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VISCERAL REACTIONS: ALTERNATIVE FOOD AND SOCIAL DIFFERENCE IN TWO NORTH AMERICAN SCHOOLS

A Dissertation in
Geography and Women’s Studies

by

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ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION:
School Garden and Cooking Programs (SGCPs) are alternative food initiatives that seek to encourage healthy eating habits among children by offering hands-on, sensory based experiences in garden and kitchen ‘classrooms.’ SGCPs have recently gained notoriety and momentum within North America under the converging contexts of ecological sustainability and human health concerns. My dissertation explores this growing trend of healthy, alternative food in schools by way of two North American SGCP case studies: a public middle school in Berkeley, California, and a public K-6 school in a rural community in Nova Scotia. My dissertation involved three months of in-depth, qualitative research at each case study location, including interviews with teachers, parents, and leaders of the SGCPs, as well as focus groups and in-class activities with students, and many hours of participant observation in the kitchen and garden classrooms. Drawing on academic scholarship within the fields of human-nature geography and feminist theory, my dissertation explores and discusses SGCPs by way of three central axes of analysis: the production of knowledge, the structure of power/hierarchy, and the un-structured ontology of lived experience/social practice. This analysis suggests that SGCPs, and the alternative food movement at large, would benefit from developing practices that are more attentive to social difference and visceral experience.
TABLE OF CONTENTS:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>List of Figures</td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgements</td>
<td>vii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 1: Visceral (Re)actions – Nature and Social Difference</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 2: Political Ecologies of the Body – A Framework for Research</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 3: Visceral Methods</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 4: Food Knowledge</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 5: Food Identity</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 6: Food Pedagogy</td>
<td>163</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 7: Conclusions</td>
<td>189</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Afterword: Grounded Nutrition and Food Education</td>
<td>197</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>237</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIST OF FIGURES:

Figure 1: Cover of The Nation magazine, Sept 2006 4

Figure 2: Typical language used to describe taproot and rhizome ontologies 45

Figure 3: Imagining taproots and rhizomes in terms of forces of motivation 47

Figure 4: Diagram depicting structural and rhizomatic forces of a SGCP eating event 49

Figure 5: Schema of a PEB framework 54

Figure 6: The Plainville School garden in July 74

Figure 7: Daily functioning of Nova Scotia and California SGCPs 76

Figure 8: The cooking classroom at Central School 77

Figure 9: Number of interviews by type 83

Figure 10: Example of a question prompt and student answer from interview script 86

Figure 11: Example of note taking guidelines and student response 87

Figure 12: Excerpt from a letter written to a student at Plainville School 88

Figure 13: Excerpt from a letter written to a student at Central School 88

Figure 14: Example discussion guide for comfort food mini-study 182

Figure 15: Table highlighting the 5 stories of Mac and Cheese, inspired from interviews 186
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This dissertation is dedicated to:
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Introduction

“I am not building this as a model for the city, or for the nation; I am building it as a model for the world” (Activist, CA) 

Studying Healthy Alternatives

On November 10, 2008, the New York Times ran an article entitled “Bake Sales Fall Victim to Push for Healthier Foods: Nutrition Rules Are Affecting School Traditions.” The article discussed nationwide trends in school food, but focused particularly on the changes that are being implemented in California schools, including the Berkeley school district. The write up contained a photograph of a kindergarten teacher reviewing a list of “good foods” and “bad foods” with her 5-year-old students. The list of bad foods included candy, chocolate, Burger King, McDonalds, cake, ice cream, and soda. Salad and strawberries topped the good food list.

In March of 2009, First Lady Michelle Obama announced her plans to dig up part of the White House lawn in order to make space for an organic vegetable garden. The impetus for this garden was both ecological sustainability – reducing green house gas emissions that arise from industrial production and distribution – and human health – encouraging fresh fruit and vegetable consumption “at a time when obesity and diabetes have become a national concern” (Burros, March 19, 2009). The garden is meant to become an inspiration particularly for children. “My hope,” said Mrs. Obama, “is that through children, they will begin to educate their families and that will, in turn, begin to educate our communities.”

Both of these examples are representative of a growing emphasis in the United States and Canada on what is broadly called ‘alternative food’ – a term that has come to signify a variety of food practices that are intended to counter the perceived ill effects of the modern/industrial food industry on both ecological and human health. From its origins in the environmental movement of the 1960s (among other origins), the alternative food movement has emerged as a critique of industrial methods of agricultural production and distribution (from Rachel Carson’s famous exposé of the DDT industry in 1962 to Vandana Shiva’s attack on genetically modified foods in 2000). The push for alternative food has also involved an increased emphasis on local growing, and local purchasing, such that the social relations of production and consumption can (ideally) be conducted at a fully knowable, ‘human’ scale. This, in turn, (it is argued) supports the economic and social well-being of rural communities, and keeps the food system out of the hands of large-scale agribusiness corporations, which tend to be inattentive to the needs of local communities and landscapes. More recently, however, with growing concerns over the so-called obesity epidemic, this push for alternative foods has also occurred alongside increased widespread attention to dieting, body size, and healthy eating. More and more alternative food initiatives now tend to fall at the intersection of environmentalism and nutrition, thereby linking ecological health and community health with the health of

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1 Activist and gardener paraphrasing Alice Waters on the purpose of the Edible Schoolyard© at its inception
human bodies. School Garden and Cooking Programs, including Alice Waters’ now famous ‘Edible Schoolyard’ in Berkeley, CA, are prime examples of this growing trend.

School Garden and Cooking Programs (hereafter SGCPs) are alternative food initiatives that seek to encourage healthy eating habits in children by offering hands-on, sensory based experiences in garden and kitchen ‘classrooms.’ Students plant seeds, pull weeds, gather produce, and then chop, sauté, and bake their harvest into a (hopefully tasty) meal or snack. The idea is that through these intimate, sustainable food experiences, children will come to choose healthier foods, including locally grown fresh fruits and vegetables. While neither school gardens nor cooking education are necessarily new phenomena in schools (think of Waldorf-inspired schools, or home economics classes), SGCPs have recently gained notoriety and momentum within North America under the converging contexts of ecological/economic sustainability and human health concerns, particularly because they are seen as projects that creatively address all of these issues simultaneously. What’s more, many SGCP leaders have been able to find considerable financial support for their alternative school food initiatives by framing them as also or especially healthy eating projects, instead of projects that simply attack the industrial food system (the US Department of Agriculture, for example, which also supports agribusiness, funds school gardens as nutrition intervention projects through food-stamp related grant money; see USDA.gov).

My dissertation research explores this growing trend of healthy, alternative food in schools by way of two North American SGCP case studies: a public middle school in Berkeley, California, (hereafter called Central School for the purpose of anonymity) and a public K-6 school in a rural community in Nova Scotia (hereafter called Plainville School). Although neither of these projects were directly connected to the Edible Schoolyard© (ESY) project of Alice Waters and the Chez Panisse Foundation (see edibleschoolyard.org and chezpanissefoundation.org), both projects have been influenced by not only the media attention and public support that ESY project has garnered, but also by the ideological frame of ‘universal’ importance that Alice Waters and other alternative food leaders have lent to the ESY project (i.e. as a “model for the world”). In other important ways, however, they differ dramatically from the ESY project. Most notably, the two projects I studied rely on limited public grant money and volunteer labor, arguably making them (somewhat) more realistic models for the world than the generously supported ESY project, which relies heavily on private funds.

My dissertation project involved three months of in-depth, qualitative research at each case study location, including interviews with teachers, parents, and leaders of the SGCPs, as well as focus groups and in-class activities with students, and many hours of participant observation in the kitchen and garden classrooms. In each location, I also conducted interviews with a variety of alternative food leaders who were active more broadly in the community, beyond the functioning of the specific SGCPs in question. The purpose of these interviews was to try to understand what types of food-related struggles each community was facing, and how (if at all) SGCPs fit into these larger food struggles. The data from all of this fieldwork was subsequently transcribed and coded thematically, and then analyzed in light of both the patterns/tendencies and
exclusivities/potentialities that emerged from my transcripts and memos. In this dissertation, I present the findings of this qualitative work through the use of interview quotations, field note excerpts, anecdotes, images, and detailed description.

