told us that we should put them into one pile. Both men sitting next to me argued with him—so I felt comfortable voicing my concern as well. The consultant reiterated that our statements should be general and positive. He described the form that a value statement should take—“future oriented, positive, and concise.” He read a corporate customer service value statement to us. This struck me as an inappropriate example, and—judging from the faces of others in the group—it went over poorly. Yet, ultimately, the group did adopt a more positive and tension-free value statement.
Participants at the table began debating the consultant’s directive and discussing the issue of diversity in Golden much as participants had done during the earlier focus group. The lead Transformation, Inc. consultant walked over to see what was happening. She leaned in and whispered to the consultant at our table that he needed to help the group stick to the format. He looked anxious and caught in the middle. She also glared openly at me and I realized she might have assumed I had instigated the debate. This made me feel quite uncomfortable, and I found myself stepping back from the discussion after this interaction. We finally developed a set of value statements that captured some tension—the idea that Golden residents “want the best of both worlds—a natural environment with easy access to urban amenities”—but we never captured any of the tension around diversity. I felt like important resident experiences were left behind, and our own group discussion went undocumented. As the other groups reported out I wondered whether similar interactions had taken place around those tables. The value statements all struck me as somewhat anodyne, and most sounded like they could have been written for any small U.S. town across the country.

Next, the representative from a keypad polling organization stepped in front of the room and described the electronic system attendees would use to respond to survey questions. He was soft-spoken and he mumbled so that most people seemed unable to hear him. The Transformation, Inc. consultant took over and joked about how the keypad devices wouldn’t open garage doors so people shouldn’t bother to take them home. The process seemed new to all of the participants sitting around me. 63 people participated—there were not quite enough devices for all attendees, and those of us who were not Golden residents did not participate. Initial questions were about participant
demographics. Almost half of the participants reported living in Golden for less than 10 years, but over 25% reported living in Golden for more than 25 years. The neighborhood demographics were quite notable—seven geographic areas were displayed and 42% of attendees came from the wealthier northern neighborhood, while only 5% came from the poorest two neighborhoods on the other side of the major freeway. However, approximately 30% of participants also reported that this was their first experience at a GV 2030 activity. A lot of people clapped and several people yelled ‘wooooo’ and ‘woooooohoooo’ during this first part of the keypad polling process.

Participants were then surveyed on each of the 11 general value areas. They were asked to rank the values and to respond to three questions about each value area based on a Likert scale ranging from ‘agree strongly’ to ‘disagree strongly’ for (a) themselves, (b) for their neighborhood, and (c) for future generations. This provided a unique opportunity for residents to share not only some of their own interests, but also some assumptions about their neighbors and about future generations. There were, however, some survey design problems that I discussed with the sociology professor from my prior breakout group. First, it was unclear as to whether questions about ‘future generations’ related to what participants believed should, could, or would happen. When someone pointed this out towards the end of the survey, the planning and development director acknowledged the problem and said he would work to fix the issue for future surveys. Second, value statements often lumped several topics together—e.g., open space, aesthetics, and pedestrian access or social connections and volunteerism—so that it was hard to determine what interest or value people were actually responding to. Finally, the pace with which the consultant facilitated the survey discouraged attendee dialogue. The
greatest diversity in survey responses related to the questions about diversity and
tolerance and about a supportive environment for families. Respondents generally
expressed a belief that they supported these values more than their neighbors did.
Responses to these questions generated quite a bit of nervous laughter and chatter around
the room, but the consultant pushed forward at a rapid pace. The survey was long and
there was no time provided for interaction between questions. Individuals frequently
expressed signs of surprise or concern and sometimes people talked briefly to a neighbor,
but there was no time for group discussion.

In the end, the computer system failed and the keypad-polling consultants worked
to reboot the system while the planning and development director shared more
background on the GV 2030 process. He said that city planners and council members
would use prioritized values to help guide future decision-making. One audience member
asked whether they could apply the values to prior decisions to see whether it might have
made a difference—led to better decisions. A lot of people nodded and voiced support for
her request. The planning and development director said this was a good idea. He also
invited any and all participants to attend the upcoming LAC meeting and noted that it
was an open-door group. The final vote on value priorities was never presented. This felt
anticlimactic to me, and the planning and development director ended the meeting rather
abruptly, saying they would try to share the results with the community later. The energy
in the room dropped notably as people were leaving.

Summit communication design reinforced the notions that values belong to
individuals and that community values are simply aggregated individual values. The
breakout group timeframe and consultant instructions again led to discursive closure
(Deetz, 1992) in that participants were disqualified for lacking procedural expertise, certain topics were avoided, and final value statements served to neutralize politically contested objects. Planners and consultants began to talk about how these values would stand the test of time in order to guide the development of the Golden 2030 twenty-year general plan. The design of the keypad-polling activity also worked to neutralize value statements and close off potential opportunities for dialogue. Residents could have simply entered survey input from their own homes since their direct interaction was constrained by summit communication design. Where survey results generated surprise, there might have been opportunities for rare conversations between neighbors. Instead, attendees experienced surprise about confusing or inconsistent responses without being able to talk about these findings. This is not a case of technological determinism since the process could have been facilitated differently. Although technological and temporal dynamics were instrumental in closing off opportunities for participant dialogue, these dynamics were not generated by exigencies or inherent technological qualities, but through communication design.

In his study of group decision support system facilitators (GDSS) Aakhus (2001) suggested that GDSS facilitators have a responsibility to help those who employ their services explore communication design as a fundamentally interactional and necessarily political activity. He also found that a tendency for facilitators to adopt a technocratic—as opposed to a design—stance often precluded co-creative and imaginative design. I do not believe that keypad-polling consultants or Transformation, Inc. consultants worked with the GV 2030 project team to explore the capacity and potential limitations of particular keypad-polling design choices. For example, how should participants interact
with each other throughout the polling process? Should breakout groups be maintained?

How much time should be provided in between questions? Should discussions be facilitated after particular questions? I suspect, however, that Aakhus’s findings and suggestions provide insight into only one part of a more complex set of interactions and attendant discourses that shaped the GV 2030 keypad polling process.

I don’t believe expert/technocratic power alone closed off Summit I keypad polling interaction possibilities. Specific GV 2030 discourses continued to shape project team talk about the nature of stories and values, about what ideal public participation looked like, and about what end products were expected or required. The *autonomous city* narrative emphasized the importance of community consensus and shared values. The *storytelling as research* discourse made it important—and possible—to ‘extract’ values. *Accountability discourses* influenced particular decisions about event timing, the pace of technology, and desired outcomes. They also presupposed a certain type of planning product accountable to constituents and to a conventional planning genre.

Unanticipated weather conditions had resulted in a narrower timeframe for project completion and the above accountability discourses seemed to generate a greater sense of urgency. During this stage of the process, I also began to see how Orton played a significant—if largely unintentional role—in generating and maintaining accountability outcomes.

It was not only the professionals and practices of ordinary democracy that exerted pressure in terms of ‘project completion.’ Orton’s practices contributed as well. I will unpack and explore this critical point in more detail at the end of this chapter. For now, I will simply point out that Orton’s organizational heritage and their Heart & Soul project
discourses stressed the role of technology in community planning projects; Golden planning staff told me they needed to design and implement technologically-based planning tools to satisfy Orton despite their expressed lack of experience with—and enthusiasm for—some of the technology tools. At the end of the visioning process, one planner told me: “my biggest regret is all of the crap at the summits. All of the technology crap—even if it had worked I’m not so sure I would have loved it.” (N. G., personal communication, December 3, 2010). I’m not sure that some project team members were ever comfortable with the decision to incorporate particular technologies, but city staff seemed to believe it was a necessary step in order to meet their obligations to Orton. An Orton consultant told me she was frustrated with summit communication design decisions, but that she was struggling to balance her role as an advocate and a consultant who would eventually evaluate the project. Accountability discourses significantly influenced project team choices in relationship to communication design.

**Community Summit II: Applying Values**

On the evening of the second GV 2030 summit, the weather was finally sunny and warm with no threatening storms on the horizon. There were between 50 and 60 people already in the main cafeteria when I entered with my university colleague, and groups of 6-12 people were milling around several large poster board presentations. Each poster included a scenario description next to the eleven Golden value statements that had been identified during the GV 2030 visioning process. Participants were asked to read the scenarios and rank how important they thought particular values were in relationship to each scenario—and the decisions it might involve. The scenarios related to hypothetical planning and development issues in Golden.
Several tables and chairs were clustered around three computer monitors, and some of the tables were covered with handouts, pens, and other activity props. About 75 people were present when the planning and development director welcomed attendees and described GV 2030 and the Orton Heart & Soul process. He explained stories as a way of getting at community values and values as planning tools: “You are providing information to use as a decision-making tool” (personal communication, June 9, 2009).

Next, the Transformation, Inc. consultant stepped forward and addressed Golden residents as ‘pioneers’. She said the process was unique, and explained that academics wrote about these kinds of processes, but were not familiar with them in practice. She used a PowerPoint to define values-based decision-making and explained how summit attendees would be asked to engage in a series of scenario exercises and a keypad polling activity that would work like magic to collect data from summit attendees.

The initial keypad polling exercise showed that attendee demographics were similar to those at the last summit—over a third of participants had household incomes of over $100,000/year and the low-income neighborhoods on the other side of the freeway were still dramatically underrepresented. The average age appeared quite a bit older though. Responses to the question about prior event attendance showed nearly an even split between those who had attended prior GV 2030 planning events ‘a lot,’ ‘a little,’ or ‘not at all.’ When participants were instructed to rank the values, there was suddenly a great deal of confusion. I did not have a keypad, but nearby participants showed me how the numbers assigned to values on the PowerPoint slide did not match the value numbers on the event handout. The planning and development director announced that this discrepancy was due to technological limitations—that the keypads only had numbers
ranging from 0-10, so values needed to be numbered from 0-10 rather than 1-11. Most attendees appeared to be satisfied with this explanation, but when the consultant and planners did not move to redo the initial poll several people called for a revote. The poll was reopened, but for less than a minute. Two women sitting next to me complained that they had not had time to revote and that the survey would not be valid. Apparently, the highest ranked value was ‘responsive government’. This surprised me, and I wondered whether the numbering discrepancy had impacted survey outcomes. Nevertheless, this ranking system would be used to guide summit scenario planning activities.

**Budget Cut Scenario: Group #1**

I decided to remain at one scenario table for all three rounds in order to study how different groups deliberated about the same subject. There were just fewer than twenty attendees in our initial scenario group. Our scenario related to real proposed Colorado ballot initiatives that—if passed—would greatly impact local government funding streams. I’m relatively familiar with this kind of initiative since I had helped to address local government cuts stemming from similar propositions in California. These propositions would have limited vehicle and property taxes, ultimately decreasing Golden’s city budget by between $1 and 1.5 million each year. The city manager explained that these propositions would mean a 10% reduction in city general funds, and would likely impact services like police and fire.

