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Empowering Citizens in a Global Era: A Grounded Theory Study of Community Gardens

Anita Tam

Clemson University, anitaptam@gmail.com

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EMPOWERING CITIZENS IN A GLOBAL ERA:
A GROUNDED THEORY STUDY OF COMMUNITY GARDENS

A Dissertation
Presented to
the Graduate School of
Clemson University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy
International Family & Community Studies

By
Anita Pei Tam
December 2014

Accepted by:
Dr. Catherine Mobley, Committee Co-Chair
Dr. Mark Small, Committee Co-Chair
Dr. Bonnie Holaday
Dr. Anthony Marsella

ABSTRACT

In our global era, the modern food system can be viewed as consisting of a dominant macro-level corporate food industry, challenged by broad-based meso-level food justice and democracy movements, which are in turn fueled by micro-level community food initiatives. Research has yet to examine the role of community gardens in the context of this complex, multi-level food system. Grounded theory methodology was thus used to explore the deeper meaning of the community gardening experience to participants, in order to better understand the ways in which community gardens may scale up and contribute to democratizing the food system. Analysis of the qualitative data gathered through in-depth interviews with community garden participants revealed nine emergent themes that can be further interpreted through theoretical frameworks of basic human needs. Community gardens were found to be particularly meaningful to participants in that they contribute to the fulfillment of very basic needs as postulated by Abraham Maslow and Erich Fromm, and thereby have the potential to empower participants, and inform their personal identity in ways that make them more likely to identify with collective action and food system change. Interpretation of the findings reveals the potential role that community gardens can play as a hub and catalyst for major food system change by fostering recognition of basic needs as universal human rights and cutting across a multitude of sectors to connect the micro-, meso-, and macro-levels. Implications for research, practice, and policy are discussed as they relate not only to incremental change in the global food system, but also progress toward a more just, socially responsible, and peaceful world.

DEDICATION

To my friends and family, near and far, who much like community gardens,
anchor me in my past personal history, connect me to my present place in the world, and
give me hope for the future.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my undergraduate research assistant, Daniel Martinez, for his tremendous efforts and dedication to this research endeavor. I am also grateful for every individual who has helped to plant the seeds of change, and who has helped to nurture and inspire the flourishing of community gardens in Greenville County, SC and beyond. My gratitude extends to all of my dissertation committee members for their ongoing support, guidance, and encouragement throughout this entire process. Special thanks go to Dr. Catherine Mobley for collaborating with me on research over the past several years, serving as an exemplary role model not only as a researcher and scholar, but also as a kind and compassionate human being. Finally, I thank Dr. Anthony Marsella for teaching the first course I took as a graduate student at Clemson University, which renewed my faith in academia, in humanity, and in the possibility for positive change in our increasingly global world.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The corporate food regime that steadily gained ground over the past several decades and which now dominates our world's modern food system is neither socially, economically, nor environmentally sustainable (Holt-Giménez, 2011; Nicholson, 2011; Shiva, 2005; Stédile & Martins de Carvalho, 2011). This global food system also creates and perpetuates an array of social and environmental injustices (Friedmann, 1993; Lang, 2003; Lappé & Collins, 1977; Lappé, Collins, & Rosset, 1998; Patel, 2008; Pollan, 2006; Shiva, 1999). In response, a broad-based “food justice movement” promoting a more sustainable food system, based upon democratic principles that empower and engage community members beginning at the grassroots level, has emerged and is gaining momentum around the globe (Alkon & Agyeman, 2011; Gottlieb & Joshi, 2010; Holt-Giménez, 2011; Lang, 1996). In the United States, this food justice movement is evidenced by the rise of local and regional food policy councils, community-supported agriculture, farmers' markets, and other local initiatives that serve to strengthen individuals' and communities' connection to their food supply (Martinez et al., 2010; Winne, 2008). The contemporary community garden movement is often lauded as an example of this emerging “food democracy.”

Historically, the American community garden movement has waxed and waned in response to changing socioeconomic conditions. From the late-19th century urban lot gardens in Detroit, to the “Relief Gardens” during World War I and the Great Depression, and the “Victory Gardens” during World War II, community gardens have helped to

combat major food shortages, boost morale and self-respect, engender a sense of independence among the unemployed, and promote patriotism. The community garden movement declined noticeably after WWII when economic distress was not as acute and the direct need to supplement household food supplies was no longer salient. The early 1970's marked a revival of the movement as food prices soared and a new zeitgeist – inspired by a broadening environmental consciousness, neighborhood revitalization, emphasis on social connectedness, and grassroots activism – took hold across the nation (Lawson, 2005).

Within the past five years, there has been a remarkable resurgence of community gardens. This occurrence can be attributed to both a growing threat of food safety violations as well as the global economic downturn which resulted in heightened risks of food insecurity. A research area ripe for inquiry concerns the sustainability of this contemporary community garden movement, and the extent to which it can foster food justice and democracy not only at local levels but regionally, nationally, and globally as well. There is much evidence thus far suggesting that community gardens offer numerous benefits to individuals, families, neighborhoods, and broader communities (e.g., Alaimo, Reishcl, & Ober Allen, 2010; Draper & Freedman, 2010; Hynes & Howe, 2004; Okvat & Zautra, 2011); however, the question remains as to whether and how community garden participants understand, support, and identify with the basic tenets of the broader food justice movement. Moreover, there is a need to first explore the ways in which community gardening participants even think about and articulate the meaning of their community gardening experience.

The current study, therefore, adopts a grounded theory approach to explore the meaning of the community gardening experience as articulated by garden participants in the Upstate of South Carolina, specifically in Greenville County, which has increasingly gained statewide recognition for its community gardening network and initiatives. Understanding the nature and underlying meaning of the community garden experience is critical for drawing the connection between this initiative at the micro-level and its potential for scaling up and effecting change at a broader community and/or society level. As this grounded theory study will reveal, interpreting the impact of the community gardening experience on individuals at perhaps the most fundamental level of fulfilling basic human needs (Fromm, 1941, 1955; Maslow, 1943, 1954, 1970) may be a valuable way of understanding the deeper meaning of community gardening, its growing appeal and attractiveness, and its ability to empower individuals to take a more active role in helping to transform the broader food system.

Statement of Problem

Across our communities and around the globe, we encounter vast diversity, and yet as fellow human beings, we share a very fundamental commonality – the need to eat. This basic need, however, remains unfulfilled far too often. Over the past several decades, the rise of agribusiness has resulted in the record production of food, and yet, in today's global economy, roughly 804 million individuals are chronically undernourished and hungry (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 2014). Even in the United States, we live in the land of plenty and boast about our low cost of food relative to that in other countries. And yet 14.3 percent of American households

experience food insecurity, meaning that they have difficulty at some time during the year providing enough food for all their members due to a lack of resources (Coleman-Jensen, Gregory, & Singh, 2014). In our very own communities, we painstakingly run food banks and soup kitchens to feed the hungry, and yet the poor are getting poorer and increasing numbers of adults and children are malnourished and fall victim to diet-related illnesses.

The widespread lack of access to affordable and healthy food, in spite of the fact that food has never before existed in such abundance, thus, provides much food for thought as well as room for critical examination, action, and change (Lappe et al., 1998; Poppendieck, 2013). Given the ways in which the modern global food system has evolved over the past few decades, it is not surprising that the general American public tends to know little about and exert little control over its food source. The latter half of the twentieth century ushered in a period of unprecedented changes in how food is produced, processed, distributed, and in turn, consumed and controlled (Lang, 2003; Lang, Barling, & Caraher, 2001). The modern food system has become highly industrialized, globalized, and marked by enormous market concentration, such as among corporate food manufacturers, corporate food retailers, and agrochemical companies (Lang, 2003). The very nature of this food system with its elongated supply chain severs connections between production and distribution, and consequently between the growers and consumers. Even within the United States, food products from conventional sources travel an average of approximately 1,500 miles before they reach consumers' plates (Pirog & Benjamin, 2003). A host of health, economic, social, and environmental

externalities have resulted from this food system that focuses on maximizing efficiency and output. In turn, proponents of more locally-based systems that are participatory, democratic, relational, and socially just have emerged in favor of large-scale food systems change (e.g., Freedman & Bess, 2011).

One way to conceptualize our modern food system is as a dynamic contestation of market and social forces manifesting in a spectrum of macro-, meso-, and micro-level food movements. At the macro-level, the global food system has become overwhelmingly dominated by a corporate food regime, characterized by neoliberal policies heavily invested in traditions of economic liberalism and market-based agribusiness. The social externalities of such a regime have in turn triggered reformist traditions which call for an increase in social safety nets, voluntary corporate responsibility measures, and consumer-driven niche markets. However, all of these inevitably serve to strengthen the corporate food regime. In response, a more progressive social movement emphasizing notions of food justice and food sovereignty has emerged to challenge the corporate food regime (Holt-Giménez & Shattuck, 2011; McMichael, 2005; Patel, 2009; Windfuhr & Jonsén, 2005). This latter broad-based food movement is international in scope and can be construed as currently occupying a meso-level that is ultimately fueled by grassroots micro-level initiatives. At the micro-level, local community initiatives such as local and regional food policy councils, community-supported agriculture, farmers' markets, and community gardens exist across the nation and serve to strengthen individuals' and communities' connection to their food supply.

As Hassanein (2008) describes, "...food is contested terrain, representing a struggle between those economic and social forces seeking to control the system and those citizens seeking to create more sustainable and democratic food systems" (p. 287). More to the point, "as a growing force, food justice movements promote a strategy of food security where all people have access to adequate amounts of safe, nutritious, and culturally appropriate food produced in an environmentally sustainable way and provided in a manner that promotes human dignity" (Levkoe, 2006, p. 91).

Purpose of the Study

The overall purpose of the current research is to explore the ways in which the contemporary community garden movement can contribute to democratizing local food systems by first gaining a better understanding of what the community gardening experience actually means to participants. The community gardening experience is of particular interest in the current study as opposed to other forms of opposition to the corporate food system, such as farmers' markets, community supported agriculture (CSAs), and backyard gardening, because it is more holistic in approach. Being outdoors in nature and directly connecting with the earth to grow one's own food (as opposed to purchasing it from a local farmer or paying for a membership with a local CSA), and furthermore, doing so with other people in the community as part of a shared collective effort, makes community gardening unique and perhaps fulfilling and empowering in a way that engagement in other local community-level food initiatives may not be.

That said, gaining a deeper, richer, conceptual understanding of how individuals perceive and articulate the meaning of their community garden involvement is critical at

this juncture. Given the explorative and inductive nature of this research question, grounded theory methodology was used to ascertain the deeper meaning of the community gardening experience, as it relates to the participants personally and their beliefs about the potential for community gardening to effect change at broader levels of community and society.

The following presentation of this study, therefore, follows a structural format that is deemed most appropriate for communicating the natural progression of grounded theory research (Dunne, 2011). This current grounded theory study begins with the *context* of the food system and the community garden movement, leading into exploration of the *empirical data* from the community garden participants themselves, which then results in the *emergence* of the applicability of Maslow's (1943, 1954, 1970) and Fromm's (1941, 1955) theoretical frameworks related to fundamental basic human needs. The significance of this study and its findings has numerous implications and sows many seeds for future theory development, research, practice, and policy.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Although community gardens today can take on many different shapes, sizes, and forms of organization, be found in an array of venues, and serve a wide range of purposes, the American Community Gardening Association (ACGA) provides perhaps the simplest definition of community gardens: “Any piece of land gardened by a group of people” (2014). Milburn and Vail (2010) further contend that community gardens are considered successful if they provide benefits to the environment, community, and individuals. As such, a growing body of research documents the history of community gardens, the numerous benefits and multiple meanings associated with community gardening, and the range of obstacles that challenge their long-term viability. Community gardens also offer an entry point for participants to be part of a collective effort increasing access to local food and perhaps even identify with the broader social movement around food justice and democracy. The body of literature pertaining to the social psychology of social movements offers insights to better understand the connections between the micro-, meso-, and macro-levels of individual participation in a collective effort.

Community Gardening in the United States

The original community garden movement in the United States can be traced back to Detroit at end of the 19th century, where in response to economic crisis, vacant urban lots were transformed into gardens as a temporary means to assist the poor in supplementing their food supplies and to improve morale, self-respect, and sense of

independence among the unemployed (Lawson, 2005). The idea of community gardens as a means of relief emerged again as World War I and the Great Depression imposed grave economic hardships on families across the nation. During the Depression era, it is estimated that 5,000 gardens were cultivated in vacant lots in New York City alone (Armstrong, 2000). World War II also led to the widespread proliferation of home and community gardens (this time, termed “Victory Gardens”) both to combat major food shortages and promote patriotism. During the period following WWII, though, as the nation recovered, economic distress was not as acute, and the direct need to supplement food supplies was no longer salient, the community garden movement declined noticeably (Lawson, 2005).

The early 1970s marked a revival of gardening, not so much as a national duty, but rather a hobby, especially with millions of Americans moving to suburban homes with individual yards (Lawson, 2005). With growing interest in neighborhood revitalization efforts and environmental activism, this time period also marked the beginning of the modern era of community gardening (Birky & Strom, 2013). Over the past 100+ years, the community garden movement has waxed and waned, in response to changing socioeconomic conditions. In drawing the distinction between the historical government-sponsored vacant lot gardens in the United States (i.e., the relief and war gardens) and contemporary community gardens (e.g., 1960s onward, which are motivated by neighborhood improvement, sociability, and empowerment, in addition to the production of food), though, Kurtz (2001) makes a compelling argument about the multiple meanings and markedly different experiences of individual gardens within even

the present-day contemporary movement. Based on examination of previous studies and on three specific examples of community gardens in a mid-West city, Kurtz concludes that community gardens “serve as important arenas in which urban residents negotiate shared, changing, and sometimes contested meanings of both ‘community’ and ‘garden’” (p. 660).

This finding likely applies not only to urban settings, but more rural and suburban ones as well. In fact, now that the body of literature on community gardening has grown significantly, a few pivotal comprehensive literature reviews have been conducted, which document the wide range of settings where community gardens have emerged. More importantly, however, are the benefits that are associated with these community efforts. In reviewing a total of 55 studies focusing on community gardens exclusively in the United States and published between 1999 and 2010, Draper and Freedman (2010) identified 11 major themes: health benefits; food source and security; economic development; youth education, development, and employment; use and preservation of open space; crime prevention; neighborhood beautification; leisure and outdoor recreation; cultural preservation and expression; social interactions and cultivation of relationships; and community organizing, empowerment, and mobilization.

Similarly, Okvat and Zautra (2011) conducted a thorough review of existing empirical evidence on how community gardens might foster resilience in social ecological systems and found that community gardens offer a range of benefits at multiple levels. In terms of individual well-being, there are notable cognitive and affect benefits. At the community-level, there are benefits around social networking,

multicultural relations, community organizing and empowerment, crime reduction, nutrition and physical activity, and economics. Regarding environmental well-being, climate change mitigation and expanded awareness of environmental issues as well as increased civic participation in fostering sustainability are evident.

The tremendous range of benefits offered by community gardening certainly warrants further academic and practical attention. The challenges associated with starting and sustaining a community garden that offers such diverse benefits have also been documented (e.g., Borrelli, 2008; Milburn & Vail, 2010; Schmelzkopf, 1995; Tan & Neo, 2009), but deserves more attention as well. Land, funding, participants, leadership, and supportive policies are all critical elements, but not necessarily present and yet commonly taken for granted by community members. Taken together, the extent to which community garden participation may empower individuals to not only sustain the community garden movement, but also identify with the broader food movement, and in turn, tackle larger issues in the overall food system is certainly ripe for academic and practical inquiry.

Role of Community Gardens in Food Systems Change

The role that community gardens play in the local food system, and then even further, the role that the local food movement plays in creating change in the global agribusiness-driven food system, have gained the attention of food justice researchers (e.g., DeLind, 2011; Freedman & Bess, 2011; Mount, 2012; Werkheiser & Noll, 2014). Around the world, a meso-level food movement has begun to challenge the dominant macro-level focus on agribusiness, as consumers increasingly seek to support small and

local “family” farms. This food movement has brought to the forefront issues of food safety, environmental degradation, health and wellness, and class and racial inequalities around availability and access to safe, nutritious, and affordable food. At the micro-level, a range of community initiatives have emerged to address these various issues through local food production.

Macro-Level: The Global Food System

Throughout the 1980s and to the current day, the world food system has been shaped by corporate-led globalization. This shift was fueled by the expansion of neoliberal policies favoring large-scale agribusiness, implementation of structural adjustment programs (SAPs) in developing countries, and concentration of power over food and agricultural policy in a handful of transnational corporations (Mousseau, 2005; Windfuhr & Jonsén, 2005). Over time, several trends have served to dismantle the power of individual states to regulate their own food and agriculture laws and instead gave rise to the modern corporate food industry. These trends include the industrialization of agriculture; the spread of SAPs which broke down tariffs and eliminated national systems of agricultural protection measures in the Global South; and the establishment of the World Trade Organization in 1995, with its Agreement on Agriculture, and a series of binding international treaties and Free Trade Agreements (Holt-Giménez, 2009; Holt-Giménez & Shattuck, 2011; McMichael, 2005, 2009; Mousseau, 2005; Pechlaner & Otero, 2008; Pimbert, 2009; Windfuhr & Jonsén, 2005).

This corporate food industry is currently characterized by monopoly agrifood corporations with record profits and unprecedented market power. Such concentration of

power over land, food, and agriculture results in policies that benefit large corporations at the expense of small-scale farmers, consumers, and the environment (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 2009; McMichael, 2009; Mousseau, 2005; Windfuhr & Jonsén, 2005). Large-scale industrial agriculture has been marked by promotion of export crops in developing countries rather than food for domestic consumption, specialization in the production of just one or two crops (i.e., monoculture farming), influx of genetically modified organisms (GMOs), massive increases in the application of chemicals and pesticides, overuse of water resources, and loss of fertile soil due to erosion and salinization (Holt-Giménez, 2009; McMichael, 2005, 2009; Mousseau, 2005; Pimbert, 2009; Windfuhr & Jonsén, 2005). Due to the tremendous power of corporations over market shares and hence food policy, these aforementioned practices continue in spite of contention among local farmer and consumer organizations. Within this system, there essentially exists little democratic participation in decisions about food. Thus, the current food crisis of hunger and malnourishment is not a technical problem premised merely on the need to produce more food, but is rather a social and political issue that is exacerbated by the global nature of food production and distribution.

Meso-Level: The Food Movement

In response to the trends which have led to the massive restructuring of global agriculture accompanied by increased food insecurity, undernourishment, social exclusion, and deepening poverty around the world, a new broad-based food movement has gained momentum at what can be considered the meso-level. This global food

movement goes beyond mere food security and provision of food aid, by promoting more progressive notions of food justice and food sovereignty.

Proponents of the meso-level food movement recognize how the corporate food industry values quantity over quality, large farms over small farms, monocultures over biodiversity, long-distance food over local food, and de-skilled factory cooking over skilled home cooking. They also recognize the culture of the food industry based on hyper/supermarket over street markets, nutrient-light fast food over nutrient-rich slow food, advertising and marketing over education, consumerism over citizenship, and corporate food control over food democracy (Halweil, 2005; Lang, 2005; Lockie, 2009; Pimbert, 2009). The food movement seeks to reverse these trends and reconnect and engage local communities and people with their food and food choices.

One of the most prominent examples within the food movement is La Vía Campesina, which is a self-proclaimed “international peasant movement” formed in 1992, and comprised of small and medium sized food producers, farm and agricultural workers, and indigenous communities from all around the world, representing “family farms” and “people of the land”. This international coalition formally introduced the term “food sovereignty” at the 1996 World Food Summit, calling for “people’s right to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems.” La Vía Campesina has also organized major international conferences on food sovereignty (e.g., 2001 World Forum on Food Sovereignty, 2007 Nyéléni Forum on Food

Sovereignty) attended by organizations of family farmers, civil society organizations, nongovernmental organizations, academics and researchers.

In addition to the ongoing work and increasing influence of La Vía Campesina, the growth of the food movement is evidenced by global, regional, and national food networks. These coalitions serve as connecting forces for organizations representing farmers, agricultural workers, and indigenous peoples, as well as NGOs, civil society organizations, people's movements geared towards promoting food security, food justice, and food sovereignty. Such expansive networks facilitate dialogue and debate between the various entities across sectors and geographic boundaries. They also provide a platform to engage a wide range of pertinent stakeholders and thereby increase the likelihood of influencing policy at national, regional, and international levels.

Micro-Level: Local Community Initiatives

While the global food sovereignty movement is gaining much momentum among coalitions of farmers' organizations, non-governmental organizations, civil society groups, and intergovernmental agencies such as those associated with the United Nations, Holt-Giménez and Shattuck (2011) argue that perhaps the fastest and largest grassroots expression of the food movement is evident in Northern industrialized nations. These authors describe this tendency as a "progressive trend" and suggest that the groups involved are primarily active in local to national arenas and focus on mobilizing local communities to address local issues. This can be viewed as the micro-level of the food system movement.

In the United States, as an example, individuals have begun to engage at the micro-level by participating in a range of local gardening and farmers' market initiatives to increase their gardening skills, supplement their food supply with local sources of safe and nutritious food, and in some cases, to help raise community awareness of sustainable local efforts to push back on the effects of macro-level corporate control over the food system. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (2014), within the last five years, the number of farmers' markets has increased by over 50%, from 5,274 in 2009 to 8,268 in 2014. Since the U.S.D.A. began tracking this statistic about 20 years ago, the number of farmers markets has nearly quadrupled (from 1,755 in 1994 to 8,268 in 2014). At the same time, there has been a revival of community gardens, as families and communities sought to maintain food security during the relatively recent economic downturn.

Community gardens have been recognized as a means for individuals to increase their social capital (Alaimo, Reischl, & Allen, 2010; Glover, 2004; Glover, Parry, & Shinew, 2005; Glover, Shinew, & Parry, 2005) and as a model for strengthening economic, social, and environmental sustainability at the local level (Blake & Cloutier-Fisher, 2009; Ferris, Norman, & Sempik, 2001; Holland, 2004). Thus, community gardening can play a role in the growing local food movement which seeks to transform residents from being merely "food consumers" to being "food citizens." As such, community gardeners have the potential to increase their sense of community and engaged citizenship by participating in various forms of "civic agriculture," defined by

Lyson (2007) as “a broad-based movement to democratize the agriculture and food system” (p. 19).

Sub-Movements Within the Local Food Movement

The local food movement overall has been both touted as a way to democratize the food system, making it more healthy, just, and sustainable, and also criticized as a co-opted means of offering choices to the affluent while preserving the status quo of the industrial food system controlled by the corporate conglomerates. To help us better understand this predicament, Werkheiser and Noll (2014) provide an insightful analysis of the local food movement as comprised of three distinct sub-movements: the individual-focused, systems-focused, and community-focused. The individual-focused sub-movement is perhaps the most prominent in the mainstream discourse. It views food as a product, individuals as consumers, and the local food system as a useful way to improve the quality and delivery of the food product. From this perspective, local food can be supported as a personal choice and preference for the taste of fresh or organic food. Critics of this sub-movement argue that it can be elitist in some ways, allowing access only to those who are economically privileged and can afford to vote with their dollar (DeLind, 2011). Furthermore, the ways in which food as a product has been co-opted by those with corporate control over the production and distribution of food, and therefore, perpetuates many of the injustices along class, ethnic, and gender lines that are present in the current industrial food system.

The systems-focused sub-movement, on the other hand, sees food not solely as a commodity that is sold and purchased, but rather as something that is always

institutionalized. This approach treats individuals as citizens and activists rather than mere consumers, and is concerned with addressing institutional-level issues and modifying laws and policies to enact systems-level change in the food system, with the goal of increasing local food production and consumption. However, critics argue that this approach is intricately linked with the food security movement that integrates communities into neoliberal globalization, which has long been criticized for its environmental degradation and inequitable and unjust treatment of poor, indigenous, and other marginalized communities.

