Organizing for Social Change: Grassroots Efforts to Reduce Food Insecurity

A dissertation presented to
the faculty of
the Scripps College of Communication of Ohio University

In partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree
Doctor of Philosophy

Lindsey M. Rose
June 2012

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This dissertation titled
Organizing for Social Change: Grassroots Efforts to Reduce Food Insecurity

by
LINDSEY M. ROSE

has been approved for
the School of Communication Studies
and the Scripps College of Communication by

Austin S. Babrow
Professor of Communication Studies

Scott Titsworth
Interim Dean, Scripps College of Communication
ABSTRACT

ROSE, LINDSEY M., Ph.D., June 2012, Communication Studies

Organizing for Social Change: Grassroots Efforts to Reduce Food Insecurity

Director of Dissertation: Austin S. Babrow

The number of people living in poverty in the United States is the largest it has ever been in the 51 years during which poverty estimates have been published (DeNavas-Walt, Proctor, & Smith, 2010). One area especially plagued with poverty is the Appalachian region of Southeastern Ohio. Despite the existence of government assistance programs, families are experiencing food insecurity and turning to local charitable organizations which are struggling to keep up with demand (see Curry, 2010). In response, a number of organizations have tried to address food insecurity using alternative ways of organizing; this research examines these attempts. It offers unique contributions to health and organizational communication scholarship.

I employed interpretive research methods to explore how one community organization, the Community Food Initiatives (CFI), mobilizes people and resources to address food insecurity. Specifically, I engaged in participant-observations, in-depth interviews, and discourse analysis. The constant comparative method was used to identify patterned regularities in the data (e.g., interview transcripts, fieldnotes, and documents).

Results offer a description of the systemic and regulatory issues with our current food system, followed by highlighting the ways in which CFI programming mobilizes the community to inspire social change. Next, I discuss the importance of establishing a relationship with your food, arguing for the value of connection to the earth and food systems. Finally, I advance the claim that CFI demands ethical revaluation of caring,
work, and community engagement. I close with theoretical and practical implications, limitations, and directions for future research.

Approved: _________________________________

Austin S. Babrow
Professor of Communication Studies
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

As the completion of my dissertation draws near, I am filled with gratitude toward the many individuals who have helped me along the way. To begin, I would like to recognize the influence of my undergraduate and master’s advisor, Dr. Leigh Ford. Dr. Ford, you have been a strong supporter and advocate for me throughout my education. I am thankful for your encouragement to pursue graduate school and appreciate the friendship we have fostered over the past several years. This dissertation has been immensely impacted by my committee members: Drs. Austin Babrow, Lynn Harter, William Rawlins, Jennifer Bute, and Jaylynne Hutchinson. Austin, I very much appreciate the time you have invested in me. Your wisdom, guidance, and careful editorial work have challenged me to be a better researcher and writer. I am thankful for your flexibility and consideration as I juggled family and school, and feel honored to have completed my Ph.D. under your direction. Lynn, your passion and dedication to engaged community research has propelled this dissertation. Your superb instruction in the first year research methods class has provided a strong foundation for my research. Bill, your enthusiasm in the classroom enlivens my love for teaching. I appreciate the warmth, excitement, and interest you bring to every class, and reflect on my class time with you fondly. Jen, I am thankful for your willingness to continue working with me even after you have left Ohio University. I have enjoyed our collaboration at conferences and look forward to continued conversations in the future. Finally, Jaylynne, your classes have motivated me to explore issues of social justice, democracy, and education. I am thankful for your insight on my work.
In addition to my committee members, I would like to acknowledge a few individuals in the School of Communication Studies who have positively impacted my time here. Gayle McKerrow and Heather Grove, you manage organizational details with grace, and have consistently been a friendly face in Lasher Hall (and an open arm to hold a baby). Scott Titsworth, you were the first person I got to know at Ohio University and have been a warm conversation and immensely helpful throughout my time here. Brittany Peterson, thank you for your guidance as a young academic (and mom). I appreciate your support. Amy Chadwick, you have kindly offered your time as I explored the job market; I will miss our neighborhood conversations. I am thankful for my colleagues and friends, who have been there to share notes and laughs. A special thanks to Anne Gerbensky-Kerber, Laura Russell, Abby Wojno, Joe Mazer, Jeff Kuznekoff, Rebecca Mercado Thornton, and Jennifer Barber. I feel especially blessed to have met Emily and Spencer Patterson, who have helped me too many times to count. Emily, I will forever cherish our many fond memories of dinners, play dates, soccer games, and trail runs. Spencer, you have been a loyal friend and helpful study partner. You have offered reassurance and generously shared your time and family with me.

My family has been a consistent support system throughout my Ph.D. and dissertation. To my parents, Dan and Sally Arnold, your parenting has instilled a strong work ethic and care for family that has helped me through the challenges of graduate school. Dad, thank you for working hard to put me (and my siblings) through my undergraduate degree. You imparted a value for education that has brought me here today. To my mom, I especially appreciate the many miles you put on your car to come down and take care of my girls during the more frantic moments of my doctoral work. I
can very honestly say that I am not sure I would have finished without you. You have always been one of my strongest supporters – thank you. To my sister, Jessica, thank you for being my sounding board as I ranted about food politics, farming, and health. Your strong, entrepreneurial, self-reliant lifestyle motivates my research. To my brother, Nathan (Spikey), I appreciate your laid back responses saying things like “everything happens for a reason,” when I have been stressed out about school, jobs, and life. Your ease is comforting.

Finally, I must acknowledge the steadfast support of my husband, Jonathan. Jon, I appreciate your continued dedication to me and our family. Your willingness to relocate, take full house and children duties, travel around to my conferences, and tolerate my complaints continues to amaze me. Thank you for always prepping my coffee even though you wake up hours before me. You are patient, loving, funny, considerate, and a perfect match for me. My love for you is punctuated by our two little girls, McKenna, and Kayla, who have marked the happiest moments of my life. To McKenna, your charisma and energy puts my life in perspective and I am forever grateful for the joy and laughter you have brought me in just a few short years. To Kayla, your demand for physical closeness offers a poignant reminder of the value of caring and love, and has given me direction as I conclude my Ph.D.
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CHAPTER ONE: PROBLEM STATEMENT

The number of people living in poverty in the United States is the largest it has ever been in the 51 years during which poverty estimates have been published (DeNavas-Walt, Proctor, & Smith, 2010). The federal poverty level is defined as $10,830 for a family of one and/or $22,050 for a family of four. The official poverty rate for the United States in 2009 was 14.3 percent – that is an estimated 43.6 million people living in poverty (up from 13.2% in 2008, 39.8 million people) (DeNavas-Walt et al.). One area especially plagued with poverty is the Appalachian region of Southeastern Ohio. Ten of Ohio’s thirty-three Appalachian counties are designated by the Appalachian Regional Commission as “distressed” areas based on the criteria of high unemployment rates and other depressed economic indicators (Pheley, Holben, Graham, & Simpson, 2002).

Athens County is centrally situated in Southeastern Ohio, and although home to Ohio University and a mid-sized hospital, Athens County has the highest percentage of people living at or below the poverty level in Ohio. In fact, the 2009-2010 annual report issued by Athens County Job and Family Services stated that 30% of all Athens County residents (more than 19,000 people) live below the federal poverty level. As such, Athens County has double the percentage of people living in poverty compared to the statewide 15.2% of all other Ohioans. Although a number of government assistance programs exist, if a family of four receives the maximum benefit levels for food and cash assistance, a total of $1,204 in assistance, that family is still $633.50 below the poverty level each month (Athens County Job and Family Services, 2010). Consequently, families are experiencing food insecurity and turning to local charitable organizations which are struggling to keep up with demand (see Curry, 2010).
Food security means that “all people at all times have access to enough food for an active healthy life” (Pheley et al., 2002, p. 447). Food security entails adequate access to food in safe and socially acceptable ways (AMA, 2010). Thus, food insecurity is evident when families have limited resources, inadequate access to food, rely on food assistance programs, skip meals, substitute nutritious foods with less expensive alternatives, and seek assistance from food pantries (LeBlanc & McMurry, 1998). Importantly, food insecurity does not necessarily equate to food shortage. Instead, food insecurity in the United States is more commonly associated with an abundance of unhealthy food options. For example, the existence of food deserts, which are places where people have poor access to healthy, fresh foods; This is particularly a problem among those of lower socioeconomic status where mobility issues pose access challenges (Larsen & Gilliland, 2008). Food deserts offer a plethora of fast food options, but provide a limited number of stores providing nutritious food (Corrigan, 2011). Thus, food insecurity describes quality, just as much (if not more so) as quantity.

Food insecurity is a severe public health concern affecting 11.1% of the United States population in 2007 (Chilton & Rose, 2009). Women and children are a special concern. Female-headed households had a food insecurity prevalence rate of 30.2%, almost 3 times the national average, and more than 12.4 million children experienced food insecurity in 2007 (Nord, Andrews, & Carlson, 2008). Nearly half of all children in the United States receive food stamps at some point in their young lives (Emery, 2009).

Ironically, food insecurity exists in conjunction with obesity (Corrigan 2011). Compared to more urban areas, residents of rural regions are generally in poorer health,
with higher rates of chronic disease, disability, and mortality (Jones, Parker, Ahearn, Mishra, & Varyiam, 2009). In addition to poor disease management, other results of food insecurity include increased risk and development of chronic disease, inadequate intake of key nutrients, iron deficiency, under nutrition, dietary imbalance, poor psychological and cognitive functioning, and substandard academic performance (AMA, 2010; Rank & Hirschl, 2009). Research has found that health is considered an invaluable commodity among Appalachian residents (Goins, Spencer, & Williams, 2011). Yet, given the previous discussion about food insecurity in Appalachia, and the various health concerns that tend to go along with food insecurity, it is likely that this invaluable commodity is not being attained by individuals experiencing food insecurity.

A number of factors lead to food insecurity. Given the geography of Appalachia, the cost of developing an infrastructure (e.g., roads, communication systems, and public works facilities) that adequately supports access to nutrition and health care delivery is challenging (Pheley et al., 2002). Inclement weather such as snow, ice, and rain pose threats to travel as well, making the mountainous terrain of Appalachia especially difficult. Factors such as limited supermarkets, lack of variety of foods available, and higher food prices contribute to food scarcity in rural, compared to metropolitan areas (Morris, Neuhauser, & Cambell, 1992).

At present, the US spends over $50 billion per year on nutrition assistance programs for the US population (Chilton & Rose, 2009). Programs include the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, the National School Lunch Program, and the Special Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program for Women, Infants, and Children. A
number of other programs have begun to address issues of food security. On a national scale, the Community Food Security Initiative (CFSI) of the US Department of Agriculture has the goal of cutting US food insecurity in half by 2015 through creation and expansion of partnerships that build local food systems and reduce hunger (USDA, accessed February 1, 2011). Specifically, CFSI aims to develop new partnerships at the local, state, and federal level to help communities reduce hunger, improve coordination among existing USDA programs (e.g., nutrition assistance programs, community food grants, ongoing research, farmers’ markets, and food recovery projects), expand technical assistance to states, communities, and nonprofit groups to build long-term local structures to increase food security, and increase public awareness of the causes of food insecurity and innovative community solutions to hunger (USDA, accessed February 1, 2011).

The American Dietetic Association (2010) believes, to eliminate food insecurity, there must be interventions including adequate funding for, and increased utilization of, food and nutrition assistance programs, inclusion of food and nutrition education in such programs, and innovative programs to promote and support individual and household economic self-sufficiency. Other attempts to address food insecurity include a rights-based approach. A human rights framework works actively with those affected by food insecurity and ensures that food security monitoring is compared to benchmarks in national action plans (Chilton & Rose, 2009). Specifically, a human rights framework focuses on government accountability, public participation, an analytic framework that accounts for vulnerability and discrimination, and stronger connections between policies and health outcomes (Chilton & Rose).
The aforementioned programs are nationwide efforts to address food insecurity. Efforts have also been made to improve food security in Appalachia and in the Athens, Ohio, region in particular. Ten food pantries exist in Athens, but they usually distribute food in bulk. Because not everyone knows what to do with 10 pounds of oats, employees of the Athens County Children’s Services offer cooking classes about once a month teaching patrons how to plan healthy meals, keep food safe, and use pantry items to the fullest (Ciavarra, 2003). Another new program was developed as a result of a grant earned by an Ohio University professor, David Holben. Holben’s ECOhio Garden Project provides hands-on gardening training and promotes other sustainable activities in the community that contribute to developing a healthy local food system (Mauzy, 2010).

Community based initiatives to address food insecurity are the focus of this research. Communication scholars have argued that community-based organizing in our own communities have received scant attention compared to that in international contexts (Harter, Norander, Quinlan, 2007). Specifically, my dissertation focuses on the organizing strategies of the Community Food Initiatives (CFI) (which will be described in detail in Chapter Three). Briefly, CFI is a membership based grassroots organization with a mission of supporting “a local food movement that promotes low income families improved access to food, community controlled local food production, enhanced health, and entrepreneurship” (CFI, 2010). CFI pursues this mission through three primary programs: To foster food security and self-reliance, CFI focuses on three primary programs: Community Food and Gardening Education (CFGE, formerly Community Gardening), CFI Donation Station, and Farm to Cafeteria (F2C, formerly Edible
Schoolyard program). The CFGE program focuses on engaging community members through community gardening and hosting educational workshops to foster self-reliance. The Donation Station is a booth at the local farmers market where workers aim to collect money (which is used by CFI staff to shop at the farmers market for pantry donations) and produce (which is then donated to area food pantries). F2C is a program targeting area youth with a nutritional food curriculum and summer programs teaching children how to grow, harvest, and cook their own produce.

Food security in Appalachia might be improved by the initiatives previously mentioned. For example, working with local, state, and federal programs in order to engage community members based on community needs might bring people together to improve food security. Yet, research suggests that, rather than turning to the community for assistance, notions of rugged individualism seem to pervade the Appalachian region (Jones, 1999). Indeed Jeannette Walls’ memoir entitled *The Glass Castle* vividly depicts the life of a family living in extreme poverty with four young children in rural West Virginia who adamantly oppose any form of government or community assistance. Influenced by both geography and temperament, it is said that early Appalachian settlers often sought to avoid religious, social, economic, and political hierarchies of their homelands and were drawn to the isolation of the mountains (Jones). This geographic solitude encouraged the values of independence and individualism that appear to permeate the culture today. Limited contact with and distrust of the outside world contributed to the creation of strong kinship networks in this region (Jones).
Indeed, individualist ideals are evident in programs seeking to illuminate food insecurity. For example, the mission statement of the CFSI is, “Helping nonprofit groups, faith-based organizations, state and local government agencies, tribes, and individual citizens fight hunger, improve nutrition, strengthen local food systems, and empower low-income families to move toward self-sufficiency” [emphasis added]. Even the motto of the CFI states, “from seed to self-reliance.” Phrases like “self-reliance” and “self-sufficiency” seem to connote individual responsibility, rather than community interdependence. Yet, the very design of the CFI programming as well as its title suggests that community will or should play an important role in fostering self-reliance. For example, the CFI works to bring people of diverse talents and specialties together to learn ways of self-reliance. Perhaps “community” is a concept that can or should be understood as a means of promoting independence, much as the idea enshrined in the U.S. constitution that the rule of law is our best guarantor of individual freedom.

Exploring alternative ways of organizing to address food insecurity offers unique contributions to health and organizational communication scholarship. Indeed, food as a health communication issue has received limited attention. Cramer, Green, and Walters (2011) contended “If food has become increasingly important within our processes of communication as a means of expression, manifestation of identities, form of discourse and ritual, hallmark of social relationships, and if food is ubiquitous, then it is for these very reasons that we need to more closely consider how food and its practices operate as a means of communication” (p. xiv). Communication scholars have critiqued their colleagues for focusing singly on discursive constructionism without explicit
consideration of material conditions (Allen, 2004; Ashcraft & Mumby, 2004; Dougherty, 2011). Dougherty asks “*What is missing from the scholarly life such that we as a discipline have been able to ignore the material conditions that shape the lives of the people we study?*” (italics original, p. 110). With enthusiasm for a careful blend of constructionism contemporaneous to acknowledging lived realities, this dissertation offers an in-depth analysis of how one small non-profit organization, CFI, mobilizes people and resources to enact social change. In so doing, I respond to calls from health communication scholars to study marginalized communities (Ford & Yep, 2003) and alternative, participatory ways of researching and organizing (Harter, Hamel-Lambert, & Millesen, 2011). The following paragraph gives an overview of the chapters to follow.

Chapter Two offers a review of literature. Specifically, I draw on recent food discourse and articulate the theoretical frameworks guiding the project. Next, Chapter Three describes the research design I employed, discussing linkages between the theoretical structures and my commitments as a researcher, the research setting, data collection and analysis, and assessments of rigor. Then, Chapter Four explains the results of my research. Specifically I highlight systemic and regulatory factors driving CFI’s work, political barriers to food security, drives to establishing a relationship with your food, and lastly demands for ethical revaluation sparked by engagement with CFI. Chapter Five concludes the dissertation with a discussion of theoretical and practical implications, limitations, directions for future research, and finally, I close by reflecting on my personal experiences throughout the dissertation journey.
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMES

In this chapter, I contextualize my dissertation project among recent food discourse and theoretical scholarship. I begin by reviewing extant literature addressing food issues. Next, I outline the major assumptions of the theories guiding my study: problematic integration theory, dialectics, and pragmatism. Finally, I address how these theoretical frameworks coalesce to inform this project, and I offer a set of guiding research questions.

Food Issues

Food has become an increasingly popular topic. Recent food movements (i.e., slow food, local food, organic food) offer a poignant illustration of our heightened awareness of food, which appears to stem from a general dissatisfaction in food systems and standards. Some have argued that food movements have been popularized in the United States because we are a receptive audience due to our lack of food identity. Dougherty (2011), for example contended: “In the U.S., we don’t really have a ‘food culture,’ which is a historically derived pattern of food consumption that both supports and is supported by a larger culture” (p. 237). Pollan (2009), on the other hand argued that food is generationally idiosyncratic instead of culturally bound. Regardless of the approach, it is clear that individuals living in the United States have largely dabbled in various types of foods, often with little purpose or focus. Mindlessness associated with eating practices has led to a number of health issues (to be discussed below), which has contributed to a sharp consciousness of the consequences problematic food systems have on our wellbeing. The next sections speak to political issues constraining our food system
and focuses on how some individuals and communities have responded to dissatisfaction with food, drawing attention to farming and gardening in particular.

**Politics of Food**

Food is a political issue deeply situated in our history (see Berry, 2009; Nestle, 2002/2007; Pollan, 2009). The rationing of food (e.g., meat, sugar, gasoline, canned goods) for instance, during World War II, inspired food guidelines based on pragmatic concerns over availability and theoretical considerations of nutritional standards (Nestle, 2002/2007; Pollan, 2009). Nestle references 1942 federal pamphlets instructing Americans to “do your part in the national nutrition program” which meant eating foods from eight groups every day – four of which were milk, meat, eggs, and butter (p. 35). The following year the USDA slightly shifted guidelines, issuing a National Wartime Nutrition Guide that stated: the “U.S. needs us strong: eat the Basic 7 every day” (Nestle, p. 35). The new guidelines had placed meat, eggs, fish, and beans in one category, with separate groups for milk, fats, and sugars. Between the end of World War II and into the 1970’s Americans appeared to be moving in the direction of a more “prudent diet” as per capita consumption of animal fats from all sources dropped from eighty-four pounds to seventy-one (Pollan, 2009, p. 46). Yet, during this time of meat reduction, fats from seed oils approximately doubled and individuals had more heart attacks.

As foodies like Pollan (2009) and Nestle (2002/2007) have described, Americans tend to follow food guidelines blindly, ignoring common sense ideas about the value of whole, nutritional foods, over food labels that literally tell the consumer the product is “low fat.” Take for example, the documentary *Food Matters*, which urges individuals to
return to whole, unprocessed foods for better health, even reversing chronic diseases through diet changes (e.g., hypertension, diabetes) (Colquhoun, Bosch, & Tedeschi, 2011). Instead of being critical consumers of our food choices, Nestle argued that constantly changing food guidelines have resulted in a “bewildering array of food groupings issued by various agencies” (Nestle, p. 35). In the 1980’s food began to be replaced with “nutrients,” as basic foods like eggs were labeled with words like “cholesterol” and beans labeled as “fiber” (Pollan). Concern with “nutrients” over food has been attributed to advertising, overabundance, and food marketing that appeal to four factors: taste, cost, convenience, and public confusion (Pollan). The consequence of our reliance on “nutrients” is a perception that basic, raw foods (e.g., fruits, vegetables, nuts) are perceived as unscientific compared to their nutrient enriched counterparts. One of the major contributor to reliance on processed goods is advertising. Nestle reported that nearly 70% of food advertising is focused on convenience foods (e.g. candy, snacks, alcohol, soft drinks) whereas just 2.2% is geared towards fruits, vegetables, grains, or beans.

Advancing a counterargument against enriched food products (for the modern athlete and runners in particular), Christopher McDougall, in his book, Born to Run: A Hidden Tribe, Superathletes, and the Greatest Race the World has Never Seen, shares the story of Tarahumara Indians of Mexico’s Copper Canyons, who defy all physical odds, relying on raw quinoa for sustenance in races of 50 miles and more (McDougall, 2009). Quinoa, once called “the gold of the Incas,” offers an excellent source of protein, amino acids, and other health building proteins (“World’s healthiest foods,” April 9, 2012). The
nutrition choices of the Tarahumara Indians stand in stark contrast to the modern American runner, who relies on powerbars, sports drinks, and gels to maximize physical potential. Ironically (or not), the Tarahumara Indians, with their makeshift footwear and raw quinoa appear to race well beyond the capacity of the most American runners without injury; which is interesting, because according to McDougall (2009) up to eight out of every ten American runners report injuries every year.

The eating and lifestyle practices of the Tarahumara Indians are consistent with the above arguments advanced by Pollan and Nestle in their support of raw, basic foods, against processed “nutrients.” Distrust over processed foods suggests that we must question trusted sources (e.g., journalists, nutritionists, and scientists) as Pollan (2009) argued “Not only does nutritionism favor ever more novel kinds of highly processed foods (which are by far the most profitable kind to make), it actually enlists the medical establishment and the government in the production of those products” (p. 52). Nutritionism is the ideology that the key to understanding food is the nutrient, which, because it is invisible, mandates the involvement of science to inform consumers of nutritious food options (Pollan, 2007). As an example, Pollan noted that the “FDA recently signed off on a new health claim for Frito-Lay chips on the grounds that eating chips fried in polyunsaturated fats can help you reduce your consumption of saturated fats, thereby conferring blessings on your cardiovascular system” (pp. 52-53). In short, foodies like those I have referenced at length in this section assert, quite rightly, that American’s mindless adherence to dietary guidelines have significantly contributed to the deterioration of real food diets, with substantial ramifications for our health.
Dougherty (2011) offered a slightly alternative perspective to the views expressed by popular authors such as Pollan and Nestle. Dougherty recognized that the U.S. relies on a few large corporations which control our food, and urges consumers to be suspicious of corporation-driven food innovations. However, she advocates for a more holistic view of the use of production and technology, to illustrate, for instance the merit of using pesticides on crops. Dougherty, a small sheep farmer and academic, argued that without the aid of pesticides, many small farmers would lose the majority of their harvest to insects. Pushing for a locovore mentality, she explained the need to consume food produced by small local farmers. But small local farmers are constrained by watchdog organizations that function to survey cottage food industries that produce artisan products (e.g., bread made in your own kitchen). Small farmers cannot afford to rent space in a commercial kitchen, but are not allowed to sell products made in their own homes. Dougherty proposes a license small farmers can apply for that allows them to turn their kitchens into commercial cottage kitchens for one day (or a few days) a week, with the assumption that kitchens meet cleanliness requirements (as determined through inspection). She suggests that we must treat consumers like grown-ups, meaning they must be given enough (unbiased) information to make an educated decision (e.g., consumption of raw milk).

Farming practices have significantly changed how our food is brought to the table. Though the number of farms has steadily decreased since 1960 (from about 3.2 million to 1.9 million), the average size has increased by 40% and their productivity by 82% (Dougherty, 2011). This is partly because most farms today raise single commodity
animals/crops such as cattle, chickens, pigs, corn, wheat, or soybeans. Chickens, for example, used to be raised in small flocks by many farmers, but today most are “factory-farmed” in massive numbers under contract to a few companies (e.g., Tyson). Mass production of chickens can be attributed to sudden increased demand for chicken breasts (because they are presumed to be a superior meat for human health) bombarding the food system (Dixon, 2002). A number of critics have drawn our attention to the industrialization of animal food production, calling particular consideration to mass produced chicken. These highly managed factory farms are officially termed concentrated animal feeding operations (CAFOs) (Kingsolver, 2007). Animals are chosen for rapid growth, ability to withstand confinement (some literally don’t have room to turn around), and resistance to the pathogens that grow in these conditions (as a result of immediate contact with fecal matter) (Dougherty, 2011; Kingsolver, 2007). According to Kingsolver (2007), a six-foot-by-eight-foot room can house 1,152 chickens (see also documentary Food Inc. produced by Kenner & Schlosser, 2009). In disgust with factory farming Berry (2002) likened such conditions to concentration camps as he stated “the designers of animal factories appear to have had in mind the example of concentration camps or prisons, the aim of which is to house and feed the greatest number in the smallest space at the lease expense of money, labor, and attention” (p. 11). Opponents of factory farming cite issues like inhumane treatment to animals, pollution, and human health (see Berry; Dougherty; Kingsolver). Focusing on the latter point for just a moment, confined animals experience significant physical stress, and are frequently given antibiotics in their feed to ward of disease. Even with the aid of antibiotics, a 1998 press
release from the Consumers Union reported that over 70% of supermarket chickens harbored campylobacter and/or salmonella bacteria (Silver, 1998).

The factory farming of animals clearly offers a number of ethical and health implications. As consciousness over factory farming is raised, more and more people are turning to plant-based diets (Pollan, 2001). Yet, prevalent use of genetically modified organisms (GMOs), by companies like Monsanto, is posing a new set of obstacles and concerns over crops. Genetically modified seeds are appealing to farmers because the seeds are engineered to withstand normally fatal effects of herbicide (i.e., Roundup) (Dougherty, 2011; Kenner & Schlosser, 2009). Scant research has been done to ensure the safety of genetically modified foods, but animal testing revealed increased death rates among GM-fed chickens and increased production of new allergens in GM foods (Smith, 2003). Part of the problem is that regulations only recently (July, 2011) required genetically modified foods to be sold with labels to identify them as GMOs, indicating the lax regulations guiding United States food requirements (Starkman, 2011). GM foods are a regular part of the United States diet. For example, approximately 80% of soy and 38% of the corn planted in the United States in 2003 was genetically engineered, and derivatives of these two crops are found in about 70% of processed foods (Smith, 2003).

In addition to issues with GMOs, mass produced crops necessitate cheap labor, often in the form of migrant workers, who work in horrific conditions for little pay (and usually no health benefits). Vegetables cost more to produce than meat, are labor intensive, susceptible to insects, require frequent weeding, and many need to be picked by hand; Dougherty (2011), concerned with social class, quite accurately pointed out that
when physical labor becomes involved, this work becomes classed. Referencing Marvin (1994), Dougherty describes how body work (physical labor) is associated with lower social class, compared to text work, which is linked to literacy, which is associated with higher class. Migrant workers (like farmers) are routinely associated with lower class. The United States, despite its dependency on the contributions of migrant workers in food production, has legalized the process of brutalizing migrant workers in their attempt to cross the border. In reference to migrant workers, Dougherty (2011) argued: “They are the primary means through which we harvest vegetables. Yet laws and the force of public opinion make it dangerous for these workers to come in and do their important work. We should celebrate their arrival every year with a festival and gifts. Instead we look upon their arrival with suspicion” (p. 176). As a poignant example, consider the Tommy Lee Jones (2005) film, The Three Burials of Melquides Estrada, which depicts the brutality (legal and accepted) of the United States Border Patrol on Mexicans attempting to cross the border. Notably, at one point in the film after a group of Mexicans had evaded the border patrol, a patrol officer stated: “somebody has to pick the strawberries.” This offhanded statement depicts dominant perceptions of migrant workers as useful only for menial tasks (e.g., strawberry picking), who run serious risks just for working in the United States (e.g., being deported, brutality, imprisonment).

The preceding paragraphs explain the realities and dangers of factory farming and mass produced crops. However, farm size does not necessarily equate to better treatment of animals or the safeguarding of human health. Dougherty (2011), for example, warns readers against confusing the size of the farm with the integrity and quality of the farmer.
In her book, *The Reluctant Farmer: An Exploration of Social Class & The Production of Food*, Dougherty shares the story of a friend who visited a small peach farm and ate a ripe peach off the ground, realizing shortly thereafter that there were dead birds all over the ground. The friend immediately began having seizures. Apparently the small farmer had grown frustrated with the loss of peaches to parasites and sprayed massive amounts of an unknown chemical all over the ground – a chemical that clearly had a major impact on the surrounding ecosystem, so much so, that it was killing small animals in the area. Fortunately, the friend survived the experience without long term health consequences, but the point is that all farmers need to be responsible caretakers.

Wood (1994) has argued that caretaking behaviors have been systematically undervalued in the home and service professions (e.g., nurses, social workers). I argue that disregard for caretaking can be extended to small farms as well. Dougherty pointed out that the U.S. privileges large scale row crops over small family farms and suggested that we need a system in place to allow small farmers to thrive (i.e., help more people own small farms and make those farms more profitable). As a case in point: small farmers have reported struggling to get loans from the Farm Services Agency (FSA). Dougherty’s proposed solution would be to have a separate entity of this organization especially for small farms to help prevent encroachment from large corporations (e.g., Wal-Mart) and fund small project loans and educational tools for new farmers. While small farming makes an invaluable contribution to the food system and proves an essential skill to taking ownership of your food security, current food systems and practices have diminished the likelihood of survival for small farmers.
In short, the individual consumer’s food choices are challenged by a number of issues in terms of dietary guidelines, nutrition labels, and even the advice coming from trusted sources such as medical professionals. The next section highlights the health implications of our consumptive behaviors.

**Health Concerns**

“Health experts suggest conservatively that the combination of poor diet, sedentary lifestyle, and excessive alcohol consumption contributes to about 400,000 of the 2,000,000 or so annual deaths in the Unites States – about the same number and proportion affected by cigarette smoking” (Nestle, 2002/2007, p. 7). In 1995 “the diet-related medical costs for just six health conditions – coronary heart disease, cancer, stroke, diabetes, hypertension, and obesity – exceeded $70 billion” (Nestle, p, 7). Importantly, the chronic diseases just mentioned are associated with excessive or imbalanced intake of food and nutrients. This is good and bad news. The good news is that such diseases can arguably be improved or even reversed. Consider for example, the powerful documentary, *Forks over Knives* (2005), in which participants claim to have reversed major chronic diseases such as heart disease and diabetes by adopting a plant-based diet (Wendel, Fulkerson, Corry, & Boon, 2011). The bad news is that behavior change is hard and the lifestyle of many American’s (e.g., eating “on the go”) appears to necessitate the convenience and ease of processed foods that are slowly killing them.

Drawing on material from Public Health Reports, Nestle compares the top 10 leading causes of death in 1900 to 2000. In 1900 leading causes of death include tuberculosis (11.3), pneumonia (10.2), diarrheal diseases (8.1), heart disease (8.0), liver
disease (5.2), injuries (5.1), stroke (4.5), cancer (3.7), bronchitis (2.6), and diphtheria (2.3) (numbers based on percentage of deaths). Compared to 2000: diseases of the heart (31.4), cancer 23.3, stroke (6.9), lung disease (4.7), accidents (4.1), pneumonia and influenza (3.7), diabetes mellitus (2.7), suicide (1.3), kidney diseases (1.0), and liver disease and cirrhosis (1.0). These statistics support the claim that while public health initiatives reduced the prevalence of diseases of infection, lifestyle changes greatly increased the incidences of chronic illness. As described in the previous section, advertising, convenience, larger portions, and added nutrients in foods otherwise high in fat, sugar, and salt encourage consumers to “eat more” (and if you’re adhering to USDA guidelines, to eat more meat and dairy in particular).

Our diet in the United States even has a name (along with many negative connotations) – the “Western diet.” Populations eating a “Western diet,” “generally defined as a diet consisting of lots of processed foods and meat, lots of added fat and sugar, lots of refined grains, lots of everything except vegetables, fruits, and whole grains – invariably suffer from high rates of so-called Western diseases: obesity, type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and cancer” (Pollan & Kalman, 2011, pp. 6-8). Describing the Western diet as one of excess is quite accurate, which is alarming, when much of the world’s population is concerned with getting enough food. Advocating for a plant-based diet, Nestle (2002/2007) argued, “It is one of the great ironies of nutrition that the traditional plant-based diets consumed by the poor in many countries, some of which are among the world’s finest cuisines, are ideally suited to meeting nutritional needs as long as caloric intake is adequate” (p. 16). Indeed, recent documentaries (e.g., “Food, Inc.”)
“Forks over Knives”) have advanced strong arguments for a plant based diet as a viable means of improving health and even reversing chronic maladies such as heart disease. Arguments have been so compelling, in fact, that community initiatives are advocating for a plant based diet (e.g., Live Healthy Appalachia, CFI). One helpful tool for adopting a plant-based diet is an awareness of farming and gardening, which is elaborated on in the next section.

Farming and Gardening

In response to growing dissatisfaction with food systems and the consequent deterioration of our health, individuals and communities have begun efforts to reeducate themselves (and others) on the values of self-reliance through gardening and farming. Even our First Lady, Michelle Obama planted a vegetable garden on the White House lawn in March of 2009, garnering headlines and applause from foodies and environmentalists. A boom of interest in local food, recognition of our perilous state of health, and concern over food safety are a just a few factors contributing to escalating interest in gardening and farming (Berry, 2009; Dougherty, 2011). Hanson and Marty (2012) argued that “As the world becomes less food secure every day, growing food in unconventional places will be thought of no longer as a nicety, like a flower box of petunias slung from a brownstone’s windowsill, but as a necessity born out of the looming realization that there will be nine billion of us to feed by 2050” (p. xii). Yet, self-sufficiency in our food production offers much more than simply increasing food security. Community gardens, for instance, offer a purposeful site for togetherness and learning from others, school gardens foster experiential learning at its finest and even
spark dialogue about changing school lunches, and urban farms are increasingly sites for apprenticeship and social services (Hanson & Marty). Thus, gardening and farming have taken on new meanings and increasingly diverse locales. The following sections offer a brief synopsis of home food gardening, community gardening, and urban farming/gardening.