Academically speaking, this dissertation weaves together three areas of intellectual scholarship: human-environment geography (particularly political ecology and agri-food studies), human/cultural geography (particularly geographies of affect and emotion), and women’s studies (particularly theories of embodiment and social difference). In my theoretical argumentation, all three of these areas converge into what I call “visceral geographies,” which I have carved out as the academic space in which I seek to analyze SGCPs. The topic of viscerality is the centerpiece of Chapter 1, and so I will refrain from a detailed discussion here; however, generally speaking visceral geographies refer to the ways in which bodily human experiences are produced and reproduced relationally and materially through complex interconnection with both social forces and other physical ‘bodies’ (including food and food environments). In other words, a visceral geography approach to SGCPs imagines bodily motivation or sensory compulsion to eat certain foods as something that is variously and contextually produced through a wide array of social relationships, intellectual engagements, and material attachments, which give rise to explainable but not pre-determined eating experiences.

This way of approaching SGCPs makes sense for a variety of reasons, but most basically because it allows me to think through how food is at once a matter of social and biological relevance – following from food’s connections to ecological sustainability, community well being, and human health. This relational and material approach also allows me to be attentive to the power relations that are necessarily embedded within food behaviors, motivations, and ‘choices,’ while at the same time be open to uncovering how SGCPs might encourage changes in the power structures that currently configure the alternative and industrial food systems. In short, the concept of visceral geographies provides a lens through which to consider how the (uneven) social and material relations of our food system come to matter in the playing out of alternative food politics within human bodily experiences. Importantly, however, in doing such work I do not seek to argue that particular sets of relations can or will always produce the same bodily experiences or sensations. Rather, I draw on events and occurrences from my case studies to describe how bodily motivation to eat is at once structured and haphazard – how it is both dependent on social positioning and ever-open to new outcomes.

Awareness and Difference in Alternative Food
Because I consider myself to be an alternative food advocate, and ultimately a proponent of SGCPs, it was especially important for me in conducting this research to be aware of the past and present limitations of the alternative food movement. More particularly, I wanted to be cognizant of the ways in which alternative food activism can both counter and reinforce social hierarchies. As SGCPs have emerged within the broader rubric of healthy food alternatives, it is clear that they have also taken on many of the problems and contradictions of such food-based activism. One especially telling result has been the framing of SGCPs, like so many other alternative food projects (see Image 1), as
initiatives that ultimately seek to counter an imagined ignorance and apathy in the broader population by encouraging a broad-scale educational ‘awakening.’

Figure 1: Cover of The Nation magazine, Sept 2006

Both within and beyond SGCP projects, such a fact-based framing furthers the common belief among many alternative food activists (including, as I will show, many of my interviewees) that a lack of individual knowledge is the major obstacle in pushing the movement forward, rather than the structural inequities or social hierarchies that prevent equal food access and attachment. “If they only knew where their food came from…” the lament goes (Guthman 2008), as though knowledge itself would solve the problems of our food system. This framing perpetuates the idea that some of us are ‘in the know’ about what is best to eat, while others (usually minorities and the poor) are either ignorant dupes, or worse, careless consumers whose individual choices further the destruction of the planet and local communities. Moreover, when we consider that educational status, racial identity, class standing, and cultural attachments all determine how we come to know food (differently), this rigid, fact-based push for one particular type of ‘correct’ knowledge also perpetuates a number of broader hierarchical structures – racism, classism, and sexism, for example.

Significantly, in tacking human health (and no doubt, ‘correct’ body size) onto the list of food-based concerns, the push to become ‘aware’ of our bad food choices has now gained even more momentum. Through mechanisms of nutrition education, such as food pyramids or good food/bad food lists, distinct ‘shoulds’ of eating are now encountered not only as political or ecological necessities but also as scientific and biological truths that need to be learned and understood by everyone, everywhere (but particularly those who are currently lazy or asleep). The scientific backing of alternative foods therefore helps to universalize and naturalize the tenets of alternative consumption, pushing local
eating as a natural and apolitical act, rather than something that is social and questionable (a problem that I discuss in more depth in Chapter 1). In some ways, this push has been a very effective strategy in promoting ‘healthy alternatives,’ but it has also precluded attention to diversity and difference (or lack thereof) within the alternative food movement.

As my interviews with alternative food activists suggest, in light of the push towards education and awareness, many activists have come to consider schools to be the ideal place to take on this labor of ‘enlightening.’ As one activist put it, in schools you have a ready, “captive audience” of students who are relatively easy to convince. But, the implication here is that the learning that goes on in schools is a unidirectional, ‘banking’ system type of education where information flows from holder to recipient (hooks 1994); that is, there is an assumption, held by many SGCP leaders, that certain people (experts/teachers) hold the correct information about how best to eat, while others (novices/students) need to and will become educated. Alongside this assumption is the implication that the students themselves are empty vessels, with little or no agency, and with no significant cultural attachments or social positions to ‘bring to the table’.

This assumption carries over from the broader alternative food movement, where alternative food leaders and nutrition ‘experts’ are lauded for holding correct and universally relevant food knowledge, while the rest of us (and specifically the economically and socially disenfranchised, as well as the large-bodied) are, by contrast, considered naively in the dark. Beyond perpetuating the myth that food choice is ultimately a matter of individual preference and behavior, as several food scholars have shown, the result of this rigid, universalizing approach to alternative/healthy food has been a “chilling” of those less racially, culturally and economically connected to the movement towards its overall agendas and goals (Guthman 2008). In other words, the insistence of alternative food activists on one right way to eat has led to the reproduction of a racially, culturally, and economically homogeneous social movement that in many ways continues to be ineffective at reaching out beyond (let alone addressing/dismantling) such lines of social difference. For example, we can consider that many of the spaces of alternative food – farm markets, community gardens, Whole Foods stores, and now (as I will argue) SGCPs – are often socially coded as middle-class, white (Slocum 2007, Guthman 2008), and also healthy, ‘slim’ spaces. The ramifications of this sort of coding for the effectiveness and motivational reach of SGCPs are a large part of what I set out to understand in this dissertation research.

**Questioning the Difference of Sensory Education**

Despite the strong social connections between healthy, alternative eating and middle-class, white, slim culture, it is important to note that many of the alternative food leaders involved with SGCPs insist that food is our “common ground,” and that eating is a “universal experience” (Waters 2008). Such assertions were in effect my initial impetus for taking on this dissertation research, since I viewed these statements as fundamentally detrimental to the success and progressiveness of the alternative food movement. Beyond the mundane fact that we all have to eat, I came to discover that the reasons for this misguided understanding lie in the ways in which sensory education is imagined to
work. SGCPs are often considered to be equally accessible to all students, or even more, to be a great equalizer among students from different cultural, racial, or economic backgrounds. The imagined key to this equality is, quite interestingly, sensory perception. As one teacher from the Berkeley SGCP explained to me:

“The value of sensory based [education] is that it is accessible. You are not doing lectures, you are giving equal access and equal opportunity for students to engage with food.” (Teacher, CA)

In this way, SGCPs are conceived as sensory education initiatives that will magically unlock ‘correct’ food behavior by compelling students to use their senses. Many leaders imagine SGCPs to be equality-producing because they only or at least primarily require students to taste, smell, and touch food, as opposed to intellectually or rationally engaging with food, which may be more difficult for some students. But, there are at least two problematic inferences here: first, that prior to entry in these programs (some) students (i.e. the ones going to McDonalds for their food) are not using their senses; and two, that students’ sensory perception exists as a natural/essential category that is both prior to and distinguishable from their social experiences and intellectual development.

It is because of such assertions and assumptions that my interest in SGCPs first took on a ‘visceral’ feel. I was interested in understanding how SCGPs motivate children to make changes in their eating habits, if they indeed do so, and also how this motivation (or de-motivation) differs across lines of social difference. Ultimately, the question of motivation was to me a visceral question – involving the material sensations and experiences of the human body. But it was a question that was also in no way apart from the realm of social (re)production. Just as Julie Guthman (2008) discusses the “chilling” effect of alternative food on people of color, so too could I sense the importance of social attachments and intellectual knowledge to different bodily motivations to eat.

