A feminist political ecology of food justice in Iowa

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A feminist political ecology of food justice in Iowa

by

Carrie Chennault

A dissertation submitted to the graduate faculty
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Major: Sustainable Agriculture

Program of Study Committee:
Ann Oberhauser, Major Professor
Christina Gish Hill
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The student author, whose presentation of the scholarship herein was approved by the program of study committee, is solely responsible for the content of this dissertation. The Graduate College will ensure this dissertation is globally accessible and will not permit alterations after a degree is conferred.

Iowa State University
Ames, Iowa
2019

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DEDICATION

For Andee, my wife, partner, and best friend.
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ABSTRACT

In this dissertation, I study strategies for local and alternative food initiatives to advance more just and equitable approaches to food insecurity. My research focuses on one emerging type of local food initiative designed to address food insecurity, community donation gardening. I engaged in a three-year feminist and ethnographic study of a community-run and USDA- and Cooperative Extension-sponsored donation gardening and food rescue program, Growing Together Iowa. In Growing Together, community gardeners grow or glean food to distribute directly to community members experiencing food insecurity or alternatively to donate to partnering emergency food organizations, such as area food pantries. I focus on the institutional and community gardening partners in Growing Together in an effort to better understand the ways in which solutions to food insecurity emerge from social relations and socio-historical contexts. Framing community donation gardening as sites of political-ecological negotiation and struggle, I show how the politics of food insecurity unfolds in everyday life in Growing Together. I also explore how the social justice praxis of marginalized communities and community-engaged scholar-activists can play a role in that unfolding. Drawing upon feminist theories and methodologies to examine these sites, I demonstrate how uneven power relations permeate even well-intended efforts to address food insecurity. Through community-engaged scholar-activism and co-authorship, this dissertation also identifies possibilities for developing solutions to food insecurity that include but extend beyond immediate food needs. These efforts reveal opportunities for developing new subjectivities and practices by identifying different modes of connecting to food and community and by contesting the rhetoric of personal responsibility and poor food choices attributed to food insecurity. Engaging with food justice and a feminist political ecology of food insecurity that is material, structural, and discursive, this research works to reconfigure power relations in local food initiatives by working with and for those who are most marginalized in our food system.
CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Society desperately needs novel and alternative approaches for addressing food insecurity. In the United States, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (2018) estimates that 40 million people lived in food-insecure households in 2017. According to their analysis, rates of food insecurity are highest among “Low-income,” “Black, non-Hispanic,” and “Hispanic” households, in addition to “households with children” and people “living alone.” Feminist and social science research considers how food insecurity emerges from conditions of social inequality and is unevenly distributed along intersectional matrices of race, gender, class, sexuality, and ethnicity (Cadieux and Slocum, 2015; Sachs and Patel-Campillo, 2014). Sachs and Patel-Campillo (2014, 400) assert: “Because hunger and food insecurity often converge where marginal identities intersect, the power, structural, and gender dynamics associated with approaches to food insecurity must be historically and analytically specified.”

In this dissertation, I am interested in the practice of food justice as a critical component of solving food insecurity. My motivation follows in the tradition of political ecologists and critical food scholars like Cadieux and Slocum (2015, 3) who boldly assert: “For us, true food security is impossible without social justice being understood as one of the necessary starting points for analyses of, and solutions to, food insecurity.” Resisting a strict or universal definition of food justice, Cadieux and Slocum (2015, 13) offer four “organizing areas” for food justice practice based on their research and literature review:

1) acknowledging and confronting historical, collective social trauma and persistent race, gender, and class inequalities;

2) designing exchange mechanisms that build communal reliance and control;
3) creating innovative ways to control, use, share, own, manage and \textit{conceive of} land, and ecologies in general, that place them outside the speculative market and the rationale of extraction; and

4) pursuing labor relations that guarantee a minimum income and are neither alienating nor dependent on (unpaid) social reproduction by women.

Developing socially just approaches to food insecurity requires scholars and the food movement not only to examine how food insecurity is experienced unevenly along the lines of social categorizations, but also how \textit{solutions} to food insecurity emerge from social relations and socio-historical contexts that differently position people in relation to food, environments, institutions, and one another.

The “dominant food movement” includes alliances among individuals, government, NGOs, companies, and other social organizations (Cadieux and Slocum, 2015). Scholars refer to these alliances as alternative food networks (AFNs) in reference to the dominant food movement’s focus on developing alternative types of food (e.g. local and organic) and systems of exchange that differ from conventional agrifood systems (ibid). In response to food insecurity, AFNs have developed “local food initiatives” to address people’s “day-to-day needs”; yet, these initiatives are not especially well-positioned to alter underlying structural inequities that create conditions of food insecurity (Caraher and Dowler, 2014, 232). Beyond meeting community members’ day-to-day food needs, what these initiatives arguably can do is challenge people’s understanding of food insecurity as an individualistic problem of right food choices, give attention to the broader conditions in which people experiencing food insecurity live, and reframe the problem of food insecurity as a structural issue (Caraher and Dowler, 2014, see below).

These opportunities largely remain unrealized, although they have been a key focus for growing “food justice” and “food sovereignty” movements in the United States and globally. To date, research has revealed how dominant food movement efforts in North America—often situated within what Holt-Giménez and Wang (Holt-Giménez and Wang, 2011) refer to as “reformist” organizations—tend to focus on increasing local and organic food production, while reinforcing notions of right food choices and individual responsibility. What opportunities exist to change
these trends? In this dissertation, I am interested in the question of how local and alternative food initiatives might advance more just and equitable approaches to food insecurity. In answering this question, I explore the role of power and how local food initiatives engage in processes of food justice practice (Cadieux and Slocum, 2015).

Questions of who has the knowledge and responsibility to develop solutions, how to account for and measure the effectiveness of specific approaches or programs, and more fundamentally, how to frame the problem of food insecurity itself, underlie the power configuration of local food initiatives. Existing research encourages institutional and community-based solutions to take into account people’s lived experiences of inequality and produce knowledges with and for community members experiencing marginalization and food insecurity (Bradley and Herrera, 2016; Cadieux and Slocum, 2015). While this scholarship advocates for greater participation of people experiencing food insecurity, few other studies take a reflexive approach in examining how and why institutions and communities fail to enact participatory processes, or how they might do so more equitably. The need exists to develop new frameworks capable of directly and reflexively reconfiguring power relations among the social institutions, community organizations, and communities working to address food insecurity (see Bradley and Herrera, 2016; Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy, 2013; Cadieux and Slocum, 2015, as example frameworks).

Attention to critical and reflexive questions within local food initiatives can enable institutions and community organizations to realize broader possibilities including but beyond immediate food needs. Put differently, a commitment to engage the politics of food insecurity is a necessary precursor to challenge people’s understanding of food insecurity as an individualistic problem of right food choices, give attention to the broader conditions in which people experiencing food insecurity live, and reframe the problem of food insecurity as a structural issue. Contributing to this area of research is important because participatory approaches, even if enacted, may fail to gain participation of community members experiencing food insecurity or to advance the struggles of marginalized communities. This dissertation reveals how institutionally-supported and community-led food security projects surface on-the-ground as sites of political-ecological negotiation and
struggle. In examining these sites, this research identifies how uneven power relations permeate even well-intended efforts to address food insecurity. Through engagement with food justice and the politics of food insecurity, this research opens up the discursive and ontological spaces in local food initiatives, in ways that legitimize and welcome diverse and marginalized knowledges and practices.

1.1 Purpose statement

The purpose of this dissertation is to examine one emerging type of local food initiative designed to address food insecurity: community donation gardening. Defined simply, community donation gardening consists of gardeners often working with local partners to distribute some or all of the produce grown at community gardens directly to community members experiencing food insecurity—or indirectly to “emergency food” organizations such as food pantries that in turn distribute the produce to community members. This dissertation derives from a three-year feminist and ethnographic study of a community-run and USDA- and Cooperative Extension-sponsored program in Iowa called Growing Together Iowa. I focus on the institutional and community gardening partners in Growing Together in an effort to better understand the dominant ontologies and discourses of food insecurity that shape community donation gardening. Framing community donation gardening as sites of political-ecological negotiation and struggle, I explore how the politics of food insecurity unfolds in everyday life in Growing Together. I also consider how the social justice praxis of marginalized communities and scholar-activists can play a role in that unfolding.

I use feminist and critical frameworks to analyze power relations, co-produce new forms of knowledge, and transform practices within the institutional and community spaces of Growing Together. Through this analysis, I employ feminist geography and queer autoethnography to consider how politically mobilized experiences of discomfort and vulnerability can inform the journey toward building food justice alliances (Chapter 2); feminist political ecology to explore the food, land, and housing issues that emerge alongside community gardening in the context of uneven racial relations and urban neighborhood revitalization (Chapter 3); and feminist theory to redefine the concept
of community relationally, departing from the individualist, neoliberal, and racialized logics that undergird local food initiatives (Chapter 4).

1.2 Context of study

Leading up to my dissertation research, the SNAP-Education (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program-Education) program at Iowa State University (ISU) Extension and Outreach (henceforth, Cooperative Extension or Extension) received funding from the eponymous USDA SNAP-Education program to develop and set into motion a creative local food initiative to address the lack of fresh fruits and vegetables at food pantries in Iowa. ISU SNAP-Education invites, funds, and trains volunteer Master Gardeners who are skilled at growing produce to work together as community donation gardeners. The statewide initiative, Growing Together Iowa, encourages Master Gardeners to develop community partnerships with emergency food distribution sites, meal services, community gardens, and other partners. In my role as a graduate research assistant, I traveled to project sites across the state, engaging in participatory activities, ethnographic observations and interviews, semi-structured interviews, and co-authorship with gardeners.

Growing Together Iowa operates as a university-community initiative of local and emergency food stakeholders working on the interconnected issues of food insecurity and access, local food production and recovery, gardening, and nutrition. Master Gardeners and community partners engage in gardening and gleaning activities to increase the amounts of fresh, locally grown fruits and vegetables available to community members experiencing food insecurity. At the local level, Growing Together partners distribute the produced food either directly or through organizations such as food pantries. ISU SNAP-Education provides educational, technical, and financial support to county Master Gardeners to carry out this work and report results annually. Depending on the structure and location of the community gardens, food recipients may take part in gardening and garden-related activities. While most of the gardening activities occur at community-led gardens, ISU research farms in the first two years of the program (2016—2017) hosted demonstration gardens and invited Master Gardeners to harvest the produce for donation.
Conceptually, ISU Extension’s SNAP-Education program designed Growing Together to address food insecurity by helping to “make healthy choices easier” through increased healthy food access (Iowa Master Gardener, 2016). Informing the project, ISU SNAP-Education consulted the Food Bank of Iowa, which identified the lack of fresh produce available at food pantries as a primary barrier to healthy eating for people experiencing food insecurity (personal correspondence with Christine Hradek, ISU Extension SNAP-Education Coordinator). Growing Together accomplishes its healthy food access objectives in tandem with direct educational programming from ISU SNAP-Education, which provides SNAP-eligible community members with nutrition education on healthy eating and active lifestyles (Iowa Master Gardener, 2016).

ISU SNAP-Education has played a wide range of roles in Growing Together—conceiving of the project, designing its objectives, applying for federal grant funding through USDA SNAP-Education, partnering with Master Gardeners and county Extension units, partnering with ISU research farms to host demonstration donation gardens, creating an application process for community gardens to receive mini-grants, administering the project, providing regular technical assistance, performing scholarly research, and conducting program evaluation, among other roles. As a graduate research assistant in Extension, I have participated in many of these activities, in conjunction with the dissertation research which informs this paper.

As a feminist scholar-activist, I seek to make theories with communities that matter to the communities with which I work (hooks, 1994; Nagar, 2014; Cadieux and Slocum, 2015). Through collaborative research processes, both in my formal and informal involvement with the community donation gardeners and partners in Growing Together, I provided a structure and an opportunity for participants to step back from the daily grind of the project to critically reflect on their processes and perspectives. Through engagement with Growing Together participants, we increased our understanding of their goals in the project and how their understandings of community and food developed and even shifted through the course of their involvement with the project.

As an advocate of food justice, I worked to communicate with participants the lens through which I analyze Growing Together and also the values that I bring to my research collaborations.
Through our work together as well as data collection and participant feedback, Growing Together’s participants provided input to shape the future directions of Growing Together, both as an ISU Extension program and more locally in their communities. Writing about this collaboration via academic publication not only provides critical analyses of food politics, but also recognizes the contributions of Growing Together participants who put their time, energy, and skill into making a difference in their communities. At the same time, my accountability to processes of social justice and to marginalized communities at times complicated the analysis of Growing Together, its partners, and my institutional and academic position within Extension. Rather than turn away from these tensions, I approached them as productive moments to engage Cadieux and Slocum’s (2015) “organizing areas” of food justice practice.

1.3 Theory

In this dissertation, I weave together critical food studies with feminist political ecology, two interdisciplinary social science fields that draw extensively from critical and feminist geographies. In this section, I include a literature review of these fields, with discussion of their relevance to my research on Growing Together.

1.3.1 Critical food studies: Toward food justice and sovereignty

Critical food studies (CFS) is an interdisciplinary field that brings together the social sciences and humanities to examine the political, economic, cultural, and historical aspects of food in society. According to Goodman (2011, ii), critical food studies concerns the “original theoretical and empirical treatments of the materialisations of food politics, meanings and representations, the shifting political economies and ecologies of food production and consumption and the growing transgressions between alternative and corporatist food networks.” A major focus of critical food studies is how alternative food networks (AFNs) have arisen in response to corporatist food networks, also referred to more generally as corporate food regimes (see Chapter 3 and McMichael,
2009). AFNs commonly promote organic and local food initiatives through the development of alternative markets and non-market activities (Hinrichs, 2000; Wilson, 2013).

Critical food scholars see potential for “food justice” and “food sovereignty” in AFNS but do not assume that AFN practices, including organic and local food initiatives, are inherently equitable (Cadieux and Slocum, 2015; Guthman, 2008). They emphasize the need to pay attention to the ways in which AFNs, even those aiming to address food insecurity, may fail to transform and may even worsen existing inequalities (Alkon, 2013; Cadieux and Slocum, 2015; DuPuis et al., 2005; Slocum, 2006). Highlighting these issues, Alkon (2013, 655) points to commonly held problematic assumptions of AFNs as inherently more “natural” than corporate food regimes:

Supporters construct local organic food as simultaneously natural and social but do not make the leap to seeing nature in processed foods or factory farms. This division allows supporters of local organic food to construct their own foodways as separate (and separable) from the corporate food regime, orienting them toward the creation of alternatives over a fuller and more critical engagement with industrial agriculture.

Recognizing the need for deeper engagement, critical food scholars examine how people’s different relations with food and food networks—or as Alkon (2013) puts it, socionatures—reveal social inequalities. Attention to the conditions faced by immigrant farm laborers, communities of color, and other marginalized participants in the food system enables critical food scholars to trace the ways in which uneven food relations and experiences are tied to historical oppressions and broader socio-natural relations (Alkon and Guthman, 2017; Guthman, 2008; Slocum, 2007). For instance, empirical studies and critical analyses reveal how alternative food networks (AFNs) depoliticize food consumption, emphasizing individual consumers making ethical eating choices by knowing where their food comes from and knowing their farmers but not their farm laborers (Alkon and McCullen, 2011; Alkon, 2013; Guthman, 2008).

Relevant to studies of food insecurity, critical food scholars question which foods are deemed “ethical choices” in the alternative food movement and by whom, and how a focus on choice elides deeper structural and ontological issues. Through presenting the historical and social contexts
of food insecurity, critical food scholars show how food choices are not choices for everyone. This debate takes the form of a critique of “good food,” a concept which emerged in AFNs. CFS scholars problematize how definitions of “good food” are fixed according to dominant cultural norms that tend to exclude the cultures of people of color and other marginalized communities (Guthman, 2008; Cadieux and Slocum, 2015). Briefly, “good food” refers to the concept of, or particular understandings of what constitutes, perfect or ethical eating (Alkon and McCullen, 2011; Bradley and Herrera, 2016; Busa and Gardner, 2015; DuPuis et al., 2005; DuPuis and Goodman, 2005; Figueroa, 2015; Guthman, 2008; Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy, 2013; Minkoff-Zern, 2014).

CFS scholars argue that far from advancing food security, promoting “good food” in practice counterproductively has focused on the poor consumption choices of already marginalized people. Specifically, they argue that public health and nutrition programs focused on “good food” have stigmatized and pathologized people experiencing food insecurity, particularly in communities of color (Cadieux and Slocum, 2015). Such programs in practice have fixated on issues of cultural difference and unaffordability as reasons why people make wrong choices and have relied upon “universal” definitions of taste, all the while ignoring the relationalities that produce food preferences and “choices” in the first place (Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy, 2013). These issues have driven critical food scholars like Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy (2013) to develop an approach to alternative food and nutritional outreach programs. They offer the Political Ecology of the Body (PEB) methodology to guide activists, teachers, program administrators, and scholars to refocus attention on what they term “bodily motivation” to eat food and the ways motivation “arises out of specific bodily histories and prior and current affective/emotional relations with alternative foods” (ibid, 88; See also Chapter 3 of this dissertation).

Broadly, CFS problematizes how AFN practices can propagate culturally privileged norms, values, and institutions embedded in histories of uneven socio-natural relations (DuPuis and Goodman, 2005; Alkon, 2013; Guthman, 2008). They utilize intersectional perspectives to examine how certain community and alternative food spaces, such as farmers markets, often exclude and erase marginalized members of a community based on race and class (Alkon and McCullen, 2011;
Replicizing food, scholars like Guthman (2008, 435) show how “correct” food choices coincide with histories of capitalist development and the devalued labor of people of color. Critical food scholarship also goes beyond an analysis of existing social inequities. This body of work reframes the “ethical” dimensions of alternative food systems by examining capacities, particularly the efforts led by communities of color and marginalized groups, to challenge uneven socio-natural relations through enacting practices of food justice and food sovereignty (Alkon and Guthman, 2017; Cadieux and Slocum, 2015; Figueroa, 2015; Sbicca, 2014) and fostering relations of care (Jarosz, 2011; Carolan, 2016).

1.3.2 Feminist political ecology: Toward a praxis of nature-society relations

In this dissertation, I integrate the research needs identified in critical food scholarship with theoretical and methodological insights advanced in political ecology (PE). Scholars in the field understand PE as an important analytic tool for enhancing critical food scholarship, emphasizing three conceptual tenets: “critique through a historical and multi-scalar analysis of power and inequality,” “conceptualizing society and nature relations as dialectical” and “problematizing the production of knowledge and creating new spaces of possibility” (Moragues-Faus and Marsden, 2017, 277–79). My research employs these analytic tools, with attention to their development in the subfield of new feminist political ecology (Elmhirst, 2011). Relevant to critical food research on AFNs, Harris (2015, 162) describes feminist political ecology (FPE) as a “critical intellectual-political site to think through ‘alternatives’” to neoliberalism.

Building on analyses of power relations, FPE suggests patching together a critical approach to knowledge and practice through praxis. The field of political ecology emphasizes uneven resource access and control, analyzed through “the social, political, and economic context that shapes environmental policies and practices” (Rocheleau et al., 1996, 3–4). The first generation of FPE emerged during the 1990s as a response to absence of gender as a variable of analyses in political ecology, noting how the field negated the importance of that social identity and how it factored into resource access (Rocheleau et al., 1996, 3–4). FPE emphasizes relationships between “bodies, ev-
everyday practices, and global processes” in addition to the production of social difference (Vaz-Jones, 2018, 714). Through a synthesis of feminist perspectives on the environment—namely ecofeminist, feminist environmentalist, socialist feminist, feminist poststructuralist, and environmentalist—FPE challenges norms in academic and political discourses (Rocheleau et al., 1996, 4–9).

Departing from expert-driven environmental analyses and approaches, new FPE stresses participation by communities in envisioning their future well-being; produces anti-essentialist understandings of sex, gender, race, species and other social categories; and encourages “thinking with” Black, indigenous, intersectional, postcolonial, posthuman, and queer feminisms to advance decolonization and social justice efforts (Harcourt and Nelson, 2015; Harcourt et al., 2015; Lloro-Bidart, 2017; Mollett and Faria, 2013; Mollett, 2017; Nightingale, 2011; Nirmal, 2016a,b). As Hanson and Buechler (2015, 6) describe it, FPE necessitates “privileging the knowledge of those most affected or marginalized by neoliberal, colonial, and patriarchal systems.”

New FPE also explores emotional and affective geographies as a path to highlight “artistic and emotional responses to various ‘crises’ of environmental governance (Harris, 2015, 164). Sultana’s (2011, 164) FPE research on water resource access, control, and conflict draws upon redefinitions of “emotion” in emotional geographies, in which “emotions are relational and fluid, not in individualized human subjectivities but rather relationally produced between peoples and places (Davidson and Bondi, 2004; Davidson et al., 2005; Smith et al., 2009).” Sultana argues that emotions matter to FPE, enhancing the way we understand nature-society relationships and resource struggles in their specific contexts. Similarly, Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy (2013) engage emotion and affect in their research on school garden and cooking programs. Their Political Ecology of the Body (PEB) methodology weaves political ecology’s attention to structural forces as explanatory of social inequities and “second-generation” FPEs poststructural lens on discourse and meaning-making together with an exploration of emotion and affect that can reveal the “haphazard, ontological forces of daily material interaction” (86).

Feminist political ecologists call for praxis at the intersection of nature-society relations, or naturecultures (Haraway, 2016), and their approaches are particularly suited to the study of AFNs,
including local food initiatives like community donation gardening. The present-day food system, including the presence of food insecurity, is undoubtedly situated by histories of colonial economy, land management, development, and knowledge production that has oppressed marginalized others. It is also situated by more recent modes of oppression brought about through globalization and neoliberal governance. Feminist political ecologists call for scholars to explore opportunities for developing new subjectivities and practices through critical and collaborative reflection. I root my understanding of developing new subjectivities through praxis from feminist political ecologists Harcourt and Nelson (2015, 7), who state that:

Acknowledging and then addressing the effects of privilege is important in order to be open to (and subjected to) the challenge about our viewpoints and to work out ways to build connections and shared visions across differences and in the process to question of positioning of privilege. This move, begun by decolonial and post-colonial scholars (such as Lugones 2008 and Mohanty 2003), opens up possibilities for becoming something and someone different - rooted in place and history - and connected to envisioning alternative futures with and among broader communities.

As a community-engaged researcher, I explore opportunities to perform feminist praxis as a mode of critical food scholarship. Thus, I seek not only to understand the uneven power relations in Iowa’s food systems, but also, in my collaboration with participants, to find different modes of connecting to food and community beyond the rhetoric of personal responsibility and poor food choices attributed to food insecurity. Through this dissertation, I recast food security as “mutual interdependence” (Butler, 2005, 2012; Gibson-Graham, 2011; McKittrick, 2011), based on a responsibility to care and nourish self, other humans, and diverse world-beings (see Chapter 4). This feminist praxis aims toward potentials to bridge the structural, epistemological, and ontological divides that separate food security from food insecurity in Iowa’s communities (see Chapter 3), while recognizing that failures and missed opportunities occur along this journey (see Chapter 2).
1.3.2.1 Alternative food economies

In addition to attending to the above areas of research called for by critical food scholars and feminist political ecologists, my research contributes to feminist and critical scholarship through its relational approach, its attention to alternative economies, and its complex theorizing of subjectivities and identity. Critical food literature commonly focuses on food production and consumption, but would benefit from activist scholarship that seeks to foster the types of connections, relationships, and networks that can attend more broadly to people’s complex and dynamic experiences of everyday life. Further, while critiques of market activities and wage labor have contributed valuable insights to critical food literature, feminist economic geographers Gibson-Graham (2008) have suggested in their alternative economies framework that critical and feminist scholars also chart the contributions of non-market and unpaid labor.

My research explores the possibilities and limits of building AFNs as an alternative food economy through the caring and volunteer labor, food sharing, and community organizing that occurs in and around Growing Together. It further sheds light on the benefits and drawbacks of developing alternative economies through institutional partnerships (including Extension, Master Gardener, and food pantries) that are embedded within the corporate food regime and reformist organizations (Holt-Giménez and Wang, 2011). Finally, while the CFS literature on food justice commonly cites racial and economic oppression, new FPE contributes a more complex lens through which to examine relationally situated identities as diverse, multiple, and fluid. Through these feminist perspectives, I contribute an understanding of food justice that considers not only race, ethnicity, and economic status, but also gender, class, age, ability, species, and other social marginalizations, and that further posits these intersectional identities as performative and relationally constructed.

1.4 Methodology

In this dissertation, I utilize feminist, ethnographic, and community-engaged methodologies. I am grounded methodologically through my commitment to doing research outside of the traditionally prescribed norms of the patriarchal Western academy, in ways that recognize the non-neutrality
of knowledge production and that respect the intersectionality of backgrounds, experiences, and locations that people bring to the research process (Alexander and Mohanty, 2010; Doucet and Mauthner, 2007; Fonow and Cook, 1991, 2005; Haraway, 1988; Narayan, 2004). In this section, I discuss how attending to the politics of voice (Fine et al., 2004; Smith, 1999) is central to my undertaking of feminist, ethnographic, and community-engaged methodologies in this dissertation.

1.4.1 Feminist methodologies

Feminist methodologies in the Western academy arose as a challenge to masculine authority and bias, and to wrestle with and challenge other forms of marginalization that occur through the process of academic research (Doucet and Mauthner, 2007; Fonow and Cook, 2005; Haraway, 1988; Leckenby, 2007). Concerning the politics of voice, questions of who is doing the research, how knowledge is being generated, who benefits from the knowledge and how, who is seen as knowledgeable (and who is not), which knowledges count, who is seen as supplying “raw data” versus sophisticated “knowledges” are important for the feminist researcher to consider (Alexander and Mohanty, 2010; Fonow and Cook, 2005; Nagar, 2014). Accordingly, feminist methodologies, especially in the post-modern or poststructural traditions, attend to the ways that doing research, and the subsequent generation of knowledge, are enmeshed within relations of power (Alexander and Mohanty, 2010; Leavy, 2007; Rose, 1997).