Many people in our group couldn’t see each other, and the large room with concrete floors resulted in poor acoustics. People were leaning forward in order to hear each other. I was straining to hear what sounded like an intriguing conversation about city debt when the Transformation, Inc. consultant interrupted scenario discussions with a
she asked people to vote on initial value priorities based on ‘instinct’ and a brief introduction to the scenario. I noticed that some people seemed confused by the instructions and others said they were not ready to apply values without more information and discussion. After a moment or two, the consultant showed attendees that the highest rated values were ‘responsive government (38%),’ ‘support for local businesses (18%),’ and ‘controlled change’ (12%). Most group members shrugged and some said they were not sure what they were supposed to do with this information. I wondered how values could be compared across very different scenarios—and for what purpose. The city manager finished explaining the budget-related propositions to our group. An older man in a wheel chair moved forward and asked, “who put these on the ballot?” and the city manager talked about his suspicions—the same individual who had advocated similar propositions in California. Another resident asked a question I was unable to hear and a young woman said, “holy cow, that would be crazy!” The consultant then asked us to form smaller breakout groups and use values to respond to our scenario.

I broke out into a group with six other people and decided to participate in the final decision process, but to say little that I thought might influence the course of the deliberation. We were given budget sheets and a Transformation, Inc. consultant told us we should each remove 10 coins from brightly colored buckets to represent local government budget cuts for each of the following departments:

1. Public Safety (police, fire department, code enforcement)
2. Public Works (streets, sidewalks, drainage, traffic control, street lights, engineering)
3. Parks and Recreation (parks, recreation, community center, Splash, cemetery, open space, facilities upkeep)

4. General Government (finance, human resources, information technology, city council, city manager, city clerk, communications, courts)

5. Planning and Economic development (master planning, development review, historic preservation, community marketing fund, business retention and attraction, CDBG)

One group member said he was unfamiliar with what some of these departments did, and a woman next to him nodded. A middle-aged woman in a brightly colored jacket said we should each remove 10 coins from the buckets and then justify our decisions. I wanted to suggest that we talk prior to making choices, but I held back. Everyone started grabbing coins and taking notes. Then we went around the circle and explained our logic. People appeared to listen and nod, but no one asked questions or expressed a change of perspective. Reasons for choices did not seem to relate directly to values, but to other interests or logics. Stated justifications included:

1. I feel like this area is probably overfunded—is that true?

2. I think we should be fair and take the same percentage from everybody (2 participants).

3. I think we should be political and reduce funding for a highly visible project so people will think more before cutting taxes.

4. I think things will get dangerous so we’ll need more police on the streets.

5. I think we should cut general services since those don’t benefit citizens directly and I don’t understand what they really do for us—what do they do?
6. I don’t think planning is important when we have no money to plan things—what would we plan for?

A group member pointed out that some of our decisions seemed to be in conflict with identified values—for example, caring about government and parks, but cutting planning and recreation money severely. Everyone nodded and at least two people seemed to check out of the process. No one suggested changes to the initial allocations, but a couple of people continued to raise questions about local government services. One woman said she needed more information about what departments actually did and asked if she should try to find the city manager. At this point, the consultant interrupted the process and asked group members for results. The whole scenario lasted 45 minutes at most.

**Budget Cut Scenario: Group #2**

The city manager introduced the budget scenario and, again, individuals asked just a few questions before the consultant urged us to move on. I wondered whether participants would have asked more questions if they had been able to hear each other better or had more time to discuss answers to the questions that were raised. Again, during our breakout sessions, a group member urged us to take our coins out before justifying our decisions to each other. We went around in a circle and shared our rationale. One woman said she didn’t feel at all bad about taking a lot of money from the general fund because it was ‘undefined’ and therefore not accountable to citizens. She also said she wouldn’t feel bad about taking money from public safety because she didn’t feel unsafe. The primary Transformation, Inc. consultant walked over to us and reminded us to refer back to the values for decision-making rationale. After this, one woman said she realized that parks were a value but said she viewed them as more discretionary during times of budget crisis.
A couple of people nodded and one woman shook her head and frowned. After this, participants went back to listing their justifications for cuts, and these had very little to do with values:

1. I think the general fund doesn’t do much for us—does it?
2. I think the general fund is “undefined” so I don’t feel it’s a priority.
3. I think public works should be maintained because physical breakdowns are the most costly over time.
4. I think we should try to be fair by not cutting too much from any one area.
5. I think we should cut general services since those don’t benefit citizens directly and I don’t understand what they really do for us.

Two group members asked questions about how local government was structured and about the services offered by particular departments. A Council member from another breakout group began sharing more details about some city departments and budgets, and this initiated more lively discussion. The consultant called an end to the scenario before I could learn whether any group members were reconsidering their earlier cuts.

**Budget Cut Scenario: Group #3**

Again, the city manager introduced the budget scenario in a similar manner, although this time someone asked whether the scenario was hypothetical. Apparently the other two planning scenarios were hypothetical land use and transportation proposals. In this breakout group, an LAC member suggested that we talk and ask questions prior to allocating funds. People took longer to listen to each other and they expressed much greater reluctance to make budget cut decisions. Otherwise, individuals still went around
the table to express their individual rationales for particular budget cuts. Only the LAC member connected her rationale to identified community values:

1. We should take equal amounts from all government areas to be fair.
2. We should cut general services since those don’t benefit citizens directly and I don’t understand what they really do for us—what do they do?
3. It would be wise to cut the general fund more since they don’t provide direct services.
4. We shouldn’t cut parks because they generate revenue, and community members clearly value parks.
5. We shouldn’t cut public safety too much since even modest cuts might decrease safety.
6. We could cut parks or safety so people really feel it and understand the cuts.

At the very last minute, members agreed, reluctantly, to compromise by cutting across the board, but slightly less from services perceived as critical. This struck me as a last minute compromise to meet the consultant’s deadline, but it also felt eerily similar to the dynamics in many public meetings.

Across these groups I heard little talk about GV 2030 values. Individuals typically presented ideas based on other assumptions or logics. Where a group member did bring up values, others argued that the specific circumstances of the scenario did not lend themselves to applying or supporting particular values. Often, expressed rationale related to the following themes:

1. Fairness
2. Crisis response/the prioritization of risk reduction activities
3. The favoring of familiar or more publicly visible services

4. Strategic political decision making—to protest or resist budget cuts

I noticed how few questions were raised, and that when participants did raise questions about city services they discovered that information was not readily available. After these scenarios, the city planner brought the summit to a close by explaining how the next GV 2030 steps would involve “putting all of this into a planning framework” (personal communication, June 9, 2009). He said the LAC project team would use the polling data to build a kind of decision-making framework or system.

As in the first summit, communication design shaped the interactions of summit participants and the products generated by summit activities. Scenarios were structured so as to provide participants with only limited background information and little time for group interaction. Although public administrators presented scenarios, they did not actively engage in breakout group discussions. At the end of the evening, a city administrator told me she had not participated much in group discussions because she had not wanted to exert too much influence on final decisions. I told her I had similar concerns about my own participation given my scholarly role and my experience as a former local government manager. Our reluctance to participate contributed to the kind of co-optation dilemma that Guttman (2007) described. According to Guttman, efforts to increase competence in public deliberation cases may also shape agendas and direct attention “according to those in power” (p. 426). We did not want to close off important conversations by bringing in more technically expert perspectives, but our absence may have contributed to a less informed discussion. When participants did raise important questions about local government services or procedures their questions went unanswered.
Group breakout participants were also urged to make quick choices based on pre-existing ideals.

Consultants and planners argued that this values-based decision-making process would make for more publicly transparent and accountable planning policies and development decisions. Yet, at this summit, participants in my breakout group also resisted the directive to use values to guide their decisions. Instead, they applied alternative logics and ideals associated with their own experiences of the world—and perhaps relied on information shortcuts (often termed cognitive heuristics) to reason in a more efficient manner (Ryfe, 2005). Ryfe’s description of an information shortcut is consistent with some of what I observed in Summit II breakout groups:

In a nutshell, the idea is that, in any given situation, individuals will reason by using information cues. Instead of taking in and evaluating all relevant information, individuals take an information shortcut, relying on some subset of information to make a judgment and discarding the rest. (p. 55)

According to Ryfe, these shortcuts “mobilize scripts” (p. 56)—what I have referred to as discourses—thereby allowing group members to come to a relatively unreflective judgment. Ryfe argued that meaningful deliberation is characterized by a disruption of these scripts—that surprising or disturbing interactions might jolt us out of our scripts. If this is generally the case, than Golden city planners may experience frustration in trying to get both publics and political leaders to apply these values to planning cases. Value statements, in and of themselves, did not appear compelling or surprising enough to inspire more reflective or curious interactions in Summit II groups.
Although attendees resisted applying values directly to at least some scenarios, the texts that emerged from the summit were shaped largely by existing GV 2030 discourses related to storytelling, values, and accountability. Value statements emerged as abstracted and prioritized lists that could be applied to hypothetical planning cases. At an LAC project team meeting, Orton technology consultants talked about how keypad-polling results from the summits might be extrapolated for the purposes of demonstrating the importance of particular values in the community. The planning and development director expressed concern about getting a final visioning report to the planning commission and the city council for review, and an Orton consultant urged the project team to stick to their timeline.

**Accounting for Values and Values Accounting**

There’s a really good chance that it’ll still be the magic that we promised people—the long-term commitment to the values system and decision making process. (N. G., personal communication, December 3, 2010)

You know I think I was disappointed when I saw the draft document, because like I said, so much was lost when it came down to like a boiled down policy document. But, I also understood going into it that we had to... but, you know I guess I was a little disappointed when I got it and it was like “value J, one sub-A. (L. R., personal communication, December 3, 2010).