School gardens and other sensory food-based initiatives have been shown to be successful in motivating many kids to change their food habits (Morris and Zidenberg-Cherr 2002), but there are many questions left unanswered. In what ways are these programs motivating to students? How is motivation accessed and experienced by students differently? What types of attachments or ideas motivate students across different means, and towards (perhaps) different ends? How far or how long does this motivation carry, and what obstacles exist to the continuation of motivational experiences in students’ future lives? Most importantly, what does this motivation do (if anything) to address and dismantle the broader social hierarchies of race, class, gender, and age (among others)?

Although motivation is often considered a positive visceral experience, it is important to recognize that this is not always or necessarily the case. In order to expand beyond the current (homogeneous) bounds of the alternative food movement, it is my contention that food activists need to begin to consider how and why alternative food can be “animating” to some and “chilling” to others (Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy unpublished). This is part of the work that I intend to do within this dissertation. Moreover, considering the
social pressures on both men and women to maintain an acceptable body size, we must remember that motivation itself (even as animating) is not always or necessarily a politically progressive process. Students (and their parents) can be motivated in ways that perpetuate, rather than disrupt, social hierarchies and material inequities. If we are left to assume that SGCPs “magically” unlock correct food behavior (as is often repeated by the leaders of such programs), then we will fail to account for the ways in which bodily attachments and social experiences are central to the circulation of power, and to the (uneven) distribution of empowerment, within the realm of alternative food. I seek to preclude this potential failure through the varied discussions on the pages that follow.

Repetition, Disruption and Agency
The irony of the oft-repeated “magic” of SGCPs is that, as numerous teachers and volunteers can attest, the space of sensory education takes careful attention and purposeful preparation – sensory education does not just happen organically. Whether planning the garden rotations, the recipe lists, or the table arrangements, SGCPs take place only through a great amount of determined effort – a fact that I both witnessed and was a part of daily during my field work. Once all of these conditions are in place, however, as many SGCP leaders claim, the cupid-esque “magic” is then said to take over:

“The only way they will change their [eating] habits is to fall in love…I want [the kids] to fall in love. You can prepare the romantic circumstances [for this to happen]. And you can get some really good matchmakers” (Interview with Alice Waters, Dec 2007).

In encouraging kids to ‘fall in love,’ however, one of the most frequently repeated pedagogical strategies of SGCP teachers is, quite simply, repetition. As one teacher explained to me, “you introduce a food again and again, you normalize it, and then it does not appear so foreign” (Interview with teacher, 2007). If the end goal of SGCPs is a return to natural eating via the senses/magic, then such claims and strategies do not seem very problematic. However, if we consider the sheer diversity of cultural differences and social experiences that children inevitably bring into a food education classroom, these statements could be read more along the lines of assimilation or cultural imperialism. Further, we might ask, what happens when students magically fall in love with certain foods, only to find that these foods are inaccessible to them culturally or economically outside the confines of the school walls?

These were the types of questions and problems that I set out to tackle as I began my dissertation research. Clearly, with a theoretical grounding in human-nature geography, and particularly in political ecology, I was unsatisfied and uneasy with the narrative of a magical return to nature. Like many who are attuned to the power of nature discourse, I came to view these explanations as eschewing important political and social tensions that ultimately keep the alternative food movement from expanding in progressive ways (meaning in ways that disrupt social hierarchy). My background in feminist theory led me to question such nature narratives particularly in terms of social difference, leading me to search for the ways that gender, race, and class hierarchies influence students’ experiences and trajectories of eating.
Yet, as I conducted my research, I was struck with the recognition that this critique was also not enough – that it was not the whole story. There is a certain lack of agency in both the nature narratives and the socially-attuned re-framing, a certain amount of pre-scripted teleology that did not allow room for the real complexities and ambiguities of food, eating, and life that I witnessed within SGCP classrooms. Whether through nature or social construction, these stories did not adequately explain how students and teachers and parents, in interacting with each other in bodily ways through food, have a role in affecting outcomes that are far from certain. What’s more, neither of these stories recognize nor sympathize with the complexities and contradictions that many progressive activists face on a daily basis. To be sure, in food activism there is always the tension of working both within and against the ‘system’ (Raynolds 2002). Thus, it was important for me to enter into the educational spaces of SGCPs with an eye on both repetition and resistance, duplication and disruption, injustice and agency.

In particular, I came to view SGCP classrooms as spaces in which the living out of life is occurring continually, haphazardly, and also purposefully. This is not to say that life does not happen in other educational contexts or arenas, but rather that SGCP are by design, as hands-on educational projects, places that (can and often do) connect school-based learning directly and purposefully to other life processes and experiences (in a variety of different ways). Certainly this is not limited to hands-on, sensory learning, but these classrooms do provide a particularly ripe context in which to observe and analyze such connections. Moreover, SGCPs focus on sensory experience allowed me to particularly ask what role the material, visceral body, through embodied habits and sensations, might have in the production of student motivation to eat (differently). In other words, how does the body itself have agency?

With these ideas in mind, my dissertation research became a project of becoming attuned to the realities and inequities of social difference within alternative food while at the same time allowing for the possibility that “life becomes resistant to power when power takes life as its object” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987). SGCPs are indeed structured spaces in which the current inequities of power within the food system can be experienced and reproduced, but they are also lived spaces in which embodied life experiences can contradict the norms and groupings of social life, allowing for different outcomes to emerge. In recognizing these dual certainties, my dissertation is written with the knowledge that SGCPs are both complicit and resistant to power, and in the hope that they can become increasingly a project of the latter.

Dissertation Structure
The structure of my dissertation is as follows. In Chapter 1, I lay out the theoretical background of this project, explaining specifically and in detail what I mean by the term “visceral.” I also use this chapter to describe why attention to the visceral is important to alternative food, and to political activism more broadly, and thus why it is relevant to my analysis of SCGPs. In Chapter 2, I then introduce the analytical framework of my dissertation research, which I call political ecology of the body (PEB). I situate this framework within work in human-environment geography and health geography, and
then discuss its relevance to understanding food-based motivation. In this chapter, I also explain how a PEB framework for research allows for an analysis of SGCPs that expands beyond current critiques of such programs as instruments of neoliberalism. Chapter 1 and 2 comprise the bulk of my theoretical work.

Chapter 3 then introduces and describes the sites and methods of my particular SGCP case studies. I use this chapter to explain why and how different qualitative methods are important for research on visceral geographies, and also why and how my case study sites allowed for different insights into alternative food as a visceral experience. I also detail both my theoretical research questions as well as examples of my specific interview/working questions. Chapters 4, 5, and 6 then present my empirical findings from both of the case study locations. These chapters tackle the three themes of food knowledge, food identity, and food pedagogy, in this order. My discussion of food knowledge in Chapter 4 centers on the ways in which SGCPs both replicate and resist ‘fact-based’ food education, with important consequences for the production of motivational experiences. Chapter 5, on food identity, then moves the discussion towards an analysis of social difference, examining the particular ways in which SGCPs encourage material attachments to food that both reify and defy the boundaries of gender, race, class, and age-based identities. Finally, Chapter 6 examines SGCPs pedagogical strategies, exploring the effectiveness and the (differential) effects of both rigidity and leniency in the classroom. After closing with a brief concluding chapter, the dissertation ends with an afterword called “Grounded Nutrition and Food Education: A Primer for Encouraging and Unearthing Geographic and Feminist Principles in School Garden and Cooking Programs.” I intend this supplement to be distributed widely to SGCP leaders and advocates, but especially to the communities and schools that have contributed directly to this dissertation research.
Chapter 1: Visceral (Re)actions – Nature and Social Difference

This chapter explores the relevance of the concept of 'the visceral' to recent scholarship in geography and women's studies, relating this literature to my empirical analysis of School Garden and Cooking Programs (SGCPs) in this chapter and the chapters that follow. The first section of this chapter discusses how visceral reactions have come to connote a 'natural' or 'universal' process within alternative food, and describes why this connotation can undermine our ability to imagine the food events of SGCPs in terms of social difference. After contrasting this connotation with what I want to signify with the term 'visceral (re)actions', the chapter then moves to an exploration of the varied academic literature that relates to my visceral perspective, examining the role of the body in recent geographic and feminist theorizing. I first explore the importance and limitations of social constructionist arguments of the body, and then move on to discuss scholarship that particularly attends to the role of the material body in social and political life. Finally, I address the contemporary emergence of geographies of affect and emotion - two related fields that have produced nuanced geographic scholarship on bodily feeling. I end this section with a discussion of some of the terminology of the visceral that I use within this dissertation.