Home Food Gardening

In reference to our valorization of grass lawns Pollan (1991) stated “In a little more than a century, we’ve rolled a green mantle of it across the continent, with scant thought to the local conditions or expense;” he went to explain the economic incoherence of our obsession with grass: as “America has some 50,000 square miles of lawn under cultivation, on which we spend an estimated $30 billion a year” (p. 55). Pollan’s contention nearly twenty years ago still holds true, with front yard food gardens under continuous public scrutiny. Food gardens include vegetables, fruits, berries, and herbs. In Athens, Ohio city regulations have posed a number of obstacles, with front yard food gardens only being legalized in 2010. And Athens is not alone in this battle. As a case in point: In July of 2011, after a water line burst and destroyed her front yard, Julie Bass of Oak Park, Michigan built raised beds filled with vegetable plants to help feed her six children fresh, organic produce. The result of her creative landscaping? She was charged with a misdemeanor and up to 93 days in jail because the vegetable plants were not considered “suitable landscape” (Wiley, 2011). Charges were later dropped and the Bass family reported that they are saving money and having conversations with neighbors they had never met in the fifteen years they have lived in that neighborhood (Tuttle, 2011).
Though grass is generally unusable, a turfed lawn appears to be the pervading expectation.

Despite an expectation for turf, research suggests that more people are taking ownership of their food security by planting a home vegetable garden. Burpee & Co., one of the country’s largest seeds suppliers, reported a 40 percent increase in sales from 2007-2008 (Todd, 2011). According to the National Gardening Association, in 2008, 31 percent (36 million households) of all United States households participated in food gardening, and that was expected to increase to 50 percent in 2009 (“Garden Market Research,” 2008). According to this same report, participants stated the main reasons for growing their own food as better-tasting (58%), save money on food bills (54%), better quality food (51%), and to grow food they know is safe (48%). Moreover, 34% of households said that the current recession is motivating them very much (14%) or a fair amount (20%). The link between economic hardship and gardening is evident across our history as well. Consider, for example, the surge of Victory Gardens under the encouragement of Eleanor Roosevelt during World War II (Nestle, 2002/2007).

Gardening offers an undoubted economic advantage: the average food garden will yield approximately $500 return when considering a typical gardener investment and the market price of in-season produce (“Garden Market Research,” 2008).

In addition to the economic benefits of gardening, growing your own food has been argued to be a responsible practice of ecological politics (Pollan, 2006). That is, gardening is an environmentally friendly way to source food. Others have suggested that gardening (and hunting) resonate with a work of art: “the garden plot is a canvas, a
palimpsest that is constantly reinscribed” (Brummett, 2011, p. 262). Feeding family and friends from your own garden evokes a sense of pride and instills a mindset that coming together around food is an act to be valued (which we will further explored in Chapter Four) (see Kingsolver, 2007). Consistent with Kingsolver’s emphasis on food and family, Mogel (2001), relying on Jewish teachings, urges families to treat meals as sacred; she stated “with the destruction of the ancient Holy Temple, each family’s dining table serves to replace the original holy altar: the table belongs to us and to God” (p. 160). Gardening fosters a connection to food which, as I will describe in Chapter Four, encourages individuals to have a closer relationship to the earth, their meals, and recognition of the inherent connections between food, lifestyle, and health. Undeniably the act of working in the soil, planting, and harvesting your own food stands in stark contrast to the mechanization of supermarket shopping (see also Brummett, 2011).

In short, home food gardens have seen a drastic increase in the last few years. This surge has been connected to recent economic hardship and reflects an emphasis on a newfound connection to the earth, food, and distrust of food systems. Regardless of one’s gardening philosophy (e.g., gardening as art, gardening as a safety precaution, gardening as a way to bring family together), home food gardens offer a viable and cost-efficient way to bring food to the table. The next section describes community gardens as another technique to foster food security.

Community Gardening

A community garden has been defined as: “An individual or collection of individuals growing plants and/or animals on either public or private property for their
own consumption or to donate to the needy” (Hanson & Marty, 2012, p. 6). The American Community Gardening Association (ACGA) describes community gardens quite broadly as growing flowers, vegetables, and/or community; as rural, urban, or suburban; as located in schools, hospitals, or neighborhoods; and for personal or market use. The ACGA website cites a number of benefits of community gardens including: improving the quality of life for people in the garden, providing a catalyst for neighborhood and community development, stimulating social interaction, encouraging self-reliance, beautifying neighborhoods, producing nutritious food, reducing family food budgets, conserving resources, creating opportunities for recreation, exercise, therapy, and education, reduction of crime, preservation of green space, creation of income opportunities and economic development, reduction of city heat from streets and parking lots, and provision of opportunities for intergenerational and cross-cultural connections (www.communitygarden.org).

Interest and dedication from the community, and resources from non-profit organizations and the public sector, make community gardens a worthwhile space for raising awareness of issues of food security and promoting involvement with the food system (Corrigan, 2011). As mentioned above, community gardens offer a viable strategy for obtaining healthy and affordable food. Perhaps most importantly, community gardens offer space to teach people skills at self-reliance (Winne, 2008). To ensure the sustainability of community gardens, certain conditions such as adequate space, access to soil, water, seeds, tools, and dedicated community members are required (Corrigan, 2011). The latter point suggested by Corrigan rings true in the words of Winne (2008),
who, in reflecting on his years of studying community gardens, stated “I have come to believe that community gardens can help people fill the food gap only when they are motivated and encouraged to do the hard work that forms the building blocks of the community” (p. 66). In other words, community gardens thrive when they are organized and operated by community members, rather than relying on an outside organization for all operations.

Community gardens have steadily increased in popularity, drawing in gardeners from diverse backgrounds and gardening experience. As I will describe in Chapter Five, community gardens are a powerful social activist mechanism, often requiring participants to donate produce to individuals and organizations in need, thus, fostering a communal mindset and ethic of care among independent gardeners.

*Urban Farming and Gardening*

Urban farming and gardening has taken different forms across varied communities worldwide. Hanson and Marty (2012) define an urban farm as “an intentional effort by an individual or a community to grow its capacity for self-sufficiency and well-being through the cultivation of plants and/or animals” (p. 5). Urban farming calls for a paradigm shift in the consciousness of people around the world in which good health, innovation, and productivity are an intrinsic part of our lifestyle (www.urbanfarming.org). Demanding recognition that traditional farming and gardening practices are not always most effective, Hanson and Marty stated “with a billion of the globe’s people hungry, a second billion undernourished, and another billion obese, conventional and industrial forms of agriculture have hardly earned bragging rights” (p.
Thus, urban farming offers a practical tactic for the rebuilding of economically repressed and struggling cities that are often devoid of access to fresh, healthy food, a problem that contributes directly to escalating rates of obesity and other diet-related issues (Winne, 2008).

The recession of 2008 and consequent decimation of the housing market and spike in unemployment resulted in entire communities being vacated (Hanson & Marty, 2012). Abandoned plots of land in cities opened up the opportunity for mass urban gardens. With little capital investment, unemployed citizens can turn vacant land into something productive in a short time, giving urban farms an important role in a broader effort to create a more sustainable and just food system. Gottlieb and Joshi (2010) supported the value of urban farming as they stated “food justice advocacy has come to be associated with growing food in, or in the shadow of, the city” (p. 149). Urban farming does more than tackle immediate food security. For example, children learn about fresh food, college students put scholarship into practice, parents have a safe place to purchase healthy food, and legislatures witness a vivid example of a good policy (thriving community gardens on every corner) (Hanson & Marty, 2012). Yet, others are not quite so optimistic about the flawless urban gardening model. Winne (2008), though a major proponent of gardening, points out difficulties with city officials, toxic soils, crime, vandalism, theft, and gardening inexperience as just a few of the challenges associated with urban farming. Commending the urban gardening movement sweeping Detroit, Michigan, Dougherty (2011) described the beauty in seeing whole urban blocks being reclaimed by Mother Nature: offering a “sense of peace to an otherwise busy landscape”
In the spirit of offering suggestions for the sustainability of places like Detroit, Dougherty calls for a new kind of homesteading in which people wanting land could create a business plan to describe how the land would be used, which would then be evaluated by a diverse group of people. Proposing an apprenticeship model, Dougherty suggested that urban farming and this new mode of homesteading could “promote small family farms, decrease poverty, develop a sense of community, and provide a means of sustaining the larger urban landscape” (p. 252). An apprenticeship model for making use of vacated spaces might contribute to the longevity of urban farms to help sustain individuals new to farming.

Urban farming, like the other types of food sourcing described in this section, offers space for people to come together around food. Though a proven strategy for addressing food insecurity, like other forms of gardening, urban farming presents unique challenges (e.g., learning a new trade, crime, and soil issues). Despite these obstacles, urban gardening remains at the forefront of food security initiatives, and, as sanguine community organizers like Hanson and Marty (2012) state: “wherever there is broken concrete, there is a chance for life to appear” (p. 2). With the problem of food security and the promise of home and community gardening as one potential solution, I turn now to scholarly perspectives that may be useful for understanding community food initiatives.

The last major section of this chapter outlines my theoretical sensibilities, drawing on problematic integration theory, dialectics, and pragmatism.
Theoretical Sensibilities

Problematic Integration Theory

Problematic Integration theory examines the interplay of communication and the integration of probabilistic and evaluative orientations (Babrow, 1992). Concerned with likelihood, probabilistic orientations deal with probabilities, beliefs, and expectations (Babrow, 1992, 1995). Probabilistic orientations are understood as associations between objects of thought. As such, they are formed retrospectively, contemporaneously, and prospectively (Babrow, 2001). Evaluative orientations are assessments of the world, such as the goodness or badness, rightness or wrongness of some object or occurrence (Babrow, 1992, 1995). Weaving probabilistic and evaluative orientations together, Babrow argued that, through experience, people integrate probabilistic and evaluative orientations to form understandings, emotional meanings, intentions, and lines of action. However, at times integration can be problematic. Problematic integration is the difficulty experienced when probabilistic and evaluative orientations resist comfortable synthesis in thought, feeling, or action (Babrow, 1992, 1995). Communication plays a key role in PI theory; “communication is central to the creation, maintenance, and resolution of PI, just as PI is central to pragmatic and semantic aspects of communication” (Babrow, 1992, p. 97). As such, communication is a source, medium, and resource in experiences with problematic integration (Babrow, 1995).

PI theory contends that there are four basic forms of PI: diverging probability and evaluation, uncertainty, ambivalence, and impossibility (Babrow, 2001, 2007). These four types of PI can chain or “transform” from one to the next, often relying on
communication to do so. As such, there is a fundamental interdependence among the four forms, as they are experienced across a variety of contexts and levels of experience (Babrow, 2001).

One form of PI is divergence. Diverging probability and evaluation arises when there is a discrepancy between what we believe to be so and what we want to be so. A second form of PI, ambiguity (uncertainty) exists when “one is uncertain about which among a set of probabilities might describe a given situation” (Babrow, 1992, pp. 111-112). A third type of PI, ambivalence, “arises when we are faced with mutually exclusive alternatives and when we are faced with a single object (person, prospect, experience) that evokes contradictory, mutually exclusive evaluative responses” (Babrow, 1992, p. 120). Finally, the forth form of PI Babrow (1992) identifies is impossibility, which, interestingly denotes certainty, as it implies something “certainly cannot be” (p. 120).

Integration is made more or less difficult based on a number of issues including the configuration of probability and value, and the importance of a concern to one’s system of beliefs and values (Babrow, 1995). Moreover, “the greater the value at stake or the more basic the belief, the more likely it is that the PI will be manifested in expressive and instrumental communication” (Babrow, 1995, pp. 287-288). More generally, PI affects and is affected by both intimate social interaction and broad public discourse. Focusing on the latter, Babrow discussed PI when the problem is communal (e.g. natural disaster, community problem). People may cope with community PI by coming together to form alliances. For instance, Babrow (1992) discussed how communities sometimes respond with a theology of hope in the face of crisis.
In sum, PI theory proposes that individuals form probabilistic and evaluative orientations towards the world, which must be integrated. This integration can be problematic, and when our expectations and evaluations are not in sync, problems arise. Such problems take the form of divergence, ambiguity, ambivalence, and impossibility. PI theory offers a potentially useful framework for studying the CFI, and food insecurity more generally, because it provides a language to question the sorts of PI that are likely to characterize food insecurity. Drawing on PI theory, I asked the following research questions:

RQ1: How are uncertainties, diverging expectations and desires and other forms of PI associated with food insecurity understood among CFI participants? How do participants characterize their efforts to cope with these challenging beliefs and desires?

A Dialectical Perspective

Dialectical thinking originated with the ancient Greeks. Plato believed that two of the major modes of human inquiry were in dialectic and rhetoric (Bizzell & Herzberg, 2001). Dialectic was understood as rigorous argumentative dialogue that could be used to test absolute/certain truth. A dialectical perspective is based on dialogue in which opposing views are rigorously interrogated. Over the years since its earliest meanings among the ancient Greeks, dialectical thinking has taken a variety of different forms. In contemporary communication studies, dialectical theory has taken the form of analyses of the tensions inherent within interpersonal relationships (Rawlins, 1989; Baxter & Braithwaite, 2008).
Focusing on the context of friendship in particular, Rawlins (1989) characterized a dialectical perspective on relationships as concern with totality, contradiction, motion, and praxis. Totality refers to how relationships are influenced by society, while society is simultaneously influenced by relationships. As such, totality is concerned with the interrelations constituting social life. Contradictions are opposite but equally essential constitutive features of relationships. The concept of motion reflects the idea that relationships are not static, but rather, always changing; stability is never more than temporary because of the inherent tensions between dialectical opposites or contradictions. And finally, the notion of praxis can be understood as the world-shaping reflexivity of social action. That is, praxis concerns how humans are simultaneously subjects and objects of our actions, making active choices based on situational constraints.

Rawlins (2009) described a number of dialectical tensions evident in interpersonal relationships. Pertinent to the present project is his explication of individuation and participation. Rawlins stated that our identities and senses of self-derive from two dialectically interconnected sets of activities – individuation and participation. Individuation includes “activities that recognize the boundaries identifying us as a distinct entity separate from others” (p. 27). Individuation entails an individually embodied self or a social group as a distinct entity separate from others. Participation on the other hand, “involves activities incorporating us with others and identifying us as a relational entity connected with others” (Rawlins, 2009, p. 27). Participation is concerned with how we are necessarily connected to others. Taken together, individuation and
participation shape our perceptions, thought, and communication: “they are always already present simultaneously for human action and identity” (Rawlins, 2009, p. 28).

Individuation is centered on noticing differences and drawing distinctions. As such, it can be harmful, lending itself to exaggerated separation from others, individual rights, and individualism (Rawlins, 2009). Rawlins argues this is a misperception of individuation – emphasizing self’s differences to the neglect of significant similarities with others. Yet, participation, with its emphasis on connection and similarity runs a complementary or obverse risk of emphasizing the self’s similarities with others to the neglect of significant differences.

As the preceding suggests, individuation can occur in edifying or dispiriting ways. Edifying individuation is an important part of self-reference and other recognition. That is, you can distinguish yourself by recognizing how you’re different from others. Edifying individuation can achieve a positive freedom – “the freedom to embrace our responsibilities to self and others and to have a say in the events of our lives” (Berlin, 1969 as cited in Rawlins, 2009, p. 36). Individual consciousness allows us to create possibilities for ourselves and others. Yet, pursuing our independence can also be self-serving, resulting in dispiriting individuation (Rawlins, 2009). This sense of autonomy can be seen as a negative freedom – “we do whatever we deem correct in the absence of perceived restraints from others” (Berlin, 1969 as cited in Rawlins, 2009, p. 37). Dispiriting individuation refuses to acknowledge interdependence and alienates the self from others.
In order to have meaningful individuation, participation must also coexist. Just as in its dialectical opposite, individuation, participation can either be edifying or dispiriting. Edifying participation “requires enacting similarities that make a worthwhile difference in connecting with others” (Rawlins, 2009, p. 39). It transcends particularities in the human condition and acknowledges shared vulnerability. Edifying participation notes difference only when it makes a difference. Yet, participation can also be misguided. Dispiriting participation is premised upon “similarity that effaces meaningful variation in human beings” (Rawlins, 2009, p. 42). It is an indifference to others’ uniqueness and can sometimes result in mindless conformism. Rawlins cautions that we must “be continually vigilant about solidarity becoming insularity” (p. 43).

The foundational work of Rawlins is central to the present proposal particularly because of his focus on individuation and participation. Other scholars have taken up Rawlins work to inform the study relational dialectics. For example, Baxter and Braithwaite (2008), in discussing Relational Dialectics Theory (RDT), described it as “a theory of the meaning-making between relationship parties that emerges from the interplay of competing discourses” (p. 349). Discourses are conceptualized as systems of meaning that are uttered whenever we converse with others. Individuals often have multiple discourses that are not always harmonious. Rather, they tend to exist in competition and opposition to one another. RDT is concerned with such discursive tensions, positing that such tensions are not only inventible and necessary, but at the heart of meaning making (Baxter & Braithwaite, 2008).
RDT is premised on three central propositions (Baxter & Braithwaite, 2008). The first proposition states that meanings emerge from the struggle of different, often opposing discourses. This proposition is consistent with Bakhtin (1990) who believed all meaning making could be understood as dialogue. The second proposition states that the interpenetration of discourses is both synchronic and diachronic. Diachronic means occurring over time, whereas synchronic refers to one moment at a time. As such, discourses are concerned with both past and present utterances. The third proposition holds that the interpenetration of competing discourses constitutes social reality. As such, communication can be seen as a mechanism constituting the social world.

Dialectical theory is well-suited for understanding the discourse and activities of the CFI. Specifically, Rawlins offers a useful vocabulary to recognize the dialectical tensions present in the discourse surrounding the CFI. As previously mentioned, there seems to be a simultaneous push towards independence and interdependence in the messages sent by the CFI. For example, horticulture specialists’ work with people experiencing food insecurity; devotion to sustainable living is illustrative of edifying participation. Yet, CFI’s mission to promote self-reliance seems to embrace tenets of independence. Given the preceding discussion of individuation and participation, it might be useful to question how members of the CFI foster edifying individuation and edifying participation. Thus, the following research question was put forth:

RQ 2: How is the tension between individuation and participation experienced?
**Pragmatism**

Dewey’s concern with systemic study, experiential learning, student-teacher relationships, and the role of the community speaks volumes to communication pedagogy in alternative contexts. Dewey (1938/1997) has charged that an intelligent theory of education must concern itself with the causes of conflict, and then, rather than creating a theory of false oppositions to current educational practices, it must formulate a plan with deeper meaning. As such, progressive education should offer a new order leading to novel modes of practice. Dewey was deeply concerned about the operations of the traditional school, but was also discontented with attempts made by progressive schools. Comparing the two, the traditional school relies on subjects or cultural heritage for its content; the new school emphasizes the learner’s impulse (e.g., study that which is of interest to you) and current problems in society.

Traditional education views the chief role of the school as a place to transmit new knowledge, stresses rules of conduct, morality training, and conformity to rules and standards. The main purpose of traditional education is “to prepare the young for future responsibilities and for successes in life, by means of acquisition of the organized bodies of information and prepared forms of skill which comprehend the material of instruction” (Dewey, 1938/1997, p. 18). In this view, pupils are seen as docile and obedient, books are representative of the wisdom of the past, and teachers are the agents of knowledge transmission and controllers of conduct. Traditional education exemplifies much of Foucault’s concern with the ways in which systems of organization (such as schools) make “the educational space function like a learning machine, but also as a machine for
supervising, hierarchizing, rewarding” (Foucault, 1995, p. 147). As such, schools (much like prisons, hospitals, and workplaces according to Foucault) become an economy of productivity where power relations are engendered. Like Dewey, Foucault called people to question dominant power structures and challenge traditional ways of thinking, knowing, and being.

The rise of progressive schools was a product of discontent with traditional education, opposing many of the primary tenets of traditional education (Dewey, 1938/1997). For example, progressive educators value expression in and cultivation of individuality, free activity, learning through experience, learning goals that are immediately applicable for students and studying subjects students are experiencing in their lives, which necessitates a familiarity with our changing world. These seemingly abstract principles come into fruition through the skilled facilitation of teachers, who work with students on an individual basis. As Foucault (1995) clarified in his discussion of the productive force of power (i.e., not all power is negative), the role of instruction is actually quite important if the source of authority is used appropriately.

Despite attempts made to reform education, Dewey (1938/1997) believed that neither the traditional nor the progressive school were adequate. Instead, Dewey saw the significance of systematic scientific study as an important way to enlarge experience, but he believed such experience was only educative to the degree that it informs the learner’s outlook, attitude, and skill. Importantly, Dewey’s uptake of systematic scientific study meant trying things out in order to learn how they work. The key to a sound education is the continuous linkage between the past and present. Schools should be one of the most
important agencies for creating these linkages and shaping the attitudes of students to achieve a democratic society (see Jacobs, 2003).

In addition to the importance of past and present connections, Dewey (1927/1954; 1938/1997) believed a genuine community fosters member’s natural desire for sociability, and was therefore, was an integral component to experiential learning. Thus, the individual means nothing without the community. Similarly, Bruner (1960/1977) spoke of the joint attention that must exist between the learner and tutor and the honorable social relationship that allows for meaningful learning to occur. Education viewed in this way can be seen as a way of communally joining others through active participation, contribution, and mutual understanding. As such, learning is a dialogical negotiation in which the teacher and learner communicatively construct shared realities. Just as Bakhtin (1986) described an utterance as only understood and related to by the communality of the speech community, communication can be viewed as way of joining the teacher and student.

Educators play a key role in fostering community and a shared worldview among students. Yet the desired credentials among teachers have been an issue much debated. Myles Horton, founder of the Highlander Research and Education Center (formerly called the Highlander Folk School) in 1932, believed the best educators were those who had knowledge based on lived experiences, rather than outside “experts” (Horton, Kohl, & Kohl, 1998). In fact, one of the primary tenets of the Highlander pedagogy (which will be explained in detail below) is the belief that true education only happens when you bring together a circle of learners who can share their experiences and analyze problems.
to create change in society. Others have suggested that teachers play an important role in training individuals to be well-balanced citizens for democracy, arguing that intellectual development equates to better citizenry (Bruner, 1960/1977); as such, educational structures can be seen as a microcosm of the larger social fabric (Dewey, 1927/1954). Dewey (1938/1997) believed that educators must be keenly aware of the environing conditions that shape experience, and that they must also recognize in the concrete what surroundings are conducive to having experiences that lead to growth. Speaking about teachers, Dewey (1938/1997) stated “they should know how to utilize the surroundings, physical and social, that exist so as to extract from them all that they have to contribute to building up experiences that are worth while (sic)” (p. 40). Bruner (1960/1977) echoes this claim:

If teaching is done well and what we teach is worth learning, there are forces at work in our contemporary society that will provide the external prod that will get children more involved in the process of learning than they have been in the past.

(p. 73)

This involvement is also likely to foster a sense of community and citizenry in the student. Thus, rather than expecting a spectator student (as Bruner has warned against), the active teacher is keenly aware of the connections between the curriculum and the student, and works to involve students in the lecture to foster a sense of community, and social desire to learn.

Dewey’s work, though recognized as an enticing alternative to traditional education, has not been integrated with much success. The Highlander Research and
Education Center (hereafter referred to as “the Highlander”), whose primary mission has been to address current issues with justice, equality, and sustainability through leadership training, is one noteworthy exception (www.highlandercenter.org). The Highlander was monumental during the Civil Rights Movement in the 50’s and 60’s, supporting leaders like Rosa Parks and Septima Clark (Horton et al., 1998). It works by educating students in what is now considered a prime example of participatory research in which students are trained in specific tasks and then sent out to serve those in need (see also Harter, Hamel-Lambert, & Millesen, 2011). For example, ordinary citizens have been trained to help workers with black and brown lung diseases organize and demand health clinics and cleaner air mines and textile mills, and they have organized protests against pollution caused by toxic landfills and strip mines (Horton et al., 1998). Horton’s work reflects much of Dewey’s emphasis that knowledge is rooted in social experience (see Horton & Freire, 1990), and offers a poignant exemplar of how individuals can come together to create social change. The Highlander is illustrative of how Dewey’s philosophy of structured education can be carried out within an institution. My concern with this project is with what nonstructured education looks like outside of educational institutions. Thus, the following research question was posed:

RQ 3: How does the CFI educate participants about the historical practices of sustainable living in ways that give them agency in relation to their present food security status? What are the roles of the education practices of CFI in fostering self-reliance?
Summary and Research Questions

Food insecurity is a significant issue, especially in rural areas such as Southeastern Ohio, where there tend to be especially high rates of food insecurity. Lack of adequate nutrition is a severe public health concern associated with various problems such as higher rates of chronic disease, disability, and mortality (Jones et al., 2009), poor psychological and cognitive functioning, and substandard academic performance (AMA, 2010). Though a number of state and federal food assistance programs exist, individuals are increasingly turning to alternative means to meet basic needs. As I have described in this chapter, dissatisfaction with food systems has propelled gardening in many forms (e.g., home, community, urban). While individuals are increasingly taking such independent measures, community organizers have been at the forefront leading initiatives to combat food security. One organization seeking to alleviate food insecurity is a local non-profit, the Community Food Initiatives (CFI). Given the innovative mission and activities of the CFI, they offer a fertile context to examine how individuals come together to foster self-reliance and improve food insecurity in an Appalachian county.

To recap the questions raised in the foregoing discussion: Babrow’s PI theory suggests that we question the sorts of PI that are likely to characterize food insecurity. As such, I asked how uncertainties, diverging expectations and desires and other forms of PI associated with food insecurity understood among CFI participants. How do participants characterize their efforts to cope with these challenging beliefs and desires? Rawlins’ work in dialectics offers a useful vocabulary to understand the dialectical tensions present in the discourse surrounding the CFI. Given the preceding discussion of individuation
and participation, I crafted a research question concerning how members of the CFI foster edifying individuation and edifying participation. How is the tension between individuation and participation experienced? Lastly, the work of Dewey and others suggests that I ask: what are the roles of the education practices of CFI in fostering self-reliance?

To investigate these research questions, I adopted an interpretive research design in which I triangulated methods of observations, interviews, and discourse analysis. These approaches to inquiry were used as tools to explore the innovative ways that CFI is addressing food insecurity. The next chapter explains my research design.
CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODS AND DESIGN

This chapter articulates the research design I employed to study how CFI organizes to address food insecurity in Southeastern Ohio. I begin by explaining the cohesiveness between my theoretical frameworks and commitments as a researcher, and how these fit with interpretive forms of inquiry. Then, I describe the research setting and approach to data collection, drawing on participant-observations, in-depth interviews, and discourse analysis, followed by a discussion of my approach to data analysis. I conclude by articulating how I conceptualize the rigor of my research.

Interpretive Forms of Inquiry

Foucault (1980) argued that the role of the intellectual is to use the tools that enable them to disrupt the status quo and challenge the conventional. This dissertation challenges the conventional by highlighting one organization, the CFI, which exists as a counter-discourse against mainstream notions of poverty (and therefore food insecurity) as dependency. Instead, CFI mobilizes community members and resources to inspire social change – shifting eating practices, lifestyles, and institutional policies. Examining local grassroots organizations such as the CFI supports recent calls to engage with the communities in which we live and gives “credence to alternative realities around which to organize” (Harter, Quinlan, & Norander, 2007, p. 107).

The research questions grounding this dissertation suggest an open ended research design. In agreement with Patton (1990), who advocated for researchers to reject “methodological orthodoxy in favor of methodological appropriateness” (p. 39), I have chosen an interpretive design that I believe appropriately addresses the research
questions. Importantly, the theoretical frameworks guiding this study provide a fitting framework for interpretive research. PI theory, though rooted in post-positivist theory and research, has been applied to a number of qualitative projects (Babrow, 1995; Gill & Babrow, 2007; Russell & Babrow, 2011), and been theoretically developed in a decidedly interpretive stance (Babrow, 2001, 2007; Babrow & Matthias, 2009). Dialectic theory has been developed out of the interpretive tradition, and the philosophies of experiential education fit with an interpretive framework as well. My dissertation project uses these theories to explore the shifting and dynamic nature of social processes, and therefore has been developed in an interpretive frame. I use PI theory, dialectics, and pragmatism as sources of sensitizing concepts (Miles & Huberman, 1994) to illuminate communicative practices in the CFI. Thus, the goal is not to test aforementioned theories, but rather, to use their concepts to illuminate the data I gathered, while at the same time, using the data to illuminate the concepts of the theories (see Gill & Babrow, 2007). The theories and data were used as mutually informing sources of understanding of the activities of the CFI.

The epistemological commitments of the researcher inherently impact the research process and presentation of the findings. As an interpretive scholar I am particularly committed to openness in discovery (similar to grounded theory), practical theory, and appreciative inquiry. I address each of these commitments in the following paragraphs.

First, though I believe the theoretical framework and research questions are fitting in the context of the CFI, I embrace what Lindlof and Taylor (2002) have called a “blend
of strategy and unexpected discovery” that is characteristic of qualitative research (p. 210). To offer a specific example, the original proposal included Bandura’s (2001, 2004) agentic theory as a potential sensitizing concept, but as I have begun to “write up” results I have decided agentic theory is not central to my interpretations of the results.

Participant’s descriptions of agency, for instance, can be supported through Rawlins’ (2009) explication of edifying individuation. Though Bandura’s research is fitting in this project, it was not a crucial theoretical frame, so it has been omitted from the final dissertation. In the spirit of openness to shifting theoretical frames, as I immersed myself in the data collection, analysis, and write-up, I found the theoretical frameworks of this project to be less obviously self-evident. As I note in Chapter Five, future directions of this research will probe the analysis further with the aid of the theories described in Chapter Two. As is, this dissertation offers valuable descriptions of my interpretations, with less of a focus on critique and theoretical analysis.

Second, as a researcher, I embrace the philosophies of practical theory. Practical theorists are participant researchers, so they are engaged in the research itself with a commitment to positively contribute to the organization’s cause (Pearce & Pearce, 2001). The tenets of practical theory enable the researcher to ask two important questions: “what’s going on here?” and “what should I do now?” (Pearce & Pearce, p. 106). These two questions have guided my research activities with CFI. To address the first question, I spent considerable time in the field, recorded meticulous fieldnotes, and participated in extensive in-depth interviews. Full emersion in the field (often quite literally) facilitated a thorough understanding of CFI. To address the latter of Pearce and Pearce’s questions, I
contributed to CFI through volunteer work, participated in garden work days, and offered consultation with the Board of Directors and new Executive Director (as will be detailed in Chapter Five). The response aspect of practical theorists (i.e., what should I do about my findings) highlights their fundamental concern with applied research (Boyer, 1990), which, as communication scholars, we are particularly well suited to address. In asserting the uniqueness of the communication discipline to contribute to praxis, Craig (1989) contended that what makes the communication field especially distinct is “the intimate tie that exists between the discipline’s work and practical communicative activities” (p. 97). As I will describe in the next chapter and especially in Chapter Five, my dissertation research has helped to advance a number of practical implications for the communication discipline, CFI, and other small grassroots organizations.

Finally, my research sensibilities are shaped by beliefs in appreciative inquiry (Ludema, Cooperrider, & Barrett, 2001). Ludema et al. (2001) described appreciative inquiry as:

Premised on the belief that it is much faster and more straightforward to go through the front door of enthusiasm. Going through the back door to study low morale on the way to a future of enthusiasm is an unnecessary detour that simply makes no sense. p. 191

I began studying CFI’s programming because I was impressed with the direct impact CFI has had on the community. Given my leanings towards appreciative inquiry, I asked participants questions like “What is the biggest impact CFI has had on the community?” and “Why were you drawn to CFI as an organization?” Yet, as I will describe in Chapter
Five, I worked hard to ensure that my zeal for CFI’s cause did not blind me to their weaknesses. For instance, as a tactic to encourage reflexivity I took detailed fieldnotes, noting behavioral observations, patterns, and also detailing my personal responses and reflections. As I temporarily move away from full immersion in the field, I struggle to fully embrace an appreciative approach in the data analysis and write-up. I have learned, for example, that CFI relies almost entirely on grant funding, making their mission self-sustainability ironic, even hypocritical, given their inherent unsustainability as an organization (because grants are unpredictable). Even so, entering the field from an appreciative perspective facilitated respect, trust, and hope, much as a dialogic orientation might (Ford & Yep, 2003).

The synergy between theoretical openness, practical theory, and appreciative inquiry is a further elaboration of the interpretivist sensibilities grounding my research. My dissertation project builds on the idea that meanings and action are socially constructed through ongoing dialogue, in which there are multiple and competing views, often in tension with one another (Gergen, 2009). As discussed earlier, the theoretical frameworks guiding this analysis are aptly suited for an interpretive study. Further, my commitments to openness in theory, practical theory, and appreciative inquiry are conducive to community based research. Daft (1983) charged that “Direct involvement in organizations and the use of human sense to interpret organization phenomena are necessary for discovering new knowledge” (p. 539). In response to Daft’s assertion of the value of immediacy with the organization under investigation, I opted for an immersion
The style of inquiry in which I fully engaged CFI as a volunteer, member, and researcher. The next section describes the research context and methodological approaches.

**Research Setting and Methodological Approaches**

As a critique of “armchair theorizing” Daft (1983) challenged organizational scholars to study organizations first hand to fully grasp and be able to articulate thick descriptions (Geertz, 1983/2000) in naturalistic settings (Cheney, 2000). The following sections detail my attempt to study CFI’s programming first hand, in order to render meaningful, rich, portrayals of my findings.

*Community Food Initiatives*

The Community Food Initiatives (CFI) is a local nonprofit organization working to increase local food security and self-reliance (www.communityfoodinitiatives.org). Originating in 1992 as a cooperative to connect farmers to families in need, CFI has become iconic among local food enthusiasts. Though a small organization, with only two paid staff and three AmeriCorps Service, CFI has had a tremendous impact on the community and was one of the first grassroots organizations to focus on food issues in the region. To foster food security and self-reliance, CFI focuses on three primary programs: Community Food and Gardening Education (CFGE, formerly Community Gardening), CFI Donation Station, and Farm to Cafeteria (F2C, formerly Edible Schoolyard program).

The Community Food and Gardening Education program has been a major focus of CFI. At present, the Community Garden Program has facilitated the development and maintenance of six gardens in two counties. The 2010 Community Garden survey
indicated impressive success. On average, each garden plot produced 123 pounds of produce, for a total of 12,669 pounds. In addition, 100% of the community gardeners indicated they now eat more fruits and vegetables (CFI newsletter, volume 13, issue 1).

The goal of the community gardens is for them to ultimately become independent organizations. Spring of 2011 marked the first garden, the Westside Community Garden, to begin operating independently from CFI (see press release, 3/26/11). The Westside Community Garden is an assortment of adjoining garden plots in the West End Park on Athens Westside. The transition to independent operation represents a three year process in which CFI has prepared the gardeners to handle garden maintenance and gardener issues independently. CFI will continue to support the gardeners by acting as a fiscal agent and advising on garden management issues. The Community Food and Gardening Education program also targets community youth. For example, Youth Entrepreneurs at Hope! (YEAH!) is a program for youth living in Hope Apartments (low-income housing) in Athens, Ohio, in which youth have an opportunity to grow and sell their own produce harvested from a garden in their apartment complex. In 2010 YEAH! increased their consumption and knowledge of fresh local food while learning business skills by marking and selling products at the Athens Farmers Market.