In the community-focused (CF) sub-movement, by contrast, people are seen as members of communities and food is co-constituted with those communities, which amplifies the symbolic nature of food in the culture:

Food is not only a consumptive product or institutionalized good. Rather, it comes before these things in that the way people grow, consume and sell food is a matter of how they create and reproduce communities and culture. Food has a more fundamental category as a collectivizing force, especially among marginalized groups, which can become seats for activism. CF conceives of people as being members of a community and distinct culture, including in its food needs. (Werkheiser & Noll, 2014, p. 207)

Werkheiser and Noll (2014) assert that this community-focused sub-movement, although the least discussed in mainstream discourse, is most closely related to notions of food sovereignty and offers the most radical potential for changing the larger food system

because it values relational elements of food, strengthening of relationships within and between communities, cultural diversity, and respect for the environment.

What does this mean for community gardens? Community gardens have the potential to be situated in this community-focused sub-movement, but may fall short depending on the extent to which participants, as a result of their community gardening experience, identify themselves merely as consumers versus citizens and/or activists, versus empowered community members responsible for the co-constitution of food in one's culture. To shed light on the possibility for participation in a micro-level initiative like community gardens to encourage participation in a larger collective social movement and hence foment macro-level changes in global food and environmental sustainability, it is important to examine the linkages between personal identity and collective identity.

Social Psychology of Social Movements

Collective identity is a widely used concept in the social science literature on social movements. Classical theories of Marx, Durkheim, and Weber provide a foundation for understanding the structural and cultural bases for collective identity formation, particularly for “old movements” that coalesced around shared grievances and perceived injustices. “New social movements” that emerged starting in the 1960s, such as peace activism, feminism, and environmentalism, were based less on economic grievances and class conflict, and more on cultural and symbolic issues linked to identity, status, and humanism (Johnston, Laraña, & Gusfield, 1994). Consequently, in addition to the classical theories, social psychological approaches to identity have formed a “critical cornerstone within modern sociological thought” (Cerulo, 1997, p. 385), especially

within the field of social movements where concepts of the self and identity are of particular interest.

This relatively new social psychological tradition recognizes that individual identity is important in understanding social movement participation. Accordingly, “it is a task of all social movements to bridge individual and cultural levels,” and that this is achieved by “enlarging the personal identities of a constituency to include the relevant collective identity as part of their definition of self” (Gamson, 1992, p. 60). Building solidarity and raising consciousness are also central to meshing the individual and the cultural and social systems, and hence crucial for micromobilization (Cohen, 1985; Gamson, 1992). In other words, collective identity is a construct at the cultural level, and for individuals to mobilize for collective action, individuals must make it part of their personal identity.

According to Klandermans (2004), individuals are drawn to social movements for three primary reasons: to change their circumstances in the social and political environment (instrumentality), to identify as members of a certain group (identity), or to search for meaning and express their views (ideology). Each of these three motives has both sociological and psychological underpinnings. For the first motive of wanting to change their circumstances, there must be some sense of dissatisfaction, feeling of relative deprivation, injustice, or grievance. Participation in a collective effort is more likely to occur if individuals believe that they have the resources and ability to make an impact and improve their situation. Sometimes the costs outweigh the benefits of participation, but that may be outweighed by the motive of belonging to a valued group.

As such, collective identity is therefore recognized as another key factor in movement participation.

Identity can be succinctly construed as a place in society (Simon, 1999). Personal identity is comprised of the different roles an individual occupies, as opposed to collective identity, which is a place in society shared with other people. There is much empirical evidence, such as with labor unions and the women's movement (Kelly & Breinlinger, 1996), the gay rights movement (Simon et al., 1998), and farmers' protests (Klandermans, Sabucedo, & Rodriguez, 2002), supporting the basic hypothesis that "strong identification with a group makes participation in collective political action on behalf of that group more likely" (Klandermans, 2004, p. 364). In their review of the literature on collective identity, solidarity, and commitment, situated in the context of micromobilization and participation, though, Hunt and Benford (2004) argue that while there is some evidence that the alignment of personal and collective identities is critical for individual participation in social movements, there are insufficient data to explain exactly how and why this occurs. Nonetheless, in addition to the instrumentality and identity motives, the desire to simply express one's views is another reason for participating in a social movement.

This motive of expressing one's ideology highlights the creative and cultural aspects of social movements. Expressive movements capitalize on the emotions that fuel the growth and development of social movements and protest: "People are angry, develop feelings of moral indignation about some state of affairs or some government decision and they want to make that known. They participate in a social movement not only to

enforce political change, but to gain dignity in their lives through struggle and moral expression” (Klandermans, 2004, p. 365). In the very least, individuals may be in a state of confusion and look for others in a social movement to share their experiences and express their feelings. The critical link between individuals and their participation in social movements may also rest with the social movement activists’ ability to “weave together a moral, cognitive, and emotional package of attitudes” (Klandermans, 2004, p. 365).

Taken together, the aspects of instrumentality, identity, and ideology harken back to the older psychological tradition in the study of social movements where identity theory provides the crucial link between social system breakdown and collective action (Fromm, 1941). From the perspective of more contemporary social identity theory, situational factors activate one’s group identity, by making certain facets of one’s personal identity more salient. Salience is essentially a function of the individual’s current personal and/or social goals and is also a reflection of the psychological significance of a group membership (Oakes, 1987). Some identity scholars (e.g., Stryker & Serpe, 1982, 1994) theorize that the likelihood of activating one identity versus another may depend upon the extent to which a person is connected or embedded to others in a particular social structure, and also upon the relative strength or depth of his/her ties to others.

Stets and Burke (2000) further assert that a combination of identity theory and social identity theory provides “an understanding of the conditions for the probability of and the actual activation of an identity” (p. 231), and that “identities referring to groups

or roles are motivated by self-esteem, self-efficacy, self-consistency, and self-regulation” (p. 233). It is a merger of these two theoretical approaches that will provide better understanding of the macro-, meso-, and micro-level processes of individual participation in social movements. The macro-level concerns collective identity and whether participation in a social movement increases with personal identification with the group. The meso-level attends to inter- and intragroup relations and their influence on group identity. The micro-level involves analysis of cognitive and motivational processes, such as self-esteem, self-efficacy, perceived injustice, and feelings of authentic alignment with one’s “real” self, that influence one’s likelihood of participating in a social movement (Owens & Aronson, 2000). Perhaps intertwined with these cognitive processes, another micro-level process that may motivate individuals to participate in a social movement is their inherent need to belong (Baumeister, Dale, & Muraven, 2000).

It appears that a number of key cognitive and social factors influence individuals’ self-concepts, the extent to which certain facets of their identities become salient, and hence the likelihood they will engage in a collective effort. According to Gamson (1991), though, “The best long-run guarantor of democratic participation in a movement is a collective identity that incorporates the idea of people as collective agents of their own destiny, and adopts a practice that encourages them to be active and collaborative” (p. 49). In relation to community gardens, what remains unexplored are the ways in which participation therein activates individuals’ identities, and as a result triggers the identification with one or more sub-movements within the local food movement, and thus

create potential for mobilizing greater participation in the food justice and democracy movement.

Summary of Past Literature and Significance of Current Study

A community garden can be broadly defined as any piece of land gardened by a group of people. These gardens may be comprised of individual or shared plots, require a fee for membership or be open to volunteers, and be on private or public land found in urban, suburban, or rural neighborhoods and residential housing areas, or associated with community organizations, schools, hospitals, businesses, and other institutions. Despite these differences in structure, membership requirements, land ownership, and location, community gardens share a common goal of growing food, herbs, and/or ornamental plants for the benefit of the community.

Interest in community gardens has surged over the past decade both in practice and academically, as evidenced by the growing body of research examining the range of individual benefits and motivations associated with community gardening (e.g., Draper & Freedman, 2010; Wang & Glicksman, 2013; Zick, Smith, Kowaleski-Jones, Uno, & Merrill, 2013). At the collective level, Comstock et al. (2010) compared garden participants and nonparticipants on measures of social cohesion and found greater neighborhood attachment among community gardeners. Okvat and Zautra (2011) reviewed empirical evidence from studies of community gardening documenting individual-level, community-level, and environmental well-being, and raise a compelling question of what it would mean for community gardens to “scale up”. Concerned about the longevity of community gardens, Birky and Strom (2013) examined the current state

of the contemporary community garden movement in the United States, and argue that the diversity of garden types, function, organizational support, and broader financial, cultural, and political support (compared to previous eras of community gardening) has created a more stable and perhaps more sustainable movement than we had witnessed in the past.

Indeed, the community garden movement has grown significantly over the past decade. According to the American Community Gardening Association (2014), there are an estimated 18,000 community gardens across the nation, and this number is on the rise. If this contemporary community garden movement continues to gain ground, it begs the following question: To what extent can community gardening serve as a promising strategy to not only enhance levels of individual and community well-being, but also contribute to food justice and food democracy, and hence agricultural sustainability, environmental justice, and global climate change mitigation? What warrants exploration at this juncture is the connection between perceived change at the individual level and the potential for community and, in turn, societal-level change. Any such societal-level change begins with individuals; the blossoming of change begins with the planting of a seed.

This research endeavor fills a gap in the literature by exploring the meaning of community gardening from the perspective of community garden participants. Moreover, it seeks to explore the narratives put forth when participants are asked to reflect upon the ways in which they have changed as a result of their involvement and experiences with community gardening. It also explores the ways in which participants believe that the

broader community has changed or transformed, or has the potential to change or transform, as a result of the growing community garden movement. In other words, how do the community gardeners themselves articulate the changes they have experienced as a result of their participation with the community garden, and furthermore, in what ways, if any, do community gardeners articulate the connection between the community garden movement and more transformative change at the societal level? Taken together, the thoughts, beliefs, and feelings expressed through stories shared by the participants will provide insight into not only the meaning of the community gardening experience but also the impact it has had on shaping personal and collective identities, and furthermore, the ways in which the gardeners identify with various sub-movements within local food, and hence the potential for community garden involvement to effect larger scale change in the overall food system.

CHAPTER THREE

METHOD

The current study uses grounded theory methodology (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) to explore and understand the experiences of individuals participating in community gardens in Greenville County, South Carolina. One unique feature of grounded theory is the dynamic interplay of data collection and analysis allowing categories and themes to emerge naturally from the empirical data (Payne, 2007). This feature of grounded theory is especially useful for the current study because of the very nature of the research question – exploring how participants articulate the meaning of their community gardening experience.

To gain deeper and richer understanding of what the community gardening experience means to participants, it is necessary to engage in open dialogue and to allow participants to simply share their experiences, tell their stories, and reveal their personal narratives. This inductive, bottom-up methodological approach allows participants to reveal what is important to them, with the researcher following the leads presented by the respondent. As such, the personal meaning emerges from the respondents themselves, instead of the researcher arbitrarily imposing a preconceived framework of ideas and *a priori* assumptions in a deductive, top-down manner. Grounded theory methodology has similarly been used in studies exploring the acquisition, retention, and transmission of social-ecological memory in allotment gardens in Sweden (Barthel, Folke, & Colding, 2010), and exploring the contributions of household food gardening to community food security (Kortright & Wakefield, 2011).

During the summer of 2014, in-depth qualitative interviews were conducted with the founder or coordinator of six community gardens and 30 garden members (five members from each of the six gardens). Clemson University Institutional Review Board approval was granted in June 2014, prior to the initiation of participant recruitment and data collection.

Setting and Population

Greenville County, SC is a 785-square-mile area with an estimated total population of 474,266 (United States Census Bureau, 2014), and where the number of community gardens has increased by over 1300% in the past five years (Gardening for Good, 2014). In 2010, the rapid growth of garden initiatives across Greenville County was becoming apparent; however, there were limited resources for gardens as well as limited networking between emerging garden initiatives. As a result, a small group of individuals (including the primary investigator of this study) began to form the foundation for a much-needed community garden network and resource center in Greenville County, which was subsequently named Gardening for Good and officially launched in 2011. This network is led by a Director, a paid position through a capacity-building non-profit organization in Greenville, and governed by an Advisory Board. Working towards its vision of a “sustainable network of flourishing gardens that cultivate community vitality, civic engagement, and access to affordable, healthy, and culturally appropriate food,” Gardening for Good’s mission is “to foster communication, promote exchange of knowledge, facilitate stewardship of resources, and support advocacy efforts among Greenville County garden initiatives” (Gardening for Good, 2014).

According to Gardening for Good (2014), there are currently 73 identified gardens in the county, which are categorized as community-based gardens, neighborhood gardens, faith-based gardens, non-profit gardens, school youth gardens, urban farms, and workspace gardens. Each garden is classified primarily based on its location, source of participants, and governance structure.

Given the notable differences in purposes and nature of the various types of gardens, the current study limits its exploration to individuals participating in three specific types of gardens: community-based, neighborhood, and faith-based. The decision to focus on these three garden types was methodologically based on both practical reasons and a basic understanding of the nature of the garden types.

Community-based gardens tend to be open to the public and serve the purpose of bringing diverse groups of people in the community together to grow food for themselves and perhaps to share with others in need. Because they are often found in central locations such as on public land or on the property of a community organization, participants typically commute by car in order to participate. Neighborhood gardens are much like community-based gardens with the purpose of bringing together people to grow food, herbs, and flowers for the benefit of the community, but the main difference is that they are located in specific residential communities, so the participants are primarily local residents who live within walking distance or a relatively short commute via bicycle or car. Faith-based gardens, on the other hand, are also like community-based and neighborhood gardens in their primary purpose, but are located at churches and participants include both members of the congregation as well as other community

members who are not affiliated with the church. School gardens and workspace gardens, on the other hand, are typically more exclusive in that they serve the particular school or business where they are located, and participants are either students of the school or employees of the business. Non-profit gardens grow food exclusively to donate to people in need, and urban farms just operate at a much larger scale compared to the other garden types.

Therefore, three types of gardens (community-based, neighborhood, and faith-based) were selected due to their similarities in overall nature and structure, but also to provide some variation in the typical source of garden participants. Table 3.1 shows the comparisons between these three types of gardens, and illustrates similarities and differences in terms of location, type of plot, the typical source of participants, organizers, and intended purpose. It is important to note, however, that the three garden types were included, first and foremost, to enhance the breadth of the sample and thereby increase generalizability of the study results. Including three garden types would also provide the researcher with a preliminary sense for possible differences between garden types; yet acknowledging the relatively small sample size (N=30) and selection of only two gardens per garden type, the goal of the current study was not to conduct analyses at the garden-type level nor to draw formal conclusions across garden types.

Sample

Representing the three types of gardens (community-based, neighborhood, and faith-based), two gardens of each type were selected for inclusion in this study.

Interviews were conducted with the founder or coordinator of each garden and five additional members from each garden.

Garden Selection

The six gardens purposively selected for inclusion in this study are considered model initiatives in Greenville County by Gardening for Good, based on their history of activity and level of collaborative efforts with other community groups. While representing the three different garden types, they also represent the diversity in size, structure, and operation found within the garden types. All six gardens were established between 2009 and 2012, range in size between 800 square feet and 7600 square feet, with anywhere between one collectively-shared plot to 23 individually-managed plots, and have from 10 to 20 active participants who are either volunteers or fee-paying members. Table 3.2 shows the comparisons between these six gardens.

The primary investigator is the founder and current coordinator of one of the selected community gardens (Synergy Garden) and was also on the founding board of the Gardening for Good community garden network. These prior roles and affiliations naturally informed the selection of the six gardens. Background information about each of the gardens and contact information for the coordinators were accessed through direct contact with the Gardening for Good Director, who regularly updates the comprehensive garden database.

Participant Recruitment

The coordinator of each selected garden (other than the Synergy Garden) was identified with the assistance of the Director of Gardening for Good, contacted via

telephone or email, and then interviewed in person. With the exception of one garden (Bon Secours St. Francis Community Garden), the current coordinators were also the founders of the gardens. All five coordinators agreed to participate in the study, and each completed a face-to-face interview either onsite at the garden or at a coffee shop. These interviews varied in length from 30 minutes to 86 minutes, with an average length of 53 minutes.

After each interview, the coordinators either immediately provided the researcher with names and contact information for five individuals who are members of their garden and who they believed would be interested and willing to participate in the study, or contacted their members asking for volunteers to participate in the study and then forwarded contact information to the researcher at a later time. For the Synergy Garden, five participants were identified by the researcher who has worked alongside all of the garden volunteers since the garden's inception in 2009. Of the volunteers working in the garden, the researcher purposively selected five individuals who were among the most active with the garden, but who varied in their tenure with the garden. These selection criteria were used to maintain consistency with the selection criteria used by the coordinators of the other five gardens.

The researcher contacted each individual identified by the garden coordinators via telephone or email, and all of the interviews were conducted between mid-June and the end of August in 2014. Of the 30 individuals initially identified, 29 completed an in-person face-to-face interview at either the garden, a coffee shop, the participant's home, the participant's place of work, the researcher's home, or a community center near the

garden. The one individual who declined participation was interested and willing to participate, but could not do so due to extenuating family circumstances. As such, another garden member was identified by the garden coordinator, and that individual did complete an interview. All interviews were conducted individually, with the exception of one interview with a male gardener who invited his wife to sit in on the interview. This was a retired couple who always gardened together and shared similar views about the gardening experience, so they opted to participate in the interview together. In total, 30 interviews were conducted with garden participants, and the interviews varied in length from 17 minutes to 85 minutes, with an average length of 54 minutes.

Demographic Characteristics

The research participants (both garden coordinators and members) ranged in age from mid-20s to over 70 years, with the largest percentage (33.3%) falling in the 35 to 44 year-old bracket. A majority of the participants were female (61.1%), compared to 38.9% male. Nearly 14% of the participants are sole occupants in their household, 36.1% live in a double-occupant household, 44.4% have three or four members in their household, and 5.5% live in households with five or more members. A large majority of these participants are homeowners (91.7%) and have lived in that home for anywhere from a few days to 37 years. The sample was predominantly comprised of White participants (83.2%), with smaller percentages of Asian, Black, Hispanic, and Middle Eastern participants. Table 3.3 shows the demographic comparisons of the overall sample (including garden coordinators and members) and the 30 garden members across the six gardens.

Data Collection

Before the start of each interview, the researcher provided study participants with a copy of the Informed Consent Form and verbally emphasized the parts regarding their voluntary participation in the research study, potential risks and benefits, and protection of confidentiality (Appendix A). After the end of the interview, research participants completed a brief survey asking for basic demographic information (Appendix B). All interviews were audio recorded and then transcribed by an undergraduate research assistant. To ensure accuracy, the primary investigator compared the transcripts with the original recording prior to analysis.

Interview Procedure for Garden Coordinators

Semi-structured interviews with the coordinators were designed primarily to solicit background information about the intended purpose, history, structure, funding, and governance characteristics of the gardens. Coordinators were also asked about the nature of their involvement with the garden, how participants are recruited and retained, ways in which the garden has changed over time, what makes the garden unique and different from other gardens, perceived challenges and barriers versus successes and highlights, and future goals for the garden. (See Appendix C for the interview protocol used with garden coordinators). Sharing of additional information related to the garden was encouraged throughout the interview.

In addition to the specific garden-related questions, coordinators were also asked to elaborate upon the ways in which they personally have changed as a result of their involvement with the garden, the ways in which community gardens have the potential to

change the broader community and/or society in general, and finally, ways in which they miss the garden if they are away from it for what they may consider a long period of time. These questions were asked primarily to provide the coordinators with an idea of what the interviews with the garden participants would entail.

Interview Procedure for Garden Participants

In accordance with grounded theory methods (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), only a few broad, open-ended questions along with some semi-structured questions were developed for the interviews with garden participants. (See Appendix D for the interview protocol used with garden coordinators). Leads that emerged during data collection were followed, and subsequent questions were reshaped accordingly; topics that respondents defined as crucial, and which may have been unanticipated, were pursued. Follow-up questions were, thus, focused to invite the participant to interpret his or her experience, to articulate his or her intentions and meanings, and to allow a loosely guided exploration of the topic. The primary questions of interest, serving as points of departure, asked participants about the nature of their involvement with the garden, what their community gardening experience means to them personally, the broader impact of their participation, and personal as well as community/societal-level change.

Data Analysis

Analysis was conducted according to Glaser and Strauss's (1967) grounded theory research methods. Grounded theory emphasizes the constant comparative method, whereby data is coded and analyzed in phases, in such a way that categories of data emerge and previously-coded and subsequent data are compared and fit into the emergent

categories. As such, coding and analysis consisted of three main phases: 1) an initial phase of open coding involving incident-by-incident coding of the data, followed by 2) a focused, selective, and more conceptual phase using the most significant and/or frequent initial codes to sort, synthesize, integrate, and organize large amounts of data, and a final round of 3) theoretical coding which conceptualizes the relationships between the substantive core categories and sub-categories resulting from focused coding.

The first phase of open coding (incident-by-incident) was conducted using NVivo 10 for Windows, which is a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software program. Sticking very closely to the data during this phase, as prescribed by grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006, Glaser, 1978), each incident within each interview was first coded with words that reflect action (i.e., with use of gerunds) so as to create codes that reflect the participants' stated views, circumstances, behaviors, and sentiments. This process of scrutinizing and naming the data with codes allows the researcher to learn about what the data consists of and begin to make sense of what it may suggest. According to Charmaz (2006), this "grounded theory method itself contains correctives that reduce the likelihood that researchers merely superimpose their preconceived notions on the data" (p. 52). In other words, rather than applying preexisting categories to the data and forcing the data to fit them, initial codes are grounded in the data so that the codes fit the data and the nuances therein. Meanwhile, the researcher remains open to whatever patterns, contrasts, and theoretical possibilities may begin to emerge from the data.

The long list of initial codes created in NVivo was then exported to Microsoft Excel 2010 for the next phase of coding that was more focused and conceptual. In this

phase of focused coding, codebooks were created where earlier codes were reviewed, compared within and across interviews, and condensed where appropriate, allowing the researcher to capture and synthesize the main themes in the participants' statements. Like the first phase of coding, this phase of focused coding uses constant comparative methods to make analytic sense of the data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Data is constantly compared with other data from within the same interview to find similarities and differences in participants' experiences, actions, and interpretations to develop a focused code. Then, data from other interviews are compared to these codes, again to determine similarities and differences in the meaning of the data, which helps to further refine the codes that represent emerging categories of data.

After the focused codes were developed, theoretical coding (Glaser, 1978) was conducted to analyze, integrate, conceptualize, and specify possible relationships between the categories developed in the previous coding phase. Whereas "initial coding fractures data into separate pieces and distinct codes" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 60), theoretical codes are integrative and "weave the fractured story back together" (Glaser, 1978, p. 72). This final phase of coding allows the researcher to bring the data together into a coherent and comprehensive whole with precision and clarity, tell an analytic story, and move that story in a theoretical direction.

Engaging in analytic memo-writing, theoretical sampling, saturation, and sorting fostered robust categories and analysis (Charmaz, 2006). Throughout the data collection and analysis process, memo-writing was performed to informally record analytic notes and ideas about events and/or trends that emerged from the data. Memo-writing led

directly to theoretical sampling, which in grounded theory pertains to conceptual and theoretical development (i.e., fitting emerging theories with the data). The process of theoretical sampling begins with identifying the preliminary categories that emerge and then checking, qualifying, refining, and elaborating upon them, and also comparing them with other categories. Saturation occurs when no new properties of the core theoretical categories emerge, suggesting thorough evaluation of the data. Sorting of the categories allows for the creation, refinement, and integration of theoretical links and hence development of a theoretical framework (Charmaz, 2006; Jones & Alony, 2011).

The aforementioned data analysis steps and processes are inherently self-correcting when rigorously incorporated into the qualitative research process. They are essentially what Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson, and Spiers (2002) refer to as integral “verification strategies” which are necessary for systematically establishing reliability and validity, and thus attaining rigor in a qualitative research endeavor such as the current one.