Feminist researchers work to reconfigure power, while also acknowledging that their scholarship can also reinforce and normalize binaries and hierarchies (Alexander and Mohanty, 2010; Doucet and Mauthner, 2007). Recognizing how all these factors play into non-innocent knowledge production and what that implies for feminist research, Haraway (1988, 579) redefines objectivity in feminist terms, encouraging feminist researchers to have “a no-nonsense commitment to faithful accounts of a ‘real’ world” without making claims to a transcendent notion of objectivity. Haraway’s epistemology blends standpoint and poststructural epistemologies, characterizing standpoints as “unequal, partial, and contingent” (O’Shaughnessy and Krogman, 2012, 501). Donna Haraway’s more recent work emphasizes a more-than-human ontology. Haraway, along with more-than-human
feminists like J. K. Gibson-Graham, defines a researcher’s role beyond tracing how power enables and constraints knowledge; their more future-oriented goals of becoming-with inspire feminist researchers to take on roles in community-based projects that imagined and practiced being differently in the world relationally with others (Haraway, 2016; Gibson-Graham, 2011).

Across these strands of feminist methodologies, feminist research’s political objectives place the researcher in a role aimed at transforming the lives of people (and, borrowing a term from Haraway, other worldings) who have been oppressed and marginalized in society, and absent in processes of knowledge generation and decision making. Recognizing the difficulties and struggles inherent in such a research process, feminist methodologies place the researcher in the role of navigating the sticky issues that come up in the process. While academic research products, such as journal articles and books, may often appear to audiences as clean and coherent accounts, feminist methodologists bring the messiness of the process to light, though acknowledging that it can only be brought partially into light (Rose, 1997; Nagar, 2014). Researchers can walk audiences through the complexities, struggles, and contradictions of the different, situated, multiple, fluid, and relational positionalities held by various participants in the research project, from the university researcher to communities, publishers, academic institutions, and non-academic institutions.

1.4.2 Ethnographic methodologies

If we have learned anything about anthropology’s encounter with colonialism, the question is not really whether anthropologists can represent people better, but whether we can be accountable to people’s own struggles for representation and self-determination.

Visweswaran (1994, 32)

In ethnography, authority in the twentieth century prior to post-modern and indigenous influences denoted a binary, hierarchical, and effaced relationship between the researcher and the researched-as-object, whereby the Western researcher claimed qualification and expertise through intensive ethnographic fieldwork and subsequent interpretation to authentically represent truths and realities about Other cultures (Clifford and Marcus, 1986; Clifford, 1988; Smith, 1999; Katz, 1992).
Historian of ethnography, Clifford (1988) and feminist indigenous studies scholar Smith (1999) write on the problematic of authority in two interrelated ways. First, as an epistemological problematic, ethnographic authority’s claim to truths specifically and to objective Truth more generally positions indigenous and marginalized peoples as objects about which the ethnographer can know and represent the truth.

Post-modern/poststructural, indigenous, and feminist scholars, including Smith (1999), dispute the Western academic claim to research as objective and value-free, or as capable of revealing an innocent truth. Along these non-innocent lines, authority is also relationally problematic via material-discursive productions and limitations on knowledges and subjectivities in the world, with critical attention to the conditions that have enabled Western ethnographers to dictate those terms and bounds in the first place. The deployment of ethnographic authority as a form of power brings attention “not to the interpretation of cultural ”texts” but to the relations of their production” (Clifford and Marcus, 1986, 13). Smith (1999, 60) describes authority as the means “to ‘see’, to ‘name’, and to ‘know’ indigenous communities” through non-indigenous representations to non-indigenous audiences. In a second sense of the word, Smith speaks of the discursive, subjectivizing functions of authority, “the reach of imperialism into ‘our’ heads” (23).

In response, post-modern ethnographers and indigenous and feminist scholars, among others call for new practices to contest and reconfigure the expert authority model in ethnography that maintained the status quo. Importantly, Jones and Jenkins (2008, 478) cite voice as the means for moving out of the margins, though still recognizing the impacts of power on that voice too. Ethnographers encourage relinquishing authority to represent the voices of those that the researcher deems unable to speak (Clifford and Marcus, 1986, 9–10). Finding voice after being rendered voiceless involves “reclaiming, reconnecting and reordering those ways of knowing which were submerged, hidden, or driven underground” (Smith, 1999, 69).

Taken together, these scholars prompt me to rethink authority as contingent upon openings in the discursive space for diverse marginalized voices, epistemologies, and ontologies. Authority, redefined, depends on a praxis that leads marginalized knowledges being authorized within the
discursive space. Put another way, Jones and Jenkins (2008, 481) insist that academic dialogue and collaboration must be about making actual transformations to political power. Authority redefined as such involves disclosing my agenda and values, and then working to see if a possibility arises for a shared agenda to collaborate (Nagar, 2014). This type of collaboration requires “negotiated relations of whose story is being told” (Jones and Jenkins 2008, 475; see also Fine 1994; Stage and Mattson 2003). In navigating these commitments, I have engaged autoethnography as a way to explore the complexities of collaboration and the intersubjective relations that develop between scholars and communities (Tomaselli et al., 2008). Situating autoethnography as feminist praxis, my research explores the transformative possibilities of “evocation and emotion as an incitement to action” (Tomaselli et al. 2008, 365–66; see also Holman Jones 2005).

1.4.3 Community-engaged methodologies

Feminist scholars emphasize a responsibility to do research that is accountable to marginalized communities and that results in the production of knowledges that matter not just in academic circles, but also to the lives of community members (Cahill, 2007; Campbell and Fonow, 2009; Harcourt and Nelson, 2015; Nagar, 2014). Carrying out this mission means taking on roles in community-based projects that imagine and practice being differently in the world relationally with others (Carolan, 2016; Gibson-Graham, 2011; Haraway, 2016). Through this philosophical approach to knowledge production, I aim not for generalizable knowledge production, but for transferable local knowledge that is “location specific but not location bound” (Alexander and Mohanty, 2010, 24, 27).

In addition to these issues, community-engaged and participatory action scholars emphasize the necessity of knowledge co-production with marginalized communities. This form of collaboration requires attention to non-academic audiences, as well as the need to critique institutional practices that do not give credit for non-academic products (Benson and Nagar, 2006). Rather than assuming that knowledge co-production emerges through common commitments and values, these methodologies encourage alliances that work across and through differences. As Benson and Nagar (2006,
stress: “the meaning forged through dialogue is not necessarily arrived at through agreement and shared perspectives but can evolve from constructive disagreements.” Moreover, participation and co-authorship do more than reveal marginalized voices; they create “new forms of knowledge and ways of knowing” (Cahill, 2007, 270).

The relationships that I built with gardeners and community partners through the Growing Together project incorporated critical reflexivity and dialogue as methodological modes of imagining and enacting more just and caring relations, and as the basis for collective activism. Departing from traditional notions of the objective researcher and refraining from claims to a transcendent objectivity (Haraway, 1988; Smith, 1999), I committed to radically vulnerable praxis as a journey of forming political alliances with the potential to disrupt injustices (Nagar, 2014). Forming these alliances requires scholars to make themselves radically vulnerable through sharing reflections, memories, and life experiences with participants (Nagar, 2014, 23). Throughout this process, I explored ways of blurring together mind and body, thinking and feeling, while also focusing on the everyday life experiences of self and others (hooks, 1994, 70).

Importantly, the theoretical and knowledge production activities of feminist, community-engaged research should not solely benefit academic audiences (Benson and Nagar, 2006). Feminist scholarship commits itself to reciprocity and actionable knowledge production that is useful and beneficial to both university and community partners. I engaged in reciprocity through developing and co-developing forms of knowledge to advance the social justice efforts of marginalized communities. In this work, we sought to co-develop new forms of knowledge, develop greater accountability in Extension, and share this work with broader audiences in ways that can lead to transformative action. I also contributed to the daily activities of collaborators by assisting alongside gardeners and food pantry workers growing and distributing food; working with them to better understand their needs, goals, and challenges; communicating partners’ experiences, successes, challenges, and goals to Extension; developing a toolkit and making presentations that assist community efforts; and locating and sharing resources that partners have identified as important to their goals.
1.4.3.1 Research participants and limitations

My field-based research involves primarily community donation gardeners and, secondarily, the institutional spaces and partners that constitute Growing Together Iowa, including Cooperative Extension, the gardens, and partner sites like food pantries. In the three body chapters of this dissertation, I present data from ethnographic observations and interviews at Growing Together sites, as well as transcribed semi-structured one-on-one interviews with gardeners from two counties in Iowa. All research procedures and activities were approved by the Iowa State University Institutional Review Board (IRBID #16-243).

Chapter 3 of this dissertation engages two community gardeners from Dubuque County Iowa, Laura Klavitter and Lynn Sutton, as co-authors working together in praxis. In contrast, while Chapter 2 and 4 use quotes and observations of other Growing Together participants, I wrote the chapters as sole author. I did not discuss co-authorship with or invite the participants presented in those chapters to co-author. Additionally, as a feminist committed to community engagement and accountability, I acknowledge a second significant limitation to this research—that I did not formally engage the people who receive food from the donation gardens in data collection and co-authorship for my dissertation. Though engaging and co-authoring with marginalized community members is a core goal of my research agenda, in this dissertation I was unable within the scope and time frame to build the types of trusting, long-term, supportive, and secure relationships that I would want to have with the recipients of food produced through the project (See Chapter 3 for my co-author, Laura Klavitter’s, discussion of the slow process of building connections between outside institutions and marginalized residents in the Washington and North End neighborhoods of Dubuque). Accordingly, this limitation reflects the institutional structures of Growing Together, my social location of privilege, and the difficulties of connecting with food recipients compared to the easy access I have to the gardeners and institutional affiliates who are Growing Together’s primary partners. Nevertheless, I hold myself accountable in this dissertation to generate new forms of knowledge that benefit people experiencing food insecurity and marginalization.


1.5 Funding

From January 2016 - December 2018, I held graduate research assistantships with ISU Extension and Outreach (ISUEO) Local Foods Program and SNAP-Education Program. Funding for this dissertation research was provided by ISUEO—including ISUEO funding from USDA—and the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture. Growing Together Iowa is administered through ISUEO SNAP-Education with funds that originate from USDA Food and Nutrition Service’s SNAP-Education program. These funds pass through the Iowa Department of Human Services and are subcontracted to ISUEO, in accordance with the Food Assistance Nutrition Education State Plan. Some overlap exists between data collection for Growing Together Iowa and this dissertation project. However, not all data collected for Growing Together Iowa is included in this dissertation. Moreover, my analysis of the data for this dissertation exceeds the scope of the Food Assistance Nutrition Education State Plan.

1.6 Dissertation organization

This dissertation includes five chapters: the introduction (Chapter 1), three body articles (Chapters 2-4), and the conclusion (Chapter 5). The introduction and conclusion present discussion of the overall dissertation project and situate the three articles within the literature. The body articles, while interrelated and sharing similar concerns, permit me to approach the data through separate research questions and analyses. Broadly across this dissertation, my research addresses the question: how do we understand the everyday practices of community food? Sub-questions include: How are these practices emotionally, physically, and relationally embodied? How do they affect, produce, and reproduce food security and insecurity? How can feminist praxis constitute new understandings of community food?

In the first paper, Chapter 2, I focus on the question of radical vulnerability (Nagar, 2014) and how scholar-activists can build alliances to transform agrifood systems, land-grant universities, and Cooperative Extension. Contributing to critical food scholarship and feminist geography, I ask: how do multiple, intersecting oppressions shape inequities in local food initiatives? While examining how
cultural norms limit the transformative potential of Growing Together as a local food initiative, my work situates the performances of multiple bodies under attack as sites of natural-cultural struggle, negotiation, and possibility. This paper examines the (de)territorialization of Latinx bodies through transnational migration and precarious repositioning as laborers in poultry plants and livestock facilities, as well as the politics of survival of mothers navigating social expectations of behavior in their community. Bridging the geopolitical context of fieldwork with my reflexive position in the field, this work advances queer autoethnography as a methodology to disrupt the stable positioning of myself as an academic author and political ally of marginalized communities. Contributions include a methodological and conceptual extension of vulnerability through three interrelated forms of queer praxis: opening, destabilizing, and angling. Through these practices, I am continually working to better position scholars, academic institutions, and marginalized communities together in pursuit of political alliance.

In the second paper, Chapter 3, my co-authors and I contribute to critical food studies and feminist political ecology of the body, asking: how are community activists pursuing politically tenable transformations in neighborhood access to food, land, and housing? Departing from expert-driven environmental analyses and approaches, feminist political ecology stresses participation by communities in envisioning their future well-being. Demonstrating this approach, I have partnered in co-authorship with community gardeners and activists to showcase how the seemingly mundane, often ignored everyday knowledges and practices within communities of color in Dubuque, Iowa engage a transformative place-based politics in resistance to social marginalization, precarity, and food insecurity. We use Political Ecology of the Body (PEB) (Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy, 2013) as a methodology to consider how people’s bodily, emotional, and social lives in the Washington and North End neighborhoods of Dubuque, Iowa impact their relationalities with food, gardening, and neighborhood spaces. In this work, we contribute to knowledge on the relationship between food, land, and housing justice, the politics of marginalized voice in the city, and the generative potential of everyday embodied experience in neighborhood gardens and growing spaces.
In the third paper, Chapter 4, I contribute to critical food studies and community food scholarship by asking: how does Growing Together, as a federal government and state university-sponsored community food program, work to sustain people and local food environments? Researchers play an important ontological role in shifting away from academic conceptions of communities as ‘deficient’ and ‘in need’ communities—conceptions that drive top-down, technocratic and anthropocentric food systems interventions. In this paper, I trace how Growing Together relates to and reinforces an ontology of community as “more responsible” supply chains of local food producers and consumers, while ignoring social inequities. By exploring the social relationality among human communities and local food environments, I also demonstrate how everyday community food practices exceed and contradict neoliberal productions of community as “more responsible” supply chains. My work contributes to a reimagining of what “more responsible” might mean outside of neoliberal relations by employing feminist theory to address issues of power, relationship, and identity in the community food spaces of Growing Together. In this research, I develop a feminist redefinition of community based on tenets of dynamic relationality (Pratt, 2012) and mutually interdependent relationality (Butler, 2005, 2012; McKittrick, 2011). I encourage institutions like Extension to redirect their efforts to working with and for communities in building relations of connectivity, kinship, and survival in the face of mortal urgency (McKittrick, 2011).

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CHAPTER 2. THE PATH TO RADICAL VULNERABILITY: FEMINIST PRAXIS AND COMMUNITY FOOD COLLABORATIONS

A paper submitted for publication as peer-reviewed chapter in Feminist Geography Unbound

Carrie Chennault

2.1 Abstract

In this chapter, I engage queer autoethnography to focus attention on the question of radical vulnerability and how scholar-activists can build alliances to transform agrifood systems, land-grant universities, and Cooperative Extension. This paper turns to my work as a researcher within a community-run and USDA- and Cooperative Extension-sponsored donation gardening program, Growing Together Iowa. In this chapter, I recount an uncomfortable fieldwork encounter with two Growing Together community gardeners that reveals the geopolitical dynamics of food insecurity at play in their community—and how the experience of uneven power differences flowing in multiple directions complicated speaking up when I encountered racism in the institutional spaces of the project. Examining the geopolitical context of the encounter, I trace the (de)territorialization of Latinx bodies through transnational migration and precarious repositioning as laborers in Iowa poultry plants, and the politics of food security and survival faced by mothers navigating social expectations in their community. Bridging the geopolitical context of fieldwork with my reflexive position in the field, this work advances queer autoethnography as a methodology to disrupt the stable positioning of myself as an academic author and political ally of marginalized communities. Disappointed in my complicity in the production of whiteness as the norm, I turn to scholarship on queerness and vulnerability to extend the concept of radical vulnerability in moments of failed, missed, and impossible alliance. I reflect on how I reacted to the discomfort of encountering racism with silence and complicity, and how I have since responded through multiple retellings. Through
opening, destabilizing, and angling, each section of this chapter’s analysis reveals types and sources of discomfort. In differentiating and disentangling them, I shed light on the political potentials of engaging discomfort and reveal opportunities for Extension to take steps toward allied partnership with marginalized communities.

2.2 Prologue

On a summer day in 2016, I met with a small group of gardeners participating in a statewide university-community collaboration: Growing Together Iowa. The partnership works to address the lack of fresh produce available in places like food pantries. That morning we sat around a picnic table overlooking the garden while talking about plans for harvest and distribution. Amid conversations, they wove in questions, stories, and discussions about their rural community and food. Suddenly, two gardeners started conversing heatedly and at length about where to donate the food and whether Latinx community members\(^1\) were food insecure. One gardener wanted to distribute at places like the laundromat, where the gardener’s adult daughter drops off clothes for donation to Latinx children. The laundromat might make a good site for food distribution, the gardener reasoned, reporting that the community lacked a designated food pantry. I understood the gardener to believe that if people cannot afford a washing machine, then they probably cannot afford to buy food either.\(^2\) The other gardener refuted the need to distribute food at the laundromat and insisted that not all Latinx community members were food insecure—those who worked at the poultry plant\(^3\) made “good money.” The gardener explained that Latinx people who rent homes

\(^1\)I wrestle with the discomfort of describing community members referenced in this story without reinforcing colonizing knowledge systems. After much contemplation, I have decided to use the term Latinx—a product of the queer, decolonial, and anti-racist mobilizations of Latinx activists (Pelaez Lopez, 2018)—and have replaced references to “the Hispanics” in this retelling. For reasons which I will later expand upon, throughout the chapter I replace instances when the gardeners used the phrases “Hispanic” or “the Hispanics” with “Latinx” or “Latinx community member(s).” My research did not include Latinx participants in the community. The decision to retell the story of this encounter without having them as partners in Growing Together, or as co-authors of this chapter, enacts a colonizing form of authorship: non-participants yet again are passively identified, in this case as Latinx.

\(^2\)In reviewing the manuscript, this gardener did not remember the conversation about the laundromat but agreed that it would make a good site for distribution. Reflecting on being raised in a middle-class family without a washing machine, the gardener also said that using a laundromat would not mean someone is food insecure.

\(^3\)Upon review, the gardener clarified that mention of the “poultry plant” more broadly referred to the egg and hog operations in the community.
without washing machines must use the laundromat, despite having jobs and income. Their broader assumptions connecting the laundromat, food insecurity, and the plant were not further elaborated upon and remained unclear to me, an outsider visiting the community for the first time.

At that moment, the first gardener, growing visibly agitated, looked at me and said, pointing a finger in my face directly, “here’s something for your research.” The gardener described a child in town who, as the story went, told the gardener’s daughter, “I don’t have food because my mom went and got a tattoo last night.” While retelling the daughter’s account, the gardener acted increasingly upset and could not get over why the mother would neglect feeding the child. The gardener subsequently characterized the mother as someone who spent limited resources on selfish indulgences. The mother and child were not the only people experiencing food insecurity, according to the gardeners. Children in the community, the other gardener noted, were “unchurched and unfed,” and I recalled how earlier the first gardener mentioned that no one at their church was food insecure. The first gardener spoke of “a lot of white families that are druggies” and how those children did not receive enough food either. The two gardeners soon focused on how to feed the children in their community.

### 2.3 Introduction

Growing Together Iowa is part of the SNAP-Education program in Cooperative Extension. The project’s name refers to producing, gleaning, and distributing communally grown fruits and vegetables to address food insecurity. Growing Together supports these activities at university research farms and through grants to county extension offices in coordination with Master Garden-

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4The story I present is constructed from fieldnotes and my interpretation of the encounter. I originally wrote my account describing the family as Latinx, based on my understanding of the remarks about the child and mother, which occurred in the midst of the gardeners’ discussing Latinx food insecurity. Later, I include discussion of this point and the gardeners’ other feedback.

5Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP)-Education state-level programs receive support from the eponymous USDA program to provide education and resources on nutrition and physical activity for recipients of SNAP (formerly food stamp) benefits.

ers and other partners—including food pantries, food banks, free meal programs, congregate meal sites, schools, organizations serving immigrants and refugees, farmers, gardeners, 4-H, and youth programs.

As a researcher in Cooperative Extension, I located my work within emerging efforts to make equity a core food systems principle and racial equity a top priority (Mosley et al., 2015; Pirog et al., 2016; Undoing Inequality in the Food System Working Group, 2018). This collective journey toward equity is challenging because the colonizing history of Extension has shaped and continues to shape the racialized relations of food and agriculture (Collins and Mueller, 2016; Firkus, 2010a,b; Grim, 2015; Harris, 2008; Pirog et al., 2016). For instance, when I joined Growing Together, I expected limited opportunities for alliance because the project neither made racial justice and equity foundational to its structure, nor included them as goals. In my role, I searched for those limited opportunities to foster ties among allied participants and extend Growing Together’s impact beyond donated produce.

Alliance work can begin from an understanding of the everyday as political, from something as seemingly politically insignificant as community gardening. Working within and in tension with Cooperative Extension, I aspired to co-create alliances that Nagar 2014 and Nagar et al. 2016 term radically vulnerable Radical vulnerability is “an intellectual and political alliance where there are no sovereign selves or autonomous subjects” (Nagar et al., 2016, 511), and requires “trust and critical reflexivity” (513). These alliances are collectively reflexive and work across university-community boundaries to decentralize knowledge production.

The journey of radical vulnerability includes budding opportunities for activist collaborations, but also failed and missed ones (Nagar, 2014). Despite mentions of this journey, Nagar constructs radical vulnerability as co-authorship, raising questions of how to do praxis and write in instances of failed, missed, and even impossible alliance. The encounter in the prologue proved to be one of those moments in my continuing journey. My encounter spurred critical engagement with discomforting

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7In 1972, Washington State University Extension created an unpaid volunteer model of Master Gardeners to handle increasing public requests for gardening advice, education, and training, a program which now extends across the U.S. (Takle, 2015; Rohs and Westerfield, 1996).
fieldwork as a decolonizing mode of feminist geographic inquiry. Physically, I was uncomfortable with the palpable sense of tension and fear I felt during the encounter. Reflexively, I was concerned with the ways in which a focus on moral character can erase the racial foundation and structural unevenness of food insecurity. The silence emanated from my discomfort and concern but also, I recognized, from my complicity in whiteness.

The future encounters with the gardeners that could have deepened understanding were limited due to the logistics of a statewide project, the gardeners’ schedules, my embodied discomfort, and an uncertainty about how to bridge divides. Nor did I meet members of the gardeners’ community who were experiencing food insecurity. From the beginning, they were positioned in Growing Together not as active partners in co-creating solutions to food insecurity, but as recipients of food and of nutrition education. Even if unintentionally, this intervention model arguably casts food recipients as being in need and deficient, not only in terms of food, but also in the knowledge, skills, and capacity to be active partners.

Situating co-authorship as a journey, in this chapter I extend radical vulnerability to include the praxis that can develop while in search of alliance. To set the stage for this journey, the following two sections provide the social contexts of agriculture and food security in Iowa. I follow Nagar’s (2014, 85) approach to reflexivity—emphasizing context and relational engagement over static notions of a researcher’s identity. The next section introduces radically vulnerable praxis as a mode of political alliance with the potential to disrupt injustices and turns to scholarship on queerness and vulnerability to extend the concept of radical vulnerability in moments of failed, missed, and impossible alliance. Returning to the garden encounter, I then reflect on how I reacted to the discomfort of encountering racism with silence and complicity, and how I have since responded through multiple retellings. The retellings ground me in the “lengthy duration” and “stickiness” of confronting racism and other marginalizations (Ahmed, 2004, secs. 49, 57, emphasis original), even as my performative politics is future-oriented. Through opening, destabilizing, and angling,

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8Within Growing Together, Master Gardeners, as primary partners, have autonomy to form partnerships with community organizations and members. Some gardening projects I visited did include people experiencing food insecurity as active partners; yet Extension did not directly reach out to them as partners.
each section of analysis reveals types and sources of discomfort. In differentiating and disentangling them, I shed light on the political potentials of engaging discomfort.

Finally, this chapter considers how to build alliances that can transform agrifood systems, land-grant universities, and Cooperative Extension. Challenging the racialized relations within which projects like Growing Together are embedded remains an ongoing effort. In closing I discuss what steps Extension can take toward allied partnership and accountability.

### 2.4 The geopolitics of Iowa agriculture

Growing Together is situated within the historical, economic, cultural, political, and ecological contexts of food and agriculture. In Iowa, as elsewhere, commodity agriculture began with the expulsion of Indigenous peoples and has continued through decades of land-grant research and technocratic agricultural modernization that have led to cheap food, destructed ecosystems, and inequitable social relations (Carter et al., 2018). Agronomic research from U.S. land-grant institutions to modernize global agriculture through the Green Revolution and biotechnology have sowed the foundations upon which more violence, colonization, and inequity have occurred (Patel, 2013; Shiva, 2016). These marginalizations stand in stark contrast to the ubiquitous patriarchal discourse in Iowa of the productive, independent farmer who feeds the world.

Undergirding modern Iowa agriculture are complex geopolitical relations developed through neoliberal economic and trade policies. I use the term *geopolitical* to identify food insecurity as a process of “state-subject-territory” (Smith, 2012, 1515) formation through which bodies in their everyday lives are linked with national and international agrifood policies and politics. Relevant to this chapter, the bodies of Latinx populations have become territories through a geopolitical relationship in which U.S. dominated policies, such as the flooding of Mexican markets with cheap U.S. corn, have pushed people off land in their country and into the United States as migrant labor.

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9 Indigenous peoples living and farming in present-day Iowa and the Upper Midwest during the eras of French, British, and U.S. settlement include, but are not limited to, the Sisseton-Wahpeton Oyate (Dakota), Sauk and Meskwaki, Winnebago (Ho-Chunk), Iowa, Oto, Medewakanton, Omaha, and Wahpekuta (Colbert, 2008; Eagle-Woman, 2005; National Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act Program, nd). The National Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act Program (nd) has compiled an extensive database of Indigenous land cessions through treaties between 1784-1896, including for Iowa.
Latinx immigrants in the United States experience high rates of food insecurity; they simultaneously often face unstable employment and dangerous labor conditions coupled with insufficient wages, health care, housing, and social supports, and for non-citizen immigrants, lack of access to government safety net programs (Greder et al., 2009, 2012; Sano et al., 2011). Thus, the (de)territorialization of Latinx bodies occurs through transnational migration and precarious repositioning as laborers—including in poultry plants and livestock facilities but also, as this chapter presents, as mothers navigating the intertwined politics of morality and survival at play in their new communities.