The second major program organized by CFI is the Donation Station. CFI staffs a Donation Station at the local Farmer’s Market in which monetary donations are used to buy produce sold at the farmers market (fresh produce is donated as well), which is then distributed to over thirty-five locations in need in the Athens community. The Donation Station serves the community by holding designated hours throughout the week for
pantries and individuals to pick up needed goods acquired from the farmers market and local farmer donations. In 2010, the donation station had supplied over 50,000 pounds of fresh produce to over 25 needy social service agencies and food pantries. The CFI Donation Station has recently partnered with Good Earth Farm to expand and increase production and food access.

The third program CFI manages is the Farm to Cafeteria program. The Farm to Cafeteria (F2C) program targets food consumption in institutions such as schools, hospitals, and prisons. In cooperation with Live Healthy Appalachia (www.livehealthyappalachia.org) and Food is Elementary, CFI works with local schools to improve health for students, teachers, and administrators. For instance, CFI collaborated with Kids on Campus to host a Summer Feeding Site Program where low-income youth have an opportunity to learn how to garden and cook with fresh produce. CFI has also begun to work with the Hocking Valley Community Residential Center (a residential center for young men who have committed nonviolent crimes) to create gardening opportunities for the men living there and the O’Bleness Memorial Hospital to improve food options.

Folded into these three overarching programs are a number of other activities such as the Seed Saving Program, in which members of CFI work to educate the public on collecting vegetable seeds, as well hosting a number of seed giveaways, composting education, and policy activity (e.g., shifting school menus while adhering to USDA guidelines). CFI also sponsors a number of workshops which are free for CFI members ($25 annual membership fee) or $5 for nonmembers (or one hour of volunteer time).
Workshops are geared to address pressing concerns and opportunities at the moment. As such, they are seasonally appropriate (e.g. planting in spring, canning in summer). For example, October workshops included “winter cover crops and composting,” “basic home sprouting,” and “wild harvesting and preparing nuts and acorns.” Spring workshops addressed issues like “Organic Gardening Basics,” “Wild Foraging for Nettles,” “Make Compost Easy,” “Making Dairy Products Naturally,” and “Running a Value-Based Sustainable Food Business.” Workshops are led by diverse volunteers ranging from permaculturists to raw food enthusiasts.

Methodological Approaches

Access and Initial Fieldwork

I began fieldwork by researching the CFI in the fall of 2010 by following their initiatives on the CFI website (www.communityfoodinitiatives.org), reading local newspaper articles about food insecurity, and joining the email listerv where I could access newsletters, announcements, and workshop information. Initial exploration provided a foundation for the history, goals, and events of CFI. After studying CFI in this manner for three months I contacted Ronda Clark, the Executive Director of CFI to set up a meeting. We met for the first time on March 24, 2011; I introduced myself, explained my research interests, and expressed a willingness to contribute to CFI as a volunteer. My fieldwork began as a volunteer at the Donation Station on March 26, 2011 (see Appendix A for researcher log), where I volunteered several times. Shortly thereafter I volunteered at the food distribution, along with an assortment of other tasks (e.g., stuffed mailers,
labeled vegetable tags). I began participating in workshops, attained a plot at the Westside Community Garden, and attended local presentations about food insecurity.

Initial engagement in the field was guided by research questions based on the theoretical frames described in the preceding Chapter. For example, I noticed CFI making efforts to enable people to take ownership of their own food security through community gardening and workshops (edifying individuation and participation). Yet, given the food insecure status of this region, I also witnessed to a number of situations that illustrated the value of nutritional food, and some of the processes that individuals might experience when this is compromised (e.g. a necessity to turn to pantries and CFI donations) (PI theory – divergence). The tenets of experiential education were prominent throughout the workshops and community gardening as leaders emphasized the merit of formal instruction in conjunction with hands-on learning. In short, preliminary research in the field supported the theoretical concepts guiding the project. In order to deepen my understanding of the workings of CFI, I crafted a research design that facilitated a fuller immersion in the field, triangulating methods including participant observation, in-depth interviews, and discourse analysis. In so doing, my research fit with Ellingson’s (2009) call for crystallization. As she described it:

Crystallization combines multiple forms of analysis and multiple genres of representation into a coherent text or series of related texts, building a rich and openly partial account of a phenomenon that problematizes its own construction, highlights researchers’ vulnerabilities and positionality, makes claims about
socially constructed meanings, and reveals the indeterminacy of knowledge claims even as it makes them. (p. 4)

The following sections will discuss each of these techniques.

**Participant-Observation**

Participant-observations accounted for a considerable portion of my data collection. This mode of data collection assumes systematic observations of social settings and interactions in naturalistic contexts (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). Ethnographic participation entails a commitment to getting close to the social setting of interest and experiences of the people involved (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995). In this way, the researcher “must be able to take up positions in the midst of key sites and scenes of other’s lives in order to observe and understand them” (Emerson et al., 1995, p. 2). Ethnographic participation has the capacity to illustrate powerful instances of participatory research in action (see for example, Harter, Hamel-Lambert, Millesen, 2011; Thorp, 2006). In this way, ethnographic observations are consistent with my commitments as a researcher to engage in research that has social justice capacities.

At present, I have logged approximately 100 hours of fieldwork, participating in meetings, working at the West Side Community Garden, volunteering at the Donation Station, and attending workshops (see Appendix A, research log for details). As previously described, CFI organizes three primary programs: Community Food and Gardening Education (CFGE, formerly Community Gardening), CFI Donation Station, and Farm to Cafeteria (F2C, formerly Edible Schoolyard program). Other initiatives organized by CFI fall within these three primary programs. To facilitate a nuanced
understanding of the various strands of CFI work, I engaged in participant observations within each of the three primary programs. To offer a few examples, one of the more significant contexts of data collection was the West Side Community Garden (WSCG). To enter this site, I began by attaining a plot and meeting with the plot coordinator (April 10, 2011) to sign the garden contract and locate a plot. Throughout the summer I frequented the WSCG at least 2-3 times a week spending anywhere from ½ hour (when it was very hot) to 3 hours. During this time I worked my plot (e.g., tilling soil, planting vegetables, weeding, watering, harvesting), worked the communal spaces (e.g., raspberry patch), and conversed with other gardeners. My role as a researcher in the WSCG necessitated varying degrees of involvement. For example, while attending workshops at the garden I “passed” as a passive observer, jotting scratch notes (see Lindlof & Taylor, 2002); other instances did not permit the use of note taking at all. During community work days for instance, complete physical involvement required that I leave my notebook aside so I could push the wheelbarrow, weed, and water. Lindlof & Taylor explained that “researchers seek to perform their roles in ways that make sense to its social actors. They notice what is going on and try to join in as responsible and contributing members” (p. 135). Taking this consideration to heart, I put my textual tools aside in favor of physical tools and fully immersed myself in the community garden culture. This posed methodological constraints, like struggling to retain and record exact quotes from participants, but I believe the value of engaging in full participation outweighed other options (e.g., passive observation). In other cases, however, my involvement was less
direct allowing me to capture rich quotations, setting details, and personal reflections (e.g., at workshops, annual CFI dinners).

In addition to programming directly under the auspices of CFI, I engaged in fieldwork concerning related organizations (e.g., Rural Action Produce Auction, farm tours, Athens Farmer’s Market). For instance, CFI is closely connected to Good Earth Farms and receives significant donations from the owners of this farm. To learn more about the connection between CFI and Good Earth Farms I contacted the owner of the farm, and he obliged me with a one-on-one walking tour of the farm. I was able to ask questions about the farm, his goals, how it impacts CFI and the community, and also learned more about his goals of self-reliance more generally. I also spent considerable time at the Athens Farmer’s Market. Part of this time was devoted to volunteering at the Donation Station, but I also frequented the market to talk with farmers and community members. These conversations were informal and unrecorded, but contributed to a holistic sense of the local food scene and CFI’s presence at the market.

During fieldwork, whenever possible, I took hand written scratch notes or head notes trying to document key phrases and themes as they emerged (Lindlof & Taylor, 2003). Scratch notes are jottings taken within the field or shortly after leaving it, and include brief notations about actions, statements, dialogue, objects, or impressions that can later be expanded upon in fieldnotes. Headnotes can be taken when scratch notes are not possible, and instead offer focused memories of specific events and impressions. Handwritten notes, drawings, charts, and contact information for potential interviewees were recorded in a small, leather bound research journal which I carried with me during
the entirety of my dissertation project. These jottings were used to draft comprehensive fieldnotes in which my observations, as well as personal and subjective responses to observations, and interpretations of social action were expanded upon (Saldaña, 2009). All fieldnotes were typed on my personal computer, totaling over 50 single-spaced pages. I wrote fieldnotes using guidelines offered by Lindlof and Taylor (2002) asking myself the following questions: who are the actors, how is the scene set up, how do initial interactions occur, how do actors claim attention, where and when do actors interact, and which events are significant? Clifford (1986) explained that ethnographers “begin, not with participant-observation or with cultural texts (suitable for interpretation), but with writing, the making of texts” (p. 2). As such, I used writing as a sensemaking process (Emerson et al., 1995), continuously crafting in-process analytic writing in which I reflected on questions and patterned regularities I noticed (Emerson; Lindlof & Taylor). Clair (2003) argued that ethnography is changing to recognize the implications of the ethnographer; as such, much of my personal reflections and connections are noted in Chapter Five (personal reflections section).

In-depth Interviews

I conducted in-depth interviews concurrent with and following fieldwork. My goal was to use the observations to guide the interviews with clarifying questions about my observations and inquiries. Interviews are an exceptional means of traveling “deeply and broadly into the subjective realities” of participants (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 170); as such, interviews are seen as meaningful rhetorical constructions of participants’ experiences. Purposive and snowball sampling were used to locate participants.
Purposive sampling involves the selection of information rich respondents for the study, with a clear emphasis on quality over quantity, and depth over breadth (Patton, 1990). Purposive sampling was important because it allowed me to target key stakeholders of CFI. For example, I directly contacted CFI staff and AmeriCorps workers, as well as workshop leaders, and community gardener organizers. As I discuss in Chapter Five, I plan to engage in future research involving local food pantries, which will also begin with purposive sampling. Snowball sampling yields a study sample based on referrals from other people involved with the project (Lindlof & Taylor). As Lindlof and Taylor described, snowball sampling is well-suited for social networks and subcultures. Snowball sampling helped me connect to gatekeepers from other organizations that work with the CFI (e.g., Good Earth Farms, Rural Action, Athens County Health Department).

In addition to purposeful and snowball sampling, many of my interviews were the result of informal conversations during fieldwork. For example, as I was hunched over weeding a patch of raspberry bushes during a community work day, natural conversation proceeded to my dissertation project, which then led to recruiting participants to interview. In this way, my position as a participant-observer was conducive to interviews.

Conducting interviews with participants was an important contribution to my fieldwork. Lindlof and Taylor (2002) described a number of purposes interviews are designed to accomplish; they offer an understanding of the social actor’s experience and perspective through stories, conceptualizations of communication, elicit language in natural settings, gather information about processes that cannot be observed effectively through other means, inquire about occurrences in the past, verify or comment on
information obtained from other sources, test hypotheses developed in the field, and achieve efficiency in data collection. In short, interviews allow researchers to gather information about things that cannot be observed effectively by other techniques. Interviews have been differentiated in terms of their depth and range of topics discussed, kind of discourse that is produced, length and number of interview sessions with each participant, and the relational quality of the interview encounter (Lindlof & Taylor).

Although I conducted interviews with a diverse group of people (e.g., CFI staff, volunteers, participants, affiliated organizations), my aim was to “generate detailed accounts rather than brief answers or general statements” (Riessman, 2008, p. 23). As such, I embraced pedagogies of narrative interviewing in which the interviewer is open to shifts in the story and question line and “following participants down their trails” (Riessman, p. 24, emphasis in original). While I was open to divergence, I entered each interview with an interview protocol (see Appendix B for interview protocols) that was followed more or less directly depending on the nature of the interviewee.

I engaged in a few different types of interviews. Specifically, individuals central to CFI’s day-to-day function were interviewed at multiple times throughout the project. For example, I met with the Executive Director, Ronda, first on March 24, 2011 to gain access to the organization. Following the initial meeting, I interviewed her formally twice (August 13, 2011; February 20, 2012), and engaged in informal interviews several times over the course of the year (e.g., at the Farmers Market, workshops, meetings). The informal conversations are considered ethnographic interviews (they are also called informant interviews), and are the most informal and spontaneous form of interview,
tending to be more conversational in nature. To illustrate the value of this style, Thorp
(2006) shared her experiences of participatory ethnography while working with children
in a school garden. She strongly advocates learning to be with stories, rather than asking
for stories. For her, “interviews were replaced with heartfelt hallway conversations
transcribed after the fact” (Thorp, p. 120). Thorp encourages researchers to just hang
around, spend time socially with participants, and scrap the formal interview – it is this
style, according to Thorp that gets at the real story. While these ethnographic style
interviews have been important, I also believe it has been imperative to have time to
engage in in-depth recorded interviews with the staff and other stakeholders.

At present, I have conducted formal interviews with 23 different participants
involved with CFI. As previously noted, some interviewees were interviewed formally
multiple times, resulting in 27 interviews total. Interviewees included 3 workshop
leaders, 2 CFI staff, 6 AmeriCorps workers, 1 volunteer, 8 community gardeners (6 from
the West Side Community Garden, 2 from the Nelsonville Community Garden), and 3
contributors (e.g., farmers, community organizers). Interviews lasted from ½ hour to over
2 hours, with an average of approximately 1 hour. During the interview I took brief notes,
jotting down memorable phrases or follow up questions. Mostly, I relied on the recorder,
so I could engage with, and be entirely present in the interview. I believe this
interpersonal closeness facilitated rich, meaningful discussion and open disclosure.
Interviews were conducted at a range of locations including cafes, office buildings,
gardens, farms, and libraries, as determined by the participant. All formal interviews were
recorded with the signed consent of the participant and stored on my personal computer
After careful consideration of my transcription options (e.g., hire the transcription out or do it myself), I decided to independently transcribe the interviews, resulting in 120 typed, single spaced pages of transcriptions. I stand by my decision to independently transcribe the interviews with the belief that by transcribing the research myself facilitated a closeness to the data, and allowed me to make my first “pass through” the data as I transcribed (I also jotted down brief notes of ongoing connections).

**Discourse Analysis**

Documents are important sources of information because they leave a paper trail of historical events and processes (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). Indeed, others have encouraged interpretive scholars to pay attention to “language and symbolism as a creative, action oriented, domain of human activity” (Cheney, 2000, p. 22). Text offers a way of assessing the impact of language and comparing it to other observations in the field. Though documents are of limited significance as standalone data, documents related to other evidence can be of monumental importance for the researcher. Documents, for example, can link talk and social action, can help the researcher reconstruct past events or ongoing processes that are not available for direct observation, and can reflect certain kinds of organizational rationality at work (e.g. social rules) (Lindlof & Taylor).

Discourse analysis is “the study of language in use” (Gee, 2011, p. 8). Approaches to discourse analysis include the content of language like the themes or issues being addressed and the grammar and function of words in use (Gee). Discourse analysis can be distinguished between descriptive and critical. Descriptive discourse
analysis describes how language works in order to understand it, while critical discourse analysis aims to not only describe, but also speak to and potentially intervene in, social issues and controversies (Gee). My position on discourse analysis favors the latter. As Gee points out, all language is political – it is biased, has an agenda, and inherently influences the reader. As such, recognizing the social issues and controversies evident in a text is a logical step and phase of analysis.

Familiarity with the texts of CFI was useful in a number of respects. For example, before meeting with the executive director I had already spent a few months studying the CFI website and following CFI events on the email listerv. This familiarity with the services of CFI made me an informed inquirer when I had my initial access meeting. I believe this benefited me because I was able to clearly articulate why I was interested in studying CFI, as well as offer my time as a volunteer for specific services (e.g. donation station, summer youth programs) and expertise as a competent writer (e.g. assist with newsletter). I studied the website, CFI brochures, newsletters, and newspaper articles to gain a historical perspective of the organization, as well as an up-to-date understanding of CFI programming and affiliations.

Data Analysis

As described earlier, the nature of interpretive work involves cyclical analysis in which the researcher is engaging in analysis while still in the field (e.g., in process reflective writing). Recognizing this, I also know that at some point it is necessary to suspend time collecting data so results can be formally “written up.” Leaving the field was harder than I anticipated. As I write this Chapter I consider that I attended a
potentially program shifting workshop (connecting pantry coordinators to local resources in response to dwindling funds from pantry suppliers) only two days ago, and have recently committed to a “pantry project” that will add considerable insight to this research. Yet, as Clifford (1986) reminds us, all knowledge claims are “inherently partial—committed and incomplete” (p. 7). As such, I recognize that the interpretations that I present in the next Chapter are my constructions at present, and while I have faith in the knowledge claims I put forth, they are partial because I have ceased observation of a living, changing reality.

My analysis was guided by tenets of grounded theory (also known as the constant comparative method) (Charmaz, 2005; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Grounded theory is characterized first by a grounding in the relationships between data and the categories created and second, an assumption that the codes and categories are likely to shift until late in the project. Grounded theory is “discovered, developed, and provisionally verified through systematic data collection and analysis of data pertaining to that phenomenon” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 23). Tenets of grounded theory have been effectively taken up by scholars focused on social justice issues because of the strengths of using grounded theory to portray their understandings of research participant’s actions and meanings, offer abstract interpretations of empirical relationships, and propose practical implications of their analyses (Charmaz, 2005). Current uptakes of grounded theory have suggested a number of modifications to the original work of Glaser and Strauss. Charmaz for example, offers a constructivist view of grounded theory in which guidelines of the theory are viewed as tools for analysis, but
her approach does not subscribe to the objectivist, positivist assumptions of the foundational work in grounded theory. A constructivist approach “emphasizes the studied phenomenon rather than the methods of studying it” (Charmaz, p. 509). As such, constructivist grounded theorists are reflexive about the empirical realities and collected discourse and acknowledge the role of the researcher in this process. A constructivist approach to grounded theory rejects the view that data is awaiting discovery, and importantly, it rejects the assumption that researchers enter the field as impartial observers without an interpretive frame of reference (Charmaz). Instead, “what the observers see and hear depends upon their prior interpretive frames, biographies, and interest as well as the research context, their relationships with research participants, concrete field experiences, and modes of generating and recording empirical materials” (Charmaz, p. 509). My orientation to grounded theory is consistent with a constructivist framework.

The constant comparative method was used to conduct a thematic analysis of the participant observations, interviews, and documents. As previously described, coding of the data begins early when the research is fresh in the researchers’ memory and continues throughout the research project. As such, it is iterative in nature, constantly moving between the data and new experiences in the field that refine initial codes. For example, as I continue my engagement with CFI, early criticisms of CFI’s lack of involvement with food pantries are expounded upon because new collaborations have fostered a more immediate relationship between pantries and area resources. My reluctance to leave the
field has facilitated richness in the results I share because the themes have been refined, deepened, and challenged over the past year of research.

Initial stages of coding generally involve two different kinds of codes – open codes and *in vivo* codes. Open coding is the initial, unrestricted coding in which the meanings of words, phrases, sentences and later dialogical units are coded (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). As previously mentioned, I began note taking (using the “track changes” function on Microsoft Word) as I transcribed the interviews. After the transcription was complete, I read through the transcripts in their entirety, then reread the transcripts marking notations of initial themes (and adding to initial comments recorded during the transcription process). *In vivo* codes are the words or phrases used by the social actors themselves. In order to privilege the participant’s voice, I used direct quotes to exemplify each theme (as will be evident in the next Chapter). Other efforts to keep the participants at the forefront of this research include offering rich and extensive interview quotes to support the conclusions I have drawn. After initial coding was completed, axial codes were created to integrate open and *in vivo* codes to produce deeper meanings and connections among codes (Lindlof & Taylor). Reading through the transcripts again, I noted axial codes where I began to see clusters of codes that fit together in general thought or idea. For example, a number of participants noted the value of doing work “that means something;” similarly, participants also made note of the importance of hard, physical work. These different ideals fit together as an axial theme suggesting an ethical reevaluation of work (construed as a job and physical labor).
Knowing when to leave the field presents significant challenges for the interpretive researcher. As I described in the above paragraphs, I have taken an immersion style of inquiry in this research project becoming an active member and volunteer with the CFI. Continued membership and involvement with CFI means that I have not technically “left the field” as some researchers might. However, time constraints necessitate that I focus on writing, and thus, move away from data collection in order to finish my dissertation. I have great faith in the knowledge claims I advance in this project and believe I have adequate information to base my claims, which is supported through Lindlof and Taylor’s (2002) three tests of information sufficiency: taken-for-grantedness, theoretical saturation, and heightened confidence.

Taken-for-grantedness means that the researcher is no longer surprised by participants or the routines of the scene. Echoing this sentiment, Dougherty (2011) commented that “As a person becomes part of a culture, those events that initially seemed extraordinary become ordinary” (p. 23). Taken-for-grantedness resonates with my experiences because I have become accustomed to the day-to-day happenings of CFI. I am familiar with CFI’s programming, staff, as well as future directions for the organization. In fact, I have been asked by the Board of Directors to act as a research consultant as they shift CFI programming under a new Director. In some ways, I feel the burnout discussed by CFI participants to describe how endless programming, modifications to programming, and ceaseless funding constraints overwork the few dedicated staff and volunteers. Second, theoretical saturation describes the trend of newly gathered data ceasing to offer novel categories of explanations. I have been in the field
collecting data for almost exactly one year. From the very first meeting with the Director to gain access, until just a couple days ago at a workshop, I have been taking careful fieldnotes documenting instances, and articulating patterned regularities. While CFI programming has shifted over the course of the year, the themes have been stable over the past few months, strengthening my confidence in the results I present. Recent conversations with members of the Board of Directors regarding my findings bolster my sureness of the results. Indeed, follow-up interviews with a few key participants offered invaluable support for the results, and functioned as an important mechanism of member checking (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). Third, heightened confidence describes the tendency for consistency in observations of the world being studied, and satisfaction in questions or propositions. I recently interviewed for the Executive Director position with CFI. Though I was not offered the position, the interview process offered an invaluable space for sharing key findings and raising lingering questions. The interview quickly morphed into a lively discussion of CFI’s strengths and weaknesses, as well as potential avenues for program omission and development. The interview was a platform for me to verbalize, with confidence, what I have learned over the past year. In some ways, it facilitated a sense of closure to my involvement with CFI. The bulk of my research was completed, I had working drafts of results and implications, and was able to share those findings and offer advice to a receptive audience (the Board of Directors). Given my commitments as an applied, practical theorist, the value of the interview cannot be understated – it was a prime avenue for sharing academic research with a community audience with the goal of impacting an organization for the better.
Conceptualizing Rigor

I humbly acknowledge that all research is inherently situated, partial, contingent, and subject to revision (Cheney, 2000; Clifford, 1986). The incompleteness of research, however, does not equate to poor quality. As a researcher I harness a number of criteria to maintain high standards of rigorous research. This section speaks to the standards of rigor I relied on through my dissertation project, specifically by drawing on Charmaz’s (2005) criteria for grounded theory studies in social justice inquiry: credibility, originality, resonance, and usefulness.

First, credible grounded theory research stresses that the researcher achieve an intimate familiarity with the setting, including diversity across observations and data collection, and importantly, demands that the researcher present enough compelling evidence that the reader can form an independent assessment (Charmaz, 2005). To establish my credibility in this project I spent as much time as possible observing and participating in a variety of CFI’s programming. For instance, I volunteered at the Donation Station (and I also frequented the Donation Station nearly every Saturday during the Farmer’s Market over the course of a year), observed and worked at the community gardens, and participated in a summer camp for low-income youth. Each of these programs originates from a different strand of CFI’s programming. While I tried to achieve breadth in my observations and interviews, depth across all aspects of CFI’s work was a challenge due to time constraints. Consequently, I spent significantly more time working the community garden and education aspect including community gardening and workshops, and considerably less time observing how the CFI has
collaborated with other organizations to infiltrate institutions like the schools, hospitals, and prisons (which is a future direction of research to be discussed in Chapter Five). Despite inevitable time imbalances among programming, I immersed myself as completely as possibility in CFI programming, contributing to my credibility.

Second, Charmaz (2005) described originality in terms of the freshness of the categories, new insights, social and theoretical significance, and extension of current ideas and practices. Originality demands creativity and stretching yourself as a researcher to consider the theoretical and practical implications of the research. I engaged in a number of processes to ensure originality in my project. Familiarity with existing literature in food and gardening research and communication was a first step in questioning the uniqueness of my project. Aside from a couple of recent works merging food and communication discourse (e.g., Cramer, Greene, & Walters, 2011; Dougherty, 2011) there has been scant communication scholarship exploring food issues. Thus, theoretically speaking, my research has much to offer the communication discipline unifying concentrations like social justice, health, risk, ethics, community, and pedagogy.

Third, rigorous grounded theory research much achieve resonance. Resonance challenges the researcher to ensure that the categories fully portray the studied experience, reveal deep meanings, and make connections between the data and the larger collective (e.g., society, community) (Charmaz, 2005). In my efforts to achieve resonance Chapter Four presents the themes topically ordered, but with a cause and effect relationship in mind, with the goal of portraying the research experience in its entirety so that the reader might interpret deeper implications of the research. For example, Chapter
Four begins with a discussion of the systemic and regulatory factors driving CFI’s work, followed by an analysis of the programming CFI spearheads to address these factors. Next, I probe the discourse for support of CFI’s insistence in the merit of having a connection with your food, closing with ethical implications of CFI’s work. My goal is that the narrative I craft in the next chapter resonates with the reader in such a way that the meanings are felt, and larger connections are apparent. That is, my hope is that the reader senses *moveability* of local knowledge systems – knowledge that travels and enables possibilities beyond those of its initial production (Harding, 1998).

Fourth, Charmaz (2005) argued that social justice research must use grounded theory in useful ways. The usefulness of the research is evaluated by asking questions like: can people use the interpretations in their everyday lives? Do the categories speak to generic processes? Does the analysis spark further research in substantive areas? And does the research contribute to a better society? Recent food movements (e.g., slow food movement, local food movement, and organic food movement) offer compelling evidence for a strong public interest in food. Given the economically depressed and consequently food insecure status of southeastern Ohio, studying how food issues affect the community is of outmost social concern. As I will argue in Chapter Five, the knowledge claims I put forth are garnered from my investigation of CFI programming, but are applicable to similar grassroots movements and health initiatives more generally as well. Practitioners and scholars alike are often concerned with how to bring about sustained behavior change, especially with regard to health promotions and campaigns. The themes I describe in the next Chapter illustrate CFI’s strategies to facilitate behavior
change, highlighting successful, as well as ineffective tactics. The research I have done is also useful to CFI as an organization undergoing change under the management of a new Executive Director. I am mindful of Ellingson’s (2009) critique of her own overuse of communication jargon as she reflected: “I wondered what good my argument would do if the only people who could make sense of and apply it were those in my narrow scholarly community” (p. 148). In an effort to speak to a community beyond the academy, I have offered preliminary consultation with the Board of Directors regarding my findings, specifically what programs are thriving while others are struggling, and plan to share written results as well. Consultation with the Board of Directors and new Executive Director speaks to the usefulness of the project and captures my commitments as a practical researcher.

This chapter described the research design I employed to study the organizing tactics employed by CFI to promote self-reliance and improved access to food in Southeastern Ohio. The interpretive approach I utilized in this project fit well with the theoretical frame, context, and my commitments as a researcher. Keeping standards of rigor in mind, I articulate the results of my analysis in the next chapter.
CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

Nearly 30 years ago, Daft (1983) suggested that research was storytelling. He contended, “The scientific method is more like guess work, the making up and revising of stories; Storytelling means explaining what the data mean, using data to describe how organizations work” (p. 541). Similarly, Van Maanen (1988) used the term “tales” in reference to the “story-like character of fieldwork accounts, as well as to the inevitable choices made by an author” (p. 8). I interpret the value of storytelling as encouragement to include participants’ narratives (though sometimes long or unclear in the transcription compared to when they were orated) as rich descriptors of the themes I articulate in the following sections. Employing PI theory, dialectics, and pragmatism as sensitizing concepts (Miles & Huberman, 1994), I explore communicative practices inherent in the following four overarching themes: (a) “We’re in a fight for our lives”: Systemic and regulatory issues with current food system; (b) “A person growing their own garden is a threat”: CFI programs fight dominant food systems; (c) “Down in the dirt”: Establishing a relationship with your food; and (d) “Find a connection and give”: Demanding ethical revaluation.

Themes discussed in this Chapter are supported by data gathered in fieldwork consisting of in-depth interviews, participant observations, and discourse analysis. The constant comparative method was used to find patterned regularities in the data (e.g., interview transcripts, fieldnotes, and organizational documents). Specifically, I engaged in an iterative process in which I meticulously combed through the data taking notes, developing themes, rereading the data, and building on themes, until I developed a
coherent representation of my observations. Pseudonyms are used to protect the identity of participants.

“We’re in a Fight for our Lives”: Systemic and Regulatory Issues with Current Food System

CFI, despite being a small grassroots organization, is well-known, and a vibrant resource in the community. Participants consistently indicated a strong locovore mentality, and disgust with our current food system. Surely one of the most important ways CFI works against mainstream politics of food is by establishing a presence in the community. For example, in an effort to make the organization’s mission known, the executive director meets with students, the media, writes press releases, and interviews with local media. For instance, in an interview Rebecca (CFI staff) said:

Yeah, it's just advertising. A way to get out there and advertise what we're doing… any student who wants to get in dissertations and get into presentations, because that's our future; our dieticians or whatever. Those are the people that are going to be taking care of us in the next 40 years.

The presence of organizations such as CFI is paramount given the general poor health status of people living in the United States. Major health problems in the United States include unbalanced metabolism, overweight, increased likelihood of chronic diseases (e.g., coronary heart disease, certain cancers, diabetes, hypertension, stroke), all of which happen to be diet related diseases (Nestle, 2002/2007). Nestle explained: “The principal nutritional problems among Americans shifted to those of overnutrition – eating too much food or too much of certain kinds of food” (Nestle, p. 3, emphasis original). One
does not need to search hard to observe the food excess associated with United States culture. Drive down the main street in your town and be bombarded with fast food signs, flip through a magazine and take in the food advertisements, or turn on the television to see the media blitz surrounding food consumption. Overnutrition is an issue impacting Americans across socioeconomic status (to be discussed more in the sections that follow).

Perry, founder of Family Farms, a significant contributor to CFI’s Donation Station, discussed the widespread poor health status of Americans as he stated:

Nobody eats healthy. It doesn't matter if they're poor or if they've got money. All the food that the vast majority of the food that ends up in the food pantry is just the same garbage that everybody else eats, just the worst of the garbage that everybody else eats. The stuff that the garbage that nobody else wants. And so, when you see a situation with 1 in 3 children will have early onset diabetes by 2015, that's staggering. That's a situation where we have got a massive problem in our food system. And the number is worse when you look at low income people, it's worse in minorities, it's more like 1 in 2. So, the issue is that we have a massive food problem on top of what happens to the people that have abilities and resources.

The above quotations from Rebecca and Perry speak to a keen awareness of our nation’s health crisis. Given escalating incidences of acute and chronic disease, organizations such as CFI have established a presence in the Athens community as a resource for individuals experiencing food insecurity, and as I will discuss later, CFI is an equally valuable resource for individuals who simply desire a closer connection to their food. This section
elaborates on the ways in which CFI has established their presence as an organization that works against mainstream politics of food, naming culprits such as the media and schools as the cause of our current deteriorating health. To support the overarching theme, “We’re in a fight for our lives”: Systemic and regulatory issues with current food system, I offer the following subthemes: Growing dissatisfaction in food systems; Political barriers to food security; and Media’s influence on food perception.

Growing Dissatisfaction in Food Systems

A number of participants noted significant dissatisfaction in current food systems and standards. Calling food “edible entertainment,” participants pointed to a few specific culprits shaping their view of food, namely, the media and politics. Blaming the media and politics for our current detachment from food systems, discourse from CFI participants suggests that people must learn the value of good food as a way to contribute to a thriving food economy by raising our awareness of what we eat, how we get it, and why it’s important. Throughout my interviews with and observations of CFI participants, individuals expressed their concern regarding our current food system. For instance, consider Jamie, CFI Summer AmeriCorps worker at a summer camp coordinated by CFI, Kids on Campus, and the USDA:

Looking at heart disease, how all of these things… diabetes, are becoming more prominent. You have to, something has to change, and you have to look at what you're putting into your body. And I think, if you keep it local, and if you keep it organic, then that can alleviate a lot of medical things, which can alleviate a lot of economic, you know, save money, if you have a lot of medical problems.
Consistent with Jamie’s appeal to be more aware of the connection between health and consumption, Kim, a gardener at West Side Community Garden and member of the garden Steering Committee, explained her reasoning for gardening as a distrust of our food system. Kim stated:

One of the reasons that I got actually involved in vegetable gardening is it got to the point where I don't trust the food that I get in the store anymore. You just don't know. It's just comforting to know how your food is grown and what went into the soil or onto the leaves. So when you think about food security in general there's, you know, just having food at all no matter what happens. But then there's the whole other idea that the quality of the food and so that's important to me.

As this excerpt from Kim’s interview suggests, her dissatisfaction with the current food system has been a driving force propelling her desire to garden.

A number of participants have pointed to dissatisfaction with school meals in particular. For example, participants indicated displeasure with schools’ reliance on processed convenience meals, suggesting that children’s health has deteriorated, which has negatively impacted test scores, and therefore funding, quality teachers, and diverse educational opportunities. Indeed, the current local school curriculum suggests a bias towards math, science, and English classes at the exclusion of electives (e.g., gym, home economics) leaving kids generally uneducated about food and healthy food choices. As will be elaborated on in the next overarching theme, my research suggests that CFI tries to intervene and change what is being offered in the schools by coordinating with other initiatives such as the Food is Elementary program. The Food is Elementary program is a
hands on curriculum developed by Antonia Demas, president of the non-profit organization, The Food Studies Institute (www.foodstudies.org). The Food is Elementary program works to teach young children about healthy food through hands on instruction.

Lana, the local Food is Elementary coordinator, revealed her disgust at schools’ reliance on processed and prepackaged goods. In fact, she indicated that kitchen staff are no longer expected to actually prepare food:

There is a food service conference put on at the end of July and one of the, there was one, there was a knife skills section where a chef was teaching these school cooks how to use knives and someone was telling me that one cook skipped out on the knife section. She said at their school they didn't use knives. She can run her kitchen for the whole school year without ever picking up a knife. They use can openers and box cutters and that's just about it. Can openers and box cutters. Operating a kitchen to serve a cafeteria of school-aged children without the aid of knives speaks to a profound dependence on industrially processed food.