Methodological Limitations

The primary investigator’s role in the community garden movement in Greenville County, as one of the founding board members of Gardening for Good as well as the founder and coordinator of one of the gardens under study, was beneficial in providing an inside perspective on the growing movement and also a network of contacts with various gardens and participants. These prior roles of the researcher, however, may also create bias that must be taken into account. With that in mind, the interviews with garden coordinators were geared mainly towards collecting background information about the

gardens themselves and setting the stage for recruitment of garden participants for the study. To minimize researcher bias in following certain leads in the interviews, particularly at the outset of the study, which in grounded theory methodology can have an enormous impact on shaping and reshaping subsequent interviews, it was decided that interviews with the Synergy Garden participants would not be conducted until at least two thirds of the other interviews had already been conducted. To minimize demand characteristics on the part of Synergy Garden participants, the researcher was diligent in following the exact data collection procedures and interviewing techniques employed with previous interviews. The researcher also emphasized not only the confidentiality of the data, but also the importance of and genuine desire to collect the most honest and sincere reflections and stories from the garden participants themselves.

This sampling methodology does not account for the views of those participants who are either less active or no longer involved with the garden. Therefore, the current sample is not unbiased and would likely result in data that presents a more favorable view of the garden than if a random sample of all community garden participants (past and present) had been taken. As such, the sample of participants is limited to those who are most active in the garden, and thus, those who have perhaps had the most positive experiences with the garden. Although the data does not account for attrition and does not reflect the views of those individuals who are only minimally involved, the results nevertheless are valuable in exploring the meaning and impact that community gardens can and have had for community garden participants. The stories that the individual

participants tell reveal the potential for community gardens to impact change at both the personal and societal levels.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

Although the interviews with the community garden participants followed grounded theory methodology (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) with a flexible protocol of open-ended questions, essentially allowing participants to share their unique personal narratives about the meaning of their community gardening experiences, the iterative process of qualitative data coding revealed similarities across the respondents' descriptions. Nine predominant themes emerged from the interviews, resulting in a rich depiction of the community gardening experience that can be further interpreted through theoretical frameworks relating to fundamental human needs.

These emergent themes represent robust categories found in the data; all six individual gardens and between 60-100% of the respondents from each garden type were represented within each of the nine themes. Table 4.1 shows the percentage of participants from each garden type that was represented within each theme. As indicated in this table, the differences between the garden types in their representation across the emergent themes were minimal. The resulting nine themes are, therefore, presented generally as a conglomeration of the data across all six gardens, with any specific differences between garden types otherwise noted.

Gardening Experience in the Past and Present

In the process of describing the personal meaning of their community gardening experience, every respondent made at least one reference to their past family or personal history of gardening or lack thereof. For most of the respondents, their current

community gardening experience unearths pleasant childhood memories of gardening with their family. As one respondent put it, “My grandmother had this garden, and I loved the garden. I loved to work with it, and I never lost that interest” (Cornerstone-Storehouse [CS] male). Another respondent remarked, “Growing up we had a garden, but it was more my grandparents doing it... and I loved going in the garden and getting cucumbers, and actually when I walk through the tomato plants, the smell of tomatoes reminds me of my grandparents” (Synergy Garden [SG] female). Even though respondents may think that “this is going to maybe sound weird, but...,” the way their current gardening experience connects them with their past is actually not as unusual as they believe, especially since many respondents appreciate the values gained from their childhood experiences: “...it puts me in touch with my grandmother. My grandmother has been dead for several years, but she always raised a very large garden, generally by herself. She raised eight kids all on her own, and she had to feed them all... I remember as a kid in the summer going and being in her garden. I remember digging potatoes, and just being in the dirt, and I associated that with her. She could make anything grow. So, to be able to plant some seeds, and you see them develop, it reminds me of her” (First Christian Church [FCC] female). Another respondent similarly described how the community garden gave him a sense of connection to his past, his childhood, and to his “home”: “It kind of brings me back to when I grew up raising, having to have a garden. So this is kind of like me seeing a little bit of home when I was a child growing up” (CS male).

The amount of involvement respondents had in the family garden growing up ranged from minimal to extensive. At minimum, they were at least aware of it: “As a little kid, my dad and my mom had a garden... and I remember as a kid, not long in the summertime after everybody was in bed, it was still light out, and so we would look out the window and there my mom would be working in the garden. And so, just as a kid growing up, I knew of it” (CS female). Others may have perceived their involvement in the family garden as more of a burden or chore: “As a kid I wasn’t that interested in the learning about it part. It was like ‘Oh, we need to get there and weed.’ And I was like, ‘Ughh.’... for a long time we would get a penny for every ten snails we caught, because we had a huge snail problem... it was always like a chore” (Sans Souci [SS] female). Another respondent shared a similar story “We had a huge garden in my backyard, but my job was to weed it. I did nothing else. We all had a bucket, and fill the bucket with weeds, then we could play. That’s what my mom’s rule was” (GreenGate [GG] female). And for others, gardening and farming was simply a way of life: “I grew up on a farm and we had a very large garden...All the neighboring farms had gardens and were growing things, canned them or froze them. We were very self-sufficient...We raised animals, and we did butcher cows and pigs some, too. It was a farming lifestyle in a small town. That’s just what we did” (SG female).

A number of respondents also commented on traditional family values and societal expectations associated with self-sufficiency and growing your own food: “I grew up almost never eating anything out of a can... In Mississippi, you were expected to grow your own food. I mean, if you had to buy things from the grocery store, it was almost as

if you're considered like the lazy city person... like it was a derogatory remark" (FCC female). "I grew up in West Virginia, and we basically raised everything ourselves. I mean, mom went to the store once in a while to buy sugar, coffee, flour, stuff like that... besides gardens we had an orchard, so we had pears, cherries, different things, apples, peaches, you know, plums, everything" (FCC male). As a result of their community gardening experience as an adult, they now realize that "seeing something grow is something I took for granted... the difference now is that I am able to do that myself, and see what they got out of it and what the joy was in all of that work, what the payoff was. So, that's been cool just to get a deeper understanding of things" (FCC female). Reflecting back on the family's ready access to fresh food also brings greater appreciation for one's childhood overall: "That's where I was lucky growing up... I couldn't ask for a better childhood" (FCC male).

For many respondents, the nature of and their own appreciation for growing one's own food has changed over time: "I grew up raising vegetables because we had to. And now, it's more of I can. I don't have to but I can" (CS male). As another respondent put it, "We didn't go to the grocery store and buy bags of frozen vegetables. We grew a lot of what we wanted or neighbors did... as a kid I was like, 'Gosh, why are we bothering? So many easier ways to do this.'... I think for them it was more of a cost-saving thing. I'm starting to understand that for myself, it's a matter of sourcing my food, knowing what I'm eating, where it came from, what my kids are eating" (SG female).

Even if respondents did not grow up with a family garden, they mentioned not having had the opportunity and, therefore, wanting to have the experience now as an

adult. One participant admitted, "I do get jealous of people who say, 'Oh yeah, we always grew food growing up.' I didn't have any of that" (GG female). Aside from childhood gardening experiences, some of the respondents also reported either having a home garden in the past, or currently having a garden at home. Some respondents would like to have a home garden, but join the community garden because either because they have too much shade in their yards, have had limited success with their home gardens, or would like to learn more about plants and lower the stakes by gardening with others first. Only three respondents had either previous or concurrent experience with another community garden. For a vast majority of the respondents, this is their first time being involved with a community garden.

Access to Fresh and Healthy Food

Ninety percent of the respondents elaborated upon increased access to fresh, high-quality, superior-tasting, healthy food as one of the major benefits of community gardening. Compared to produce bought at the grocery store, "the food is just better out of the garden fresh. There's just no comparison" (GG male). Some respondents shared personal and endearing stories about their preferences for fresh food and reasons for growing certain vegetables: "I've got to have cucumber. My wife would make me leave home if I didn't plant cucumbers. I remember our first cucumber. I pulled it and I carried it, and she loves cucumber, and I laid it on the counter and I said, 'Okay baby, there's your first cucumber.' And we had that that evening with dinner. It was so much different than what we been having. I don't know why, it's just better" (GG male).

Participating in the community garden has changed people in terms of their mindset and attitude toward food: “In the simplest way, it’s really made me think more about what I eat... The food just tastes better if it’s coming from the garden” (SS female). Every gardener appears to agree that “there’s no comparison...a world of difference between what you can grow and what you can buy... Tomatoes at the grocery store just don't have any taste. Tomatoes out of the garden are completely different” (FCC female). If away from the garden, one respondent even said that he would go to the grocery store and “probably would not eat vegetables for a month, because I would just feel like, “Gosh, the quality is so down” (SG male).

It is not just the overall quality, but the natural sweetness of fresh produce that often surprises participants and leaves a lasting impression: “Another cool thing is tasting the food. Like, we had some peas growing in that bed, and they are sooo good fresh! I’ve never had fresh peas before. So sweet, yeah. Like candy” (SS female). The same experience continues into the fall growing season: “There’s nothing like garden-picked vegetables...in the fall, if you’ve ever tasted broccoli in November, are you kidding me?... it’s like candy. So sweet” (CS female). Overall, the taste of fresh garden produce offers such pleasure that participants want to share it with others: “You grow it and you eat it, and if I’m not going to eat it, then I am going to share it. And oh man, it tastes so much better, doesn’t it? It does, it’s amazing!” (GG female)

Perhaps due to the enhanced flavor of fresh produce and easy access to a wider variety of vegetables, many participants report healthier eating and better nutrition as one of the most notable ways the community gardening experience has changed them on a

personal level: “I have more vegetables in my diet because of the garden, which is good from a health standpoint” (CS male). These health benefits extend to the participants’ families as well: “I realize that certainly it has a significant impact on me as an individual in terms of my family because we’re eating healthier, because we’re consuming this. I find myself eating out less, which means I’m eating healthier” (FCC male); “I see my husband changing, eating lots more green stuff. [5 year-old son] is eating more green stuff” (GG female). Participants and their families have become more concerned about how they are nourishing their bodies: “My husband and I are both thinking more about what we eat, what we are putting into our bodies” (FCC female).

Because of the garden, participants have been exposed to new foods and are more willing to try new things: “I didn’t know I liked kale...I have a new appreciation for green beans, and I didn’t know I liked squash...So I learned a lot about different plants and foods that I now like” (CS male). Participating in the garden sometimes lowers the stakes for people to try new foods. A mother of five children said: “It’s been easier to try new things. You’re hesitant to spend your money and buy them at the grocery store, but if somebody else is already building a garden and growing something you wouldn’t have thought of eating before, it’s easier to try it out” (CS female).

Furthermore, having a direct hand in growing the food makes participants, including young children, more likely to try new foods: “It was getting my kids to eat vegetables. I’ve gotten them to try things that they normally wouldn’t try. They haven’t liked all of it, but they’ve tried it” (SG female). Another mother with young children commented, “Stuff like this they would eat right off the plant. But if I picked it, brought

it in, washed it, and put it on their dinner plate, they wouldn't touch it. Honest to goodness! Somehow it crossed that threshold and it was gross. But they would pick peas off the plant and eat it... they just loved them, they thought it was great" (CS female). This preference for vine-ripened food is shared by other children as well, even very young ones. One respondent talked about her preschool-age son's taste for tomatoes: "He loves to eat them, he just eats them straight off the vine. He won't eat a tomato that's cold. He likes to eat it sun-ripened and sun-warmed, you know?... I have pictures of him in a little white tank top and a diaper with red tomato all the way down. I'm going to always grow tomatoes for that very reason" (GG female).

Personal investments in the garden have made some participants feel the need to take advantage of what they helped to produce, sometimes resulting in major changes in lifestyle: "I helped grow this food so I need to eat it. So I learned a lot about cooking food, and really got a new appreciation for fresh food... I didn't cook before...not AT ALL. This has been a big transformation...I don't really talk about it too much, but there's all kinds of things that I cook now" (SS male). Citing participation in the community garden as "a primary catalyst for sure," another respondent described how his "lifestyle in the past three years has undergone a really big change... I'm more conscious of the fuel I put my body... It [the garden] has instilled, more than anything else, the benefits and, quite honestly, the basic need for sustenance at just an organic, root-level" (SG male).

The way respondents attribute their lifestyle changes and significant health results to their participation in the community garden is noteworthy. For one participant who

has been an active member of the garden for the past five years, the community garden “has taught me and given me an opportunity to actually learn different ways to eat different foods... I’ve lost 250 pounds! I’ve got 50 more pounds to go to get to my goal. And it’s not always just the physical. It’s a lot of the emotional... the inside [respondent name] has finally gotten to come out!” (St. Francis [SF] female). For another respondent, participating in the community garden and having access to organically grown produce, along with eliminating other toxins going into her system, has made her feel “WAY, way healthier. Oh wow, oh yeah. Mentally, physically, not as tired... just more positive. And I hate to even use this word because sounds so New Age, but just more enlightened, more aware of everything. I can feel things better, I can taste stuff. I feel like I can see just everything. Sometimes I don’t believe I’m as old as I am, you know?” (CS female)

Therapeutic Aspects from Connecting with Nature

Another meaningful element of community garden participation relates to the therapeutic aspects of connecting with nature. The garden itself is often described as a “peaceful place” (SS female, CS male), “a place where people can come and commune with nature and stuff” (GG female). Another respondent even offered a superlative, “When I come out here, I think I have a greater sense of peace really than anywhere else” (CS male).

In addition to the garden being a place where one can go “to just sit in peace” (CS male), the act of gardening is therapeutic as well. In fact, participants talked much about the therapeutic, stress-relieving qualities that stem simply from direct physical contact with the earth and plants: “It just feels very satisfying to work in the dirt. It’s just very

soothing in a way... It's very therapeutic... It's like hiking, being around the natural world. And it just feels really cool to actually physically have your hands in it" (SS female). Another respondent also referred to the soothing aspect, but further elaborated upon being in touch with the life cycle: "There's something soothing about getting your hands in the dirt and planting, and harvesting, and pruning, and fertilizing, and watering, and caring for, you know, you kind of get in touch with the whole life cycle" (CS male). One respondent refers to gardening as her "dirt therapy" (SG female), and many others mentioned the stress relief they experience from weeding, for example, "It gives me something productive to do, but it also gives me release of tension... sometimes I come down and just yank out weeds to my heart's content" (GG female), and "When I'm weeding and gardening I am completely in the moment. I'm not thinking about anything. I'm just doing my weeding. I love to weed" (SF female). Even though gardening can be physically demanding, many participants "find it mentally relaxing, especially if you water the garden or something like that. You just stand there, and you're watering and nourishing plants, and somehow it just soothes the stress, it really does" (CS female). Multiple respondents described gardening as cathartic: "It's digging in the dirt, and weeding and all of that stuff. Even though it's kind of a pain in the rear to have to weed, it's also cathartic. You're getting rid of the bad to help the good... It's a purging of all this stress that you've had throughout the week when you finally get to go just pick some cucumbers" (SG female).

The idea of purging and releasing stress was frequently reported: "For me, the garden is another way to release stress. I can go up there and talk to them cucumbers all

day. I can tell them all my woes...They don't tell nobody my business [laughter]... It is very therapeutic" (SF female). Working in the garden appears to offer a productive, life-creating outlet, all while providing respite from common everyday stresses. Such stresses could come from any part of one's life, including work ("People banging away on a computer all day, and then get back in the dirt at the end of the day or whatever. It's really kind of satisfying" (GG male)) and home ("There's just something about caring for the plants that can't talk back. That is therapeutic. I live with two ten year-olds" (SG female)).

For participants with extraordinary emotional challenges such as responsibility of caring for family members with special needs, the garden has even greater therapeutic value: "To me, life can put a lot of stresses on you, but whenever I'm out in the garden everything is just kind of mellowed out. It's therapy for me. I have an eighteen-year old autistic son, which builds in a lot of stress within our family core. My wife has a lot of health issues now, and she's not able to get out and do much at all" (CS male). This particular respondent described his autistic son as previously having "meltdown issues where he has no control over it," but when they are at the community garden, "everything is melted away. He and I are seeing eye to eye on everything, and that has so much benefited me, a mental healthy state that's given me much hope." His son enjoys the garden and will often ask if they can go to the garden, and as a result of being part of the community garden, "he doesn't have so many of those stressful meltdown times like before. Whenever we started with this, they started just kind of slowing down... So it's also therapeutic for him being outside and feeling the teamwork."

For many participants, working in the community garden is therapeutic in that it serves as an escape from their busy, fast-paced modern-day lifestyles. “Instead of the new, hurry, quick, don’t have time, you know, that kind of thing,” one respondent emphasized the importance of being outdoors in nature: “When you garden, there’s so many beneficial things to it, but it really just goes back to, like, back in the old days when you rode a bike, and you played in the backyard” (CS female). Another respondent described how his involvement with the garden has actually changed him in a positive way in that “I feel like the garden has helped me slow down. I think it kind of gives you, number one a time-out... if I’m all stressed out, I can come to the garden and work, or just look around... I can just sit down, maybe pick some tomatoes and basil, and eat them right here... So there’s that, the getting more in touch with nature” (CS male). The idea of slowing down appeared to be valued by many participants: “It’s a time of getting out and away, slowing down. Doing at times some mindless tasks, so the mind can be focused on some other things” (FCC male). Similarly, another respondent said, “I definitely feel closer to the earth” (GG female), and for her, this connection with nature is particularly helpful because “I’m such a type A person, and I have anxiety and my brain is always thinking about the million things that I’m not doing that I should be doing, etc., etc. This is one of the very few places where I can kind of escape that.” Moreover, it was her participation in the community garden that led to the discovery of new sensory experiences which foster this ability to slow down: “That’s a sort of new discovery for me, and it’s only been the past few years... I would just come out in the morning, and I just love the smell of tomato plants, I love the smell on my fingertips.”

Not only is the garden an escape for many, it is restorative: “Something that is really restorative to me and really keeps lifting me... It is something good for the soul” (GG female). Also restorative is the concept of creating life from seed and witnessing the life cycle of plants: “It’s just digging in the ground... you’re trying to create new things... you see things change, going from seed to full plant, like a life cycle” (SF male). Gardening essentially “gets people back to their roots. I mean, you’re digging in the dirt to produce food... it’s a calming effect, and with everything so technological and everybody feeling so rushed and there’s no time to do anything, this is a moment in time where you just are who you are” (SG female). In other words, gardening helps to put things and individuals’ lives into perspective by providing a time-out from technology, the demands of everyday life, and the rushed nature of fulfilling these demands: “You’re planting stuff, and you’re watching stuff grow, and then you’re picking it and helping people eat healthy food. So, that’s a pretty heavy effect... Just take a moment and realize that you are not the be-all, end-all. Everybody else has a life, too. This, what you’re doing is bringing more life” (SG female). The last part of this statement alludes to the feeling that our fast-paced, busy lifestyles are destructive in nature, and that community gardening can serve as a constructive remedy.

Along those lines, respondents alluded to the many stresses from their busy lives, and so the community garden may be an attractive alternative, offering a venue and “a chance to be unplugged from our phones, maybe, and not having to respond to that email right away, and just being outside in a quieter environment” (FCC male). For some respondents, having a garden at home might be more convenient for purposes of growing

and accessing food, but they prefer community gardening because they prioritize the therapeutic elements of “getting away” and being able to enjoy nature without the distractions of everyday life. Thus, the community garden is almost like their “office away from the office” where they can be somewhat more intentional in their efforts to unwind: “It’s my mistress, don’t tell my wife [laughter]... Sometimes you just need to be out here by yourself, and you hear the insects, and if you pay attention you can hear the breeze in the trees and some of the other sounds of nature that normally you’re just too busy to pay attention to it...too distracted” (FCC male).

Many respondents shared very similar sentiments, especially when describing how they feel when they are away from the garden for what they would consider a long period of time: “I just miss the earthiness... this summer I went away for a week and a half, and so, it was a two week stretch that I wasn’t here. That’s the longest I’ve ever been away. And I just wanted to just sit down in the dirt and just pull [weeds]” (GG female). This respondent, like others, expounded on the therapeutic aspects of working in the community garden, truly connecting with nature: “It’s just not having any noise except for crickets chirping, or the river, or whatever... it’s just the sounds of nature around you. And just be sitting out there and pulling weeds, and picking fruit, and all those things. It’s just therapeutic and relaxing. It just brings me to, ‘Okay, this is what life really should be like’ (GG female). Again, with this statement, participants appear to view the garden as a productive and constructive remedy to the otherwise stressful and perhaps destructive aspects of their everyday lives. Similarly, another respondent articulated, “I wonder if we’re not looking for a way to get reconnected to the land, and

feeling the disconnect of what are lives have become... People trying to reconnect, somehow, community, land” (FCC male). The community garden may be a way for individuals to feel a sense of connection, both to nature and to community, in what they otherwise perceive as their fragmented lives.

Sense of Community and Belonging

Another major theme that emerged from the interviews was how the community garden was perceived as providing a common ground for connecting with other people, bringing together diverse groups, and perhaps even making new friends, as people work together for a common purpose. Even when reflecting upon some of their fondest community garden-related memories, the events (e.g., planting days, potluck dinners, garden concerts, cookouts) that brought people together were the most commonly mentioned. Some of the first thoughts that come to participants’ minds when describing the personal meaning of their community garden experience pertained to the relational aspects of the garden: “I often tell people that I like to garden, but this way, I get to garden with thirty of my closest friends” (SG female). Being at the garden is enjoyable and, “It’s a fun time, because it’s different personalities... It’s the people, it’s really about the people!” (FCC male). As one participant described, “that’s one good thing about a community garden, that’s where everybody can, you know, get together... I think it’s another reason I like doing it. I love working with people. I hate working alone... I like friends around, you know?” (GG male). Moreover, these relational aspects of community gardening can provide a deeper sense of connection, “The thing that satisfies me is my core connection. It’s a group of friends” (SF female).

This sense of connection with other people is evident not only for more outgoing, socially-oriented individuals, but also for those who describe themselves as more shy and introverted: “Being a natural introvert, it [the community garden] gives me an opportunity to talk to people every once in a while” (FCC female). The garden literally provides common ground and a common purpose for people to come together: “For me personally, I’m not the kind of person, like, if we had a block party or something like that, that’s really fun, but I’m really shy talking to people... with the garden, we’re all physically working on something together. So, it takes the awkwardness out of the social interaction...You’re there with a purpose” (SS female). Working together with others in a community garden, thus, removes barriers and provides an opportunity that is appreciated even by shy individuals to meet and interact with people: “I like to learn about what’s going on in people’s lives, and to be able to care about them. And this is a really concrete way for me to do that that is not as scary as just making small talk or something... It’s a really great, like not creepy, way to be involved in people’s lives” (SS female). And as such, the opportunity to connect with others at the community garden can make participants feel less isolated: “When I go back to my house and even when I’m by myself, I live alone, but I know, ‘Oh, there’s people around me. I know this person and that person.’ I don’t feel alone... I’m not best friends with the people that are here, and I don’t know everything about them, but it’s like an extended family kind of thing.”

Alleviating feelings of isolation is indeed an important benefit of the community garden for participants: “It gets people to relate...for me on a personal level, that was important because I needed to have some place where I felt like I could actually meet and

talk to people, and not feel so isolated” (SS female). Another participant commented that the garden is a “pretty neat way to forge connections, draw people out of their own properties” (SS female). For her, thinking about how neighborhoods in the past seemed to be more social with people talking and kids playing outside, “Now it’s just so quiet, because everyone is just withdrawn into their own homes and their own yards surrounded with privacy fences. And they just have become very kind of isolated. So, it is nice to have something like this [the community garden] that gives people an excuse to kind of break out of that.” The garden provides an open opportunity for anyone to join and connect with others: “Even people who have never gardened, they come and help, and then we’re sitting there, and it’s such a relaxed atmosphere that people who would never talk, talk. And the next thing you know, there’s no barriers, there’s no nothing, there’s no walls” (CS female). People, on any given day, can arrive to the garden and forge new connections: “Even tonight I got out of my car and I walked up, and there were new people there... I immediately met someone... and we got along as if we’d known each other for ten years, you know? It wasn’t like they were people I was meeting for the first time” (SG female).