The Visceral as Natural

"We are our molecules; our deepest fears, joys, and desires are embodied in the chemical signals of our neurotransmitters. But we are also creators of meaning, making up — and made out of — our histories, our idiosyncrasies, our crazy plot-lines, our unpredictable outcomes. How are we to make sense of the fact that we are both?" (Brison 2003)

As geography reaches further into the human body, both as a theoretical scale and an empirical location, Susan Brison’s question seems to me at the crux of human-environment inquiry. Her question is not new to geography or philosophy, but rather edges toward the core of nature-society investigation, placing the body at/as the center of human-environment relations. How are we to make sense of the fact that we are, like the landscapes in which we dwell, both biological and social, molecules and meaning, matter and discourse? How specifically is the human body itself a human-environment interaction? Can we now take the lessons that we have gained from decades of work analyzing “nature” in its political, economic, and social contexts (Castree 2005) and apply these findings to efforts to understand the (always relational, ever changing) human body? Feminist theorists and philosophers (like Brison) have already done much work to specify the questions and directions of such body-centered inquiries, delving into issues of emotion, sexuality, gender, and health, among others. But human-environment geography generally, and political ecology specifically (the subject of Chapter 2), can strengthen such work by couching body-centered research in broader and ongoing geographic conversations about the material processes and discursive meanings of the ‘something’ that we call nature. For certainly nature does not exist only in landscapes; it courses through our bodies with the same metaphorical and material chaos that animates the lands we walk upon.
In fact, nature both as an idea and a material thing is given particular form through the human body, and especially through bodily experience. Notions of naturalness and pre-social purity abound in discussions of bodily sensation and judgment, and these sensations and judgments are in turn lent a sort of felt legitimacy through their understood status as ‘natural.’ This interplay between (often subconscious) cognition and physical bodily sensation is at the heart of what I conceive of as ‘the visceral’ – the fuzzy place in the body where molecules and meanings, or matter and discourse, collide. Just like nature itself, the visceral is far from a pre-social phenomenon, and yet it is often discussed and experienced as such. In fact, many people use the terms natural and visceral interchangeably when discussing bodily sensations and judgments. Visceral, it seems, has emerged in the English language as nature qua bodily feeling. But despite the limits and dangers of this current usage, it is nevertheless a useful concept, worth both critiquing and retrieving as an analytical tool.

The Visceral in (not so) Everyday Social Life

Visceral reactions are commonly imagined (and thus experienced) as ‘natural’ in so much as they are assumed to derive from biological and chemical processes within the body. Importantly, these processes are frequently deemed to be apart (somehow) from the body’s role as author, thinker, and social actor, eschewing the role of cultural experiences and social differences in the formation of visceral reactions. In relation to SGCPs, a good example of this is taste. Taste is a visceral reaction with many dimensions, and can refer both to broad cultural and aesthetic partialities, and also to preferences for specific cuisines and culinary specialties. In both the broad and specific meanings of the term, taste has been shown to be influenced greatly by one’s social positioning (Bourdieu 1984). Yet in common language, many of SGCP leaders I talked to discussed taste (for food in particular, but also for food practices like eating slowly or eating at a table) as ultimately a pre-social matter:

“The actual taste of the ingredient is not the determining factor, because you know what? A McDonald hamburger tastes like crap. It is not taste, it is marketing, it is social pressure. Once you get over all the rest of it, a fresh picked tomato actually tastes better.” (Leader, NS, emphasis added)

Activist: “Cheetos are never ‘good’ food. They are a product of production. Who you are does alter your consciousness, but…”

JHC: “Not your taste buds?”

Activist: “Hmmm….I don’t know” (Activist, CA)

In these examples, individual preferences for food are imagined to be complex and are acknowledged to be muddied by social pressures and capitalist reproduction. But, "once you get over the rest of it," our material bodily impulses to choose certain foods over others, as expressed through the biological work of taste buds for example, are assumed to exist as a pure, pre-social molecular force toward (the right) behavior. Importantly, because these SGCP leaders consider taste in such pre-social terms, they also regard eating as, ultimately, a universal experience. In so far as SGCPs encourage sensory-
based learning (as opposed to intellectual learning), the programs are imagined and promoted as spaces that give “equal access and equal opportunity for all students to engage with food,” particularly because “all you have to do is use your senses” (Teacher, CA). The implication here is that through sensory perception alone, all students will naturally come to the same (visceral) conclusions about what tastes good.

“You are being educated by osmosis, rather than having to sit down and evaluate, it is happening in a different way, through the senses” (Leader, NS)

“It is a beautiful thing to see that transition [to alternative food] happen, and it happens naturally” (Alice Waters, CA)

In the above quotations, nature is imagined to work through the body to bring about a certain set of fixed visceral judgments, which are interpreted (in being ‘natural’) as ultimately good, right, or beautiful. In contrast, tastes for foods other than alternative are therefore implied to be bad and against nature, which advances the educational and political goal of SGCPs to help students "get over the rest of it." The implication is that, at its pre-social core, anybody’s visceral reaction to alternative food will be the same.

Examining such claims is important to understanding the how SGCP leaders imagine the programs to work through the visceral body, and also how they interpret SGCP outcomes or successes. Particularly, it is important to recognize that these claims are used to frame the visceral goals of the alternative food movement as essentially apolitical, and thus inherently unproblematic. In other words, the healthy eating objectives of SGCPs appear ultimately as a common good for all students, in so far as they are presumed to be nature's intended outcome. They also quite interestingly appear as the indisputably tastiest choices, to the extent that nature is imagined to really determine 'actual' taste. Thus, in Berkeley for example, the oft-repeated promotional sound bite for SGCPs offers that the food kids eat at school is simply "delicious," (i.e. Alice Waters' "Delicious Revolution," Waters 2008), begging the question, why don't the students get to make this call? Rather than actually allowing the students themselves to assess the deliciousness of the food, this claim is made a priori, with nature's unquestionable goodness/tastiness standing in for empirical evidence from those who actually eat/taste the food. In contrast to this, however, stand the many student complaints that I heard while working in the SGCP classrooms about the changes in school food, particularly at the level of the cafeteria:

"Last year they changed our lunch program, so that it is all organic. But I stopped buying it because it doesn't taste good. I mean, I want organic, but I want it to taste good too. Like cardboard and pears? Not cool…” (Student, CA)

"We like pepperoni pizza, but we can't have it because it is not healthy. [The teacher] told us that it was the school board that made that decision, but I [don't understand] because [other schools] still get to have it." (Student, NS)
Beyond disallowing the possibility that students (need to) have personal agency in the development of taste preference, claims about the 'natural' and 'actual' correctness of SGCP food also serve to rationalize the superiority of alternative food preference over other, non-conforming tastes (i.e. a taste for pepperoni pizza). This rationalization is particularly problematic given that the alternative food movement is also frequently characterized (even by many alternative food activists themselves) as economically elitist, racially white, and culturally European (Slocum 2007; Guthman 2008). In this sense, any assertion of a pre-social quality to SGCP food is not only questionable as a supposed fact but ultimately condemnable as a potentially pernicious rationalization of the imagined supremacy of rich, white, and Western forms of knowledge/valuation over other forms of knowing/assessing food. In more general terms, these dilemmas suggest that the boundary between the nature and culture of taste in SGCPs is far from clear-cut, and thus that the goals of alternative food are by no means beyond the bounds of social critique. Indeed, we might consider that what seems like untainted nature to some can feel more like cultural imperialism to others.

**Visceral Difference & Visceral Change**

Acknowledging that visceral judgments like taste are far from pre-social, how are we to understand the (potentially positive) power of the visceral within and beyond alternative food? It seems that the metaphorical appeal and indeed the material power of the visceral in many cases come from its imagined (and improbable) attachment to 'pure' nature. Certainly it is because the visceral often feels so natural – so innate – that many activists and eaters will trust it as a source of great reason. After all, when in doubt, we should just listen to our guts, right? But, if our guts are nature’s unhindered pulpit then why don’t we all crave to eat from a farmers market, or an organic garden?