Consistent with the sentiments discussed by Lana, Stacy (CFI Summer AmeriCorps) reflected on her experiences as a substitute teacher:

They don't have real silverware. They have plastic. And most of the schools use Styrofoam trays. Like some days you might get a real tray, but mostly Styrofoam. Yup. Plastic silverware and Styrofoam trays. And a lot of the kitchens, and you walk in there and they're spotless because there's no cooking going on. Literally, everything is out of a package. Everything. It's like, pop the hot dog out of the package and throw it in the warmer. It's all packaged.
As the above excerpts indicate, schools appear to instill a detachment from our food system. This kind of detachment contributes to my observations of participants’ dissatisfaction with food systems.

Another part of the problem with current food systems is simply a lack of education and exposure to traditional food and gardening techniques. Kim (West Side Community Gardener, Steering Committee) shared a story about a low-income family who participated in the community garden for their children. She shared:

We had a family, who because of health problems they didn't make it through. But they said one of their biggest reasons for wanting a garden was for their kids. To educate their kids. So they would know where food actually came from, you know? It's so important. Because I really do think that, you know, our food is just becoming something that's not really food anymore. And so it, you know, and, you know, apparently are lots of kids who think that carrots are made in a factory... So, I think everybody should be more educated about the food that they eat and where it comes from. And everybody should have some experience in that ideally.

As passages in this section have revealed, detachment from our food system is likely linked to the processed nature of the majority of food served at institutions such as schools, hospitals, and prisons. A number of factors play in to this disconnect. For example, poorly funded schools are unable to hire adequate cafeteria staff to enable enough time to actually prepare quality meals. There is also an assumption that school children will not eat vegetables, fruits, or whole grains, resulting in schools simply not
offering these options. Yet, in a recent follow-up interview with Rachel (Health Educator at Health Department), she passionately described how new intervention programs (e.g., Food is Elementary Curriculum) have revealed that kids are quite receptive to new foods (including vegetables), especially when the food is harvested from their own school garden and prepared in the classroom. In fact, she is coordinating with school principles to try to encourage the offering of food education programs during school hours, rather than as after school programing. As will be discussed later, some initiatives have already begun to find their way into school systems.

In this section I shared interview passages and observations to support the claim that individuals are largely dissatisfied with our current food system. Overproduction of processed goods and detachment from how our food is grown has contributed to a food system that is almost entirely controlled by corporate and government interests, at the expense of the consumer. Youth are especially impacted by the food system because they have little control over the food fed to them in their homes and at school, and caregivers and schools appear to have a lifestyle that necessitates reliance on quick, easy, processed meals. A sedentary lifestyle, coupled with processed meals is likely a major contributor to a number of health ramifications. Consider, for instance, the fact that the prevalence of overweight nearly doubled from the late 1970s to the early 1990s – from 8% to 14% among children ages 6-11 and from 6% to 12% among adolescents (Nestle, 2002/2007). The outlook is even worse for adults with 35% being overweight in the late 1990s (up from 25% in the early 1970s). Between 1991 and 1998, the rate of adult obesity increase from 12% to nearly 18%, contributing to increased health care costs, which, as Nestle
points out, becomes an issue for everyone, overweight, or not. The next section extends this argument by describing participants’ commentary regarding political issues skewing the food system.

**Political Barriers to Food Security**

Given the poverty rates in Athens County, three local school districts have more than 60% of their students using food assistance programs (e.g., free or reduced cost breakfast and lunch at school) (DeWitt, 2012). Free and reduced lunches have been on the rise in the past decade, with the Athens City School District reporting 40.2% (up from 26.6%), the Federal Hocking Local School District at 64.2% (from 49.6%), the Nelsonville-York School District at 60.1% (from 45%), the Trimble Local School District at 68.1% (from 60%), and the Alexander Local School District 49% (from 26%) using the program (DeWitt). Free and reduced lunch programs offer children food when there is none at home, and thus are serving a worthy cause. However, as participants in my research discussed, the meals must adhere to USDA guidelines which are skewed to favor the meat and dairy industry (see Nestle 2002/2007; Pollan, 2009).

Rebecca (CFI staff) and I spoke of the breakfast programs offered by schools:

Rebecca: Milk is not necessary and every single kid in the United States that has a free breakfast and lunch has to have milk or you do not get that reimbursement. There are such a high percentage of kids that are lactose intolerant that are forced to drink milk. Well, what are the symptoms of being lactose intolerant? Upset stomachs, kids get sick more often, congestion, probably can't focus in the
classroom. All of these issues. And we're forcing every kid that gets a free
breakfast or lunch, they have to have milk with it.

Me: uhuh

Rebecca: You can't give them a water. You cannot give them a water. Well you
should be able to give them a water instead of a milk. If they want water let them
have water. Hell, water is way better than milk. So we're forcing our kids to be
unhealthy. We're forcing them to think they have to have milk at every meal and
that chicken nuggets are your grain and your protein. Pretzels with cheese are an
entree. Yeah. I mean, it's scary as heck. What did I hear the other day? Well, one
was like tortillas and cheese is an entree. That used to be a snack. But it fits the
protein, it fits the carb count. Another thing they serve instead of giving
strawberries, I was at a presentation, I couldn't believe, I'm sitting there like, they
could tell that I was like, "you've got to be kidding me," strawberries, instead of
strawberries, they give strawberry shortcake because they get credit for the fruit
and the grain.

This notion of “getting credit” is in reference to schools’ reliance on government
reimbursement. But, as Rebecca’s statement indicates, schools are only able to get credit
for meals that meet USDA nutritional guidelines. Later, in vocalizing her frustration with
school lunches, she shared her interpretation of a meeting with other community
organizers.

So this guy came down from somewhere in Ohio who was doing this supposedly
supporting local and the school lunch program gave this presentation, I'm like,
you're not supporting local. You're serving the same old crap with an apple on it. That's all that he's doing. I'm like, “you're not doing anything local.” The fact that you would, they call it bundling so that he, when he serves that strawberry shortcake he's getting the grain for the, it's that crappy yellow stuff you get at Kroger, that's the grain! For the whole meal. Out of a dessert. And I just raised my hand, he was the one with the tortilla chips and cheese and pretzels and cheese and all that stuff, and I just raised my hand and said “everyone of your entrees creates heart disease. You’re so promoting diabetes, it's unbelievable. You make kids think that little cake in the strawberry shortcake is a grain.” So they graduate from high school thinking that's their grain and fruit. I can't even comprehend that. It's not only misleading, it's harmful. It's harmful. And I'm like, you've got to be kidding.

As Rebecca’s statements highlight, the food being served to children at schools, while technically consistent with USDA nutritional guidelines, could have a significant impact on long and short term health among children. Consider for example, the increased prevalence of overweight and obesity among children mentioned in the preceding section. Rates of obesity are so high among American children that many exhibit metabolic abnormalities such as high blood sugar due to “adult onset” (insulin-resistant type 2) diabetes, high blood cholesterol, and high blood pressure – all of which were formerly only see in adults (Nestle, 2002/2007). These are all associated with increased risk of coronary heart disease, cancer, stroke, and diabetes later in life.
A parent of school aged children, and former gardener at the Nelsonville community garden expressed concern over what her kids were eating at school. Tammy stated:

Tammy: And it's free breakfast, so they serve it in the classroom, but its pop-tarts. Oh yeah, every kid gets free breakfast. And I can't say don't give them breakfast, every kid gets them. If he eats breakfast at home, he still gets breakfast at school. But it's... So they give them pop tarts. Or the next day it might be cereal, but I'm sure its...

Me: Applejacks

Tammy: Right. And the next day it might be flap jacks. And so, you know, what do you do? So I try to fill him up on healthy stuff before he goes so he's not hungry when he gets there. And I understand their point is that kids need to eat something. It's a big program. But I wish that they would provide healthier options.

Given the clear correlation between school food options and children’s health, Tammy’s concerns appear rightly voiced.

In an effort to provide youth with food over the summer (when they do not have access to free/reduced school meals), CFI coordinated with Kids on Campus to host a USDA sponsored camp. Because it was USDA funded, the menu had to meet the nutritional guidelines as set by the USDA. Given CFIs aim to keep consumption local and plant based, they faced a number of obstacles in meeting nutritional requirements, getting kids to eat the food, and keeping with their mission. Jamie, a CFI Summer
AmeriCorps worker at the camp, shared her frustrations in the following excerpt from an interview transcript:

Jamie: It's just the dairy requirements are so big. But they don't consider yogurt dairy which is so...

Me: What group does it go in?

Jamie: It was in the "other" extra group.

Me: yogurt?

Jamie: Yeah. So it makes you wonder about the conflict of interest between the government and the dairy industry.

Me: Uuhh

Jamie: So we'd have to put two ounces of cheese on a black bean burger or something. Actually something very interesting was the protein substitutes, those were the hardest, most often that our only non-local food.

This “conflict of interest” Jamie spoke to was present in a number of other conversations as well. For example, Erica (CFI Summer AmeriCorps) stated: “I think that the real challenge was with the USDA protein requirements and especially meshing that with our idea of that being a plant-based diet.” Indeed, compliance with USDA guidelines posed significant stress on camp organizers, creating tensions among individuals with similar goals, as Erica shared:

Often there would be an argument about the USDA requirements, and why didn't we get the right thing, or cook the right thing, or the right amount? Just worrying
about losing funding if we didn't get it exactly right or you know, otherwise meeting regulations.

As these passages have described, stress over funding, feeding the kids, and meeting the demands of various constituencies contributed to a number of challenges at the camp.

In an interview with Dave (CFI staff) and Nate (CFI AmeriCorps), distrust in government nutritional guidelines was discussed:

Dave: On the bigger scheme of things there are corporations that are trying to market their own healthy products…

Nate: As healthy

Dave: Yeah, as healthy products, and the menu, whether it's healthy or whether its junk food, they're still there to make a profit and not care for people and these corporations have way more money than individuals or nonprofits do. Also, governmental systems are set up with lobbying issues so corporations have way more power than nonprofits have. So our whole system is skewed in favor of a profit system rather than a nurturing system. In addition, the financial system is skewed in favor of the corporations.

Highlighting the challenges individuals face to be healthy, Dave continued:

Dave: It's so skewed at this point that genetically modified food does not need to be labeled. And that's not in any other country, just in ours. And that's because of the corporate lobby system of keeping our society in the dark about what's happening.

Me: Mhmm
Dave: It's really; it's a war on the individual human being to be healthy. That's the larger picture.

As the above excerpt describes, Dave expresses a main concern over government controlled foods, and the impact of that control on individual health. As noted in Chapter Two, our food (both animal and plant based) is increasingly under the control of a few entities, which are arguably more interested in profit than consumer health.

Problematically, the people who might need the best food in terms of health have the least amount of control over their food options. Food banks, for example, because they are government and volunteer supported, are generally stocked with foods with high caloric density, but little nutritional value. In addition to food pantries, impoverished regions tend to dominated by cheap fast food options. If there are no supermarkets nearby, this might appear to be a blessing, but while they serve immediate caloric needs, such establishments “prey upon those are weakened by insufficient money, choices, and knowledge” (Winne, 2008, p. 111). Thus, while cheap, fast food options address hunger, they directly contribute to heart disease, diabetes, and obesity (Winne). Expressing his acute distrust of government controlled foods, Dave stated:

So the foods that goes into the food bank that's all politically figured out with the support to make that happen. And the foods that go into the schools, school lunches – it's all the same kind of thing. It's a big corporate controlled government sanctioned setup.

Doubts in the legitimacy and interests of government supported food systems are not without precedent. Michael Pollan (e.g., Pollan, 1991, 2001, 2006, 2009), for
example, has made a highly successful writing career of documenting misleading nutritional advice offered by the “trusted” sources such as medical establishments and government organizations. Pollan and others support Dave’s fear and assertion that:

We're in a fight for our lives. It's not just healthy food that doesn't taste good, it's... we're in a fight for our lives. We're being fed unhealthy foods and we're not being told the truth and basically being squelched when we try to do anything about it.

In short, food and diet are political concerns. That is, what people eat and what we believe we should eat are based on skewed, politically motivated standards. Nestle (2002/2007), reinforces this belief as she argued: “Diet is a political issue. Because dietary advice affects food sales, and because companies demand a favorable regulatory environment for their products, dietary practices raise political issues that cut right to the heart of democratic institutions” (p. 28). Given the political factors influencing dietary guidelines, the presence of an organization such as CFI is made especially valuable. As will be discussed in depth later, CFI offers ways for community members to challenge injustices in our food system.

*Media’s Influence on Food Perception*

Altering eating and lifestyle habits is particularly challenging given our media saturated society. Considering advertising alone, Nestle (2002/2007) reported that nearly 70% of food advertising is on convenience foods (e.g. candy, snacks, alcohol, soft drinks) whereas just 2.2% is on fruits, vegetables, grains, or beans. Concerned with the impact of advertising on food expectations, Rebecca (CFI staff), stated:
And then, you know, like coming up against what the advertising does to our culture. What advertising does to our culture, for lack of a better word, it convinces us that it's okay to drink three Mountain Dews a day; it convinces us that it's okay to slap cheese on everything, that you got to have milk every day. And it convinces us that you got to have meat every day. And it convinces us that you got to have cheese every day or you’re going to be bent over like a question mark by the time your eighty if you don't eat cheese or milk. It's all bullshit. You don't need it. You need vegetables. You need grains. You need beans. That's all you need. It's all USDA food pyramid. It's wrong. It's blatantly wrong, you know? It's completely controlled by our corporate interests.

Problematically, much the media attention has been directed at children (Nestle 2002/2007). Jamie, a CFI Summer AmeriCorps, shared:

I was listening to this thing on NPR and they were saying that on average a kid sees maybe 100 ads a day for these foods that are being endorsed by these people. And it's McDonalds, Doritos, and Mountain Dew of all flavors. It's really crazy.

In fact, the advertising at grocery stores has gotten to the degree that participants noted they don’t even bring their children to the store. Rebecca (CFI staff) shared the following:

They've got it down to the psychological, what, you walk into Wal-Mart and the packaging has been so analyzed on how we react to it, that that's why all of the packaging has got that bubble gum look. It's kind of flakey, certain colors. There's this big pink aisle and you know that little girls are going to be attracted to that
aisle because it's pink and they know that. So they know that. They've done so much research and how the brain works and with purchasing.

Despite the thriving local food economy, people seem hesitant to embrace a local, fresh foods mindset. Marsha, CFI workshop leader and local farmer expressed her frustrations when she stated:

It seems to me sometimes when I'm in the grocery stores, I want to say to people, "Hey, you know you could get that, you know you get peaches right now at market that come from just up the road?" Rather than Georgia or South Carolina or wherever those come from? Those fuzzy looking ones.

The “market” that Marsha refers to is Athens Farmer’s Market, in operation year round on Wednesday and Saturday from 10:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m. The Athens Farmers Market was established in 1972 and has grown from three vendors to now more than 65 in 2007; at present, vendor (and consumer) demand is so high that there is a waiting list for a booth to sell at (Gutknecht & Millar, 2007).

Despite the locally minded participants engaged in much of CFI’s programming, several participants expressed the impact of advertising on consumer buying and eating behaviors. As described in this subsection, the media appears to have a strong hold on food perceptions, with particular emphasis on endorsing processed over whole foods. Either consumers are aware of such biases in endorsement and simply do not care, or they shop and consume in such a mindless way that they are unaware that the food labeled as nutritious is not always healthier (and may be less healthy) than the produce section they just skimmed over. Advertising is convincing and our “on the go” lifestyles seem to
require quick and easy foods, making such products an easy sell. When there is an abundance of food (which there certainly is in the United States), individuals tend to think of little of it; only when there is shortage, is the value of food heightened and our appreciation recognized.

The theme “We’re in a fight for our lives”: Systemic and regulatory issues with current food system, addresses problematic tactics among the government, corporation, and institutions, and their immediate impact on food systems, food security, and health. This section described participant’s expressions of dissatisfaction in food systems in the subtheme titled Growing dissatisfaction in food systems, political barriers in the subtheme Political barriers to food security/health, and the impact of advertising in the subtheme Media’s influence on food perception. In short, the section as a whole offers a strong dissatisfaction with the dominant food system. The next theme explores how CFI counters issues described in this section through various programming.

“A Person Growing their own Garden is a Threat:” CFI Programs Fight the Dominant Food System

The preceding section made a case for the problematics of our food system. Specifically, I highlighted participants’ discussions of dissatisfaction in food systems, political barriers to healthy foods, and the impact of the media on food choices. Along the way, I discussed the health ramifications of diets relying on popularized processed foods. Yet, as I described in Chapter Three, my appreciative research sensibilities propel me towards exploring the positive side of even the most trying circumstances. Hence, this section articulates various strategies CFI has embraced to fight the dominant food system.
Fighting prevailing food practices is important because food is more than just something we eat. In fact, Dougherty (2011) suggested that “it is who we are. It is part of our culture and identity. Change the food and you change the culture” (p. 6). The following subthemes articulate the ways in which CFI fights the dominant food system: (a) Fighting the food system through Education; (b) Fighting the system through Gardening; (c) Fighting the system through improved access; and (d) Fighting the food system by raising the standard.

_Fighting the Food System through Education_

CFI’s programming emphasizes education. Importantly, such programing is inclusive of all community members, not just those individuals experiencing food insecurity. As such, direct programming, as well as participants’ interpretations of CFI’s activities, suggests a necessity for everyone to be self-sufficient. As will be described in the paragraphs to follow, much of the educational experiences facilitated by CFI emphasize a “hands-on” approach to learning. This is wise because participating in the producing of what you eat is a well-tested mechanism for increasing lifelong consumption of healthy foods (Hanson & Marty, 2012).

CFI’s emphasis on education pervaded the data. For example, the Food is Elementary Program challenges school lunches, as Lana, the program coordinator, shared during an interview:

Another interesting thing about this program is all the recipes, number, one, go home with parents, and number two, are based on commodity foods that schools can receive for free from the USDA. So they can be integrated into the school
lunch system once kids have a familiarity with them and we can show the cooks that kids will actually eat them.

As the above quotation from Lana suggests, coordinators are trying to work within USDA guidelines in order to foster change. Though challenging, working with the system to shift meal menus and student perceptions of food might be most effective. Strategies such as this were particularly evident in my observations of the summer camp previously described.

CFI programming emphasizes a clear devotion to education, especially experiential education in which children are involved the processes of preparing, cooking, and eating food. Stacy (CFI AmeriCorps) talked about the participatory measures that were taken to ensure youth involvement at the summer camp:

They would grate carrots, grate cheese, chop carrots, chop zucchini, chop cucumbers. Things like that. Sometimes we'd get them to come over and look and see what we're doing. Okay, now we're making a really popular lunch was frittata. So the kids helped us cook the eggs. Like, "here we need you to break all of these eggs and mix them together." So, as we could, the kids helped us.

Facilitating participation in the food production enables youth to see the full food cycle. Cheryl (former Kids on Campus leader, current CFI AmeriCorps) supported the value of this full connection as she shared: “so what the kids were actually doing when they were participating was chopping and grating, and you know, I think they need to be making things from beginning to end.” The youth campers appeared receptive to involvement in the kitchen as Jamie (CFI AmeriCorps) confirmed:
The kids really loved being in the kitchen and having the connection, like "oh I'm helping grate this zucchini and we’re going to eat it." Especially if it came from the garden and they brought it to the kitchen and then prepared it and ate it. That was the best.

This kind of experiential education is deeply valuable not only for increasing the interest of the camper-learner, but also for long term behavior change. Camp coordinators were optimistic about the effects of the camp, as Jamie (CFI Summer AmeriCorps) said:

I hope there's a little camper somewhere that's like "Mom and Dad, we need a garden!" And "I don't want to have a pop-tart because even though it has a strawberry on it, it's not a real strawberry!" You know what I mean? So, yeah I think I have to think that I, you know what I mean? Because that was a lot of work to not... It's a huge iceberg though; it's just chipping away slowly.

Whether or not the camp resulted in significant food and lifestyle change is uncertain; however, the value of simply exposing the kids to new foods, gardening practices, and food preparation skills should not be understated; nor should the fact that the camp served to provide food security to low-income youth who might have otherwise gone hungry during the summer months without the aid of free school meals. The camp is considered a USDA feeding site, which means one of the primary goals is to simply feed the kids during a segment of the summer. Stacy, a CFI Summer AmeriCorps worker supported the value of the camp as she shared:

I think just by doing the program; that was really powerful. Even if maybe on a daily basis we didn't necessarily know if we were communicating or increasing
these kids’ food security. But the fact that we fed them twice a day, five days a week, for five weeks, on those exact moments their food security was increasing.

CFI has focused the educational component to fighting food injustices through involvement in school gardens. School gardens offer a superb context for experiential education at its finest. Experiential education involves hands-on kinesthetic teaching, focusing more on methodology, and less on memorization (as in the traditional classroom) (Hanson & Marty, 2012). As described in Chapter Two, experiential learning, in conjunction with formal classroom instruction on timely, interesting material, is what generally motivates students most (Dewey, 1938/1997). Jimmy, a community gardener and AmeriCorps worker in charge of a local school garden shared his plans of trying to foster excitement among the students. He shared his strategy:

Jimmy: And I'm going to do garlic. I planted some garlic with the 4th grade class last year. It was at the last minute, it was November. And it was a third of the 4th grade so not all of the kids got to do it. I did the hexagonal thing. Everyone got to plant like 2 cloves of garlic. And I saved the garlic in the summer. So I have a bag of garlic that they grew. So I'm going to take that garlic and be like "this is what the 4th graders grew last year."

Me: Yeah

Jimmy: And, you know, and after school program grew some potatoes. So I'm going to try to put some potatoes and garlic together and they can taste what it's like if they haven't had garlic.
Jimmy’s strategy of showing kids the finished project at the beginning of the season serves a larger goal of sparking enthusiasm about gardening and vegetables in general. By allowing students to play in the dirt, feel the soil, taste the garlic and potatoes, he’s fostering a connection to, and devotion to the new foods. Learning by doing was a value throughout CFI’s programming. Erica (CFI summer AmeriCorps and camp leader) echoed Jamie’s sentiments as she stated:

When you are learning about the new thing, you want to be doing it, not just seeing someone else do it or just seeing the weird finished product you've never seen before, like lentils. Some people just haven't had anything that doesn't come from a bag or freezer.

The Food is Elementary curriculum offers an exemplar of experiential learning. Lana (Food is Elementary coordinator) explained:

Lana: It's a very hands-on, multidisciplinary curriculum. Teaches kids about cooking, nutrition, general health, agriculture, world cultures, history, things like that. All around food. So it gives kids, as opposed to, "eat your broccoli," it tells kids about the history of broccoli, who ate broccoli, look at this broccoli, see it, taste it, smell it, make some art with it.

Me: Interesting, so you're giving classroom instruction, but also hands on work.

Lana: Yes. Mostly in the first semester it's pretty typical classroom based stuff. Different presentations on dietary fat and vitamins. They learn what vitamins are in what colored foods and make art with those foods. There's a little bit of
cooking throughout here but actually, this is a food is art thing where kids will make bean mosaics, a whole bunch of different things.

CFI’s educational programming extends well beyond summer camps and school gardens. In fact, community members routinely associate CFI with workshops geared towards teaching community members self-reliance skills. Workshops address topics such as canning, foraging, bread baking, organic gardening, and composting. A number of participants spoke to the value of the workshops as filling a void in learning how to become self-reliant and increase your food security. Workshops, for example, are taking the place of neighbors and family members who might have shared that kind of information in times past. Marsha, a local farmer and workshop leader shared her view of the workshops:

They're usually kind of fun. And people are really good, attentive, ask good questions. So I feel like I'm sharing something valuable, so I guess I do enjoy those, so I do get something out of it. The opportunity to pass on some stuff you know to somebody. I don't have any neighbors that come to me wanting to know how to can pickled beans… And I guess I'm taking the place of neighbors by doing those workshops.

The pedagogical practices of CFI’s programing suggest an underlying view of education that is experiential, multifaceted, and transformative. Participants indicated a number of ways to view the process of education. For example, Ralph (community organizer and co-founder of ACENet – organization encompassing CFI) advocated for self-education as he stated:
I think truly educated people are self-educated. And there are different contexts that we can discover that are sort of like that. I think Universities at best are very rich for this kind of self-education. At their worst they’re sort of knowledge mills where people learn narrow things to prepare for jobs.

The value of experiential learning was certainly embraced and advocated for in CFI’s programming. However, my observations and interviews with CFI participants suggest a value in triangulation of educational experiences. That is, CFI participants appear to value experiential exercises, but also a number of other strategies. For example, Jimmy (West Side Community Gardener, Member of Steering Committee, AmeriCorps worker) shared the following explanation when I asked him how he learned about community gardening:

I'm a big fan of the library… I don't know how long you've been around here, but the Athens County Public library, you can check out 100 books at a time and there's no late fees! And I thought, wow that's amazing! So we got a library card and I just went to the gardening section and checked out a ton of books.

Supporting this view on multiple ways of knowing, Lacy (workshop leader, herbalist, small business owner) described her educational background:

Lots and lots of reading. And lots of experimenting and I took a few classes here and there and I go to conferences now. Now that I'm a little further down the line, I go to training conferences and learn a little more about some things. But almost all experimenting combined with reading.
The above passages describe a view of education that uses a combination of independent study and experiential exercises. This grouping of pedagogical techniques epitomizes Dewey’s (1938/1997) view of education that makes use of traditional learning (reading) and also heightens awareness of the environment. Participants suggest that traditional education, while valuable, shouldn’t be the only mechanism for learning. This conclusion is supported in Jamie’s statement “You might have learned it in school, I probably learned it in school, but I never saw it and experienced it. But it’s pretty cool when you decide to.”

Participants also pointed to the value of upbringing and heritage, drawing on family narratives to support their knowledge base. Latrina (workshop leader and former CFI staff) described her family upbringing:

They reaffirmed to me how important what I grew up with, how important that really was. And it makes me appreciate more about my heritage, growing up knowing this stuff about food. I appreciate that more. I look back and think this is important to other people. Now I've learned it all my life, so it helps me put value back on that real important stuff to know.

Participants made use of their educational experiences and background to spread the word to others. For example, Lacy (workshop leader, herbalist, small business owner) described the importance of teaching people how to use their surroundings:

Most people, unless, some, because we're Appalachian, retain that knowledge, some local foods, wild foods. But a lot of people need to be educated about that kind of stuff. Like, "yeah, you can just walk out and dig this stuff up, it's true."
Lacy’s lifestyle reflects that of Eugene Constance in *The Last American Man*, who devoted his life to living off the land, and teaching others to do so as well (Gilbert, 2002). Taking a different educational strategy, Donna (CFI volunteer) describes how her colleague, Dave (CFI staff) spreads CFI’s mission by interacting with others, passing out documentaries, and forging relationships. Donna shared that Dave is “very big on teaching people and so many things he knows. He loves to make connections with people and make their life better. Make a smaller foot print on the planet. And make people's lives better.”

Fighting food injustice through education offers one viable tactic for shifting attitudes and behaviors. As detailed in this section, CFI’s educational programming ranged from school based initiatives, to summer camps, and workshops. Much of CFI’s education strategies appeared to embrace an experiential focus in which participants literally “learned by doing.” Yet, even in workshops, leaders referenced texts, distributed handouts, and testified to the value of independent study. Thus, CFI’s pedagogical approach is best understood as a triangulation of educational strategies in which they encourage reading, hands-on work, and engaging in dialogue with others. One of the contexts this was particularly apparent, was in the gardens.

*Fighting the System through Gardening*

Participants of CFI’s programs suggested one of the main strategies to shifting control over one’s food security was through gardening. Indeed, as described in Chapter Two food gardening offers a viable technique for improving health, in addition to the economic advantage of saving on a grocery bill. Food gardens have increased in
popularity, expanding from backyards, to front yards, schools, communities, and urban locales. In the average home food garden alone, the typical gardener invests approximately $70 with a return of $500 (Garden Market Research,” 2008). Gardening is so powerful that it has been constructed as a threat to corporations. For instance, Rebecca (CFI staff) said:

Rebecca: Yeah, they're nervous about it. When Michelle and Barack Obama grew a garden at the White House they got a little letter saying that they didn't want them promoting that kind of lifestyle.

Me: Letter from…?

Rebecca: Oh like Kraft or something. Big Corporations that want people to depend on the big global food system. Kind of interesting. Because they had the Victory Gardens in the 1940's is the last time that the United States government pushed big time for growing gardens. So that's 1940's, it's been 70 years. And so now in that 70 years of time the food industry has gotten its claws so deep in our daily lives that they now have the cohones to... They see that as a threat. A person growing their own garden is a threat.

In response to Michelle Obama’s White House garden Pollan told ABC News, "At a time of economic crisis, a garden can provide a surprisingly large amount of fresh, healthy produce. But just as important, it teaches important habits of mind – helping people to reconnect with their food, eat more healthily on a budget and recognize that we're less dependent on the industrial food chain, and cheap fossil fuel, than we assume" (Barrett, 2009). Yet, as described in Chapter Two, food gardens, despite their clear benefits (e.g.,
health, economic) have continued to receive criticism (e.g., woman in Oak Park, MI who was nearly jailed for her front yard garden). Even the White House garden was the subject of criticism from the Mid America CropLife Association (MACA) which represents agribusinesses including Monsanto, Dow AgroSciences and DuPont Crop Protection. According to Snyder (2009) MACA members requested the following in their letter to the First Lady: “As you go about planning and planting the White House garden, we respectfully encourage you to recognize the role conventional agriculture plays in the U.S. in feeding the ever-increasing population, contributing to the U.S. economy and providing a safe and economical food supply.” The “conventional agriculture” is in reference the accepted use of pesticides on crops. Thus, the White House garden was perceived as a threat, as Rebecca noted in the excerpt above to agribusiness because it was organic, and therefore, not promoting the use of pesticides in home gardens.

Gardening is so important to CFI’s mission that when I asked Rebecca (CFI staff), the biggest step individuals could take to improve their food security, she responded immediately with the following:

Rebecca: Grow a garden. Grow your own food. It takes so long to learn how to be a gardener. To really understand how to grow food. I'm still learning what, like, now we're selling at the farmers market and I'm like, I should have planted more of those tomatoes because that's what the people want. Seed saving and saving seeds is a big one. It's a huge, like, if we could have a bunch of people saving seeds we could have our own local supply of seeds. But it's kind of decentralized,
it's in everybody’s houses and we compile all that information at CFI. We have an inventory of whose saving what seeds.

Me: Yeah

Rebecca: If we could get that to the point where we have enough for all of the gardeners in Athens county to build a ... from all these different seed savers all over that'd be huge for food security.

Rebecca’s comments about seed saving offer a viable means of achieving independence from the dominant system, where even seeds are commodified.

Indeed, one of CFI’s major initiatives has been to promote gardening among individuals and communities. In fact, CFI has organized half a dozen community gardens in Athens County, and in spring of 2011 oversaw the transition of its first garden to be run independently from CFI. Such gardens offer a number of advantages as discussed by CFI participants. For example, Jimmy, a West Side Community gardener and member of the Steering Committee talked about the specific ways the committee designed the contracts to encourage a communal sense. According to Jamie, “it's not like a community if you don't know who your neighbors are. So we spent a lot of time when rewriting the contract to make it more like a community.” One modification to gardener contracts has been the incorporation of community workdays, which occur once a month throughout the summer. Each gardener is required to work two of the four workdays, or substitute an alternative contribution. Speaking about the workdays in particular, Kim, a Westside Community gardener and member of the Steering committee expressed the value of a communal orientation to work. Kim said “We wanted it to be more than just get some
work done… One thing that we're hoping to do eventually is to get even more of a community spirit going. And make more opportunities for people to meet and interact.” Gardeners at the Nelsonville community garden expressed appreciation for the communal orientation to work. For instance, Tammy, a former Nelsonville Community gardener talked about her initial experiences at the garden:

> There was someone else gardening there and they came over and felt really bad for us and they had a rototiller. And did our own little plot for us. We were there with a shovel. It was just kind of nice; that community aspect.

In addition to the “community spirit” mentioned by Kim, gardens offer a viable site for learning among both adults and children. Latrina, a former CFI staff and current workshop leader spoke highly of the gardens organized for low-income youth. Latrina talked about the educational merit of working in the garden as she shared: “It was just a little kids plot and I wrote curriculum to go with it. Teaching math and science and English and everything I could think of around the garden; using the garden to teach all of those things.”

Though not using the garden for formal education, Tammy, a former Nelsonville Community gardener and mother of two small children expressed a similar pleasure at the value of her kid’s involvement in the garden. Tammy said: “I like that my kids are really involved with the garden. I have some wonderful pictures I could show you of them picking a huge head of broccoli that we were going to eat for dinner that night. And they were so excited to go out and pick the carrots and pick the broccoli.” Danielle
(garden sitter) echoed a similar sentiment regarding the value of keeping kids involved in the process of garden. Danielle stated:

I think one of the best things that could come out of them is the kids around them. And kids can see gardening happening and hopefully grow up and have an impact on their life. I think that's the benefit that I see in it because I feel like... I'm always wondering about the generation after us. So I think that's something really important.

As will be noted in Chapter Five, quotations such as the one above speak to concerns regarding value. That is, what is the value, the good we seek? As PI theory highlights, individuals routinely rely on evaluative orientations such as this to make sense of the world. CFI appears to shift values and heighten our consciousness about fundamental beliefs.

A number of participants spoke to the power of community and educational gardens. For example, Latrina, workshop leader and former CFI staff, spoke with sadness of a youth garden program that was discontinued when she left the organization. Latrina said “What got lost in the mix is that there are other things that they got out of the garden then just learning how to identify a potato bug. They got peace, art, expression, safety out of that little garden.” Though I noted a number of metaphors to describe the garden (e.g., an art project, a community), I was most struck by the metaphor of “a refuge,” as explained in the following quotation:

Over there at Hope, this little garden of the children was a lovely little place. It was a safe place. A place a refuge for these little kids at this hard place to live.
Domestic violence, it's not a great place to live. But there was a garden, decorated so beautiful, it was their refuge. (Latrina, transcript)

Gardening is so important to CFI’s mission that they worked with city officials to shift city laws regarding the legalization of front yard gardens. In this way CFI is demanding that we shift our view of aesthetics and beauty, moving away from an orientation that front yards are for flowers and back yards are for vegetable gardens. In support, Latrina (workshop leader and former CFI staff) praised CFI’s efforts as she said “They were very supportive of planting gardens in front yards and not just back yards. Yeah, people thought it was unsightly, but it's like, what's the difference between broccoli and a dahlia?”

Vegetable gardens fight injustices within our food system by heightening our consciousness about what’s good for our world. Danielle a “garden sitter,” explained how gardening has this awakening potential as she disclosed:

I talk to my middle school students and they mention they have a garden or they grow their own food or they live in solar powered houses. I think that people are getting more conscious of what's good for our world, and I think gardening is one of those things.

Gardening also offers a clear economic benefit, helping consumers to eat healthy on a budget. Latrina (workshop leader and former CFI staff), for instance shared:

The other thing I was doing with these kids is that we made our lunches every day and we grew a lot of our food or we got it from the donation station and I was
trying to teach these kids how to healthfully, on a budget, and food stamps. I think that can help.