As such, working with others in the community garden provides a sense of belonging: “I like the fact that everybody comes together to do it, so it’s a sense of belonging... it means a lot to me” (SG female). Another respondent said, “We all work together like a family. I think we care for each other... We just support each other, and have a good time together. That’s important” (SG female). Not only is working with others to achieve a common goal meaningful, but that one’s presence or absence is

noticed: “Like if you miss one day, then the next time you see these folks, ‘We didn’t see you in the garden!’ So people miss you, you know, if you didn’t go there” (SF male). But further, there is an understanding that while it is a group effort, every individual’s contributions matter, and that one’s absence would mean that “the garden would still go on, but wouldn’t be as good. It wouldn’t flourish as much... It’s knowing that you have that intrinsic value to the garden, that impact, that connection” (SG male).

For some, the community garden is also a place to connect with their own families. Some of the respondents’ fondest memories involve time shared with their family members at the garden, such as “the day we planted all these shrubs, bushes, and trees around. That was a big day. I’ll never forget that. My son really enjoyed that” (SF male). Another participant fondly recalls how “working as a family together on a project was nice. We try to do a lot of things as a family, but sometimes it’s a project like this that really brings you together” (CS female). Even if children are not actually working in the gardening, time spent with family at the community garden can be quite memorable. One participant said of her two-year-old son, “He just loves coming here...most of the pictures that I’ve taken are of him, turning buckets into drums, or just marching around the garden... it’s really fun” (SS female). Continuing along the family line, one couple really enjoys time with their grandson at the community garden: “We’re always having to keep after him. I mean, he climbs up on the benches, and he’s running and jumping, pretending that he’s spraying me with the hose and I have to pretend that I’m getting wet, you know, so that he doesn’t actually turn it on [laughter]... He likes to tease us. So, that’s part of the whole thing... Find the side where the tomatoes are and say, ‘I’m in your

bed' [laughter]" (SF male). For another participant, his own gardening experience serves as a way to connect him with his mother who is in her eighties: "I'll text my mom a picture of the okra I just collected, and I'll send her a picture of it after I fried it up. It kind of looks like what she did. I'm using her old cast iron skillet to fry it up. It's kind of a nice continuum there in the family line" (FCC male).

In addition to deriving a deeper sense of connection, belonging, and feeling grounded, participants also appreciate the expansive qualities of connecting with other people, both diverse and like-minded. Respondents often reported that because of the community garden, they have met "people I wouldn't cross paths with otherwise" (SG female). For some, "one of the key, positive benefits" of participating in the community garden is the opportunity for "meeting other members of the community. I was very limited in my interaction with community members, and so it was a great way to expand, not just for people of my own age group, but people from all walks of life and all ages" (SG male). Indeed, "I can meet different people from different walks of life. Some people I've met at the garden, I don't think I would have met them any other way. That was our connection, and I think it's awesome" (SF female). Even with neighborhood gardens where participants live in relatively close proximity to each other, there is a newfound sense of community due to the community garden: "We know people that we never would have known... now I know who lives in that house, and I know who lives here...and I think everyone feels this way... we feel like, 'Oh, this is our community'" (SS female). And even if they attend the same church, with faith-based gardens, "it's the interactions that occur and relationships formed" (CS female) in the garden that brings

participants together with people they would not have met. Another participant shared the same sentiment about how the community garden opens opportunities for “getting to know people in the church that I might not have known otherwise, you know, that we’ve seen but that we have just never really talked to. We got to know them a little bit better” (CS female).

The nature of the ground, the dirt, and the garden work itself appears to help break down barriers between people. According to one respondent, “It’s about bringing everybody together to work together on things. Because everybody has their different strengths and weaknesses, they have different things that they like to do... So it’s nice to be able to come together, and everybody brings their strengths together” (CS female). The community garden is a place where people of all ages and varying levels of ability and needs can contribute and be part of the team: “Gardening is something everyone can do, from the tiny, tiny; my three-year old granddaughter recognizes plants from weeds” (CS female). One respondent who has an 18-year-old autistic son said, “The folks that are with us at our community garden, they go out of their way to make it a point to communicate to him. This is what melts my heart” (CS male). For this respondent, the community gardening experience has offered an uncommon but welcome sense of belonging for his special-needs son: “In some instances when you’re out in different places people will see those who are not to their normal -- they might have Down Syndrome, they might have Asperger Syndrome, they might be autistic like my son -- they have a tendency to hold away. These folks here, they embrace him, and that makes all the world difference for him, and as a parent, for me.” Other members of the garden

also learn, appreciate, and benefit from the interaction with people with special needs: “See the guy over there by the trees? He’s special needs. It was real special when I realized that he may have struggles in his life, but when he comes here he’s just one of the team, you know? He’s not any different than anybody else. And I think that applies across the board. When we come here, everybody is equal in a certain sense. No titles, no attitudes, no worries” (CS male). Community gardens literally provide common ground for people of different backgrounds to come together, a place where status no longer matters: “When we all get up there, and we all sweating, and we’re all digging in the dirt together, it doesn’t matter how many dollars you’ve got if you need me to show you how to plant a tomato” (SF female). This respondent further emphasized how the community garden “puts us on an even playing field where we are all the same. Where we can be on our knees looking across the plot face to face with each other, and... you get to see the soul of a person.” Such a powerful way of leveling the playing field, and “That comes from a plant” (SF female).

Furthermore, it is not just about meeting different people, it is about connecting with them in a meaningful way: “...being able to do something together with them more than just saying, ‘Hey, how are you doing?’ More than just knowing people, but you’re actually actively doing stuff with them. You feel like you are really getting to know them, and it feels like a meaningful community” (SS female). Apparently, this sense of community can be so pervasive that it influences people’s decisions about where to live: “There are people in the neighborhood who told me that before the garden, they were considering moving out of the neighborhood. And then, once they got involved in the

garden, they felt that sense of community, so they decided to stick around” (SS female). Having a common purpose has a unifying effect: “Community is a fascinating thing when you have something to do... You need something, some purpose, some experience to work on together... there’s such a sense of community when you are working together on something” (FCC male). Another respondent said: "The biggest benefit that I have derived from it is just making friends in the neighborhood, and kind of like a sense of shared purpose... this is the first time I’ve lived in the neighborhood where there is this much of a connection between the neighbors. So I suppose having that ethos... it has been a nice change” (SS female). For another respondent, an elementary school teacher who has incorporated the community garden into her curriculum: “It’s built this bond and connection that between the students and myself and their families. So really it’s just meant this amazing relational experience. I mean, I have 4th, 5th, and 6th graders and their parents just wanting to spend time together with me, with other people in the garden working during the summer...And so, to me it means just this relational building” (GG female).

It is the sharing of such a common purpose in the community garden that brings together what may appear to be otherwise diverse groups from different walks of life. But, amidst the diversity of garden participants, respondents also report that the community garden connects them with like-minded people. It is nice to “meet people and share gardening love, and help one another” (GG female). Beyond that, one participant found it quite affirming to meet others through the community garden who are also interested in other forms of sustainability: “To see people like me really taking an

interest in it, and getting interested in bees, and chickens, and all the little urban farming, or urban whatever movement that's going on... I think it suggested something to me, but also made it okay to say, 'We'll give this a try...' It both affirms that interest, like no, you're not crazy, you're not alone...but also encourages at the same time" (FCC male).

The community gardening experience is thus also a way to connect with the broader community beyond the garden itself: "Connections... Greenville is a strong community of people who really believe in a variety of aspects of healthy living, from sustainability, and organic, to just farm to table... but we all come together under this kind of common purpose" (SF female). Moreover, participation with the community garden has connected them to a broader community of growers and others who support sustainable agriculture: "When I'm with the folks from Gardening for Good -- I went to the community gardening symposium at the Roper Mountain Science Center -- I felt excited to be a part of that. People are kind of doing this stuff to show that we can grow our own food, and we don't have to buy a plane ticket for it. Just understanding that, since I didn't really even understand that six or seven years ago, that's something that I think we all can learn more about" (GG female).

All said and done, with this common purpose of working together in the dirt and promoting ideas of sustainability, the community garden "can bring people together. If you have a similar purpose, I think that it can bring different people that may not have ever come across each other before and that come from different backgrounds and different things. You bring them together in something that you are doing the same, and you realize that there aren't as many differences as you thought there were. And I think

that can knit the community together. It can make people stand closer together" (CS female).

Concepts of Sustainable, Local, and Organic

Some participants have long held values pertaining to environmental sustainability and "believe in taking care of the environment, taking care of creation, replenishing...to keep rebuilding, keeping refixing, redeveloping..." (CS male). They may appreciate urban development and progress, but also value the underpinnings of the green initiative: "I love the progress that you're seeing in Greenville, but it's more and more concrete, and that is what it is. When you have a city that's successful it's going to do that, but nonetheless, how nice to put something green that's putting back into the earth what we're taking out" (SF female). Others have found themselves "more and more into the concept of local, sustainable, and organic," and see their involvement with the community garden as "a way of practicing what I preach... living the way my belief system is and living my values" (SF female). Some notice that in society "there's more and more of a focus on sustainability," and recognize the role that community gardens can play in sustainability efforts: "I think it's a good model, a good time for people to see that here is an opportunity to try and be a little more sustainable in our lifestyles" (FCC male). They further hope to inspire action, with the optimism that their participation with the community garden "sends a broader message that we can all take care of this space" (GG female).

For a number of participants, their community gardening efforts are meaningful to them because it addresses their food safety concerns: "I love the fact that I can pick a

tomato and hand it to my grandbaby and she doesn't have to wash it" (CS female).

Working in the garden "makes me think twice about what I'm eating, and even what I'm buying from the grocery store. Even if it's from the fresh produce area, it still makes me think about where it comes from, and what kind of pesticides are on it... because why should I buy something from another country that I have no idea what they've done to it, and how long it's been sitting there, and what kind of preservatives they may have put on it, or pesticides when I can just eat what I've grown right here?" (SG female). Another respondent who had worked for many years in the produce industry and grocery business was "shocked, even appalled, at certain farming and growing procedures and the use of the chemicals and things" (CS male). He also vehemently expressed his dismay for the poultry industry: "I despise what I see in the poultry business. I grew up on a farm where it took a while to raise babies to full-grown frying hens. And when they're doing that in just a few weeks...Something is absolutely wrong! I'm surprised that anyone would survive and don't have cancer."

Still yet, many more participants may not have been as committed to the sustainability movement prior to their community garden experience. However, through their engaged efforts and involvement with the community garden, they have developed greater awareness and appreciation for sustainability efforts. At the most immediate level, participants are more concerned about the food that they and their families consume. They want to know the source of their food and how it was produced: "Now that I've been a part of it for a few years, I feel like I know where my food comes from, and that's important to me. I feel like I know how it's being grown, I know what's being

put on it, I know where it's coming from" (SG female). Another respondent described how his involvement with the community garden has tremendously increased his exposure and comfort level with growing food and has fundamentally shifted the way he thinks about fresh produce: "I'm sure that many people in this country, and in fact the industrialized world, could attest that you don't really see the source of your food in this society. So that is also what made it kinda foreign. You know, it wasn't cleaned and processed, and like, you know, it had some dirt on it, which is fine, but at the time I was like, 'Oh my gosh, my food is dirty, like, what do I do?' Go home and wash it off, and it is still kinda foreign... But now I know full well that it is more clean than the processed stuff we get from the grocery store. So it has totally shifted in my mind" (SG male). One participant grew up with extensive family gardening experience, and his "dad basically grew up in an era when you had all chemicals and stuff. And so yeah, we sprayed for bagworms and stuff like that. You know, I was around DDT before it was outlawed" (FCC male). But as a result of participating in the community garden where they have opted for natural, organic means of pest control, he has gained increased understanding that in nature, "where there is an action, there's always a reaction and a counter-reaction. In Mother Nature, we've got everything to pretty much take care of a lot of stuff, except what man has introduced to the world," and believes it is better "any time you get away from a chemical... chemicals are bad!" (FCC male)

Furthermore, community garden efforts have influenced many participants' purchasing habits as a consumer: "When I go to the grocery store I am willing to pay a little bit more for organic or local produce because I know what goes into it now, the time

and care. That it is a little bit more effort, and it's worth it" (SS female). Other respondents shared similar experiences and thoughts: "It does open your eyes to the reality of what really goes into your food. It's not just a conversation, 'Is organic worth it?' Trust me, organic is worth it" (SF female); "Because this is an organic garden, we're buying more organic stuff at the grocery store. We think about the way things are raised, and the people that provide us with the foods" (FCC female). Commenting upon GMOs and the role of community gardens and raising consciousness, one respondent noted, "There's a lot of genetically modified vegetables. And so, between getting that and organic, I'd rather get organic... I think that once you get into gardening, you're exposed to more people who have that consciousness... community gardens can be kind of a lot of things in that effort. It can be a place where people get together and talk about it. It can be a place where people actually taste tastier vegetables" (CS male).

This heightened level of consciousness and appreciation for organic foods also relates to increased support for local food which is more sustainable in nature: "I support local businesses over these multi-nationals" (CS male); "I'm huge about going to the local farmers' markets and supporting local farmers. I never thought twice about that when I lived in New Jersey, I just went to the closest grocery store, whatever was convenient. Whereas now, I feel like I'll drive out to Happy Cow to go get my cheese, and my milk, and my cream cheese, and stuff like that to support local farmers" (SG female).

All in all, there is growing belief that community gardens can serve as "a building block, basically, to help to get to the level where you want to be" (SF male) in improving

both community health and environmental sustainability. One respondent made a compelling argument that community gardens could be a starting point for larger-scale change by educating people about the value of organic food and nutrition: “Educating people, making them realize that nutrition-wise it is important to use a natural product which you try to make yourself, instead of just buying directly from the store without knowing how it ended up being in the store” (SF male). Working in the health sector, he argued that food products that are not grown organically can contain harmful contaminants, and that the serious health issues in our society “can basically be considered an epidemic. And it’s partly because we’re not focusing on nutrition, we’re not focusing on how we take care of ourselves. It comes down to ABC, basically nutrition.” But moreover, he believes that this health epidemic is preventable through health education and increased access to nutritious foods, and one way to “save us from not only natural disaster, but save us also from a lot of the health costs” is with the community garden: “This one thing can be one of the things, you know, if we model all the things, put everything together, that’s going to make our community much stronger and better than others, by far... You have to start somewhere” (SF male).

Another respondent agreed that community gardens can serve as a starting point to change the larger food system: “I think at the grassroots ground level introducing people to sustainably grown, local, affordable, fresh, tasty food” (SS male). He strongly believes that is the case because he personally experienced a major shift in his own mindset toward food, sustainability, and possibly changing the larger food system: “That is the basics towards like what happened to me... ‘Alright, where does our food come

from?’ ... And you realize, if we grow it right here in our neighborhood, if we grow it in urban places, we really become a factor in the local food system when it comes to where food is sourced. So yeah, I think that opens up a lot of doors, where we’re talking about fighting back against the big food, fast food industry” (SS male). Overall, respondents appear to believe that “people are realizing that we need to make some changes. I think are people looking at the benefits of eating fresher food. They’ll see the books about why the French are so much thinner than we are, so much healthier than we are. I think there’s a lot to be said about looking at other cultures, which we’re starting to do because the world is getting so much smaller, there’s so much more information available to us” (SG female). And with this change of mindset, there will be increased demand for fresher produce and may be more willing to engage in gardening efforts; however, “here in America we take for granted that somebody else is going to feed us, we’re going to go to the supermarket. Most parts of the world, and I’ve travelled a lot, people still have their own gardens... people want to grow their own food, they want to know where it comes from...they contribute some time and energy, and then they’re able to actually get a fresh tomato... if you’re able to grow some stuff in your backyard, you’re more likely to eat it” (SS female). For many community garden participants, having knowledge and control over their food source, and having “people kind of get re-connected to what they’re eating,” is something they believe is critical for their own health and that of the broader community: “I just appreciate the whole concept of it. And I think that the more people see other people growing food, the more they might be inspired by it, or at least interested

in it. And I think it's so important just overall to the health of our nation, the world" (GG female).

Overall, aside from inciting major changes in the food system, simply being in touch with nature as offered through work in a community garden can offer valuable lessons about sustainability. First of all, one respondent talked much about how the holistic approach to life that he now takes is mirrored in nature, where there exists helping and cooperation among companion plants, fighting and competition with weeds, and so on: "It is really easy to see in nature, when you pay attention, the holistic approach to well-being. Different plants help other plants out, with the weeds getting in the way, and all of the interlocking variables of the garden, it's very much holistic in nature" (SG male). And sometimes in life, there are simply things that you cannot force. As one respondent elaborated, nature can teach us to put our modern, fast-paced lives in perspective and better embrace the natural unfolding of life changes: "On a personal level, I am a type-A very driven, obsessive-compulsive type of personality, just always going, and it does make you kind of slow down and know there is a process. There's a time and a season for everything, which we grow up knowing. But you see that actually come to life, you know, you cannot make a beet grow any faster than a beet wants to grow. You cannot make a tomato ripen, period. And if you are, then you have to ask what you are doing, and at what cost" (SF female). Comparing the taste of a tomato from her garden to one from the grocery store, she claims that the one bought from the store "doesn't even taste like the same food. So it's like, 'What are we sacrificing by forcing everything to happen when it's not ready?' whereas if we just let things be." Applying

these lessons learned from the garden and in nature has proven invaluable to her everyday outlook on life and overall well-being as a result: “I’ve embraced that there’s a reason that it didn’t happen today. It might be tomorrow, it might be the next day, and when it’s ready, it’ll be perfect. And if we just let it happen on its own it’s going to be much better than if we force it” (SF female). Along those lines, another respondent summarized one of the valuable lessons participants can gain through community gardening: “It teaches them patience, it’s a lot like life, you know?... There’s a lot of life lessons because you have to fight weather, you can’t do anything about that. You can’t mess with Mother Nature” (FCC male).

Learning Skills and Building Confidence

Many participants got involved with the community garden with the desire and motivation to learn more about planting and growing food. A number of respondents gravitated toward the community garden precisely because they did not have a lot of gardening skills: “I really had wanted to start a garden here [at home] but didn’t have the knowledge. And so I felt like I would be able to learn a lot” (SG female). Joining the community garden might also help lower the stakes for them: “I’m not a very skillful gardener, so I thought I might improve my skills somewhat, and maybe the stakes would be a little bit lower” (SS female). Some participants may have even been intimidated by planting: “Our first year, maybe we felt intimidated because it seemed like everybody knew so much more than we did. But, as we approached people, we found out that they were very open to helping us and encouraging us, and that kind of thing... we’re all in it together” (FCC female). Some may have even experienced failure with gardening in the

past: “I’ve tried to have several potted plants at home, and I didn’t know what to do. They always died, and I felt like, ‘Oh, I just can’t do it!’ [laughter] But being here, I’ve learned how to take care of them, and that it’s not as scary...” (SS female).

Others may have had a longer history of gardening in their family, but tried gardening at home without success, perhaps because of pests: “They just ate my harvest. So I gave up on gardening. I didn’t even think about pot plants, pot gardening or any of that. I just said I can’t do it” (SF female); or inadequate crop rotation: “I used to grow the most amazing tomatoes, and now I can’t grow a tomato. I mean it’s been years. I think I had nematodes because it’s hard to practice crop rotation in your backyard” (SF female). Others with previous gardening experience may be new to the region and want to learn more about local crops and planting schedules, compared to more northern growing climates like in Ohio: “We knew the gardening situation was very different down here. Things are going to have to be planted earlier...We didn’t know what crops are supposed to go in the ground when” (SF male). Likewise, one respondent who moved from Indiana said, “We had seven acres, so we had a nice sizable garden...But I know that from here [the community garden] we have learned to do a lot more southern stuff. We didn’t know about it up there” (CS female).

Many respondents reported that as a result of participating in the community garden, they did gain a lot of knowledge from the experience: “I learned a ton about gardening which I knew nothing about prior to this” (GG female); “...the learning experience I gained, the knowledge I learned from other people. I think that there’s a lot of wonderful things that I would have never known or learned on my own unless I

research it significantly” (SF male). Being part of the community garden also encouraged more experimentation and learning about a wider array of plants: “I’ve learned more about different plants that I might not have thought about doing before. I’ve learned there are a lot of different lettuces and things that I had no idea even existed until somebody else would bring it up and we would plant it here” (CS female). The garden involvement also allowed participants to learn more about organic growing practices such as composting: “One thing that [garden coordinator] has inspired me to do is create my own composting bin at the end of my garden. So, it’s one hand washes the other” (CS male).

The learning does not stop after just one season of involvement. Respondents continue to learn new things over time. Even in her fifth year of involvement, one participant said, “So I feel like even after doing it all these years, we keep every year learning new stuff” (SG female). And with experience, participants increasingly appreciate gardening as an ongoing learning process: “I’m learning new stuff every day about the garden... I feel like I’m starting to understand that thing that you, when you first start gardening you’re like, ‘How can I know everything that I need to know? It’s too much.’ But then when you get comfortable with that not knowing, you’re comfortable enough to say, ‘Every year I’m going to learn more. And every year I’m going to enjoy something new that I haven’t grown or eaten before’” (GG female).

As a result of the successful planting efforts, participants often report increased self-confidence in gardening as a meaningful part of their experience. One participant who had prior experience with another community garden, reported a feeling of

gratification: “The gratification of actually learning how to do it. I had planted a few plants in Atlanta, before we move to Salt Lake and got involved in the community garden, and the vine borers got the squash and the tomatoes. I don’t think I watered them enough. Everything died... So then, to work with other people, and to see something actually work, was a very fond memory” (FCC male). In addition to the gratifying feeling, though, was a newfound sense of confidence: “To feel like, “OKAY, now I get it. I can do this. I’ve got a foothold” (FCC male). Another participant who started three years ago with very little experience and feeling intimidated by gardening, was enthusiastic about her success: “This year is the best we’ve ever done! So, that’s fun, it really is. And our kids enjoy it, we have three kids. And this inspired us to plant at our own house. So, we built a bed at our house. We have all kinds of herbs and vegetables growing at home, too” (FCC female).

The increased confidence, however, can extend far beyond the garden and gardening itself. For one respondent who is now a high school biology teacher, her community gardening experiences were particularly empowering because it provided community engagement opportunities outside of her family life, and through having the hands-on experience of growing food, it provided her with the confidence to pursue the job market again: “I think that’s part of what gave me the confidence to pursue going back to work. And it is something that I do use in my classroom. I’ll talk about gardening, and when we do our ecology units and we talk about, human impact on the environment, the kinds of things that kids can do as students, what can they get involved in that would benefit themselves, as well as the community... I wouldn’t have had that

talking point without being involved [in the community garden]" (SG female). For another respondent who is also a teacher, her involvement with the community garden and incorporating it into her 5th grade science curriculum has “really stretched me as an educator. I have learned that you can take one concept and pull so many things into it. And so really I think, even outside of the garden itself, as a teacher I have grown in my ability to just integrate, and merge together, and grow one big learning experience that’s authentic to life and teach science, social studies, math, language arts, within a concept in a way that’s outside the classroom doors. And so, that’s the biggest thing that I’ve gained” (GG female).

Giving Back to Community and Helping Others

Over 80% of the respondents emphasized the ways in which their community garden participation provides them the opportunity to give back to the community and help others in need. Three of the community gardens (Synergy Garden, First Christian Church, and Cornerstone-Storehouse) were founded with a major focus on donating fresh produce to families in need as part of their intended purpose. Not surprisingly, participants with these three gardens talked a great deal about how helping others in need is a meaningful part of their gardening experience. For example, one such respondent at the Synergy Garden began her interview with a brief description of her childhood farming experiences, and then proceeded to say, “I support the goals of the mission. I believe we work together in our diversity to create a garden for people who are in need and who are hungry, and I love the philosophy and the mission. That’s what keeps me going” (SG female). To her, community gardening means “helping others who don’t

have the land to produce food, or the know-how.” The Synergy Garden donates a portion of the fresh produce to the food bank located onsite, and when community garden volunteers hear about the lines at the food bank and receive feedback about how many families are provided fresh produce because of the Synergy Garden, they feel rewarded: “We all know the value of that [fresh produce] in life. It just makes me feel really good to know I helped with that process. It’s very rewarding in that way” (SG female).