The rise of Latinx agro-industrial labor in the Midwest dates back to the early 20th century, and in more recent decades occurred as meat processing relocated to lower-wage rural communities in response to heightened global competition and consolidation since the 1970s (Gouveia and Saenz, 2000; Saenz, 2011; Stanley, 1994). The 1980s farm crisis devastated Midwestern rural “family farm” economies, and communities were eager to see agribusinesses arrive (Cantù, 1995; Stanley, 1994). Consequently, Iowa actively incentivized agro-industry development, resulting in the recruitment of immigrant and minority, including Latinx, laborers, to fill worker shortages (Cantù, 1995). By 2017, agro-industry growth in Iowa supported, among others, an annual production of 16 billion eggs and 22.8 million hogs (Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship, 2018). In this era, Iowa’s Latinx population\(^{10}\) rose from 32,647 in 1990 to an estimated 178,249—5.7% of the population—in 2017 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017; State Data Center of Iowa, nda.). The Latinx population in the rural town in this chapter grew from under 2% of the population in 1990 to over 20% in 2017 estimates (State Data Center of Iowa, ndb; U.S. Census Bureau, 2017).

The effects of U.S. agricultural policies are not unique to Iowa. As elsewhere, they resulted in consolidated farms and agro-industries, and transnational migration of agricultural laborers dispossessed of land and livelihood. Yet, the scale of Iowa agriculture is practically unthinkable elsewhere. Almost two-thirds of the land is covered with two crops: corn and soybean (Iowa State University Extension and Outreach, 2017). From these geopolitical relations arises the contradiction

\(^{10}\)U.S. Census Bureau records population estimates for “Hispanic or Latino (of any race).”
of Iowa having some of the world’s richest soils, yet over 1-in-10 households experienced food insecurity annually between 2014 and 2016 (Coleman-Jensen et al., 2017). Statewide rates of food insecurity for Latinx households are unavailable for Iowa; however, USDA estimates a national rate of 18.5% for 2016 (Coleman-Jensen et al. 2017; see also Sano et al. 2011).

The Rural Families Speak project documented the experiences of food insecurity and related challenges faced by Latinx immigrant mothers in rural Iowa (Greder et al., 2012; Sano et al., 2011). Greder et al. (2012) recommend that family and consumer science professionals connect immigrant families with their new communities to improve healthy eating and address high rates of food insecurity. Master Gardeners, they argue, might serve a critical role in educating Latinx immigrant mothers to grow vegetables in a new climate. However, community connections and educational programs can also place mothers’ bodies and health at risk when broader political clashes over identity, nationalism, immigration, and the impacts of globalization on rural communities surface as regulations on behavior.

The encounter in this chapter demonstrates how well-intended programs focused on the everyday life of raising healthy families become projects of state-subject-territory formation, in this case with injurious consequences. The gardeners I met that day constructed food insecurity in relationship to their understandings of agro-industry, Latinx immigration, increasing drug use among non-Latinx rural residents, and motherhood, illustrating the geopolitical tensions that have arisen in rural Midwestern communities.

2.5 Feeding the world while food insecure

“Food security,” Jarosz (2014, 169–70) notes, “is embedded in dominant technocratic, neoliberal development discourses emphasizing increases in production and measurable supply and demand.” A simultaneous structuring and invisibility of food insecurity plays out through the connections and contradictions of two interrelated discourses: food security as Iowa producers feeding the world and food insecurity as an individualized problem (Dankbar et al., 2017). In the first discourse,

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11 2014-2016 USDA estimates for Iowa are 10.7% of households annually, with 1.4% margin of error.
agricultural commodities—along with technologies—increase global food security. To maintain this discourse, food insecurity, in Iowa and throughout the United States, ontologically forms as an individualized phenomenon associated with laziness or immorality. Through unquestioned narratives of racial marginalization and whitened cultural practices—social stigmas, stereotypes, dispossession, and displacement—people who experience food insecurity are situated as deserving of blame for their problems (Dutta et al., 2013; Minkoff-Zern, 2014; Sbicca, 2014). Structural causes of food insecurity remain invisible.

In conversations at gardens and pantries, I frequently encountered the expectation that with hard work and thrift, one will not, even cannot, experience food insecurity. After all, the Iowa that many gardeners describe is a place of agricultural abundance. Through participants’ ongoing collaboration in Growing Together, new experiences disrupt this narrative. For example, one participant recalled their surprise at a farm family coming to the food pantry for assistance. Farming for this family was not a guarantee of enough income to feed themselves. Yet, the assumptions that link food insecurity to laziness and food security to moral behavior invisibilize other people who might receive the produce donations while perpetuating the image of a racialized other.

While contradictions like the farm family encourage a rethinking of food insecurity in some instances, the persistence of global food security discourses—and the geopolitical relations within which they are embedded—impact the potential for decolonial political alliances. Global food security discourses resonate particularly for Iowans because of the state’s identity as an agricultural leader through technocratic, neoliberal development. Iowa agriculture is imagined as feeding food to insecure others located elsewhere. Growing Together emerged within the land-grant university and these discourses.

2.6 Vulnerability as praxis

Feminist praxis can disrupt a blaming, moralizing ontology of food insecurity by generating ontologies that account for the “political economy of food insecurity, including the spatial, social, cultural, political, and the emotional aspects of food” (Miewald and McCann, 2014, 543). I engage
the scholarship of Richa Nagar to explore opportunities for radically vulnerable alliances that can disrupt these narratives through the practices of speaking-with and situated solidarity (Nagar 2014, 85; see also Nagar and Geiger 2007; Routledge and Derickson 2015). Speaking-with underscores “economic, political, and institutional” contextualization of fieldwork encounters (Nagar, 2014, 85), and situated solidarity repositions focus on “the ‘fields’ that our ‘research subjects’ inhabit” and encourages academic, institutional, and geographical border crossings that resituate knowledge production in line with political struggles (86–88). Together, these concepts guide scholars in anti-essentialist, decolonial, and relational praxis with activist communities.

Preparing for fieldwork, I considered how to mobilize speaking-with and situated solidarity. For instance, I embraced more relational ways of seeing myself-in-the-world and distanced myself from any notion of Cooperative Extension as an organization of experts who have the solution. By contextualizing Growing Together within the institutional and social structures of land-grant universities and Corn Belt agriculture, I acknowledged how these fields could simultaneously support and constrain radically vulnerable university-community alliances. Still, prior to fieldwork, I did not fully understand the messiness of disjunctures between the PhD proposal and fieldwork (Billo and Hiemstra, 2013), nor between the research I sought to do in Extension and Extension as an institution. I would need guidance in navigating the search for alliances in spaces where few partners are working to reconfigure power relations.

Expanding Nagar’s praxis, I turned to queer scholarship from Butler (2016) linking vulnerability to political resistance. Broadly, queerness can be described as “a movement of thought and language contrary to accepted forms of authority”—a “deviation” from social norms (ibid, 17). Butler presents queerness as a mode of “agency and resistance” (25) and asserts that “the vulnerability to dispossession, poverty, insecurity, and harm that constitutes a precarious position in the world itself leads to resistance” (12).

Queer praxis acknowledges vulnerability as a “condition of dependency and interdependency” mobilized to resist injustice (Butler, 2016, 25–26). The political mobilization of vulnerability contrasts with paternalistic efforts seeking to resist and master vulnerability (ibid.). Utilizing this
distinction, a queer analysis of vulnerability enables me to draw on three practices that mobilize vulnerability in resistance: opening, destabilizing, and angling.

Opening emphasizes processes of becoming. It complements Nagar’s acknowledgement of praxis as a journey, in which room exists for failures. Gilson (2011, 310) thus characterizes vulnerability as “a basic kind of openness to being affected and affecting in both positive and negative ways.” This practice involves opening oneself to discomfort, to “the ambivalence of our emotional and bodily responses and to reflecting on those responses in nuanced ways” (ibid, 325). Through this chapter, I vulnerably open myself—and my relationship to Growing Together—to being affected and affecting. I explore the discomfort of encountering racism, and my shame in responding with silence. I consider how experiences of discomfort and shame might generate future openings for alliance.

The practice of destabilizing subjectivity can challenge essentialist and fixed forms of embodiment, while acknowledging the risks of writing alone. Mitchell (2018, 196–97) draws upon Butler and Gilson to develop vulnerability as a destabilization of the subject which involves “the disruption of any kind of stable narratorial ‘I’—while exploring qualities of ‘interdependence and incompleteness’.” Similarly, Adams and Holman Jones (2008, 384) propose autoethnography-as-queer as a destabilizing methodology that “embraces fluidity, resists definitional and conceptual fixity, looks to self and structures as relational accomplishments, and takes seriously the need to create more livable, equitable, and just ways of living” (see also LeFrancois 2013). Adams and Holman Jones’s (2008, 374) methodology aligns with Nagar’s grounding of reflexive praxis within economic, political, and institutional contexts.

I borrow the concept of angling from Mitchell’s (2018, 197) work on vulnerability, which advises us to “angle ourselves towards it and to see where that angling takes us.” Angling within a queer approach means orienting myself and Growing Together toward vulnerability—conceiving of vulnerability as a “constitutive” form of interdependency (ibid, 197; see also Butler 2016; Gilson 2011). Angling suggests that vulnerability extends beyond any single encounter, while recognizing that the journey is far from certain. It encompasses a lifelong process of working toward alliances
of interdependency—not in resistance of vulnerability, but in pursuit of its political potential. Recognizing vulnerability as agential and disruptive makes it possible to consider how scholars, activists, and Cooperative Extension can angle projects like Growing Together toward greater accountability to people experiencing injustices and inequities.

Working within a context shaped by strong societal distastes for vulnerability, “becoming otherwise” (Butler, 2004, 217) creates openings where it becomes possible to disrupt oppressions—like food insecurity—that are forms of bodily vulnerability emanating through social relations (Butler et al., 2016; Gilson, 2011; Mitchell, 2018). While autoethnographic analyses of discomfort can turn the gaze inward, by revealing the intimate links between the embodied discomfort of vulnerability and discursive and structural forms of oppression, I endeavor instead to identify pathways for political action.

2.7 Responding to uncomfortable encounters

Experiencing discomfort is not unfamiliar territory in feminist and decolonial praxis (Caretta and Jokinen, 2017; Kaomea, 2003; Laliberté and Schurr, 2016; LeFrancois, 2013; Smith, 2016). When I encountered racism and responded with silence, I experienced the tension between collaboration and embodied discomfort. I questioned how one could dismantle inequities through programs that provide food to community members, when those community members become imagined as others. I underscore that my retelling of the encounter does not represent the expressed viewpoints and actions of most Growing Together participants, nor does it reveal the full experiences and perspectives of the two gardeners. Yet it reflects a commonly unquestioned discourse that seeped into the project—one in which structural causes of food insecurity are portrayed as individualized problems.

The gardeners that day grappled with labor and food in complex, contested ways that brought in race, ethnicity, gender, heteronormativity, class, age, religion, moral judgment, and individualized perceptions of poverty. For one gardener, a poultry plant job meant enough money for food. For the other, concern centered on personal judgments—of tattoos, drug abuse, and church non-
attendance. Their stories about food insecure children concentrated on how parents could afford to buy food by spending more judiciously—without their questioning whether food would be available and adequate had the mother not gotten the tattoo. Good mothering became conflated with being middle class, married, and Christian. I understood the discussed plans for donation as implicitly communicating that certain types of parents are less deserving and even undeserving of assistance. Neither gardener mentioned having relationships with the community members they were talking about, and the discourse linking hard work to food security was not pried open further.

I have considered how responses to such encounters, while firmly anti-racist and anti-colonialist in messaging, need to account for the complexity of broader relations of power. It would need to counteract any perceptions that racism is a psychological personal attribute resolvable solely by individual correction of prejudicial attitudes and behaviors (Ahmed, 2004). Yet, communication—between me, with a feminist relational ontology, and others, with different ways of seeing the world—stood as a barrier just as I wanted to break barriers down. My discomfort stemmed not only from my understanding of how racism structured the project, but from my unpreparedness to respond with feminist principles in a way that would be, and could be, received.

My response would prove critical. Yet, in that moment, I remained silent. I sat around the picnic table where the gardeners conversed. I sat listening, uncomfortable, trying to make sense of what was said and figure out if and how to respond.

For what reasons did the gardeners join Growing Together? What would happen if I alienated them and the garden failed? How could I build a transformative collaboration without partners interested in equity? Why did Extension not reach out directly to the project’s intended beneficiaries as partners? How was my participation reinforcing racism and instituting separations between those deemed worthy and unworthy to receive the food? My silence? In that silence, I reinforced social marginalization, despite potential justifications for my silence. Sudbury and Okazawa-Rey (2016) note the risk of idealizing activist research, calling for scholars to pay attention to power relations and the contradictions that infuse such projects. Despite believing that for people to think, feel, and belong differently in the world, surely we need to collectively “do differently” (Carolan,
2016, 142, emphasis original), I found myself unable to act, limited by what I could do in that moment.

I recognize that my silence represents a disconnect between working to decolonize our worlds and a complicity in whiteness, a desire to be seen as ‘good’ and ‘respectful.’ The discomfort of isolation and fear of losing partnerships pressed against me and won in that moment.

Ahmed (2010, 68–69) in writing on the feminist killjoy has spoken to my feelings in that encounter:

Power speaks here in this moment of hesitation. Do you go along with it? What does it mean to not go along with it? To create awkwardness is to be read as awkward. Maintaining public comfort requires that certain bodies ‘go along with it.’ To refuse to go along with it, to refuse the place in which you are placed, is to be seen as trouble, as causing discomfort among others. There is a political struggle about how we attribute good and bad feelings, which hesitates around the apparently simple question of who introduces what feelings to whom.

In and despite my multiple and fluid relational positionings to the gardeners, some visible and others hidden—as a researcher representing Extension, as someone not from Iowa, as a student, as a younger person, as a lesbian, as a queer person, as a feminist killjoy, as someone who has experienced violence and trauma—I went along with it and internalized the discomfort. The strength and ferociousness of the conversation felt like a hairball lodged deep in my throat. Through taking refuge in my privilege of being silent in that moment, of appearing invulnerable, I avoided causing discomfort to others and in so doing contributed to the normalization of racism.

I have considered the possibilities and limits of feminist performative knowledge production from this encounter. I stayed within the comfort of passing as semi-insider and denied my accountability to marginalized Iowans. I ignored that the conversation may have offended others in attendance that day. Had I not remained silent, I could have provided people allyship from Extension rather than complicity.
Speaking up also might have impacted the project’s ability to deliver fresh produce at this site. I could not ignore the food, and participants were volunteering their labor to produce it. I also could not ignore questions about where the food would go, who would receive it, who would decide, and how those decisions were made.

Being a troublemaker may or may not have led to an emotional connection across difference—to a connection invoking care and paving the way for critically reflective conversations. In that moment I closed off the potentiality of becoming otherwise through vulnerability (Mitchell, 2018, 197). Yet, according to Butler (2016, 25), to “bare our fault lines as if that might launch a new mode of authenticity or inaugurate a new order of moral values or a sudden and widespread outbreak of ‘care’” is rarely politically effective and risks turning vulnerability into defensiveness. While sharing emotions can serve as potential basis for solidarity, in this context it as easily could have backfired or been misunderstood.

2.8 Contending with fixed difference

In queering autoethnography (Adams and Holman Jones, 2008), I wrestle with the contradiction of wanting to draw attention to the racializing effects of essentialism, but in so doing, I find essentialism impossible to escape. In my encounter, for instance, the two gardeners spoke of community members as either “white” or “Hispanic.” In fixing social difference, they simultaneously conflated and essentialized race and ethnicity, and situated themselves in relation to an outside Other. Fixed social categorizations are fraught with ontological violence, into which the physical violence of food insecurity is woven. That day, the gardeners in a derogatory tone employed the phrase “the Hispanics” as the sole identifier of an entire segment of the community, that simultaneously was not part of their community.

What do encounters of social categorizations and fixed difference mean for feminist scholars? How do we contend with limits that are brought forth in the very retelling of such encounters? I ask these questions because beyond that moment in the garden, and beyond that community, the violence of fixed difference performatively perpetuates in the writing of this chapter. In retelling
this story using fixed categorical descriptors, even though I am calling attention to injustice, I am participating in this violence. The limits of language and categories constrain my ability to get beyond essentialist divisions.

Nagar’s (2014, 14) description of radical vulnerability, of storytelling as a form of co-authorship outside the university, touches upon these concerns:

The telling of stories must continuously resist a desire to reveal the essential or authentic experience of the subject; instead, every act of storytelling must confront ways in which power circulates and constructs the relationalities within and across various social groups.

By retelling this encounter as autoethnography, I aim to engage in non-essentialist storytelling that makes relationalities visible without reducing Growing Together participants, recipients, or myself, to single, fixed categories or autonomous selves. Though I pursue this goal, I worry my retelling will craft not only Latinx people, but also the gardeners in a way that forecloses other agencies, voices, and perspectives than my own. In telling this story alone, rather than in co-authorship, I risk perpetuating these violences.

My position in Growing Together and the statewide program structure provided me with limited ability to connect with the gardeners. The encounter took place during an Extension training for Master Gardeners, in which I assisted the trainer while interacting with participants as a researcher. I arrived at the garden not knowing whom I would meet. Following our encounter, I reached out to both gardeners. One gardener had interest in meeting but was unable to participate in a follow-up interview due to family obligations and travel. When I later presented this manuscript for feedback, the gardener expressed concern with representing their community as having drug users and how its mention would risk making the community look negative to outsiders. Sensitive to reductive portrayals of rural America’s drug epidemic, I struggled with the choice to leave this part of the chapter intact.

The other gardener pulled back from Growing Together due to a busy schedule, but within our email communications shared another story of mothers buying drugs rather than feeding their
children. The gardener was unavailable for a follow-up interview and unable to provide feedback on the manuscript until years later. Drug use among white non-Latinx mothers remained a high concern, as well as the changing demographics of the community within the past fifteen years. The gardener offered that the daughter’s story about the mother with the tattoo may have involved a “Caucasian” or an “Hispanic” child, and the gardener was uncertain which was the case—which differed with my understanding of the conversation at the garden that day. The gardener did not recall personally having seen any Latinx mothers in the community with tattoos, only “white” mothers.

Another point the gardener raised is that because Latinx children are “dressed to the nines,” it is hard for many people to realize that their families may be low-income and not have enough food. In a story that I interpreted as a marker of the morality of the Latinx community, the gardener described Latinx families as “Catholics” and “Christians” and spoke of a congregation of 50-60 Latinx people attending a baptism service at a nearby lake. After re-iterating how Latinx girls are “nicely” and “neatly dressed,” “with cell phones,” and “clean,” the gardener expressed sincere doubt that Latinx families were not feeding their children. I gathered from this statement that the gardener made a distinction between low-income families without enough food and neglectful families that fail to feed their children. At the same time, in providing feedback, the gardener conveyed senses of approbation for Latinx community members that were different from the strongly negative impressions that I perceived the gardener to hold during our encounter at the garden. Nearly three years had elapsed, and I understand many possible explanations might account for the expressed and perceived differences across these two moments in time.

Our interactions remained limited to the initial encounter and few instances of feedback. Without sustained engagement, the door was closed to future conversations that critically reflected on these exchanges and the broader geopolitics of food insecurity.
2.9 Recovering radical vulnerability?

Moments of discomfort serve an important purpose. They are not just ‘undesirable’ detours on the path to productive, radically vulnerable alliances. They are part of the work you need to “make your screw-ups and your challenges opportunities to become better allies” (Harper, 2016). Even though I have made the mistake of not speaking out, I can repurpose uncomfortable encounters as political moments to re-engage scholars, activists, and Extension in practices of radical vulnerability.

A commitment to equity should prompt Cooperative Extension to question who is and is not among its institutional colleagues and community partners, and why. New forms of partnership must be deliberate in challenging binary norms of “vulnerability as passive” and “agency as active” (Butler et al., 2016, 3) that have shaped food and nutrition interventions. Otherwise, placing Extension “experts” in positions to “help poor and uneducated others” achieve food security, health, and well-being—no matter how well-intentioned—will continue to dismiss mutual interdependency in the world. I imagine Growing Together might be an entirely different project if Extension embraced an approach that begins with the needs and values of food insecure communities. Through radically vulnerable alliance, Extension can turn to communities to engage with their vast and in-depth knowledges. By decentralizing knowledge production, university-community partnerships can co-create decolonizing solutions in ways that build trust and harness collective reflexivity (Nagar, 2014).

Cooperative Extension is well-positioned to resource “situated solidarity” (Nagar 2014, 85; see also Nagar and Geiger 2007; Routledge and Derickson 2015). To reformulate practices and policies, however, it must radically open up which knowledges and perspectives it permits to cross into its academic, expert-driven spaces (Hassel, 2004). Extension will need to work against institutional forces that limit the political mobilization of scars and wounds—of vulnerability—in pursuit of equity (Pelaez Lopez, 2018). It will need to value the contributions of communities of color, indigenous people, queer and gender non-conforming people, people experiencing poverty, and other marginalized people, and not reduce us to headcounts or to “diversity management” strategies (Ahmed, 2004, sec. 9). In the hiring of diverse people and the inclusion of diverse community
partners, Extension must embrace our troublemaking worldviews and acts of resistance, even and especially when they depart from the comfort of normative institutional practices.

Developing radically vulnerable relationships will be a necessary foundation for new types of engagement and collective action. Unlearning institutional practices takes time. Forming relationships of alliance within Extension—let alone with communities—can seem like an impossible journey. Underscoring the criticality of challenging oppression in spaces of white privilege, radical vulnerability can start within land-grant universities and Extension through problematizing institutional roles, past and present, in fostering structural inequities.

Though the road ahead is long, Cooperative Extension can restructure the systems that determine who has a say in community food policies, programs, and practices. While I do not minimize my responsibility to speak up, creating institutional spaces for conversations about Extension’s approach to diversity hiring and community partnerships is a necessary step in the more difficult structural work of addressing inequities in resource distribution and decision-making. Extension may fear alienating employees and partnerships that have produced important results, such as increasing fresh produce in food pantries. We also stand to strengthen existing partnerships and gain new ones. Greden et al. (2004), through their research on Iowa’s immigrant communities, have called for listening to marginalized community voices. Extension can take clear steps to place this goal at the forefront of its mission.

2.10 Conclusion

Engaging questions of how one speaks for, about, and with another has long remained an active area of feminist inquiry (Lugones and Spelman, 1983; Nagar, 2014). With Growing Together, the path to forming radically vulnerable alliances took an unexpected turn that helped me reflect more fully on these questions. During fieldwork, I experienced uneven power differences flowing in multiple directions that complicated speaking up when I encountered racism within the institutional spaces of Cooperative Extension. Disappointed in my complicity in the production of whiteness as the norm, I have turned to multiple, albeit imperfect, retellings of these encounters. Sourcing
vulnerability as an affective opening, in and through these retellings, I have re-engaged with experiences of discomfort to strengthen existing alliances and angle myself toward new ones (Gilson 2011, 310; Mitchell 2018).

Feminist and queer concepts of vulnerability are supporting me in a lifelong journey of praxis that will never be completed. They call attention to the necessity for continued discussion of collaborations—which ones we pursue and why, how we form them, navigating different ontologies and commitments, and ways to seek out the feminist political potential even when the path is challenging. The result is a more complex, messy, and uncomfortable practice of radical vulnerability and feminist praxis.

2.11 References


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CHAPTER 3. VISCERAL ENCOUNTERS: A POLITICAL ECOLOGY OF URBAN LAND, FOOD, AND HOUSING IN DUBUQUE, IOWA

A paper accepted for publication as peer-reviewed article in Social Sciences
Carrie Chennault, Laura Klavitter, and Lynn Sutton

3.1 Abstract

Through a praxis of co-authorship between a university scholar and two community gardeners/organizers/activists, this article showcases how the knowledges, practices, and relationalities emergent in community gardens in Dubuque, Iowa USA directly engage with a politics of food, land, and housing. The authors engage in co-authorship across university and community boundaries to ontologically reframe knowledge production and draw critical attention to the everyday livelihoods and political ecologies experienced within marginalized communities. We use extended conversations and interviews to analyze the food, land, and housing issues that emerge in the context of uneven racial relations and neighborhood revitalization. We then organize our analysis using a Political Ecology of the Body (PEB) framework to consider how people’s bodily, emotional, and social lives impact their relationalities with food, gardening, and neighborhood spaces. Our findings show that community gardening efforts are transforming the Washington and North End neighborhoods, even if these changes appear to outsiders as small-scale or difficult to measure—while also calling attention to the anti-oppression and anti-racism work that remains to be done. Our co-authorship demonstrates how community gardeners and university partners can work together to contest histories of marginalization and foster more socially just relations.
3.2 Prologue

Well, I mean, I think having the garden is a great start, and I think that if it sets a good example, maybe more gardens will pop up, but I think probably what’s going to make a bigger difference is having more competitive food options. So like, Eagle is the only shopping center in this area, aside from a dollar store and gas stations. So, you’re stuck with whatever you get, and you’re stuck with whatever prices. And unfortunately, the prices are high. And in the worst part of town that they should be high in.

Laura, in conversation with Carrie (2017)

And so not only was [the Dubuque Packing Company] where they slaughtered pigs and animals and everything, they also had a small grocery store, but you had the decent foods in there. So people could get to it. So there was that. But once that went away, nothing. There’s nothing in that space to this day, we’re talking 20 something plus years.