Yet, not everyone agrees that eating healthy and organically is even affordable for everyone. Perry (Farmer and CFI contributor) discussed the challenges of being a farmer and knowing that the people who need fresh produce most are not the ones receiving it. Perry said:

This is a difficult problem for me because I was a farmer for 12 years and about half of that was in organic, pasture-based diary and the other half was in market gardening, so what was often hard was the high price of food. And knowing that it would be difficult for even Sara and me to go out and buy that food from the grocery store. Dealing with the issues of access to good food because good food has all of a sudden become something that is a niche market. And it's not a food pantry problem, it's a community problem, a national problem.

Indeed, the tension between local, healthy, and organic foods and simply feeding a population in need of food was an issue throughout my research (and will be discussed in detail later).

In general, my research indicates that using gardening to fight injustices within our food system is a viable strategy. A number of participants expressed our need to make use of the resources we have available. Consider Perry, for instance, who said:

What we have in the area that is cash poor is that we're plant rich. It's not the best agricultural land in the world, but we've got it. And how we put that to use is to look at, you know, solving some of our food insecurity problems right here.
Other participants noted the value of area farmers and local businesses dedicated to the local economy and food security. Tammy (former Nelsonville community gardener), recalled how “we have the Snowville milk here and fresh eggs pretty easily. And we live in a rural place where you can grow vegetables or the market is fabulous. I think we're really blessed.” As these participants describe, CFI’s programming and especially gardening initiatives encourage community members to look at the food system from an asset perspective.

Rebecca (CFI staff), recalls the role of her upbringing in establishing her food security:

I grew up with a garden. I grew up on a farm. So I always knew how to do that. I could always get food because I could grow it. It just kept going from there. Once I realized what I grew up in was hugely valuable because I had access. I always had access no matter what. No matter how poor we were, we had access. Then I started to put the pieces of the puzzle together and realized that’s what I need to teach people. If you grow it, you're always going to have access. If you can grow it. Heck, just grow winter squash, throw it up on your shelf. You don't even have to can it.

Rebecca’s farming and gardening experience was conducive to her food security because it enabled her family to be self-reliant. Her upbringing has propelled her work with CFI by allowing her to educate community members on self-sufficiency skills in order to address CFI’s mission of reducing food insecurity. In so doing, Rebecca, and other CFI
participants are fighting disparities in the food system by educating, and therefore improving access to quality foods.

Fighting the System through Improved Access

One of the more significant ways CFI works against dominant disparities in the food system is by improving access to healthy, fresh foods. So far I have made a case for the health and economic benefits of gardening. But not all individuals own or rent property to facilitate a thriving food garden. Thus, having the space to garden not only makes food gardening possible, it also denotes a degree of class – those who have the physical space (and time) to garden might be perceived as of higher social class, than those who do not have the space (or time) to work a food garden. I have argued before that space plays a pivotal role in the (re)production of power (see Rose, in press). Yet, space continues to be a neglected concern among communication scholars, who have argued that we have failed to systematically address the role that space plays in construction of social power (McKerrow, 1999; Mumby, 2000; Shome, 2003). In this section I make a case that CFI attempts to even out social classes by targeting all community members to improve their self-sufficiency, importantly, by providing a common space regardless of class, gardening experience, and role within the organization (i.e., community members work along-side staff in the community gardens, newcomers with seasoned gardeners, etc.)

CFI’s mission to improve access is evident in their staunch position on, and demand for the distribution of vegetables plants only (no flowers) and healthy food (no
high fructose corn syrup, hydrogenated oils, etc.). For example, Rebecca (CFI staff) described:

We're actually right in the trenches giving out food to people who give out food. So that's been a huge, and seeds, and plants, and we only do vegetables. We don't do flowers. We keep it a very narrow. I always just keep it on food. I'm not willing to hand out flowers. I'm not willing to hand out canned beans from Kroger. If it has high fructose corn syrup, we don't take it. I always keep real strict guidelines. And so that we can keep the standard high.

According to Rebecca, keeping the standard high has caused some to characterize CFI as “snobby.” But, she and many other participants will be quick to defend the decision that high quality food must be a priority for everyone, including food pantries, which are generally stocked with high calorie, but low nutrient density commodity foods.

One of the more significant attempts to increase access to healthy local foods has been the shift at the Farmer’s Market to now accept tokens from the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly called Food Stamps). Acceptance of SNAP improves access for individuals who might have otherwise been unable to purchase goods from the market. At the encouragement of groups like CFI, the Appalachian Center for Economic Networks (ACEnet) spearheaded the acceptance of SNAP at the Farmer’s Market. Figures mentioned below show that individuals struggling to meet basic needs want to buy local, want fresh produce, and understand the value of such goods; they just do not always have the funds readily available, which SNAP enables. Rebecca (CFI staff) expressed her excitement about SNAP at the market:
Rebecca: The food stamp thing that they have at the farmers market now has been a huge boom. Last year it was $35,000 of food stamps went through the Athens Farmers Market.

Me: Wow

Rebecca: For a little town. $35,000 is the highest in the state of Ohio. That's pretty impressive. It also shows you that these people that are on SNAP want that food. But they couldn't get it before. It's an access thing. So by ACENet clearing that pathway and creating that situation where you can use food stamps at the farmers market it just took a huge barrier out of the way. So WIC and Senior Coupons and all these kind of things. It's been pretty cool. That's been amazing to me. Now it's all over the state of Ohio and all over the United States. So all these farmers markets are now accepting SNAP. The whole United States is making it so the low income has access.

Rebecca is quite right; across the United States Farmer’s Markets are increasingly licensed to accept SNAP benefits (“Farmer’s Market Nutrition Program,” March 26, 2012). Not only does this increase the opportunities for individuals on SNAP to participate in the local food economy and eat healthy fresh products, but it also contributes to a broadening customer base for farmers.

In addition to improved access for individuals relying on SNAP to shop at the farmer’s market, CFI has also worked to improve access to fresh foods by providing people without land space to garden. Apartment living, for example makes gardening challenging. However, as the quote below describes, Danielle’s involvement as a “garden
sitter” at a CFI community garden encouraged her to get a community garden organized in her apartment complex as described in the interview transcript below:

Danielle: Actually, we've been making a lot of noise to the apartment manager here to start a community garden
Me: Oh?
Danielle: Because there's the tree garden out front over here and he's kind of growing trees tall enough so you can plant them on the ground. So we asked if we could just dig out a plot 3 feet further from where his plot is and he's like well, I just hired a landscape architect and we're trying to get this community garden over... So we actually met with the landscape architect to talk about what we think would be successful, what kind of gardening people would want to do if they live here. Just based on you know, most people are professors or students and how big of a garden would you want. So, we've actually been talking to the manager a lot about that and they wanted it, but it would have ended up going in the middle of the summer, so the timing would be horrible because you wouldn't be able to plant.
Me: Right
Danielle: I think they got it in the planning stages and hopefully by next planting season there will be a garden. I think he said 5 or 6 tenants have expressed interest.

Danielle’s determination to organize a community garden in her apartment complex speaks to dedication to gardening and recognition of the value of fresh, locally grown
foods. It also supports the idea that there is demand for improved access to gardening, regardless of ones living situation. Janie, a Nelsonville community gardener supported this notion of demand as she stated:

There's demand for it in Athens. You know there's demand for um, kind of vegetables that you can't buy in the store. I mean people plant things that they like to eat that might not be grown locally, so that's another great reason to have access to a community garden, especially if you're an apartment dweller and don't have an opportunity to have a garden at your own house.

In my research, a number of individuals expressed challenges associated with their desire to plant a vegetable garden. Kim (West Side Community Gardener, Steering Committee), for example, said: “Yeah, I live in a trailer park and we are not allowed to have a vegetable garden.” Similarly, Lana (West Side Community Gardener, Food is Elementary Coordinator) spoke of the difficulty in gardening with rental properties, and how that urged her to pursue a plot at the community garden. Lana said:

Well I never had space for a garden in my rentals so, and I really liked the whole community aspect of it and I didn't have to buy any tools because they give you all the tools that you need. So that was a big part of it. Yeah, it's just nice. I gardened with a friend for a year which was nice because you could split the work. It's been good.

Jamie (CFI AmeriCorps) spoke of the value of accessibility when she shared:

Jamie: I think availability is a huge thing, you know? If it's available. If it's not available you're never even going to think about it. If there aren't places like Casa
[a locovore restaurant] or the Farmer’s Market you're not even going to think about it. It's like out of sight, out of mind. Going to the Farmer's Market is so great because you get to have that interaction. The person providing the food, having compassion. Really just kind of taking care of each other. You're supporting them and they're supporting you. It's this symbiotic relationship.

Me: Yeah. A little bit different than walking down the aisles at Wal-Mart.

Jamie: Exactly. And I don't think you understand how removed that is until you do go to the farmers market. And I think making it accessible. Which I think the Farmer's Market does a good job.

As Jamie described, improved access to shop at the farmers market fosters a connection to food and a heightened awareness of the relationship between the food provider and consumer. As will be discussed later, this kind of connection is a fundamental factor in CFI’s philosophy and practices.

CFI’s programming improves access by filling a void in the school systems. As previously described, increased demand on high test scores has created a lack of support for electives such as physical education and home economics. This shift in emphasis means that youth are receiving little, and sometimes no instruction on food and health education. Lana (West Side Community Gardener, Food is Elementary coordinator) shared in frustration how such cuts have impacted the Athens community; she said: “a child in the Athens city school district might go through their entire school time and never cook anything themselves. Never learn those basic life skills.” Thus, CFI is in a
pivotal position of introducing gardening skills, nutrition education, and culinary practice.

CFI challenges dominant food systems by improving access to individuals who might not otherwise be able to garden. In so doing, they address issues of geographical constraint, evening out social classes so that all community members, regardless of their property status, have space to work a food garden. Community gardens, plants on the window sills, planter boxes, school gardens, and urban gardens offer just a few of the unique approaches CFI has embraced to ensure gardening opportunities to all.

Fighting the Food System by Raising the Standard

CFI participants routinely advocated that we must demand higher quality food in our grocery stores and food pantries. Demands for high quality of donated goods suggest an alternative mindset that people must be purposeful in the food they share, rather than simply donating unwanted goods. Latrina (workshop leader), for example, referred to pantry organizers when she said: “They just need a paradigm shift that just a box of macaroni isn't what they need. They need fresh vegetables.” Rebecca (CFI staff) argued that people would be better off with no food at all than unhealthy food. Rebecca stated:

Because I personally think the food people get at the food pantries is part of the obesity epidemic. It's sad to say. They keep saying it's better than nothing and I'm like, oh a lifetime a chronic illness is better than nothing? People are going to die of heart disease in their 40s. I just had a friend, whose son, 40 years old, had to have quadruple bypass surgery. 40 years old. I'm 44. And he had to have quadruple bypass surgery. And they don't see it as a big deal to cut this all open,
take out the vein on their leg, and sew it into their heart in four different locations. Close us back up and that's like, common practice. Everybody is getting heart surgery. It's like the hottest thing. But really, if they just change their diet, you wouldn't have to go through that. But, you know, it's like there's this big learning curve. They don't want to change their diet. Don't do that rabbit food. So, it's a huge thing, a huge thing.

In the above passage, Rebecca points to our tendency to rely on the medical establishment to correct health issues when a change in lifestyle might be more effective. This notion of food as medicine is not new. In fact, Hippocrates has long been quoted in his simple statement “Let food be thy medicine and medicine be thy food.”

CFI participants suggest that we need a shift in focus to quality over quantity. For instance, Latrina (workshop leader) said “I think the agencies out there that deal with people in poverty maybe need to work into their focus a little more healthy eating, not just, well here's some commodity foods, you know?” Lacy (CFI workshop leader) supported Latrina’s point: “Having food is important, it's very important. But, teaching people, changing the culture to get people educated about the quality of food and where it comes from and all that stuff.” As these statements suggest, having food is not enough. Instead, people must be making efforts to teach others about healthy food choices – how to grow, harvest, prepare, and process their own food.

A number of participants expressed significant disgust with the food provided at the local pantries. Consider the following interview excerpt from Rebecca (CFI staff):
It's raising the standard of what even gets donated to our pantries. What's scary is that our local food bank is probably the least healthy; it's unbelievable what they hand out. And the director, I've met him a couple of times. Nice guy, obese. And he was doing a presentation on the local food bank. He gets this one shot and it had Ramón noodles, cake mix, everything is packaged. And he was proud of that picture. And I'm going – “no way in hell would I hand this out. I wouldn’t even accept that stuff.” And he's got to get to some point where he no longer, he doesn't see that he's hurting people with that food. It's not better than nothing. If you have nothing, go out into the forest and pick something. Or grow it yourself. Or go find someone who's growing food and ask for that.

Though Rebecca’s intentions with CFI and self-reliance in general are commendable, her language suggests a degree of verbal othering and ethnocentrism that was present across participant’s descriptions of the food insecure. Because CFI is organized by people who are not themselves food insecure, descriptions of that group often appeared to marginalizing. By positioning themselves as experts, CFI organizers structurally separate themselves from the group they are aiming to serve.

Consistent with Rebecca’s dissatisfaction in food pantry options, Dave (CFI staff) and Brandon (CFI Summer AmeriCorps) expressed a similar sentiment as evidenced in the following interview transcript:

Dave: So they say, okay, there's food out there in the food banks, people will be okay. But that food is not healthy, it's full of high fructose corn syrup, and
genetically modified organisms, additives, preservatives, and all the things that help make people allergic and addicted and...

Brandon: Obese, unhealthy foods

Dave: So those people don't think about that circle. The food that is being offered is generally making people sick. So it is rewarding to have the folks at the farmers market say how much they support what's going on here because they know they're helping, their little donation is helping get healthy produce to folks who eat it.

Concern over the quality of food in the food banks is well warranted. During a recent workshop bringing together pantry coordinators and local food suppliers, coordinators made clear that fresh foods were in short supply. In fact, due to decreased funding, the food pantries are run almost entirely on donated goods and volunteer time from a devoted staff. Rachel, representing the Health Department, patiently made an argument for the value of healthy foods; she said: “Food heals people. Food makes people well” (fieldnotes, March 7, 2012). Advocating for the value of keeping food at a local level (partly because state and government assistance programs are failing), one pantry coordinator stated “I’m a person that thinks we’re resilient. We can do it. And we got to do it local” (fieldnotes, March 7, 2012). Following the workshop a pantry coalition was formed to help keep one another aware of different local food options to support individual pantries.

Contemporaneous with a demand for raising the bar on food pantry options and CFI’s effort to provide pantries with healthy foods, a number of participants argued an
alternative message by suggesting that processed commodity foods are better than going hungry. For instance, Janie (Nelsonville Community Gardener) shared the following story that unfolded at a meeting with community organizations:

And then this guy, Dirk, was there with HAPCAP [Hocking Athens Perry Community Action Program], talking about the backpack program and so Rebecca was like, “you know, at the Donation Station what we distribute to food pantries… there's no high fructose corn syrup, there's no MSG or whatever, and I think that what's in those backpacks is mostly processed foods.” So I'm like “oh my God” we have this conflict for those kids to either go hungry or eat what is in the backpacks and from Rebecca's perspective I think. So I think if Ronda would have seen what's in the backpacks would have said that's not how we want to continue. But right now it's all we have. You can't give the kids a box of tomatoes and say "can you make something with this? Can you make gazpacho with this over the weekend?" Because no one is shepherding their food choices.

Janie’s comments about the decision to send low-income youth home with backpacks full of processed goods to ensure they do not go hungry over the weekend when not being fed through free breakfast/lunch at schools is indicative of the kinds of systemic issues driving CFI’s mission. That is, while providing youth with free meals at schools is serving the purpose of keeping kids fed, it is doing nothing to solve the problem long term. Instead, it could be argued that such assistance programs actually facilitate a dependency on a food system offering nothing but highly processed (and arguably unhealthy) food that is contributing to long-term chronic illness.
The tension between simply providing food (regardless of its perceived health value) and focusing on local, healthy, organic foods was particularly evident in the discourse surrounding participants discussion of the summer camp coordinated by CFI, Kids on Campus, and the USDA. Cheryl (former Kids on Campus staff, CFI AmeriCorps), for instance, shared the following in an interview:

Cheryl: If you want to eat totally local is a great idea, but when you're transitioning kids you need to... Everything needs to adapt a little bit. You can't be too strict about your approach. For me, the main goal is to feed the kids. They do the summer programs because these kids don't have food to eat home and so the main goal is to feed the kids.

Me: Whether that means 100% local or not

Cheryl: Yeah, ideally it would be great to do 100% local, but feeding them comes first.

Later, Cheryl shared her view of food security:

Cheryl: Here's my thing with this food security thing. Is there's this big gap between the have and have-nots or whatever you want to call it and um, you know, the kind of kids that are used to going to the Village Bakery [a locovore restaurant] and the farmers market aren't the kinds of kids that you generally, that you get in these programs, because these programs are in poverty regions. They don't pay $7 a pound for butter at the Village Bakery or the Farmacy [an organic and locovore market]. You know, they’re paying $2 at Wal-Mart or Aldees.
Cheryl’s assertion that the food insecure can’t afford the organic foods they are exposed to through programs such as the summer camp was challenged by a number of participants throughout my research. Brandon, CFI AmeriCorps, shared that CFI is interested in facilitating:

The awareness that healthy food isn't that much more expensive when you think in terms of when you eat unhealthy for your entire life and then by the time you're 60 or 70 you're spending thousands and thousands of dollars a month on healthcare, medicine, and you're going to take the rest of your life. Look at it now; maybe I should have spent a little more a month on healthy groceries instead of buying the junk food that's slowly killing you with all the other things that we ingest. And, there's been lots of studies and documentaries I've watched since I've started here that shows that you actually save money in groceries from buying healthy food, so it's really not that much more expensive to buy healthy foods.

Interestingly, Brandon’s claims regarding the economic and health payoffs of current eating habits and their impact on long term health is indicative of CFI’s disconnect from the very group they are claiming to target – the food insecure. That is, such assertions suggest that individuals experiencing food insecurity are able to afford healthier food options in the moment. CFI might benefit from more direct conversations with individuals experiencing food insecurity in order to garner a better understanding of, and helpful approach to addressing immediate needs. Such tactics are consistent with the philosophy of Horton (and Dewey) who believe that community organizers must work
with the group they are targeting so that group helps to solve the problem (Horton et al., 1998).

Similar to Brandon’s argument for the long term economic benefit of investing in our health through food now, Rebecca described the ease with which people could provide for themselves if they devoted some time and energy. Rebecca said:

So there's things you can grow that you don't even have to have electricity for. And canning tomatoes is easy. Canning jam is easy. And then dry beans. You don't need electricity for that. So much food. Potatoes and beets, turnips are all stored as they are. Really, it shouldn't be that expensive for our food. It shouldn't be. But it is because people make it so. They compare it to 33 cents a package of Raman noodles. You can't really compare it to that.

Just as Rebecca described the economic benefit to cooking and preserving your own harvest, Perry (farmer, CFI contributor) shared with me that Family Farms feeds around 60 people a week on a budget of $300/month (from fieldnotes). How are they able to do this? They are almost entirely self-sufficient. They have a cow for milk, chickens for eggs and poultry, pigs for meat, and several acres of vegetables. They have educated themselves on skills to preserve their harvest and have adopted an ethic of “living smaller.”

As I described in Chapter One, food security means much more than simply having food. Food security means safe, consistent access to nutritious foods. Participants in this project routinely described that CFI is a major proponent of healthy, local, organic foods, and pushes to make these foods accessible to all. In short, CFI is raising the
standard of what is accepted as a worthy for others to consume, keeping in mind that the patrons frequenting the pantries are often those most in need of healthy foods.

Taken as a whole, the theme “A person growing their own garden is a threat”: CFI programs fight dominant food systems, highlights the creative ways CFI works against mainstream understandings and expectations of health and wellness. Food is much more than sustenance; it is an important part of our culture. Yet, modern lifestyles have taken the enjoyment out of food, taking food and its availability for granted. Food insecurity heightens ones consciousness about food, because they become hyper aware of what they do and do not have available (see Pollan, 2009). CFI works against mainstream views of food (and the food system more generally) through education, gardening, access, and by raising the standard. As the following theme will describe, CFI promotes an intimacy with the food processes that helps individuals to establish a relationship with their food, thus, shifting how food comes to the table.

“Down in the Dirt”: Establishing a Relationship with your Food

Having a “relationship” with one’s food means understanding and caring about (a) where one’s food comes from, (b) what are its benefits and weaknesses, and (c) what its production means for the environment. This kind of connection with one’s food is valuable because it fosters better health practices for one’s self, others, and the environment. For example, when individuals are devoted to growing their own garden and harvesting, storing, and eating their own food, they are raising their awareness of what they put into their body (and anything your garden provides will be more nourishing then what you can pick up at Wal-Mart). This kind of astute awareness and mindfulness
of food is markedly different than our dominant ideologies surrounding food. For example, mainstream views of food generally focus on affordability, convenience, and taste (sugar, salt, fat). However, CFI advocates for a return to traditional ways of living – away from commercialism, capitalism, materialism etc., a return to gardening, canning, caring for neighbors.

In an age of technological abundance, new movements are urging us to step back and (re)examine what we eat, how we live, and how we care for one another: Grow a garden, give to others when you have abundance (and be mindful about what you give as described in the preceding section), get kids involved in the food process (and even recognizing that food is a process and not something to be taken for granted or consumed mindlessly). We must realize that “humans are not separate from nature but an integral part of the fabric of life” (Edwards, 2010, p. 8). Through gardening, harvesting, and cooking our own food, individuals are able to reestablish a connection to the earth. The following subthemes support the theme, “Down in the dirt”: Establishing a relationship with your food. Subthemes to follow include: A heightened awareness, See the “full circle connection,” and Return to traditional ways to harness food security.

_A Heightened Awareness_

Dougherty (2011) suggested that people actively avoid an awareness or consciousness of the marginalized, less fortunate. Living in poverty, experiencing food insecurity and the health ramifications associated with such conditions are real, lived experiences of many people living in Southeastern Ohio. Indeed, as described in Chapter One, approximately 30% of people living in Athens County alone are below the poverty
level. CFI programming insists on the recognition of significant communal disparities by “waking people up” to food inequalities and challenging community members, regardless of their food security status, to do something about food injustices.

CFI programming, and gardening in particular, fosters a relationship between people and their food by creating a connection to the land. For example, consider the following interview exchange with Janine (West Side Community Gardener, Steering Committee):

Janine: Valuable lessons... Let's see. That's a hard one. I think the best answer I can come up with for that one is to affirm my relationship with nature. How much I have been connected to nature and didn't really know it and know through having my own garden I'm able to have that. Where maybe it was a mental connection before or emotional connection, it's physical. I don't think I had that. I know I didn't have that before. Now here I am tilling my own soil. Down in the dirt. And I've never done that before. And I love it. And watching. Putting a bean in the ground and watching that bean come up – Oh my God! You wouldn't think someone would say "Guess what Rose – my beans are up!" And you're not embarrassed to say it to a fellow gardener.

Me: No, not at all.

Janine: People know what you're saying. They know that feeling – my beans are up! And I was talking to somebody the other day and I said "if I told that to somebody who's not a gardener, they would probably say "Oh my God Janine, get a life." And I think that is getting a life.
For Janine, her life has shifted from that of a passive observer of gardening activities (as she shared during an interview) to an active and engaged participant. This kind of awareness of the food cycle fosters a relationship and connection to the earth and ones’ food system: a connection, that, as some participants expressed, creates a degree of loyalty to your food. For example, you do not want to let anything go to waste – you appreciate what the garden has provided. Tammy (former Nelsonville Community Gardener) shared the following:

And it's funny, like every tomatoes that drops, as sick as I am of tomatoes, I'm like, oh no, there's one on the ground and we grew that! So I think that the quantity of the vegetables that we eat. Like the radishes, I've never bought radishes to eat, but they're actually not bad. And I like that my kids enjoy it and they go out and eat the tomatoes right off the vine. They go out and snack on the tomatoes. And it's teaching them a lesson too. He's starting school and do we let him get a school lunch or pack, all that stuff.

This excerpt illustrates a number of issues that have been present throughout my research. First, Tammy’s dedication to each and every tomato supports the assertion that gardening fosters a heightened awareness, dedication, and relationship to your food. Tammy’s kids, too, have learned as direct a connection as one can imagine, and she is intensely aware of and delighted by this.

A heightened awareness about food consumption contributes to a dedication towards home cooked foods. For instance, Marsha, a CFI workshop leader and local farmer expressed her frustration when she went to visit her mother. Marsha recalled: “My
mother offered me bought apple sauce the last time I visited her at her own apartment, and I went ‘Mom, I make this stuff now! I don't want that other stuff!’” Other participants talked about how a heightened awareness of our problematic food system helped them to engage in identity work, and the role of spirituality in determining how to address food concerns. Perry (Farmer, CFI Contributor), for example, shared: “Questions of my own Christian faith are coming together of how I live out my Christian identity in a way that is self-giving? And its root is, figuring that out is all coming together.”

Raising awareness of food fosters intentionality around food. Perry (Farmer, CFI contributor) explained:

It takes a lot of work to grow a garden. Let's say that you're a small family. It takes a fair amount of work to put into it and tend to it, but what else are you going to do with your time? Watch TV? So there's got to be some sense that's it's not just drudgery. Because I don't think that there's any way around the cost issue when it comes to food. We have to pay for food. We're taking shortcuts. That's part of the reason why our food is such poor quality. We have to pay more. But that payment doesn't have to be in money, it can be in time. So if more people are able to grow their own food and cook food that they have, take more time with their food, that's also a form of payment. One that I think is much more accessible to people whether if they’re in a city or rural area. Just spending that time and intentionality around food.

This degree of intentionality Perry refers to is consistent with his mission on the farm. As founder of Family Farms, Perry tries to raise awareness about the food and health
disparities in our own community. Perry emphasizes “Probably the biggest thing is just raised a lot of awareness about food insecurity for all the people that come and volunteer. It makes them aware of the fact that there's a lot of people make choices between gas in their car, heating their house, and food on a monthly basis.” Echoing the problematic choices being made by families in poverty, Magie (member of CFI’s board of directors, hospice nurse) shared that one-third of her clients between the ages of 30 – 65 are suffering from diseases that could have been prevented by better nutrition. She continued, “People have to choose between medication or food – it makes me livid (CFI’s annual potluck dinner, fieldnotes)!”

Indeed this kind of awakening to the tough decisions being made by community members is at the heart of CFI’s work. Max, a West Side Community Gardener appeared exasperated when he talked fondly of the Executive Director of CFI:

I've watched her on TV. She has so much education, or not education, information. And she tries to, on the access channel, tries to disseminate it. Rebecca, it's going by 98% of the people, but she tries so hard. Which is one of the components. We're doing so many good things – "listen people!" And you just can't tell people.

Struggling to garner the attention of a receptive community appeared as a thread woven through the discourse among participants. That is, how do you enliven community members’ awareness of the value of food security and efforts of self-reliance without pushing them away? People do not want their lifestyles to be critiqued; yet, the routine of most Americans is contributing to skyrocketing incidences of chronic disease and a
generation of children who will die before their parents (Nestle, 2002/2007). As such, CFI programming facilitates an awakening, urging individuals to reconsider how they bring their food to the table. In so doing, CFI helps people make the “full circle connection” between self-sufficiency, food, lifestyle, and health, as will be described next.

The “Full Circle Connection”

A number of participants emphasized how their involvement with CFI programming facilitated a relationship with their food by helping them to see the full circle connection between their lifestyle, food choices, health, and the community. Perry (Farmer, CFI contributor) described how his faith based farm helped him understand the spiritual imperative of connecting with food. Perry said:

Myself, when I started, one of the quotes that stuck with me was "where our food comes from, how we make our way, is of the utmost religious significance and how we do that or how we don't do that, is how we practice our faith." And that kind of stuck with me because I didn't really have a good sense of, you know, in a very physical way, of where my food came from. So I started working on farms to connect myself. Then I got more and more excited about connecting other folks with where their food came from, especially as I was learning a lot about the different problems within our food system.

Perry, though one of the few participants who connected food with faith, has made it his life’s mission to use his faith to connect with others through hospitality and farming. As Perry gave me a walking tour of the farm he told me the mission of the farm was “sharing
the joy of food for all who hunger.” He quoted scripture extensively, referring to the story of Ruth and gleaning the fields (Leviticus 19:20) to support the idea that farmers have been providing for the poor even in biblical history (from fieldnotes). Family Farms and Perry’s pedagogy for the operating of the farm is a perfect exemplar of how individuals can have a relationship with their food by recognizing the connectedness of food to everything in our life. In so doing, Perry speaks to the full circle connection and interdependence of farming, health, and community. As the keynote speaker at CFI’s annual potluck, Perry stated, it’s “Not purely about a farm, it’s about a community.” He talked about how the farm focuses on farming, sustainability, and discipleship. Perry said “God is in everything, soil, land; how we use things is of utmost significance.” The core question, he continued, is our “relationship with food and a sense of justice with which we bring to the table. We need to find the spiritual ethic that allows us to live smaller (from fieldnotes).”

Clearly Perry’s connection to the land is rooted in his spirituality. Others spoke of farming, and gardening as a way of reconnecting with the earth. For example, Kim (West Side Community Gardener, Steering Committee) shared the following after an interview:

Gardens have given so much to me, and also because I believe it is so important for all of us to reestablish an awareness of the connection between the land that sustains us and the food we eat, even in a token way. It seems that, from what I've seen among the gardeners, the renewal of this awareness is a very mysteriously powerful thing. All kinds of people seem to go through a very similar sort of transformation when they begin gardening!
Reflecting on her motivations for gardening Danielle (garden sitter) said:

Danielle: We try to be as frugal as we can so money wise we think it's beneficial. And we know that it's organic and it's right outside the door so we don’t have to drive to get it. So it's economical and good for the environment, and also we both just like to grow and harvest and nurture

Me: yeah

Danielle: And get our hands dirty – be involved with our food and the things that we can be involved with, we try to be.

As these participants have described, by getting their hands dirty and harvesting their own vegetables they experienced a connection to the earth and their food.

The summer camp coordinated by CFI, Kids on Campus, and the USDA offered a site for nurturing this full circle connection as well. For example, a number of the camp staff (mostly CFI AmeriCorps) discussed the experiential activities that helped the kids connect to the food. Jamie captures full circle connection idea in the following interview quotation:

I think they got a lot of exposure to a lot of different things. I think the gardening was really great. They really really bonded over that. And just being outside is just therapeutic anyway. But it did take a while for them to make the connection, the full circle connection. I think they have maybe, hopefully, a greater understanding of how you know, the circular motion of that all goes together. Even if they don't understand it's for the local economy, at least they can say "I grew this and then we took it to the kitchen and then we all ate it. And today I had
zucchini rolls with couscous and black beans." So exposure to different foods and understanding that healthy food is not tasteless. It can be enjoyable. You don't have to have meat every meal for it to be enjoyable.

As the above passage describes, kids appeared to be eager to contribute to the production of the meals. In fact, a number of camp staff confirmed that the campers were more likely to eat the foods, even if they were unfamiliar, if they had a hand in the preparation. This kind of exposure to new foods and access to the kitchen facilitated a connection to the food the campers might have missed had the food been prepared only by camp staff at the exclusion of the campers.

Indeed, exposure appeared to be key ingredient to the camp’s success and a common thread throughout my research. Sarah (CFI Summer AmeriCorps), for instance, stated the following:

> I think they just really learned how you can, how food is prepared. Where food comes from. And that it's okay to try new things and you might like something that you've never had. We encouraged them every day. They got these little charms bracelets and they got charms for trying something new. They got charms for games we played. So hopefully some of them learned. I think really it was them being more familiar with what the food was. It was a new language. A whole new set of vocabulary, being familiar with those words and what the food looks like… You learn by what you know, so your exposure to food is what you are fed. What you get to eat and lunch at school, what you eat at breakfast. It is not very good. A lot of it is education and tradition. And it's hard because we're in
a rural area and far enough south. People eat what they're accustomed to eating. It is meat heavy and fat heavy.

As Sarah described in the above interview passage, staff made use of incentives such as charms to encourage youth to expand their boundaries and try new foods. This kind of positive reinforcement appeared to be most persuasive in terms of facilitating attitude and behavior change.

Using creative strategies (such as the charms as incentives) to shift food behaviors was the camp's mechanism for overcoming the sensitivity associated with a topic such as food. Indeed, food behaviors are cultural, engrained, and therefore, hard to change. In a recent conversation with a CFI staff member, she confirmed that part of her definition of food security was recognizing the cultural embeddness of food choices (fieldnotes). In support, Marsha (local farmer, CFI workshop leader) said “Changing anybody’s eating habits is really hard. They've just been brought up on white bread and bologna and chips and then, oh let's go have a really good meal, let's get a Big Mac. And that's it.” Speaking to the delicate nature of food, Jamie (CFI Summer AmeriCorps) shared her struggles at the camp between changing food consumption and maintaining a positive relationship with the campers:

But food is such a sensitive topic, it's so intimate to people. I think sometimes they thought that maybe, I mean it's just a touchy subject. It's hard to be like "oh these are the things you should be doing; the things that you're used to seeing aren't the best for you." It's a delicate balance of trying to educate and still maintain that good relationship.
Managing this tension between maintaining a positive relationship, while also educating community members was a constant strain throughout my research, and deterrent challenging participants to see the full circle connection between food, health, and the community.

As these past few examples describe, one of the more significant obstacles to having a relationship with your food and making that full circle connection is a discomfort with new and unfamiliar foods. To address this, CFI programming embraces an educational strategy of improving awareness through educational programming such as the school curriculum, workshops, and community gardens. Yet, as will be discussed later, such programming appears to be drawing in crowds who are already food secure and devoted to CFI’s mission, not necessarily the individuals who need the education most.

Return to Traditional Ways to Harness Food Security

A number of participants emphasized the value of returning to traditional ways of eating and living in order to improve their food security. Theorists have long critiqued American consumption, arguing that consumption serves the sole purpose of marking social class. As an example of how social class is exemplified through consumption, Veblen (2006) described how individuals engage in conspicuous consumption, by which he meant their acquisition of goods and services for the exclusive purpose of displaying wealth. CFI programming challenges taken for granted assumptions regarding the value of consumption. Instead, CFI defies Western assumptions regarding consumption by
fostering a value of “less is more,” of returning to traditional ways of eating, living, and interacting with others.

The preceding subtheme described the tension between fostering a positive relationship with participants, while also trying to educate them to change their behaviors. Part of the problem contributing to this tension is simply a fear and discomfort with the unknown. CFI addresses this issue by trying to forge a new relationship with food through traditional food practices and techniques. Lana (West Side Community Gardener, Food is Elementary Coordinator) captured this tension in the following statement:

I mean I probably wouldn't eat like an octopus because I probably wouldn't eat it because I wouldn't know what it is, what to do with it, and, is it safe to eat? Basic things like that. I don't blame these people for not wanting to eat okra; you can't buy fresh okra at the store.