My point here is that visceral judgments do influence the trajectory and outcome of many social and political phenomena – including what we eat at our tables. This is a claim that I wish to expand upon extensively in this and subsequent chapters. But, as the sheer

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2 Certainly, such an apolitical framing of political struggle is not limited to SCGP programs. To be sure, beyond the realm of SGCP education, we can hear similar claims about the 'nature' of visceral reactions in other social and political contexts. In fact, the notion of the visceral-as-natural is invoked with surprising frequency – at least surprising for a scholar with an eye and an ear just recently tuned to such matters. For a contemporary example we need to look only so far as the 2008 presidential race. Voters invoked narrations of the visceral as natural in their attempts to explain the political behaviors of themselves and others. I heard viscerality used as an evaluation (they don’t understand, they are ruled by fear); an excuse (I hate her, I can’t help it, it’s a gut reaction), and a stand in for objective analysis (I just know he’s the right candidate; I feel it in my bones).

In such statements, visceral judgments are acknowledged to both contribute to the reproduction of fear and hatred in our society and also to justify and distance oneself from personal sensations of anger, revulsion, and cynicism. The term visceral therefore paradoxically carries both an air of knee-jerk, reactionism – being naïvely ruled by one’s viscera – and a sense of unhindered, pure response – following from one’s natural instinct. For example, Sarah Palin was said to have “visceral appeal” to Right-wing voters, while the Left had, towards her, a “visceral hatred.” In both of these cases, there is again an assumption that, for better or worse, this animalistic, natural drive somehow acts independently from rational, social forces in controlling the human body. Such narratives are in many ways a continuation of our society’s historic love/hate relationship with (wild) ‘nature,’ reproduced as/in a body-driven politics.
diversity of our tastes and preferences suggests, these visceral judgments are certainly not
‘pure’ nature at its essence. Instead, then, I want to suggest that we begin to imagine ‘the
visceral’ as a collection of learned bodily habits toward certain bodily feelings, desires,
and actions. These habits are not static and universal but are materially produced and
reconfigured through various biological and chemical flows that are situated within
people's different social, cultural, and political contexts. They are our daily living-out of
the messy interaction, the ongoing chaotic relationship, between Brison's (above)
meaning and molecule. In this sense, visceral reactions defy the oft-presumed boundary
between nature-as-molecule and culture-as-meaning, suggesting that it is instead the
intersection of these supposed pure forms that propels both social and natural
reproduction (Latour 1993). In this hybrid understanding, inclinations toward visceral
reactions inevitably differ from person to person, group to group, and context to context -
and thus, instead of ‘pure’ universal response (based on a unitary, pre-social force), we
can encounter contextualized instances and patterns of often inequitable and conflicting
visceral difference (in which physical bodily matter is always already socially and
differentially articulated; see Latour 2004). This, of course, does not make visceral
judgments any less real, any less tangible, or any less natural. But it does make them
more open to critique, and also more viable as instruments of social analysis (and social
change).

Given such complexities, to talk about viscerality is (admittedly) to try to specify the
unspecifiable - a something that is constantly shifting, deeply contextualized, and
haphazardly produced. It is truly difficult, if not impossible, to pin down exactly why we
taste what we taste, or feel what we feel. These bodily judgments are at once internal and
external, historical and immediate, probable and unpredictable. The larger spatial and
temporal arrangements that at a moment produce within a body a particular craving, for
example, are just too numerous and disorganized to identify; and the related internal
mechanisms of perception and judgment that attempt to filter and organize these
arrangements are similarly copious and complex in terms of the myriad ways in which
they are physically (re)articulated in and through our social world (Latour 2004). As I
discuss visceral reactions in this dissertation, then, I will not attempt to draw causal
linkages between certain social circumstances and specific food habits, nor will I attempt
to argue that cultural differences can assuredly forecast taste preference. These stories
may exist within my case studies, but if so, they are only ever partial descriptions. I want
to encourage an understanding of visceral reactions in SGCPs that is much more fluid
than this.

Still, I also want to argue that visceral reactions, despite connotations of animal instinct
and uncontrollable response, are also not entirely out of our reach – nor the reach of
others. The visceral realm is not thoroughly mysterious and unknowable, even in its
complexity and specificity. Certainly the success of the advertising industry in eliciting

3 The separate words ‘meaning’ and ‘molecule’ are not meant here to imply that there are two distinct
forces at play, involving social/cultural difference on the one hand and unitary matter on the other. Rather,
the words meaning and molecule are meant to collectively draw attention to the ways in which the realms
of the body that we generally conceive of as social and natural are in fact overlapping or hybrid in the
visceral realm.
product-based visceral responses is testament to this fact, such as when children declare that carrots packaged in a McDonald’s wrapper seem to taste better (Robinson et al, 2007). Indeed, as geographer Nigel Thrift warns, knowledge about the creation and mobilization of bodily affect is being deployed knowingly and politically, and “mainly…by the rich and powerful” (2004, 58). Nevertheless, progressive activists also can and do pay attention to the ways in which bodies come to sense and judge and (re)act, as we witnessed with the success of the Obama campaign to inspire and lend hope to many (Hayes-Conroy 2009). For these reasons, I choose the title "Visceral (Re)actions," to remind us that visceral judgments are not passive, unthinking, 'reactive' responses but instead learned and embodied behaviors that involve a series of active and often purposeful (though not always conscious) decisions. While not fully predictable, therefore, visceral reactions are certainly manipulable, and thus open to many possibilities of re-activation.

In this dissertation, following calls from affect and feminist geographers to be more attentive to the embodied politics of everyday life, I want to explore viscerality as something that we can and should understand better than we do now, and also as something that we can learn to use in effecting personal and social change at a variety of scales. This is not to deny that other avenues of social change are important (e.g. policy or institutional reform), but rather to recognize the visceral as present both beside and within other mechanisms of change. To think of visceral reactions as embodied socio-spatial productions – material relationships through which we develop (diverse) inclinations toward certain behaviors, actions, or feelings, which are often subconsciously practiced – is to take a step toward understanding visceral response as a mechanism of daily political struggle.

The remainder of this chapter explores how academic scholarship broadly, and geography and women’s studies research particularly, have contributed to what I am naming “the visceral,” through critical work on bodies and bodily sensation. The examination is not exhaustive, and is also not meant to underscore minute differences. Scholars have taken interest in the body for a variety of reasons (e.g. cultural analysis, health studies, political strategy), and have discussed the body using a variety of terms and concepts (e.g. embodiment, performance, affect, and occasionally even ‘the visceral’). The goal of this chapter is less to explain how these interests and concepts differ as to acknowledge the progression of important ideas in regard to bodies, to flag places or times where the body has been discussed in potentially unhelpful ways, and to explore significant areas of convergence within these sometimes-divergent body-centered fields. Recognizing that what any of us are trying to describe and discuss when writing about bodies is constantly in flux, however, it is important to remember that there is no one right way to talk about or think about bodies (though there certainly might be mistaken or obstructive ways). In keeping with my interest in material relations, it is what our discussions and narrations do or allow, rather than solely what they say, that is ultimately what is of importance. While the material outcome of my own work remains to be seen, what I hope to do here is to promote and advance the intellectual/activist task of consciously and deliberately opening our progressive political projects to the realm of the visceral-as-more-than-natural. I hope to make this task easier to anticipate, to imagine, and to do.
Bodies in Academia

Academics frequently shy away from bodies and visceralities as topics of scholarly interest. There is a well-worn history of this in the academy, and also particularly in geography. Bodies and their sensations and judgments have long been associated with women and with notions of femininity (e.g. being ruled by emotions), while men and masculinity have been linked to rational, cognitive thought, and thus to legitimate intellectual advancement. An in-depth analysis of this history is beyond the scope of this dissertation (for a detailed discussion see Grosz 1994), but it is important to recognize that its prevalence is still very visible in the academy today. We can see it, for example, in fields like nutrition, where the lack of social and political (lived) context in scientific research leads scholars to claim that what constitutes a healthy meal is both simple and universal (Harvard 2008). And we can see it also in the pervasiveness of pedagogical theories and practices that are inattentive to the role of the body in education (for a critique of this, see Springgay 2007, or Shilling 2004).