Lynn, in conversation with Carrie (2017)

3.3 Introduction

Two of us—Laura and Lynn—are community gardeners\textsuperscript{1} in the Washington and North End neighborhoods adjacent to downtown Dubuque, Iowa USA. Our roles include engaging with neighbors in vibrant gardening activities and local food networks. One of us—Laura—is a horticulturalist, landscaper, and avid gardener who grew up in Eastern Iowa, but moved to Dubuque after college and more recently to the Washington neighborhood. Since moving to the Washington neighborhood, Laura has taken on roles as a community organizer, connector, and leader at the Washington Neighborhood Community Garden. The other—Lynn—is an urban farmer, community gardener, social justice activist, former city council member, lifelong resident of Dubuque, and leader and

\textsuperscript{1}The phrase community gardeners denotes gardeners’ activities in communal and shared spaces. Through community gardening, we pursue opportunities to share food, seeds, plants, and related resources with our neighbors. Community is a broad term with multiple meanings across different contexts, and we acknowledge its various uses to describe spatial scales, places, groups, senses of belonging, relationships, and more. Here, we leave this term open and vaguely defined to reflect its simultaneously capacious and sometimes conflicting usage in everyday spaces and in community gardening contexts.
organizer in the Black community. Together, we are demanding that the neighborhoods—two of the most densely populated, low-income, and racially diverse in Dubuque—receive greater voice in the city. We are demanding greater voice in the midst of histories of uneven racial relations, recent redevelopment efforts, and threats of gentrification. Our co-author, Carrie, is a doctoral candidate in Sustainable Agriculture at Iowa State University and met us through a graduate research assistantship with Cooperative Extension. Together as co-authors, our efforts are aimed at broadening opportunities for residents in the Washington and North End neighborhoods, and we understand gardening as part of a social and environmental system that is intimately linked with access to cultural foodways, affordable housing, accessible grocery stores, land and public green spaces, and economic opportunity. We hope to influence the policies and actions that could bring about more gardens and quality grocery stores, along with decent housing and job opportunities for residents without forcing poorer people out to ‘revitalize’ the community. Everyday lived experiences motivate our roles in the food system, roles that include but extend well beyond growing food.

This paper presents how we have embarked on collective experiments of gardening, food sharing, and community activism by engaging directly in the social life of the Washington and North End neighborhoods of Dubuque. Through a praxis of co-authorship, we showcase how the knowledges, practices, and relationalities emergent in the Washington and North End neighborhoods directly engage with a politics of food, land, and housing. We organize our analysis using a Political Ecology of the Body (PEB) framework (Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy, 2013) because it allows us to consider how people’s bodily, emotional, and social lives impact their relationalities with food. In this way, PEB visibilizes relations of everyday life that are difficult to represent from a macro perspective. Community spaces and activities in the Washington Neighborhoods exhibit food-body and garden-body relationalities full of “collaboration, co-experimentation, and coming together” (Carolan 2016, 150; see also Gibson-Graham 2011), even within the broader uneven social landscape that perpetuates precarity and minimizes political voice.
This paper is organized as follows. Section 2 discusses co-authorship as a mode of community-engaged feminist methodology and considers how power dynamics and hierarchies structure our collaboration. We include a brief history of the relationship between the land-grant university and Cooperative Extension system, community engagement, and knowledge co-production. In Section 3, we situate the community gardening efforts described in this article within the historical and socio-political contexts of racism in Dubuque and the state of Iowa, and consider the impacts of urban revitalization on land, housing, and food struggles. In the Sections 4 and 5, we present accounts of our (Lynn’s and Laura’s, respectively) everyday social lives and the co-experimental knowledges, practices, and relationalities emerging through community gardening, organizing, and activism. Section 6 introduces the PEB model. We describe how consideration of PEB emerged in response to critical issues identified by us, and also through the broader statewide network of community gardeners that Carrie encountered through research with Growing Together Iowa. In this section, we utilize the PEB framework to further our analysis. The article concludes with discussion of the implications of our analysis for organizations focused on community development. We reflect on the process of our collaboration and co-authorship as a demonstration of how community and university organizations can work together as partners to contest histories of marginalization and foster socially just relations.

### 3.4 Feminist methodology and co-authorship

A praxis of knowledge co-construction and co-authorship can begin with a commitment to, as Whatmore (2006, 604) describes it, “a redistribution of expertise attendant on the recognition of multiple knowledge practices and communities that bear on the framing of inherently uncertain

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2 We—Carrie, Laura, and Lynn—met through our affiliation with Growing Together Iowa, a statewide community donation gardening effort set into motion as part of the SNAP-Education program in Cooperative Extension, in partnership with the Master Gardener program. Growing Together Iowa, which links together emerging networks of local growers and emergency food stakeholders, seeks to address intertwined social issues related to food access, local food production, community gardening, and nutrition. Carrie’s role as a graduate researcher with Cooperative Extension has facilitated connections with Growing Together sites across the state. Laura’s connection to Growing Together originally began as a Master Gardener coordinator for Dubuque County Extension, as well as through personal involvement with the Washington Neighborhood Community Garden. Lynn became connected to Growing Together as a Master Gardener in Dubuque County.
socio-technical problems.” More than just a redistribution, this paper aligns with Indigenous and decolonial efforts to shift from “learning to know the other” to “learning as an engagement with the other” (Kuokkanen as cited in Sundberg 2014, 40, emphasis original). It acknowledges that, along with ontological reframing, praxis demands attention to the everyday livelihoods and political ecological relations experienced within marginalized communities (Di Chiro, 2015; Harcourt et al., 2015; Mollett, 2017).

Situating co-authorship and praxis within “a diverse set of bodied knowledges and activities—always attuned to emotion and affect—that do not privilege one way of (scientific, intellectual) knowing as the right way” (Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy, 2013, 86, emphasis original) can shift power relations and critically reframe issues of knowledge, voice, and authority. We see potential for this shift in collaborations like Growing Together, as many community partners have expressed a deep desire for knowledge exchange with other communities across Iowa that are co-experimentally developing networks among growers, food pantry staff and clients, neighborhood residents, and grassroots partners. Through our co-authorship, we demonstrate the importance of multi-directional knowledge flows that can identify—as we do in this article—issues like food, land, and housing as interrelated political ecological struggles. From a starting point of collective struggle, we seek to supplant colonizing and technocratic paradigms of community engagement with collaborative, co-constructed, and socially just partnerships, even as we recognize the tensions, challenges, and limits of this journey.

For our co-authorship, the tensions of co-constructing feminist knowledge through the research process emanate from the power dynamics among us and our different lived experiences. These dynamics infuse our interactions and risk privileging academic knowledge, voice, and authority (DeVault and Gross, 2012; Hesse-Biber, 2014). Beginning in 2016, Carrie carried out community-engaged research for Growing Together, including in Dubuque. Feminist methodologies, based on principles of radical vulnerability, co-authorship, and social justice for marginalized and oppressed communities, have guided this engagement (Chapter 2; see also Hesse-Biber 2014; Nagar 2014). Two of us, Carrie and Laura, first met in 2016. During our visits, we went to the Washington Neigh-
borhood Community Garden where Laura is a garden leader, walked throughout the neighborhood, visited the community food pantry, engaged in conversations, and exchanged ideas through observational as well as ethnographic, open-ended interview and contextual questions (Bloom, 1998; Hesse-Biber, 2014; Stage and Mattson, 2003). We sought, as DeVault and Gross (2012, 229) describe it, to produce knowledge for, and not about, the Washington neighborhood.

Stories and themes emerged that first year, which pointed to the political ecologies of the neighborhood and its community gardening efforts. Carrie, familiar with PEB through studies of feminist political ecology in graduate school, began iteratively thinking about the model in relation to the issues Growing Together partners identified as important to the well-being of their neighborhoods. We continued to explore the political ecologies of the neighborhood, which led Laura to connect Carrie with Lynn in 2017. However, Carrie did not explicitly discuss the PEB framework with Laura and Lynn at this stage of the collaboration, though it served as a useful tool for Carrie to approach our engagement and analyze our findings. During Carrie and Lynn’s visits, we went to the North End neighborhood to see the urban farming and backyard gardening efforts in which Lynn is heavily involved, and we toured Lynn’s larger growing space on a collaborative farm outside of Dubuque. We also talked about Lynn’s garden in the Washington neighborhood that had been removed for development earlier that year. The themes and issues that we address in this article emerged iteratively over the course of these interactions—through in-depth semi-structured interviews, site visits, and follow-up conversations—and draw on our individual and collective commitments.

In the fourth and fifth sections of this article we present two of our first-person accounts, Lynn and Laura’s, respectively. We provided these accounts through in-person conversations, phone and email conversations, and recorded interviews from 2016-2019. The accounts are compiled and typed by Carrie and reviewed by Laura and Lynn. The additional stories, insights, analyses, historical context, and background information throughout the article are derived from our unrecorded conversations from 2016-2019, and from background research conducted by Carrie with Laura and Lynn’s guidance.
While academic convention dictates that “scholars” present short quotes from “interview respondents” and enrich those quotes with their own analyses and insights, this article presents longer accounts to highlight the richness of the knowledges and analyses co-authored by the three of us. Moreover, Nagar (2014, 3) wrote extensively on the need for feminist principles of co-authorship in response to the asymmetrical relationship between researchers and non-academics, noting problematically:

This material hierarchy can result in a taken-for-granted epistemic hierarchy in which metropolitan knowledges are privileged as “sophisticated” and where nonmetropolitan knowledges are perceived as “raw data” or stories that need to be framed and put into perspective by the formally certified intellectual.

Principles of co-authorship guide our engagement. However, the above passage from Nagar points to the tension in co-authorships that cross the boundaries of academic and local knowledges. Carrie’s contribution to the co-authorship stems from a position of academic authority—and with it the resources and connections to publish and potentially shape Cooperative Extension’s role in community food collaborations. The contributions of Carrie also include applying the academic PEB framework, which, while yielding valuable insight, should not be privileged over local knowledges. This aim drives our emphasis in Sections 4 and 5 on the extended accounts of Laura and Lynn as analyses of food, land, housing, and community in Dubuque. We then utilize PEB in Section 6 as further analysis to organize and draw connections among the issues raised in our conversations.

### 3.5 Cooperative Extension and knowledge co-construction

The tensions of co-constructing feminist knowledge in this article are situated within the broader contexts of Cooperative Extension. The colonizing history of U.S. land-grant universities, in which Cooperative Extension is embedded, continues to shape institutional knowledge production, including what knowledge is produced, how it is produced, whose knowledge counts, and who benefits. Charting land-grant university history, Esty (2016) and la paperson (2017) trace the relational processes of Native American dispossession and genocide and white migration and
land-granting enacted through the Morrill Act of 1862 (7 U.S.C. §§301). Not incidentally, Cooperative Extension—established in the Smith-Lever Act of 1914 (7 U.S.C. §§342)—developed in this nation-building context as a service within land-grant universities to transfer scientific technologies of agricultural modernization in the form of practical, useful education to the “broader public” (Collins and Mueller, 2016; Gould et al., 2014; Jones and Garforth, 1997; Leeuwis, 2004; Morse et al., 2006). The technology transfer mission of Cooperative Extension enacted modes of ontological colonization through “Western technocratic objectivism” and top-down paradigms of engagement in which researchers and specialists enter communities to implement expert-designed programs, a paradigm which persists to present day (Collins and Mueller 2016, 326; Hassel 2004).

In recent years, Cooperative Extension has begun to promote alternatives to top-down engagement, including co-learning, co-facilitation, and collaboration (Dunning et al., 2012; Enderton et al., 2017; Hassel, 2004; Raison, 2010). Moreover, and directly relevant to our co-authorship, Cooperative Extension organizations are increasingly emphasizing the need to address uneven power relations and structural inequities in the food system in the United States—and are acknowledging that local food systems are not inherently more just (Ammons et al., 2018; Enderton et al., 2017; Pirog et al., 2016). Importantly, we emphasize here that engagement includes but also is about more than working with diverse and marginalized community partners; it involves opening up to diverse ways of viewing the world and constructing knowledge, including local and indigenous knowledges (Collins and Mueller, 2016; Hassel, 2004). Our co-authorship presents Cooperative Extension with an alternative model of community engagement—one with the potential to fundamentally reframe how projects like Growing Together address pressing social issues like food insecurity, a point to which we return in the Discussion section.

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3The Morrill Act of 1862 granted states “public lands” (30,000 acres for each U.S. Congressional member in a state’s delegation) to finance the establishment of land-grant universities and increase private ownership of land by white settler-colonialists (though in reality, much of the land sold by states was purchased by speculators and land companies, not settlers. (Esty 2016, 156; la paperson 2017). Esty (2016, 155) sums up U.S. Representative Justin Smith Morrill’s vision for the land-grant university system as “the blueprint for American progress, health, and civilization,” and “the destiny for white America.”
3.6 Racial relations and inequities in Dubuque, Iowa

In this section, we discuss how the livelihood of Dubuque’s racially and ethnically diverse residents have been impacted especially by oppressive politics and policies. Historians have documented how the Black community in Dubuque has endured a long history of violence, dispossession, displacement, and social exclusion that continues into present day. We primarily focus on the Black community in this section, as it constitutes the largest non-white group in Dubuque (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017a), and because the history of the Black community in the city throughout the 20th and into present day provides a significant context for understanding racial relations and anti-racist activism. Additionally, Lynn’s positionality, as a member of the Black community and lifelong Dubuque resident, enables us to weave together this history with Lynn’s lived experiences.

This history is especially important for understanding the two neighborhoods in Dubuque that we write about in this article—the Washington neighborhood, next to downtown with the Mississippi River bordering on its eastern edge, and the North End neighborhood, north of and adjacent to the Washington neighborhood. The two neighborhoods are among the city’s most racially and ethnically diverse. The U.S. Census tracts roughly encompassing the neighborhoods, Census Tract 1 and Census Track 5, include sizable populations of Dubuque’s Black, Latin American, and Pacific Islander communities, among others (City of Dubuque 2013; U.S. Census Bureau 2010; U.S. Census Bureau 2017a; see Appendix A and Appendix B for population estimates). Additionally, families in these two tracts have incomes below the poverty level at estimated rates of 30.0% (+/-13.2) and 23.9% (+/-9.9), respectively, compared to a citywide rate of 10.4% (+/-1.5) (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017b). Within metropolitan Dubuque County, the tracts also represent two of the three...
While this section focuses on the history of the Black community in Dubuque, we also acknowledge additional histories and lived experiences—among the diverse racial and ethnic communities formerly and currently in Dubuque, and at intersections of race, ethnicity, class, gender, age, ability, and so forth—that are not reviewed in this section and that have received far less scholarly and media attention. Lynn and Laura interact regularly with Marshallese Pacific Islander, Latinx, and additional diverse residents through gardening, community engagement, and activism, working to improve their lives and their access to gardening and food through these activities. Our stories, analyses, and recommendations in this article are based upon our interactions with the many racially and ethnically diverse communities and low-income residents who live in the Washington and North End neighborhoods and throughout Dubuque. Although we review the history of inequities facing the Black community in this section, we call for future research to document the status, histories, and lived experiences of diverse and low-income communities residing in the Washington and North End neighborhoods and throughout Dubuque.

Understanding the experience of Black people today in Dubuque requires situating present-day events within an historical context. According to Midwest historian Schwalm (2009), in 1839 Iowa ‘Black laws’ began governing migration to the territory, limiting the settlement of free Black people. The territory and then state continued to expand its Black laws, and from 1851 until its repeal in 1864, state law fully restricted Black settlement in Iowa (ibid.). While records suggest that the ban was not strictly enforced at the local level—and Black migration continued to the state—the presence of these laws reflected a broader racialized discourse common in northern states in that era, one which purported that “people of African descent were naturally dependent, appropriate targets of coercive and circumscribing behavior, and therefore deservedly outside the boundaries of respectability and citizenship” (ibid., 27). Based on Schwalm’s extensive analysis of historical archival documents from Iowa, we know that while some politically radical Iowans fought for the
rights and legal status of Black people, a long history of racism and racist ideology became cemented through policies that socially and economically disadvantaged Black Iowans for generations to come.

Racist ideology continued to deter the settlement of Black people in Dubuque and other Iowa communities throughout the 20th century. The interweaving of racist policies—official and unofficial—with discrimination and violence meant that Dubuque’s Black population totals would remain low through the following decades, the lowest among major Iowa cities through the early 1990s (McAllister, 1991). As just one example of how the city actively deterred Black settlement, in a 1991 newspaper interview, James Sutton (Lynn’s father) recalled working on railroad maintenance in the 1950s and how Dubuque police officers would approach Black train passengers to, as Sutton described it, “tell them to get back on the train” (ibid.). For those families already in Dubuque—there were only a handful when the Sutton family arrived in the late 1950s—they faced hatred, threats, and violence.5

By the 1980s and 1990s, violent forms of white resistance to Black people ensued in the form of Ku Klux Klan rallies, cross burnings, and racially motivated school violence in Dubuque (Gutsche, 2014). A plan by the city council to attract more Black residents in response to the initial cross burning only increased white backlash and violence (McAllister, 1991). In the midst of this string of racial violence—including 22 cross burnings and 11 additionally racially motivated incidents—an article in the New York Times in 1991 reported that one of the cross burners, upon returning from jail to work at a meatpacking plant, was said to have been met with “backslaps and a standing ovation” from his co-workers (Wilkerson 1991; see also Trenkle 2015; Associated Press 2016).

Despite this violence, the diversity of Dubuque, including its Black population, did increase substantially after the early 1990s and continued into the 2000s (U.S. Census Bureau 2000; U.S. Census Bureau 2010; see also Bassman et al. 2013). In Dubuque and across Iowa more generally, these increases have brought about efforts to halt the influx of Black people from urban centers like

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5 Acts of racism were overt and public, but also included private acts that attempted to make Black people’s lives in Dubuque intolerable. In recalling Mr. Sutton’s work at the railroad company, for example, Lynn remembers how other maintenance workers in Dubuque had put sand and dirt in Mr. Sutton’s packed sandwiches. As a result, Mrs. Ruby Sutton (Lynn’s mother, Mr. Sutton’s spouse, and a recognized leading civil rights activist in Iowa) would walk from home to the railyard each midday with lunch to deliver to Mr. Sutton. Eventually exasperated by the situation, Mrs. Sutton complained directly to the railroad supervisor, who fortunately did put a stop to it.
Chicago (Gutsche, 2014). In 2016, a cross burning again occurred—this time at the corner of East 22nd Street and Washington Street, only blocks from the Washington Neighborhood Community Garden (Munson, 2016).

Less than a year prior to the 2016 incident, the Des Moines Register, a major newspaper in Iowa, featured an opinion column tracing the long and extensive history of racial violence and injustice toward Black residents of Dubuque, asking if Dubuque was going to be the next Ferguson, Missouri (Trenkle, 2015). The article summed up the similarities between the two cities: “Dubuque’s white agenda mimicked Ferguson. It included police profiling, segregation, minimal Black ownership of homes and businesses and a racial legacy of exclusion and prejudice” (ibid.). As a significant example of these injustices in the area of housing, in 2013, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD, 2014) issued a finding that the city of Dubuque had failed to comply with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and other various federal regulations (see also Trenkle 2015). HUD’s investigation revealed that rule changes in the city’s housing assistance program discriminated against Black applicants moving to Dubuque from Chicago and resulted in a sharp decrease in overall Black participation in the program (from 31% to 21% in 2010; Bouscaren 2014). The findings resulted in the city voluntarily making changes to its housing program (ibid.).

### 3.7 Revitalization, urban green spaces, and land conflicts

As Iowa’s history of segregation and racial injustice continues to affect communities of color in Dubuque, economic development pressures also are impacting life in the Washington and North End neighborhoods. Residents are witnessing rapid changes in the neighborhood amidst city development efforts to revitalize urban corridors such as the Washington neighborhood areas (City of Dubuque, 2008), which include the use of Community Development Block Grants to address building vacancies and rental unit rehabilitation and provide support for public services (City of Dubuque, nd; Inclusive Dubuque, 2015). Three important revitalization issues that receive less attention are how residents navigate the affordability of newer affordable housing versus unsafe
living conditions in older rental units, and the need for green spaces versus the gentrifying effects of those spaces.

Affordable housing is relative from our experience, and we have grown increasingly concerned that some, if not many, current residents will continue their struggles to afford housing despite newer “affordable” housing options that are in the works (see Wong 2018). At the same time, within the Washington and North End neighborhoods we have seen that the other options available to are all-too-often neglected and in disrepair. Lynn has taken leadership on this issue, organizing collective action when neighbors have faced unsafe living conditions within their neighborhoods’ older low-income housing units (for a recent example in the news, see Fisher 2018).

The circumstances described above point to the tri-partite relationship between histories of exclusion, segregation, and neglect; property and building vacancies; and emerging local economic development plans, as they come together to constrain housing options residents in the Washington and North End neighborhoods. These circumstances also shape our opportunities to develop neighborhood green spaces as “urban commons” (Safransky, 2017). Pudup (2008, 1232) describes the relationship between, on the one hand, thriving community gardens in vacant spaces, and, on the other hand, “a kind of benign neglect by capital accumulation.” As capital flows into our neighborhoods in the form of housing and business development, it shapes our options for gardening in the neighborhood. Growing spaces have sprouted up in the numerous vacant lots in the Washington and North End neighborhoods (Bassman et al., 2013), in many cases providing an interim use until the land can be repurposed for development (Drake and Lawson, 2014; Glowa, 2017). We remain aware that, paradoxically, community gardens in low-income urban neighborhoods often can contribute to their own eventual destruction, attracting higher income residents and businesses to the neighborhood and raising property values (Glowa 2017, 236–37; Quastel 2009; Voicu and Been 2008). The potential of gardens to improve neighborhood appeal can even incentivize private land owners to grant permission to community gardeners to cultivate a vacant lot until property values rise (Drake and Lawson, 2014; Glowa, 2017). While the gardens provide a valued land use
for many neighborhood residents, they might contribute to trends of gentrification that complicate neighborhood struggles for quality affordable housing.

Thus, the land politics of vacancies, housing, and community gardens is entangled with economic development considerations, particularly of exchange values versus use values (Smith and Kurtz, 2003). McCann (2002), however, more broadly conceptualizes local economic development conflicts as a cultural “politics of struggle” in which city elites and marginalized groups vie over competing visions of a city’s future. Interestingly, while property values—both as use and exchange values—do matter to these struggles, local economic development decisions take shape through the power of rhetoric and discourse (ibid.). Though elites tend to dominate local economic development politics, the discursive power of marginalized groups also can propel alternative visions of the city (ibid.). Relatedly, Safransky (2017) discusses how land development conflicts are about racialized displacement and resource distribution but are also about something much more fundamental. As our neighborhood struggles demonstrate, these conflicts are inseparable from “struggles over race, property and citizenship that undergird modern liberal democracies” (ibid, 1081) and “ongoing struggles for decolonization” (ibid, 1079; see also Glowa 2017). Urban development scholars call for analyses to consider the role of marginalized groups usually excluded within urban economic development politics, a task that our co-authorship explicitly takes up in this article.

Community gardeners in the Washington and North End neighborhoods have made use of vacant land to create vegetable gardens and green spaces. Seeing decades of disinvestment turn into redevelopment, revitalization, and, potentially, gentrification, we understand the need not only for gardening and greening projects, but also for efforts to make sure communities of color and low-income residents are not displaced. We are intimately aware of the contradictory implications of urban green spaces, and echo the concerns of Rosol (2012, 251), who warned:

> where “upgrading” and beautification are the aims of local authorities…gentrification is close. If strategies to improve living conditions in a neighborhood are not combined with mechanisms that prevent displacement of residents and keep housing affordable, even the most well-meaning projects can become the engine of gentrification.
It is within such historical and socio-political contexts that we define what it means to be gardeners, growers, and community members in the Washington and North End neighborhoods. It is within the context of structural racism—disinvestment, housing precarity, and, more recently, redevelopment, threats of gentrification, and displacement—that neighborhood residents experience some of the lowest in levels of household income and food access in the city (U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2017; Bassman et al., 2013). These intertwined issues cannot be separated from one another. Keene and Padilla (2010), in writing about the migration of Black people to Eastern Iowa, investigated the stigmas of relocating from ‘tainted’ and ‘vilified’ places—so called ‘urban ghettos’—and the effects of that stigma on the health and well-being of people of color in their new places of residence. Similarly, this section has illustrated how the vilification of Black people relocating to Iowa, from the 19th century through present day, has enabled a persistent and intergenerational effort to exclude communities of color in Dubuque from the social, political, and economic means of influencing local economic development policies, and escaping conditions of racial violence and poverty.

While these conditions persist, the Washington and North End neighborhoods are nonetheless sites of agency and action where residents actively engage in “place making” (McCann 2002; see also Allen et al. 2018). In the next sections, we present Lynn and Laura’s stories, which provide deep insight into simultaneity of political ecological forces at play in the neighborhoods, shaping the relationalities of food, housing, land, and community. Despite the uneven social landscapes that have limited access to spaces and impacted how knowledge is produced, something is happening at and through the gardens to reshape those forces.

3.8 Social justice and neighborhood revitalization: Lynn’s account

I (Lynn) am a lifelong resident of Dubuque, leader and organizer in the Black community, Master Gardener, and former city council representative. As a community activist, I speak out against the injustices that are impacting people’s wellbeing. Food security is a major part of that activism. A

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6 Lynn adapted plans for that year and remained involved that year through projects such as donating plant starters to the community food pantry. Subsequently, the same landlord told Laura of similar plans to eventually remove the Washington Neighborhood Community garden for development. As of the time of writing in 2018, the Washington Neighborhood Community Garden remains active and in place.
big challenge facing community gardening in the Washington and North End neighborhoods has been long-term access to land and resources. As background, one of the neighborhood gardens that I led—slated to be part of Growing Together in 2017—was bulldozed overnight early in the growing season. The property landlord did this without telling anyone in order to place an office building on the property.⁷

When looking around the community now, I see ample vacant, unused spaces that could be utilized for growing food long-term. Recently, for example, I proposed developing gardens in a nearby unused green space that is closer to the highway heading out of town and has been an empty field for decades. The city has focused its efforts on ‘revitalizing’ the vacant locations in and near the Washington and North End neighborhoods. While the city’s plans favor built infrastructure, I believe we should leave more spaces undeveloped. A group of us in the community stays on the lookout for vacant lots with potential to be used for growing food. Upon finding them, we go to the city with our ideas to put in a garden, to feed people, and to teach people how to do that. When we talk to the city about getting more permanent spaces, it is a push and a struggle. There is a tension between how we are thinking of revitalization and the city’s plans. The city’s plans seek to make our neighborhoods better by developing more housing, restaurants, shops, and sites for business, but I always ask: better for whom? Revitalization planning needs to draw upon the diversity of residents living in our neighborhoods, including those with less privilege.