In August 2010, the planning and development director presented a draft Golden Vision 2030 report to the City Planning Commission for review with limited prior input from LAC members. LAC meeting attendance had dwindled to just over half of its phase I and II averages, and most attendees were now city staff members or city leaders.
Multiple LAC members described the final Golden Vision 2030 Report as anticlimactic, but not unexpected. One member told me she thought the values identification process was a waste of time: “I think that if you’d asked any of us to come up with those value statements we would have done it without any of that work.” (M. R., personal communication,” December 2, 2010). Another member told me she really appreciated the storytelling and had learned a lot about the community but still did not see how values could ‘guide’ government decision-making. Two other members expressed continued hope that planners would be able to use the values to make decisions more aligned with community interests. The report described the GV 2030 process and the resulting document in the following manner:

As a result of the community input and participation in the project, a series of overall community value themes were identified, and subsequently tested and refined in two community summits in May and June 2010. The further refinement of the various themes demonstrated that Golden’s heart and soul community values are best depicted as:

A set of overall or guiding principles; and

A comprehensive set of values for City policy decisions and actions presented below according to the series of value themes. (p. 11)

It [the plan] is an articulation of an integrated set of core community values that will guide the City (and to some degree the community) in setting overall direction and in decision making for the next several years. The GV 2030 Plan assembles and creates a context and framework for presenting and using the primary or core community values to guide City decisions and actions. For
purposes of the process, the core community values or beliefs that describe what
Golden is and must remain. (City of Golden, 2010b, p. 7)

The above language constitutes values as fixed, shared, uncontested, and independent of
changing context. This articulation is consistent with the autonomous city narrative
described in Chapter Five and with associated efforts to forge a shared community
identity. This text naturalizes (Deetz, 1992) values by obscuring the complex,
inconsistent, and situated nature of resident stories and articulating values-identification
as an objective and apolitical research process. Full stories are excluded from this report
and, while there is no clear authorial voice for the report, the values themes were tested
and refined by the community. This articulation of GV 2030 and its products also
addresses—and contributes to—accountability discourses by generating another
measurement tool. According to the report, all Golden residents must now be vigilant
about the consistent application of values to city planning cases:

Golden Colorado is our town. Its’ future is our future. And we the community are
assuming responsibility for this future.

With this statement, the community of Golden, Colorado is continuing on a
journey, begun more than 150 years ago, to assure that it is, and always will
remain, a community true to a set of core, heart and soul values. The Golden
Vision 2030 Plan is the articulation of our community values the characteristics
that make Golden what it is today. The plan is also a guide to help community
members and City officials evaluate the issues and decisions we will face in the
coming years. This plan will help us assure that the Golden of 2030 is still true to
the community values of today. (City of Golden, 2010b, p. 6)
In this part of the report, the authorial voice belongs to the community—residents must now be responsible for ensuring that community development remains consistent with the GV 2030 values identified in 2010. Not only does this text reinforce a static and uncontested understanding of values—it also generates the kind of responsibility dilemma that Guttman (2007) described in the following manner:

Does the participative process empower citizens by entrusting them with the responsibility to present informed and deliberated views on difficult choices, or does it serve to absolve officials from either making unpopular policy decisions or from seeking alternative solutions? (p. 428)

In the following chapter, I argue that the GV 2030 values approach may unintentionally discourage resident participation in future public planning by neglecting the situated nature of policymaking. However, group interactions during Summit II also demonstrated that residents may resist the straight-forward application of values to concrete situated problems.

**Accountability Dilemmas**

MacCallum (2008) argued that the process of moving from collaborative community engagement to final product involves a problem of translation associated with “the plan as a genre” (p. 325). According to MacCallum, the genre of planning texts acts “as an abstract intermediary with power over participants in collaborative planning” (p. 239), so that more participatory planning approaches do not generally lead to alternative results. Although I do not dispute MacCallum’s claim, I found that it was not a singular genre of document, but a variety of intersecting discourses, practices, and material and temporal actors that contributed to the final articulation of the Golden Vision 2030
During the Orton project town convening described at the beginning of this chapter, Orton consultants encouraged project teams to maintain their focus on the relational aspects of the Heart & Soul process. Throughout the GV 2030 process, multiple Orton consultants and community members expressed concern that city planners and city officials would fall back into old habits and neglect the relational and transformational aspects of storytelling. Although the GV 2030 process and the Golden Vision 2030 report largely neglected these discourses, this was not attributable only to a singular text genre or to the disciplinary habits of planners. Discourses of accountability were not only related to processes and techniques of government, but also to Orton’s articulated project expectations.

A ‘project’ necessarily organizes attention and activity in certain ways. The term ‘project’ itself implies a beginning and endpoint. The Heart & Soul project and its policy texts organized practices, directed attention, and shaped activities across pre-established periods of time. The project’s scope of work involved the temporary assignment of project staff, the involvement of new partners, the use of particular technologies, and the evaluation of progress. There was also the implied termination of partnership associated with any project. A Golden administrator stressed the fact that Orton would not be involved in Golden for the ‘long haul’: “You know at some point Orton’s gone” (N. G., personal communication, December 3, 2010). He went on to explain that city staff and volunteers would be responsible for carrying on in the face of impending budget cuts, unpredictable political shifts, and new development challenges. Nevertheless, LAC members and city officials talked about how Orton would evaluate their progress on
specific project outcomes. This contributed to a powerful accountability discourse and a corresponding means-end rationality.

Orton also arrived with a powerful narrative about the autonomous city and about the problems of planning and the limitations of ordinary democracy. They began with a problem—they argued that small towns currently lack the capacity to protect themselves and engage their residents in meaningful ways. They also began with a solution—asking communities to design and implement a storytelling and values-based planning process to protect their existing character. Orton expressed a commitment to allowing communities to define their own identities, while simultaneously providing a strong narrative about the community—its problem, solutions, and character. This presents a dilemma: how can Orton assist communities in building their capacity if Orton’s ‘project’ discourses and practices necessarily assume already identified deficits and solutions? Orton unintentionally maintains traces of a ‘deficit-based’ governance model in its project design.
A healthy democratic process calls for a vibrant clash of political positions and an open conflict of interests. If such is missing, it can too easily be replaced by a confrontation between non-negotiable moral values and essentialist identities. (Mouffe, 1993, p. 6)

By the end of the GV 2030 process, the LAC and the LAC project team had collected nearly 400 stories from Golden residents at neighborhood parties, city events, farmer’s markets, and community group meetings. They had held approximately two-dozen story values-identification focus groups, facilitated three large-scale community planning summits, and drafted a Vision 2030 Report and a book celebrating GV 2030 stories and values. As I mentioned in the previous chapter, several LAC members described the final phase of the project as anticlimactic. They told me they were uncertain
about whether their work would make a difference. They said they were tired. I felt tired. Planning commissioners thanked remaining LAC members for their hard work and began to talk about upcoming development decisions and neighborhood meetings. I spent time hugging LAC members, walking along the Clear Creek Trail and hiking the Golden mesas. I promised to stay in touch once I had returned to California. I also parted with a sense of déjà vu. Was this just one more public participation effort that would fade into obscurity? Would resident stories really inform future planning activities?

In this final chapter, I am faced with choosing one of many possible stories to tell about the GV 2030 process since “no phenomena can have only one narrative or a single genealogy” (Flyvbjerg, 1998, p. 8). My telling will necessarily be shaped by countless factors, including my research questions, my practitioner background, my access to some meetings and not others, and my role as a scholar and participant observer. As a practitioner, I am inclined to share a story about a struggling team of planners frustrated by countless legal regulations, mounting accountability expectations, and limited financial and temporal resources. They ventured into new territory, took some risks, and spent more time interacting with the public than is typical in the vast majority of planning processes. As a former consultant, I am tempted to deconstruct the contracting process and try to tell a more nuanced story about how and why consultants and planners constructed a particular scope of work together. I could also construct a narrative about the ways in which specific stories and storytellers seemed to make a difference in the everyday lives of residents. I certainly believe this was the case. Yet, this particular story is about public participation, planning, and ordinary democracy.
In my first research question, I set out to study how GV 2030 participants articulated the problems of planning and the limitations of ordinary democracy. I traced patterns in LAC meeting interactions and interviewee talk, and found that LAC members frequently drew on Orton’s meso-level discourse about how and why citizens were being excluded from important public planning processes. In meeting talk, they described public meetings as uninviting or inaccessible, and in interviews they described some backdoor deals and unaccountable officials. A number of survey respondents reported that they were more likely to attend public meetings if planners incorporated specific planning cases and creative alternatives or solutions. I learned that numerous residents were itching to participate in conversations about specific development issues. Nearly everyone I spoke with advocated more—and more diverse—public involvement in long-term planning. Storytelling was taken up as one way to go about accomplishing this goal. Yet, the GV 2030 visioning process culminated in a report that claimed to represent long-term public values. Planning commissioners and city council members would now, according to several LAC members and the report, be able to make publicly accountable decisions based on the consistent application of community value statements. We were back to an aggregate understanding of public judgment, and the public sphere was, if anything, positioned as less significant to the practices of ordinary democracy. As a scholar, a practitioner, and a citizen I wanted to understand how this had happened.

Although my analysis has emphasized a complex set of discourses, my first instinct was to return to a traditional conception of power and ask who was responsible for the outcomes of the GV 2030 process. I felt pressured to wrap my dissertation up with a clear set of conclusions and return to scholarly arguments about the relationship
between structure and agency. Yet, this violated my commitment to a more complex understanding of power and to research grounded in participant interactions. Kuhn’s (2006) suggestion about a situated agency-structure ‘tilt’ provided me a way forward. In multiple studies of workplace identity, Kuhn sought to temper “claims about modernity’s totalizing influences on identity” (p. 1339) by focusing on locally situated discourses. He argued (2009) that scholars might find patterns across an array of discursive interactions that ‘tilt’ toward either agency or structure in the way that they position individual-organization relationships. I think this determination of agency-structure relationships is best made locally, at sites of interaction, rather than via more abstract theorizing. During the GV 2030 process, participant understandings of this relationship—particularly as it pertained to their own sense of agency—played a significant role in shaping communication design. By approaching the story in this way, I noticed how frequently LAC members, and especially planners, talked about their position and their activities in relationship to a web of existing policy (LeGreco, 2012) and associated accountability practices.

**Golden’s Policy Web**

LeGreco (2012) claimed that multiple stakeholders engaged in policy processes must explore how their goals “align and collide with other policy texts and practices” (p. 56). I argue that any meaningful effort to change or supplement the practices of ordinary democracy necessarily places stakeholders in relationship to the kind of policy web that LeGreco described. In Golden, efforts to change public participation practices, even in seemingly informal ways, were necessarily enacted in relationship to existing meso-level policy discourses. Although, participants did not all experience this web in the same way,
the majority of LAC members were constantly working, at its intersections, to make sense of expectations, paradoxes, and unexpected events. City planning commissioners and council members stated that GV 2030 visioning outcomes should be integrated into the city’s general plan and serve as a decision-making guide for specific land use development cases. Orton’s policies involved the expectation that locally constituted practices would be evaluated in relationship to their metrics and transmitted beyond local contexts to serve as best practices for other communities. Most LAC members seemed very aware that their work would be integrated with other aspects of the policy web and evaluated by a variety of other policy stakeholders. They were always constructing and responding to the problems of planning and limitations of democracy with a certain degree of reflexivity. Over time, I began to see that the LAC’s reflexive policy talk was shaped by a logic internal to their policy web.