Another participant remarked that helping those in need was a major impetus for her involvement besides learning about gardening: “Once I went there and found out that it was, like, half work in the garden and half give back to the community that was really exciting to me. And I think that’s part of my excitement for maintaining. When I talk to people, I’ll tell them all about the garden, and then I’m like, ‘But the best part is that it’s community service, too’” (SG female). For her, one of her fondest memories came from witnessing the philanthropic impact of her community gardening efforts: “I think it’s always a good feeling to walk through those [food bank] doors and put all the produce on the table. But one day when I was leaving driving to go to work and I saw the line at the food bank down the whole sidewalk and all the people, I thought, ‘Oh, they’re going to go in and get the food.’ So I would definitely say that’s my most significant memory where I feel like that all your hard work pays off.” Similarly, another participant said, “It makes me feel better about myself that I’m able to give back and to help out” (SG female). For her, it is about simply helping out in a multitude of ways: “It’s helping out the food bank, it’s helping you, it’s helping everyone else that’s a part of the garden because everybody takes a share in it. So, it’s not that you’re just helping one person,

you're helping a multitude of people. And actually, you really don't even know who you're affecting, so it kind of puts a whole different spin on things." This respondent further elaborated upon the notion of paying it forward, doing something positive for someone else, with the hope that they will give back as well. Helping others was a particularly meaningful and emotional component of her community gardening experience because of her ability to empathize with those in need: "What if it was me that needed that help, and there was nobody there to provide that help? So, that's kind of my, and I've been in places, sorry. [starting to cry] I've been in situations where I've needed help, and there was none to be had. So, it makes me feel good to know that I'm helping people that don't even know that I'm helping them. It just makes me feel better." That said, the community garden can have a powerful impact not only on those in need, but also on those who are participating and thus have the opportunity to provide help to those who need it.

At the First Christian Church Community Garden, one of the participants who had gardened a lot throughout his life wanted to help get the community garden started precisely because "You see the people that are homeless and hungry; kids going to school on Monday showing up not having any food, you know? And I thought, especially in this country, it's kind of really absurd" (FCC male). So, for him, it is nice to help community members who may be homeless and in need of food: "Now that the season is in, we usually pick it twice a week, and we take some of it to Project Host, and some of it to Triune. They've got a program that really works with the homeless in Greenville. They've got the soup kitchen, and stuff like that...I really like it when I pick and I know

that it's going down to the food bank...we should be able to feed people. We feed half the world anyway." Another participant was very supportive of this charitable component of the community garden, "One of the ground rules is that they [garden coordinators] want to be able to come through and harvest occasionally to take to the food bank or people who need the food, which I'm all supportive of. I've got more tomatoes than I know what to do with right now" (FCC male). For him, he had also been considering other ways for the community garden to help people in need: "There are some concepts here that I'd like to try to promote...I read about a variation of the community garden, but the idea is that people who are gardening at their home or wherever bring the food you would normally give away, bring it to the church Sunday morning, and sell it at a fair price to other people who can't or don't garden. And then use that money for missioning. So that people are gardening, they're seeing their food going to good use. It's generating some revenue that's being used for something...Because I know a lot of people at that church, they're not going to garden, but they enjoy the fresh produce, and this is a way of bringing that to them, and making certain the surplus doesn't go unused, and that it generates some funds that can be used, kind of triangular win, win, win."

At the Cornerstone-Storehouse Community Garden, one respondent who also runs the food pantry onsite finds it very rewarding to volunteer and "To help feed the people that can't do it [the garden], through the food pantry it's really nice to be able to give them fresh vegetables and stuff instead of just the cans" (CS female). Another respondent further elaborated, "the people who come here are pretty destitute, in bad shape, and whenever they see garden fresh vegetables they like it a lot" (CS male). For

him, one of his fondest memories from his community gardening experience related to helping a couple coming to the food pantry for help: “Last fall, I was harvesting some of the collards and cabbage greens for some of the folks in our storehouse. And there was this one older black couple, they both hugged me because I had something that was their favorite that I could give to them and they didn’t have to pay anything for it. You talking a heartwarming experience, that was it. That was good, that was really good for me.”

Even at the other community gardens where giving produce to charity is not a focal point or stated purpose of the garden, participants nevertheless spontaneously talk about other ways of giving back to community as a meaningful part of their gardening experience. At the St. Francis Community Garden, for instance, helping others in the garden when needed and hence the community was expressed by one respondent as a meaningful aspect of his involvement: “It means a symbol of how we can work as a group and be united as one, one group. Serve our mission, which is really helping the community... there’s always somebody there helping someone else, even if that person couldn’t come for a month, or gets sick, or something. So, we make sure to take care of everybody else’s, not only our plot” (SF male). Another respondent was passionate about ways that community gardens could leverage support to increase access to healthy food for the less fortunate: “The level of involvement that gardens can bring you into is just much more than I ever fathomed, truly... We are kind of breaking that trend of organic, or local has to be for the well-off... I think that if there were more volunteer opportunities within them. I would love to see when you pay for your plot here you’re funding a plot at a school, or a plot in a less fortunate neighborhood” (SF female).

At the GreenGate Community Initiative Garden, the one respondent who worked the garden into her school's curriculum did so because she noticed that "the students in the fifth grade had from the very beginning of the year wanted to pray for the homeless of Greenville. It was just a burden that a bunch of them had on their heart because of just some interactions that they had during this summer when they were downtown with different homeless people and things that their parents had modeled for them. You know, taking a homeless person to get some lunch or whatever...through that burden constantly coming over my ears, I was looking at the curriculum that I had to cover and I thought, 'Well, we could maybe do something to learn science that would help them become involved on a daily basis with the homeless'" (GG female). The community garden project ended up adopting a multidisciplinary approach to teaching, and ultimately fulfilled the students' original desire of helping the homeless: "The students and I came out here, surveyed the land, and then they went through the process of researching plants and figuring out what could work with what, creating a garden layout. We did it with Math and Science connected, and with English/Language Arts. Each group had to write a proposal... it actually covered all four [core subjects] because in Social Studies they cover development of civilizations. And in order to have a civilization develop, you have to have food. So, it was a great team effort with all the teachers that I work with." In the end, the students were able to complete the circle and donate some fresh produce to the homeless: "The last day of school actually we got our first harvest, which was the lettuce. We just pulled them instead of breaking them off. So we brought them all in, we all

washed them and then washed them again, dried them all on the lab table, and then got to bring them down to the Greenville Rescue Mission.”

Aside from this project in collaboration with the school, the way participants in the neighborhood gardens (GreenGate and Sans Souci) typically talked about giving back to the community had more to do with improving the place or betterment of community in the general sense. For example, one GreenGate respondent, a retiree, said: “The green space gives us a chance to give back a little. Again, it’s a community garden” (GG male). A younger female respondent also feels a sense of obligation to improving the place: “I’m just like one of those people, I can’t, I don’t know how not to be involved in things like this... I want this green space to always be a great place for everybody to come” (GG female). Others help in the community garden because they, too, agree that it offers way to improve the community in general: “I just think it’s a great opportunity for the neighborhood to have a really nice place” (GG male).

Participants with the Sans Souci Community Garden also feel they have a stake in the garden because they want to help improve the community, specifically the neighborhood in which they live: “I am helping to make and create something for the betterment of the community. Contributing to that, I should say. You know, it takes all of us to do it obviously, it’s a huge garden” (SS female). Another respondent remarked almost identically, “It’s working together to do something that we know is positive for the community... We’re trying to do something positive for the community, and it’s not just growing vegetables. Part of this was actively trying to make the neighborhood that we live in a better place” (SS female). One other respondent recalled one of his fondest

memories: “Probably building trellises at some point, things going up, and it was just so beautiful to see...it was beautiful for my eyes to see that we had done something, we had changed a place. It was visible, and people are going to see it, and it was beautiful, just absolutely beautiful” (SS male).

Enjoyment, Fulfillment, and Sense of Identity

Overall, the entire community gardening experience, running the gamut from taking control of one’s health and enjoying the fruits of one’s labor, to helping someone else in need, to improving a place, the community, changing societal norms, and perhaps even protecting the planet, appears to be rather empowering for participants. Such empowering experiences are marked by feelings including excitement, pride, sense of accomplishment, and even hope. These feelings appear to contribute to a newfound sense of personal identity, where participants see the community garden as part of their routine in everyday life, as reflected by the ways in which the garden often comes up regularly in conversation and participants’ desire to share their experiences and inspire others to be involved with community gardening as well.

To begin with, seeing the day-to-day change is enjoyable and rewarding: “I like to see it, I mean that’s part of what I enjoy about gardening, is you really get almost a daily sense of accomplishment. You planted something, and it’s growing, it’s healthy” (SS female). Simply witnessing things grow from seed is exciting: “It’s pretty cool...We have a couple families with young kids. They’re getting them involved... ‘Oh, look what we have here!’ picking squash and zucchini and stuff like that. Watching that, having them out here, you know kids, they’re young. But when they see something come to life from

nothing, basically a little seed, it could be really infectious to some people” (FCC male). Another respondent similarly talked about how he enjoyed the mid-summer months because “this time of year, when you see things just getting green and getting tall, that’s really fun... Once things take root, and then suddenly start to get big, that’s exciting” (FCC male).

Expressions of excitement, pride, accomplishment, and enjoyment recurred throughout the interviews. First of all, relating back to the aspects of learning and skill-building, participants also get quite excited when they experience success with their harvests. As one participant expressed, “It’s exciting to see the food come in. And for it to be healthy, and that it doesn’t get attacked by bugs, that it did better than it did last year” (SG female). One respondent eagerly shared a story about how enormous her squash got to be one year and how much produce she has gotten from the community garden: “They were huge, they almost looked like a necklace... Matter of fact, I carried a couple around my neck when I would go home. So anyway, I was really excited... I’ve gotten quite a bit of produce from it” (GG female). For another participant, her fondest memories “all revolve around when I have success, especially success with something I’ve had bad year after year, like bad zucchini. And then to get so many zucchinis where I’m almost at the point where I’m like, ‘I don’t really want any more.’ I mean, I’ve made batch after batch of zucchini muffins because I don’t even know what else to do with it anymore!” (SF female). The same respondent also described the excitement she experienced with a successful turnip crop one year: “Everything was flourishing so well... we had so many that did so well we were pulling them out three and four at a time and

cooking them... By the time I was pulling up the last batch I had one that literally was the entire hand. I cooked that turnip, and it lasted four servings. That one turnip was four large servings!” To have such successes are exciting and memorable, but even some of the failed attempts can contribute to the overall positive experience as well: “Then of course I have memories from my botched attempts. That’s life. But it is kind of fun, and then if you have a plant that survives you’re like, ‘Oh, these plants are the best plants I’ve ever had in my life’” (SF female).

Another respondent described an enjoyable and rather humorous experience when he shared a plot with a friend: “That was really a lot of fun because he said, ‘I’m going to go for it!’ He bought, what was it, fifteen tomato plants? It was way too many. WAY too many tomatoes... It was crazy, but he was like, ‘I’m going to have so many tomatoes I’m not going to know what to do with them all!’ That was exactly what happened. And it was exciting, but it was fun and entertaining” (FCC male). Even when participants are away from the community garden for a few weeks, they return to it with excitement: “I came and all the peas went into one of my beds, that were supposed to be on the trellis, and they’re all falling over. There were peas all over! It was great! I was just sitting there eating them, because I love fresh peas” (SS female).

Participants take great pride in enjoying the fruits of their own labor: “Not only seeing things grow, but I get to eat the fruits of my labors, too... garden fresh tomatoes for lunch today was absolutely wonderful” (CS male). Planting from seed was particularly meaningful for one participant: “I like knowing that I planted something from a seed, and I am eating it a few months later. It gives you a sense of accomplishment, like you did

something, you made something” (SS female). According to another respondent, “There’s a lot to be said for the feeling of being able to provide some of your own food, and to have it as fresh as you want it, go out and pick it and eat it right out of the garden, you know?” (GG female). In addition to the freshness quality, there is satisfaction from having a hand in how your food is grown: “The satisfaction of growing some of your own food... not only does it taste better, but if it’s fresh grown you know what’s been put on it and that kind of thing. People like doing things with their own hands... You put a little effort into it, it’s kind of like the payoff. I get to take it out and eat it, you know?” (GG male). Overall, having knowledge and control over what goes into their food, what they are consuming, and making informed choices over what they purchase is empowering. As one respondent articulated, “When you take control of your life, and your nutrition, and your health, you become the arbiter of your own destiny, so to speak. That's really what it's about, taking control of your life. There are things that are outside of your control, of course, there are things that you can't do anything about, but one thing you can do something about is how you eat and how healthy you try to be” (SG male).

When away from the garden for what they may consider a long period of time, almost all respondents said that they miss the garden in some way or another. For participants, the gardening experience has made them realize how committed they are to both the team effort and to the plants themselves. One respondent said he, “would feel as if I had shirked my responsibilities” (SG male); another said she would “feel guilty that I am not out there” (SS female), while yet another said, “I’ve always felt a commitment to the garden... I feel sad when I can’t go” (SG female). Similarly, another respondent

indicated a sense of responsibility: “I have this sense of responsibility that I should be out there... everybody kind of picks up and helps out... You work together as a team. If it’s just yourself, you might slack off a little bit... I feel like I have to contribute because that’s the whole idea is that it is a community. And so, if people are loafing then it doesn’t get done” (SS female).

In addition to commitment to the team effort, there is also a commitment and even attachment to the plants as if on a relational basis. The garden was described by one respondent as a friend: “It’s kind of weird, you don’t consider a garden a physical friend, but yeah in a way, I consider our garden a friend. And being away from a friend for a long time, whenever you get back you are always glad to see them” (CS male). For some, the relational analogy exuded greater emphasis on the dependent nature of the plants and the need to care for them, as one participant remarked, “This is an ongoing, sustained ministry... it’s something that takes months to work through... and if you do turn your back on it, it comes with a cost,” so when she is away from the community garden: “I worry about it! [laughter]... it’s like a child” (FCC female). Another respondent felt similarly, “I worry about it, yeah... I certainly feel a responsibility to the garden. It might sound kind of strange, you know, but I help bring life to these plants and I want to nurture them” (FCC male). One respondent who is into her fourth year of involvement with the garden described a growing sense of attachment: “The longer I participate in this, the more I become attached to it. So, it’s kind of like a relationship with the garden itself... you just get attached to it. It’s like you’re nurturing it, and it’s nurturing you back” (SS female).

It is the act of putting forth a great deal of effort, care, and concern into nurturing the plants as if they were caring for a child that contributes to the heightened sense of accomplishment and fulfillment. One respondent, for example, vividly described a personal experience that occurred over 40 years ago in the first garden he had of his own: “And I can’t tell you but it sounds like psychological calamity to tell you how I felt when I actually dug my first yellow potatoes that I grew... Oh, I mean, it was elation. I can say ecstatic, but it was just, you know, two shots of whiskey wouldn’t have been the same feeling” (CS male). Then, lowering his voice and speaking in a slower, more deliberate pace, he continued with a heartfelt account of his experience the following year with growing sweet potatoes: “I love sweet potatoes, too. Oh, I love sweet potatoes. So the next year I had sweet potatoes, and I was experimenting with some of the fertilizing... and then those plants started struggling. And I was working like I was taking care of a sick baby, working on those things...” After a short, thoughtful pause, he grinned, clenched his fists, and exclaimed, “And then, they came through. That day was won! And I dug up those beautiful sweet potatoes. I was so thrilled... when I dug those first potatoes it was like your first kiss, your first girlfriend or whatever. When I dug those potatoes it was tremendous.” Interestingly, this account was so heartfelt and vivid, and yet, the respondent said, “I know I haven’t talked much about that. One thing, I haven’t really been asked that question. Another is I would feel foolish volunteering it.” To say the least, recounting a memory from over 40 years ago in that manner showed just how meaningful and personally fulfilling the gardening experience has been for some.

That sense of pride, although at a lesser intensity, was also commonly expressed by respondents as a general feeling underlying their ongoing involvement with the community garden: “I’m just happy when I see it... it’s kind of a sense of pride... It’s pretty cool” (FCC male). A participant at another community garden described his pride as a natural part of the human experience: “I take pride in being part of the garden...And that's part of the appeal, of course. It is part of the human experience to take pride in your own work, and pride in your own involvement in something” (SG male). Finally, another respondent referred to his feeling of pride in concert with feelings of love and commitment: “If you really, really love something, then you’re going to put a lot of effort into it. And the garden, I love it, so I’ve put a lot of effort into it. I’m proud. I’m proud of it completely” (CS male).

Furthermore, the garden, and particularly a community garden, offers all participants a way to experience commitment to a team effort, to the plants and to the garden overall, and success which boosts confidence. It also brings a sense of accomplishment and increased self-worth to individuals suffering from illness or disability as well. One respondent said, “Here I am fifteen years into my [Multiple Sclerosis] diagnosis discovering a new passion that does require some physicality, and I’m able to do it” (GG female). Having something to be excited about is also empowering in a way that makes people feel more fulfilled and, in a sense, hopeful. One respondent told a story about a fellow community gardener who had been diagnosed with cancer and had to have a mastectomy: “With my friend who was going through this thing with cancer, and the fact of what was motivating her to get up the bed and walk up

and down the hall was she needed to hurry up and get well so she could get back and see her cucumbers. [laughter] Because she heard about how big the plants had gotten, you know? This kind of thing, that is not just about a cucumber, you see what I'm saying?" (SF female). For another respondent, who has witnessed the positive impact the community garden has had on him and his 18-year-old autistic son: "It's actually given me hope. It's because of both the camaraderie with the fellowship, so to speak, of the partnering of the workers in the garden. That has actually embedded hope within me. It's like feeling a cool breeze on a hot day. It's refreshing, and that's how it's changed me" (CS male).

With such positive impact as a result of participating in the community garden, respondents appear to talk about the garden as being a major part in their life and routine. As one respondent put it, "This has become more of a lifestyle" (SG female). One respondent who lives within walking distance to the garden said, "I like to try to have it in my daily routine because then I can come see it and pick whatever vegetables look delicious. Usually I'll come in the morning, and so I'll maybe bring some stuff home and eat it throughout the day... so I just love that process" (SS female). For others, having the garden as part of a weekly routine makes it noticeable when even one week is skipped: "I normally come on Thursdays. I missed one Thursday so it was like two weeks between the time I was there, and I was like, 'Wow! That just feels like I've been FOREVER gone from here' ...I feel like I missed out, just because I want to be there" (SG female). Similarly, another respondent alluded to feeling off-kilter when he misses his usual time at the garden: "It's become almost like a ritual. And you know, if you don't do your

normal ritual every week, it's like you miss it. It's like if you exercise regularly, and then you don't exercise for a week, then you don't feel the same...if you're volunteering to do something, it's in your heart, you really want to do it. Nobody is forcing you to do it... You are doing it on your own...It's in your heart, it's in your passion, your love" (SF male). References to the garden as a ritual were fairly common, as another respondent described the meaning of her gardening experience as "a morning ritual of going out there and just eating a couple of sugar snaps. Just being in that sort of cool of the morning, kind of dewy cool morning. Just stuff like that is really important" (GG female).

Like many other participants, one respondent said that the community garden frequently comes up in conversation with friends, family, and coworkers because people know he is involved with it, and furthermore, "it gives some focus, it's a part of my life now" (CS male). For many, the fact that the community garden even comes up in conversation with strangers shows that it is largely embedded in their life and personal identity: "When I'm shopping at Publix, I run into people where they ask Publix to carry more organic stuff. And I've said to people, 'Have you ever thought about joining a community garden?'" (SG female). Another respondent mentioned how the community garden often comes up in conversations with customers at the home improvement store where she works because she wants to share the positive experience with others: "I want to help other people get involved... you want to have people get more involved and enjoying. You want to get other people to have that same feeling as you have" (SG female). Also, in one's own neighborhood, conversations about the garden may ensue: "I

love the feeling of telling people who live in this neighborhood and have for years, ‘Do you know what we have down here? We have the ability to grow almost anything. We have apple trees. We have fig trees. If we just take care of them, it’s a great community resource’” (GG female). Another respondent reported that “just inspiring people is basically what I’m trying to do.... I like to try and encourage people to do things that can have some positive, lasting change. So I feel like our garden is a good model for that” (SS male).

A few additional statements sum up how important the community garden is to the personal identity of participants. One respondent said even after only one year of involvement, “Now this is my LIFE. I mean it’s not all consuming my life... but this is a major part of my life” (GG female). For another respondent, the community garden is particularly important because it provides her with the opportunity to have a greater sense of self and make a unique contribution to her family identity: “It’s given me an opportunity to have some self-confidence to remember that I have a lot to offer beyond being a mom and a wife. And that’s been huge for me... Everything had just for so long been just been about my family. And I think it’s very healthy for people to have something that’s theirs....It’s good to have something else so that when you come home you have something to share” (SG female). In so many ways, the community garden can be of great importance and become a core part of one’s life and identity: “Oh man. It would probably be one of the most important things in my life, because like I said, it’s a therapeutic experience for me every time I come out. So it’s very, very important. If

something was to ever happen where we couldn't have it anymore, it would hurt bad” (CS male).

Intergenerational Connections

One final theme that emerged centered around the way community gardens have the capacity to connect people across generations in a multitude of ways. Perhaps the most commonly mentioned way involves the teaching of children. Participants see the community garden experience as good way to engage children and provide them with first-hand interactions with nature and learning about how food grows: “You’re teaching children where the food comes from, how the food is grown, that they can participate in that” (SG female). Respondents tend to talk about these experiences with delight and enthusiasm. At one of the faith-based gardens, for example, one respondent said, “This year we have a designated bed just for the children. So, they went out and planted their own things. And it’s painted. It’s festive for them. So, they go out every Sunday morning, and they’re ooh’ing and ah’ing, and watching, you know, ‘This looks bigger,’ or ‘this looks the same.’ Getting to water, so they’re having fun” (FCC female). Another participant, who has been with the garden since it began five years ago, talked about the meaningful teaching experience he has had with his son who has enjoyed participating in the garden starting at age six: “I kind of teach my son, okay, you put the seed, and that becomes a plant. The plant produces these products, the crops. That kind of helps him to learn how things come to life... and help him also to learn everything about working with other people and helping other people. Teach him good things, ethical values, you know, as you’re growing up” (SF male). So through the process of growing food and working

with others to do so, the hope is that certain life lessons will be learned, and certain values of respect for others and for nature will also be instilled in children.

Another respondent who has also been a community garden participant for the past 5 years with her twins who are now 10 years old was very pleased with the impact their involvement has had on her children: "...hearing them talk to other people about why they do the garden and kind of what they get out of it... It sparked a lot of conversations at home about why people were coming to the food bank... They've come up with different ideas throughout the year of things they want to do... the idea of giving back, and they've been exposed to so many different people over the years" (SG female). For the participant who included her 5th grade science class, she found that the authentic learning experience in the garden was tremendously successful, in that some students had been struggling with certain subjects like math, and then "all of a sudden it clicked for them. And it was like, 'Oh, well this is the reason why we have needed to learn math'... the language arts teacher, she was like, 'I can't believe this, I've never had proposals that were so on target and passionate'" (GG female). Looking ahead, in addition to continuing with the community garden, this teacher has been thinking of other ways for the students to help those in need in a more relational way: "How can we serve people in need by not just dropping off donations, but actually meeting them and investing in their lives in a relational way?...there are smaller opportunities I think where they [the students] can not only plant a garden, bring produce and that, but also maybe go in and make crafts with children, or play games."