While efforts to utilize green spaces for growing food are a struggle, I have kept pursuing incremental opportunities. I have recognized that sometimes you have to start small and go from there. For instance, I partner with an urban farm, Convivium, located in the neighborhood to expand gardening spaces. Without larger spaces for growing food, our community decided to put smaller spaces right in people’s backyards (Figure 3.1). The farm partners with the neighbors and has installed raised bed gardens at their homes. They are wonderful because they create a direct line to food, and those kinds of opportunities are coming about more and more. We remain on the

⁷Laura and Lynn describe the proposed changes discussed by the city to include attracting new businesses to empty store fronts and replacing older and deteriorating multi-unit housing with single-family affordable housing for low and middle-income residents.
lookout, however, for larger spaces. Every time a house is taken down in our community, we will go see who has the space and if it has a green area. While local politics and plans for revitalization currently restrict our efforts to small, incremental changes, our community is organizing around the issue of green spaces because of our desire to make life better for people who live in the neighborhood.

My desire to grow food is rooted in childhood experiences in Dubuque. The types of food and levels of food access that once sustained us have been disrupted. During my childhood, summers were times of gardening, fishing, and hunting, and my parents’ friends always shared in their bounties. Beyond summertime, the nearby local pack house operated a grocery store that carried decent foods. When the foods that the neighborhood had access to changed, our diets changed too.
Since the grocery store went away, there has been nothing in that space to this day, over twenty years. Children growing up in the neighborhood today have fewer options.

These issues are important to me because it is about people and community. It is about meeting people’s needs. Sometimes I think that point is getting missed. I think we get caught up in the aesthetics of the city and neglect the basics. Are people’s needs being met? Because we have children facing obesity and a lack of proper nutrition. In Iowa, an estimated 14.7% of 2- to 4-year-olds in WIC and 17.7% of 10- to 17-year-olds are classified as obese (Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, 2018). In Dubuque, I see how these issues are reflected in our food differences. Decent grocery stores are miles away from our community; we need to reduce those numbers (see Footnote 9). Children do not need to start out in life with obesity because it leads to problems later in life.

I ask: if these issues are something we can control, why don’t we? Why shouldn’t we be concerned? We should be concerned with food’s impact on children, and we should look more into the connection between food and children’s performance levels at the schools. Of Dubuque’s 18 public schools, 10 recently have been identified as low performing (Iowa Department of Education, 2018). Proper nutrition becomes even more critical in this context. If we neglect these issues, nobody wins. I have asked myself, what can we do? I believe it will take a one-on-one approach. We can have all the programs in the world, but we need something in place that is fully dedicated to making this system work for our children. Unfortunately, I see kids hit the convenience store to buy junk food on the way to school, which provides little to no energy. It fills them up for a short time, but not the long term. That is why this issue is important to me—because no one needs to start out life like that.

The disappearances of our food spaces and food cultures impacted my personal health too, which in turn prompted me to turn to gardening and natural foods as an adult. The health issues that I experienced subsequently stabilized. Food can provide for health and nourishment but often I cannot find the types of foods that I want to buy fresh at the grocery store. When I talked to Carrie about this problem, I mentioned the challenges of finding the foods I want to be able to enjoy, like okra. I hardly can find it anymore. One grocery store, Econofood, had it years ago, but
now that store is gone and nobody carries it fresh. One time I came across fresh okra at Hy-Vee, a local grocery store. I immediately put a picture on Facebook and messaged my friends, “Look and tell me I’m not seeing things.” That is the only time I have seen it, and I gathered it up. The stores carry frozen okra, but it is not the same.

The take home message of this story is that Black community members, as well as community members from Asian-Pacific and African countries, often cannot access or find the foods they want to eat in the Washington and North End neighborhoods, or even in Dubuque. I have friends who even travel to Madison, Wisconsin (nearly 100 miles away) to shop for this reason. I have taken on a role in the neighborhood to grow, share, and promote healthy foods, increasing access to diverse varieties of seeds and vegetable plants. I focus on the crops and varietals in demand in communities of color and immigrant communities but hard if not impossible to find in the city.

In my role as a connector, I work with partners to bring people and food resources together. I have a garden that provides food for the community, naturally. I also do a lot connecting with people and helping them understand what it is to grow something. I help them learn how to grow it, where to get things, and how to move forward with growing food because often they do not know what resources are out there. As an example of bringing people and food resources together, Leslie (pseudonym) at Convivium Urban Farm had started a lot of starter plants and set them out for free. My friend Tamara (pseudonym) took them all but did not have enough space. Rather than letting the plants sit, I helped distribute them out to people so they could start their vegetables.

I want to take a step back here and discuss why all the issues I mentioned above—access to food and land, having a say in the future of our neighborhood—are issues demanding social justice. I understand the pain that comes from being undervalued, from being ignored, and from a long history of racism that has permeated all spaces of the neighborhood. I have experienced firsthand the barriers facing communities of color. That history has come to the forefront of recent political tensions as Dubuque’s population has become increasingly diverse. In response, I stay actively engaged in our food and in all the justice issues important to our wellbeing.
To show how racism plays out, take the issues of vacant land and food access. Why is it that every time our community proposes an idea to make it a growing space, it meets resistance? Our inability to grow food is compounded by our inability to buy it in a store. We do not have the same types of quality grocery stores accessible to our neighborhood that are in other parts of Dubuque. Why are these stores only on the other side of town, why aren’t they ours? These resources, land and food, are not benefitting the people in need of these benefits. Why is the idea of moving low-income people into affordable housing units on the periphery of the city—moving our community close to a better grocery store—considered a better potential solution than working together to make our current, centrally located neighborhoods habitable for all of us?

In response to all these issues, I have obtained an acre of land within an area of Dubuque identified as a food desert. I am growing food that is affordable so people can receive the benefits. It is also a community effort. I go and speak with the Dubuque city council on a regular basis, and set up meetings with the city manager, city attorney, and the human rights director. I need their buy in to address these disparities.

Dubuque has had a real culture shift and demographics have changed in recent years. Yet, from what I have seen the city has not coped with these changes. Their policies and actions have created a feeling that those who have migrated to Dubuque, those who are shifting the demographics, are causing the problem. I see the city’s revitalization plans as an attempt to push these people out, so that tourism and other city priorities are not impacted. What this has meant for our neighborhoods is that people—people of color, immigrants, and low-income people—are left living in substandard housing and living conditions. I said to Carrie that it is no wonder that there are arguments and fights occurring. They are perpetuated by the way the city has responded to changing demographics.

At the city council meetings, I have voiced these concerns. I have said in these meetings (as retold to Carrie in a 2017 conversation):

You have to look at how you created this. You put the majority of people you think are like minded in one area. And you close the lid. When you close the lid, you’re closing
lids to economic [opportunities], to jobs, a decent place to learn, decent food, medical attention, even entertainment. And now they’re all there and there’s only one way to get out. Here’s an analogy, if you put a bunch of lab rats in a box, and you close the lid, how are they gonna get out? They gotta fight each other to get to the top. That’s what you have here. Now our challenge is how do we get ’em out? How do we get ’em out? And, more importantly, do you want ’em out? There’s our challenge.

In my meetings with city officials, I have been working to combat these issues too, especially given the extent of dilapidated housing in our neighborhood. After years of dedication to these issues, I am now working to take legal action in support of the members of our community who are vulnerable to landlords who refuse to take proper care of rental housing.

Racial relations in Dubuque shape these connected issues—food, land, housing, and community development. In spite of these injustices, I am continuing to pursue incremental efforts, for example, finding ways to provide people with the food they enjoy and with opportunities to grow it. Even as some of our community gardens have been taken away, I keep thinking outside of the box to identify potential new green spaces to grow food and to advocate for better housing. I will keep bringing these opportunities to the attention of the city, in hopes that they will stand behind our efforts to increase green spaces and contribute to people’s wellbeing. Across my areas of activism—food security, land access, quality affordable housing, and social justice—I am demanding that plans to revitalize our neighborhoods truly work to make the lives of people living here better.

### 3.9 Gardening as more-than-food: Laura’s account

I (Laura) am a horticulturalist, landscaper, and avid gardener. I live in the Washington neighborhood in Dubuque, where I am a community organizer, connector, and leader at the Washington Neighborhood Community Garden. In 2016, I met Carrie while in my former role as the Dubuque County Extension Master Gardener Coordinator. Over the course of our conversations in the past few years, I have shared experiences of living in the Washington neighborhood and taking on these multiple roles. To understand the Washington Neighborhood Community Garden, it is important
to understand the neighborhood’s context. For example, when I first met Carrie, we talked at length about the neighborhood’s history and its relationship with outside people, organizations, and institutions. As a neighborhood resident, I have seen firsthand the tenuous relationship of my neighbors with the city and the police, a relationship linking directly to histories of racism and how that racism has manifested over time, through generations, and in everyday life. Even when people are not overtly racist, I see microaggressions happening in Dubuque on a regular basis.

Racism and its manifestations in the daily lives of people in the Washington neighborhood have impacted my role as a neighborhood organizer and gardener. As someone who is relatively new to Dubuque and to the neighborhood, I have sought to develop relationships with my neighbors but also am constantly aware of the balance required in navigating the racial dynamics of building trust as a white female in a diverse neighborhood. I walk past neighbors everyday. When I see someone for the first time and consider saying hello, I have learned to ask myself, “Is my motivation to build a relationship for the sake of relationships? Is it to make me more comfortable (while potentially making them more uncomfortable)?” It requires not trying too hard and not forcing a relationship when people may not want to expend the additional emotional labor to build one with me. In terms of gardening, I think about how to connect with people without being forceful about getting them involved if they do not want to be involved. One might conclude that without a little discomfort on all our parts, bridges might never be built. Yet, I never want to assume that I know what is best for anyone because that is a patriarchal way of thinking. In all my interactions, I have learned to be present and to have respect for people’s space in the neighborhood.

One of my goals in moving to the Washington neighborhood and joining this garden was to disrupt the stereotypes and the stigmas about certain areas of town. When I moved to the neighborhood, I also saw that outside organizations—for instance, city government, non-profit organizations, and universities—often would implement projects without first listening to, considering, and building trust with neighborhood residents. A major goal of my community organizing and gardening has been to reverse this trend, to turn one-sided relationships into reciprocal ones. What is im-
portant is not just asking for feedback from neighborhood residents, but having something to offer and inviting them in.

I have made myself into a connector, bridging the city and community organizations in Dubuque with the Washington Neighborhood. From there, if I really want to reverse these historical trends and one-sided relationships, I need trusting connections deeper into the neighborhood. Reaching out to leaders in the Black community who are already working with community organizations has been instrumental. I was very fortunate, for example, to connect at the Farmers Market one day with a leader in the Black community whose organization has been focused on intergenerational poverty. He invited me to take part in the organization’s programming with the correctional facility in the Washington neighborhood. This is just one example of the slow process of chain reactions that is beginning to bridge these gaps.

It is in this context that my role in the Washington Neighborhood Community Garden takes shape. Gardening for me has been about more than food. It has been an important way for neighbors to come together and have physical spaces to appreciate and enjoy. However, efforts to gentrify the neighborhood—including increasing purchases of lots by developers—demonstrate the neighborhood residents’ lack of control of land resources. At the same time, I recognize that food access and food security can be impacted by but require more than gardening. Like Lynn, I want to see more fresh food and grocery options in the neighborhood and question why the most expensive grocery store in Dubuque is located in the neighborhood that can least afford it.

At the garden, my fellow community members and I are driven by our desires to invest long-term through perennial plants, pollinators, and other species and infrastructures. When I think about this vision, what I would love to accomplish is getting our space to be more permanent. Right now, the space is owned by a property owner. Being able to get a long-term lease or a longer idea of that space would be wonderful because that will then mean more investments in longer term crops, like perennials and shrubs. Also, in 2017 we wanted to put in a drip—irrigation system that would make everything hands-free because it would save so much water. But because we were not sure if we would have the space next year—because we do not own the land—we felt we could not really
put in infrastructure the way that we would want. By 2018, we still did not have a secure space, but we decided to go forward with the drip-irrigation system in hopes that our efforts to make the garden a more permanent space would make it so.

We also have talked about chickens and beehives, and all sorts of things that really take knowing that you have a secure space before you begin. My long-term vision is either to solidify that space, as a permanent location for the garden, or be able to identify another space in our neighborhood that can be a permanent location for our garden, so that we can start moving in that direction. When Carrie asked me in 2017 if I had a sense of what would be needed to go forward with either of those two options, I said that I wanted the work we put to help the property owner see that this is a valuable asset, and taking this asset away is going to cause harm to the community. As far as other land, we have had a difficult time figuring out where else we would go. While we have put out feelers to see what comes up, we honestly have had to have a little faith that wherever the garden is supposed to be, we will get it figured out.

Another challenge—and opportunity—of the garden has been in redefining social expectations about what participation in a community garden means. While there are the constraints on the garden and how it is being accessed, I also have seen how encounters at the garden are redefining what it means to be part of the garden. What is interesting is that in the first few years of being at the garden, I grew convinced that the garden was not reaching all our neighborhood’s communities. The garden had been reaching people that I know, people in my same general structure and system, and people my age (young adult). I had found that it was not reaching those in poverty as much as we would have liked it to. (This is still true today, though I have been working to change that.)

So, I realized that it was not really reaching the components of the neighborhood that probably needed it the most, and that has been a continuing struggle for us to get that involvement. However, I do think that just having that garden exist, a green space exist, a beautiful space that is growing food and plants—that even if not involved, walking past it provides some sense, perhaps, of enjoyment or meaning. I think that for me, there is a lot of value to just having something beautiful in your neighborhood, even if you are not involved.
For example, we do notice that quite a few people walk by the garden, and they stop and they are looking in, and they are pointing at things. If I am at home, oftentimes—as often as I can if I am near a window and I see somebody stopping by—I run over and greet them, and invite them in. I try my best to involve others. We also have our group gardening day on Sundays, which is an attempt to invite anybody to come in and garden with us and take food home. Though, as I said that is still not quite reaching those that we need to reach. And that is another reason that having a space long-term will enable the garden to reach more and more people the longer that it is there.

One time when Carrie came to visit, and we were inside the garden, I pointed out the vantage to the park across the street where neighborhood children spend a lot of time playing (Figure 3.2). Later, I brought up the relationship between the garden and the park in our conversation because it illustrated what I had learned about the role of the garden and connecting better with more people in the community. I notice that every time that we are over at the garden, there are kids over at the park. And they are always watching what we are doing. A lot of the time they come over and ask us what are we doing. Or, especially if I am working outside of the garden, like in our little pollinator gardens or such, I will get kids over that actually want to help, and if I have the capacity, a lot of the times the kids will get to come in the garden. Therefore, I would say that the community that we are reaching, across the board, has been kids, because kids always want to come in and see what we are doing, and pick things, and explore. Sometimes there are parents there, and the parents will come over as well. Or the children will go home and tell their parents. That part is extremely valuable, to have that park across the street. Otherwise I do not know how much visibility we would have.

I have learned important lessons from my interactions with the children, including lessons about what it means to connect with people and the factors that stop people from coming to the garden. For instance, the kids who come in and pick raspberries have never picked raspberries before. They have no idea what a ripe raspberry looks like. I think it helps me when I am explaining to new people who come into the garden, what things are. And I realize in that moment that they do not
have the same context that I do, and that even the most basic concepts are not familiar, are not something that’s just learned.

These experiences broaden my awareness that not everybody knows about even the most basic concepts of gardening. And that has been eye opening, because it has made me look at things differently when trying to evaluate how I am going to approach the garden, how I approach people, and also how I approach, mentally and emotionally, understanding why it is that maybe people do not garden. I am fortunate enough to have a certain knowledge base, whereas others have not even a sliver of that. It has made me understand why feelings about not having that knowledge base might keep somebody out of the garden.
3.10 Political Ecology of the Body

Political Ecology of the Body (PEB Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy, 2013, 87) is a tri-partite framework that conceptualizes political ecological relations through three intertwined components: matter, structure, and knowledge. PEB describes material, everyday food-body relations (relational ontology) as impacting and impacted by uneven social relations (structural forces) and restrictive knowledges (knowledge production) (85). We utilize PEB in our analysis to consider how people’s bodily, emotional, and social lives impact their relationalities with food. PEB is particularly relevant to our co-authorship because it emphasizes the intersection of forces in political ecological struggles like food, land, and housing insecurity.

Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy (2013, 83) in their work describe the role of PEB—the interconnections among matter, structure, and knowledge—in bringing about social change, noting that: “structures influence the capacity of the body to affect change at a variety of scales, whether through global political economic forces, mechanisms of belonging at the community level, or linguistic categories that influence our personal experiences of self and other.” In their article, Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy apply the PEB model empirically in the context of school cooking and gardening programs to explore food-body relationships and bodily motivations to eat healthier, and also suggest it can be applied to include a wider variety of material associations, which we take to include garden-body relationships. They developed the model in recognition of political ecology’s increasing focus on “(un)healthy bodies” in addition to “(un)healthy landscapes” (85), domains which community gardening can bridge. By visibilizing diverse community knowledges, practices, and bodies that historically have lacked recognition and authority, relational frameworks like PEB can open up possibilities to co-construct knowledges that actually matter to the reshaping of inequitable social relations.

Thus, PEB is a framework that community-engaged researchers and partners can actively use to contest hierarchical categories, critically interrogate power relations, and make visible non-essentialist relations and enactments that largely have been ignored in dominant constructions of knowledge (Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy, 2013). Relationality in the context of feminist
political ecology includes ontological approaches that “treat humans and nonhumans as mutually constituted in and through social relations (Castree 2003; Hobson 2007)” (Sundberg, 2011, 321). Feminist political ecologists utilize the term *naturecultures* (Haraway, 2007, 2016) to conceptualize those relations as non-dualistic and non-individualistic (Di Chiro, 2015; Harcourt, 2015). PEB as a relational framework can guide community-engaged researchers in focusing on the emotional and embodied experiences of community members, while connecting those experiences to the broader social relations that produce inequities like food, land, and housing insecurity.

We seek to advance the opportunities for people living in the Washington and North End neighborhoods and highlight what matters to their/our lives. In terms of the PEB model, the garden makes new relationships and new experiences possible, but we contextualize these enactments in terms of the structural, ontological, and knowledge constraints that need to be disrupted too. Structural factors of food, housing, and land and uneven power relations permeate our neighborhoods. We have shown how structural factors—notably the context of systemic racism and its relationship to social precarities like poverty and food, land, and housing insecurity—directly interrelate with the politics of knowledge production and everyday food-body and garden-body relations. Two examples from our accounts illustrate this interrelationship. It manifests in our struggles to define revitalization in terms of permanent green spaces, quality affordable grocery stores, and thriving cultural foodways. Secondly, in the development programs seeking to address food, land, and housing insecurity, we see outside organizations re-marginize already marginalized communities by failing to first listen to people actually living in the neighborhood and take into account their knowledges and visions. Rather than forging one-sided relationships, principles of reciprocity guide our efforts to connect city and community development organizations with diverse and low-income residents in the Washington and North End neighborhoods.

Considering the three factors of the PEB model as overlapping and intertwined, we have critically considered how the Washington neighborhood’s lack of control of land resources is entangled with the possible futures for the neighborhood, its residential housing, and its gardens. At the same time, it is also entangled with visceralities defined by caring body-garden encounters between
human neighbors, plants, pollinators, and other species. Laura continues to invest in making the Washington Neighborhood Community Garden a space that fosters these caring relationalities—and helping the rest of the city recognize those values—even as the garden’s future remains very uncertain.

For Lynn, bodily relations to food in the neighborhood—what food one can grow, share, or buy, what one eats, and one’s bodily responses to eating—have been shaped by the changes in food, housing, and land access over past decades and in more recent years. We began having conversations, documenting the history of racism in Dubuque through Lynn’s account and conducting research. We examined how racism has shaped the city, and the effects of recent increases in the Black population and overall diversity of the city, concentrated in a few central districts, including the Washington and North End neighborhoods. Lynn has shown that an ontology of food access takes on more meaning when it is understood in this historical context as place-specific, culturally-specific, and bodily-taste specific. These experiences show how the broader structural struggles within the Washington and North End neighborhoods interplay with emotional, affective, and bodily relations—relations among humans, food, green spaces, living spaces, and other biota and abiotia. Lynn’s quest to engage in a certain type of food-body relation culturally rooted in childhood experiences forms an important part of being a social justice community activist.

Further connecting structural factors to the politics of knowledge production, we ask: who gets to define what revitalization looks like in the Washington and North End neighborhoods? In Lynn’s account, the question, “Who benefits?”, points to the ways that revitalization has been mediated by uneven power relations between neighborhood residents and the city. Revitalization works against diverse and low-income communities when “place-making” is limited to a process “through which residents imagine the neighborhood they want, and through which they work to produce a middle-class landscape, whether by changing the build environment, governing other residents’ behaviors, or excluding particular people” (Elwood et al., 2015, 128). The changes of Laura and Lynn’s neighborhoods, over time and through complex social relations within and throughout Dubuque
reflect the negotiations over what counts as revitalization and whose definition of the city comes to dominate polices and action.

In response to currently limited options and opportunities for gardening and green spaces, Laura and Lynn make do through creative collaborations and co-experimentations, alongside their continued activism and organizing. The examples we cited in our accounts—Lynn works with the Convivium urban farm to install small raised beds in neighborhood backyards, and Laura expands gardening practices throughout the Washington neighborhood in unconventional ways and spaces, such as curbside green spaces, to reach even more neighbors—demonstrate an elite land politics in which ontological understandings of economy and development leave little room for large permanent garden and green spaces in the neighborhoods. Working within and against structural, ontological, and knowledge constraints, Washington and North End residents are engaging in co-experimental, emergent alternative economies (Gibson-Graham, 2008), even as residents continue to press the city to have a say in the future of revitalizing vacant spaces.

Laura’s experiences further demonstrate challenges to dominant forms of knowledge construction—particularly, what does it mean to participate in the garden? In Section 5, Laura’s account describes the factors that influence an alternative ontology of participation, including considerations of racism and emotional and physical labor, as well as the slow process of building trusting relationships across racial and class boundaries. These factors have the potential to shape new understandings that simply being present in the neighborhood—including walking by and appreciating the garden—constitutes a form of relational engagement with, of participation in, the garden. Structural inequities have made gardening in its traditional sense (laboring to grow food) inaccessible for much of the neighborhood, even as Laura’s leadership in the garden and role as a community organizer is working to change it.

Participation in the Washington Neighborhood Community Garden is as much about walking by and appreciating the garden or showing curiosity and interest in it—or even growing non-food plants together—as it is about laboring to grow food, suggesting the role of affective and emotional encounters in this ontological reimagining. The structural, ontological, and knowledge barriers to
participating in local food systems have reshaped Laura’s role in the neighborhood in response. Through these experiences, Laura has seen how newly-conceived practices of participation can contest existing knowledge systems and social expectations about what it means to be part of the garden—and there are opportunities for outside organizations to learn from this ontological reimagining. Combining the stories and analyses in the previous two sections with a PEB framework suggests numerous opportunities for organizations working in food systems and community development to reframe their role, which we discuss in the next section.

3.11 Discussion

We consider the implications of our analysis for outside organizations planning to enact community development programs. We recommend that organizations—including Cooperative Extension, universities, governments, non-profits, and for-profit organizations—listen to and learn from communities rather than coming in as experts with predefined solutions already in hand. Outside organizations need to learn from and value the everyday experiences, creative capacities, efforts, and innovative practices already taking place within neighborhoods like Washington and North End.

Engaging neighborhood-based residents, organizations, and businesses in proposed development plans, policies, and programs is an important first step. We also encourage outside organizations to pay more attention to issues of uneven access, power, and authority—structure and knowledge, in PEB parlance—that shape social marginalization and limit possibilities to contest uneven relations. Along these lines, we note that supporting diversity requires more than including communities of color and low-income residents as representatives within local food and community development programs. They need to take account broader social contexts and the political inequities that produce conditions of poverty and insecurity.
Reflecting on community development plans for the Washington and North End neighborhoods, for example, we have shown how power dynamics are working to exclude residents from having a say in the places where they live. Throughout this article, we discuss how power dynamics come into play in the attempts of residents in the Washington and North End neighborhoods to turn vacant lots into permanent green spaces. Our experiences have shown us that non-market uses of land valued by neighborhood residents often take a backseat to local economic development projects that involve private land owners and business interests as primary beneficiaries. Similarly, as both Laura and Lynn’s accounts describe, we remain concerned that new housing being developments being built on vacant lots in the Washington and North End neighborhoods may not be accessible to residents with very low or even no income. The Washington and North End neighborhoods that we envision are places where residents who do not want to take on home ownership or cannot qualify for loans to purchase newly developed homes can still find affordable places to live in habitable conditions. They are also places where culturally diverse residents can buy and grow the food they want to eat, and where the neighborhoods’ residents—no matter their race, nationality, income level, or social status—can have a say in the future of their community.

Moreover, our analysis gives visibility to the transformations that the Washington and North End neighborhoods are making, even if these changes appear to outsiders as seemingly mundane, small-scale, or difficult to measure. These everyday practices involve co-experimentations with different modes of being and interacting with human neighbors, as well as the biotic and abiotic communities that are a vital part of the daily lives of people. As we have described in detail, our work in gardens, with pantries, and in throughout the neighborhoods is hindered by, but also challenges head-on, histories of racism, marginalization, and inequity in Dubuque. Our experiences

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8A University of Iowa study on poverty in Dubuque concluded: “Thus, the City’s interest in supporting homeowners in the Washington neighborhood and other older neighborhoods is well placed—so long as it improves the ability of existing homeowners to cover their housing costs” (Babb et al., 2012, emphasis original). Adding too this conclusion, we stress the need to support the ability of residents—including renters—to cover their housing costs without relocating away from the neighborhood.

9While not making the important distinction of quality and affordable grocers from lower quality and expensive ones, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (2017) publishes an online interactive Food Access Research Atlas, which maps low income and low food access areas by census tract. The atlas identifies the aforementioned Dubuque Tracts 1 and 5, roughly corresponding to the Washington and North End neighborhoods, as among the few areas in Dubuque classified as low-income and low access at one mile.
illustrate how projects like Growing Together can expand in scope to enable people, for instance, to experiment with their own definitions of ‘good food’, to expand ideas of what ‘participation’ in a community garden even means, and contribute to understandings about how to best address food insecurity in their neighborhoods (see also Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy 2013, 87; Gibson-Graham 2011; Carolan 2016; Haraway 2016).