In other ways, however, the academic turn away from the material body has been understandable, and even productive. For example, within geography particularly, the theories of biological determinism, which sought to explain cultural differences in behavior through genetics and racial categorization, has been rightfully discredited (Livingstone 1992). From these “socio-biological” explanations however, it seems that the biological body has become tainted – so much so that even with a huge recent upswing of interest in the body on the part of feminist scholars, geographers, sociologists, and educators, much of this social-science work on the body has remained oriented towards representation and social inscription, rather than the work of molecules or physical bodily matter in producing bodies and bodily experiences. Of course, this is not to deny that there has not been a great deal of scholarly investigation in regard to the (extremely variegated) work of molecules in other fields of study, such as molecular biology or endocrinology. However, this work does not overlap to any large extent with social-scientific understandings of social structure, political economic context, or cultural reproduction. In this sense, the body as a viscerally or materially relevant actor in daily life remains under-theorized. Ostensibly to steer clear of any potentially essentializing biological arguments, many researchers and social theorists have avoided direct discussions of biology and its influence on social behavior even in regard to taste (though see Rodaway 1994). Through my analysis of SGCPs in this dissertation, I hope to encourage a re-entry of the material, biological body to discussions of geography, health, and social experience (as in Mansfield 2008, which I discuss in Chapter 2). First, however, I want to briefly explore some of the various and important scholarship in geography, women’s studies, and related disciplines that have influenced and advanced my thinking on bodies and visceral reactions.

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4 In this dissertation, the term molecules refers broadly to the material processes of the human body that both reproduce and recreate the social contexts through which bodies are developed or “articulated” (as in Latour 2004).
The Body as Social Construction

While often eschewing direct discussion of bodily materiality or biology, feminist geographers and other scholars of the body have gone to great lengths to draw attention to the (often oppressive) social conditions through which people experience daily life. There has been much important scholarship on bodies and embodiment in the past several decades, most of which has drawn attention to the body as it constructs and is constructed by our social, economic, and political world. Through this work, scholars have imagined the body not as an isolated biological object, but as a location for the practice of social values, beliefs, and norms. The body has been theorized as a surface upon which culture is written (Rose 2001), and also a malleable (perhaps docile) entity that is able to be disciplined and controlled (Foucault 1990).

Much of this work has remained consciously distant from the discussions of the body as biologically driven (by, for example, one’s viscera or taste buds), and furthermore has served to forcefully deconstruct any biological essentialization of the body in social theory at large, and in feminist theory particularly. Despite the importance of such theorizing, however, some feminist scholars have critiqued work on the body as social construction, arguing that this work has not given enough attention to the materiality of the body – to the actual ‘messiness’ and ‘fluidity’ of bodily practices and processes. This critique is important in the attention it brings to the material body as it develops and is developed within various social contexts. Indeed, in many ways, social constructionism has tended to “render the body incorporeal, fleshless, fluid-less, little more than linguistic territory” (Longhurst 2001, 23). However, while social constructionist arguments have not necessarily drawn attention to how the body is materially in flux, I would argue that much of this work has inspired many of us to rethink our assumptions about a fixed biological self. This is, perhaps, the first step in re-activating the body in academic scholarship.

For example, Judith Butler’s (1990) Gender Trouble was instrumental in this social constructionist type of anti-essentialist work, and is particularly notable because it destabilized feminist theory to its core. Butler took biological essentialism in women’s studies head on, deconstructing the very subject upon which feminism is (thought to be) founded – that is, the ‘woman’. She writes, “The feminist subject turns out to be discursively constructed by the very political system that is supposed to facilitate its emancipation” (1990, 4). In other words, Butler suggests that not only is gender (the social ‘performance’ of sex) something socially constructed, but the very category of woman is also discursively/culturally produced. The sex/gender distinction is therefore no longer valid to Butler – sex is not a ‘natural’ biological category, determined and fixed by our essential, pre-social being. In fact, she maintains, there is no such thing as a pre-social body – bodies are always, already discursive (a point that she reiterates more forcefully in Bodies that Matter, 1993).

In this work, the resistance to biological essentialism is powerful. Butler takes important strides towards rethinking the body and bodily experience as always, already social. Moreover, she eschews biology for an important reason: she wants to argue that the
discourse of (fixed) biology is a powerful force in controlling and compartmentalizing bodies – in precluding what certain bodies can be and become. While we might be left to wonder how the material of our bodies (in non-fixed terms) act back upon this social discourse, or why our bodies develop certain visceral assessments of categories like male and female, right or wrong, or good food and bad food, Butler’s work undoubtedly tells us much about the broader social relations out of which our bodies develop certain judgments and habits of feeling.

Embodiment and Social Change
What is perhaps most important about Butler’s work is the possibilities that it opens up for rethinking the role of the visceral in social practice. Like Michael Foucault, Butler moves from explaining that bodies are controlled and normalized, and that bodily experiences and performances are perceived as ‘natural’ even though they are thoroughly social, to offering insights into how we might begin to become aware of these processes of normalization/naturalization, and thus begin to control them ourselves. Her strategy of attack is also largely discursive – but the imagined result is certainly not. Butler explains, “Woman itself is a term in process, a becoming, a constructing that cannot rightfully be said to originate or to end. As an ongoing discursive practice, it is open to intervention and resignification” (1990; 43). The attention to process is particularly notable here – bodies are not just inscriptions of culture, but continual works in progress, of which we can take an active (perhaps intellectual) role. Here, agency is located not in the body, per se, but at least through the body.\(^5\)

The language of ‘performance’ in Butler’s work has also been especially important to geographic and feminist scholarship on bodies and embodiment. For example, Catherine Nash (2000) offers the metaphor of performance to explain that “women and men learn to perform sedimented forms of gendered social practices that become so routinized as to appear ‘natural’” (654).\(^6\) This metaphor has allowed us to explain both that we reproduce social norms like sex/gender roles through specific and repeated bodily acts (e.g. by performing femininity perhaps through eating certain foods, or engaging in certain tasks in the kitchen), and that, as we learn how to identify these mechanisms of reproduction, we can begin to resist and change such roles through our bodies as well (e.g. by being open to other types of performances, or other kinds of food attachments and behaviors). Thus, as Nash goes on to suggest, the metaphor of choreography is “perhaps better than performance in conveying the idea of codes, traditions, and conventions that people reproduce, rework, parody, or upset – the constraints and rules as well as the possibilities for subversion.” In other words, because the body is social (read: changing), it is also (potentially) retrievable as an instrument of social change.

Linda McDowell (1995, 2005) similarly notes that in the service industry, the performance of gender roles is a requirement for employment. Though professional jobs

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\(^5\) And furthermore, to the extent that the conscious brain is already also the body, her work would accomplish both – more on this later.

\(^6\) Note that, going further into the body, we could recognize that these practices do not only appear natural, but also feel or are experienced as natural through visceral mechanisms of judgment.
are often seen as ‘mind’ work, McDowell (1995) tells us that jobs are increasingly characterized by what she recognizes as ‘body’ work: by sexualized performance, careful disciplining, and self-surveillance. For McDowell, this recognition is not an end in itself but is the beginning of a broader political project to understand and take control of bodies in social reproduction:

“The body is the primary site of social experience. It is where social experience is turned into lived experience. To understand the body we have to know who controls it as it moves through the spaces and times of our daily routines, who shapes its sensuous experiences, its sexualities, its pleasures in eating and exercise, who controls its performance at work, its behavior at home and at school and also influences how it is dressed and made to appear in its function of presenting us to others. The body is the core of our social experience.” (Fiske 1993: 57 quoted in McDowell 1995: 76).