Thus, many participants not only have high hopes for the children who are involved, they have also witnessed positive changes that the community garden has had on children. Some of the participants' fondest memories of their community gardening experience, therefore, relate to their experiences with children at the garden. For example, one respondent who said, "I really like seeing the kids out in the garden, seeing them learn. Because I remember when I was a kid how nice that was to see where your food comes from, and how you can have an impact on that. So it's nice to see other kids go through that experience. Especially the kids who you kind of wonder what kind of experience are they getting at home, the kids who wander in by themselves and you never see their parents" (SS female). This same respondent shared a heartwarming story about one ten-year-old kid in the neighborhood who saved up his money to earn his membership into the community garden: "There's one kid, N____, who lives a couple of streets up from us. When he first started kind of hanging around the garden, he approached [the coordinator] about it. He didn't really know what the garden was, or why it was there, and you know how [the coordinator] is. He of course took him under his wing and was like, 'This is what we're doing. If you want to be involved, you can come and help out.' N____ was like, 'How much does it cost?' [laughter] Of course, [the coordinator] would not have made him pay. But, he told [the coordinator] that he was gonna mow some lawns so that he could raise enough money to join the garden. He originally wanted to use that money to buy a Playstation. And he accomplished his goal that summer. He mowed enough lawns to join the garden, instead of buying a Playstation... this kid riding around the neighborhood curious about the garden became a

part of the garden. And he did meaningful work...he has since brought his little sister out there. And now his mom comes with him... his sister now has had two birthday parties in the garden. Like, tea parties.”

Another respondent, the 5th grade teacher, passionately shared her fondest memory of the garden: “Just the excitement of the kids with different things... I mean, it would be just their excitement of, ‘I found a toad! I found a lizard! Look at the length of this root!’ We had a competition one day when we were weeding of who could pull the biggest root. And so, that was part of the measuring stuff that we did. And so, it was a blast, but they were so excited to weed the garden at that point... when it’s full of a bunch of kids, and we’re all working together, and I’ll turn on the hose and just randomly spray the air and mist them and stuff. [laughter] Just that excitement, and that love of life, and that innocence that comes out. I think that’s my favorite, I just love it. I love that, just that excitement in them. And to know that I am part of it, you know, I’m part of it. And it’s not about me, but it’s fulfilling to know that you are a part of joy being brought to people, and it’s not just, “Oh I made them happy.” But it’s a joy that is more meaningful... It’s just a deep relationship” (GG female).

In tandem with these very positive, fulfilling, and meaning experiences with the children, participants believe the community garden is an excellent way to pass along valuable lessons for younger generations: “I think the community garden is something that, there’s a lot of the values, jobs, a lot of the principles involved in the community garden are, I don’t want to say old school, but it goes back to the good old days, the good old values, you know what I’m saying?” (CS female). Along those same lines, another

respondent argued, (SG female) “It’s a lot more work than most of the younger generation is used to... but they need to learn because nothing comes free, you have to work for it. And if you’re going to work for something, this is one of the best things you can work for.” Likewise, it is difficult to know exactly when a value is instilled but the community garden is certainly believed to be fertile ground for that process to occur: “I always felt like you don’t know when you are planting that seed, and you don’t know when that interest is going to come in... maybe not then, but maybe as they become young adults and they first have their own property... maybe those fond memories will have them mentoring children in their neighborhoods” (SF male). Respondents see the value of community gardens as yet another way of contributing to the development of youth and hence the future well-being of society: “I think it takes a neighborhood to raise a child. I like to know that kids are, if my kids go to somebody else’s house they’re also trying to teach them, as well” (SF male).

On the other end of the spectrum, participants also agree that a meaningful part of the community gardening experience is the ability to connect with older generations: “You have the generational gaps, different moral worldviews, different outlooks on life. And I think that’s something that is really important to consider for any community garden, or community endeavor, volunteer project, whatever the case may be, is bridging that gap, connecting older folks to younger folks. I think that’s something that the garden is, a good, kind of neutral common ground...” (SG male). This respondent further elaborated that at the community garden, “just in what seemingly innocuous conversation, where you don’t really think much of it, you’re spreading your values...

there is a lot of things that older generations can pass knowledge on and wisdom on to younger generations... that's a way for the older generation to learn, and continue to grow and evolve.” As such, interaction and learning across generations can go both ways, and the community garden provides common ground for that to occur. A respondent from another garden also commented upon the intergenerational component that he has observed, engaged in, and learned from: “There might be a multi-generational component here to this garden. I’ve seen a couple of people out here, and it’s been a parent/young child doing the garden together... There was an older gentleman that lived in an apartment across the way... he was reminiscing about the gardening and the food... this gentleman was quite clear that it was an economic necessity for their family. They were growing that garden to help get them fed... the stigma perhaps that was associated with that” (CS male).

In addition to the inadvertent learning that can take place between people of different generations, there also exists more of a realization and conscious effort to transmit values. One respondent, for example, shared, “I honestly think that when I became an empty-nester, it reframed my life, and instead of being 100% focused on M___ [adult daughter]... it freed up all this time, and I guess I became that grandmother person that starts thinking, ‘Well, it’s time to transmit values and culture’ ... And so, I think maybe that’s why I got involved in the community garden” (SF female). Many of the mentioned values that respondents feel strongly about restoring relate to sustainability: “People nowadays, it’s throw away this, throw away that. I grew up with if it breaks, you fix it and you keep on using it until there’s no more use in it at all... I

like the old school, it says okay, you create something and you sustain it. You do maintenance on it. You feed it. You water it. You can actually benefit from it” (CS male). After elaborating further about how these values seem to have “just fallen through the cracks on the porch” over his lifetime, this respondent asserted that with the community garden experience, people can learn and society can regain the values related to sustainability: “You’re actually creating, re-creating something that has happened for generations, for generations and generations. People need to start realizing that there’s some things in life you don’t throw away. You remember, you SUSTAIN those ideas, those procedures that you grew up with. You sustain them through the youth so that if something happens, they will have hope to go back to” (CS male). Consistent with these desires to transmit values of sustainability to the younger generations, some respondents consider the ways the community garden provides them with the opportunity to leave a lasting legacy: “This is about future generations here. I want to get an orchard started here... for future generations, for future generations long after I’m gone, for people I don’t even know” (FCC male). The community garden essentially serves as a way for many participants to develop, refine, and practice their values related to sustainability, and perhaps internalize them almost as a moral code to pass on for generations to come.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

This study highlights the meaningful role that community gardens play in the lives of community garden participants and also the potential this kind of holistic endeavor may exert on local food systems and societal norms related to environmental sustainability. Many of the findings from the interviews were consistent with findings from previous studies on the motivations and benefits of community gardening including food security (e.g., Kortright & Wakefield, 2011), health (e.g., Armstrong, 2000; Wakefield, Yeudall, Taron, Reynolds, & Skinner, 2007; Zick et al, 2013), social networks and support (e.g., Comstock et al., 2010; Firth, Maye & Pearson, 2011), impact on youth (e.g, Hung, 2004), leisure and enjoyment (e.g., Ferris et al., 2001; Shinew, Glover, & Parry, 2004) and contribution to local sustainability (e.g., Holland, 2004; Walter, 2013).

The unique contribution of the current study stems from its engagement of participants in an open-ended interview process asking them neither directly about the individual facets of their motivations for joining the community garden nor specifically about the benefits they have derived from participation, but rather about the meaning of the community gardening experience to them in its totality. In the process of ascertaining the deeper meaning of the community gardening experience, participants were also asked about the nature of their involvement, their fondest memories of the experience, what they miss when they are away from the garden, the ways in which they have changed personally as a result of participating, and what they perceive as the broader impact of

their involvement as well as community-level change as a result of the growing presence of community gardens.

As discussed in the previous section, the following nine major themes emerged from the interviews:

- Gardening Experience in the Past and Present
- Access to Fresh and Healthy Food
- Therapeutic Aspects from Connecting with Nature
- Sense of Community and Belonging
- Concepts of Sustainable, Local, and Organic
- Learning New Skills and Building Confidence
- Giving Back to Community and Helping Others
- Enjoyment, Fulfillment, and Sense of Identity
- Intergenerational Connections

Within each of these emergent themes, all six individual gardens, and between 60-100% of the respondents from each garden type were represented. Although the sample size from each garden (N=5) and each garden type (N=10) was relatively small, this high level of representation in the themes nonetheless reveals preliminary indication that despite the diversity of garden types and individual differences across participants (e.g., age, gender, race, year of involvement with the garden), there are decipherable commonalities in how people describe the meaning of their community gardening experience. Furthermore, the meaning of the community gardening experience understood across these nine themes may have interesting theoretical implications

fostering better understanding of the connection between participation in the micro-level community garden initiative and more meso- and macro-level changes in the food system.

Theoretical Framework

Based on the current findings, community gardening appears to be a particularly meaningful experience in that it not only anchors participants to their past personal and family history, connects them to their present place and community, and offers hope for future generations, but can also contribute to the fulfillment of very basic human needs. Given the ways in which participants articulate the nature and personal significance of their community gardening experience, there appears to be a remarkable fit between the nine themes that emerged from the empirical data and the theories of basic human needs postulated by Abraham Maslow (1943, 1954, 1970) and Erich Fromm (1941, 1955).

The notion of human needs has long been recognized as a central aspect of the human condition. But according to Dover and Joseph (2008), in the field of social work practice and research as well as social welfare policy and social action, human need has been a contested concept, one seen as “empowering, in that it leads to demand for human rights, but also as humiliating, in that it can subject those with unmet needs to negative, stigmatized, minimal definitions of need by those with power” (p. 398). Nonetheless, the concept of human needs has been increasingly seen as contributing to a strengths-based approach to social policy (Chapin, 1995), and also central to social justice and human rights (Gil, 2004; Mullaly, 2001; Witkin, 1998; Wronka, 1992).

In relation to plants and gardening, human needs have also been applied in the field of horticultural sciences. Waliczek, Zajicek, and Lineberger (2005) conducted a survey study to investigate differences in perceived life satisfaction between gardeners and nongardeners, and found that gardeners had overall life satisfaction scores that were significantly higher than those of nongardeners. The researchers interpreted life satisfaction by relating it to Maslow's hierarchy of human needs. And in an earlier study pertaining to community gardening, Waliczek, Mattson, and Zajicek (1996) conducted a nationwide survey to examine the relation between community gardening and quality-of-life perceptions, measures of which were based on Maslow's hierarchy of human needs. The researchers found that community gardens were rated as highly important across each level of Maslow's hierarchy by all racial/ethnic groups, but were especially important to African-American and Hispanic gardeners.

Beyond individual measures of quality of life, the conceptual frameworks of both Maslow and Fromm offer an insightful lens through which to view the community gardening experience, and may provide a fresh perspective on how this seemingly simple activity of community gardening can not only help individuals to fulfill very critical psychological and social needs, but also empower individuals to identify with the food justice and democracy movement and mobilize broader changes in the food system, in turn, fostering greater sustainability.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

According to Maslow (1954), man has an essential nature, in that he has innate needs, capacities, and tendencies that are inherently good or at least neutral. Healthy,

normal, and desirable development consists of an impulse towards growth and towards actualization of these human needs and potentialities (Maslow, 1968). Maslow's (1970) hierarchy of needs entails five levels, whereby needs at the lowest levels are most compelling, and once generally satisfied, trigger the emergence of higher needs. The levels from lowest to highest are the: physiological needs (hunger, sex, thirst, etc.), safety needs (security, stability, protection, freedom from fear, etc.), belongingness and love needs (friends, family, affectionate relationships with people), esteem needs (self-esteem including desires for strength, achievement, mastery, competence, confidence, and independence; respect of others, respect and esteem from others), and self-actualization (desire to be more whole and complete, morality, creativity, problem solving, lack of prejudice, fulfillment of potential).

Maslow (1968) believed that although people have an inborn nature that is inherently good or neutral, they may not reach their highest potential due to environmental circumstances. Exposure to an unhealthy environment, one that thwarts the course of self-actualization, may result in sickness and psychopathology. A healthy environment, by contrast, is one that is conducive to desirable development and growth towards self-actualization by satisfying all the basic needs.

Table 5.1 contains a selection of quotes from the community garden participants categorized according to Maslow's various levels of needs. As shown in this table, community gardening can contribute to at least partially meeting basic needs at each level of Maslow's hierarchy. As such, community gardens can be considered one of those

“healthy environments” described by Maslow that enable individuals to continue on a path toward fulfilling their potential and achieving a sense of completeness or wholeness.

Pertaining to the lowest level of Maslow’s hierarchy, respondents commonly referred to the increased access to fresh and healthy food, which relates to partially fulfilling a physiological need. Respondents also discussed financial savings from growing at least a portion of one’s own produce (hence contributing to financial security); increased awareness and appreciation for the concepts of sustainable, local, and organic (hence protection of natural resources); again the increased access to fresh and healthy food (which contributes to securing physical health); and the therapeutic aspects from connecting with nature (which stabilizes mental health); all of which relate to the fulfillment of the next level of safety needs. Furthermore, nearly every respondent discussed the ways in which their participation in the community garden related to either forming new friendships, having more quality time or connections with their family, or meeting new people in the community, and furthermore, how working together with people gave them a sense of belonging, all of which contribute to fulfilling a need for love and belongingness.

As a result of participating in the community garden, many respondents reported feeling better about themselves and having more self-confidence in themselves overall (hence increased self-esteem); greater confidence in their gardening abilities; increased knowledge and control over their own food source; sense of accomplishment and achievement from successful growing efforts and being able to enjoy the fruits of one’s own labor; feeling as though their individual contributions matter (hence respect by

others); and having the opportunity to give back to the community and help others in need (hence respect for others); all of which relate to fulfilling the basic need for esteem.

Finally, the community gardening experience offers many respondents a creative outlet and playground for experimentation with new growing methods and trying new foods. It also provides a means for participants to live and teach values of sustainability, show commitment and model respect for nature and the garden itself (which relate to morality). The ways in which the community garden literally provides a common ground for breaking barriers between people of diverse backgrounds contributes to lack of prejudice. Additionally, the garden connects participants to their childhood, past experiences, and family history; it becomes big part of their daily lives, routines, and rituals; and for some, it even gives them hope; and as such, it informs a sense of identity. The sharing and transmitting of values is also described as it relates to intergenerational connections, whether through teaching children or learning from older generations; and also the desire to leave a lasting legacy for generations to come. All of these latter examples relate to the highest need for self-actualization.

One of the major criticisms leveled against Maslow's hierarchy involves the shape of the hierarchy itself, often represented as a pyramid with the more basic needs at the bottom. It is debatable whether the fundamental human needs are hierarchical or non-hierarchical. As it relates to community garden participation, respondents never explicitly mentioned Maslow's hierarchy, nor did they consistently present the meaning of their gardening experience in a way that ascended the pyramid one level at a time. There was, in fact, great variation in the order in which respondents alluded to the

different basic needs. Nonetheless, it is interesting to find that the community gardening experience does tap into all five basic needs.

Maslow's hierarchy with self-actualization being the apex of self-improvement has also been criticized as being ethnocentric and perhaps more favorable for individualistic and socioeconomically privileged societies. The sample of the current study was predominantly white and middle to upper-middle class (as indicated by high rates of homeownership); which thus may have skewed the results in such a way that reflects greater fit with Maslow's hierarchy than had the sample been more evenly distributed across socioeconomic status. However, given the nature of the comments that supported the self-actualization needs, it appears that community gardening may actually level the playing field for people of all socioeconomic statuses to experience at least partial fulfillment of this highest order need. Findings from a quantitative survey study of community gardeners' quality-of-life perceptions based on Maslow's hierarchy (Waliczek et al., 1996) speak to this interpretation. Although Waliczek et al. did not measure socioeconomic status, per se, they did find a statistically significant difference between racial subgroups on their rated importance of the community garden especially as it relates to self-actualization. The researchers suggested that particularly for gardeners who may lack economic means of securing land or home ownership, community gardens provide important quality-of-life benefits related to every level of Maslow's hierarchy of needs. They further conclude that their findings may have "special implications for economically disadvantaged areas in larger cities where other resources are generally sparse" (p. 209).

Fromm's Basic Needs

Fromm (1955) believed that modern-day people suffer from a basic condition where they simultaneously exist as a part of nature and separated from it; of being both animal and human. As an animal, people have physiological needs, and as a human being, they are equipped with the ability to think, reason, and imagine. Through the ages, humans have been torn from their primordial union with nature and left with no powerful instincts to cope and adapt to a changing world. But with the power to reason and imagine, humans are aware of their "human dilemma" of being free but simultaneously isolated and alone. To escape from these feelings, people strive to become reunited with nature and their fellow human beings. From this basic condition of human existence arise five distinctively human needs, the need for: relatedness, transcendence, rootedness, identity, and frame of orientation. Fromm (1973) also introduced the need for excitation and stimulation as a sixth basic need.

Relatedness involves the need to create relationships with others based upon care, responsibility, respect, and understanding. Transcendence refers to a person's need to become a creative being, caring about their creations and developing an interesting life. Humans also want to be an integral part of the world and have a feeling of belonging (rootedness); they strive to establish roots and feel at home in the world. Individuals also want to have a sense of personal identity, see themselves as a unique person and as part of a social group. Frame of orientation represents the need to have a stable and persistent way of perceiving and understanding the world and our place in it. Finally, humans have the need for excitation and stimulation, which entails actively striving for goals rather

than simply responding to automatic reflexes and drives (Hall, Lindzey, & Campbell, 1998).

Fromm (1955) argued that these basic needs are embedded as part of human nature through evolution. In order to meet the outer demands and requirements of any given society, though, a person often compromises these inner basic needs. Society can, therefore, be described as sick when it fails to satisfy the basic needs of humans.

Table 5.2 provides a selection of quotes from respondents, showing how community gardening can contribute to at least partially meeting each of the six basic needs postulated by Fromm. In describing the meaning of their community gardening participation, respondents talk a great deal about connecting with others, both like-minded and diverse; and also the importance for a sense of belonging, of membership, of inclusion. These narratives reflect partial fulfillment of the need for relatedness. Next, being thrown into the world without their consent, humans have a need to transcend their nature by destroying or creating things. According to respondents, the community garden offers them an opportunity to connect with nature and to experience the peace, enjoyment, and excitement from planting, growing, and simply being part of creating life. From witnessing change and growth of the plants and the garden, and also from improving a place by adding something green, participants fulfill their need for transcendence in a positive way by creating and caring about their creations.

The community garden also allows them to establish roots and feel at home again in the world. Not only do participants report feeling more connected to the place physically, the community gardening experience reminded all respondents of their

childhood and family history related to gardening. Also, with increased experience, participants often reported increased attachment to the garden and commitment to the team effort, which indicates establishment of ties with the outside world, and hence fulfillment of the need for rootedness. Community garden participants talk a great deal about the how the garden has become a major part of their lifestyle and routine; how they may have a sense of responsibility to the garden and care for the plants as if they were a child or a friend; taking pride in the garden; talking about a sharing their experiences; and also feeling a duty to inspire others to join a community garden or at least garden at home. As such, the community gardening experience appears to play a role in fulfilling a sense of identity.

Through the process of engaging with the community garden, participants also report increased awareness and appreciation for the concepts of sustainable, local, and organic. In a way, these concepts provide a frame of orientation, a road map or consistent philosophy by which we navigate our way through the world. Finally, the community garden also helps fulfill a need for excitation and stimulation. That is evident in the numerous ways in which respondents expressed their excitement, pride, sense of accomplishment from learning, having successful growing efforts, and enjoying the fruits of one's own labor, and also from the other positive feelings associate with garden-related events, including laughter from both novel and everyday encounters, sharing the fun and excitement with others while at the garden, having the opportunity to try new planting methods and new foods, and even perhaps regaining a refreshing feeling of hope in life.

Theoretical Implications

According to both Maslow's hierarchy and Fromm's postulations, fulfilling basic human needs enables people to be whole, healthy, and meet the higher reaches of human nature in productive ways. The experience of community gardening, compared to other forms of micro-level food initiatives (e.g., farmers' markets, community-supported agriculture, farm-to-table programs), appears to be unique in that it is rather holistic in approach and has the potential to at least partially meet every basic need proposed by Maslow and Fromm. As such, the community gardening experience can be particularly meaningful in empowering participants and also informing their personal and collective identities. Relating back to the literature reviewed earlier, community gardening does therefore appear to hold potential for transforming individuals from being merely "food consumers" to being "food citizens" who take responsibility for the co-constitution of food in one's culture and hence contribute to food justice and democracy (Lyson, 2007; Werkheiser & Noll, 2014).

Empowerment of Citizens

Across the nine emergent themes, empowerment both as a personal outcome and a process appears to relate to not just one, but all of these themes. In the process of strengthening their mind and body (psychological and physical health) through gardening, participants gain a sense of belonging and purpose by working with others to improve overall well-being for themselves and others, and they also learn the skills to be in control of that improvement process. Scaling up to social movements, Klandermans (2004) points out that individuals are drawn to social movements for several reasons, one

of which is the desire to change their circumstances; joining a collective effort is more likely to occur if individuals believe they have sufficient resources and ability to make an impact. The community gardening experience, with its reported ability to meet basic needs of participants in empowering ways may therefore increase the likelihood that participants will become more involved in the local food movement beyond the community garden.

Even at the level of local politics, a previous study of the democratic effect of community gardening found that the amount of time spent in the garden was a significant predictor of political citizenship (Glover, Shiner, & Parry, 2005). In the current study, some respondents described the community-level changes they have witnessed as a result of the community garden. With one particular neighborhood, the community garden came first, “and then, after the community garden, we started to have more regular community meetings. And then, from the community meetings we developed the neighborhood alliance” (SS female). The community garden brought neighbors together, offered a place to talk amongst each other, share grievances, and changed people and the community for the better: “It really has transformed the way that I think; and I’ve heard people say this, and I’ve seen it and observed it amongst people in how they view their community. There’s more pride. Once you establish that, I think the benefit, they’re taking care of their house more, they’re better neighbors, they’re more involved in political processes and all kind of things. They just are wanting to protect it and see it improve” (SS male).

At the much broader level of social institutions, democratization “involves the empowerment of individuals through their self-organization and through increasing their self-determination in all areas of activity” (Hill, 2003, p. 122). Along those lines, “democratization involves the creation of new knowledge and values, in effect a paradigm shift, that brings about the meaningful empowerment of groups relegated to subordinate positions” (p. 123). And furthermore, the emphasis is on “conscious, rational individuals acting in concert to advance their true interests as individuals and as groups (the needs of others, including those of future generations and of the environment, will be taken into account...)” (p. 123). The same ideas are applicable to the food justice movement seeking to democratize the food system.

In fostering food justice and food democracy, change, much like in other institutional practices, “begins when individuals who share a perception that change is necessary or desirable initiate new practices; the process is completed when a new practice becomes the rule” (Hill, 2003, p. 124). Moreover, “change in the knowledge shared by a group provides the link connecting individual agency to change in social practices” (p. 127). In the current study, many respondents referred to the community garden as a place that brings together diverse groups of people, where people can come together and talk, and learn from each other generally, but also learn about food, the difference between organic and non-organic foods, “be exposed to more people who have that consciousness” (CS male). The community garden empowers participants not only in growing one’s own food, but in bringing them together with others to be part of a growing movement to change the broader food system: “People are kind of doing this

stuff to show that we can grow food. We can grow our own food, and we don't have to buy a plane ticket for it. Just understanding that, since I didn't really even understand that six or seven years ago, that's something that I think we all can learn more about. And I would love to be a part of showing people that" (GG female).

Personal and Collective Identity

In the process of meeting basic needs, community garden participation inevitably shapes one's sense of identity, which is also a basic need according to Fromm. The garden often becomes a major part of the participants' routine lifestyles and the experience both makes people more aware of certain aspects of their own personal identity and influences the extent to which they begin to identify with collective identities that exist in relation to the food movement. Across the nine themes that emerged, the most frequently discussed theme was "Sense of Community and Belonging."