Such transformative local knowledges and practices often remain peripheral to projects developed and led by outside organizations. For example, in Cooperative Extension community food programs, the design of activities and data collection historically have been oriented within a supply chain model of production, consumption, and waste reduction (Iowa State University Extension and Outreach 2017; Dunning et al. 2012; see also Chapter 4). This paradigm, grounded in “Western objectivism,” technocratic science, and top-down modes of engagement (see 3.5), leaves out important ways of knowing, particularly knowledges rooted in the everyday lives of communities experiencing social marginalization. In projects like Growing Together, supply chain paradigms delineate the parameters of project activities. While the project does not engage in ‘market’ activities commonly associated with supply chains—and arguably constitutes new forms of diverse, non-market ‘alternative economies’ (Gibson-Graham, 2008)—it nevertheless reflects supply chain emphases on maximizing production and efficiency. Aims include helping community gardeners make growing and donating activities more productive and efficient and assisting food insecure consumers in accessing and eating foods that maximize individual and societal health (Iowa State University Extension and Outreach, 2017). The project also overlaps with other efforts in Cooperative Extension, including the focus of nutrition experts on influencing eating behaviors and diets to maximize health, implemented through strategies that ‘help’ food insecure people ‘choose’ healthy foods (Carrie, personal conversations within Cooperative Extension and field notes). We show in this article that such models fail to consider histories of racism and colonization. They do not account for how these contexts position marginalized communities in political struggles over interrelated structural issues like food, housing, and land. Moreover, they tend to re-marginalize already marginalized
communities by assuming a universal definition of ‘good food’ (Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy, 2013).

Thus, our analyses problematizes the ways in which colonizing ontologies neglect knowledges generated in marginalized communities, and particularly those knowledges which advance their/our political struggles. The stories, co-constructed knowledges, and lessons we present reveal how the prevailing ontologies leave out issues that are important to people experiencing social marginalization. Our analyses show how racism, for instance, has led to economic marginalization, a lack of quality grocery stores and cultural foodways in the Washington and North End neighborhoods, and the implementation of community development plans and policies that fail to work for all residents.

Finally, attending to the interplay of structure, knowledge, and matter in food-body and garden-body relationships requires attention to the spatial-temporal dimensions of community food practice. The location of the gardens matters: we can foster new visceral encounters by being in these locations, in these neighborhoods, without threat of our gardens being bulldozed. As we share stories about our neighborhood gardening spaces and efforts, we reveal how the quantity of produce grown matters, but it arguably matters less than the relationalities that are developing, and that have the future potential to develop in the green spaces throughout the neighborhoods.

The PEB approach transforms the very notion of community economy. Structural, ontological, and epistemological factors identified through PEB can constrain but also can open up novel opportunities for developing alternative economies of food, based on social values like care. Applying the relational approach of the PEB model gives outside organizations the tools to break open the knowledge categories that situate dominant ontologies of community and economic development. It suggests roles for outside organizations beyond that of expert and focuses co-facilitation and co-learning roles on transforming inequitable relations in communities.

Through time spent living, engaging fellow community members, gardening, sharing food, creating beautiful shared green spaces, working with the neighborhood food pantry, attending city council meetings, organizing politically, and more, people in the Washington and North End neighborhoods are fostering a range of visceral encounters that aim to have an impact on social marginal-
ization, inequity, and insecurity. It is through a process of coming together and becoming together through active listening, learning about, and addressing the concerns, issues, and opportunities of neighborhood residents that outside organizations can be part of these efforts. Community programs and projects can use models such as PEB to trace these connections. Building on this point, for instance, we (re)define—in a socio-historical context—what it means to participate in a community sharing garden. We have shown how definitions arising from local communities can depart from ‘expert’ knowledges. For example, organizations like Cooperative Extension have constructed their understanding of community gardening and food donation based on idealized production and consumption practices (Dunning et al., 2012; Hassel, 2004). Through experiences in gardening and in neighborhood spaces, we found a mismatch between the traditional technocratic views of community donation gardening and food access, and views of community gardening as an opportunity for co-experimentation, new relationalities, and visceral encounters.

Re-thinking an ontology of community and food, a new relational ontology permits us to consider how the visceral encounter of walking in the neighborhood streets past a garden can constitute garden participation. Stopping for a moment and noticing it can constitute participation. Finding forms of play and exploration in the garden can constitute participation, as can eating the food it/we co-produce. Finally, experiencing a range of emotions—curiosity, appreciation, connection, trust/distrust, and comfort/discomfort, as well as taste/distaste for the vegetables grown—can also constitute a form of participation. Participation can be understood as relational assemblage, rather than as a numeric accounting of people engaged in garden labor (more indicative of technocratic measures of participation). In each instance of participation, the encounter of garden, body, and community forms a relational assemblage that contributes to the diversity of community food practices. Relevant to Growing Together, as an important part of reframing its relational ontology of food, Cooperative Extension can work with Master Gardeners who come from more privileged backgrounds to develop an awareness of how and why a garden might not reach everyone in a neighborhood, and why participation might take forms beyond traditional notions of gardening labor.
Beyond garden-body relations, when structural inequities persist, producing neighborhoods that lack affordable, quality grocery stores and housing, how can institutional partners build in the flexibility to respond? Transforming an organization’s role from an expert-based model to a facilitative and collaborative one in which communities define their needs and values means that programs will need to become more process-based. In other words, such programs will need to be less strictly defined from the outset to make space for the voices and needs of marginalized communities.

### 3.12 Conclusion

Through co-authorship, we have demonstrated how community and university organizations can work together as partners to contest histories of marginalization and foster more equitable social relations. For organizations like Cooperative Extension that are new to framing food, land, and housing insecurity as political ecological struggle, this paper empirically demonstrates how the PEB approach is useful in guiding conversations among partners and framing the social issues that matter to people’s everyday lived experiences. Through a praxis of knowledge-co-construction, we have sought to bring a politics of the everyday into view, and to enact new, more just and caring relations. Painting such a picture of community gardens provides a much richer understanding of how growing spaces can play a role in the transformation of food relations and practices, while also calling attention to the anti-oppression and anti-racism work that remains to be done.

Introducing political ecology into community engagement serves as a re-imagining of food systems for institutional and community partners. The PEB model is just one example of a relational framework that facilitates this shift—from food as this reproductive commodity that fills a strictly understood nutritional need of humans to something else—to food as a core, affective and interconnecting part of all beings. Based on our experiences, we see potential for community food collaborations to rethink what and who counts, and to foster relational ways of doing, thinking, and belonging. In co-authorship, we identified and analyzed the social structures and knowledges that shape the Washington and North End neighborhoods, but also the everyday, seemingly mun-
dane, often ignored relationalities that matter to us and our neighbors. These visceral encounters ground our activism and create unseen opportunities to enhance equity and bring about community well-being.

3.13 References


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CHAPTER 4. RETHINKING ‘COMMUNITY’ IN COMMUNITY FOOD

A paper to be submitted to *Antipode*

Carrie Chennault

Abstract

In this article, I present a case study of Growing Together Iowa to examine how this government- and university-sponsored program works to sustain communities and local food environments. Growing Together Iowa is a community donation gardening and food rescue program that aims to increase healthy food access among people experiencing food insecurity. It provides grant-funding to develop non-market local food supply chains connecting volunteer gardeners and gleaners as suppliers of free food to area food pantries, other distribution sites, and food recipients. This case study turns to textual analysis of Growing Together program documents, as well as analysis of ethnographic fieldwork and interview data from Dubuque, Iowa. I trace how Growing Together relates to and reinforces an ontology of community as “more responsible” supply chains of local food producers and consumers, while neglecting the political struggles that underlie food insecurity. Focusing on Growing Together’s activities in Dubuque, the analysis illustrates tensions between producer/consumer-focused conceptualizations of Growing Together, as defined through official documentation, program design, and evaluation, and the daily lived experiences of racial and class exclusion in neighborhoods experiencing high rates of food insecurity. I show how racial and class exclusion become reinforced through binary frameworks that equate food (in)security to (un)healthy and (non-)working bodies, cast food-secure producers as sustainers of life, and reduce food-insecure consumers to recipients of food and nutrition education. Reimagining what “more responsible” might mean outside of neoliberal producer-consumer relations, I turn to feminist theory to address issues of power, relationship, and identity in community food. By exploring the social re-
lationality among human communities and local food environments in Dubuque, I demonstrate how everyday community food practices exceed and contradict neoliberal productions of community as “more responsible” supply chains. In response, I develop feminist redefinition of community based on tenets of dynamic relationality and mutually interdependent relationality. Drawing upon Black feminist scholarship on relational life and mortal urgency, I encourage government and university sponsors of local food initiatives to redirect efforts away from local food supply chains and toward collective struggles that work with and for communities experiencing food insecurity.

4.1 Introduction

Food movements in the United States are working to address the ills of a global corporate food regime that has contributed to human and environmental crises like food insecurity and ecological devastation (Holt-Giménez and Wang, 2011; McMichael, 2009). The framing of global food emerges as a disconnection between production and consumption that tends to hide exploitative relationships with humans and the environment (Johnson, 2019). In the U.S., community food systems have emerged as a local alternative to global systems, based upon the understanding of community as a networked supply chain of socially interacting and often geographically close producers and consumers of local food (Campbell et al., 2013, 9). By developing localized producer-consumer relations, supporters of community food systems seek to foster greater food security and more socially, economically, and ecologically sustainable food systems (Campbell et al. 2013; Feenstra 2002; Slocum 2006, 328).

Underlying community food as a solution to global food is an assumption that more responsible supply chains emerge from local community connections (Allen 1999; Hinrichs 2000; cf. Kneafsey et al. 2008, 3). Community food system initiatives have worked to increase the presence and viability of alternative market and non-market localized supply chains where suppliers and distributors include farmers markets, food hubs, food co-ops, community supported agriculture (CSA), community gardens, immigrant farms, food recovery organizations, and grocery stores and food pantries.
carrying local food options (Hinrichs, 2000; McEntee and Naumova, 2012; Slocum, 2006; Wilson, 2013).

The U.S. food movement has developed a robust alternative food infrastructure but still has important work to do. In the Introduction to their recent edited collection on the food movement, critical food scholars Alkon and Guthman (2017, 14) call for a new era of food activism centered around a commitment to hold governments responsible for sustaining humans and the environment—rather than depending on individuals, communities, and free markets. Their work traces the history of activism in the movement, including successful efforts to produce and promote local organic food. While problematizing the predominance of privileged—often white and affluent—participants in the U.S. food movement, they also cited numerous food justice efforts to develop community food systems led by low-income people and communities of color (7-8; see also McEntee and Naumova 2012, 237).

As Alkon and Guthman (2017) note, the need for a new era of activism, stems from critiques that pervasive racial, class, and gender inequities and neoliberal forms of governance persist even within the alternative spaces formed by the food movement (see also Alkon and McCullen 2011; Minkoff-Zern 2014; Slocum 2006). Critical food scholars have identified these issues by studying the exclusionary functions of corporate and alternative food systems, revealing the constraints that differentially position people, food, and environments in relation to one another. Allen (2010, 296) explains the constraints of local food: “That is, differences in wealth, power and privilege exist both among and within localities. In addition to differences that correspond to material resources, there is also differential discursive status and access, mediated through cultural relations of power.” Considering community as an alternative, its potential for transforming the food system becomes not just an issue of physical proximity among more responsible supply chain participants, but one of power, relationship, and identity among and within community food systems (Allen, 1999; McCutcheon, 2013).

In holding governments responsible for guaranteeing that food systems sustain humans and the environment, it is important to examine not only what services governments fail to provide, but
also the services they do provide. In this article, I will develop a case study of Growing Together Iowa to examine how a federal and state-sponsored program works to sustain people and local food environments. Growing Together Iowa is a community donation gardening and food rescue\(^1\) program to increase healthy food access among people experiencing food insecurity. It works to develop non-market local food supply chains that connect volunteer gardeners and gleaners to food pantries, other distribution sites, and food recipients.

Now a multi-state\(^2\) initiative, Growing Together began in 2016 in Iowa and was developed by Iowa State University Extension and Outreach (which I refer to as Cooperative Extension in this article). This project operates through Cooperative Extension’s SNAP-Education program, with funding and guidance from the federal USDA SNAP-Education program. County-level Cooperative Extension offices across Iowa work with local community gardeners and partners to apply for grant funding for projects. Participants in turn follow USDA and Cooperative Extension guidelines, take part in Cooperative Extension educational and training events, and report project outcomes annually. In this article, I will explore how Growing Together relates to an ontology of community as “more responsible” supply chains of local food producers and consumers. I will discuss what this approach has enabled the program to accomplish in terms of improving food access. Grounding a supply chain approach as a neoliberal response to food insecurity, I also will consider the limits of this approach. These limits include how neoliberal forms of governance depend on communities becoming “more responsible,” and how, paradoxically, neoliberal subjectivities also inhibit responsibility and reinforce social inequities. As a case study, Growing Together will reveal how everyday life—social relationality among human communities and local food environments—exceeds and contradicts neoliberal productions of community as “more responsible” supply chains.

Reimagining what “more responsible” might mean outside of neoliberal producer-consumer relations, I turn to feminist theory to address issues of power, relationship, and identity in com-

\(^1\)Community donation gardening describes the efforts of community gardens to grow and donate food to local food distribution sites, such as food pantries. Food rescue includes the efforts of farmers or other community members to glean unharvested food from farms or collect unsold food at retail sites like farmers markets.

\(^2\)Since 2016, Cooperative Extension in Iowa has worked with other states to expand the project more broadly across the US Midwest.
munity food systems. Alkon and Guthman (2017, 14) assert that “social movements help shape subjectivities—senses of proper selfhood and citizenship—whether explicitly in trainings or implicitly through modeling particular languages and behaviors.” I argue that feminist theory can assist us in redefining community relationally, departing from the individualist, neoliberal, and racialized logics that constitute community food system subjectivities as producers and consumers (Alkon and Guthman, 2017; Busa and Garder, 2015; Moragues-Faus, 2017) and food as a commodity (DeLind, 2006; Figueroa, 2015).

To develop a feminist redefinition of community, I will employ two important relational features, dynamic relationality (Pratt, 2012) and mutually interdependent relationality (Butler, 2005, 2012; McKittrick, 2011). First, Pratt (2012, 182) “re-thinks” community dynamically in terms of a performative “practice-affect-emotion” spiral, defined as “the cycle of practice, affect, and emotion cause and effect that loops through unfolding associations.” In this article, I will discuss how this re-thinking enables us to deconstruct community’s fixed spatial binaries (global/local, belonging/not belonging, homogeneous/diverse, human/non-human) and reconstruct community as spiraling moments of encounter unfolding among diverse peoples and environments. Second, Butler (2012) theorizes an ethics of responsibility to humans and the environment to develop a notion of mutual interdependence. Butler’s work suggests how an ethics of responsibility is thwarted by dominant individualist understanding of the human subject. Our ethical response to an individualist human subject, Butler argues, is to become undone as subjects.

Black feminist theory is employed in this analysis to reexamine what community, redefined as spiraling moments of encounter as undone subjects, might mean for developing praxis in Growing Together. Black feminist scholars have called attention to the dehumanizing ways in which racism—through positing a white human subject against a less-than-human other—and its analysis can foreclose attention to already existing relationalities of black life (Gilmore, 2007; McKittrick, 2011; Mollett, 2017). A focus on black life provides new food activists, and the governments they are holding responsible for sustaining life, a way to disrupt this foreclosure. Black feminist theory tells us that community already exists as relations of connectivity, kinship, and survival in the face of
mortal urgency (McKittrick, 2011). Forms of new food activism, including scholar-activism, can demand that government programs like Growing Together engage communities in existing and new collective political struggles to sustain life amidst racism and inequity.

My experiences working with Growing Together reveal the ways in which a supply chain ontology is deeply embedded within community food systems. This ontology has contributed to the production of fresh, local food for people who have little access to it. Such an immediate, material response is necessary in the face of a deeply inequitable food system, but is not sufficient to transform social relations that produce inequities. As I will show through this case study, Growing Together, while providing an immediate response to food insecurity, also reveals the ways in which the commoditizing and subjectivizing forces of this response produce neoliberal forms of governance, neglect racial and class exclusion, and displace existing and potential radical struggles for life.

Through analysis of Growing Together and engagement with feminist theory, I elucidate principles of praxis around which the collective efforts of community food systems participants, scholars, and government and non-government partners, can refocus on creating conditions of responsibility for humans. These principles require us to reflect upon what it means to be human in the first place and how our understandings of the human can interfere with our responsibilities for sustaining the world.

Section two in this paper reviews the supply chain conceptualization of community predominant within community food systems scholarship and turns to critical food scholarship to consider the problematics inherent in the conceptualized idea of community. I take up the critique of community food, offered by critical food studies, through the remainder of the paper. In section three, I develop a case study of Growing Together, using ethnographic and interview methods and textual analysis. My research on Growing Together took place over three years of working with ISU Extension and Outreach and community garden partners at affiliated community garden and food distribution sites across the state. In this article, I focus on community donation gardening efforts in the Washington neighborhood, a racially and ethnically diverse and lower income neighborhood in
Dubuque Iowa. The case study of Growing Together sets the stage for the analysis in section four, in which I draw on feminist theory to re-define community relationally and inform principles for new food activism. The conclusion discusses how new food activism can build upon and contribute to relational understandings of community. I make the case for why it is important to incorporate these principles into the development of “more responsible” community relations, and how the principles counteract supply chain invocations of community food systems dominant in theory and practice. Lastly, I consider future directions for new food activism in critical food research and praxis.

4.2 Defining community as producers and consumers within a local supply chain

Community food systems as a body of scholarship is a practitioner-focused field aiming to address key challenges in developing sustainable local food economies (Campbell et al., 2013). Community food systems is a broad area of study, bringing together scholars, practitioners, policy makers, and other local stakeholders, many of whom contribute to food and agricultural Extension within the U.S. land-grant university system. Community food scholars and stakeholders are committed to a vision of a community food system “in which sustainable food production, processing, distribution, and consumption are integrated to enhance the economic, environmental, and social health of a particular place” (Feenstra 2002, 100; additionally, Dunning et al. 2012; Sands et al. 2016 provide examples in the context of Cooperative Extension and food policy councils, respectively). The supply chains in community food systems—often referred to in terms of “farm to fork” (Feenstra, 2011, 70)—include both alternative market economies (e.g. farmers markets, CSA, and traditional and cooperative grocers) and non-market economies (e.g. community gardens and food pantries).

Feenstra (2002, 100) identifies the problem of “the dominant food and agricultural system” as one of “environmental degradation and economic disaster” for communities. In the framing of this problem, the communities harmed by this system include people involved in family farms and
local agrifood businesses, as well as community members lacking sufficient access to or ability to afford “real food” (100). A major assumption underlying the successful proliferation of community food systems is that communities can solve these issues, given the right institutional support. As Feenstra (2002, 101) puts it, “We believe that part of the solution involves citizens in particular places putting their creative energies together to come up with their own solutions.”

Central to this idea of community food systems is an understanding of community anchored in social movement trends starting in the 1960s that emphasized “human scale” movements versus “large-scale politics” (Allen, 2010, 296). By the 1990s, the dominance of neoliberal policies ushered in an era of vertically and horizontally integrated global agrifood and created a reactionary local movement in response (ibid, 296). Advocates of community food movements started with the belief that localized supply chains based on community connections are more responsible than these global food supply chains (Allen, 2010; Morgan et al., 2006).

By the turn of the century, community food scholarship emerged to provide institutional leadership and guidance from universities to the public (Feenstra, 2002). They encouraged the development of “sustainable” and democratic” community food systems that, among many goals, can produce more respectful relations and equitable socioeconomic conditions for marginalized agrifood laborers and eaters (ibid, 100-103). Yet, community food scholars over time also have come to realize that localizing supply chains around values of democratic participation cannot inherently produce more just social relations (Allen 2010, 297; Campbell et al. 2013).

In response, community food systems literature has directed attention to correcting issues of “racial and class bias” as a response to sociocultural critiques raised by critical food scholars (Campbell et al., 2013, 8). They have also theorized the development of more “equitable, sustainable, and democratic” supply chains through “supplement[ing] market-based solutions with carefully targeted public investment” (ibid, 7). Despite the desire to address social justice, the community food literature largely considers social justice to be possible through community relations that prioritize values beyond financial profit (Allen, 2010).
Community food scholars and practitioners understand this set of community relations in terms of value-based supply chains (Feenstra, 2011; Klein and Michas, 2014). Klein and Michas (2014, 57) note:

These models seek to incorporate conventional supply chain norms of efficiency, standardization, and affordability while meeting the diverse social and economic values motivating the local food movement, such as mutual benefit between supply chain members, transparency, environmental stewardship, and social equity (Diamond & Barham, 2011; Feenstra et al., 2011; Stevenson & Pirog, 2008).

As this quote illustrates, values like social equity and justice take shape within the supply chain. In response to sociocultural critiques focused on race and class, community food scholars and practitioners advocate for increased diversity and ownership of community food initiatives by people of color (Campbell et al., 2013, 8–9). On the consumer side of the supply chain, community food studies applies behavioral approaches to explain, for example, low participation rates of low-income people in community food spaces like farmers markets (Farmer et al., 2016). Proposed solutions to low participation among low-income groups involve facilitating interest in or access to localized supply chains, for instance through increased consumer education or bringing mobile markets to low-income and diverse neighborhoods (ibid.). In summary, this literature suggests that communities can develop local supply chains that are inclusive of diverse groups of producers and consumers; moreover, local supply chains can contribute to greater justice and equity through democratic processes of participation (Feenstra, 2002).

4.3 Deconstructing the problematics of community: Perspectives from critical food scholarship

Alternative food geographer McCutcheon (2013, 186) addressed the problematic of race and community food in the United States in a case study of two Black Nationalist organizations within the food movement:
Those looking to diversify the movement and bring marginalized groups in might use these two cases as examples that growing and distributing food is not enough. Social justice must be at the heart of community food work because the relations occurring in it are a microcosm of the relations occurring in society.

McCutcheon’s findings suggest, for critical food scholars, the initial promise of community food systems has not been realized. Critical food scholars have chronicled the overwhelming extent to which community food systems in practice have failed to counteract neoliberal governance, reproduced dominant cultural norms, and exacerbated racialized social inequities (Alkon and Guthman, 2017; Bradley and Herrera, 2016; DuPuis and Goodman, 2005; Slocum, 2006). They have pointed to the devastating human health and environmental effects of neoliberal state and corporate actions, while questioning the transformative capacity of current community-based alternatives that make individuals and communities “responsible for addressing problems that were not of their own making” (Alkon and Guthman 2017, 15; see also Alkon and Mares 2012, 349). In this context, community itself has become a problematic, rather than a solution to the crisis of global food.

Caraher and Dowler (2014, 235) describe how the “current rhetoric easily reverts to the need for people to budget and cook adequately, locating the problem at the individual level yet again.” Recognizing the tensions between normative practices of good food and the marginalization of low income people and communities of color in alternative food spaces, Alkon and McCullen (2011, 953) draw on Patricia Hill Collins’ contributions to intersectionality theory to analyze constructions and contestations of race and class in two farmers markets in California. They found that romanticizing local food and designating particular food choices as ethical together posit low income people and communities of color as “ignorant and apathetic towards their food sources” (ibid, 953).

In demonstrating how producer- and consumer-focused narratives permeate community food systems, scholars have examined how efforts to address food insecurity seek to enable right food choices of individual consumers through access to fresh, locally-grown fruits and vegetables. These right food choices are grounded in dominant cultural practices of good food, the general idea of, and specific ideas about, what constitutes perfect or ethical eating (Alkon and McCullen, 2011;
Bradley and Herrera, 2016; Busa and Garder, 2015; DuPuis et al., 2005; DuPuis and Goodman, 2005; Figueroa, 2015; Guthman, 2008; Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy, 2013; Minkoff-Zern, 2014). Norms of ethical consumption foster attitudes among privileged—often white and affluent—food system participants that “poor people/people of color/other victims of cheap food would purchase local food (and make the morally right choice) if only the barriers (education, finances, etc.) to these purchased were removed” (Busa and Garder, 2015, 333). Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy (2013, 82) further problematize how nutrition education programs have transformed “good food/bad food lists” and “‘shoulds’ of eating” into “scientific and biological truths,” erasing the social histories in which behavioral codes, regulations, and norms are constituted.

Critical food studies show how such a focus on marginalized consumer behavior reproduces food system inequities rather than promotes food security or justice. More broadly, critical food scholars call attention to the social and economic inequities that produce food insecurity and injustice, and how the intersections of race, class, gender, and other social marginalizations factor into the diversity of complex and shifting food relations. Problematically, marginalized groups have little overall voice, decision-making, and participation in the U.S. within community-based food systems, which has further prompted scholars to collaborate with marginalized communities in the pursuit of food justice, security, and sovereignty (Bradley and Herrera, 2016).

Research on the politics of community aligns with calls to study the capacities of marginalized communities. These calls emphasize the need to de-center food in critical food research (Figueroa, 2015) and problematize how our current food system depends on some lives counting less than others (Guthman and Brown, 2016). In the next section, I introduce a case study of Growing Together Iowa as a way to examine the politics of community and food and identify opportunities to reframe responsibility in light of the critiques raised in critical food scholarship.

### 4.4 Community in Growing Together: A case study

As a research assistant for Growing Together Iowa for three years spanning 2016 to 2018, I participated in Cooperative Extension program activities and organized events with Cooperative
Extension faculty, staff, and other research assistants at Iowa State University. Within Growing Together’s participating communities, I took part in donation garden trainings, field days, public presentations, harvests, donation activities, and volunteer work at pantries. In conducting this research, I employed field-based methods that include ethnographic interviews and observations and semi-structured interviews. During my fieldwork, I traveled to participating gardens and affiliated food distribution sites within Growing Together across the state of Iowa. I also engaged in participatory research through co-authorship with Washington and North End neighborhood community gardeners in Dubuque, Iowa (Chapter 3).

In Growing Together Iowa, participating community donation gardens independently operate across the state. Community donation gardens are similar to community gardens (versus individual or at-home gardens), but growers distribute produce either directly to local residents experiencing food insecurity or indirectly to area food pantries and similar distribution sites (Chapter 2, 2; Iowa State University Extension and Outreach nda). Master Gardeners in participating counties develop (or in many cases, build upon already developed) relationships with community gardens interested in donation. The gardens then formally affiliate with this program through a county-level application for up to $5000 of annual grant funding per county from the Cooperative Extension SNAP-Ed (Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program-Education) program. The program in turn requires County Extension offices to collect and submit evaluation data from each garden, which then filters into state and multi-state reports to USDA SNAP-Education. In many, if not most, cases the participant communities have been and continue to take part in community food activities (community gardening, urban farming, local food advocacy and activism, etc.) in their various locales prior to and independently of Growing Together, in efforts affiliated and unaffiliated with Cooperative Extension.