While neither McDowell nor Nash explicitly imagine the specific role of the internal, biological body in their accounts (e.g. through discussions of the mechanisms of muscle memory, habit formation, or physical motivation), certainly they want us to understand the body as a material site through which we physically experience social interaction (e.g. through our food related pleasures as well as other sensuous activities). The involvement of the material body is at times more passive than active in these accounts (with ‘pure’ social forces as the active agent), but at other times we can begin to imagine how the material body can be harnessed (even disciplined?) in countering oppressive agents. We can imagine, for example, how things like pleasures or tastes can be reclaimed or ‘taken back’ by a sort of visceral playing and retraining of such material habits (Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy 2008). There is an important implication in this work that as we begin to pay attention to how our material bodies are socialized, and how this socialization influences our lived experiences (such as within a SGCP eating event) we will be better positioned as students, teachers, and activists to “choreograph” resistance to oppressive social forces (Nash 2000).7

‘Process’ Biology in a Relational World

In the above works, the practice of political resistance through the material body is obvious, but any discussion of the internal sensations and processes of judgment that might inhibit and enable this resistance is limited. It is important to note that the biological body is largely absent as an active agent in the production of visceral experiences throughout much of the social constructionist scholarship on bodies. While

7 Foucault was similarly interested in the surveillance and control of disciplined bodies for these reasons. In fact, Foucault (1990) wrote that, “the purpose [of his work] is to show how deployments of power are directly connected to the body” (151). And for Foucault, too, the point was not just to understand these “technologies of the self,” but also to use our understanding as a starting point for resistance. Thus, for Butler, McDowell, Foucault, and many other body theorists, the social construction of the body involves not only the practice of social norms, beliefs, and laws, but also, hopefully/potentially, the political resistance to these norms.
much feminist scholarship attends to daily experiences of/in the body, the physical matter of the body is often not theorized as having an effective role in these experiences (or at least not explicitly so). As I will address in Chapter 2, this point echoes recent critiques aimed at political ecology for being ‘all politics and no ecology,’ wherein social constructionist arguments over nature have (arguably) led to a strong focus on the politics of discourse at the expense of the findings of ecological science. But how are we to specify the role of the material body in producing visceral judgments like taste preference without conceding to biology as a static and essentializing science (where we ultimately would all prefer the same foods)? We need to begin to describe with more specificity how the material body is able to change – how, for example, different bodies are motivated to eat certain foods – and also how material conditions and relations influence the way that change happens.

One way to do this is by (re)exploring and (re)theorizing what it means to be(come) healthy, particularly in a way that conceptualizes physical bodily well-being as contextual and relational process. There are four avenues of thought in recent academic scholarship that contribute to such a project. First, work on bodily transformation within feminist philosophy helps us to conceive of the body as an active socio-political process, one that is relevant to both personal growth and collective change. Second, academic scholarship in the fields of (qualitative) health geography and disability studies opens bodily health to contextual questions of place and social difference. Third, actor-network theorizing helps us to re-imagine the (healthy) body as a relational entity, in which bodily agency is a collective endeavor. And fourth, studies of food and visceral politics serve to specify how bodily reactions to food itself can be understood as relational and political events. Below I address each of these in this order.

**Bodily Transformations**

How and why do biological bodies change? What does or can this change accomplish in the broader social world? Brison’s question (in this chapter’s opening) of molecules and meaning is for her not only an intellectual and political inquiry, but also a journey that is essential to bodily health and particularly to physical bodily healing – a specific and purposeful type of bodily transformation. In her book, Brison recounts her personal recovery from the trauma of rape as a material process of biological change, one that involves simultaneous intellectual and physical struggle in the aftermath of violence. She describes how her flashbacks, goose bumps, rapid heartbeats, sensations of panic, and other bodily conditions slowly begin to shift and dissipate as she actively labors through the cognitive (meaning making) and corporeal (muscle building) journey of self-re-invention. In other words, her body changes (heals) through a negotiated yet disorderly process of “conscious” visceral re-acting in relation to both the social definitions and the physical training that reproduce her post-trauma self. Health, in this sense, is social, physical, negotiated, and never complete.

Brison’s work allows us to recognize at least three important characteristics of the biological body that are essential to research on SGCPs. First, the body is ever-changing, a “process-of-being,” and thus always in material flux. Bodies (re)act (differently) to social and environmental stimuli in ways that constantly shift the sensations we
experience and the judgments we make. In Brison’s account, it would be hard, if not impossible, to draw a definitive line between mental/cognitive and physical/bodily healing; the visceral shifts that she labors through happen in the spaces in-between. Similarly, in a cooking or gardening classroom, the boundary between sensory education and cognitive engagement is not clear cut; students’ visceral (re)actions to food take place as a hybrid of the two forms of development. In this sense, the material flux of the body is not separate from the body as a social construction. Rather, social constructions, norms and identities, are given material legitimacy, and also resisted, as they are (re)evaluated through conscious and subconscious bodily judgments and reactions. But it is important to recognize that the biological body is also fluid in this process, constantly shifting in terms of how, when, and to what it (re)acts – or to what it senses/tastes as natural. Whether in regard to the production of tastes or the process of healing, performances of social norms and roles change alongside physical changes in bodily reaction and judgment precisely because the two are not separate processes.

Second, despite the importance of this recognized fluidity, bodily change is not (often) drastic but rather incremental or developmental. Although fantastic or traumatic events can radically and rapidly alter one’s visceral experiences, in everyday life activities like eating, or in the aftermath of such weighty events, change most often comes slowly. Visceral reactions therefore feel natural (read: fixed) for good reason: bodies form habits of feeling and perceiving that become subconscious and often increasingly viscous (Alcoff 2006). Our response mechanisms become accustomed to firing in certain ways, and it can become harder and harder to ‘feel out’ new ways of judging, (re)acting, or tasting. Indeed, habits lend a sort of comfort and stability that is not always easily or contentedly altered, neither in SGCP classrooms, nor in other social spaces. In addition, while there is also much haphazardness and uncontrollability within our larger external world, there is furthermore a lot of undeniable “stickiness” (Slocum 2007) in this world as well – in terms of, for example, the entrenched-ness of hierarchical social norms, definitions, and expectations in regard to ‘correct’ eating, or in terms of the continued inequities and inefficiencies of our health care and food systems at large. Thus, although life is always changing, we also must be careful to not assume fluidity as an inevitability. In Brison’s account, she labored through much internal and external viscosity. And, she approached fluidity not so much as an inevitability, but as a developmental and political practice.

Third, Brison’s work reminds us that (despite these viscosities) we have at least some ability to consciously affect and direct such change, through deliberate engagement with the socio-spatial and material contexts that influence a body’s re-creation. Even though we cannot fully dictate (or even fully know) why our body feels or (re)acts in certain ways, we can consciously have an influence on these processes. For a food related example, we can and do develop tastes for certain foods through various material and socio-spatial interactions over the course of time, to the point where previously bad tasting foods can begin to taste good (i.e. we can develop a ‘taste’ for them). It is hard to

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8 Deleuze and Guatarri call this deterritorialization (1987)
9 bell hooks (1994) discusses this phenomenon in regard to the often uncomfortability of liberal arts education, especially for students whose learning directly confronts past experiences and beliefs.
determine the exact causal pathways of such a development, and yet certainly many of us can and do frequently work toward new tastes and preferences (for personal, practical, or political reasons). Still, as Brison’s own experiences illustrate, consciously recognizing and re-acting to our bodily tendencies or viscosities takes more than simply intellectual will, and more than just a flexible living-out of life. It takes conscious individual and collective effort to understand our visceral reactions, it takes deliberate collaborative work to change unhelpful or inequitable socio-spatial conditions that preclude progressive change, and above all, it takes time to do both of these things (a claim to which many alternative food activists agree). Brison wrote her book ten years after her traumatic experience – and her process of healing was (perhaps is) still ongoing.

**Health in Socio-Spatial Context**

Beyond Brison, other feminist theorists have articulated similar projects of bodily transformation\(^{10}\). In *Bodies and Pleasures*, Ladelle McWhorter (1999), for example, describes a political process of bodily transformation that involves (among other physical changes) the training and discipline of muscles in dance as part of a conscious effort to re-claim ethnic heritage. Although McWhorter does not frame her work as related directly to health or healing, the process of bodily transformation that she describes certainly links personal, bodily well-being to broader social and political struggle. In this sense, the scholarship of feminist theorists like Brison and McWhorter converges with a thread of recent work in health geography and disability studies in which scholars have promoted a redressing of health as a concept that is necessarily contextual and nested in places (Dyck et al 2005, Kearns and Moon 2002; Valentine 1999). Like the work of Brison and McWhorter, in this understanding of health, bodies are fluid, developmental, and changeable, and thus being or becoming healthy is not a universal condition but instead a varied process that is necessarily affected by the socio-spatial and political arrangements of particular places (e.g. a home, school, community, or region).