Respondents talked a great deal about connecting with others as a major change they have personally experienced as well as a positive potential for community change. Some respondents even referred to the need to belong on a personal level: "I needed to have some place where I felt like I could actually meet and talk to people, and not feel so isolated" (SS female), as well as on a broader level: "I think people need to belong, they need to know kind of where their place is. And if you don't know your neighbors, you're kind of, it's kind of like a state of anomie where you're just not really grounded, you know?" (CS male)

The next most commonly discussed theme was "Enjoyment, Fulfillment, and Sense of Identity" which also relate directly to both Maslow's and Fromm's frameworks.

Respondents often referred to the community garden as a part of their lifestyle and routine, and also alluded to how it gives them a sense of wholeness, by connecting them not only to their past personal history but also fulfilling them in a productive way that connects them to the unfolding of change and life in nature. Not surprisingly, then, participants reported talking about and sharing their community gardening experiences regularly with others, wanting to inspire others to have the same experiences for themselves, and perhaps even feeling a duty or obligation to do so. As such, this theme also draws the connection between individual community garden participants and their budding identification with the food justice movement.

When asked specifically about the broader impact of their involvement and the potential for community change, the most commonly discussed theme was “Concepts of Sustainable, Local, and Organic” and the “Intergenerational Connections” particularly as it relates to passing on values to children and the next generations. A close third was the theme of “Sense of Community and Belonging” where the community garden is seen as a great way of bringing people together to work for a common purpose, but it appears that when thinking about the potential for community change, what comes to mind are the ideas related to the food justice and democracy movement. Community gardens are seen as “a good model, a good time for people to see that here is an opportunity to try and be a little more sustainable in our lifestyles” (FCC male). They are also seen as a way to combat the corporate food industry: “We’re talking about fighting back against the big food, fast food industry” (SS male). Furthermore, respondents see participation in community gardens as an important way of teaching children and transmitting these

values of sustainability to younger generations: “Your generation and the generation behind you are going to face a crisis. And people don’t take it seriously... respect for Mother Nature is why I think it’s important” (SF female). Relating to Fromm, these values of sustainability not only demonstrate respect for nature, but also provide a frame of orientation, a road map to guide one’s way of life.

Overall, the data viewed through the theoretical lens of basic needs, as theorized by Maslow and Fromm, reveal that participation in community gardens can have a powerful effect on people by fulfilling their basic needs, and thereby empowering them to make personal choices, and also informing their personal identity in ways that make them more likely to also identify with the food justice and democracy movement. The results also revealed that the community gardening experience certainly provides access to the local food movement. When talking about personal changes they have experienced, many respondents were able to talk concretely about changes in their purchasing habits as a consumer. But when talking about potential for broader-level community change, the nature of their comments shifted toward encompassing more general values of food justice (e.g., importance of knowing one’s food source). The extent to which community garden participants identify with various sub-movements in the local food movement (individual-focused, systems-focused, versus community-focused), though, still needs further exploration.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

The current study revealed that the community gardening experience is meaningful to participants as reflected across nine major themes and also revealed unexpected connections to Maslow's and Fromm's theories concerning basic needs. Perhaps what makes the community gardening experience particularly meaningful, though, is that it contributes to fulfilling basic human needs. In doing so, the experience is empowering and may therefore expand the potential for individuals to identify with and participate in the broader food justice movement, and in turn, contribute to changes in the food system.

Limitations

The current study limited its sample to three types of community gardens (community-based, neighborhood, and faith-based). Meanwhile, the findings and interpretations suggest that participation with these three types of gardens has the capacity to fulfill basic needs within both Maslow's and Fromm's theoretical frameworks. Another limitation of the current study relates to the relatively small sample size of participants from each garden. However, given that the actual number of active participants at each garden ranged from about 10 to 20, the study sample represented roughly between 25% and 50% of the population from each individual garden. Although the sample size allowed for reasonable in-depth qualitative data collection, it would be difficult to conduct comparative analyses and generalize results by garden type without larger sample sizes from the garden types. Furthermore, this study was limited to

community gardens in Greenville County, SC, all of which were established within the past five years. Changes related to the longevity of the gardens, the leadership of the gardens, and the community garden movement overall could have major consequences for these micro-level community initiatives and the local food system over time.

Future Research

Future studies could explore whether the same theoretical frameworks pertaining to basic needs apply to the other types of gardens (besides community-based, neighborhood, and faith-based), and the impact these differences may have on the longevity of participants' commitment to the garden. Additional studies with larger samples would allow the researcher to delve deeper into comparing the impact of various independent variables such as gender, age, race, year of involvement, home ownership status, and garden type particularly as they relate to identification with different sub-movements of the local food movement. Related to the relatively nascent nature of the individual gardens and the community garden movement overall in Greenville County, future studies should examine changes over time as the gardens continue to grow and moreover as the garden leadership changes, especially since the current coordinators of many gardens in the Upstate are also the founders. Thus, the nature of the individual gardens and the community garden movement overall could be very different over time, may lead to different kinds of experiences and meaning for participants, have different impacts on the larger food system, and would certainly warrant further research. Even further into the future, a follow-up study examining the correlation between the number

of various types of community gardens in certain locations and indicators of broader-level changes in the local food system would also be interesting.

Furthermore, the theoretical implications of basic needs relate not only to the basic needs approach to economic development, but also to the discourse on universal human rights. Approaching basic needs with a human rights framework increases the moral imperative, political commitment, and legal obligation for society to meet fundamental human needs, such as food, water, health, education, and shelter, of its people. Future research should examine the nexus between basic needs and human rights, and the role that community gardens may play in fostering this very critical conversation, thought process, and deliberative dialogue.

Implications for Practice

With the documented understanding that community gardening has the capacity to meet basic human needs, which perhaps explains participants' sense of commitment to the effort and their desire to talk about and share their experiences and also recruit others to participate, the most immediate implication for practice would be to capitalize on participants' excitement and commitment grow the community garden movement. For founders and coordinators, it would be important to set the gardeners up for success, with success defined as having the opportunity to tap into each of the basic needs. It also appears that articulation of one's experiences is a sense-making process that raises awareness of one's interpretation of the experience. The heightened awareness may link to increased salience of personal identity as it relates to collective identity with a larger social movement. So, garden coordinators may want to find a way to increase the

opportunities for participants to talk about and share the meaning of their participation, whether in a formal or informal setting.

Moreover, it appears that participation in micro-level community gardens, while fulfilling in a multitude of ways, often has the most immediate impact of exposing participants to the nature of growing food and in turn feeds into personal lifestyle changes related to gardening and purchasing habits as a consumer. Beyond this individual-focused level of the local food movement, it may be worthwhile for community gardening initiatives to focus more attention and make a more concerted effort to emphasize and somehow make more salient the role of gardeners as citizens, as activists, and as community members contributing to the meso-level food justice and democracy movement. Perhaps this could be achieved first with increased connection between community gardens and sectors in society such as schools and places of employment, and with greater efforts to include traditionally disadvantaged populations such as the disabled or mentally ill, low-income, and even prisoners; and second, with increased connection between community gardens and food policy councils. Such expansion in reach would provide wider access for people to connect with the food movement in a community-focused way that according to Werkheiser and Noll (2014) has a more meaningful impact in fundamentally changing the macro-level food system, as opposed to “voting with your dollars.”

Implications for Policy

Community gardens hold deep meaning for participants. They also hold great potential to level the playing field for individuals to partake as empowered citizens in

changing the food system. As such, expansion of community gardens at the local level would require increased funding and allocation of resources that support not only the development of new gardens but also the continuation of existing gardens, and the networking opportunities between gardens as well. Advocacy efforts could promote the addition of community gardening as a budget line item in both nonprofit and corporate businesses and in private and public sectors.

At the regional level, more efforts at forming food security coalitions and food policy councils, uniting diverse stakeholders and including representation of participants in micro-level initiatives such as community gardens, could be made to leverage greater support for creating food systems change that promotes social and environmental justice. In an opinion editorial, Bonfiglio (2011, January 24) critiqued the American food system's control by corporate food producers that rely on industrial agriculture and are detrimental to our health and environment; and lauded "food sovereignty" movements and local community initiatives for "beginning to make a difference in the way America eats." She also noted the work of food security and food sovereignty advocates that have successfully changed food policy around the United States and beyond. At the policy level, changes have included gaining official seats at policy group meetings, enactment of new food labeling laws, and adoption of a formal and comprehensive city-wide food policy by city councils. Such regional efforts could also feed into development of a national food policy.

In a recent and timely opinion editorial, Bittman, Pollan, Salvador, and DeSchutter (2014, November 7), open with the following statement:

How we produce and consume food has a bigger impact on Americans' well-being than any other human activity. The food industry is the largest sector of our economy; touches everything from our health to the environment, climate change, economic inequality and the federal budget. Yet we have no food policy – no plan or agreed-upon principles – for managing American agriculture or the food system as a whole. That must change.

Bittman et al. (2014) contend that the health and environmental threats posed by the current macro-level food system are akin to threats to our national security, and as such, changing the food system and developing a food policy to do so, ought to be a national priority and rise on the government agenda. As part of that agenda, it is argued that resources must be invested to ensure secure access to safe and healthy food that is produced, processed, and distributed in socially, economically, and environmentally just and sustainable ways. Also embedded in the national policy would be regulations ensuring that food marketing to impressionable populations such as children is conducted in a way that instills life-long habits for consuming food that contribute to healthy lifestyles. Currently, food-system related policies are piecemeal and overseen by eight federal agencies dealing with separate facets of problems related to the food system (e.g., chronic disease, food safety, school lunches, marketing to children, immigration, labor conditions, water and air quality, support for farmers and agricultural subsidies). The danger of not crafting a coherent national food policy becomes apparent when farm policies that fuel the agricultural-industrial complex blatantly contradict and, worse yet, undermine policies related to public health and the protection of the natural environment.

A national food policy is necessary to bring food and farming to the forefront of public concern, to treat food-related issues as systemic problems, and to establish socially just and environmentally viable standards for promoting improved food, health, and well-being of all Americans.

Such major changes at the local, regional, and national levels depends on the recognition of basic needs as universal human rights, followed by a highly complex process of defining, monitoring, and enforcing new food policies. The current research findings suggest that this process may be instigated with active participation by individuals in community gardens and subsequent mobilization of individuals in a more collective effort demanding change. In other words, and as shown in Figure 6.1, community gardens may serve as a micro-level hub and catalyst for substantive change, as it connects individuals to the meso-level of the food and agriculture system, fostering increased sense of belonging, enhanced personal and collective identity, and empowerment; and as it also connects to the macro-level of food policy, social values, culture, and rights and responsibilities, via a multitude of sectors (e.g., health, economic, education, environment, government, industry, civil society, and public relations). As such, community gardens may help to not only fulfill basic needs of garden participants, but also prompt action and inform the larger dialogue related to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), and in turn, contribute to the reduction of human deprivation in society while making a range of economic, social, and cultural rights a reality for all. Advancing such a social and political system that is more responsive to the basic needs of

individuals is paramount to reduce individual and group violence and to create a more caring, just, and peaceful world.

The time is ripe for more systemic change in the global food system. The future is promising for community gardens because they help to fulfill basic human needs and hold potential for empowerment, collective action, and social change. The blossoming of change and hopes for not only a more sustainable food system that is properly aligned with universal human rights and responsibilities, but also more peaceful relations in our global era, may very well begin with the planting of a seed.

Table 3.1

Characteristics of Three Types of Community Garden Included in Study

Characteristic	Garden Type		
	Community-based	Neighborhood	Faith-Based
Location	Community organization	Residential communities	Religious organization
Type of plot	Individual or shared	Individual or shared	Individual or shared
Typical source of participants	Volunteers commuting from broader community	Residents living within the neighborhood	Members of the religious organization and broader community
Organizers	Representatives from the community organization (e.g., nonprofit, hospital, city government, business)	Local residents or neighborhood association	Leaders from the religious organization
Intended purpose	Bring together individuals from diverse groups to benefit those involved and the surrounding community	Create heightened sense of community and place within a local residential neighborhood	Provide fresh produce to members and/or to those in need in the local community

Table 3.2

Comparison of Six Gardens Selected for Study

	Synergy Garden	St. Francis Community Garden	Sans Souci Community Garden	GreenGate Community Initiative Garden	First Christian Church Community Garden	Cornerstone-Storehouse Community Garden
Type	Community-based	Community-based	Neighborhood	Neighborhood	Faith-based	Faith-based
Year founded	2009	2009	2011	2011	2010	2012
Size (in square feet)	7600	936	2688	3000	800	800
Type of plots	Shared	Individual	Shared	Shared	Individual	Shared
Number of plots	1	16 center and 10 perimeter	19	1	23	16
Membership requirements	Open to volunteers	Sliding scale fee	Annual fee \$25/individual \$40/couple	Open to volunteers	\$35 Annual fee	\$25 Annual fee or donation
Number of active participants	20	16	10	10	15	15

Table 3.3

Demographic Characteristics of Participants as a Percentage of Each Community Garden Sample

Characteristic	Overall (Coordinators & Members) (N=36)	Synergy Garden (N=5)	St. Francis (N=5)	Sans Souci (N=5)	GreenGate (N=5)	First Christian Church (N=5)	Cornerstone- Storehouse (N=5)
Gender							
Male	38.9	20	40	20	40	60	60
Female	61.1	80	60	80	60	40	40
Race/Ethnicity							
Asian	5.6	0	0	20	0	0	0
Black	2.8	0	20	0	0	0	0
Hispanic/Latino	5.6	20	0	20	0	0	0
Middle Eastern	2.8	0	20	0	0	0	0
White	83.2	80	60	60	100	100	100
Age							
25-34	16.7	20	20	60	20	0	0
35-44	33.3	60	0	40	40	40	20
45-54	13.9	0	20	0	0	40	20
55-64	22.2	0	60	0	0	20	40
65 and older	13.9	20	0	0	40	0	20
Total Household Members							
1 person	13.9	20	0	40	0	0	0
2 people	36.1	40	60	20	40	20	40
3 or more people	50.0	40	40	40	60	80	60

Table 3.3 (continued)

Characteristic	Overall (Coordinators & Members) (N=36)	Synergy Garden (N=5)	St. Francis (N=5)	Sans Souci (N=5)	GreenGate (N=5)	First Christian Church (N=5)	Cornerstone- Storehouse (N=5)
Households with Members Age:							
5 years or younger	11.1	0	0	20	20	20	20
6 to 17 years	25.0	20	20	20	40	20	40
65 years or older	25.0	40	20	0	40	20	40
Homeownership Status							
Owners	91.7	80	100	80	100	80	100
Renters	8.3	20	0	20	0	20	0

Table 4.1

Emergent Themes as a Percentage of the Sample by Garden Type

Emergent Theme	Garden Type		
	Community-based (N=10)	Neighborhood (N=10)	Faith-based (N=10)
Gardening Experience in the Past and Present	100	100	100
Enjoyment, Fulfillment, and Sense of Identity	100	100	100
Sense of Community and Belonging	100	100	90
Access to Fresh and Healthy Food	90	90	90
Concepts of Sustainable, Local, and Organic	90	90	90
Intergenerational Connections	90	80	90
Giving Back to Community and Helping Others	90	80	80
Learning New Skills and Building Confidence	70	70	70
Therapeutic Aspects from Connecting with Nature	70	60	70

Table 5.1

Data and Emergent Themes Embedded Within Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs

Basic Needs <i>Aspect Pertaining to Community Garden Participation</i>	Emergent Theme	Supporting Quotes
Physiological	<i>Food</i> Access to Fresh and Healthy Food	<p>“It was a nice little walk with my dog to go get some food, instead of having to jump in my car and drive, you know, three or four times as far to go buy some crappy food from the grocery store.”</p> <p>"When you think about low socioeconomic status, impoverished communities, there’s a huge potential for just all the benefits that come of it... I mean even in the simplest format, a few bags of soil amendment, and a little plot, and some sunlight, you can get a lot of food."</p>
Safety & Security	<i>Financial savings</i> Access to Fresh and Healthy Food	<p>"It’s an economic advantage if you don’t have the money. Produce is expensive... I think we probably spend half of our food budget on produce."</p> <p>"Right now, we’ve got a five year old and a three year old. After moving around five times in the past five years, the benefits of the garden right now are primarily, in my mind, we’re tight on the budget, and so, I’m hoping to ease some of that strain with the food we can produce."</p>

		"You food shop at the store, and you can see what prices have done recently. It's unbelievable. I can't believe it! I love pickled beets, you know? I just love them. I need to pickle some more beets. They're expensive."
<i>Natural resources</i>	Concepts of Sustainable, Local, and Organic	<p>"There's more and more of a focus on sustainability. I think it's a good model, a good time for people to see that here is an opportunity to try and be a little more sustainable in our lifestyles."</p> <p>"I love the progress that you're seeing in Greenville, but it's more and more concrete, and that is what it is. When you have a city that's successful it's going to do that, but nonetheless, how nice to put something green that's putting back into the earth what we're taking out."</p> <p>"Because this is an organic garden, we're buying more organic stuff at the grocery store. We think about the way things are raised, and the people that provide us with the foods."</p> <p>"There's a lot of genetically modified vegetables...I'd rather get organic. I think once you learn the difference, which a lot of people don't even know... but I think community gardens can be kind of a lot of things in that effort. It can be a place where people get together and talk about it. It can be a place where people actually taste tastier vegetables."</p>
<i>Health (Physical)</i>	Access to Fresh and Healthy Food	<p>"I have more vegetables in my diet because of the garden, which is good from a health standpoint."</p> <p>"My husband and I are both thinking more about what we eat, what we are putting into our bodies"</p>

Health (Mental) Therapeutic
Aspects from
Connecting with
Nature

"There's nothing like garden-picked vegetables...in the fall, if you've ever tasted broccoli in November, are you kidding me?... it's like candy. So sweet."

"I often will say that going out to the garden is my dirt therapy, because there's just something about caring for the plants that can't talk back. That is therapeutic. I live with two ten year-olds."

"People banging away on a computer all day, and then get back in the dirt at the end of the day or whatever. It's really kind of satisfying."

"There's something soothing about getting your hands in the dirt and planting, and harvesting, and pruning, and fertilizing, and watering, and caring for, you know, you kind of get in touch with the whole life cycle."

"It's digging in the dirt, and weeding and all of the stuff. Even though it's kind of like a pain in a rear to have to weed, but it's also cathartic. You're getting rid of the bad to help the good...It's a purging of all this stress that you've had throughout the week when you finally get to go just pick some cucumbers."

"I'm such a type A person, and I have anxiety and things like that and my brain is always thinking about the million things that I'm not doing that I should be doing, etc., etc. And this is one of the very few places where I can kind of escape that. That's a sort of new discovery for me, you know, and it's only been the past few years...I would just come out in the morning, and I just love the smell of tomato plants, I love the smell on my fingertips."

"For me, the garden is another way to release stress. I can go up there and talk to them cucumbers all day. I can tell them all my woes...They don't tell nobody my business." [laughter]..."It is very therapeutic."

It's a chance to be unplugged from our phones, and not having to respond to that email right away. And just being outside in a quieter environment... part of it is getting away, if it was in my yard, it would be hard to not get interrupted with the phone, or a family member coming in, or, "Dad, I'm hungry."...[The community garden] It's my mistress, don't tell my wife...Sometimes you just need to be out here by yourself, and you hear the insects, and if you pay attention you can hear the breeze in the trees and some of the other sounds of nature that normally, they're there all the time you're just too busy to pay attention to it...Too distracted... I try to be a little intentional...I've got the hose going, let me just sit and unwind."

Love & Belongingness

Friendship Sense of
Community and
Belonging

"I often tell people that I like to garden, but this way, I get to garden with thirty of my closest friends."

"It's a fun time, because it's different personalities... It's the people, it's really about the people!"

"The thing that satisfies me is my core connection. It's a group of friends."

Family Sense of
Community and
Belonging

Time with son: "I have just so many fun memories of him. He just loves coming here...most of the pictures that I've taken are of him, turning buckets into drums, or just marching around the garden... it's really fun."

Time with grandson: "We're always having to keep after him. I mean, he climbs up on the benches, and he's running and jumping, pretending that he's spraying me with the hose and I have to pretend that I'm getting wet, you know, so that he doesn't actually turn it on. [laughter]...Of course he likes to tease us. So, that's part of the whole thing...Find the side where the tomatoes are and say, "I'm in your bed." [laughter]

"I'll text my mom a picture of the okra I just collected. And I'll send her a picture of it after I fried it up, it kind of looks like what she did. I'm using her old cast iron skillet to fry it up. It's kind of a nice continuum there in the family line."

"Working as a family together on a project was nice, too. We try to do a lot of things as a family, but sometimes it's a project like this that really brings you together."

Community Sense of
Community and
Belonging

"It gets people to relate...for me on a personal level, that was important because I needed to have some place where I felt like I could actually meet and talk to people, and not feel so isolated."

"Even tonight I got out of my car and I walked up, and there were new people there...I immediately met someone...and we got along as if we'd known each other for ten years, you know? It wasn't like they were people I was meeting for the first time."

"It's built this bond and connection that between the students and myself and their families. So really it's just meant this amazing relational experience. I mean, I have 4th, 5th, and 6th graders and their parents just wanting to spend time together with me, with other people in the

Esteem	<i>Self-esteem</i> Enjoyment, Empowerment, and Sense of Identity	garden working during the summer."
		"Even people who have never gardened, they come and help, and then we're sitting there, and it's such a relaxed atmosphere that people who would never talk, talk. And the next thing you know, there's no barriers, there's no nothing, there's no walls."
		"It's the camaraderie that for me keeps it all going and keeps it an enriched experience."
		"It makes me feel better about myself that I'm able to give back and to help out."
		"It really feeds my sense of purpose more. It probably helps me more than anybody else in the community because I feel that it gives me a sense of worth. It gives me a sense of pride when we see what everything's done. You know, you're helping someone else, and so that always makes you feel good when you are helping someone else."
		"It's given me an opportunity to have some self-confidence to remember that I have a lot to offer beyond being a mom and a wife. And that's been huge for me...Everything had just for so long been just been about my family, and I think it's very healthy for people to have something that's theirs...That's one of the things the garden has given me, and I think that's part of what gave me the confidence to pursue going back to work."
	<i>Confidence</i> Enjoyment, Empowerment, and Sense of Identity	"It's like a whole new, like learning the language of the plants... It has opened a new door, I feel like it's possible now."
		"If I'm in the garden and someone asks me, "Hey, what needs to be

done today?" I can look at them with confidence, with knowledge and say, "This is what we're doing..."

"I feel like my community gardening experience has led me to just explore!...growing trees for other people, taking clippings... I feel like the garden has piqued my interest, and also given me the confidence to do this stuff. And it's so weird, because I never really considered myself a gardener...I would have never thought I would have taken a leadership position, for sure, in a garden. Now, I'm instructing other people on what to do."

Knowledge & control over food source Enjoyment, Empowerment, and Sense of Identity

"Now that I've been a part of it for a few years, I feel like I know where my food comes from, and that's important to me. I feel like I know how it's being grown, I know what's being put on it, I know where it's coming from."

"I think at the grassroots ground level introducing people to sustainably grown, local, affordable, fresh, tasty food. That is the basics towards like what happened to me..." "Alright, where does our food come from?"And you realize, "If we grow it right here in our neighborhood, if we grow it in urban places, we really become a factor in the local food system when it comes to where food is sourced." So yeah, I think that opens up a lot of doors, where we're talking about fighting back against the big food, fast food industry."

Achievement Enjoyment, Empowerment, and Sense of Identity

"This year is the best we've ever done. So, that's fun, it really is...and this inspired us to plant at our own house. So, we built a bed at our house, and we have all kinds of herbs and vegetables growing at home, too."