It was through my involvement in another public planning initiative—a K-12 reform project—that I began to notice how an internal system logic (Deetz, 1992) had shaped communication design significantly throughout the GV 2030 process. I traced the (re)production of what I have termed discursive accountability formations through a series of interconnected micro-, meso-, and macro-level discourses, and also identified technological, temporal, and material factors that reinforced these formations. Nearly all GV 2030 discourses that I traced generated or, more often, responded to particular accountability texts and relationships. In some cases, these relationships were understood as existing between human actors, so that planning accountability was to publics, public officials, disciplinary peers or other planning stakeholders. In other cases, accountability relationships were understood as existing between actors and texts such as
stories, inter-organizational contracts, policy metrics, or budgets. These accountability relationships often disregarded human actors so that planning practices were responsive to a code that referred back to its own logic (Baudrillard, 1975). GV 2030 discursive accountability formations were established and maintained through complex and inter-imbricated discourses so that any innovations in communication design were subject to either purposeful or latent evaluation within this “self-producing, self-referential” (Deetz, 1992, p. 182) system.

I traced the (re)production of GV 2030 discursive accountability formations to develop the following propositions about how these formations evolved and shaped the design and outcomes of the GV 2030 process: (a) the articulation of the relationship between planning problems and ordinary democracy (re)produced accountability relationships and measures, (b) public participation practices were designed in relationship to temporal experiences associated with accountability relationships and measures, (c) alternative public participation practices and outcomes were embedded in a system of procedures and accountability measures associated with ordinary democracy, and (d) codified public values served as accountability metrics that have the potential to displace or discourage public participation in the practices of ordinary democracy. Below, I provide a brief overview of current accountability practices associated with ordinary democracy and planning. Then I describe how discursive accountability formations evolved during different phases of the GV 2030 planning process, ultimately contributing to certain forms of discursive closure. Finally, I describe the theoretical and practical implications of this phenomenon and draw on GV 2030 examples to suggest
possibilities for opening up discursive accountability formations to inquiry, contestation, and more transformative storytelling approaches.

**Discursive Accountability Formations**

Dictionary.com (2012) provides the following definitions for what it means to be accountable or to practice accountability:

**ac·count·a·ble**

1. subject to the obligation to report, explain, or justify something; responsible; answerable.

2. capable of being explained; explicable; explainable.

**ac·count·a·bil·i·ty**

1. the state of being accountable, liable, or answerable.

2. *Education.* a policy of holding schools and teachers accountable for students' academic progress by linking such progress with funding for salaries, maintenance, etc.

These definitions underline the relationship between accountability and reporting metrics, and imply that actors are accountable to certain authorities. The inclusion of an ‘accountability’ definition that refers explicitly to education shows how accountability expectations have become embedded in policy macro-discourses. These definitions also suggest that accountability is associated with expressive communication practices—reporting, explaining, and justifying. Throughout each phase of the GV 2030 process, multiple discourses, technologies, temporal relationships, and material resources interacted to produce, reify, and occasionally challenge accountability logics. Although *the discursive accountability formations* can be mapped in particular ways, I do not mean
to suggest that they constitute a structure—although structural components are often involved. Consistent with Deetz’s (1992) interpretation of *self-referential systems*, I understand discursive accountability formations as patterns of relations that produce substantive system products: “the process, rather than either the initial structure or the ‘external’ conditions, produces the outcome” (p. 182). However, I also understand material, technological, and temporal factors as intimately connected to communication design, and therefore to the (re)production of particular systemic logics. Although my interpretations result from situated GV 2030 interactions, I believe the following propositions are useful for researching and designing alternative public participation practices in other settings.

**Proposition 1: The articulation of the relationship between planning problems and ordinary democracy (re)produces accountability relationships and measures.**

LAC members articulated the problems of planning by drawing on Orton’s meso-level discourses about city planning, responding to city official and planner talk and policy texts, and incorporating discourses from prior city planning events. The LAC’s relationship to stakeholders—both present and absent in LAC meetings—shaped planning problem articulation so that accountability was constructed as a local phenomenon. Orton’s *autonomous city* narrative, which was reinforced by a variety of other discourses and practices, positioned city problems as problems of internal identity. According to the autonomous city narrative, the ‘heart and soul’ of Golden was being threatened by various external forces. Golden would only be able to respond proactively if city planners engaged residents in identifying and codifying the community’s unique attributes and values. This narrative was constructed and reinforced by Orton’s stated
mission and goals, LAC member talk, material and symbolic boundaries, and government and corporate accounting systems. The autonomous city narrative positioned public planning processes as accountable to the residents of Golden. A less prominent alternative interdependent city narrative understood Golden’s future as intertwined with regional, national, and global forces, and it positioned public planning processes as also accountable to nonresidents and other communities through meso-level policy discourses. The autonomous city narrative gained strength throughout the GV 2030 process because of its familiarity, its consistency with Orton’s organizational discourses and its relationship to the existing accounting practices of ordinary democracy.

According to Orton’s discourses, the current practices of ordinary democracy were not sufficiently accountable to the experiences, values, and interests of Golden residents. Although their public participation talk and texts typically encouraged an exploratory communication design process, Orton’s meso-level policy texts articulated a clear sense of the planning problem and preferred project outcomes. This is consistent with Kettl’s claim (2000) that new governance practices are increasingly designed and implemented by organizations not previously responsible for the practices of ordinary democracy. Since several Golden planning commissioners and council members had expressed an interest in more publicly accountable decision-making frameworks, they were supportive of Orton’s emphasis on values-based planning practices. This is consistent with Rose’s (1999) claim that political leaders and publics often turn to accounting technologies to justify and evaluate decisions about contentious governance problems.
Once the City of Golden entered into a formal partnership agreement with Orton (City of Golden & Orton Family Foundation, 2008), the City and the nascent LAC were accountable to Orton’s articulation of the planning problem as well as to its preferred activities and outcomes. The partnership agreement included the following accountability language:

Building accountability and sharing results: To ensure accountability, implementation plans must include a system or set of practices for the ongoing monitoring and evaluation of the community’s decisions over time. Results and progress toward preserving and enhancing the community’s Heart & Soul will be regularly communicated to the public and the Foundation. (p. 4)

This agreement and the corresponding work plan generated a variety of accountability metrics associated with specific communication strategies and project outcomes. LAC progress would be monitored based on completed procedures, activities, expenditures, and policy texts. Emerging discursive accountability formations also involved temporal accountability metrics—city planners and other LAC members were responsible for delivering project outcomes to the public, to Orton, and to city officials by specified deadlines. According to Rose, “rendering something auditable shapes the process that is to be audited: setting objectives, proliferating standardized forms, generating new systems of record-keeping and accounting, governing paper trails” (p. 154). Although this kind of inter-organizational accountability discourse is relatively common, in my experience, policy stakeholders rarely discuss how it shapes perceptions of problems or needs, goals, and ongoing practices.
I do not believe, however, that discursive accountability formations were (re)produced in fully intentional ways. The systemic nature of the distortion (Deetz, 1992) obscured some of the authority relations and desired outcomes that were “not necessarily warranted or freely selected” (p. 178). Throughout GV 2030, accountability discourses and practices were largely taken-for-granted and articulated by nearly all stakeholders as constitutive of effective public participation, governance, and planning. LAC members were responding to a kind of shadow problem—an assumed lack of accountability. In reflecting upon this phenomenon, I observed this dynamic in my own experience with policy and planning disciplines as well. As a public policy instructor at a large California university, I am required to address the National Association of Schools of Public Affairs and Administration (2009) standards for helping students pursue: “the public interest with accountability and transparency” while “serving professionally with competence, efficiency, and objectivity” (¶ 3). The affiliated American Society for Public Administration established a Center for Accountability and Performance in 1996 (ASPA Center for Accountability & Performance, 2009) with the objective of assisting all levels of government to “move to performance-based, results-driven management” (¶ 1) and develop the technical skills, best practice knowledge, and performance measurement tools necessary to bring this about. These macro-discourses about public policy and administration assume that planning and governance problems are generated or exacerbated by a lack of accountability and technical knowledge. In my experience, this construction of the problems of planning and ordinary democracy is not talked about because accountability processes involve “in-formational repetition rather than conversation” (Deetz, 1992, p. 187). I have a sense that calling certain constructions of
problems or accountability practices into question would position me as a troublemaker within policy and planning disciplines. Accountability is assumed to be an inherently positive condition or goal—what Weaver (1985) coined as a ‘god term’—and something to which all participants are assumed to be committed. Like other god terms, ‘accountability’ is relatively ambiguous, flexible, and impenetrable. Therefore, discursive accountability formations shape understandings of public problems and solutions in ways that go largely unnoticed or undiscussed.

**Proposition 2:** Public participation practices are designed in relationship to **temporal experiences associated with accountability relationships and measures.**

Although LAC interviewees and storytellers explained the limitations of ordinary democracy in distinct ways, meeting talk became increasingly focused on discourses of accountability. During the story listening/values identification process, communication design was significantly shaped by planners’ construal of temporal urgency and scarcity (Ballard & Seibold, 2003) and uncertainty about project outcomes. Dimensions of time and productivity were understood in relationship to an existing policy web and associated power dynamics. LAC members’ professional experiences also shaped conceptions of accountable practices and outcomes.

During the first phase of GV 2030 I heard that citizens were not getting the full story—and were not being taken seriously—for a number of reasons: meetings typically associated with ordinary democracy were uninspiring; the practices of ordinary democracy did not attend to the real experiences, feelings, or interests of residents; residents were either too unmotivated or overburdened to participate in the practices of ordinary democracy; or problems of power (e.g., special interest group influence)
displaced citizen judgment. Each of these discourses positioned the public and the LAC in different ways and constructed certain public participation ideals. However, the (re)production of discursive accountability formations and the associated construction of public planning problems as problems of accountability positioned efficient measurement of citizen experiences as a primary locus of LAC sense making and activity. Orton’s commitment to storytelling constituted the general mode of communication, but LAC members struggled to articulate the nature and aims of storytelling largely in relationship to discursive accountability formations. LAC members, and especially the LAC project team, designed communication with an interest in ascertaining, reporting, and prioritizing values.

The GV 2030 values identification process was designed in relationship to temporal deadlines enacted via a complex set of local planning policies, funder work agreements, and overt and latent political interests interpreted through ongoing LAC and project team talk. Ballard and Seibold (2003) claimed time is constructed in organizations through a series of dimensions that are constituted through “three task-related communication structures”: “feedback cycles, activity coordination methods, and workplace technologies” (p. 383). In temporal terms, feedback cycles represent the periods across which organizations or groups are held accountable for performance. Activity coordination involves the ways in which organizational or group members’ coordination methods shape—and are shaped by—members’ experiences of time. Finally, Ballard and Seibold drew on the social entrainment model developed by McGrath and Kelly (1986) to posit that technology and time function in recursive ways—so that our interpretations of time shape our technology choices and technologies shape our
experiences of time. Each of these temporal structures has implications for GV 2030 communication design.