Other participants noted hesitancy in canning, as Danielle (garden sitter) exclaimed: “It’s not safe for tomatoes ever. So, it just instills the fact that I never want to can.” Consistent with Danielle’s resistance to canning, Tammy (Nelsonville Community Gardener) said “canning scares me because I worry about botulism. I actually won't eat anything that's home canned.” Though botulism is a valid concern, Kingsolver (2007), defending canning, said: “canning doesn’t deserve its reputation as an archaic enterprise murderous to women’s freedom and sanity” (p. 199-200).

CFI participants emphasized teaching people how to be resourceful (using traditional techniques) in order to take ownership of their food security status. At its most
basic, this mentality suggests that if you are able to do it (e.g., garden, can, forage, hunt, cook) yourself, you will be more food secure. Rebecca (CFI staff) described CFI’s goals in the following interview passage:

We help people become self-sufficient in their food production. So we help them grow their own gardens and we also work with schools and the donation station and we increase access to fresh food through individual family gardening, through education with the school. After school education, in the classroom, on the importance of real food and how to make squash soup, things like that. We increase access through the CFI donation station. We bring in all the food we get to our most needy who can't afford to buy it. And really should be growing it. And kind of things. We hand out plants to those people, seeds to those same people, we just keep trying to push them to grow it themselves.

As described earlier, emphasis on self-sufficiency is on target in terms of economic and health benefit; saving money and improving health (e.g., physical exercise gardening, increased consumption of vegetables).

Goals to promote traditional techniques such as drying one’s own food have certainly reached some families. For example, Latrina (CFI workshop leader) described the value of drying foods: “It's just a wonderful way to store food because you're not depending on electricity. You know, if your freezer breaks you've got your dried food.” By utilizing traditional methods of drying food, Latrina improves her food security with a fully stocked pantry of dried foods. My fieldnotes from a workshop run by Latrina recalled the history of dried food:
She talked at length about how drying foods has been an elemental part of food security for many years. She spoke of how Christopher Columbus had dried foods on the ships and during the Depression, when canning goods were too expensive, people turned to drying foods as a safe means of preservation and food security. She said “Drying food has saved humanity.” The first several minutes of the workshop offered a historical overview of drying.

A more dramatic example of traditional living is the lifestyle of Lacy (CFI workshop leader, herbalist, small business owner). She and her family have taken an “off the grid” approach to solidify their food security:

Lacy: My husband and I work a lot on security in different forms. It's like, we have wood heat and so that's like really good to know, sometimes it's especially looking out, way out there... It's like, if the power went out in a conventional house there could be problems. And we've been sometimes really grateful that if the power goes out or we're snowed in we have some security here. We have a big pile of wood. We got a wood stove. You can cook on a wood stove. So, yeah, I don't know. Just little things like that. We have a garden and we try to get to know plants. We have a meadow and a vegetable garden and an herb garden and woods. So we have a pretty good mix of places to try to get food from. It's all part of the plan in different ways. We try to think about all that stuff because I don't think it's going to go on very long like this. It's pretty much like...

Me: What do you mean?
Lacy: I mean that the consumption, like, I'm trying to say it without being really cliché, but it is really cliché, just the way of everything coming from external sources and being really consumptive in most of society in America. And actually the Western thinking is spreading across the world and it can't go on. You know, even as I drive my car to home, to my office and back and back and back. It's like, this isn't going to last forever. It just can't. Not in a rational, itemized number sort of way, but in a common sense sort of way. You don't have to do the math to know that it's not going to work. It's like, "well let's all get biodiesel cars or sun powered cars." And it's like, okay, so we all get sun powered cars and then our factories have to have something to run on to make the solar cells. Or we could set up all these wind powered things. But somehow I know that's not going to work. We just can't be that big. We can't be all centralized like that. It's always been small and village oriented. And I think once you get this giant national and even bigger things it's like, it's sort of not at a humane level anymore. It's not based on relationships and things connecting. And I think once you get beyond that level it's not sustainable. It's just not going to work.

Lacy’s lifestyle, though not typical of most CFI participants, illustrates different ways she has taken ownership of her food security by embracing a self-reliant way of life. Later, she expressed how a return to traditional ways of living has made her more confident in her survival skills:

It's reassuring, even in being in a city or somewhere. Like we were in a garden, but you can be just about anywhere and find dandelion or burdock for that matter.
Or, you know, like people plant things for landscaping that have edible parts and pieces. So it's almost like, to me, that's reassuring because it's like, well, if tomorrow my electricity stopped and never ever came back on or if I didn't have any more gas ever for my car to run into town and go to the store, then I would know that I have a good start. I still feel like, it would be hard to survive winter, but I feel like I have a pretty good grasp on some things. I wouldn't feel totally lost. I wouldn't feel totally unfamiliar in the plant landscape in my backyard and in the woods. I feel like sort of among friends, you know?

As described in the above interview transcripts, Lacy seemed to adopt a kind of “off the grid” mentality in which she has separated her (and her family) from society due to a distrust in current consumption behaviors. She speaks to issues larger than just food systems, but Western consumption in general. While she might be self-reliant, and thus, keeping with CFI’s mission, her lifestyle seems to depart from CFI’s goals when considering the underlying tones of solitude, exclusion, even individualism. That is, though she might be improving the food security of herself and her family, there appears to be little regard for the community in her food philosophy. Thus, acts of self-reliance and community engagement (both central to CFI’s mission) appear to present either-or binaries, rather than both-and tensions. Yet, I met Lacey through her role as a CFI workshop leader, suggesting that she has a degree of communal concern as well. The point is that Lacey distrusts modernity at a very fundamental level and believes that a return to pre-modern living traditions are her (and our, implicitly) only hope.
Participants’ dedication to traditional practices was evidenced in discussions of connectedness and respect for food. Marsha, for instance, a CFI workshop leader and local farmer shared a story of when she and her husband lost their calf and how they dealt with that loss:

I think the first time I ever canned meat in West Virginia was when we had to deliver a calf and we had to pull it, it didn't live. And I quickly, we took it home and I went over to one of my friends’ houses and asked "is this meat any good, or is it going to taste awful?" and they said "no, it's good." It's extremely tender and it’s not like veal, it's not anemic or anything. And the mother was healthy. So I canned all the meat from the hind legs and the back bone and stuff and it was just so nice to have cans of beef that you could throw in a soup or something. It took a lot of work to can it, but I did it. I did it. It was kind of like; you did it, because we were so disappointed to lose that calf. And it was the first calf we had lost. And I said "okay, I'm going to make the most of it."

Though I squirmed as I listened to Marsha share a story of canning a calf, the underlying tone of her narrative appears to be one of respect and appreciation for what the calf was able to provide for their family. The death of the calf, though disappointing, was an opportunity to show respect for its contribution, by canning it for meat. Marsha’s story illustrates the preceding theme of recognizing the full circle connection between the way we live and the food we eat. As a farmer, she has an acute awareness of, and respect for the land and animals because that is literally how she puts food on the table.
Participants indicated that using traditional modes of food security was a value held in high regard in their upbringing. Latrina (workshop leader), taught a number of workshops in which she relied heavily on wisdom learned through her family. Latrina talked about gardening and processing their own food in the following interview excerpt:

All my family. Valuing that, that's what we valued. We valued growing it, putting it up, and then most importantly, eating it. You know, that's how we ate. We didn't eat junk food. We didn't want it. We didn't need it. So, we didn't run around. I mean it's not that we wouldn't buy a bag of chocolate chip cookies and stuff like that. But we wouldn't go get a bag of fast food. For one thing, there wasn't fast food restaurants around our place. And our food security was security. We never worried about being hungry. We never ran out of food and we gave food away to people.

As Latrina described in the above quotation, they were not necessarily wealthy, but they were food secure because of their ability to be self-sustaining, to grow their own food, cook their own food, and even give it away to others.

Participants suggested that returning to tradition meant utilizing techniques such as foraging. Lacy (CFI workshop leader, herbalist, small business owner), for example, directed a workshop at the Nelsonville Community Garden where she walked participants around the garden and identified plants that could be used medicinally. From my fieldnotes:

Lacy challenged typical notions of what “counts” as a plant and what counts as weed. She shared that dandelions are the “world’s most hated plant, but actually
an excellent source of vitamin D.” She talked about the health benefits of incorporating different naturally growing plants into your diet as she stated “All of the plants we’ve been showing are very healthful and should be part of your diet.” Using plants that are growing in your own backyard has a clear economical component. Throughout the workshop, Lacy identified plants that could be used to treat poison ivy, bee stings, warts, sunburns, indigestion, and even cancer. One of the major messages of the workshop seemed to be that if individuals could educate themselves on the natural resources around them, then they can take ownership of their own health without the aid of pharmaceuticals.

Later, in an interview, Lacy described her appreciation when her husband brings home burdock root:

Burdock root, we talked about in the medicinal sense. And it is very medicinal, but it's also something, like my husband is a landscaper and farmer for us, but he occasionally just digs up burdock and brings it from work where they pulled it for something and brings it home and we cook it up. I'm not so much thinking about, well sometimes I am, but I'm not so much thinking "this is good for my liver,” but it's like, it's food.

It is unlikely that when most American’s stomachs growl that they react by walking to the woods to search for dandelions or burdock root. But, as Lacey’s workshop lessons and interview conversation suggest, there is food security in hunting and gathering techniques.
In contrast to solitary attempts at fostering food security, a number of participants pointed to the role of the community in adopting traditional food techniques. Marsha (workshop leader, farmer) shared the following:

I think all the things that Shagbark, the people that do the grain. Even though it’s puny, their operation, and there's bigger grain mills in Logan or someplace. I still think everyone that knows how to do something like that contributes to our food security. Even if somebody just has a garden one year and then they decide it was too much work, I didn't like going out in the hot of July, and getting too many cucumbers or something. So okay, but they know how to do it, so it contributes to our food security. Maybe they got seeds off of CFI once and they had a garden, then they decide the following year, no, I don't want to do it. Still, I think it helps. I think all that helps and I think it can't help but be sort of good even if it’s only the upper-class that's buying local. I mean, I've had a lot of people tell me, I'm not going to buy any meat at the grocery store, I'm just going to get it all at the Farmer's Market. I tell them, "That’s all I do."

As Marsha attests, even smaller steps at working your own garden or buying from the farmer’s market contribute to food security and promote a view that “living smaller” by relying on local grain mills and the Farmer’s Market are valuable ways for the community to promote traditional food practices. Marsha suggests a moderate view of behavior change compared to the previous excerpts, but a perspective that might be more likely to facilitate modification in food behaviors than the “all or nothing” approaches previously mentioned. Indeed, persuasion research indicates that incremental changes
that fit within one’s range of beliefs are much more likely to facilitate change than messages falling outside of one’s latitude of acceptance (Littlejohn & Foss, 2011). In fact, this “all or nothing” versus “small steps” towards behavior change is one of the significant tensions I noticed throughout my research. As I will elaborate on in Chapter Five, CFI’s demand for massive lifestyle change might be one of their primary deterrents in attracting community members. That is, by asking individuals to completely discontinue shopping at grocery stores, cut all processed foods, grow their own fruits and vegetables, and can enough of their produce to last until the next growing season, they might “scare” people off.

Returning to traditional ways of living and eating is one of the ways CFI encourages a closer relationship with our food. Others have advocated for the value of integrating traditional practices with Western knowledge. For example, Edwards (2010), in advancing the merit of protecting indigenous cultures (namely the Tibetan, Balinese, Inuit, and Kogi in Edwards’ research), argued that “traditional knowledge is often dismissed as unscientific and anecdotal because it is qualitative rather than quantitative and can be enmeshed in spiritual beliefs, but its strength lies in its endurance over millennia” (p. 16). Edwards suggests that, given increasing interdependence among nations, we must learn better ways of living on earth; he says “we must first create a context that accommodates the profoundly different worldviews of native cultures and modern society” (p. 20). As the participants in this section describe, traditional practices such as gardening, foraging, farming, and canning offer viable strategies to improve food security.
“Find a Connection and Give”: Demanding Ethical Revaluation

CFI programming necessitates a reconsideration of fundamental values and beliefs. In so doing, CFI makes a strong case for the value of food, beyond mere sustenance. Drawing attention to the importance of food, Pollan (2009) stated:

We forget that, historically, people have eaten for a great many reasons other than biological necessity. Food is also about pleasure, about community, about family and spirituality, about our relationship to the natural world, and about expressing our identity. As long as humans have been taking meals together, eating has been as much about culture as it has been about biology. p. 8

The following subthemes support the overarching theme of “Find a connection and give”: Demanding ethical reevaluation: Establishing an ethic of caring, An ethical reevaluation of work, and An ethical reevaluation of community engagement.

*Establishing an Ethic of Caring*

One of the particularly striking observations I noted in participants’ discourse was an underlying devotion to caring for the community. Importantly, the sort of caring emphasized among participants has been a caring for the community at large, not only for those within your immediate network. For example, the donation station encourages community members to donate to people with whom they have no relationship; you simply drop off money or produce and it is distributed as CFI sees fit. Some might perceive CFI as the “middle-man” creating a disconnect between the “haves” and the “have-nots.” An alternative view might be that CFI encourages community members to share when they have abundance; it does not matter with whom you are sharing. The
website uses language to suggest that when we have abundance, we should share. For example, on the homepage, the reader finds the statement: “Our ‘food for all’ work is supported by regional farmers, local food producers, and community gardeners who contribute fresh produce and locally produced foods to our Donation Station.” Language such as “food for all” emphasizes CFI’s dedication to equal access to food and helping those in need. When I asked Rebecca (CFI staff) the biggest thing individuals could do to improve food security, she said without hesitation:

Growing food. I mean, everybody needs to be growing food and then giving 10% back. Everybody needs to give 10% to their community somehow. Whether it's their neighbor, or the donation station, or the pantries, whatever it is. Find a connection and give 10% back.

As illustrated in Rebecca’s response, people need to be self-sufficient by growing their own gardens, but, also purposeful in their gardening with the expectation that they will donate part of their harvest. Donating 10% of your harvest is consistent with the “Plant an Extra Row” project of the Emergency Food Network (EFN), a nonprofit emergency food distribution center, focused on providing healthy food to food banks, shelters, and community meals (“Emergency Food Network,” March 27, 2012). The “Plant an Extra Row” project is one of EFN’s projects developed to help feed the hungry by asking gardeners to grow extra produce for the purposes of donation to food pantries. It entails planting an extra row of vegetables, fruits, or herbs in your garden, delivering the produce to a pantry, and sharing the message of giving with others. “Plant an Extra Row”
is similar to the Tibetan environmental ethic of seeking not only your own enlightenment, but also help others and, and in the process, end suffering (Edwards, 2010). This focus on the self to help others stands in stark contrast to individualistic tendencies in the United States.

The mindset of learning skills for self-sufficiency in order to give and care for others outside of your immediate network creates a circle of returning. This circle of returning is illustrated in the following exchange during a group interview with Nate (AmeriCorps volunteer), Brandon (AmeriCorps volunteer), and Donna (CFI volunteer)

Nate: Well I think the more you teach someone and teach them to become self-reliant the more they can become a part of the community that is working to help other people become self-reliant. So, you have a cycle starting at the individual and then allowing them to become a productive member of society and the community, and then you have to bring in more people

Brandon: So you're saying by teaching someone to say, grow their own food, they can then teach someone else how to grow their own food?

Nate: Right

Brandon: It's just happening, so you're hoping the community, by teaching one person, they may teach one person, and they may teach three, so technically you have helped 4 or 5 people how to do grow their own food, therefore the community will be able to sustain itself better than it did before.

Donna: Part of the... We have a lot of starts in the spring that are donated to us, we in turn donate and part of the criteria for the donation is once your garden
produces, then you can bring stuff back to us, so it creates a circle of returning.

And we have people that do that. We have had several people stop at the market
"Well this is out of my garden." So, they are doing that.

As the above passage illustrates, as individuals learn self-sufficiency skills, they are often
inclined to pass on that knowledge to others. This multiplier effect means that CFI is
reaching much more than the small group of people attending the workshops and
participants in their programming. Instead, CFI is potentially influencing participants’
family, friends, neighbors, and colleagues.

Creating this circle of returning instills an ethic of care (concern for relationships)
and value for community among participants. Donna (CFI volunteer), for example,
shared:

We had one family stop one day and they left lots and lots of produce and they
said, "Well you gave us starts in the spring, now we're returning." So that's part of
that community.

Involvement with CFI and similar organizations facilitates a sense of community and
dedication to others. Janine (West Side Community Gardener, Steering Committee)
spoke favorably of the community as she shared “That's what I love about this area. So
CFI has helped me see that. And has encultured that – you have to give back. We have to
share.” As Janine attests, CFI has helped her to recognize that sharing when you have
abundance is a natural behavior; it is something that every person in the community
should be doing. Later, she reinforced her belief in sharing when she said “being able to
garden just reinforces the Athens trait of take care of your neighbor, take care of the
poor.” Notice in the preceding statement Janine refers to this ethic of caring as an
“Athens trait.” A number of participants spoke of how Athens is different from other places because of its local, community, grassroots type of focus. As a college town with numerous local farmers, situated in the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains, it is no wonder that an organization such as CFI is able to thrive. People drawn to this type of location might be more likely to express interest in gardening, drying foods, canning, and supporting the local farmers market. Yet, as the opening chapter described, Athens also faces a poverty rate of approximately 35%, making the need for food security awareness and self-sufficiency skills paramount.

As described above, CFI appears to encourage a circle of returning in which participants who receive support from CFI later “pay it forward” by giving back what they are able. Yet, this kind of reciprocity might not be a constant expectation. For example, Kim (West Side Community Gardener, Steering Committee) described CFI’s generosity in the interview passage below:

Kim: I had some things to can and I remember they just gave me a whole bunch of really pretty little jars and oh, that's right, I was canning stuff for Christmas presents. And they lent me the canning equipment, the whole set up and everything. And at the time they didn't ask me for anything. It might have been partly because I was involved with Rural Action. When you're an AmeriCorps and you have any interaction with those organizations, they understand that you're...

Me: Because you pretty much have a stipend, right?
Kim: Yes. A stipend that cannot be any more than the poverty rate that you serve.

We had, me and my husband were both in it and had three kids in the house at that time, so we were pretty strapped.

As Kim described, they were “pretty strapped.” CFI supported her and her family when they could not afford to buy their own canning equipment. This kind of care for others appears to be a driving force behind much of CFI’s work. The community gardens, for example, foster a particular ethic of caring. Janie (Nelsonville Community Gardener) described a fellow community gardener “This guy, Mike has this whole space... He told me he does it for the joy of planting and gives it all away.” Mike’s actions suggest the value of a community garden plot and the capacity of that plot to address food insecurity by growing food for the sole purpose of donation. Indeed vegetable gardens have the capacity to make a significant impact on community hunger. A recent follow-up interview with Nate, a CFI AmeriCorps revealed that one of the new programs CFI is coordinating is to help set-up vegetable gardens at local food pantries. This kind of work, though not “fixing” food insecurity, is one very tangible way of improving the quality of food filling the food bank shelves.

Providing healthy food to people in need is one way to nurture and show care to the community. Dave (CFI staff) was pleased with the work CFI is doing as he exclaimed:

Dave: And, so I get to feel like we're offering good, healthy food, good healthy produce specifically to folks in need.

Me: Mhmm
Dave: And nurture them.

Caring for people through food is a value fully embraced by Perry, founder of Family Farms (and major contributor to CFI) as he shared the following:

Perry: The motto of the farm is "sharing the joy of food for all who hunger." It's meant to be multilayered. But that idea of sharing the joy being that, why people come here, show that it's fun and we have all these folks around, and really be intentional about how it's fun to grow food. So we shift up the jobs. It's not just about getting a project done but doing it in a way that shows that it's fun and organizing it so that it is. Cooking with people, which we do fairly often and also putting up food, canning. Doing that and sitting around the table and having a conversation is fun.

Perry’s philosophy on food and farming is indicative of CFI’s efforts at independence through self-reliance and interdependence through caring for the community. As previously described, this notion is consistent with the work of Rawlins (2009) who suggests that individuals constantly manage a tension to individuate and participate. The particular strategies embraced in these initiatives determine if that tension is edifying or dispiriting. At its best, Perry’s farm appears to promote edifying individuation and participation.

Extending care for the others is an act that can be done regardless of age of ability. Latrina (workshop leader) spoke reverently about her mother’s ethic of care even in old age:
My mother was growing food when she was in a nursing home in this little atrium garden and her hallway opened up to it and they gave that to her. There was a newspaper article about my mother. She had tomatoes, peppers, beans, and flowers in that garden. She was sending home with the nurses tomatoes. And one friend visited her, a younger woman in the community and she called my sister and said "Sue has fed me out of her garden since I was a teenager and she's still feeding me out of her garden and she's 82 at a nursing home! So that's my parents. They'd grow enough food so when people were having hard times with money we'd feed them, we'd feed neighbors and relatives all the time. It was just an act of love. It was an act of love.

As Latrina described, her mother’s ethic of caring through food was an “act of love” she could provide even through her older age. These behaviors and the philosophy behind sharing with others demand a shift in individual values and ethics; that is, engagement in CFI programming facilitates review fundamental beliefs and values (which will be further explored in Chapter Five).

Perry (Founder of Family Farms, CFI contributor) contributes to a pedagogy of caring through the model of the farm: “it [the farm] is a place where people can come in and work physically and help their community and to model a place that's self-giving.” Indeed, this model of self-giving is appreciated by individuals who receive CFI donations. Donna (CFI volunteer) was near tears as she recalled a recent visit to a church that provides meals to those in need:
Nate and I put together the food and drove out to Mineral and they were so appreciative. There is Pastor Ray, I think is his name, and they were kind of hanging around outside looking for us and they said "You're here – you've got food!" We started unloading, we took my car, and they'd just stare. I'd pull out a box and one would take it. And Pastor Ray said "We're so grateful. We're so grateful." It's a poor little town you know, you can tell driving through it; it has no industry that I can see. Some churches and houses is about all you see. So Dave had asked that I find out what they wanted or if we were sending too much of one item. I said "Is there anything you want more of?" He said, "No we'll take anything." I said "Is there anything you want less of?" "We'll take anything, we just appreciate anything you do for us." It just touched my heart. That was people who you actually see – we're helping, we're feeding these people. So they put together boxes and people drive through and they hand them out a box.

Donna’s touching story illustrates a shift in values, from caring for yourself and your immediate network, to caring for and providing for individuals who simply need the food. The narrative also shows how CFI improves access to healthy foods, but does not necessarily solve food insecurity in all of their programming.

Donna’s involvement is primarily with the Donation Station, which is a program for collecting donated money and produce to provide for those in need (individuals and organizations). The Donation Station has had a significant impact on the community, distributing food to over 35 locations in Athens County, totaling more than 21 tons of fresh food in 2010 (which was estimated to double in 2011). While the Donation Station
has had less of a self-reliance focus than other CFI programs, the act of caring for others
through food might facilitate motivation to learn self-sufficiency skills among donation
recipients. That is, CFI might be “whetting their appetite” to give, to be generous.

By encouraging people to enlarge their circle of caring CFI demands a
reconsideration of fundamental beliefs and expectations of others, making central the
value of caretaking behaviors (through giving of food in particular). CFI’s programming
reflects Wood’s (1994) work on caring, which argues that caretaking behaviors are
generally undervalued and unappreciated. Wood references the work of parents, nurses,
social workers, but the same argument can be extended to CFI participants who care for
others through food. In demanding that community members extend their circle of caring,
and be purposeful about the care they give to others (e.g., plant an extra row), CFI fosters
an alternative mindset regarding how people care for their neighbors (and people they do
not even know).

**An Ethical Revaluation of Work**

Discourse among CFI participants illustrates an emphasis on the value of work.
The excerpts in this section support the value of work in two capacities: (a) the value of
doing worthwhile work, and (b) the value of physically working hard. Dougherty (2011)
described the tendency for farmers (who were working class despite the fact that they
owned their land, home, equipment, had no boss, owned their time) were proud of the
“body work” they do. Body work is in reference to Marvin’s (1994) description of text
and body work in which text work denotes upper class (working with words) and body
work denotes lower class (working with the body). Similar to the farmer’s discourse
described in Dougherty’s research, CFI’s programming encourages a reevaluation of our ethic of work, suggesting there is significant value in working hard, in physical labor, work of the body.

The value of doing worthwhile work was particularly striking in conversations among the AmeriCorps workers. All AmeriCorps are paid a living stipend for their services. But, that living stipend cannot exceed the poverty level for the area you are serving in order to help AmeriCorps workers relate to the groups they work with. Erica, a CFI AmeriCorps working with the summer camp described her excitement at seeing the AmeriCorps position become available with CFI:

Erica: They usually don't have paid positions with their organization, so it's like "of course I'm going to do this! This is the kind of thing I believe in." And if I can do that instead of working in some restaurant over the summer.

Me: Yeah. Okay.

Erica: I thought it would give me some good skills for helping food insecurity in the future.

There is no doubt Erica could have made more money working at “some restaurant” compared to the stipend she received through her AmeriCorps service, but the value of doing work she “believes in” with the potential of helping her learn more about food security for the future far outweighed the financial draw of a different job.

Donna (CFI volunteer) describes her motivation for serving with CFI as an opportunity to help someone:
Donna: I didn't want to just do nothing. I was 60 some, I've got a lot of years left, why spend them doing nothing when I can benefit someone? Make a difference in someone's life?

Me: Yeah

Donna: That's my motivation. And it still is – make a difference in someone’s life.

Donna’s passion and dedication to CFI was especially striking. At the age of 60+, Donna shared that she has “reinvented herself.” When most of her similarly aged peers are retiring, spending winters in Arizona, and engaged in leisure activities, Donna is out foraging fresh food at the Farmer’s Market, volunteering at the distribution center, and using her banking experience to keep track of the donation station's finances.

The compassion and warmth emanating from Donna is matched by Dave (CFI staff) who described his motivation for working for CFI:

I'm basically a caregiver type person in my job activities. So, being able to do the Donation Station, when I heard it was becoming available, was very appealing to me to be able to help serve needy people, people in need, in our community in another fashion. If I'm going to work, I'm going to do something that's of value. I'm certainly not in it to make money.

As Dave described, he’s “not in it to make money,” which is good, because as a small, grant-funded, non-profit organization, lack of money was an obstacle expressed by every single interviewee. As I will elaborate on in the next chapter, CFI’s needs are met almost entirely through donations and grants. This unpredictability in income has posed a number of challenges including the overworking and consequent burnout of staff and
volunteers, discontinuation of programs, and an inability to carry out all necessary tasks due to inadequate funding. Given the sustainability mission of the organization, CFI is ironically not self-sustaining.

Yet, as participants consistently reported, money was certainly not the be-all-end-all of their work. In fact, money was a minimal factor in terms of overall job satisfaction. Nate (CFI AmeriCorps) spoke of his interest in doing work that was of value for the community:

I wanted to work in the community and you know, go to work with the idea that I was actually doing something for the betterment of the community rather than just going to work and doing something that wasn't really, something that was just an everyday job, you know?

Working for the betterment of the community suggests an alternative ethic of what constitutes a good job, a job of value. Participants construction of a valuable job was one that must be fulfilling, rewarding, support the community, and make a difference; these constructions stand in stark contrast to maximizing income or prestige, which are so commonly idealized in the broader culture. Brandon (CFI Summer AmeriCorps) spoke of how most CFI staff and volunteers worked far more than what they were paid for:

I'm 40 hours as well and then some. And these two, Dave and Donna do amazing things because they probably work 50 hours a week if not more, and Dave's getting paid for 20 and Donna is getting paid in smiles.

Donna, who gets “paid in smiles,” spoke with an astute mindfulness when she used the metaphor of a cog to describe the value of her work with CFI:
I just feel fortunate to be part of a system that is attaining food and then seeing that people who are hungry, children are hungry, are now having good food, good produce, healthy and good to eat. To me, that’s what intrigues me, what makes my heart soft. To think, I'm just a little cog in this whole main stream, but because of my little cog here, someone is eating healthy food. It just thrills me to death to think that. That's kind of the way I approach it.

For Donna, putting healthy food on the tables of strangers whom she would likely never meet, and who would likely do little to repay her, was one the main motivating factors for her work. Interestingly, benefitting people one never knows and who never know their benefactor is the highest form of charity in Jewish ethics.

In fact, CFI’s programming in general created a divide between their services and the people who received them. As a result, my research focuses on the perspectives of those involved on the operations end of CFI, rather than the recipients of CFI donations. This is also partly because CFI’s mission to serve the food insecure is slightly inaccurate. While they provide donations to food pantries, the majority of their programming is organized around assisting individuals to shift their lifestyle to more local, fresh, organic foods, as well as an educational focus, infiltrating into the school systems in particular. As the next section will expand upon, part of CFI’s work might be encouraging community engagement among the food secure to be more activist-like, in order to better meet the needs of people actually experiencing food insecurity.

While I heard limited first hand stories of CFI’s involvement with the food insecure, the few narratives that were shared were particularly telling of the life changing
capacity of an organization such as CFI. That is, the stories cultivate a sense of value among the volunteers and workers. Consider the following interview exchange between Brandon (CFI summer AmeriCorps) and Donna (CFI volunteer):

Brandon: We get stories from people. Just last week someone from UCM [United Campus Ministry] was telling us a story. They took, what was it that she took, maybe eggplant, something weird, and she came in telling us "They just loved that – they had never heard of it!"

Donna: Fried green tomatoes!

Brandon: That was it! People that never talk or smile were talking and smiling [Donna and Brandon in unison, and laughing] over something so simple. We don't always necessarily see it, but people do come in and tell stories about the things they do and people getting excited about food they've never had or seen before.

As Donna and Brandon testified in the above passage, the opportunity to try something new can be an exciting and motivating experience. It might be that trying new foods is a first step in changing long term consumption behaviors. Using language from the stages-of-change approach (also known as the transtheoretical model), it might be that recipients of CFI donations are in the preparation stage in which they experiment with new behaviors, without completely changing their lifestyle (Prochaska, DiClemente, & Norcross, 1992). This important stage is the precursor to the action stage, then finally the maintenance stage which assumes sustained behavior change. By introducing new foods to individuals, CFI facilitates movement throughout the stages and thus long term behavior change.
As described in the opening paragraph of this section, the value of work was described both as physically hard work, and also as work that is meaningful. In regards to the former, CFI participants expressed the importance of physical labor. For example, Rebecca (CFI staff) expressed frustrations with the laziness of today’s children. She voiced an “earn your keep” kind of mentality in which she challenged youth to contribute more to the household. Rebecca said:

All kids have a sense of entitlement. They don't have to do anything. They can just sit there and food is brought to them. They don't have to work. They don't have to do anything. They don't have to leave the house to do anything. The other thing is that they don't know how to work. They never had to work. They don't do the dishes anymore. They don't do the housework anymore. They don't go out and garden and help.

As an advocate homeschooler for her three children and farmer for her family, Rebecca knows the value of hard work. As she expressed in the above quotation, she believes her work ethic and the work ethic of her children is in the minority with most kids spending time “exercising their thumbs” (i.e., playing video games). Indeed, recent research has called attention to the inactivity of today’s youth, calling parents and community members to save our children from “nature-deficit disorder” (Louv, 2008). Referring to our age as the third frontier, Louv argued that this frontier is characterized by (among others) “a severance of the public and private mind from our food’s origins” (p. 19). Yet this laziness and disconnect from our food is not unique to our youth. Adults seem to be resistant to adopting more engaged food choices as well. Marsha (CFI workshop leader,
farmer) taught a canning workshop and shared with me in an interview: “I think canning is a dying art because people are getting so they don't even want to cook their own dinner, let alone stuff for winter. Why bother?”

Most people are drawn to certain foods because of convenience, ease, and affordability (Nestle, 2002/2007). CFI’s programming challenges dominant ideologies surrounding our food consumption by suggesting that we should value working hard for our food. Food should not be something grabbed on the go and mindlessly devoured. CFI’s philosophy toward food consumption is quite consistent with the Slow Food Movement, an international idea with thousands of followers across more than 150 countries, which works to connect food, the community, and the environment (“Slow Food USA,” March 28, 2012). As this section has described, CFI programming facilitates an ethical reevaluation in which participants are challenged with the task of reconsidering the value of work. What is a good job? What does it mean to work physically? CFI minimalizes financial gain while maximizing emotional and community reward for engaging in activities to address food insecurity. Importantly, CFI calls attention to youths’ troubling inactivity by encouraging experiential learning exercises which foster a connection to food through gardening. In so doing, CFI incentivizes physical activity by working the soil, maintaining a garden, and learning to be patient while cooking, learning the pleasure of “slow food.”

An Ethical Reevaluation of Community Engagement

Among other tactics, CFI appears to incentivize community engagement by celebrating its success on its website. A pattern of celebration is central to CFI’s attempts
to establish their expertise and credibility. For example, under the Seed Saving headline CFI states: “We distributed hundreds of seed packets, 14,000 lbs. of potatoes and nearly 70 flats of free tomato plants through the help of Jackson Area Ministries and the Society of St. Joseph this year.” CFI is creating an identity of success. Offering tangible ways CFI is impacting the community offers a potentially useful approach to build up people’s sense of pride in their small contributions. They know that they have contributed to these impressive numbers. This in turn builds identification and sets the stage for escalating change—at least in some participants.

As described in the preceding section, much of CFI’s programming appears to be devoted towards community members already embracing CFI’s views. For example, the vast majorities of CFI members are individuals who are already locally minded, eat organically, and grow their own garden – foodies, hippies, locovores, whatever the term; CFI has a receptive audience in the Athens community. Thus, their mission of reducing food insecurity by enabling self-reliance is unlikely to face much criticism or resistance in this region. Initially, one might question the worth of the organization if they are not necessarily interacting with and shifting the behaviors of individual’s actually experiencing food insecurity. Yet, as this section will describe, my research suggests that part of CFI’s underlying goals might actually be incentivizing individuals (who are already food secure) to engage in social justice and community organizing activities.

Kim (West Side Community Gardener, Steering Committee) described her motivations for becoming involved with CFI’s community gardening program:
I just felt like it was time for me to do something more for the community and I don't know, you know, I have, my job is kind of taxing for me. And you know, I've had, you know, three kids, two of them are out of the house now. That was, we don't have a whole lot of money and so I just really feel like for the longest time I hadn't been even out in the community let alone doing anything for it. So I just kind of felt that it was time and I liked a lot of the people who were involved.

Kim described her paid work as “taxing,” yet, she chose a volunteer position that involved challenging physical labor. As the volunteer coordinator for the West Side Community Garden she spent her summer at the community garden meeting with gardeners, tilling soil, planting, weeding, organizing community work days, and a number of other strenuous tasks through the heat of the summer. Providing for the community and escaping the mental strain of her paid work was a way for her to contribute to the community and engage in community organizing work she found meaningful.

As this Chapter has described, CFI’s programming suggests an alternative way of organizing based on community involvement, experiential learning, and challenging dominant ways of eating and living. A number of participants spoke to CFI’s mode of organizing. For example, Ralph (cofounder of ACENet and community organizer) described the value of organizing cooperatively:

Cooperatives rely on a very humane and mature way for people to live their own lives in a way that can satisfy not only economically, but our interpersonal and social needs. And I believe as a species we evolved from small cooperative bands
and that the kinds of interpersonal relations and organizations that we have now, that have come up in just the past 100 years are not really that consistent with our fundamental nature. And increasingly create difficulties for us. So I have devoted my adult life in various ways to try to help people rediscover the benefits of organizing themselves cooperatively.