		<p>"It's really stretched me as an educator...as a teacher I have grown in my ability to just integrate, and merge together, and grow one big learning experience that's authentic to life and teach science, social studies, math, language arts, within a concept in a way that's outside the classroom doors."</p>
		<p>"It sounds like psychological calamity to tell you how I felt when I actually dug my first yellow potatoes that I grew...Oh, I mean, it was elation. I can say ecstatic, but it was just, you know, two shots of whiskey wouldn't have been the same feeling."</p>
<i>Respect by others</i>	Sense of Community and Belonging	<p>"People's contributions matter and their absence would be noticed and garden wouldn't be as good or flourish as much...It's knowing that you have that intrinsic value to the garden, that impact, that connection."</p>
<i>Respect for others</i>	Giving Back to Community and Helping Others	<p>"To be good to your fellow man...help people out. The basic stuff, food, shelter, a little bit of kindness. It goes a long way."</p> <p>"It's helping out the food bank. It's helping everyone else that's a part of the garden because everybody takes a share in it. So, it's not that you're just helping one person, you're helping a multitude of people. And actually, you really don't even know who you're affecting, so it kind of puts a whole different spin on things, but you know it's something positive...What if it was me that needed that help, and there was nobody there to provide that help? I've been in places, sorry. [crying] I've been in situations where I've needed help, and there was none to be had. So, it makes me feel good to know that I'm helping people that don't even know that I'm helping them."</p>
Self-actualization	<i>Creativity</i> Enjoyment, Empowerment,	<p>"I've enjoyed doing the creative things with it. It's offered some outlets that I don't normally have, that I have been missing. So it's helping me</p>

	and Sense of Identity	get kind of back to a more ideal situation...being able to grow something and create something."
		"I enjoy planting stuff, I like to see things grow. To me, it's not only fun, but it's more like an experiment...So it's basically kind of like a playground, an experimenting station."
		"I feel like my gardening experience has led me to just explore!...I feel like the garden has piqued my interest, and also given me the confidence to do this stuff. "
<i>Morality</i> <i>(living and teaching values of sustainability, commitment to and respect for nature and the garden)</i>	Concepts of Sustainable, Local, and Organic	<p>"I think that America could really benefit from community gardens because they are sowing hope back into the children that are coming up...So many things that I have seen in my lifetime that has just fallen through the cracks on the porch. Nobody can remember how to do this, nobody can remember how to do that. With the community garden, you're actually creating, re-creating something that has happened for generations and generations. People need to start realizing that there's some things in life you don't throw away. You remember, you SUSTAIN those ideas, those procedures that you grew up with. You sustain them through the youth so that if something happens, they will have hope to go back to."</p> <p>"I certainly feel a responsibility to the garden. It might sound kind of strange, but I help bring life to these plants and I want to nurture them."</p> <p>"You just get attached to it. It's like you're nurturing it, and it's nurturing you back. I think that's what keeps drawing me back to it...it's kind of like a relationship with the garden itself."</p> <p>"It's kind of weird, you don't consider a garden a physical friend, but</p>

yeah in a way, I consider our garden a friend. And being away from a friend for a long time, whenever you get back you are always glad to see them."

"I've always felt a commitment to the garden...I feel sad when I can't go."

"It teaches them patience, it's a lot like life, you know? There's a lot of life lessons, because you have to fight weather, you can't do anything about that. You can't mess with Mother Nature."

"I think the community garden is something that, there's a lot of the values, jobs, a lot of the principles involved in the community garden are, I don't want to say old school, but it goes back to the good old days, the good old values..."

"I always felt like you don't know when you are planting that seed, and you don't know when that interest is going to come in... I think it takes a neighborhood to raise a child. I like to know that if my kids go to somebody else's house they're also trying to teach them, as well."

Lack of prejudice Sense of
(Breaking barriers and Community and
providing common ground) Belonging

"You see the guy over there by the trees? He's special needs. It was real special when I realized that he may have struggles in his life, but when he comes here he's just one of the team, you know? He's not any different than anybody else. And I think that applies across the board. We may come here with our own things going on in our lives. And then when we come here, it doesn't, none of that really matters. Not that nobody wants to listen, obviously we care about each other, but everybody is equal in a certain sense. No titles, no attitudes, no worries."

<i>Personal identity</i>	Enjoyment, Empowerment, and Sense of Identity	"I see how it brings people together...one of the first things that I noticed was how status didn't matter... one of the things that I noticed was dirt is dirt, okay? So when we all get up there, and we're all sweating, and we are all digging in the dirt together, it doesn't matter how many dollars you've got if you need me to show you how to plant a tomato... So it puts us on an even playing field where we are all the same. Where we can be on our knees looking across the plot face to face with each other, and you get to see the soul of a person. That comes from a plant."
	Gardening experience in the past and present	<p>"The community garden puts me in touch with my grandmother. My grandmother has been dead for several years, but she always raised a very large garden."</p> <p>"It kind of brings me back to when I grew up raising, having to have a garden. So this is kind of like me seeing a little bit of home when I was a child growing up."</p> <p>"It's become almost like a ritual. And you know, if you don't do your normal ritual every week, it's like you miss it. It's like if you exercise regularly, and then you don't exercise for a week, then you don't feel the same...if you're volunteering to do something, it's in your heart, you really want to do it. Nobody is forcing you to do it, nobody is asking you to do it. You are doing it on your own...It's in your heart, it's in your passion, your love. That is a very big key."</p> <p>"For me, it's changed, it's actually given me hope. It's because of both the camaraderie with the fellowship, so to speak, of the partnering of the workers in the garden. That has actually embedded hope within me. It's like feeling a cool breeze on a hot day. It's refreshing, that's how, and to me, that's how it's changed me."</p>

<i>Sharing & transmitting values</i>	<p>Concepts of Sustainable, Local, and Organic</p> <p>Intergenerational Connections</p> <p>Giving Back to Community and Helping Others</p>	<p>Involving 6-year-old son: "I kind of teach my son, okay, you put the seed, and that becomes a plant. The plant produces these products, the crops. That kind of helps him to learn how things come to life...I felt like it is something that helps me to do a thing I always enjoyed doing, and help him also to learn everything about working with other people and helping other people. Teach him good things, ethical values, you know, as you're growing up."</p> <p>About 10-year-old daughters: "It sparked a lot of conversations at home about why people were coming to the food bank...They've come up with different ideas throughout the year of things they want to do...the idea of giving back, and they've been exposed to so many different people over the years."</p> <p>"You have the generational gaps, different moral worldviews, different outlooks on life. And I think that's something that is really important to consider not just for our community, but for any community garden, or community endeavor, volunteer project, whatever the case may be, is bridging that gap, connecting older folks to younger folks. I think the garden is a good, kind of neutral common ground... in what is seemingly innocuous conversation, where you don't really think much of it, you're spreading your values...there is a lot of things that older generations can pass knowledge on and wisdom on to younger generations...that's a way for the older generation to learn, and continue to grow and evolve."</p> <p>"This is about future generations here. Like I want to get an orchard started here...for future generations, for people I don't even know. I think that's cool..."</p>
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Table 5.2

Data and Emergent Themes Embedded Within Fromm’s Basic Needs

Basic Needs <i>Aspect Pertaining to Community Garden Participation</i>	Emergent Theme	Supporting Quotes
Relatedness	Sense of Community and Belonging	<p>“I often tell people that I like to garden, but this way, I get to garden with thirty of my closest friends.”</p> <p>"The thing that satisfies me is my core connection. It’s a group of friends." "It gets people to relate...for me on a personal level, that was important because I needed to have some place where I felt like I could actually meet and talk to people, and not feel so isolated."</p> <p>"Even tonight I got out of my car and I walked up, and there were new people there...I immediately met someone...and we got along as if we’d known each other for ten years, you know? It wasn’t like they were people I was meeting for the first time."</p> <p>"It’s built this bond and connection that between the students and myself and their families. So really it’s just meant this amazing relational experience. I mean, I have 4th, 5th, and 6th graders and their parents just wanting to spend time together with me, with other people in the garden working during the summer."</p> <p>"Even people who have never gardened, they come and help, and then we’re sitting there, and it’s such a relaxed atmosphere that people who would never talk, talk. And the next thing you know, there’s no</p>

		barriers, there's no nothing, there's no walls."
		"We all work together like a family. I think we care for each other. So that part is rewarding, as well...We just support each other, and have a good time together. That's important, too...I mean, I'm just enriched with all the people."
Transcendence	Therapeutic Aspects from Connecting with Nature	<p>"When I come out here, I think I have a greater sense of peace really than anywhere else"</p> <p>"There's something soothing about getting your hands in the dirt and planting, and harvesting, and pruning, and fertilizing, and watering, and caring for, you know, you kind of get in touch with the whole life cycle."</p>
	Enjoyment, Empowerment, and Sense of Identity	<p>"I like knowing that I planted something from a seed, and I am eating it a few months later. It gives you a sense of accomplishment, like you did something, you made something."</p> <p>"I've enjoyed doing the creative things with it. It's offered some outlets that I don't normally have, that I have been missing. So it's helping me get kind of back to a more ideal situation...being able to grow something and create something."</p> <p>"This year is the best we've ever done. So, that's fun, it really is...and this inspired us to plant at our own house. So, we built a bed at our house, and we have all kinds of herbs and vegetables growing at home, too."</p> <p>"There's the green initiative and being environmentally friendly. Anytime you're putting in more green, especially when you look</p>

Rootedness	Gardening Experience in the Past and Present	around, and I love the progress that you're seeing in Greenville, but it's more and more concrete. And that is what it is, when you have a city that's successful it's going to do that. But nonetheless, how nice to put something green that's putting back into the earth what we're taking out."
		"It kind of brings me back to, you know, I told you before that I grew up raising, having to have a garden. So this is kind of like me seeing a little bit of home when I was a child growing up."
		"Growing up we had a garden, but it was more my grandparents doing it... and I loved going in the garden and getting cucumbers, and actually when I walk through the tomato plants, the smell of tomatoes reminds me of my grandparents."
		"...it puts me in touch with my grandmother. My grandmother has been dead for several years, but she always raised a very large garden, generally by herself. She raised eight kids all on her own, and she had to feed them all... I remember as a kid in the summer going and being in her garden. I remember digging potatoes, and just being in the dirt, and I associated that with her. She could make anything grow. So, to be able to plant some seeds, and you see them develop, it reminds me of her."
	Enjoyment, Empowerment, and Sense of Identity	"The longer I participate in this, the more I become attached to it. So, it's kind of like a relationship with the garden itself... You just get attached to it. It's like you're nurturing it, and it's nurturing you back. I think that's what keeps drawing me back to it."
		"I've always felt a commitment to the garden... I feel sad when I can't go."

Sense of Identity

Enjoyment,
Empowerment, and
Sense of Identity

“I have this sense of responsibility that I should be out there... everybody kind of picks up and helps out... You work together as a team. If it’s just yourself, you might slack off a little bit... I feel like I have to contribute because that’s the whole idea is that it is a community. And so, if people are loafing then it doesn’t get done.”

“It gives some focus, it’s a part of my life now.”

"It’s become almost like a ritual. And you know, if you don’t do your normal ritual every week, it’s like you miss it. It’s like if you exercise regularly, and then you don’t exercise for a week, then you don’t feel the same. You miss your ritual that you like to do, especially if it’s something you enjoy doing."

“I worry about it, yeah... I certainly feel a responsibility to the garden. It might sound kind of strange, you know, but I help bring life to these plants and I want to nurture them.”

“It’s kind of weird, you don’t consider a garden a physical friend, but yeah in a way, I consider our garden a friend. And being away from a friend for a long time, whenever you get back you are always glad to see them.”

“I worry about it! [laughter]... it’s like a child.”

“I take pride in being part of the garden...And that's part of the appeal, of course. It is part of the human experience to take pride in your own work, and pride in your own involvement in something.”

“If you really, really love something, then you’re going to put a lot of

Frame of Orientation

Concepts of Sustainable, Local, and Organic

effort into it. And the garden, I love it, so I've put a lot of effort into it. I'm proud. I'm proud of it completely."

"Oh man. It would probably be one of the most important things in my life, because like I said, it's a therapeutic experience for me every time I come out. So it's very, very important. If something was to ever happen where we couldn't have it anymore, it would hurt bad"

"I want to help other people get involved... you want to have people get more involved and enjoying. You want to get other people to have that same feeling as you have."

"I believe in taking care of the environment, taking care of creation, replenishing...to keep rebuilding, keeping refixing, redeveloping."

"This is a way of practicing what I preach... living the way my belief system is and living my values."

"There's more and more of a focus on sustainability. With community gardens, I think it's a good model, a good time for people to see that here is an opportunity to try and be a little more sustainable in our lifestyles."

"I'm sure that many people in this country, and in fact the industrialized world, could attest that you don't really see the source of your food in this society. So that is also what made it kinda foreign. You know, it wasn't cleaned and processed, and like, you know, it had some dirt on it, which is fine, but at the time I was like, 'Oh my gosh, my food is dirty, like, what do I do?' Go home and wash it off, and it is still kinda foreign... But now I know full well that it is more clean than the processed stuff we get from the grocery store. So it has totally shifted

Excitation and Stimulation	Enjoyment, Empowerment, and Sense of Identity	<p>in my mind.”</p> <p>“When I go to the grocery store I am willing to pay a little bit more for organic or local produce because I know what goes into it now, the time and care. That it is a little bit more effort, and it’s worth it”</p> <p>“I just appreciate the whole concept of it. And I think that the more people see other people growing food, the more they might be inspired by it, or at least interested in it. And I think it’s so important just overall to the health of our nation, the world.”</p> <p>“It teaches them patience, it’s a lot like life, you know?... There’s a lot of life lessons because you have to fight weather, you can’t do anything about that. You can’t mess with Mother Nature.”</p> <p>“This time of year, when you see things just getting green and getting tall, that’s really fun... Once things take root, and then suddenly start to get big, that’s exciting.”</p> <p>“It’s exciting to see the food come in. And for it to be healthy, and that it doesn’t get attacked by bugs, that it did better than it did last year.”</p> <p>“I had a turnip, and mind you turnips are not good this big, but everything was flourishing so well... we had so many that did so well we were pulling them out three and four at a time and cooking them, and going back and pulling. By the time I was pulling up the last batch I had one that literally was the entire hand. I cooked that turnip, and it lasted four servings, that one turnip was four large servings...And just to see that, from seed.”</p> <p>“I came and all the peas went into one of my beds, that were supposed</p>
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to be on the trellis, and they're all falling over. There were peas all over! It was great! I was just sitting there eating them, because I love fresh peas."

"It's actually given me hope. It's because of both the camaraderie with the fellowship, so to speak, of the partnering of the workers in the garden. That has actually embedded hope within me. It's like feeling a cool breeze on a hot day. It's refreshing, and that's how it's changed me"

Access to Fresh and
Healthy Food

"I've got to have cucumber. My wife would make me leave home if I didn't plant cucumbers. I remember our first cucumber. I pulled it and I carried it, and she loves cucumber, and I laid it on the counter and I said, 'Okay baby, there's your first cucumber.' And we had that that evening with dinner. It was so much different than what we been having. I don't know why, it's just better."

"You grow it and you eat it, and if I'm not going to eat it, then I am going to share it. And oh man, it tastes so much better, doesn't it? It does, it's amazing!"

"I helped grow this food so I need to eat it. So I learned a lot about cooking food, and really got a new appreciation for fresh food... I didn't cook before...not AT ALL. This has been a big transformation...I don't really talk about it too much, but there's all kinds of things that I cook now"

Learning New
Skills and Building
Confidence

"So I feel like even after doing it all these years, we keep every year learning new stuff..."

"Every year I'm going to learn more. And every year I'm going to

enjoy something new that I haven't grown or eaten before.”

“It's really stretched me as an educator. I think that's what I've learned the most... even outside of the garden itself, as a teacher I have grown in my ability to just integrate, and merge together, and grow one big learning experience that's authentic to life and teach science, social studies, math, language arts, within a concept in a way that's outside the classroom doors. And so, that's the biggest thing that I've gained.”

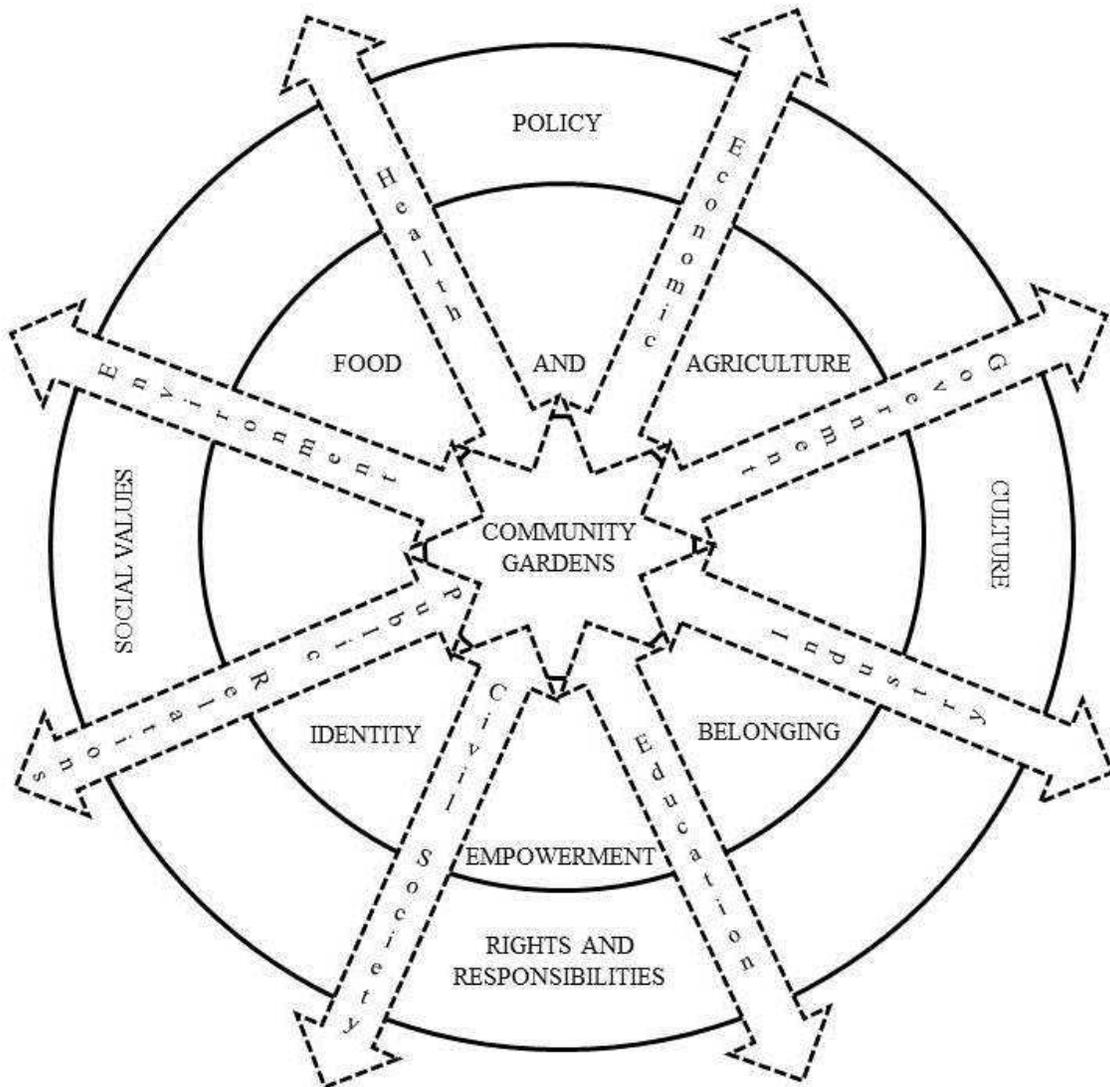


Figure 6.1. Community gardens as a hub and catalyst for food systems change.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Informed Consent Form

Information Concerning Participation in a Research Study Clemson University

Community Gardening as a Strategy for Transformative Social Change

Description of the research and your participation

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Anita Tam and Dr. Catherine Mobley. The purpose of this research is to learn about your experiences with the community garden. We are interested in the meaning of your community garden participation, and your perceptions of how your experience has resulted in personal and/or community change.

Your participation will involve completing an in-person interview that will be audio-recorded. If you would like to share additional stories and pictures about your garden, we will ask you to provide those. These pictures may be included in subsequent presentations of the research findings. The amount of time required for your participation will be from 45 minutes to 1½ hour.

Risks and discomforts

There are no known risks associated with this research. If a particular subject is uncomfortable for you, you are free to end the interview at any time.

Potential benefits

This research will help us to better understand the impact of community gardens and those factors that lead to successful community garden efforts. You may also experience a benefit from the opportunity to share your experiences with someone else.

Protection of confidentiality

We will do everything we can to protect your confidentiality. Your name will not be attached to your responses. If there is some potentially identifying information included in the interview, we will not include that in any transcripts that are used in publications. Your identity will not be revealed in any publications that result from this study. The audio recordings of the interviews will be destroyed five years after the data is collected.

Voluntary participation

Your participation in this research study is voluntary. You may choose not to participate and you may withdraw your consent to participate at any time. You will not be penalized in any way should you decide not to participate or to withdraw from this study.

Contact information

If you have any questions or concerns about this study, or if any problems arise, please contact Dr. Catherine Mobley at Clemson University at 864-656-3815. If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, please contact the Clemson University Office of Research Compliance at 864-656-6460.

Appendix B: Demographic Survey Completed by Participants

1. Gender: _____
2. Age:
 - a. under 18
 - b. 18 to 24
 - c. 25 to 34
 - d. 35 to 44
 - e. 45 to 54
 - f. 55 to 64
 - g. 65 or older
3. How many total people live in your household on a regular basis?
 - a. Total number _____
 - b. How many of these individuals are under the age of 6? _____
 - c. Between the ages of 6 and 17? _____
 - d. Over the age of 65? _____
4. Race/ethnic background _____
5. Do you rent or own your home? _____
6. How long have you lived in this home? _____

Appendix C: Interview Protocol for Garden Founders/Coordinators

Below are some questions that were asked of the community garden founders/coordinators to gather contextual information about the gardens.

- What is the nature of your involvement with this garden, and for how long?
- When, how, and why this garden was started?
- Would you please describe how this garden is supported financially?
- How would you describe the structure of this garden?
- How many volunteers/members are involved? How are volunteers/members recruited and retained? Is there much overlap in participation from year to year?
- Would you please describe the general roles of volunteers/members, and ways in which they participate?
- How are decisions related to the garden made?
- What, if any, major changes have taken place at the garden since its inception? In other words, in what ways has the garden evolved over time?
- What are some of the garden's major successes/highlights and challenges/barriers?
- What are future goals for this garden?
- What, if anything, do you believe makes this garden unique and different from other gardens?
- How much time do you spend working in/coordinating the garden?
- What additional information about the garden would you like to share?
- Would you please identify five participants who are active in this garden and who you believe would be interested in discussing and sharing the meaning of their gardening experiences with me?

Appendix D: Interview Protocol for Garden Participants

Below are some general questions that were used as starting points for more specific questions that were asked of the community garden participants to gather information about their gardening experiences.

- What is the nature of your involvement with this garden, and for how long?
- What does your community gardening experience mean to you personally? [How?] [Why are you involved?]
- In what ways have you changed, or transformed, as a result of participating in this garden?
- Do you ever consider the broader impact of your involvement with this garden? In what ways?
- In what ways, if any, does this garden and others like it have the potential to change, or transform, the broader community?

Additional questions may include:

- In what ways have you felt either particularly welcome to or ever excluded from the garden?
- How far away do you live from the garden?
- How much time do you spend on average per week at the garden?
- If you are away from the garden for what you might consider a long period of time, what do you miss about it?
- What are some of your fondest memories of your gardening experience?
- In what ways does your community gardening experience differ from other volunteer experiences?
- To what extent do you talk about/share your community gardening experience with others?
- Do you plan to continue your involvement with the community garden?

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