**Feedback Cycles.** Dubinskas (1988) discovered that organizational groups could hold contrasting conceptions of time and, in his ethnographic study of a genetic engineering firm, he identified a tension between what he termed *closed* and *open-ended* temporal orientations. Open-ended orientations emphasized process and did not assume a fixed end-point. Closed orientations emphasized immediate activity in relationship to proximate end-points. Orlikowski and Yates (2002) argued that these orientations are unstable and contingent, so that temporal enactments and interpretations are subject to change. During the initial months of the GV 2030 process, LAC member talk indicated a more open-ended temporal orientation consistent with Orton’s meso-level texts that encouraged project towns to experiment with new public participation techniques. Over time, however, LAC members, especially planners, adopted closed temporal orientations associated with policy feedback cycles.

Golden planners talked increasingly about GV 2030 project deadlines as non-negotiable. They produced texts and presentations to demonstrate the importance of meeting numerous performance expectations. This is consistent with Orlikowski and Yates’s (2002) claim that “project deadlines may initially appear to be so far away that most project members enact open-ended temporal structures” (p. 692). During the second phase of the GV 2030 process, closed temporal orientations generated a great deal of talk about ‘running out of time,’ and the insufficiency of resources. This kind of talk represented construals of time as both urgent and scarce (Ballard & Seibold, 2003, 391). In some cases, deadlines had been established through formal work agreements with
Orton or through planning commission and city planning policies. In other cases, deadlines—particularly those deemed unreasonable—were understood to be the inevitable outcome of short political election cycles. Golden’s political leaders wanted change during their tenure to prove their responsiveness to public interests. Multiple, and sometimes conflicting, deadlines articulated by GV 2030 stakeholders meant that Orton’s call for experimentation and risk-taking was incongruent with this closed temporal orientation. During the second GV 2030 phase, planners expressed increasing anxiety about being accountable to a variety of stakeholders—to city council, the planning commission, residents, Orton, and the planning profession. They often expressed a desire to experiment and be more creative but they also talked about needing to explain their process and produce tangible policy outcomes on a tight timeline. These accountability concerns influenced planners’ decision to contract with an external project consultant (Transformations, Inc.) in the middle of the GV 2030 process and begin coordinating communication design via a smaller LAC project team.

**Activity Coordination Methods.** The planners’ decision to delegate responsibility to an outside consulting firm correlated with their growing uncertainty about GV 2030 process outcomes and their explicit need to meet a variety of project deadlines. This choice was also shaped by LAC member uncertainty about how to equate storytelling with professional research experiences and transmission-oriented assumptions about communication. More than half of all LAC members had worked in technical and/or research-oriented positions, and meeting talk often equated accountability with data validity and statistical measurement standards. Although I believe this aspect of the committee make-up was unintentional, it shaped desired project
outcomes, and therefore communication design choices, in concrete ways. When the city contracted with an outside consulting firm to coordinate the story listening/values identification process, the scope of work explicitly emphasized rigorous testing and concrete outcomes.

A set of intersecting discourses about storytelling, research, and accountability made it possible for the LAC project team to design a highly structured and sequential process where residents tabulated and prioritized individual value statements to arrive at shared community values. Like other project partners, Transformations, Inc. understood and enacted time in relationship to discursive accountability formations. They appeared to interpret process outcomes as urgent and they enacted time in a linear, fast-paced, and tightly-scheduled manner. They were responsible for helping to design and facilitate values identification focus groups and community summits to identify, rigorously test, prioritize, and apply community values. This approach generated a means-end rationality and a closed temporal orientation, so that processes of discursive closure were incorporated into focus group and summit communication design in both intentional and unintentional ways. Orton and external project consultants advocated an assets-based approach to community stories that effectively stripped stories and values of internal tensions, negative experiences, and across-story conflicts. Focus groups and summits were packed so full of activity, and organized in such detail and so far in advance, that it would have been impossible for the consultants to facilitate difficult conversations, provide time for dialogue and reflection, or allow new process ideas to emerge. Stories and storytellers were generally not put into communication with each other and emerging values were often articulated as data contributing to an aggregate measure of public
experience. This meant that Golden storytellers were telling and listening to individual stories rather than co-constructing a collective story or set of possible stories.

The theory of discursive closure (Deetz, 1992) needs to account more fully for the complex relationships between time, communication design, and conflict. GV 2030 communication design provided little space for dialogue and contestation. Although discursive closure was generated by particular forms of talk, communication design decisions, shaped by temporal understandings, determined the amount of time available for talk. In my experience, consultants and planners are quite aware that conflict takes time—it is unpredictable and cumbersome. It does not fit neatly into timelines and project charts. In order to be accountable to numerous stakeholders and policy texts, practitioners needed to reduce unexpected activity. Davidoff (2003) argued that future forms of planning should openly invite “political and social values to be examined and debated” (p. 210), but this type of participation requires far more time than traditional public meetings (Mansbridge, 1973). Particular forms of discursive closure such as topical avoidance or the disqualification of certain participants may be generated or exacerbated by some of the temporal construals identified by Ballard and Seibold (2003). Meeting facilitators who experience time as scarce or urgent may knowingly or unknowingly employ strategies to close off productive conflict.

Workplace Technologies. Ballard and Seibold (2003) define technologies broadly as “the physical and social tools that structure or assist task completion” (p. 404). Based on this definition, LAC members employed a wide range of technologies throughout the GV 2030 process. They mapped out process activities on detailed calendars and spreadsheets, they digitally recorded stories, they distributed hard copy and
electronic surveys, they posted online updates, and they used keypad polling. This technology did not determine communication design. Rather, it was employed based on project team members’ communication design hypotheses and associated temporal understandings. The technological design then structured possibilities for participant interaction at LAC focus groups and summits.

Ballard and Seibold’s temporal enactment dimensions—flexibility, linearity, pace, precision, and scheduling—help to show how GV 2030 technology was designed in relationship to the temporal understandings described above. LAC members engaged in far less discussion about the use of specific technologies during the second and third phases of GV 2030. Most GV 2030 technologies were employed after LAC members had adopted a more closed temporal orientation characterized by construals of time as urgent and scarce. Event volunteers did not receive training on technology tools, and Transformation, Inc. consultants sounded unfamiliar with the affordances and constraints that particular technological choices might offer. Project team members designed events with limited time for technological experimentation or troubleshooting, and technologically-facilitated activities moved at a rapid pace. Digital stories were tightly edited and presented to focus group members with no time before or after for reflection and discussion. Keypad polling questions at summits were asked and answered with no time for participant talk about survey results, and no time buffers had been built into event schedules to account for technological problems. Technologies, deployed in this manner, generally duplicated existing polling practices to generate measurements of aggregate public opinion. This contributed to a tension between two different epistemological approaches regarding the formation of public opinion. Aggregate polling
assumes that already existing public opinion can be accessed and represented through the right forms of listening or data collection. Alternately, transformative storytelling approaches assume that public opinion is formed and revised through the interactions that constitute public participation at a particular place and time.

**Time and Public Participation.** It is certainly true that highly participatory activities, and especially those that welcome productive conflict, take time. According to Tsoukas (2009), changing professional practice takes time—it is not as simple as suddenly adopting a new habit, because significant change requires interaction, play, and distanced reflection. Yet, I do not believe that the solution is *more time* in the sense that such a suggestion is commonly understood. At the Heart & Soul Wingspread conference, project town leaders told me they wanted more time—time to learn and practice new facilitation techniques, build community relationships, and test out more innovative storytelling strategies. They complained or joked about funder expectations for long-term, sustainable public participation strategies. How would activities like digital storytelling be carried out on a regular basis without continued outside funding? They talked frequently about the nexus between resources and time. If they had more funding, they would be able to get more done and do more to meet continuously expanding stakeholder expectations. They also talked about needing to be more efficient, draw firmer boundaries, and say ‘no’ more often. This resonated with my own experience as a local government manager. I argue, however, that these solutions neglect the discursive and systemic nature of temporal experience. These are technical and individual solutions to a systemic problem. I am not suggesting that time has no immediate and material impact, but that
experiences of time are shaped by situated talk, meso-level policies, and macro-level discourse about the relationship between time and practice.

I think the important question is, as Deetz (1992) might suggest, not ‘what is?’, but ‘how did it come to be this way?’. How did numerous planners and community stakeholders come to construct and accept public participation projects widely described as unsustainable? If a significant percentage of practitioners lack the ability to draw boundaries and create space for new learning and innovation, why is this the case? I believe GV 2030 points to at least a partial answer. If discursive accountability formations reward and discourage particular practices, they simultaneously structure temporal experiences. Over time, deadlines that represented taken-for-granted accountability measures contributed to the LAC’s closed temporal orientation (Dubinskas, 1988). This generated a sense of urgency and scarcity, and planners appeared more reluctant to take risks associated with a more open-ended temporal orientation. They expressed frustration and resentment towards impending deadlines and specific accountability measures, yet they did not actively resist these accountability practices. I believe this is because discursive accountability formations, stabilized within a web of policies, came to constitute the context of rationality and acceptable practitioner behavior.

**Proposition 3:** Alternative public participation practices and outcomes are embedded in a system of procedures and accountability measures associated with ordinary democracy.

A constellation of government accounting discourses (Rose, 1999) and practices generated and maintained a means-end rationality, and the genre of ‘the plan’ undoubtedly had a conservative effect (MacCallum, 2008) on GV 2030 communication
design. Planners and city leaders needed to produce documents that could somehow be linked to a network of regional and national planning texts. The planning and development director frequently talked to me about how locally-situated ‘quasi-judicial’ processes needed to account for a system of local and federal land use laws while still being accountable to resident values. He expressed uncertainty about how to connect value statements to a complex array of policies associated with ordinary democracy.

Accountability was not just about accountability to local stakeholders, but also about accountability to a web of policies with associated procedural requirements and metrics that circumscribed communication in particular ways and required planners to manage paradox (LeGreco, 2012). Alternative public participation practices and outcomes had to be brought into conversation with existing policies in order to influence government planning decisions.

In interviews, the city planning and development director expressed frustration about an increasingly complex set of policies and procedures associated with local planning. He took a number of steps to convey this complexity to city leaders, but spent little time discussing these policies with LAC members. On multiple occasions he told me he did not want to frustrate or depress otherwise enthusiastic residents when legal requirements prevented change. In a December 6, 2010 (City of Golden, 2010c) memorandum directed to the city mayor and city council, the planning and development director explained that the GV 2030 vision and policies needed “to be very clearly articulated” (p. 2)—ideally at the site level—in order to be relevant to land use entitlement decisions. He then outlined a number of problems with existing practices of ordinary democracy that I had not heard articulated in LAC meetings. He described a
complex proposal submission process characterized by regulations that limited early interactions between developers and citizens and between developers, citizens, and political leaders. He argued that required planning commission hearing processes were “not at all conducive to direct conversation or collaborative design” (p. 5) since ex-parte contact regulations prohibited this kind of broad public interaction early in development processes. Planning commissioners and council members were not allowed to participate “in any of the preliminary discussions and debates about land use and design, or in any neighborhood discussions about the request” (p. 6). This meant that applicants often had little insight into issues the decision-making body or citizens might have. By the time public decision-making bodies typically received proposals, creative solutions became difficult since any major changes could only be made through a request denial and the applicant’s subsequent decision to start the submission process over again. Ex-parte regulations assumed that any prior discussion might reduce commissioner or council member objectivity. In light of legal limitations that constrain talk to certain times, places, and formats, it is hardly surprising that planners and city officials have sought a way to bring themselves into conversation with public values before they are faced with determining the fate of nearly complete development proposals.