Similar to Ralph, Dave (CFI staff) said “What if I don't like capitalism, or socialism, or consumerism? What else is there? Well there's cooperation. There's cooperatives.” Views expressed by Ralph and Dave suggest an alternative ethic of organizing that is more community minded – cooperatives. CFI, though not a cooperative in the strict definition of the word, does embrace a number of cooperative characteristics. For example, people are organized around a similar goal, participants are able to openly voice opinions (in fact, because CFI only has two paid staff, much of the work is done by AmeriCorps who repeatedly indicated their excitement about CFI), and CFI members have a close connection to CFI services (e.g., similar values, goals, lifestyles).

CFI participants also suggested a number of creative ways to try to make an impact on people who were experiencing food insecurity, thus fostering the mindset that everyone must be mindful of food insecurity; it is a community concern that can be addressed through community engagement. The most notable example from my research involves the summer camp coordinated by CFI, Kids on Campus, and the USDA. Jamie (CFI Summer AmeriCorps) described how they targeted youth to connect to low income families:
We made a recipe book for them to take home for their parents. So hopefully they'll be like "Oh I remember this and I liked it, we should make this together.” So it's a bonding experience.

The above quotation indicates tangible efforts CFI has facilitated in order to shift eating and lifestyle behaviors among low-income families in the region. As indicated in Jamie’s comments, sending home a recipe book is a vehicle for starting a conversation about healthy eating. It might be that if the conversation is begun by the child, rather than an outsider (such as a CFI staff), the parent will be more receptive to change. In a follow-up interview with Rebecca (CFI staff), she confirmed that one the main reasons for targeting children at schools or school-like settings (such as the camp) is that they have a captive audience. Kids’ habits are less engrained, therefore more susceptible to change.

One of CFI’s struggles seems to be recruiting a captive audience among adults. Indeed, in much of my fieldwork attending workshops, community garden workdays, and even free seed handouts, attendance was sparse. As I will elaborate on in the next chapter, CFI is often missing the very group they claim to target. Yet, the camp offered one very tangible way CFI has used youth to reach food insecure families.

Lana (Food is Elementary Coordinator, West Side Community Gardener) supported the observation of working through kids and schools to reach a larger family audience. She said:

I think that it really helps when you focus on kids it kind of breaks down barriers between impoverished families, needy families; everybody can come together
around food. And teaching kids practical skills to be able to sustain themselves with food that is cheap and reliable.

Indeed coming together around food appeared to a dominant strategy for CFI to incentivize community engagement. Kevin (former CFI AmeriCorps) gave a brief introduction at CFI’s annual potluck dinner and said “Ya’ll are here for the food, and I don’t mean the potluck food.” Being “here for the food” encompasses more than simply the food brought to contribute to the potluck. Kevin’s message speaks to a larger concern and dedication to food issues holistically – improving access, awareness, and education for all community members.

CFI establishes an ethic of caring by simultaneously encouraging self-reliance and community activism. As described throughout this chapter, balancing this tension was a constant theme threaded through participants conversations. Rebecca (CFI staff) described this tension:

So we just keep pushing – you got to do it yourself. Bring it down to the community level and your individual backyard level and do it as a community and also in your backyard and support your community in that way. We just keep pushing it.

As Rebecca described, by becoming self-reliant and planting your own garden, you are able to more fully contribute to the community. Speaking of gardening in particular, Lacy (CFI workshop leader) shared how gardening encourages a more humane existence:

I think it's [community gardening] going to bring it back to a humane level of existence for everybody where there is less… there are certain illnesses that go
along with civilized society or whatever and I think those will all decline again when things are running on a more humane level and people are able to live a little differently.

As Lacy and Rebecca describe, CFI programming facilitates an ethical reconsideration of our role as community members. The idea of a heightened awareness previously discussed is consistent with the theme of incentivizing community engagement. If community members are open to the vulnerability of learning about food insecurity in the area, are willing to let themselves feel others insecurities, they might be more likely to engage in social justice oriented activities.

Dave (CFI staff) expressed the need for community members to acknowledge the poor, the hungry, the existence of inequity in the community, and do something about it. Dave shared his respect for people that frequent the donation station and allow themselves to acknowledge the pain of food insecurity:

The people that just show up and you can tell that they've just got broken hearts because there's such poverty and pain in the world. It's devastating, its heart wrenching, and it's not even necessary. And so that's rewarding that people have enough consciousness and are empowered enough to actually feel the pain and the discomfort that goes along with being aware with how rough it is.

As the above excerpt suggests, CFI programming facilitates a shift in individualistic aims and pursuits by challenging individuals (who might be food secure) to care about the wellbeing of others and do something about it; to plant a garden, donate to the donation station, volunteer at the distribution center, or receive training to teach nutrition lessons.
to school children. CFI appears to incentivize a social justice mentality. Jimmy (West Side Community Gardener, Steering Committee) shared that he has been involved in a number of community events (e.g., boy scouts, AmeriCorps), but, as he exclaimed “For me, it's also the first time where I've felt like I've done some community organizing.”

CFI’s influence on motivating the food secure to action offers a counterargument to claims that the organization is missing their target by not reaching people experiencing food insecurity and shows the educational merit of an organization such as CFI at fostering social change. As this section has described, coming together around food provides an impetus to reevaluating community engagement. In so doing, CFI flattens social classes so that community members act as participants regardless of their food security status.

Taken as a whole, the theme “Find a connection and give:” Demanding an ethical reevaluation, highlights, what I believe to be one of CFI’s greatest community contributions. Involvement with CFI propels a change in mindset, values, and fundamental beliefs about how we can care for others through food. CFI programming challenges individuals to care for others beyond their immediate social network, to value work, and try out the role of a community activist. The final chapter pulls together themes from this chapter by discussing the theoretical and practical value of this dissertation project.
CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

My dissertation research, which explored alternative ways of organizing to address food insecurity, stems from my interest in grassroots organizing and public health. Given my researcher commitments towards appreciative inquiry, I was drawn to the work of the CFI in particular because of their positive impact in the community. CFI is especially impressive because they have been able to make a tremendous impact on the community relying on very few resources. As I articulate conclusions from my dissertation research, I am still captivated by CFI’s ability to inspire social change among community members through creative and sustained programming. Yet, my research has raised a number of questions regarding the sustainability of an organization that is inherently reliant on external and (inconsistent) funding, as well as erratic community support (through the participation of volunteers). In this chapter I first synthesize themes discussed in Chapter Four to present implications and reflections on the dissertation project. First, I review the research questions proposed at the beginning of my study, drawing on results from Chapter Four and the theoretical frames guiding my research. Next, I articulate practical implications of the project. Then, I note a few limitations, followed by directions for future research. I conclude with a personal reflection on the dissertation project.

Theoretical Implications

Babrow and Mattson (2003) described a theory as “a consciously elaborated, justified, and uncertain understanding” (p. 36). In view that places even greater emphasis on the constructive potential of scholarship, Gonzalez (2000) contended that “theory is
not to be refuted or disproven, but contextualized and amplified” (p. 629). According to these definitions, theories are valuable frameworks to help make sense of data, but they are inevitably tentative and partial, and thus open to extension. In the spirit of applying and building theory, the following section articulates theoretical implications of my research. Specifically, I discuss my research findings according to the research questions posed in Chapter Two. I employ problematic integration theory, dialectics, and pragmatism to examine how CFI engages the community to reduce food insecurity and spark social change.

Research Question One

My first research question asked: How are uncertainties, diverging expectations and desires and other forms of PI associated with food insecurity understood among CFI participants? How do participants characterize their efforts to cope with these challenging beliefs and desires?

In Chapter Four, I presented results of the dissertation to describe the systemic issues CFI is up against, and how they respond by encouraging a closer relationship to one’s food and ethical reevaluation. Drawing on PI theory, I believe CFI demands that participants reconsider fundamental values and beliefs about how they bring food to the table. Babrow outlines PI theory as fundamentally concerned with probabilistic and evaluative orientations, which are often out of harmony with one another (Babrow, 1992, 1995). This uncomfortable combination of probabilistic and evaluative orientations contributes to different forms of PI (divergence, uncertainty, ambivalence, impossibility), which are mediated through communication (Babrow, 2001, 2007). While PI theory has
been applied to a number of contexts, few have spent considerable time exploring the
evaluative component of the theory. Evaluative orientations, concerned with goodness or
badness, rightness or wrongness (Babrow, 1992, 1995) speak to our fundamental beliefs
about how we ought to live, as individuals and in relation to others, and what it means to
be a “good” human being.

In the section “Demanding an ethical reevaluation,” I spoke to the different ways
in which CFI programming calls participants to reconsider their values in the themes:
Establishing an ethic of caring, An ethical reevaluation of work, and An ethical
reevaluation of community engagement. In terms of PI theory, demanding ethical
reevaluation contributes to PI by adding depth to importance of fundamental evaluative
orientations, and suggesting, perhaps, that those foundational beliefs can be challenged.
That is, CFI programming appears to take on the role of a change agent in which they
shift central beliefs about the world. Shifting one’s evaluative orientation is likely to
create a ripple effect, in which subsequent forms of PI are also altered. For example, if
you embrace an ethic of caring, and in adopting this stance begin to plant an extra row of
produce for an elderly neighbor, you might be more likely to experience divergence when
your neighbors do not have adequate access to fresh produce. Prior to this shift in
evaluative orientation you might have felt indifference regarding the consumption habits
of your neighbors. Thus, through CFI, people are able to deepen caring about others’
plight (i.e., place greater value on their well-being) and the risk of greater PI this entails
because they do so in the context of doing something to contribute to their neighbors’
wellbeing (i.e., decrease the probability of their neighbors’ need). In other words, CFI
may create a context in which risk value shifts are made possible by simultaneously shifting probabilities.

As the preceding paragraphs suggest, results from this dissertation contribute to PI theory by making a connection between PI and risk. Adams (1995) defined risk “as the product of the probability and utility of some future event” (p. 30, emphasis original). Beck (1992) argues that risks are a product of human existence. He suggests that people formulate perceptions of risk based on scientific input (i.e., what science says to be risky) and social expectations (i.e., what society believes to be risky), which are inherently value-laden. Worded differently, both scientific and social rationality entail probabilistic orientations (understanding likelihood) and evaluative orientations; when these expectations join uncomfortably with desires, we experience risk (see Babrow, 1992).

Participants in this research have supported the premise that CFI programming contributes to a reconsideration of risk. That is, CFI heightens one’s awareness of the health concerns associated with our current food system in an attempt to encourage alternative eating and lifestyle behaviors among consumers. In so doing, CFI appears to ask participants to reassess what they consider to be risky food choices. For example, as I described in Chapter Four, some participants were hesitant to learn how to can because of a fear of botulism. While botulism is a serious bacteria, risks of consuming food from your local grocery store is arguably far riskier (e.g., factory farming, pesticides). By encouraging participants to “have a relationship with their food,” CFI programming nudges individuals to take ownership of their health and diminish food-relate risks. This degree of agency speaks to a shift in one’s probabilistic orientation (i.e., perception of
risk), by advancing the argument that a relationship with your food and utilization of traditional techniques of food survival (e.g., gardening, foraging, canning) is conducive to agency (and therefore might help to control risk).

PI theory asserts that PI emerges in the form of divergence, uncertainty, ambivalence, and impossibility (Babrow, 1992). Illustrations of these forms were evident throughout the dissertation project. As the research question noted, I was concerned with how people coped with different forms of PI. To offer a few examples, I saw participants coping with uncertainty regarding their food security by embracing the educational capacities of CFI. For example, community members distrusted food in the grocery stores so they joined a community garden and made efforts to be more self-sufficient. Participants also spoke to the value of the workshops, suggesting that when they experienced diverging expectations and desires, they sought avenues for taking ownership of their food security with a “do it yourself” kind of mentality. Through efforts such as education, gardening, and improved access, participants appeared to harness a mindset of self-reliance in order to address different forms of PI.

Research Question Two

My second research question asked: How is the tension between individuation and participation experienced?

Research question two was guided by Rawlins’ (2009) explication of individuation and participation in which he proposed that the two are dialectically interwoven, rather than contradictory. At their best, individuation and participation are edifying. Rawlins described edifying individuation as a positive freedom and an
important part of self-reference and other recognition. Its counterpart, edifying participation, requires enacting similarities and connecting with others. At their worst, individuation and participation are dispiriting, which is associated with individuation meaning alienation and disregard for others, and participation as indifference to uniqueness and conformism (Rawlins).

As described in Chapter Four, specifically, the theme addressing “Ethical Reevaluation,” participants routinely spoke to the ways in which involvement with CFI sparked a mindset of care and community. For example, the theme “A circle of returning:” Establishing an ethic of caring, addresses the tendency for participants to acknowledge how their involvement with CFI urges them to care for others outside of their immediate family and network. By “planting an extra row,” for instance, individuals appeared to embrace a communal orientation in which they cared for themselves while also caring for others. Similarly, the theme an ethical reevaluation of community engagement captures CFI’s communal emphasis, by advancing the argument that food is a communal need, best met through a communal effort. These two themes illustrates Rawlins discussion of edifying individuation and edifying participation by showing how participants came together as self-reliant individuals who were also fundamentally concerned with communal well-being.

In fact, the organization of CFI’s programming appears to be fundamentally concerned with the marriage of individuation and participation. Community gardens, for instance, offer space for individual self-reliance, but the gardener contract mandates that all gardeners are required to donate 10% of their produce to an organization or family in
need. Indeed, the very structure of a community garden challenges the notion of gardening as a solitary activity. The workshops offer another example of how CFI programming negotiates the tension between individuation and participation. The workshops are a space for community members to offer their expertise to individuals interested in learning a new skill. At its surface, these efforts might appear to enforce the idea of individual self-reliance (e.g., learn how to can peaches by attending a workshop; therefore, eat local, organic peaches year round). But the workshops also offer a meaningful space for participation. By learning together, working a canning assembly line, participants are able to recognize the value of working together – of participation. By volunteering their time to share knowledge, workshop leaders demonstrate CFI’s value for education and teaching others to learn how to be self-reliant. As I shared quotations from participants in Chapter Four, by teaching others skills at self-sufficiency, you are creating a circle of returning, in which those students become teachers and continue to spread CFI’s mission.

Research Question Three

My third research question asked: How does CFI educate participants about the historical practices of sustainable living in ways that give them agency over their present food security status? What is the role of the education practices of CFI in fostering self-reliance?

Research question three was proposed based on my reading of Dewey (1938/1997) and his concern with systemic study, experiential learning, student-teacher relationships, and the role of the community. The portion of Chapter Four that speaks...
most readily to this research question is CFI programs fight dominant food systems. Throughout my research I have observed CFI’s strong position on the emancipatory capacity of education. Thus, education was seen as a tool to rebuild dominant food structures that have historically suppressed human agency. By educating community members about food survival techniques, CFI is enabling self-reliance and fostering an awakening (as described in Chapter Four) to the value of self-sufficiency.

Adopting a temporal framework, CFI participants consistently focused on the past, present, and future. Specifically, participants used communication to (a) appreciate the past, (b) live in the present, and (c) prepare for the future. This temporal viewpoint is consistent with research in narrative describing narrative emplotting as a temporal trajectory organizing how characters and actions move forward with purpose (Ricoeur, 1981). Indeed narrative theorists have described the main process of narrating as the sequencing of events to maintain temporal ordering; constantly considering the “past/present/future flow of continuity and disruption to give force to some understanding of the distinction between ‘now’ and ‘then’” (Harter, Japp, & Beck, 2005, p. 16). To offer a few illustrations of each temporal point, first, CFI educators appreciated the past by relying historic documents such as family cookbooks and traditional gardening, harvesting, and cooking techniques. Second, participants lived in the present by embracing the merit of experiential learning. This was particularly striking in the theme Fighting the food system through Education. Recall, for example, youth at the summer camp going through the entire food planting and consumption process. Third, participants appeared to focus on preparedness for the future. Consider the workshop leader noted
previously who is leery of current food system and practices, and has therefore, readied herself by becoming self-sufficient.

In short, participants used education as a primary mechanism of fighting the dominant food system (e.g., processed convenience goods) through gardening, improving access, and raising the standard. This speaks to Dewey’s work by supporting his stance that true education must be both structured and experiential, and that the wisdom of authority figures such as teachers (i.e., workshop leaders), when used to their full potential, are a vital means of fostering social change. Thus, this dissertation research supports Dewey’s work, but it also points to new directions communication scholars might pursue to advance and build upon Deweyan pragmatism. That is, most recognize Dewey’s emphasis on experiential learning, which is obviously evident in this research as well, but Dewey also supports systematic scientific study and the role of authority in education. Workshop leaders routinely brought handouts, bibliographies, and texts to support the hands-on activity. They also lectured, read to, and asked questions of participants. This kind of triangulation in education techniques supports the benefit of mingling systematic study with experiential learning. Instructors were also well equipped to use their surroundings in ways that met the needs of the students (participants) in ways that made the role of the instructor particularly important. For instance, when community gardeners experienced insect damage, the steering committee organized a workshop on organic gardening. Similar to the Highlander School described in Chapter Two, instructors considered the immediate food security needs in the community and reacted with instruction.
Practical Implications

As I described in chapter three of this dissertation, I am deeply committed to engaged research in which I am able to contribute not only to theory within the communication discipline, but I am also concerned with my contributions to the larger community. As such, the following paragraphs discuss a number of practical implications for CFI. I focus on CFI in particular because they have been the center of my research, but the implications I disclose are relevant to likeminded nonprofit organizations. My involvement with CFI as a researcher, member, volunteer, and community citizen, positions me well to articulate how CFI might shift their programming to increase their sustainability and impact on community food security.

First, extensive time in the field and in-depth conversations with CFI participants suggests that CFI’s high expectations are intimidating and unrealistic for most community members. In fact, CFI’s “all or nothing” approach to health and life style functioned as a deterrent to participation and behavior change. By preaching to potential participants that they must be entirely self-sufficient, give up all meat, dairy, and processed foods, and shop locally, they are projecting an unapproachable and rigid identity to the community members who might just want to learn how to shop at the farmers market. But, my experiences with CFI suggest that their grassroots, hippy culture, and all of the communication jargon that goes along with “living off the land” are highly intimidating to some. My research suggests the question – is CFI’s “all or nothing approach” deterring potential membership and behavior change? For example, I recently attended my first seed exchange in which local farmers exchange or sell seeds. The value
of saving seeds cannot be understated. In an age of Monsanto and GMO’s (see Nestle, 2002/2007) saving seeds is a way of protecting yourself from modified foods. I attended the seed exchange as a researcher of CFI, gardener, and therefore, someone with working knowledge of seed exchanges and the values of such practices. Yet, I quickly realized I was out of my league in the conversations among the local farmers. They spoke a strident and extreme way that I could not relate and did not understand. There I stood, just a couple of months away from a Ph. D., with a dissertation addressing food insecurity and alternative ways of organizing, and I could not even participate in the conversation. Here, my inability to talk shows an exclusion from this social group.

CFI’s exclusionary focus makes small behavior change appear irrelevant. For example, Cheryl (CFI AmeriCorps), in critiquing an “all or nothing approach” shared:

There can't be a universal way to eat. Eating is not only varied according to body type and geographic location, but it carries a lot of emotion behind it. You have what I like to refer to as hug foods, like if you had your tonsils out you have ice cream, if you got a good report card, you get to... hug foods. My philosophy is that if you need a hug food, if you need that chocolate and you crave it, eat it and forget about it, but don't eat it and berate yourself about it.

Echoing this sentiment, another camp teacher said “I've learned over the years that you have to do things in steps and that's fine. You can't expose people to something totally foreign and expect them to jump on it right away (Erica, CFI Summer AmeriCorps).” In short, one diet does not fit all; instead, limited diet creates conditions that produce
unhealthy food; alternatively, a well-rounded diet allows the small farmer to thrive (Dougherty, 2011).

My own experience with CFI reaffirms the assertion of CFI’s excessive demands on food and lifestyle change. For example, in a recent follow-up interview with Rebecca (who has just resigned from her position as Executive Director), she told me the Board of Directors needs to be careful on the selection of a new Executive Director because if he/she walks in to the office with a Diet Pepsi he/she will lose the staff. As a recent applicant for the position, I pondered what CFI staff might say if they saw me at Kroger giving my two-year-old a donut as bribery for good behavior as I shopped. Would I always be looking over my shoulder to see if anyone saw me eating a non-local apple or an ice-cream cone (because according to a number of CFI participants meat and dairy products are slowly killing us)?

Instead of demanding a complete overhaul of one’s diet and lifestyle, I would encourage CFI to recognize the value of small, incremental change. For example, CFI participants might benefit more from hosting a workshop on planting tomatoes and basil for one summer, instead of a complete garden loaded with a variety of produce. Not only are tomatoes and basil relatively simple to grow, they are also companion plants (i.e., they grow well together), and gardeners are able to make a number of simple dishes from these two plants alone. Fostering a mindset that small changes are valuable might be more likely to attract and keep more participants. In addition to increased membership, slow and steady diet change might be more enduring across a lifetime, and therefore have a substantial impact on overall health.
Second, a number of participants expressed concern about how to grow the organization while maintaining a high standard of food (e.g., no high fructose corn syrup, artificial sweeteners, or partially hydrogenated oils) and programming. That is, how does CFI spread their mission of increasing self-reliance and food security, while also ensuring that the organization is sustainable, reputable, and increasing access to quality (i.e., fresh, local, organic) food? Rebecca (CFI Staff) articulated this concern as she stated:

I’d like to see community gardens all over southeast Ohio. The board has thought about satellite CFI's. Partnering with health departments and having a CFI member work out of Vinton county health department or something like that, to teach people how to do community gardening in Vinton county. I worry about the standard. Because I keep such a high standard.

Rebecca’s concern regarding food standard is consistent with the first implication described – CFI asks too much of participants. While Rebecca and others noted the importance of a high standard, my observations suggest that they are actually spread too thin to maintain a high standard and sustainable programming. Folks in this line of work use the term “mission creep” to describe the tendency for organizations to rearticulate their mission beyond its original scope in order to attain grants and other support.

CFI is a vibrant organization known by most community organizers in the area because they are involved, in some capacity, with nearly every food related initiative in Athens County. Being widespread has a number of advantages, but it also presents challenges of doing one job well. That is, because CFI has half a dozen community gardens, they might only have the staff and funds to maintain one community garden
well. A number of community gardeners expressed this very frustration as they reported a lack of tools, inadequate communication, lack of a consistent water source, and discouraging emails from CFI staff regarding the upkeep of the garden plots. One participant even brought an email she received from the CFI garden manager essentially scolding community gardeners for subpar garden upkeep and threatening to apprehend the plots for reallocation. This community gardener, laughing, but clearly frustrated with the email, responded "Okay, apprehend my plot and give it to another gardener. There's no one lined up to do that!" Her response to the rigid email attests to a belief that CFI should be grateful the community gardeners are at least trying to garden, and making use of an otherwise vacant field that no one else plans to use. Another gardener reported that when she thanked CFI for expanding the community garden program to Nelsonville, the staff, who had just visited the garden, responded "I just went down there, it looks like crap." The two quotations just shared offer a view of CFI’s high demands (as described in the first implication), but also point to a problem of CFI simply being spread too thin to adequately help maintain the gardens they begin.

As another illustration of CFI’s over commitment, Latrina (workshop leader) said “That's the problem with CFI is that they burn people out. And they get so many projects going that things, people, start getting burnt out. So I just said: ‘I can't do this anymore. I just can't do this anymore.'” Latrina’s statement indicates the impact of CFI’s over-commitment, not only on struggling to maintain a high standard across programming, but also the impact of excessive demands on their volunteer pool. CFI is a small organization, with two paid staff, inconsistent AmeriCorps support, and volunteers. High standards and
numerous programs create a burden on volunteers, making them less willing to give a little of their time, knowing it will result in a larger commitment than they are willing or able to make.

As a suggestion to their over-programming, I would encourage CFI to reevaluate their mission and goals. I asked every interviewee to explain CFI’s mission and I heard a range of responses concerning a number of topics (e.g., gardening, community awareness, schools, Farmer’s Market, and food pantries). CFI does all of these things, but perhaps not to its potential. Reevaluating the mission and goals could help CFI to focus on just a few projects, put all of their energy on those projects, and make sure they are sustainable before moving on. The problem is that they get excited and move on to another project before they have concluded or made the prior project self-sustaining. To offer a couple of specific suggestions, CFI could profit from transitioning out of the school programs because these programs are adequately maintained through other similar organizations (e.g., Live Healthy Appalachia, Food is Elementary). Or, CFI could shift their mission as less of a focus on food insecurity (because they actually do little direct work with the food insecure as the following point will detail), and instead center its attention on training community activists, who could then take over some of CFI’s projects. As the previous Chapter described, the community activist portion of CFI’s work is certainly an underlying goal and impact, but if it were the main focus, they might be more effective in the community.

Third, my research indicates there is a severe disconnect between CFI and the people they are claiming to serve (i.e., the food insecure). CFI’s website describes the
mission: “Since 1992, CFI has embraced a mission of building and supporting a local food movement that expands fair access to fresh and nutritious food for all people in our region.” The “fair access… to all people” portion of the mission statement reveals their focus on people experiencing food insecurity and their consequent focus on food pantries, community dinners, and churches providing food for families in need. Yet, numerous participants pointed to CFI’s inability to target the people who need their services the most. For example, Marsha (workshop leader, farmer) referred to the farmers market in particular when she shared: “It's kind of ironic and kind of sad that the people who are most food secure are the people who don't have any worry about food.” As Marsha described, even if individuals are educated about the value of eating locally raised meat, the cost factor of purchasing meat from a local farmer at the market is a severe deterrent. CFI might discourage participants from purchasing their meat from the grocery store, but they do little to help them afford alternative options. As an exception, some CFI members are beginning to promote vegetarianism as an alternative that is affordable, and as mentioned previously, perhaps better for overall health.

Speaking to other issues contributing to a disconnect between CFI and their target audience, consider Cheryl’s (CFI AmeriCorps) comments (stated in Chapter Four) about the tendency for the food insecure to shop at Wal-Mart or Aldees over organic, local markets such as the Village Bakery or Farmacy. Cheryl stated: “When you do these kinds of programs, you need to do them how they're going to have to do them.” Her concluding comment captures the premise that programs organized by CFI must be replicable, which, in the Appalachia region, means they must be affordable. CFI improves access to healthy
foods through the donation station, by taking in donations and giving those donations to people in need. But, the donation station does not do anything to eradicate the problem of food shortage – they simply give people access to foods they might not be able to get from food pantries (though CFI is initiating more direct work with pantries to address this issue). Telling people they would be better off to shop and eat at local hubs such as the Village Bakery or Farmacy as noted in Cheryl’s statement mentioned above is unrealistic because it assumes people have the financial resources to participate in this mode of eating, shopping, and living. Not only are these locales more expensive than their alternative, but they are intimidating to the outsider new to the locovore culture. Indeed, the newcomer to these places feels a sense of “outsiderness” and discomfort as my own recent experiences shopping at the Farmacy have revealed. In addition to feeling out of place, I spent $16 on a small bag of ground flax, granola, a chocolate bar, and applesauce – hardly staples, and nutritionally insufficient to make a meal or provide for a small family. My recent shopping experience highlights the challenge of working within a budget and also trying to contribute to the local economy.

As I detailed in Chapter Four, CFI works to instill an ethic of care, community activism, and a value of work, tradition, and connection to food (among other themes). But, CFI programming appears to be lacking in making direct connections to people struggling to meet basic needs, instead appealing to folks who might already be food secure. My suggestion to address this deficit is to engage in more direct work with local food pantries and churches. To maximize efficiency, goods gathered through the donation station are transported to CFI’s office, for distribution to area organizers who pick up the
goods for distribution. In this way, CFI functions as a “middle-man,” improving efficiency at the cost of establishing a relationship with the people receiving the donations. Shifting attention to relationships with food pantry patrons will demand a refocused attention and energy, but it is shift that could help CFI reach their target. If CFI were to reallocate a few of the programs (as described above), they might be able to give more attention to fostering relationships with needy organizations and individuals. This could take the form of educational workshops at food pantries or helping to plant and maintain vegetable gardens at patron’s homes. In fact, a shift in workshop focus might improve the efficacy of CFI’s workshops which are poorly attended.

In short, I believe that CFI is a passion driven organization comprised of some of the most compassionate, smart, and driven people I have ever met. Involvement with CFI has heightened my awareness of our problematic food system and has propelled my dedication to community engaged research. The implications I have described in this section are suggestions I offer with the mindfulness that CFI’s high expectations originate from their dedication to food issues, and their over commitment likely stems from their passion to maximize their impact. My hope is that by sharing these suggestions, I am able to positively impact what I believe to be a remarkable organization.

Limitations

I have faith in the knowledge claims I have advanced in this research project. Considerable time in the field, triangulation of research methods, and commitment to scholarly study (within and outside of the communication discipline) speaks to the rigor of my research. Yet, as with all research, this dissertation represents my view, partial and
incomplete, of how organizations (namely CFI) mobilize community members and resources to address food insecurity in Southeastern Ohio. As such, the following paragraphs discuss a few limitations of my research.

One of the main goals of my dissertation project was to better understand how CFI organizes to address food insecurity. To explore this concern, I planned to interview participants of CFI programing on a number of levels – CFI staff, AmeriCorps, volunteers, donators, members, and recipients of donations (i.e., individuals experiencing food insecurity). At present, I have conducted 27 different in-depth interviews with participants in roles including workshop leaders, CFI staff, AmeriCorps, volunteers, community gardeners, and CFI contributors. As this list describes, I have not had any direct contact with people experiencing severe food shortage. Interestingly, this limitation speaks to an implication described in the previous section in which I discussed CFI’s tendency to “preach to the choir”; that is, they engage community members already interested in social justice activities (focusing on food issues), but have little direct behavior changing impact on food pantry patrons. CFI provides fresh foods to pantries through the Donation Station, but their role is minimal in terms of teaching self-reliance to donation recipients. Consequently, my dissertation privileges an organizational perspective, with minimal space for how CFI’s work is perceived from a recipient’s point of view. A more nuanced (or next phase of this research to be discussed in the next section) project could examine recipients’ perspectives by contacting the organizations who pick up CFI donations and spend time observing how the next exchange unfolds (e.g., community dinners, food pantry pick up).
A second limitation of my dissertation research has been a bias towards specific points of CFI’s programming. Indeed, choosing focal programs to research and represent in the results speaks to the power of the researcher in presenting knowledge claims (Van Maanen, 1988). CFI addresses their mission of fostering self-sufficiency through three programs: Community Gardens/Food and Garden Education, Donation Station, and the Farm to Cafeteria program. In order of greatest to least time allocated, I spent most of my research studying the community garden/food and garden education program, donation station, and lastly, the farm to cafeteria program. I attribute this bias to a few factors. First, to date, I have spent approximately 85 hours conducting fieldwork, with 18 of those hours spent in the West Side Community Garden, and 13 hours spent participating in workshops. In addition, 11 of the 27 interviews were conducted with participants directly engaged in the garden and education program (e.g., workshop leaders, community gardeners). Including fieldwork and time spent interviewing; over half of my time was spent with participants engaged in the garden and education program. Part of the problem with the bias in time might involve the overall timing of my project. I had my first meeting (to gain access) with CFI staff on March 24, 2011. Though they directed me towards the donation station, which is where I began volunteer work every Saturday through the spring, joining the organization in the spring also meant a lot of hype over the garden program, with minimal attention towards the farm to cafeteria program. As such, I spent the spring, summer, and early fall deeply enriched in the community gardens and workshops. During the fall, I independently transcribed each interview, taking detailed notes along the way. December marked the completion of transcription and I have been
studying transcripts, noting themes, writing, and conducting follow-up interviews since then. While this schedule was conducive to my dissertation progress, it left little time to observe the Farm to Cafeteria program. Specifically, I have not observed how the Food is Elementary curriculum has played out in the classroom. While this would have been advantageous, CFI is only indirectly involved with Food is Elementary curriculum. Instead, the program operates more directly under the auspices of Live Healthy Appalachia. Nonetheless, a more well-rounded study would have observed the program and interviewed students and teachers.

Finally, a third limitation of my research is that my findings focus on CFI in a time of transition. Specifically, the Executive Director just recently announced her resignation and the Board of Directors is interviewing candidates (including myself) to fill the position. I know through informal conversations with CFI participants that the Board is seeking an individual to revamp and reorganize CFI. As such, a number of the issues I discussed in the previous section regarding CFI’s weaknesses are likely to be remedied through a restructuring.

All research, regardless of the methodological approach is partial and incomplete. I offer the limitations noted above as an acknowledgement that my dissertation is not an exception to this understanding. I have faith in the knowledge claims I have advanced, but respectfully recognize that my project is limited in scope. In the following section I articulate how I will take what I have learned through the dissertation project to future research endeavors.
Directions for Future Research

My dissertation research has provided a platform on which I intend to base my research trajectory. Sustained time in the field, multiple research methods, and membership with CFI has afforded me an opportunity to learn about the challenges and rewards of grassroots organizing. Studying how CFI inspires social activism and awakens community members to health disparities in the community has been a tremendous learning experience. As I described in the limitations section, there are a few areas for growth which I intend to explore in the future.

First, as I previously described, my research emphasized an organizational perspective. Learning about alternative ways of organizing is a valuable contribution to literature in organizational communication. Specifically, this research speaks to Krone and Harter’s (2007) call for the public intellectual to respond to issues in their own community as well as transfer issues from one geographic place to another. Yet, an emphasis on the organization neglects the role of the recipient (in this case, mostly food pantry patrons and participants in church hosted community dinners). Future research should explore what happens when food is picked up from CFI’s distribution center and distributed to community members. Given the practical and applied nature of my research agenda, I am concerned with questions such as: How are new foods received? Are they used? Are they appreciated or do patrons experience discomfort in the novelty of unique foods? What kind of educational programs would be useful to pantry coordinators and patrons? During a recent interview with a Health Educator at the Athens County Health Department I learned that a partnership between the Health Department and CFI had
formed and initial plans for what has been termed the “pantry project” were underway. The pantry project is centered on fostering a more immediate relationship between CFI and the food pantries, with goal of a) improving accessibility of new foods (namely fresh fruits and vegetables) and b) offering educational programming to increase patron’s self-sufficiency skills. The first collaborative workshop between the Athens County Health Department, Rural Action, and CFI was held just recently (March 7, 2012) and brought in over 50 participants, a remarkable crowd compared to other workshops I have attended. There was a pronounced energy and excitement in the air as the pantry coordinators learned of different local resources (e.g., CFI’s Donation Station, Rural Action’s Produce Auction, independent farmers) available to fill an increasing void with the Second Harvest Food Bank (due to government cut-backs). At the close of the meeting pantry coordinators had banned together with plans of a coalition to encourage communication among pantries. My role in the pantry coalition (I was asked to contribute) fulfills my commitment to practical research in which the researcher works directly with community members to understand their own worldview, becomes a “catalyst, coach, facilitator, and teacher/learner” (Ford & Yep, 2003, p. 248). Programing such as the pantry project just described offers innovative and creative ways organizations like CFI are organizing for long term social change. The pantry project and others like it offer a next step for my research and warrant the attention of communication scholars.