In developing the case study below, I draw upon interviews, ethnographic fieldwork, and document sources produced by Cooperative Extension for Growing Together. In the first part of this section, I discuss the structure and design of Growing Together. I introduce document sources to highlight how this program reflects a supply chain ontology, and I discuss how quantification
is built into this logic through program evaluation. The second section shows how supply chain ontologies interface with program activities on-the-ground, I present and discuss excerpts from a semi-structured interview that I conducted with Sonja DeMulder, a Dubuque County Master Gardener. Sonja has volunteered at the Washington Neighborhood Community Garden (WNCG) in Dubuque since 2016 and travels into the neighborhood to do this work. In my research traveling across Iowa and meeting with volunteer Master Gardeners and affiliated food pantry personnel, I learned how this program reflects diverse understandings and experiences of community. I focus on Sonja’s experiences and understanding of community as a “boundary-crosser” in Dubuque because it demonstrates the ways in which community donation gardening activities simultaneously can reinforce and contest a supply chain approach to community food systems.

As Sonja’s story shows, Cooperative Extension’s involvement in fostering community food systems as local supply chains shapes how the concept of community, and its relation to food, is imagined and enacted. Sonja’s story is important because it illustrates some of the tensions between producer/consumer-focused conceptualizations of Growing Together, as defined through official documentation and program design and evaluation, and the daily lived experiences of racial and class exclusion in community food systems.

4.4.1 Supply chain perspectives

By adopting and promoting a local supply chain approach to conceptualize community food systems, Growing Together uses forms of quantification built into the logic of the supply chain to justify its existence to Cooperative Extension and USDA SNAP-Education. The ontological spaces of Growing Together become defined in terms of production, consumption, and neoliberal forms of governance that hold individuals and communities responsible for addressing social and environmental problems (Alkon and Guthman, 2017, 12–14). I argue that Growing Together demonstrates how a supply chain ontology is embedded in non-market forms of economy. Whereas supply chains generally take shape through market-based activities of exchange between producers and consumers, the networks of local food production, donation, and consumption affiliated through Growing Together
illustrate an example of non-market-based community economies through activities of community donation gardening, gleaning, and free food distribution.

The coalition of partners who come together to apply for the grant fill a diversity of roles in support of these activities, as is shown in the guidelines for Growing Together grant applicants (Figure 4.1) and in the list of county project descriptions for the upcoming 2019 growing season (Iowa State University Extension and Outreach, 2019). The supply chains form as networks of Master Gardeners, local farmers, and gardeners in partnership with organizations and people who distribute and consume the produced food and provide technical support for Growing Together’s activities.

![Figure 4.1 2019 Growing Together Mini-Grant Guidance: Eligible Applicants. Iowa State University Extension and Outreach.](https://www.iowaaging.gov)

Two important points bear mention here in evaluating the claim that Growing Together reflects and reinforces a supply chain ontology. First, by “reading for difference rather than dominance” (Gibson-Graham 2006, 54; Harris 2009) as a mode of textual analysis, we can find spaces of difference within the application guidelines for partnerships that do not necessarily fit within supply chain roles. For instance, partners may include Agency on Aging organizations, 4-H chapters, and groups that service immigrants and refugees, among others (Figure 4.1). In practice, I have
observed during my site visits across the state, however, coordination with other individuals and organizations tended to function within the scope of supply chain activities—whether to enlist 4-H participants as volunteer gardeners, to provide grant funding for refugee farming groups, to establish a produce donation relationship with a congregate meal site serving older Iowans, or to provide educational materials for low-income families on food safety and preservation of garden produce (see also Iowa State University Extension and Outreach (Iowa State University Extension and Outreach, 2019). This is not to discount the diverse modes of participation by Growing Together partners, but rather to point out how the guidelines tend to conceive of these roles in defined terms.

The program guidelines establish two primary project partners, Master Gardeners (growing the produce) and food recipient agencies. Diverse coalition members play a “supporting” role to strengthen these primary supply chain activities. This role is further evidenced in the guidelines, which state that funds from the grant should “enable Master Gardeners in Iowa to engage in projects which increase the availability of fresh produce to families with low-income” (Figure 4.2). Cooperative Extension also defines the scope of grant-eligible community garden activities for Growing Together (Iowa State University Extension and Outreach, ndb). In 2019, these activities included “Donate” and “Connect” (Figure 4.2), both of which strengthen the development of supply chains. “Donate” activities focus on food production and distribution itself and “Connect” activities focus on developing the networks to foster production and distribution, with an explicit expectation that food production and distribution activities will result from the development of these new supply chains.

The second point is that, in reading for difference, we can see ways that Growing Together actually accomplishes more than its guidelines might suggest. This program supports the development of spaces that do far more than encourage production, distribution, and consumption of “healthy food.” As a researcher visiting sites across the state, I encountered diverse relationships among people, food, and the gardens—gardeners who find gardening therapeutic and joyful or an opportunity to learn something new. Many Master Gardeners previously had grown flowers, rather
Figure 4.2 2019 Growing Together Mini-Grant Guidance: Activities. Iowa State University Extension and Outreach.

than vegetables, or had primarily grown vegetables for personal consumption or demonstration (i.e. at an educational event or county and state fairs), not to production scale. These gardeners are excited by opportunities to experiment in this new way. I also met food pantry staff who teach volunteers about people’s lived experiences of food insecurity as an effort to dispel myths about poverty and food insecurity.

Further, by directing funding and Master Gardener volunteer hours toward the production aspects of community gardens, already existing community gardens can allocate effort and non-Growing Together resources to other types of activities. Partnering with Growing Together also strategically can enable greater legitimacy and visibility among community leaders, municipal governments, and other potential funding organizations. My point in reading for difference is to show what the project actually accomplishes or enables outside of the bounds of its supply chain conceptualization through Cooperative Extension and USDA. Yet, as I show in the next section, the
supply chain nevertheless occupies the ontological spaces of Growing Together in ways that displace issues of power, relationship, and identity raised by critical food studies.

Turning next to program evaluation and reporting to the USDA, institutional representations of Growing Together’s accomplishments make reading for difference a more challenging endeavor. This program’s evaluation metrics reveal how community food relations are conceptualized by institutional funders as a supply chain. Growing Together directly assesses healthy food access by measuring changes in supply (Figure 4.2, Figure 4.3). Of the research and evaluation data emphasized and accounted for throughout the project, one measure has captured the essence of the Growing Together’s objectives and has become ubiquitous with its success: the pounds of produce grown in the gardens and donated to the food pantries. As a direct measure of supply, the pounds of produce provide the central rallying point around which the project has been able to gear its resources and communicate its results. This metric prominently appears in Growing Together communications and outreach—including web pages, press releases, promotional materials, internal team communications, status updates (see, for example Iowa State University Extension and Outreach 2019). The pounds donated have been celebrated institutionally, for instance, in a USDA SNAP-Education Twitter post (SNAP-Ed Connection, 2017), by the Association of Public Land Grant Universities (nd), and through an award at the annual Iowa State University Extension and Outreach conference to the county that had donated the greatest number of pounds during the previous growing season (Iowa State University Extension and Outreach, 2018).

The program also seeks to impact changes in consumer demand for fresh fruits and vegetables. For example, it encourages the sharing of “nutrition education” materials, particularly those that are developed through direct education programs coordinated by Cooperative Extension’s SNAP-Education program (Iowa State University Extension and Outreach, nda), see Figure 4.2). This requirement situates Growing Together in line with the historical nutrition education mission of USDA SNAP-Education. Figure 4.3 illustrates the importance of the supply chain and its quantifiable measurement in terms of production, distribution, and consumption.
Projects leveraged $145,759 in non-SNAP-Ed funds to support their work.

227 food pantries and distribution sites received produce as a result of the project.

142,523 pounds of fruits and vegetables supplied to food pantries and distribution sites.

Growing Together is a multi-state SNAP-Ed project to increase access to fruits and vegetables in food pantries. SNAP-Ed, the Master Gardener Program and food pantries are working together to build and maintain donation gardens in their communities.

Figure 4.3 2018 SNAP-Ed Highlights: Growing Together. Iowa State University Extension and Outreach
The promotional document “2018 SNAP-Ed Highlights: Growing Together” refers to supplies of vegetables by poundage, the number of sites in production, the distribution to food pantries and related sites by number of sites served, the number of community partners and Master Gardener volunteers involved, and the number of low-income people served by the project (approximated through foot traffic at distribution sites). It also presents the dollar amount of non-SNAP-Education funds leveraged by grant recipients.

This last metric establishes a key relationship in Growing Together linking the supply chain ontology directly to neoliberal modes of governance. The development of community donation gardening networks to address food insecurity seems, on the surface, counter to the enactment of neoliberal forms of governance precisely because it is government-funded. Yet, USDA and Cooperative Extension designed Growing Together grants as temporary kick-starters, intended to spur integrated networks of individual volunteers, NGOs, and community organizations that can independently support community donation gardening activities. I thus situate Growing Together within efforts that scholars refer to as “roll out neoliberalism” (Peck and Tickell 2002; see also Alkon and Guthman 2017). Pudup (2008, 1229) goes so far as to rename community gardening to organized gardening projects to “draw a distinction between the postwar ‘community gardening’ era when organized projects could be construed as social resistance and the more recent projects animated by an ethos of individual.”

4.4.2 Engaging the problematics of community

The supply chain emphasis within Growing Together has guided, and even shifted, how gardeners operate the community gardens. For Sonja, a Master Gardener who, in 2017, served as the sponsor for the SNAP project at the Washington Neighborhood Garden in Dubuque, Iowa, reaching poundage goals for their community donation garden became a new priority for the garden, which is in a predominately low-income and racially diverse neighborhood in Dubuque. The garden had

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Sonja, upon review of this manuscript, emphasized how the term “organized gardening project” describes what Growing Together expected of the Washington Neighborhood Community Garden, recalling how it redirected the gardeners’ time to “websites, spreadsheets, and timelines” activities rather than community gardening activities. Sonja lamented how, during participation in Growing Together, they become “accountable for numbers and resources but los[t] the whole human side.”
not previously functioned in this capacity, and when it fell short of the poundage donation goals set out in the grant application, Sonja sought other ways to make up these totals. Meeting poundage goals has benefits. It provides benefits of increased fresh food access for people in the Washington neighborhood. Yet, Extension’s evaluation of community gardening projects based on poundage goals may unexpectedly reinforce racial and class relations, as well as foreclose some of the political potentials of building community through a public gardening space.

During our interview, Sonja experienced conflicting feelings about what community means. On one hand, Sonja described how the garden has functioned and continues to function, serving the neighborhood residents directly without as much attention to production levels. The interactions happening at the garden constituted community for Sonja. On the other hand, through the garden’s affiliation with Growing Together in 2017, Sonja’s community garden efforts attended to donating maximized poundage to the local pantry. Illustrating these points, Sonja spoke about the neighborhood residents coming to the garden:

“They are so excited, the kids especially, and some adults, to come into the garden, work the garden, take the produce home, because they work the garden. Right? So that means, not that much is going to the food pantry, but it’s in the community.”

What Sonja identifies in this quote is the ideological difference between the garden as a space in which neighborhood residents come together, work, and take some food home—thereby creating community—versus the garden as a production space designed to supply the local food pantry. Later, Sonja elaborated on interactions with community residents at the WNCG and described how experiences in the year prior to participation in Growing Together created a desire to come back to the garden in the following year:

And I was giving out cabbages, and tomatoes, and cucumbers. And that’s what I found rewarding, when I had that interaction. I didn’t know who was going to show up, and who would stop to chat, and who would tell me stories, and who would say, “Is that hops growing there?” And I would say, “How did you know that was hops? Because that’s really different.” And you know, you’d have these little interactions. . And [then]
I was in my car, and I was probably cleaning my hands before I touched the steering wheel, and I looked over, and there was a grandfather with his son, picking up cabbages, and the two of them smiling, and talking, and laughing. And I thought, “How does this get any better?” And so, that’s why I got involved again this year.

In this following year when WNCG participated in Growing Together, Sonja recognized that the garden was not going to meet its poundage goals. Although Extension did not require the gardens to meet these goals, the program’s objectives nonetheless reframed Sonja’s way of thinking about being a community gardener. Sonja began working on efforts outside of the WNCG to acquire tomato plant starters and transplant them to five-gallon buckets for the pantry to distribute to compensate for the donation shortage. In another effort to compensate for the garden, Sonja created handouts for community members and organizations like the local fire department to encourage them to donate produce to the food pantry. Sonja explained this to me:

I wanted to expand, because I knew it wasn’t going the way I thought it was going to go at Washington, and I knew I had these goals. So I thought, “Okay, this is my way of making up the lost poundage from the Washington, if I could get more people from the community to donate.” And so, that’s what I’ve been focused on.

Without a way to measure the future tomatoes produced in the distributed buckets or how many pounds of donation the fliers generated, Sonja felt that these efforts at least would add some poundage, even if unknown, to the totals. The differences between the Sonja’s initial motivations for involvement and subsequent responsibility for poundage goals in the next year—as part of Growing Together—point to the impacts of Extension narrowly conceptualizing community within a supply chain approach.

Listening to Sonja’s story, I became aware of a second level that reflects a certain set of social expectations about the relationship between community donation gardeners and people experiencing food insecurity. As background, the community garden and food pantry where Sonja volunteers are located in the Washington neighborhood, which is one of Dubuque’s most racially and ethnically diverse and has a much higher rate of poverty than overall for the city (U.S. Census Bureau,
Communities of color, and in particular the Black community in Dubuque, have faced a history of violent racism and social exclusion (Chapter 3). At the time of my interview with Sonja, the racial and class context of the Washington neighborhood were familiar to me through my research, including time spent in the Washington neighborhood and through other participant interviews. These factors, while not named as “race” and “class” in our conversation, were part of the subtext of these stories.

The account of the donated tomato plants hinged on the relationship between the volunteers who arranged for, potted, and delivered the tomatoes containers to the pantry, and the end recipients of the donated tomatoes. Sonja described a conversation that took place after donation, upon returning to the food pantry in the Washington neighborhood. In this story, one of the pantry assistants—described as “food insecure”—failed to maintain the donated tomato plant:

So, I went back just recently, and I said, “Any feedback about those tomato plants?” And she had a helper there, and he said, “Oh, mine were doing great, but I got in a fight with the neighbor and they destroyed it.” You know, that’s the food insecure, right? So, but I thought he sounded positive. So I said to Lee (pseudonym), “Did you ever thank Jody (synonym) for all that she did?” And Lee said, “Well, you never gave me her address.” And I thought, “I don’t want to be pulling teeth over this.” But, Master Gardeners, the president, did a nice write-up, so that the other Master Gardeners knew. Because really, I would like other Master Gardeners to be helping over there. But, they’re not jumping.

Sonja clearly made associations between a broadly expected behavior of people in the Washington Neighborhood—the food pantry staff and the recipients of the produce—and the level of willingness of other Master Gardeners to address food insecurity in this neighborhood. A few minutes later, Sonja came back to the relationship between the lack of Master Gardener involvement and a missed opportunity to garden two additional large plots for produce donation. Sonja and I had the following exchange, which reflected the segregation of Master Gardeners and food recipients, of food security/insecurity, and of safe/unsafe neighborhoods in Dubuque:
Sonja: I thought, “That would be a nightmare for me.” Because I would be all on my own doing that. And see, that’s what stops me. So, if I had more people involved. And I’ve tried with the Master Gardeners, and they’re not jumping.

Carrie: Why do you think that is?

Sonja: The neighborhood. They’re afraid of the neighborhood.

Carrie: Have you had any Master Gardeners that aren’t afraid of the neighborhood?

Sonja: I had one lady come out last year, because they get kind of desperate near the end of the year to make their 20 hours [required for the Master Gardener program]. And, I thought she had a positive experience, because we did a lot of harvesting, there were a lot of people around, like all these kids, and even a lady. So, she wasn’t, I mean, she had the ultimate experience of seeing the produce, seeing where it goes, and seeing how it’s managed, but she never showed up again.

This story reveals how Sonja incorrectly thought (or hoped) that the production, distribution, and donation of the fresh produce might sufficiently impress the Master Gardener and encourage further involvement, describing it as the “ultimate experience.” Yet, these notions of community and food did not overcome the neighborhood’s history of racial and class exclusion. As our conversation went on, Sonja talked about the recent shooting that had happened on 16th Street, in the Washington neighborhood not far from the garden and the food pantry. Other Master Gardeners told Sonja, “You’re crazy” for going to the Washington neighborhood, and Sonja admits to going there less often because “my husband doesn’t like me going there.”

While continuing to go to the Washington neighborhood despite warnings from everyone, Sonja’s perspectives on safety also came out during our interview in speaking about two teenagers—one “Caucasian” and one “African American”—who were friends and who wanted to help out at the garden. Sonja was harvesting vegetables and gave the teenagers a knife. During our interview

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Sonja at one point in the interview described being “way over 20 hours.”
Sonja reflected that even though nothing happened, maybe it was not such a good decision to give the knife to them. Sonja said the issue was not a fear of personal security but of personal liability and concern for the teenagers’ personal safety and potential lack of healthcare access. The immediately prior reference to being called “crazy” shows how Sonja’s decisions—to go to the garden, to give the teenagers a garden knife—came into uneasy relation with white, affluent circles in Dubuque and common beliefs about race, class, and violence. The fear of Sonja’s fellow Master Gardeners and others in Dubuque who fear the Washington neighborhood reveal naturalization of beliefs that poor people and people of color are inherently violent and will attack white, affluent people given the chance. This naturalization can happen by decontextualizing the reasons why neighborhood violence does occur. How Sonja weighed personal experiences in the Washington neighborhood versus concern for safety was not apparent from our conversation. Regardless, Sonja continued to work at the garden and in partnership with members of the Washington neighborhood.

It is possible that, in being repeatedly called crazy for going to the Washington Neighborhood Community Garden, Sonja’s reaction was to acknowledge other people’s concern to me without being personally concerned.

Sonja has a different background than other Master Gardeners. While Sonja had lived in Dubuque for only three years, the other gardeners were there “forever” and saw the neighborhood as having a “stigma” associated with it. Sonja told me about having a personal motivation for participating in the garden: to reduce the stigma of the neighborhood by building “community character.” In making this point, Sonja demonstrated understanding that the neighborhood strategically would be in a better position to receive the assistance it needed if it met more affluent and white community member’s expectations of character. Sonja may have understood that building “community character” could be strategic for the neighborhood. But Sonja’s comments also suggested that the current character of the neighborhood was not a sufficient reason for people to stay away, explaining to me: “But that’s part of it, right? That’s part of food insecurity.”

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5Sonja clarified this concern upon reviewing the manuscript.
Taken together, the document sources from Growing Together and Sonja’s experiences reveal how the program supports a supply chain approach to community food, while also creating space for boundary-crossing experiences that both reinforce and contest this approach. The tensions between a project conceived in terms of production and producer-consumer roles, and the daily lived experiences of racial and class exclusion in the Washington neighborhood, suggest an opportunity to re-imagine alternative approaches to community food.

4.5 Discussion: Redefining community

The community donation gardening in Growing Together represents a diverse form of non-market community economy (Gibson-Graham 2008; see also Gibson-Graham 2003), with resources freely shared among communities rather than exchanged in the market. At the same time, the supply chain emphasis in Growing Together situates the garden-to-food pantry pipeline as the appropriate response to food insecurity and low levels of community food access. This solution persists even though, as this case study shows, racial and class exclusion in cities like Dubuque creates conditions for “food apartheid” (Bradley and Galt 2014; for a more in-depth discussion of racial and class exclusion in Dubuque, see Chapter 3). Aware of the limitations of diverse and alternative economy approaches, Alkon and Guthman (2017, 2) have focused on direct efforts to challenge neoliberal governance of food systems by state and corporate actors—efforts led by “communities that experience the toxic effects of industrial agriculture.” This quote suggests that community can take on a transformative role when it is politically attuned, when it is led by marginalized communities.

With a goal of fostering just worlds, the question may not be so much whether community can be politically attuned, but rather how to develop community in ways that attend to power, relationship, and identity. Feminists have drawn attention to how power divisively structures community as local vs. global, human vs. less-than-human/inhuman, as homogeneous vs. diverse/different, and as belonging vs. exclusion (Nightingale, 2015; Mollett and Faria, 2013; Graddy-Lovelace, 2017). As activists and scholar-activists, we must gear our praxis toward relational constructs of community
that contest and disrupt these problematics, while recognizing that challenging uneven power relations is an always ongoing endeavor. In this section, I consider important factors in redefining community relationally. I argue that a relational understanding of community can open possibilities for new food activisms.

4.5.1 Community as dynamic relationalities

The idea of doing community is not new. Pratt (2012) used this performative approach to community to bring new relationalities to light, and thus disrupt normative binaries of community, such as homogeneous/diverse and belonging/exclusion. Responding to critiques by political ecologists, Pratt redefined community not as “a concrete, bounded thing to which we can belong” (178) but performatively as an “open-ended unfolding of togetherness” (182). A significant contribution of this work is its de-emphasis (though not a rejection) of community as an ideal formation defined by belonging and shared valued. Rather, community must center on the practices and emotions that take place through encounters. Within this framework, emotions play a central role as “signposts” to make meaning of the togetherness generated by collective practices (Pratt 2012, 182; see also DeLind 2006; Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy 2013). Doing practices together, Pratt notes, constitutes a form of community that does not idealistically assume or necessitate that collaborators come from the same places, hold the same views, or have the same social identities; disagreement and difference are constitutive of collective practices rather than indicative of failed efforts (181). This definition sets the stage for understandings of community that move beyond geographic proximity by making room for community to encompass diverse and momentary encounters of political alliance in contestation of global corporate agriculture.

By not getting stuck on shared values and senses of belonging, performative formations of community can work across difference by exploring what we (can) do together, while allowing for “disassociation” and “pulling apart” (Pratt, 2012, 178). Accordingly, I read this framework as potentially capable of elucidating the uneven and inequitable power relations that can go unnoticed or unaddressed in community food collaborations and food activism. This framework holds
potential for fostering encounters across difference while also creating space for difference. In that sense, community can avoid a recourse to dominant alternative food imaginaries and pay attention to processes of negotiation.

Put another way, community need not be based entirely on shared vision. Rather, doing community can mean working together through multiple intersecting and diverging practices. Yet, how do you get to the point of “doing together” when power relations invisibilize and discount some people and parts of the world, the not-community? How do you “do together” when the negative emotional and affective signposts push us apart?

Pratt’s rethinking of community can open space for non-innocent, dynamic relationalities rather than the social and political gridlock of a static, bounded conceptualization of community relations. What is crucial here, and a point undeveloped by Pratt, is that doing practices together, especially across difference, requires that participants recognize one another—a condition of encounter explic- cated extensively in feminist theories.

4.5.2 Community as mutual interdependence

This is not the death of the subject, in either case, but an inquiry into how the norms that govern ethical principles must be understood as operating not only to guide conduct but to decide the question of who and what will be a human subject” (Butler, 2005, 110)

Butler (2005, 109) work in developing an ethics of responsibility builds upon an array of European social theorists and moral philosophers, including Michel Foucault and Theodor Adorno, who situate ethics within a critique of “the regimes of intelligibility that order ontology, and specifically the ontology of the subject” (see also Butler 2012). Through a process of critique, Butler advances this ethics based upon a relational theorization of subjectivity—and in so doing contests the relationship between an ethics of responsibility and a subject’s radical individuality, which has ontologically dominated European moral philosophy, and society at large, for centuries. In Precarious Life, Butler (2012, 149) asserts our ethical responsibility to politically struggle against dehumanizing norms
through affirming our mutual interdependence on earth. For Butler (2012, 142), working together to sustain life is a process of becoming undone as a subject:

If I possess myself too firmly or too rigidly, I cannot be in an ethical relation. The ethical relation means ceding a certain egological perspective for one that is structured fundamentally by a mode of address: You call upon me, and I answer. Butler’s (2012) words suggest that holding on to one’s sense of individual self denies the call of the encounter—the cycle of “practice-affect-emotion,” in Pratt’s (2012) parlance—to respond to one another by advancing the political struggles of dehumanized others. These words remind us that as much as humans are engaged in uneven power relations and struggles, we also have an ethical obligation to care, and moreover, to care for those who are dehumanized within the dominant norms of community. As much life is existentially precarious, social organizations, relations, institutions, and infrastructures unevenly distribute that precarity. Our ethical obligations call upon us to engage in struggles around basic needs like housing, food, and labor equality (Butler, 2012, 148).

Moreover, (Butler, 2012, 147) goes further to argue about the interdependency of all life; the ‘life’ we are bound to preserve cannot be understood as exclusively human:

If we try to understand in concrete terms what it means to commit ourselves to preserving the life of the other, we are invariably confronted with the bodily conditions of life and so, a commitment not only to the other’s corporeal persistence but to all those environmental conditions that make life livable.

The implications of mutual interdependency help me think through how caring only for those that dominant norms already recognize as humans misses much, if not most of the ethics of developing community. The norms of the ‘human’ make it difficult recognize the life and presence of othered-others and difficult to see ourselves as something much bigger beyond the boundaries of our individual selves.

Furthermore, our underlying mutual interdependency creates conditions for violence that are difficult to overcome, that foreclose opportunities for community. Our ethical obligation is to
struggle despite these difficulties (Butler, 2012). A relational conception of community contests modes of being in the world that deny our mutual interdependency and obligations to one another. Affirming that “the other is not radically other” (ibid, 149), we can redefine community through attention to the politics of otherization, giving us a precise sense of what it is that we need to collectively contest.