Planners and public officials may be entirely supportive of more participatory and creative planning approaches, but they are also accountable to existing policies. The LAC’s articulation of public planning problems and the limitations of ordinary democracy, heavily shaped by Orton’s discourses, did not attend to legal requirements, temporal experiences, or power relations associated with actual development proposals. Therefore, the GV 2030 public participation process was constructed as prior to, or
outside of, the existing policy arena and outcomes were not clearly connected to the everyday practices of ordinary democracy. As such, they represented an effort to circumvent existing public participation practices or act as if certain constraints did not exist. The public sphere was conceptualized, not as “a web of discursive arenas, spread across society” (Hauser, 1999, p. 71), but as a separate sphere subject to its own identity and judgment formation processes. Yet, ultimately, GV 2030 values were incorporated into city policy texts, and planners and planning commissioners expressed a desire to use these values to make publicly accountable decisions.

**Proposition 4: Codified public values serve as accountability metrics that potentially displace or discourage public participation in the practices of ordinary democracy.**

Primary GV 2030 discourses assumed that shared values would improve public planning and make policymakers and policies more accountable to the public. It was clear, however, that not all stakeholders had a shared understanding of how this process would—or should—unfold over time. Orton consultants encouraged city planners to coordinate and implement city and neighborhood planning sessions where participants could apply values to scenarios much as they had in the second GV 2030 summit. Some LAC members suggested city planners could apply city values directly to planning cases to make more informed and efficient choices. Two planning commissioners told me they wanted more direction so they could be more accountable to the public—but also so that the public would be more accountable for its decisions. The planning and development director told LAC members that city council wanted to be able to remind the public that planning decisions were based on their own values: “so by definition they should be closer to what you think” (N. G., personal communication, June 10, 2009). Although I
believe this values-based approach to planning is well intentioned, I think the underlying communication assumptions are problematic for ordinary democracy. An LAC volunteer member articulated problems with this approach well before I began my final analysis:

You’re gonna have a lot of projects, a lot of things that are gonna meet numerous of those values but you’re gonna have to choose some are gonna trump others ‘cause when you fix this problem you’re gonna actually not be proving this other one. And that’s the decision that city council has to make with the citizens input, that’s what they make a huge salary on. Tongue and cheek, obviously. That’s the news to city council and a document’s not gonna solve that for them at all. (M. R., personal communication, December 3, 2010)

Discourses that position community value statements as policymaking tools assume that public values are uncontested and fixed, and that public planning interests can be formulated in a public sphere outside of situated planning interactions. Values constitute a naturalizing discourse (Deetz, 1992) that obscures the complex and relational process by which these values were articulated.

According to Deetz, naturalization often halts discussion “at the determination of what is” (p. 191) when this is actually the place where people should be asking how something came to be in the first place. Consistent with Baudrillard’s (1975) description of the monopoly of the code, values, embedded in discursive accountability formations, may eventually refer back to their own logic rather than signifying anything outside of themselves. By being understood as timeless and stable, values necessarily become more abstract and ambiguous, but also potentially less assailable. I worry that if community values become sacrosanct—“as if there is no other way to articulate the characteristics
and values that define our community” (City of Golden, 2011)—they may be employed as political tactics that effectively marginalize dissenting views. During my time as an organizational consultant I witnessed this dynamic when members invoked core values like *multiculturalism* or *client-centered service* as rationale for a wide range of decisions or actions. In most cases, it became very difficult to facilitate a safe space for contestation since situationally-specific critiques could be marked as an attack on organizational values. In this way, naturalized values potentially make a constellation of discourses or practices undiscussable (Argyris, 1980).

Values-based planning processes potentially exacerbate a dilemma that Gutmann (2007) termed the ‘responsibility dilemma’. Gutmann (2007) and a number of other scholars have expressed concern that public deliberations about difficult or politically loaded decisions potentially “transfer responsibility from policy makers to the public” (Gutmann, 2007, p. 428). This phenomenon may serve to co-opt participating publics and let policy makers blame politically unpopular decisions on citizen working groups. Mouffe (2000) and Purcell (2009) also argued that consciously designed participatory efforts necessarily marginalize radical, but important, viewpoints and position protests and other forms of citizen action as necessarily un-collaborative. I suggest that some values-based planning approaches intensify this possibility by generating a highly abstracted form of citizen consent. A values-based decision making model may allow some planners and political leaders to suggest—and believe—they are capable of carrying out public interest without ongoing public deliberation. In this scenario, *accountability* to other human actors is replaced by *accountability* to policy texts.
If, as Hauser (1999) suggested, the public is simply an abstraction until it is brought into relationship with “expressions of civil judgment” (p. 74), then the emphasis on values-based planning as an alternative to active citizen engagement and reasonable hostility (Tracy, 2010) represents a distinctly modern—rather than discursive—conception of the public sphere. Although I find it improbable that Golden residents will abstain from future protest or deliberation about public planning, I worry that planners and public officials will interpret such interactions as problematic if they assume GV2030 values represent stable and uncontested public opinion. By adopting an epistemology that favors the collection of aggregate values, values-based planning advocates limit opportunities for the co-creation of community stories in relationship to unfolding and often unanticipated scenarios.

**Implications**

Rose (1999) claimed that political mistrust is often accompanied by efforts to justify judgments on the grounds of objective governance technologies. Political leaders and practitioners turn away from public interactions and towards facts and figures that obscure the complex technical and political effort that goes into producing *objective* decisions. I argue that political mistrust itself is at least partially (re)produced via a constellation of public policies, often constructed in the name of increased accountability. Although GV 2030 discourses about the limitations of ordinary democracy were initially centered on citizen experience and accountability to the public, they eventually shifted to emphasize accountability to policy texts. Attention moved from storytellers to their stories, from stories to values data, and finally from values data to value statements. As this happened, LAC members and city leaders talked increasingly about being *true* to
citizen values rather than to actual citizen experience. Community values might be useful in generating important conversations, yet they are also likely to close off possibilities for public participation—and particularly contestation—when they are treated as self-explanatory accountability metrics.

Discursive accountability formations created a self-referential loop (Deetz, 1992) so that many GV 2030 practices become “egocentric” (Morgan, 1986) and actively reproduced existing identities, relationships, and rationalities. According to Deetz, this drives “a vicious deviation-amplifying loop” (p. 183). I believe discursive accountability formations in a number of policy arenas may generate these kinds of deviation-amplifying loops. When governance problems are constructed as problems of insufficient accountability, then technical accountability measures are naturally offered up as the solution. Yet, public problems are never just about accountability—they are about entire systems of relationships, practices, technologies, and material resources. I think we find this conflation at work in numerous policy arenas. In health care, education, and criminal justice systems, discourses and associated practices often emphasize accountability to procedures, values, and standard measurement systems while failing to attend to situated actors (Gladwell, 2006; Rose, 1999). This dynamic positions publics, students, patients, and workers as subjects to be measured rather than engaged. It also applies aggregate understandings to individual circumstances with too much certainty given that best practice governance models—like the social sciences that informed them—are not truly predictive but educative (Flyvbjerg, 2001).

When accountability becomes a goal in itself, identities (e.g., citizen, planner, or city leader), relationships, and policies are reproduced in terms of internal systemic logics.
Consistent with Deetz’s (1992) conception of systematic distortion in decision making, stakeholders may become increasingly cut off from alternative logics. This helps to explain why GV 2030 LAC members periodically expressed commitment to transformational and relational storytelling, yet were ultimately unable to conceptualize what it would look like to co-create more nuanced and flexible community stories. Systematic distortion associated with current practices of ordinary democracy is also exacerbated by more complex inter-organizational collaborations that necessarily involve a wider range of parallel, reinforcing, or conflicting accountability policies and metrics. This means that alternative participatory ideals may, in practice, play out as parallel processes or be reshaped in the image of existing accountability logics. This is not necessarily because planners fail to recognize their own role in shaping agendas and decisions or because stakeholders share a thin conception of democracy.

In Golden, planners and numerous other stakeholders told me existing democratic practices were insufficient and that planners and city officials needed to relinquish expert power. I typically experienced Golden planners and Orton consultants as thoughtful, enthusiastic, and deeply committed to designing and testing new communication strategies. In interviews they expressed concerns about the GV 2030 process and offered up tremendous insight into specific dilemmas. Yet, existing accountability logics and metrics associated with laws and contracts, powerful stories, technology tools, and macro-discourses about accountable governance closed off alternative communication design possibilities in both overtly recognized and unexplored ways. The logics that shaped rationality were largely undiscussable (Argyris, 1980). This study extends the theory of discursive closure to show how multi-level discourses and material, temporal,
and technological factors intersect to generate discursive closure in a continuously shifting process. In the case of GV2030, it was not a singular logic, interest, or disciplinary power that closed off opportunities for more interactive and transformational storytelling. It was a complex set of relationships between discourses and material and temporal factors that shaped communication design and public participation. This points to the possibility that more radical change requires participants to identify and disrupt existing relationships between situated practices, textual genres, material factors, temporal expectations, and accountability metrics. I encourage communication and planning scholars to move beyond talk as they study the (re)production of particular communication design affordances and constraints. By making complex processes of discursive closure more transparent, scholars can help open up discursive accountability formations to exploration and contestation so participants might ask: (a) To whom or what are we accountable and to what end?, (b) how did this come to be the case?, and (c) how might accountability be reconceptualized to support new or evolving interests and commitments?

**Recommendations for Future Co-generative Theorizing**

Based on these findings and implications, I encourage scholars and practitioners interested in participatory democracy to engage stakeholders in co-generative theorizing about the relationship between public participation and accountability in actual policy arenas. I agree with Benjamin’s (2008) claim that “the giving and receiving of accounts can both open up or close down critical conversations about practice” (p. 219), and I second his call for further examination of the processes by which nonprofit—and in this case, public sector—stakeholders interact to construct and respond to accountability
expectations. LeGreco’s (2012) *policy circuit* provides one model for co-generative theorizing about public participation in local government planning as a discursive practice and as necessarily about public policy.

LeGreco’s (2012) policy circuit is designed to show “how key communication processes contribute to policy work in densely interrelated ways” (p. 49). The five processes that make up the circuit include: (a) “reflexive policy writing,” (b) “managing paradox,” (c) “addressing ambiguity,” (d) “navigating policy webs,” and (e) “attending to the unattended” (p. 49). By paying attention to these processes, advocates of improved public participation can more consciously explore how discursive accountability formations are (re)produced through ongoing interactions and policy texts and with what consequences. This, in turn, may open up opportunities for change.