Second, my dissertation project focused a great deal of attention on the community garden and education point of CFI’s programming, despite the value of other programs such as the Donation Station and Farm to Cafeteria program. The farm to
cafeteria program is fundamentally concerned with fostering a connection between local food systems and institutions such as schools and hospitals. Future research could explore how the school curriculum plays out in the classroom. Researchers might ask: Are students receptive to the instruction? How do instructors communicatively engage students? How does the instruction of the “Food is Elementary Curriculum” impact standard classroom instruction? What are the health impacts of such programs on children and families? How does classroom instruction translate into diet at home, if at all? CFI has also expanded their programming to hospitals and prisons. Exploring how such initiatives are perceived and the impact of these programs on health, attitudes towards foods, and behavior change are very interesting issues to consider.

Nearly three decades ago Daft (1983) likened research to craftsmanship, as a metaphor to explain that doing research, just like learning a craft, takes years of trial and error. Recognizing that I am a more experienced research now than I was a year ago, a third avenue for future research is to follow organizations such as CFI longitudinally as I expand my researcher repertoire and, importantly, as CFI transitions under the direction of a new director. Sustained time studying and working with organizations offers a nuanced story of how small grassroots organizations thrive or fail. Indeed, as I described in the limitations section, CFI is engaged in a significant transition with the resignation and placement of a new Executive Director. My experiences interviewing for the position with four members of the Board of Directors validate my findings that CFI is spread too thin, asks too much of its members, needs to be reorganized, and is ironically an unsustainable organization preaching sustainability (because they are almost entirely
grant funded). I began studying CFI because of their tremendous positive impact on the community; thus I entered the scene from an appreciative point of view, which clearly shapes the themes I discussed in Chapter Four. Yet, as I evaluate and articulate my time in the field (after one year), significant shortcomings of CFI are evident as I discussed above. I do not believe the limitations of the organization necessitate its demise, but do believe they must restructure to enhance their impact and long-term sustainability. Further research, studying the organization as they transition to a new Director with full support from the Board of Directors to revamp CFI, is crucial to understanding the whole story of CFI. Such research would clearly benefit CFI, but it is also crucial for other similar grassroots organizations. Scholars (e.g., Ashcraft & Mumby, 2004; Dougherty, 2011) have argued that communication scholars have tended to focus on discursive constructionism without an explicit consideration of material conditions. I attempt to address this through my dissertation, but longitudinal research getting a deeper grasp on the long-term material conditions challenging small grassroots organizations would make a significant contribution to the literature.

Personal Reflections

This dissertation project has been, without a doubt, the most meaningful and fulfilling research I have ever participated in (not surprising given my young academic career). My researcher commitments warrant consideration of how my voice saturates the findings I put forth. As such, personal reflections are woven throughout the discourse. Indeed, as I have been a participant observer, deeply entrenched in the day to day happenings of CFI, segments of the dissertation might even appear autoethnographic.
This section attempts to synthesize my reflections about how I impacted and was impacted through my research exploring how CFI organizes to inspire social change. I offer a temporal perspective of how my time with CFI unfolded over the year.

I met with the Executive Director on March 24, 2011 to explain my research project and attain a signed letter of access to complete my research with CFI. I remember feeling nervous prior to the encounter because as a middle-class, white, academic, I felt like an outsider to this grassroots and financially struggling organization. For example, I carefully considered what to wear to the visit because CFI staff generally dress fairly informal (e.g., flannel shirts, hiking boots); my appearance and attire is a far cry from the CFI members I have interacted with. Yet the Director was warm, inviting, and though clearly multitasking and frazzled, she was a passionate activist and eager to address health disparities in the community. My initial fieldwork involved my position as a CFI volunteer working at the Donation Station at the farmers market (began March 26, 2011). I recall huddling under the small tent structure and freezing (and aching from standing on the parking lot pavement a few months pregnant) as I collected and tallied produce donations. During my first Donation Station shift I volunteered with two AmeriCorps workers, Sandy and Kevin, who initiated me to AmeriCorps jargon and Donation Station protocol. Though my conversations with Sandy were cordial, Kevin was unfriendly, unwilling to make small talk, and generally made me feel unwelcome as a Donation Station volunteer. My experiences with Kevin and Sandy shifted my original view of CFI members as diehard community volunteers, generous in spirit, and loving to humankind (I acknowledge my naivety). Consider the following excerpt from my fieldnotes:
Interaction with the other two workers was casual and relaxed. Sandy and I made conversion most of the time, and Sandy and Kevin talked, but Kevin didn’t seem interested in talking with me. Him and Sandy are both AmeriCorps workers, so they have known each other a while. They talked a lot about “getting hours.” I learned that working at the donation station was one way to get their volunteer hours, among others. They need to accrue 1700 hours in order to receive their “Education Certificate” which is a lump sum that goes towards education in some capacity – tuition, laptop, books, ect.

For these two AmeriCorps, the Donation Station was a job – they were “getting hours” and being rewarded as such. As I described in Chapter Four, it was perhaps a “job of value,” but a job, nonetheless. Initial experiences at the Donation Station were troublesome because I felt like an outsider. The AmeriCorps I worked with talked in a food and lifestyle jargon I did not understand. But it was motivating as well. I was inspired to learn more about the local food economy – who were the farmers? What are their primary struggles? How is CFI infiltrating area institutions (e.g., school systems, hospitals, pantries)? What real differences is CFI making in the community?

Just as González (2000) describes the seasons of ethnography, my research folded into the gardening season and my fieldwork was consumed and entrenched in garden oriented activities. I obtained and worked a plot at a community garden, attended dozens of workshops, and interviewed (formally and informally) everyone I met affiliated with CFI, spending the majority of the summer (approximately April 2011 – August 2011) toiling and sweating (a lot) in gardens. During this time I believe I found my place with
CFI and began to reconcile my sense of outsiderness. I started to reflect on the monumental role of the community in fostering social change, especially shifting one’s food and lifestyle practices. Consider the following passage from fieldnotes (May 14, 2011):

I worked alongside half a dozen other gardeners during the community work day today weeding a row of communal raspberry bushes that run the entire length of the garden. As we engaged in this arduous and monotonous task we engaged in small talk about where we were from, why we garden here, and who was the best weeder (I had strong support especially considering my pregnant belly). The overwhelming sentiment of those conversations was that the community garden offered a space for community members to come together to socialize and learn new gardening techniques. Often you’ll see gardeners scoping out surrounding plots and commenting on the various planting strategies.

As the above fieldnote passage describes, literal “fieldwork” lent itself to a strong sense of community and identification as a “community gardener.” My dissertation research evoked fond memories of working in my family garden as a child, and I used this experience to make sense of the present research. Drawing on childhood experiences reflects C. Wright Mills (1955) declaration of the centrality of incorporating academic and personal life and trusting such experiences as meaningful (as cited in Daft, 1983). My summer research at the gardens gave me space to reconcile my imposter syndrome and I began to identify as a member of the Community Food Initiatives. Importantly this played out in a number of ways. My involvement with community gardens not only
facilitated connections with other community gardeners, activists, and health educators (many of whom graciously shared their time for interviews), but it also sparked a shift in my own lifestyle. For example, I adopted a primarily plant based diet, I honed my canning repertoire, expanded the variety of produce planted in my garden, and have become an active member/volunteer with CFI and other local initiatives.

My commitment to community organizing for health disparities has become so central to my identity that I recently applied and interviewed for the Executive Director position with CFI. This position would facilitate a deeper understanding of CFI’s work, validate and extend my findings, and most importantly give me an opportunity to put my education in to practice. Though the position was not offered to me, the interview process offered compelling evidence of the degree to which I have become fully vested as an active member of the CFI. Moreover, the interview process was an opportunity for me to consult with members of the Board of the Directors to collaboratively talk through CFI’s strengths and weaknesses. Cheney (2007) has charged that organizational communication scholars have tended to converse with one another about social justice issues at the neglect of engaging research at a community level. Collaborative procedures are especially valuable in qualitative research when insiders and outsiders are involved (Adler & Adler, 1987). Regarding the interview with the Board of Directors, they are CFI insiders, but outsiders to academia; I might be considered a straddler of insider/outsiderness as an academic involved with CFI (see also Dougherty, 2011), but not to the extent of the Board. Viewing the interview as an occasion for consultation and collaboration is consistent with calls for communication scholars to act as public
intellectuals, serving and researching beyond formal boundaries of higher education (Krone & Harter, 2007).

As a researcher, I have learned that full identification could mean it is time to step away from the site because you might be blinded by your comfort and zeal for the cause. Indeed, practicalities of fieldwork generally necessitate times of immersion and withdrawal for personal and methodological reasons (Patton, 1990). At any rate, my research examining the ways in which CFI addresses food insecurity has been a remarkable journey, complete with my hesitancy, outsiderness, reconciliation, and identification. It is my hope that scholars will continue to invest in the sometimes nontraditional modes of organizing to truly grasp how such organizations mobilize people and (limited) resources to inspire social change.
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### Meetings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity/Date/Time</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Hours</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Access meeting</strong> Thursday, 3-24-2011 1:00 – 2:00 p.m.</td>
<td>CFI office</td>
<td>Met with Rebecca (Executive Director) and Kevin (Assistant Garden Coordinator). Rebecca signed letter of access and Kevin provided an overview of CFI and volunteer opportunities.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Met with Kim – Community Garden Plot Coordinator Sunday, 4-10-2011 11:00 – 11:30 a.m.</td>
<td>WSCG</td>
<td>Met with Kim to secure plot in community garden. Paid $25 membership fee, met other gardeners, learned the rules and garden layout.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Met with Donna and Zak – Organize food distribution Thursday, 4-21-2011 10:00 – 10:30 a.m.</td>
<td>CFI office</td>
<td>I met Donna and Zak, volunteers who coordinate the food distribution yielded from the donation station. Learned the ropes so I can work next Thursday.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CFI Annual Membership dinner Sunday, 5-1-2011 5:00 – 7:30 p.m.</td>
<td>Methodist Church The Plans</td>
<td>Enjoyed a potluck dinner with other members of CFI. Rebecca discussed new initiatives and summarized key contributions. Perry of Family Farms was keynote speaker.</td>
<td>2 ½</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Met with Lana, Food is Elementary Initiative Coordinator Monday, 8-22-2011 4:30 – 5:00 p.m.</td>
<td>Her office</td>
<td>Picked up curriculum text for FIE program by Antonia Demas. Met Michelle – did her thesis on community gardens.</td>
<td>½</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview for Executive Director Saturday, 3-3-2012 2:00 – 4:00 p.m.</td>
<td>Visiting Nurses building, Athens</td>
<td>Great member checking activity. Bolstered findings, enthusiasm for change – seem unhappy with CFI’s over-commitment, unsustainability, disorganization.</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workshops</td>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Workshop Details</td>
<td>Duration</td>
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<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Grow it From Seed</td>
<td>Nelsonville Public Library</td>
<td>Workshop hosted by Jim (Degrees in plant biology, local plant seller). Focus was on growing vegetables from seed.</td>
<td>1 1/2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thursday, 3-24-2011 6:30 – 8:00 p.m.</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gardening 101</td>
<td>Westside Community Gardens</td>
<td>Workshop hosted by Latrina Shaw. Spoke about soil preparation, sowing seeds, space saving techniques, successive planting, compost, pest control, and companion planting.</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunday, 5-22-2011 4:00 – 6:00 p.m.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using Garden Weeds Medicinally</td>
<td>Nelsonville Community Gardens</td>
<td>Workshop led by Lacy Geneter, owner of Ancient Roots, a local business specializing in herbal medicinals. Walked around Nelsonville garden – located medicinal weeds.</td>
<td>1 1/2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saturday, 6-25-2011 4:00 – 5:30 p.m.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making Jams and Jellies</td>
<td>ACEnet</td>
<td>Workshop led by Latrina. Spoke about making jams and jellies. Distributed handout, gave demonstration, sampled products.</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thursday, 7-14-2011 7:00 – 9:00 p.m.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canning Basics</td>
<td>ACEnet</td>
<td>Workshop led by Marsha. Taught participants how to can peaches and other fruits and vegetables. Provided handout and hands on demonstration, gave away all canned peaches.</td>
<td>1 1/2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monday, 7-18-2011 7:00 – 8:30 p.m.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Build a Compost Bin</td>
<td>Stewart Community Gardens</td>
<td>Workshop to be led by Anne – didn’t show. Two other potential participants. Got info from other participant there, Janie who has a plot at Nelsonville – will interview.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saturday, 8-6-2011 4:00 – 5:00 p.m.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drying Your Harvest</td>
<td>ACENet</td>
<td>Workshop led by Latrina. Talked a lot about tradition, history, and how historically, drying food meant food security and therefore, survival. 7 participants – pretty good show.</td>
<td>1 1/2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thursday, 9-8-2011 7:00 – 8:30 p.m.</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Event Description</td>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Details</td>
<td>Notes</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sourdough Workshop 6:00 – 7:30 p.m. Wednesday, 11-2-2011</td>
<td>ACENet</td>
<td>Workshop led by Burt. Gave detailed description of the science behind sourdough bread baking. Very knowledgeable about scientific processes behind bread baking and health impacts of different flours and grains. Advocated for a gluten free diet and different ways to “nourish” the body. Unorganized, no hand out, poor attendance.</td>
<td>1 ½</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farm to Table – Pantry Project 5:30 – 7:30 p.m. Wed., 3-7-2012</td>
<td>Rocky Boots Community Room, Nelsonville</td>
<td>Over 50 people attended this dynamic meeting and workshop. Presenters included an undergrad dietician, Bob with Rural Action, Rachel (health dept.) and Lana (LHA), Nate (CFI), and a county health inspector. Purpose was to connect pantry coordinators to local resources.</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Garden Fieldwork</td>
<td>WSCG</td>
<td>Dig up plot; met other gardeners</td>
<td>1 ½</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunday, 4-17-2011 4:00 – 5:30 p.m.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Attended to Garden, talked with other gardeners</td>
<td>1 ½</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday, 6-7-2011 4:30 – 6:00 p.m.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Weeded, mulched, fieldwork – met Debbie – shared sweet potato starts and kale recipes</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friday, 6-10-2011 10:30 – 11:30 a.m.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Weeded, mulched, planted more seeds. Another gardener gave us several tomato starts.</td>
<td>1 ½</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunday, 6-19-2011 12:30 – 2:00</td>
<td></td>
<td>Weeded, trimmed and pulled overgrown radishes. Talked with plot neighbor about radish advice.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunday, 6-26-2011 5:00 – 6:00 p.m.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Weeded, picked 5 large cucumbers (donated 2), sprayed plants for blight and potato bugs, planted onions. No other gardeners there.</td>
<td>1 ½</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday, 7-12-2011 10:00 – 11:30 a.m.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Weeded, picked 5 large cucumbers (donated 2), sprayed plants for blight and potato bugs, planted onions. No other gardeners there.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Time</td>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Activity</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday, 7-19-2011</td>
<td>9:30 – 10:00 a.m.</td>
<td>WSCG</td>
<td>Picked 5 medium sized cucumbers to donate to CFI. Hot and muggy – no other gardeners there.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunday, 7-24-2011</td>
<td>11:00 – 12:30 p.m.</td>
<td>WSCG</td>
<td>Major weeding today. Picked three cucumbers, but a deer destroyed a lot of the tomatoes that should have been producing by now – disappointing. Needs a fence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday, 8-2-2011</td>
<td>9:30 – 10:00 a.m.</td>
<td>WSCG</td>
<td>Picked a couple tomatoes and watered and weeded. Hot, only a couple gardeners out. Talked to a woman for a while who remembered I was pregnant and due soon – interview her next time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday, 8-9-2011</td>
<td>9:00 – 10:00 a.m.</td>
<td>WSCG</td>
<td>Tended to garden – only person there. Are others getting burnt out? Frustrated with animal/bug problems? So far, garden has been more of an expense – have others experienced this?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunday, 8-14-2011</td>
<td>6:00 – 8:00 p.m.</td>
<td>WSCG</td>
<td>Tended to garden. Several others there. Talked with other gardeners and got contact info from three people for interviews. Proved to be good time for work – cool, people coming and going.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thursday, 8-18-2011</td>
<td>6:30 – 7:00 p.m.</td>
<td>WSCG</td>
<td>First social event at the community garden. Snowville Creamery donated time and supplies to make icecream on site. About 25-30 people – folks seemed to enjoy themselves. Mingled.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monday, 8-22-2011</td>
<td>5:00 – 6:00 p.m.</td>
<td>WSCG</td>
<td>Tended to garden and picked raspberries from communal patch. Mingled; took pictures of garden.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunday, 8-28-2011</td>
<td>11:00 – 12:00 p.m.</td>
<td>WSCG</td>
<td>Picked, weeded; a few plots completely unattended to – rotten tomatoes and peppers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Time</td>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Activity</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sunday, 10-16-2011 3:00 – 4:00 p.m.</td>
<td>WSCG</td>
<td>Cleaned out garden – to compost or pick. Found a bunch of carrots and sweet potatoes underground!</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Volunteer work**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Donation Station Saturday, 3-26-2011 10:00 – 1:00 p.m.</td>
<td>Athens Farmers Market</td>
<td>Kevin arrived early to set up the donation station at the farmers market in Athens for the first outdoor market of the season. Kevin, Shannon, and I were the three volunteers for the day.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donation Station Saturday, 4-2-2011 10:00 – 1:00 p.m.</td>
<td>Athens Farmers Market</td>
<td>Kevin and Dave arrived early to set up the donation. Kevin left when I arrived. I worked with Ameri-Corps worker, Sandy.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donation Station Saturday, 4-16-2011 10:00 – 11:30 a.m.</td>
<td>Athens Farmers Market</td>
<td>Dave was there early to set up the donation station. I was the only volunteer until a new intern, Jamie showed up, and then at almost 11:00 an AmeriCorps worker, Nicole arrived. Too many people so I went to work at the office.</td>
<td>1 1/2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizing mailers for CFI membership Saturday, 4-16-2011 11:30 – 1:00 p.m.</td>
<td>CFI office</td>
<td>Rebecca set me up organizing the annual membership mailer to all CFI members for membership renewal. It contained an update on CFI news and invite to speaker/dinner event.</td>
<td>1 1/2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing plant tags Saturday, 4-16-2011</td>
<td>Home</td>
<td>Labeled tags. ASAP. Returned them to CFI office on Monday (4/18/11) – tags are for plant giveaway in Glouster and Chauncey in a couple of weeks (volunteered to help).</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food Distribution Thursday, 4-28-2011 9:00 – 11:30 a.m.</td>
<td>CFI office</td>
<td>Worked with Donna (filling in for Zak) to distribute food donations to pantries and individuals. Very few pick-ups because Wednesday market just began.</td>
<td>2 1/2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Event Description</td>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Details</td>
<td>Hours</td>
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<tr>
<td>Westside Community Garden Work Day</td>
<td>WSCG</td>
<td>Attended first community workday. Worked alongside several other gardeners weeding the communal raspberry bushes along the far side of the garden. Signed in with Janine – must participate in 2 workdays a summer per contract.</td>
<td>2 ½</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Development</td>
<td></td>
<td>Feature panelists: David Holben, professor in nutrition, Ronda Clark – CFI executive director, Leslie Schaller – Appalachian Center for Economic Networks, Tim Redfern – Rural Action Sustainable Agriculture, Natalie Woodroofe – 30 Mile Meal project</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eco-Café Food Insecurity: Keeping it Close to Home</td>
<td>Front Room Coffee</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>House Ohio University</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other CFI Events</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Summer Feeding Site</td>
<td>Federal Hocking</td>
<td>Summer Feeding Site is a five week camp for low income kids in the area. Works through Kids on Campus to teach nutritional skills, literacy, health etc.</td>
<td>1 ½</td>
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<tr>
<td>Middle School Stewart, OH</td>
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<tr>
<td>Farmers Market – most Sat. from April 23 – present</td>
<td>Athens Farmer’s</td>
<td>Mingle with vendors, hang around donation station to catch up with Duane and other AmeriCorps Service, interviewed some of the vendors that contribute to CFI – formal and informal</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Marker</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Running total: 30</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tour at Family Farms</td>
<td>Family Farms</td>
<td>Perry showed me around the farm and communal house. Talked about work volunteers do and how they contribute to community</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annual CFI Seed Swap</td>
<td>ACENet</td>
<td>Bought seeds, talked with local farmers, talked with Rebecca about her resignation. Poorly attended. Felt out of place.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Interviews</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Workshop leaders</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latrina, Gardening 101; Making Jelly and Jam</td>
<td>The Diner on Court Street</td>
<td>Community activist, musician; used to work for CFI; Not happy with how her position was taken over, won national prizes for her kids gardens. Mother taught her community how to can – canning was survival – a skill we’ve lost.</td>
<td>32:21</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marsha, Canning Basics</td>
<td>Subway on E. State</td>
<td>Farmer and orchard owner – Orchard. Interesting comment about how the food insecure don’t shop at the market or eat fruits/veggies etc.</td>
<td>53:19</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lana, Using Garden Weeds Medicinally</td>
<td>AceNet</td>
<td>Small business owner – Homemade botanical recipes and medicinals; Leary of consumerism mindset, believes it can’t last – has taught her family self-reliance skills to ensure security (vegetable garden, herb garden, meadow, forest – equipped for self-sufficiency)</td>
<td>47:15</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CFI Staff</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Dave</td>
<td>ACENet Conference Room</td>
<td>Scheduled to meet with Donna and Dave – got to meet their two assistants as well. Interviewed all 4 at same time. Follow-up next Monday to finish interview. Dave led discussion – very concerned with how our world works – see transcripts when I asked about major obstacles CFI faces.</td>
<td>41:35</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dave</td>
<td>CFI Office</td>
<td>Follow-up interview to finish q’s. Shared two more dvd’s with me about food, school lunch programs – this is his way of “changing the world” as he said. Talked a lot about politicalization of food, its impact on health – key quote about</td>
<td>47:54</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
cooperation around 2 min. shared names of key informants I should be in touch.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rebecca Executive Director</th>
<th>CFI office</th>
<th>Clear passion for CFI’s mission – self-sufficiency, healthy eating, and access all key things she talked about. Bold statements about how no food is better than bad foods in pantries – wants CFI to get more involved with other institutions like hospitals, nursing homes etc. $$$ and advertising – obstacles.</th>
<th>1:00:15</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Saturday, 8-13-2011 11:00 p.m.</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Details about CFI got started and has changed. New initiatives, biggest challenges – time, motivation, captive audience. Food security needs to be cultural – kind of new. Food secure neighbors = safe neighborhood/family. Divide between local/non.

| Rebecca – follow-up | CFI office | Details about CFI got started and has changed. New initiatives, biggest challenges – time, motivation, captive audience. Food security needs to be cultural – kind of new. Food secure neighbors = safe neighborhood/family. Divide between local/non. | 40:47   |
| Monday, 2-20-2012 12:00 p.m. |            |                                                                                                 |         |

**AmeriCorps Service**

| Cheryl F2C AmeriCorps Service | Cheryl home in Meigs County | Met at Kids on Campus/CFI sponsored summer camp for low income youth. Cindy led lesson on nutrition. Business owner/founder – Healing Heart Herbals (www.healingheartherbals.com). She is the new F2C AmeriCorps Service person for CFI. Previous focus on herbs, now on food, especially meeting the needs of low income areas – like Meigs. | 1:01:45 |
| Sunday, 8-7-2011 11:00 p.m. |            |                                                                                                 |         |

<p>| Brandon Summer Service Corps | ACENet Conference Room | Worked for CFI for summer – 11 weeks. Dad is an organic farmer. Excited CFI – said he is much healthier – has opened his eyes. Should follow up with him. | 41:35   |
| Monday, 8-8-2011 2:00 p.m. |            |                                                                                                 |         |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Organization – CFI</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Notes</th>
<th>Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nate</td>
<td>COMCorps Service</td>
<td>ACENet Conference Room</td>
<td>Just started – today is first official day with CFI. AmeriCorps member with CFI. Worked on installing solar panels, travelled, was exposed to extreme poverty – shaped his perception on what he wants to do with his life – help others, not just have a “job” – make a difference. Hoping to help with some of the donation station aspirations.</td>
<td>41:35</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nate</td>
<td>COMCorps Service</td>
<td>Village Bakery</td>
<td>Donation Station is adding an education component – workshops for pantry coordinators (e.g., Sheltering Arms), partner with Health Department, pantry garden projects. “Jaded” with CFI – unorganized, poorly funded – preach sustainability but not a sustainable organization, too similar to other orgs like Rural Action. CFI’s mission is an “awakening”</td>
<td>49:52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jamie</td>
<td>AmeriCorps – CFI</td>
<td>Village Bakery</td>
<td>Just finishing up 8 week program with CFI. Spoke highly of the experience. A lot of interesting comments about how CFI helps people (and especially kids) make the full connection from garden to table. Will be in touch with other AmeriCorps workers for interviews.</td>
<td>1:08:56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stacy</td>
<td>AmeriCorps – CFI</td>
<td>Catalyst Cafe</td>
<td>Involved with CFI because of her interest in being the Donation Station manager. Challenges to camp as other folks – organization, trying new things, time, $$$ etc.</td>
<td>44:24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Erica</td>
<td>AmeriCorps – CFI</td>
<td>Village Bakery</td>
<td>Similar comments to other AmeriCorps about multiple constituencies at camp</td>
<td>45:00</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Volunteers</strong></td>
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| **Donna**  
CFI Volunteer  
Monday, 8-8-2011  
2:00 p.m. | ACENet Conference Room  
Called herself Dave’s assistant – helps him with everything he needs; runs distribution center, assists at donation station; “professional volunteer”  
41:35 |
| **Donna**  
CFI Volunteer  
Tuesday, 8-30-2011  
9:30 a.m. | Village Bakery  
Lots of talk about how volunteering has enabled her to give back, lifestyle changes, made her more “aware.” Worried about what people will eat in the winter when there is less food.  
29:22 |
| **Community Gardeners** |  |
| **Janie**  
Nelsonville Community Gardener  
Tuesday, 8-9-2011  
7:00 p.m. | Athens Public library  
Met Janie at Stewart workshop on Building a Compost Bin – it had been rescheduled so we missed it, but we chatted and she agreed to an interview. Didn’t know a lot about CFI, had gardened quite a bit, seemed frustrated with CFI and brought snippy email from Kevin about garden conditions along with a map and some more contacts – very helpful.  
51:46 |
| **Lana**  
WSCG FIE Coordinator  
Friday, 8-12-2011  
4:00 p.m. | Her office  
Main person organizing Food is Elementary program – very knowledgeable USDA reg., Live Healthy Appalachia, CFI. Experience with workshops and has a plot at community garden. Dedicated to improving kids health.  
50:32 |
| **Kim**  
WSCG Plot Coordinator  
Saturday, 8-13-2011  
5:00 p.m. | Village Bakery in Athens  
Spoke very highly of CFI and WSCG. Talked a little about how CFI supported her and her family when they were “pretty strapped” by sharing canning supplies etc.  
43:42 |
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Interview Date and Time</th>
<th>Notes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Danielle Westside Gardener</td>
<td>Her Home</td>
<td>Weds, 8-17-2011 4:00 p.m.</td>
<td>Fond of community gardening – believes in being self-reliant, organic – thinks it brings people together. Has pushed landlord to have com. Garden in apt. complex – worked with landscapers to design it – goes in next spring!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Max Westside Gardener</td>
<td>WSCG</td>
<td>Weds, 8-17-2011 5:00 p.m.</td>
<td>Has hung around the WSCG for at least 15 years – uses the area as a driving range. About 7-8 yrs ago started gardening – thinks it’s good.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tammy Nelsonville Community</td>
<td>Her Home – Nelsonville</td>
<td>Sunday, 8-21-2011 4:00 p.m.</td>
<td>Community garden for one year while her house was being built. New gardener, but very interested in it. Lots of talk about school lunches and issues in Nelsonville with lack of options. Proud of her garden – showed it to me after interview.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Janine WSCG CFI Liaison</td>
<td>Village Bakery in Athens</td>
<td>Tuesday, 8-23-2011 7:00 p.m.</td>
<td>Community garden for 4 years – started with just 7 gardens. Talked about the value of sharing with others and relationship with nature.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jimmy WSCG Volunteer and Compost Coordinator</td>
<td>WSCG</td>
<td>Weds, 8-24-2011 6:30 p.m.</td>
<td>Gardened for past two years, learned by reading. Involved with The Plains elementary after school program – in charge of the garden. Critical remarks about the WSG transition from CFI to independently run.</td>
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**CFI Contributors/related people**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Interview Date and Time</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Perry Family Farms</td>
<td>Family Farms</td>
<td>Saturday, 9-3-2011 12:30 p.m.</td>
<td>Touried farm and talked about ways in which it provides for community. Spiritually driven – quoted scripture throughout. Farms mission is centered on providing hospitality, creating a relationship with food, and sustainability.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Role/Position</td>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Notes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ralph</td>
<td>Co-founder of ACENet</td>
<td>Catalyst Café</td>
<td>Ph.D. in Education, organizes for cooperation, deeply concerned with school system, community organizer, believes CFI could improve with more discourse about relationship between community and individual (used term entrepreneur)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rachel</td>
<td>Health Educator, Athens Health Department</td>
<td>Village Bakery</td>
<td>Talked a lot about how food can impact health – plant based diet especially. Good info about how pantries need education, better food, better food needs to a priority, not an afterthought. Signed up to work with pantry project – coordinator and patron training.</td>
</tr>
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</table>
APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS

Interview Protocol for CFI Staff

Interviewee (pseudonym): ______________________ Date: __________________
Place: ___________________________       Time of Interview: ____________

Introductory script: Thank you for meeting with me today. As I mentioned when we scheduled this meeting, I would like to talk with you about food issues in the region. Before we begin, I need to ask you to read this consent form. It describes the purpose of my study. I will also need you to sign at the bottom if you would like to be a part of this research project. If you want to participate, I will give you a copy of the consent form. It has my phone number and email address in case you have any questions. I will keep your answers to these questions anonymous. This means that all identifying information about you will be removed from the study. Do you have any questions for me before we get started?

1. Could you describe your experiences and involvement with the Community Food Initiatives (CFI)?
   - How did you learn about CFI?
   - How long have you been involved with CFI?
   - What are your primary responsibilities or interests?

2. How would you describe CFI’s mission?

3. What are the biggest obstacles CFI faces to address its mission?
   - Probe – involvement, education, participation?

4. Can you share some of your experiences with different community initiatives (e.g. participation in workshops or other involvement outside of CFI)?
   - In your opinion, what should the role of community involvement be in addressing food insecurity?
What are the most important steps individuals can take to improve their food security?

5. What are the most significant ways you believe CFI is addressing food insecurity in this region?
   - Have you learned anything about self-reliance through your involvement with CFI?
   - If so, can you share some examples that illustrate how you’ve taken what you’ve learned with CFI into practice (i.e., growing your own vegetable garden, buying locally)?

6. What are some of the ways you believe CFI could address food insecurity, but hasn’t?

8. Is there anything else you’d like to share that I haven’t brought up?

9. Are there any questions I didn’t ask that you want to talk about?
Interview Protocol for CFI Volunteers (e.g., community garden organizers, donation station workers, summer program volunteers, workshop leaders)

Interviewee (pseudonym): ______________________ Date: __________________

Place: ___________________________       Time of Interview: ____________

Introductory script: Thank you for meeting with me today. As I mentioned when we scheduled this meeting, I would like to talk with you about food issues in the region. Before we begin, I need to ask you to read this consent form. It describes the purpose of my study. I will also need you to sign at the bottom if you would like to be a part of this research project. If you want to participate, I will give you a copy of the consent form. It has my phone number and email address in case you have any questions. I will keep your answers to these questions anonymous. This means that all identifying information about you will be removed from the study. Do you have any questions for me before we get started? Is it okay if I record our conversation?

1. Could you describe your experiences and involvement with the Community Food Initiatives (CFI)?

   o  How did you learn about CFI?

   o  What are your primary responsibilities or interests?

   o  How long have you been involved with CFI?

   o  How did you get started working with CFI?

   o  Why do you choose to volunteer with CFI? What are your motivations?

2. How would you describe CFI’s mission?

   o  How did you learn about these goals?

   o  Do you feel like you’ve contributed to accomplishing these goals? How?

   o  What are the biggest obstacles CFI faces to address its mission?

3. What are some of the things that you’re aware of that CFI does to address this mission?
4. Can you share some of your experiences with different community initiatives (e.g. participation in workshops or other involvement outside of CFI)?
   o What are some the key things you’ve learned from this involvement?
5. How has your life changed (or hasn’t it) through your experiences with CFI?
7. How would you describe the role of the community involvement in fostering good health/eating practices?
   o Is it feasible with your family and lifestyle?
   o Is it necessary to help you achieve your goals?
8. Are there any questions I didn’t ask that you really want to talk about?
9. Do you have any questions for me?
Interview Protocol for CFI Participants (e.g., community gardeners, patrons of the food pantry, summer youth program, workshop attendees)

Interviewee (pseudonym): ______________________ Date: ______________

Place: ___________________________       Time of Interview: ____________

Introductory script: Thank you for meeting with me today. As I mentioned when we scheduled this meeting, I would like to talk with you about food issues in the region. Before we begin, I need to ask you to read this consent form. It describes the purpose of my study. I will also need you to sign at the bottom if you would like to be a part of this research project. If you want to participate, I will give you a copy of the consent form. It has my phone number and email address in case you have any questions. I will keep your answers to these questions anonymous. This means that all identifying information about you will be removed from the study. Do you have any questions for me before we get started?

1. Can you describe your experiences with the community garden in Nelsonville?
   o How long have you been there?
   o How did you learn about it?

2. What are some of your reasons for gardening there?
   o What are some of the biggest lessons you’ve learned? Or most valuable take aways?
   o What have been the biggest challenges?

3. Are you familiar with the Community Food Initiatives?
   o How would you describe CFI’s mission?
   o How did you learn about these goals?

4. What are some of the things that you’re aware of that CFI does to address this mission?

5. Can you share some of your experiences with different community initiatives (e.g., participation in workshops or other involvement outside of CFI)?
o What are some the key things you’ve learned from this involvement?

6. How has your life changed/or hasn’t through your experiences with CFI and/or the Community Garden?

7. How would you describe the role of the community involvement in fostering good health/eating practices?
   o Is it feasible with your family and lifestyle?
   o Is it necessary to help you achieve your goals?

8. Have you found it challenging to eat the way you want to?
   o What factors do you think contribute to some of the challenges surrounding healthy eating?
   o What efforts or programs do you know about that are attempting to address food issues?

9. What are some of the ways you believe CFI could address your food related concerns, but hasn’t?

10. Are there any questions I didn’t ask that you really want to talk about?

11. Do you have any questions for me?