4.5.3 Redefining community in Growing Together

Pratt’s (2012) conceptualization of community as a “practice-affect-emotion” spiral raises questions about how can we redefine community? How can we see our relational interconnections and mutual interdependence when few social spaces exist in which we, together, can critically consider how an ontology of radical individuality shapes our emotional, affective, and even violent responses to difference? Moreover, critical food scholar Carolan (2016, 145) wrote about the impact of joy and sorrow, about accounting for the “sorrow, ontological insecurity, dread, worry” brought about through our relations with food, one another, and the world. In my role as a graduate student in Sustainable Agriculture and working with Cooperative Extension, traveling across the state of Iowa to meet people working and living amidst their community food systems, I see a reluctance, especially among privileged affluent white participants, to publicly speak about personal fears, worries, vulnerabilities, and need. Deficits—moral, financial, educational, material (including food)—belong to some imagined other (even if that imagined other corresponded to someone real).

Being associated with deficits creates a visible sense of shame, even if and when the shame was not (explicitly) verbally acknowledged. People desire themselves, and by extension their communities, to be seen in a positive light—what Sonja called “community character.” On the one hand, this is natural(ized). The desire to be well thought-of demonstrates mutual dependency, but also demonstrates a power-laden understanding of the ideal human subject as invulnerable. The ways in which community members want to be well-thought of are measured against the normative construct of the human as productive, capable, independent, invulnerable. They are also situated in
relation to constructs of the racialized, queer, and/or non-human other as unproductive, incapable, dependent, and vulnerable (Chapter 2).

In this ontology of the individual subject, relationality is translated into neediness and forcibly hidden as a source of shame. Sonja’s story about the tomato plant recipient at the food pantry illustrates the way in which structural conditions of racial and class exclusion and food insecurity in Dubuque become an individualizing ontology. Food insecurity focuses on the “food insecure.” Growing Together’s focus on poundage, healthy food, and the volunteerism of Master Gardeners (as represented in Figures 4.1-4.3 and in cited promotional materials) displace these issues of power, relationship, and identity that matter to the everyday life of the project. The unwillingness of predominately white and more affluent Master Gardeners to “jump in” may be about safety, but it may also be a response to the shame of vulnerability and a desire to be distanced from it.

The development of community food systems in Iowa and throughout the United States, of which this case study is one example, continues to be defined by neoliberal political economies and subjectivities within a supply chain ontology. Moragues-Faus (2017, 456) warns that “neoliberalism when deployed as a source of governmentality involves extending and disseminating market values to institutions and social actions, even expanding this influence to the ”soul” of the citizen-subject (Brown 2003).” Recognition of new narratives are urgently needed. To quote Butler (2005, 133–34), a critically important avenue for theoretical inquiry is “to expose and account for the inhuman ways in which ‘the human’ continues to be done and undone.” Black feminist scholars, including Mollett, Gilmore, and McKittrick, help us with these accounts. They highlight the ways that dominant groups and norms elevate the (white) ‘human’ while categorizing other (non-white) people and beings in the world as less-than-human, what McKittrick (2011, 953) “less-than-human-as-waste.” Neither full human rights nor dignity are accorded to those whose lives are discounted within dominant norms and practices; the other follows a narrative that ends in decay and death.

My conversation with Sonja reveals how unjust social relations—food apartheid (Bradley and Galt, 2014)—persist in Dubuque, including in its community food system. As we spoke, Sonja grappled with the tensions between fulfilling the objectives of Growing Together and responding
to the crisis of racial and class exclusion. Sonja’s remarks reflect the extent of racial and class segregation in Dubuque, particularly how fearful everyone (including Master Gardeners) outside of the Washington neighborhood is of coming into the Washington neighborhood. A self-described outsider, Sonja recently moved to Dubuque and claimed little understanding of its social networks and dynamics. Sonja continues to go to the Washington neighborhood despite warnings from everyone (and a fearful husband).

Reflected in Sonja’s literal and metaphorical boundary crossings, driving 20-30 minutes to get to the Washington Neighborhood Community Garden and ignoring other people’s warnings about safety, Sonja’s experiences of community gardening take shape within a broader social structure of “us vs. them,” a top-down model that separates Master Gardeners following the guidelines of the SNAP-Education-funded grant to increase the poundage of produce at the pantry from the communities they serve through their efforts. One the one hand, an “us vs. them” structure is not required by Growing Together. In the grant application guidelines (Figure 4.1), for instance, the language suggests food pantry and free meal recipients as possible coalition partners. Still, Master Gardeners direct the shape of the programs and decide whether interactions with recipients are part of their efforts, whether at the pantry and meal sites or even at the garden (the latter of which is not even considered as an option in the guidance materials). Even where interactions do occur, the meaning making and the emphasis of those interactions may still take shape as people ‘with’ helping those ‘without.’ Sonja’s story about the importance of interactions with the grandparent and grandchild who visited the Washington Neighborhood Community Garden, although showing care and connection, still frames the interaction in terms of donating food to people experiencing food insecurity.

Finding opportunities to develop community as solidarity in the face of precarity, in the face of food apartheid, is neither built into Growing Together, nor into dominant notions of social service and community development that I encountered in Dubuque. Narratives that situate food insecurity as an individual problem and charity as the solution necessitated Sonja’s strategic actions to community character building in order to make the people in the Washington Neighborhood
worthy to others of being saved. Growing Together was not designed to foster a sense of being together in, and in contest of, a racialized system; it did not challenge the naturalized order of relations. This point was exemplified when Sonja talked about one of the teenagers working at the garden, the one who helped Sonja cut cabbage stems. Sonja told the teenager that getting a college education in agronomy or horticulture would be the way to put the gardening knowledge that the teenager has obtained into good use, to better oneself.

These events show the racialized structures within which community food systems participants are embedded. Returning to McKittrick’s (2011) binary of ‘with’/‘without,’ the ontological underpinnings of a project like Growing Together situate the role of white, middle-class people who are ‘with’ (food, education, character) as helping poor others and non-white others who are ‘without,’ while assuming that charity assistance combined with individual effort are enough to overcome structural barriers. Growing Together does not contest racialized, neoliberal ontologies of “overdevelopment, accumulation, and land-ownership” (ibid, 950)—precisely because Growing Together, Cooperative Extension, and USDA SNAP-Education do not seek to restructure society, but rather work to provide charity assistance to poor people. The project creates little space to examine Black life because the moments of encounter between the people growing and eating the food reduce the latter to a people in need of food and in need of education about how to grow and eat it. Growing Together does not prepare Master Gardeners to understand racial violence, which limits their ability to correct social injustice as community gardeners. Through a supply chain ontology, programs like Growing Together struggle to see the already existing modes of life and living in communities of color and low-income communities or the anti-colonial ways of understanding the world that question domination and extraction as the path to liberation (ibid.).

My experiences in Growing Together and stories like Sonja’s have catalyzed me, in my scholar-activism, to work within and with the problematics and possibilities of community more critically. In Growing Together sites across Iowa, I encountered similar stories of collective responses to food insecurity at the local level through practices like communal gardening, food recovery, and donation of fresh produce to area food pantries. As in Sonja’s story, gardeners creatively develop networks
with other local producers, distributors, consumers, and other community stakeholders. Certainly, the collective responses of participants in Growing Together represent a form of diverse community economy (Gibson-Graham, 2008) that re-imagines social relations outside of neoliberalism, in this case, as sharing economy.

Gibson-Graham (2008, 627) understand community economy in political terms, as “democratically negotiated,” suggesting that how community economies are structured matters. I have reflected, for instance, on the need to structure processes of democratic negotiation into the project guidelines, promotional materials, and evaluation discussed above. Even if Growing Together encourages interaction between the Master Gardeners and coalition partners including the marginalized community members that the grant intends to benefit, the terms of interaction matter. As demonstrated in Sonja’s story, the community economies of Growing Together have inspired a romanticized sense of community building, through communal practices of growing and sharing food. These practices can also propagate racism and social inequities when the terms, processes, and structures of negotiation are ignored. This can happen when community economies default to particular social norms without spaces to question how those norms marginalize others or engage the presence of dynamic relationalities. Sonja’s story of the other Master Gardener who volunteered and never returned exemplifies how the “ultimate experience” of community donation gardening aims, and yet fails, to meet the gardener’s expectations. The success of Growing Together—as measured in pounds of produce, the number of Master Gardener volunteers, and volunteer hours (Figure 4.3)—depends upon white and affluent Master Gardeners having an “ultimate experience.” Its measured success does not depend upon creating spaces of democratic negotiation in which “ultimate experiences” of food and community are developed with and for Washington neighborhood residents. Growing Together’s structure does not challenge dominant norms in ways that would enable people like Sonja to effectively resolve tensions between feel-good practices of community gardening, an awareness of food apartheid, and the motivation to dedicate time and energy to achieving grant-related produce donation goals.
Growing Together as a case study thus reveals how power relations and intersecting forms of social and ecological marginalization work to exclude othered others, even while including marginalized people in activities at the gardens or through the food pantries as ‘recipients’ of ‘charity’. In the spaces of Growing Together gardens and affiliated distribution sites, as elsewhere in the United States, immigrant communities, communities of color, and low-income communities have been unevenly positioned and categorized as deficient, needy, dependent, unsafe, or a problem to be overcome (see also Chapter 2; Chapter 3). Parts of these discourses persist, even as some program participants like Sonja encounter racial violence and try to mitigate violence within these structures by developing relations of care. What these findings suggest are that more radical aspirations for community in Growing Together remain elusive so long as certain beings in the world are cast as inferior, and so long as societal responses remain apolitical.

As an activist-scholar, I draw upon black feminisms to disrupt existing ontologies of community and food. I aim to inspire a new narrative: that we are all in need, that delineating people as ‘with’/‘without’ abundance is a political strategy to avoid the discomfort of our mortality, of our interdependency for survival, and the violence of becoming ‘with’ (McKittrick, 2011). Put differently, how we define with/without has been based upon racialized and colonialist systems of defining what it means to be human (ibid.). Within the U.S. food system, created senses of abundance, of independence—through the appropriation of material comforts, safety, land, and opportunity—have relied on the exploitation, the enslavement, and the genocide of non-white people and of non-humans.

We need to counter narratives that make oneself seem independent through a denial of, or at best, a non-recognition of, the way that social organizations and institutions unevenly distribute social precarity and need (Butler, 2012, 148). In coming up with a praxis of community, McKittrick (2011) provides food activists with importance guidance. First, she shows that analyzing racial violence, while contesting black death also makes black death (and white survival) seem like an inevitable outcome in the world, even if the scholar intends to remedy this violence. Disrupting the presumption of inevitability “always already demand[s] practical activities of resistance, encounter,
and anti-colonial thinking" (ibid, 955). Building on Gilmore’s work, McKittrick puts forth an evocative practice of relational community, in which “we might imagine how we are intimately tied to broader conceptions of human and planetary life and which demonstrate our common and difficult histories of encounter” (ibid, 960).

Rather than imagining an “us” separated from “them,” McKittrick (2011) reads Gilmore’s intellectual project as tracing the everyday “ordinary” struggles of human relationality. Important here, in connecting collective struggle to Pratt’s practice-emotional-affect spiral of community, is how McKittrick notes that relationality is not a matter of “why we can’t all just get along” or “aren’t we all the same on the inside” (ibid, 959). Instead, relationality identifies head-on the “mortal urgency” (ibid, 958) that emanates from our uneven social relations, from a state/society that is organized racially. Relationality emerges from an uncomfortable recognition of the problematic “Western bourgeois conception of the human as the marker of emancipation, with everyone else, those ‘without’, starving and striving to accumulate and be ‘with’” (ibid, 959). Community is the connective kinship, life force, and black sense of place that persists through collective resistance of racial dispossession (959). What might Growing Together and what might community food look like redefined around these responsibilities?

The reciprocal relationships I am describing here refer to an openness to deliberately and critically engage the processes through which precarity becomes unevenly distributed in and through society—both humans and non-humans—and through which precarity becomes an individualized problem. Kinship, as I have come to understand it, is the de-individualization of precarity, the de-otherization of the othered other, and the responsibility to struggle with and for improved conditions of life for those who have been marginalized within our current systems of precarity distribution. I look for opportunities to develop community as a locus for activist alliances of kinship by directing societal attention on the conditions needed for life and the mutual connections that can support it.

I maintain that Sonja’s boundary crossings into Washington Neighborhood Community Garden is an important form of food activism. It is important especially when seen in the context of many white and affluent residents in Dubuque, for whom even coming to the Washington neighborhood to
“help” is too much. Yet, I saw a missed opportunity for Growing Together to enable a different type of response and responsibility, a form of new food activism that demands greater accountability from the government. Communities experiencing food insecurity, exclusion, and marginalization should not have to expect important social services vital to their lives to depend upon privileged garden volunteers being “more responsible.” They should be able to demand the right to develop community in ways that does not reinforce a community food system defined by roles of people “with” helping people “without.” Sonja’s connections with people experiencing food apartheid and racial and class exclusion can be a basis for developing greater accountability and mutual interdependence in Dubuque.

4.6 Conclusion

Engaging questions of how food activists can best address the ills of a global corporate food regime remains an active area of critical food inquiry (Alkon and Guthman, 2017). Growing Together provided me an opportunity as a scholar-activist to question how government programs develop community food systems as a response to food insecurity. Working with Cooperative Extension and conducting field research, I considered how a supply chain approach to community food systems reinforces neoliberal forms of governance and forecloses modes of doing community that attend to social inequities. I also began to imagine alternative principles of community, rethinking community food in ways that would not situate communities as responsible for problems not of their own making (ibid.).

Sourcing feminist theory as an ontological opening refocuses programs like Growing Together decenters goals of production and consumption and emphasizes encounters that support daily struggles for life in excluded and marginalized communities. Obviously, these struggles might include growing and eating food, but they should not situate communities without food as communities without character. They also should not construct communities without food as being dependent on the willingness of people with food to volunteer their time and energy, regardless of good intentions or a desire to help. When community donation gardening translates on-the-ground in
Dubuque into binary roles of predominately white, affluent producers and a racially diverse, low-income community of consumers, it reinforces community as an exclusionary space, as those “with” in relation to those “without.” These are the costs of ignoring the racial and class dynamics of developing community food as supply chains.

Sonja’s encounters in the Washington neighborhood—through cycles of “practice-affect-emotion”—might have enabled a different response and a different sense of responsibility had Growing Together provided mechanisms through which the government actually could become more responsible to the lives of people in the Washington neighborhood. Growing Together could have encouraged different types of encounter in the Washington neighborhood for outsiders like Sonja who genuinely want to see the Washington neighborhood thrive but might not be sure what thriving means or how to get there. In this neighborhood, for example, Growing Together could have worked to build community through fostering a black sense of place. In my co-authorship with two gardeners from the Washington and North End neighborhoods (Chapter 3), we emphasize the need for community food and nutritional outreach personnel to learn from and value the everyday experiences, creative capacities, efforts, and innovative practices already taking place within neighborhoods like Washington and North End as a starting point for working together to build community. That co-authorship has shown, in fact, that the Washington Neighborhood Community Garden (WNCG) already aims to support this form of community. The Washington neighborhood and the WNCG are already “sites of agency and action” (Chapter 3). Yet, as Sonja notes, WNCG was less “successful” by the metrics of the program. What if Growing Together had offered Sonja the opportunity to unbecome the producer and become radically related to the community in mutual struggles for life?

Moreover, redefining community relationally and fostering a black sense of place could be a starting point for new types of program “reporting” to government agencies like the USDA on ways that they can be more responsible to the lives of people who experience food insecurity and social marginalization. Centering a black sense of place in Growing Together, including in its grant application and promotional materials, might also create opportunities for new partnerships. Marginalized and excluded communities and their allies can make use of the infrastructure of
community-engaged programs like Growing Together to place political demands upon government institutions and Cooperative Extension and develop ways of doing community aligned with their political struggles. By redefining community, these demands can become grounded in the mutual interdependency and mortal urgency of sustaining life on our planet.

4.7 References


Carolan, Michael. 2016. Adventurous food futures: Knowing about alternatives is not enough, we need to feel them. Agriculture and Human Values 33(1), 141–152. doi:10.1007/s10460-015-9629-4.


CHAPTER 5. CONCLUSION

This dissertation identified the ways that power infuses not only the social relations that produce inequality and food insecurity, but also the institutional and community responses to these conditions. It also identified ways that marginalized communities are resisting being constructed as deficient recipients in need of food charity instead of active relational communities full of life, knowledge, and the capacity to struggle together in the face of “mortal urgency” (McKittrick, 2011). I further showed how dominant ontologies of community and food can drive top-down technocratic interventions by ignoring important historical and cultural contexts, as well as marginalized people’s voices and lived experiences.

The findings of this dissertation suggest that while government, academic, and other social institutions can have an important role to play in solving food insecurity, these institutions need to interrogate and reformulate their processes, objectives, and ontologies of food and community. The findings of this dissertation include important steps scholar-activists can take to partner with marginalized communities in taking action to address social inequality, while continuously grappling with the ways in which scholar-activist efforts may fall short. In this conclusion, I will summarize this study’s contributions and future directions for research.

5.1 Contributions

Through an analysis of food and community in the context of global agriculture, this dissertation contributed to feminist political ecology’s theorization of relationships between “bodies, everyday practices, and global processes” (Vaz-Jones, 2018, 714). Chapter 2 situated Growing Together in the context of geopolitical relations that construct binaries of food security/insecurity within narratives of global agriculture and productivity. Contributing to theorization of intimate geopolitics (Smith, 2012), this chapter showed how conditions of food insecurity intertwine with dominant
understandings of labor and motherhood and the everyday politics of morality and survival in communities. Chapter 3 contributed to the literature on Political Ecology of the Body (Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy, 2013) by reframing Growing Together outside of narrow, technocratic conceptions of food insecurity. Situating knowledge production within marginalized neighborhoods in Dubuque, Iowa, this chapter repositioned Growing Together within the everyday political struggle over the right to food, land, and housing. Finally, Chapter 4 undertook an ontological re-imagining of community food. Contributing to a feminist theorization of “new food activism” (Alkon and Guthman, 2017), it offered a rethinking of community as the relational response to mortal urgency that demands connectivities struggling together in and for life.

Advancing feminist political ecology as simultaneously theoretical and methodological, this dissertation presented an analysis of the stories and experiences shared through research, and reflected on my scholar-activist journey as one of discomfort, struggle, and vulnerability (redefined) coupled with the joys of alliance and transformative action. Without discounting the importance of alternative and non-market economies that subvert conventional foodways, I called attention to opportunities for feel-good community gardening and food sharing practices to become practices of transforming the present and enacting a feminist future.

My applied contributions included calling upon institutional actors, including federal and local governments and academic institutions, to take serious steps in affirming food justice not only in name but in and through feminist praxis. Through authorship and co-authorship, this dissertation provided conceptual frameworks through which institutions like Cooperative Extension might differently engage marginalized communities. Growing Together continues each year to evolve and spread into new communities and into states beyond Iowa. In terms of program evaluation, the findings from this dissertation reveal a need and opportunity to de-center the measurement and tracking of poundage, and re-orient the program around the lived experiences of people experiencing food insecurity. In the Washington and North End neighborhoods, for example, residents care about the alignment of neighborhood revitalization policies with needs for more permanent designated green, growing, and gathering spaces, as well as quality housing in these neighborhoods.
for those who are most marginalized. Cooperative Extension can account for how well its programs support the activist and organizing efforts of marginalized community members in the Washington and North End neighborhood in pursuing these goals. More broadly, Cooperative Extension can track how well its programs support marginalized communities having a say in the policies and programs that impact their lives and their neighborhoods. Local food production can be part of such efforts but care must be taken to consider whether specific program structures align with neighborhood goals and whether more equitable social relations are being fostered in the process.

While the constraints of working within a federally-funded grant program likely will continue to define the shape and scope of Growing Together, this research nonetheless demonstrated the challenges and limitations that have arisen within this current structure. On a broader scale, this research suggests the need for future policy changes at a federal USDA level that can better enable programs like Growing Together to ground responses to food insecurity in greater accountability to marginalized communities. This dissertation contested dominant ontological constructions of food insecurity in USDA SNAP-Education and Cooperative Extension programming as a first step needed in reframing the definition of the problem that current policy and programming seeks to address.

On a more immediate and local scale, the co-authored publication with Klavitter and Sutton (Chapter 3) will be used this semester in a service-learning based course at the University of Dubuque, in which students are taking part in activities at the Washington Neighborhood Community Garden. Also in Dubuque, our publication more broadly will support the social justice activism and community organizing taking place within the Washington and North End neighborhoods. DeMulder, a WNCG gardener I interviewed (Chapter 3), identified opportunities for this research to inform municipal government policies and community development programs, and this research begins to bridge a gap in the literature on racial relations, social inequality, and urban revitalization that is much-needed in Dubuque.
5.2 Additional publications and areas for future study

I will continue to analyze the data collected for this dissertation project, including papers intended for publication in scholarly journals. In addition, I plan to continue my collaboration and co-authorship with Laura Klavitter and Lynn Sutton, my co-authors for the publication presented in (Chapter 3). In this work, I plan to develop future publications (academic and non-academic) that advance the struggles for food, land, and housing justice in Dubuque and throughout Iowa. For the Growing Together project, I have developed an ISU Extension and Outreach toolkit on donation gardening, in which I integrated findings and recommendations from this research and synthesized the additional research findings and recommendations from other researchers on the project across multiple disciplines and topic areas, including horticulture, food safety, and gleaning practices. The toolkit is located at https://www.extension.iastate.edu/ffed/community-donation-gardening-toolkit/. While the toolkit reflects the more traditional educational outreach functions of Cooperative Extension, through providing educational resources and guidance on community donation gardening, it emphasized the importance of partnering with and identifying the needs of the community members who are intended to benefit from the garden and the food produced. I also developed a community food security primer within the toolkit that presents concepts like social equity, food justice, and structural explanations for food insecurity. In the toolkit, I emphasized equity factors to consider in developing community donation gardens, including: culture, emotion, health, access and ownership, and the ability of marginalized communities to influence decision making.

In terms of areas for future study, scholarship is needed to further the ontological re-imaginings of community and food, and the forms of institutional praxis on these topics. To advance the research from Chapter 2 and Chapter 3 on radical vulnerability and political ecology of the body, respectively, future research needs to be done to understand how scholar-activists can partner with marginalized communities through responding to and contesting institutional norms at universities that elevate dominant cultural narratives about what community-engaged scholarship should look like and do. Understanding land-grant universities as driving both scholarship and community
programs, there is need for continued research on the tensions between traditional modes of research and engagement versus feminist praxis based in accountability. How can we close the gap between grant-funding opportunities for research and programs at land grant universities and the types of research programs that might be driven by marginalized communities? The research in this dissertation—through its publication and public presentation—have opened up opportunities for new types of dialogue with Extension leadership. Knowledge production with and for marginalized communities presents a first step in closing this gap, and continued applied research needs to identify how to support more of this work and how to incorporate it into the broader mission of universities.

Building on efforts of rethinking community, what does it mean to enact the forms of community I offered in Chapter 4? How else might the political ecology of the body methodology enable scholars to visibilize the already existing relational forms of community present in marginalized communities? Future research might look at other examples of new food activism in the face of mortal urgency. Rather than seeing the Midwest and the interior U.S. as spaces constituted by their lack of social movement and activism, future research needs to reframe our understandings of this region of the country as already activist, even if the forms of activism are hidden or devalued within dominant narratives of agriculture, food, and community.

5.3 References


APPENDIX A. DUBUQUE, IOWA POPULATION CHARACTERISTICS
2013-2017

The table below provides 2013-2017 population estimates, broken down by select racial and
ethnic classifications, from the U.S. Census Bureau (2017) American Community Survey for the
City of Dubuque, Iowa (Table A.1).

Table A.1 Select Categories from ACS Demographic and Housing Estimates. 2013-2017
American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates. City of Dubuque, Iowa (U.S.
Census Bureau 2017). All estimates include margins of error.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Estimate</th>
<th>Percent Estimate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>One race</td>
<td>57,090 +/- 276</td>
<td>97.7% +/- 0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>52,934 +/- 311</td>
<td>90.6% +/- 0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black or African American</td>
<td>2,560 +/- 242</td>
<td>4.4% +/- 0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian and Alaska Native</td>
<td>45 +/- 40</td>
<td>0.1% +/- 0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>864 +/- 145</td>
<td>1.5% +/- 0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander</td>
<td>357 +/- 17</td>
<td>0.6% +/- 0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two or More Races</td>
<td>1,320 +/- 270</td>
<td>2.3% +/- 0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic or Latino (of any race)</td>
<td>1,287 +/- 178</td>
<td>2.2% +/- 0.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A.1 References

APPENDIX B.  DUBUQUE, IOWA CENSUS TRACTS 1 AND 5
POPULATION CHARACTERISTICS 2013-2017

The table below provides 2013-2017 population estimates, broken down by select racial and ethnic classifications, from the U.S. Census Bureau (2017) American Community Survey for the City of Dubuque, Iowa for the two census tracts roughly overlapping with the Washington and North End neighborhoods (Table B.1). It is worth noting that relatively large concentrations of ‘Hispanic or Latino (of any race)’ populations also occur throughout several other tracts in Dubuque (see U.S. Census Bureau 2017).
Table B.1 Select Categories from ACS Demographic and Housing Estimates. 2013-2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates. Dubuque, Iowa Census Tract 1 and Census Tract 5 (U.S. Census Bureau 2017). All estimates include margins of error.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Tract 1 Estimate</th>
<th>Tract 1 Percent</th>
<th>Tract 5 Estimate</th>
<th>Tract 5 Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>One race</td>
<td>2,816 +/-287</td>
<td>94.1% +/-3.9</td>
<td>3,414 +/-404</td>
<td>99.4% +/-0.6</td>
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<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>1,919 +/-236</td>
<td>64.1% +/-7.7</td>
<td>2,613 +/-343</td>
<td>76.1% +/-6.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black or African American</td>
<td>669 +/-237</td>
<td>22.4% +/-7.0</td>
<td>466 +/-174</td>
<td>13.6% +/-4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian and Alaska Native</td>
<td>5 +/-10</td>
<td>0.2% +/-0.3</td>
<td>20 +/-31</td>
<td>0.6% +/-0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>111 +/-76</td>
<td>3.7% +/-2.5</td>
<td>0 +/-9</td>
<td>0.0% +/-0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native Hawaiian and Other</td>
<td>20 +/-35</td>
<td>0.7% +/-1.1</td>
<td>250 +/-92</td>
<td>7.3% +/-2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pacific Islander</td>
<td>201 +/-81</td>
<td>6.7% +/-2.7</td>
<td>95 +/-74</td>
<td>2.8% +/-2.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

B.1 References