The points on LeGreco’s (2012) policy circuit are not sequential, and they all draw on one another. Reflexive policy writing is the process by which multiple stakeholders engage in talk about policy texts and processes. During GV 2030, the visioning process was never explicitly understood as a policy practice, and most stakeholders engaged in little reflexive policy writing after the initial phase of the project. In my interviews with LAC members, I noticed how more reflexive talk about policy writing might have led participants to conceptualize alternative ways of communicating the Golden story. For example, an LAC member told me she thought a ‘choose your own adventure’ approach would allow community members to work in teams to create alternative paths for future development in Golden (L. R., personal communication, September 9, 2009). This is consistent with Kahane’s (2004) recommendation that communities co-create alternative future scenarios to engage difference and maintain
flexibility in the face of uncertain circumstances. I believe LAC members would have come up with numerous creative ideas if planners and consultants had created spaces for reflexive policy writing conversations.

LeGreco also drew on Stohl and Cheney’s (2001) four paradoxes of organizational participation—*structure, agency, identity,* and *power*—to show how efforts to manage paradox can be traced across policy (re)production processes. In the case of GV 2030, this attention to paradox helps to illuminate a structure-agency paradox where Orton advocated locally-based planning policy while urging project groups to embrace their organizational narratives, technologies, and accountability metrics. Orton, unintentionally, established an asymmetrical relationship by approaching Golden planners and other LAC members with a strong set of expectations and preexisting assumptions about the nature of community problems. I agree with Block’s (2011) claim that consultants will be most successful in assisting their clients or partners if they form their initial contracts in direct consultation with primary project participants. This joint-contract development allows participants to engage each other in direct discussions about perceptions, expectations, and concerns early in a partnership. Agencies that provide funding and consultation through competitive grants processes rarely establish this kind of collaborative project design since they incorporate relatively stringent expectations and accountability metrics to screen applicants. In Golden, it was clear that planners’ aversion to risk was tied to their understandings of Orton’s existing accountability policies, measures, and associated temporal expectations. I think planners needed to know they would not be penalized for taking modest risks when experimenting with alternative participatory practices.
Future studies of the relationship between risk and discursive accountability formations may generate new ideas about how to explore and facilitate a reasonable degree of risk-taking in public policy environments, especially during the early stages of contract formation. To this end, there are cases worth studying. For example, the highly acclaimed Savannah, Georgia ‘Grants-For-Blocks’ program was founded on the notion that citizens should develop their own neighborhood plans and their own understandings of success. Small grants of up to $500 were awarded to approximately two-dozen neighborhood groups. City staff members were involved in the process, but neighborhood groups were responsible for reviewing, designing, and implementing community activities and programs with little or no external regulation. The program was sponsored by the Ford Foundation, the Harvard Kennedy School of Government, and the City of Savannah. Discourse associated with the program emphasizes collaboration and reciprocal accountability rather than accountability to grant policies and funder expectations (Puntenney, 1998). When I attended a community development conference in 2000 I asked a representative from the ‘Grants-For-Blocks’ program how they ensured financial accountability. She told me they supported community accountability by not worrying about it—that some financial risk was worth the possibility that neighbors would engage in dialogue and innovation. For years, this has reminded me that we are not stuck with existing accountability practices. I believe that organizations like Orton have an opportunity to facilitate more creative and sustainable planning processes by finding new ways of working with communities to co-create contracts. By applying LeGreco’s policy circuit, practitioners and scholars may be able to better understand and navigate paradoxes of organizational participation.
I also advocate future research on how existing legal regulations related to public planning facilitate or discourage alternative public participation design. Although I am not a legal scholar, I am reluctant to assume that current legal practices are the only possible way to reduce conflict of interest or facilitate transparent decision-making. In fact, in some cases, these practices may generate a false sense of accountability since planning meetings are poorly attended and back-door dealings are not entirely rare. I encourage communication scholars to partner with planners, and public policy and legal scholars to explore how existing laws shape communication design.

At the end of the Twentieth Century, conflict resolution scholars worked with legal scholars and practitioners to develop Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) policies and practices that have had wide-ranging implications for how families, organizations, and communities address conflict (Goldberg, et al., 2003). ADR is a process by which a third party, external to a particular dispute, “assists disputants in reaching an amicable resolution through the use of various techniques” (U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2012, ¶ 1). This process was intended to support more creative, timely, and cost-effective conflict resolution approaches by providing an alternative to traditional adjudicatory processes. It is not my intention to assess the merits of particular ADR policies or techniques. Rather, I believe the emergence and evolution of ADR shows how communication scholars can work with planners and scholars from other disciplines to study policies and practices impacting public participation in an effort to invent alternatives. Change of this nature will also require advocacy, and I believe organizations like Orton, with a national presence and strong commitment to improved public
participation, are in a good position to facilitate conversations about regulatory changes that span various levels of government.

**Making Stories Matter**

Finally, I cannot end my story of Golden without talking about why and how I think stories matter—to communities, to planners, and to scholars. I have argued that a more relational or transformative approach to storytelling did not align with discursive accountability formations that positioned clarity, efficiency, and measurement as the keys to effective governance. Yet, I believe Golden stories still provide important clues about the relationship between public life and planning policy. Stone-Mediatore (2003) advanced new narrative practices that recognize the partial, relational, and contingent nature of storytelling by emphasizing *ongoing* engagement and the importance of “enlarged thought” (p. 184). According to Stone-Mediatore, community storytelling should involve critical questions and dialogue rather than modern research tools. Responsible storytelling takes time for reflection. From this perspective, each text is always about more than itself and always in relationship to other texts and human relationships.

I wanted to see what I might discover by taking a more relational and abductive approach to interpreting GV 2030 stories, so I read 60 Golden resident stories repeatedly, drawing out and playing with themes, connections, tensions, and patterns. I talked with LAC members about these stories and then I shared the publicly available stories with friends, colleagues, and planners from my new community. I found that Golden stories, when put into conversation with each other, taught me a lot about relationships between public planning and everyday experience. Stories about ordinary activities such as
walking or planting trees were about more than individual values or preferences. They were about relationships between place, space, and identity. They were about emotion and memory and, in many cases, about a sense of belonging—of being in the right place, with the right people, at the right time. These stories were also about policy choices. That tree that was spared over there, the walking path never built here, the bridge that connected two parts of the community—these development choices shaped residents’ lives in ways that mattered.

**Walking.** When I read Golden stories, I was most struck by how residents talked about walking. They walk and they walk ... and they walk some more. They also ride bikes and scooters, use wheel chairs, push strollers, and travel on snowshoes. But so often, they talked about walking. In their stories, walking was rarely just about walking though. Walking did something in the world. Walking built new relationships and maintained long-term relationships. It allowed children to explore, expend excess energy, and play with other children. Different generations met up on trails and on sidewalks:

> The trails, the sculptures along Clear Creek, the fun of the kids. I think that’s a lot of things that are missing, even old people, even preschoolers are not put together enough (F.F., personal communication, July 18, 2009)

Walking improved physical health and allowed people to slow down and reflect on their day, their relationships, and community changes. Walking was harder for some residents than for others. Not all neighborhoods have trails and sidewalks that facilitate safe walking, and some areas are not as accessible for residents with disabilities:

> On Orchard Street we’d like to see the traffic slowed a bit, so can get across safely by car and by foot. It’d be nice to be able to have a bike path or something,
because our only way in is the frontage road unless we go through the fairgrounds and currently there’s not even a shoulder to ride on. (K., personal communication, August 22, 2009)

For people who work long hours outside of Golden, walking has become a luxury. Nevertheless, the majority of storytellers talked about walking regularly. Their stories also provided insight into when, where, and why people walk in Golden.

They walk when they live close to neighbors, businesses, and parks. They walk because they live near friends, and sometimes they make friends because they walk.

Residents also walk when public bus stops and bus routes are easily accessible:

Being disabled, having RTD out here is a very big asset … Denver—this entire metropolitan area is one of the best in the entire nation, as far as disabled access and consideration … I’m usually in a wheelchair when I’m doing these things so it’s wheelchair accessible (R., personal communication, August 22, 2009)

They walk because they have dogs and because they have children:

A lot of us that walk our dogs in the neighborhood get to know everybody by their dogs’ names. And I always speak to the young people, the young residents, try to be friendly. I’ll catch them working in the yard, putting in their gardens, repairing their fences. (W.M., personal communication, August 22, 2009)

They walk to be near natural beauty and to observe public art and to get to community events. They walk to take advantage of the summer sunshine and they often snowshoe when they are unable to walk or drive. They walk when they feel safe and they often feel safe because people in Golden are out walking. Some new residents walk a lot because they finally feel safe walking—or because they can now walk to places and people that
matters to them. When I read all of these stories about walking, I wondered how often Golden residents and planners reflected together on what walking means to them and on what it means for Golden’s future.

**Trees.** Golden storytellers talked about trees—about why trees matter to them and about what trees do for a community. Trees were more than natural artifacts for these storytellers. They shaped human experience:

Well if you’re really early, for the sun coming up, you actually see, there’s a big cottonwood tree in back of my house. I live next to the golf course, so there’s a big cottonwood tree, and the sun will come up just behind that cottonwood tree and just fill the sky with, you know, with the beautiful light of the sunrise, and with the cottonwood tree as the backdrop, foredrop? Whatever, anyway, (LAUGHS). And that’s um, you feel, when you see that you feel a real sense of expansion that anything is possible in that day. (S.C.G., personal communication, May 2, 2009)

Residents of all ages talked about trees. Trees provided shade and aesthetic beauty. They marked community change and the passage of time, and they connected one generation to another:

The biggest thing, a lot of the biggest changes I notice is that all the trees that are growing up there used to be just fields. So a lot of the trees, 30 year old trees, I guess it shows the time. (C., personal communication, June 27, 2009)

And what I’ve noticed happening since we’ve been here is, if you drove down Mt. Zion you would see little trees and now it’s like a forest. And when we first came here we were shown a map of Beverly Heights neighborhood and it was named, it
was written across the top of it “uninhabitable desert”… so you can see that now it’s a habitable forest. (B.W., personal communication, June 27, 2009)

Trees represented attachment or commitment to a particular place; people often expressed appreciation for the trees in their lives and pride for the trees they had planted:

I have a crooked one [tree] on the corner of 11th, 10th and Washington, at the old junior high school. In 1963 _______, a Kiwanis Club Member, a very famous Kiwanis Club Member and my high school biology teacher—he and I planted that tree on the corner of 10th and Washington. And there’s a plaque on there that says that the Key Club of Golden planted the tree. (Chip, personal communication, June 27, 2009)

Although they laughed it off, I remember more than one storyteller becoming choked up while describing a particular tree. Alternatively, an absence of trees could represent uncomfortable exposure, a lack of attachment, or discomfiting changes to a previously familiar landscape. In some stories, healthy trees also indicated a healthy environment at a time of impending ecological crisis:

There’s a babbling brook behind our house, and hopefully that babbling brook will flow forever. Cause I always worry about our shortage of water and how it’s one of our most precious resources, and that if we can continue to preserve our environment, that babbling brook will hopefully always flow and we’ll have nice green trees. (P.C., personal communication, May 2, 2009)

I think these stories about trees point to some deeper truths about the nature of ‘values’. In the above story excerpts, storytellers valued trees always in relationship to each other and to their sense of self. A tree is not only valuable as a material object—it is valuable in
terms of what it represents, what it can accomplish, and what emotions it generates for and among storytellers.

**Stories for the Future**

Fischer (2009) and Ryfe (2005) argued that it is often storytelling rather than reasoning-based deliberation that motivates us to action, and Fischer urged practitioners to learn from public stories. I believe that Orton and its project town partners are on to something important. Stories potentially motivate people to action, open up crucial conversations, and guide policy choices that enhance everyday experience. Yet, stories treated as simple representations of reality—stripped of rich detail and complexity—lose their capacity to inspire. They become disconnected from everyday experiences that are necessarily partial and open to interpretation and contestation. Communication scholars have an opportunity to join practitioners in developing storytelling processes that honor, and reflect upon, public accountability interests and the practices of ordinary democracy without applying traditional evaluative metrics to story interpretation. According to Eisenberg (2007), this changing approach to storytelling is really about moving from a modernist to a postmodernist worldview:

A more constitutive, contingent, provisional view of communication would lead us to identify not with our present story but with the storyteller; not with one’s current identity but with the generative process of sense making from which numerous possible life stories might arise. Such a perspective once again shifts the purpose of communication, this time from a process dedicated to describing the past to one designed to entertain future possibilities. (p. 212)
This perspective calls on communities to imagine storytelling as a never-ending process of interactive invention, and identities as always in the process of becoming. It presumes the formation and reformation of countless public spheres and suggests a world in which plans are never finished. I am interested in what it would mean for citizens and planners to believe in this particular story—to find ways of opening public planning up to storytelling as an ongoing and transformative process. As I conclude this dissertation, I wonder if, and how, our storytelling will continue to influence planning practices in Golden. In my experience, new stories are often generated by inquiry, so I ask: what comes next?
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### APPENDIX A

**GV 2030 Discourse Tracing Data**

**Phase I**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of Analysis</th>
<th>Data Type</th>
<th>Data Sources</th>
<th>Hours/Pages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Micro</td>
<td>Participant observation</td>
<td>1. Initial meeting with Golden planning staff</td>
<td>4 pages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2. 5 Golden LAC meetings</td>
<td>75 pages</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3. Five GV 2030 neighborhood block parties</td>
<td>15 hours/35 pages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Formal texts</td>
<td>6. Golden LAC meeting agendas and handouts</td>
<td>~ 60 pages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td>7. 13 Golden LAC member interviews</td>
<td>200 pages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Digital recordings and transcripts</td>
<td>8. X GV 2030 stories</td>
<td>63 stories/100 pages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meso</td>
<td>Formal texts</td>
<td>1. 2 Golden City Council resolutions regarding GV 2030</td>
<td>4 pages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2. Initial LAC membership list</td>
<td>4 pages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3. City of Golden-Orton Partnership agreement</td>
<td>13 pages + 9 page work plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4. General planning guidelines</td>
<td>~ 30 pages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Participant observations</td>
<td>o Orton Trustee meeting</td>
<td>3 pages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Media sources</td>
<td>o Local newspaper articles</td>
<td>~ 10 pages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Macro</td>
<td>Formal documents</td>
<td>o National planning articles</td>
<td>~ 50 pages</td>
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### Phase II

<table>
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<th>Data Type</th>
<th>Data Sources</th>
<th>Hours/Pages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Micro</td>
<td>Participant observation</td>
<td>4. 4 Golden LAC meetings</td>
<td>100 pages</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• 1 Meeting with Golden planners and project team consultants</td>
<td>5 pages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• 3 GV 2030 storytelling listening/focus groups</td>
<td>10 pages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Formal texts</td>
<td>9. Golden LAC meeting agendas and handouts</td>
<td>~ 60 pages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Listening/focus group handouts</td>
<td>10 pages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Media sources</td>
<td>1) Storytelling white paper</td>
<td>~ 50 pages</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Phase III

<table>
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<th>Data Type</th>
<th>Data Sources</th>
<th>Hours/Pages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Micro</td>
<td>Participant observation</td>
<td>5. 3 Golden LAC meetings</td>
<td>8 pages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6. 1 Meeting with Golden planners and project team consultants</td>
<td>7 pages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>7. 3 GV 2030 summits</td>
<td>7 hours/16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Formal texts</td>
<td>1) Planning literature and associated links</td>
<td>8 texts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td>Meso</td>
<td>8. 1 planning commission forum</td>
<td>pages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>9. 1 public review forum</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1) 7 Golden LAC member interviews</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Media sources</td>
<td>Formal texts</td>
<td>1) GV 2030 Vision Report</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2) Golden Voices/Values/Visions book</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Press releases</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Electronic newsletters</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>•</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Macro</td>
<td>Participant observations</td>
<td>• Orton Community Matters conference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Formal texts</td>
<td>• New York Times coverage</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX B

Interview Protocol

• What led to your decision to participate in the GV 2030 as an LAC member/staff member/consultant?

• What aspects of the “Heart & Soul” GV 2030 project are most important to you and why?

• What aspects of the “Heart & Soul” GV 2030 project are you most uncertain about or concerned about and why?

• What will it look like to you if this process succeeds in being inclusive in its approach to public engagement?

• What strategies and tools do you believe will be most helpful in engaging the public?

• Would you like to see any changes to the current direction of the planning process? If so, what changes would you like to see?

• How is this process different than other community or organizational planning processes you have been involved with?

• What do you have to contribute as a member of this planning process?

• What events have been most important in shaping the planning process so far? Why do you think they were so important?

• What do you think about the way the Golden LAC is structured? Does it work well? Do you have any suggestions for improvement?

• Who are the key people involved in the GV 2030 process? What makes them recognizable?

• What would be considered a typical level of involvement?
• What does a person need in order to contribute to the LAC? To the planning process in general?
• How do you define collaboration? Where do you see it at work in this planning process?
### APPENDIX C

#### Chronological Ordering of GV 2030 Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month &amp; Year</th>
<th>List of Events</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>November, 2008</td>
<td>• Golden becomes an Orton Heart &amp; Soul project town partner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November, 2008</td>
<td><strong>GV 2030 Phase I:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March, 2009</td>
<td>• The Golden LAC forms the Golden LAC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March, 2009</td>
<td>• The Golden LAC meets for the first time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February – June, 2009</td>
<td>• The Golden LAC hosts a GV 2030 ‘kick-off’ meeting open to the broader public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May – August, 2009</td>
<td>• Five Golden LAC meetings focus on hosting events, conducting community outreach, and ‘collecting’ community stories.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May – October, 2009</td>
<td>• The Golden LAC hosts dozens of additional community storytelling group and person-on-the-street storytelling sessions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December, 2009</td>
<td>• Orton holds a trustee meeting in Golden</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July, 2009</td>
<td><strong>GV 2030 Phase II:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July, 2009</td>
<td>• The Golden LAC contracts with an outside consulting firm for planning and group facilitation support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summer, 2009</td>
<td>• Golden planners begin meeting with outside consultants in a ‘project team’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October, 2009</td>
<td>• The Orton Foundation hosts a project town meeting at Wingspread</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July, 2009</td>
<td>• The outside consulting group puts on a story focus group training session for Golden LAC members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July – January, 2009</td>
<td>• 5 LAC meetings focus on story listening focus groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date Range</td>
<td>Event Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October – February, 2009</td>
<td>• The Golden LAC and consultants host approximately two-dozen story listening focus groups and other less formal listening sessions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January – March, 2010</td>
<td>• GV 2030 Phase III</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Two Golden LAC meetings focus on planning community summits with the purpose of involving the public in reviewing and condensing story themes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March – May, 2010</td>
<td>• The Golden LAC hosts three community summits (two were intended, but one was snowed out before completion)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring, 2010</td>
<td>• A key member of the Golden LAC planning staff resigns from the project and takes another planning-related position</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June – August, 2010</td>
<td>• Golden planning staff organize values and recommendations and draft a GV 2030 Vision Report</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August – October, 2010</td>
<td>• The Golden LAC hosts GV 2030 Vision Report public review forums</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September, 2010</td>
<td>• The Golden LAC meets with planning commissioners to review GV 2030 public feedback</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October, 2010</td>
<td>• Orton hosts the 2010 Community Matters conference in Denver, CO where Golden is a featured project town</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December, 2010</td>
<td>• The Golden City Council approves the GV 2030 Vision Report</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX D

Structured Questions

Planning:
1. How do LAC members and partners articulate the role of publics in public planning?
2. How is planning defined in relevant policy texts?
3. What perceived public planning problems or challenges do participating LAC members and partners describe?
4. How do participating LAC members and partners articulate planning purposes for the broader community using specific word choices?
5. What planning activities are stipulated and/or coordinated in policy texts?

Public(s):
   - Which publics are in the intended audience—how, specifically, are publics articulated?
   - Which members of the public actually participated? Were absent?
   - How did planning participants make sense of/understand the absence of intended public participants?
   - How are particular public(s) present/represented in new/updated policy documents?

Public Participation and Democracy:
   - What ideals of ordinary democracy are articulated by LAC members and partners?
   - What problems of ordinary democracy are articulated by LAC members and partners?
• What alternative public participation ideals and practices are articulated by LAC members and partners?
• What dilemmas or tensions between ordinary and alternative democratic practices emerge?
• How do planning participants make sense of and/or respond to emerging dilemmas or tensions between ordinary and alternative democratic practices?
• What, if any, new policies, are developed in relationship to alternative public participation ideals?
• How is the public participation process described in new and/or updated policy documents?

**Communication Design:**

1. What alternative communication design approaches are employed by LAC members and partners?
2. What technology tools are used to carry out alternative communication design practices?
3. What kinds of everyday theories about communication emerge in LAC member and partner talk?
4. How did alternative communication design approaches account for—or attend to—conflict or contestation among participants?
5. How are alternative communication design activities/processes articulated for the broader public using specific word choices?
6. What affordances emerge in relationship to new communication design approaches? (attend also to the temporal, and material—financial resources,
7. What new constraints or problems emerge in relationship to new communication design approaches? (attend not just to the social, but to the temporal, and material—financial resources, technology, etc.)
APPENDIX E

GV 2030 Situational Map
APPENDIX F

GV 2030 Social Worlds/Arenas Maps