\(^{10}\) It may seem surprising to some that feminist and health researchers find it necessary to insist repeatedly that bodies can and do continually and materially change (Longhurst 2000); after all, as Lynda Birke (2000) notes, for many women, this fact was never in doubt. But in biomedical discourse (where much of the defining of biology takes place), there is little room for discussions of fluidity and change. As Foucault has noted, descriptions of the body in biological discourse focus on deviance from a norm, and on homeostasis (Birke 2000). Consistency is therefore taken as normal, and perturbations represent disease. But, as Birke says, this image of the fixed body is a gendered (masculine) one. And, the exclusion of biology from women’s studies in the past has served to further this fixed definition.

In recognizing that material bodies change along with intellectual minds, feminist geographers have begun to question how we might begin to use our changing biological bodies, and our cognitive capacity to effect certain changes, in furthering our politico-spatial agendas. Thus Lynda Johnston (1996), in her study on female body building discusses not only the experience of building muscles, but also how women came to use their physical, muscular bodies to disrupt and transgress gendered norms of appearance and behavior within the space of the gym. In doing so, Johnston says that she wants to put forth a conception of the body that is not pre-social, but also not purely social without a “weighty” materiality. She notes that the physical pleasure that women body builders feel in muscle building is important to their overall work, and she explains that these women physically sense empowerment as they *knowingly* change their body in such transgressive ways.
Scholars like Edward Hall (2000) and Isabel Dyck (1998), among others, have particularly critiqued body-centered scholarship that focuses either on the body in solely representational form (as a social construct), or the (biological, medicalized) body as a fixed and natural entity that is contextless and universal. Similar to Brison, Hall, for example, explains that he seeks instead to develop a new “socio-biological” understanding that is no longer deterministic but that views life and difference through the interactive, dynamic process of both biological body and social culture. In Hall’s view, a physical impairment like hearing loss is not objectively experienced as a purely biological disability, nor is it entirely a social construct, based solely upon bodily deviation from social expectations or norms. Rather, “the social context becomes an integral part of the experience of the biological process,” (Hall 2000, 26) such that impairment is neither clearly physical nor social, but instead emerges from the particular intersection of both such forces in the playing out of everyday life. Notably, this description also converges with Becky Mansfield’s recent health-focused intervention in human-environment geography (2008), which I discuss in more depth in Chapter 2.

The work of scholars like Hall and Mansfield is important for SGCPs particularly in their attention to and re-imagining of health as an interconnected process of both body and mind that takes place in specific contexts. As health geographers Nancy Hansen and Chris Philo advocate, following Freund (2001), this sort of analysis allows for a “social-materialist approach [to health]...which locates mind-bodies in space” (2007, 494). Such an approach has two basic components: 1. health is seen as an interconnected matter of body and mind, where personal experience and cognitive knowledge matter in the production of health; and 2. this personal experience of health is “embedded in and constrained by policies and practices constructed at a scale beyond [the immediate body/space]” (Dyck et al 2005, 173). In other words, in these scholars’ understanding, a person’s well-being or dis-ease is produced through particular socio-biological experiences of health (care) itself, which necessarily exists within broader socio-economic and political arrangements.

In regard to the first component, the interconnection of body and mind, this way of approaching health within alternative food would suggest that health is not determined solely by what one eats, but instead is produced (cumulatively, over time) through a person’s cognitive and subconscious engagement with the cultural and physical properties of a food-body interaction. The ‘health’ that comes from eating an organic banana, for example, would arise from the socio-biological experience of a particularly situated body physically consuming, digesting, and processing that banana within the context of a certain (cognitive/subconscious) understanding of the consequences of doing so – i.e. knowing that the banana will reduce muscle fatigue, has potassium, is low in fat, or was grown without pesticides. In this sense, health is produced through particular combinations of potential mind-body experiences (which may or may not be available to somebody): a feeling of bodily satiety, an experience of muscular comfort, a sense of satisfaction or calm in what the banana will do, a belief in the environmental goodness of the banana, etc, all of which act back on the world in reproducing/confirming the organic banana as ‘healthy.’ Importantly, in terms of the social discourse that surrounds organic banana consumption, it is not the meanings itself but what one’s understanding does or
allows (e.g. feelings of satisfaction) that is ultimately and literally what matters (and see Lang 2005).

In regard to the second component, the embeddedness of health experiences within a larger social and political economic context, it is also important to recognize that health in alternative food would necessarily come from our broader economic, cultural and spatial ability to access such food – a topic that I will discuss at greater length in Chapter 2. This (differential) ability to access food refers both to the physical organic banana itself (e.g. through its cost, geographic location, and ties to identity), and also the different embodied ways of knowing/perceiving the banana (e.g. relating it to past experiences, educational opportunities, etc). The fact that bodies develop different means and abilities to access healthy food suggests that there is a politics of health at play in the production of well-being and dis-ease, one that configures and drives the economy of health experiences in ways that can be very uneven. In this light, if SGCPs are ultimately interested in promoting healthy alternatives, or producing healthy bodies, it is important that SGCP leaders pay attention to what the space of SGCP classrooms allows physically and intellectually, as well as internally and externally, in regard to the spatial production of socio-biological health. This necessarily includes the questions of how and by whom the meanings and assessments of health itself are reinforced and/or questioned through SGCP practices.

Relational Bodies
If ultimately this inquiry into the contextually situated, minded body stems from a desire to effect ‘healthy’ (and equitable) social change, as it does for me and many other feminist scholars, then perhaps we need to begin by (re)assessing our conception of social agency. Particularly, in engaging with notions of the body as fluid and changeable, it is both practically and politically necessary to put forth a conception of agency that is not individual but relational. It is necessary practically because a relational conception helps to explain ontologically how bodies “become” in a Deleuzian sense of the word (Deleuze and Guatarri 1987), meaning how they develop through all sorts of complex interrelated internal and external socio-biological (re)actions, only some of which are controllable by any particular person or group. It is necessary politically because notions of the body as purely independent can lead to calls for individual responsibility and right choice in terms of one’s visceral project or practice, such as in the case of alternative food activists’ calls for more ‘knowledgeable’ food choices. This focus on the individual fails to consider the larger political and economic contexts that often preclude certain (disenfranchised) bodies from reaching the ideal of fully self-determined choice (an ideal that is arguably not achievable by anyone, but less achievable by some).

In the past decades, Actor Network Theory (ANT) has emerged in geography and related disciplines as a critique of human-centered environmentalism, and particularly of the nature/culture dualism, advancing a notion of agency that is grounded in material interrelations rather than exclusively individual or social dealings (Latour 1993, Whatmore 2002, Haraway 1985). ANT argues, for example, that events only occur as various actors (or “actants”), both human and non-human, come together in physical and discursive connection to produce specific outcomes. In many ways, this conception
mirrors the notion of health as socio-biological rather than ‘purely’ one or the other: as a weaving together of internal chemical shifts, food’s nutritional properties and social meanings, knowledge(s) of what is healthy, broader political economic landscapes of food, etc.

In ANT, this relational or networked theory of agency is often put forth in regional and global explanations of ‘natural’ entities or phenomena (Whatmore 2002), but it is also nevertheless an important starting place for understanding both the internal and external mechanisms of the biological body – and indeed for recognizing the interconnectedness of these two. ANT allows us to recognize that the seemingly stationary ‘matter’ of the world is in actuality a continual and chaotic set of interactions – a web of relationships that is not fixed, but also not without constraints. In this web, agency is not located in any particular person or thing, but is to be found through the process of interaction itself. Thus, agency (as the capacity to effect change) is not made up of conscious or deliberate acts, per se, but rather emerges out of the messy interaction between material and discursive flows both within and beyond the bounds of the skin. Of course, this is not to say that conscious or deliberate acts are not important (for consciousness of the material body is ultimately the point of this dissertation), but rather that a person’s individual ability to effect change is necessarily mediated through a complex and not fully knowable/controllable material and discursive world.

Understanding the body as relational allows us to consider, for example, how neurotransmitters receive and transmit social information, how muscles remember to perform certain acts, how hormones influence emotional experiences, how taste buds register sensations of bitterness or sweetness, and how all of these interactions, overtime, amount to the development of a knowing, thinking body – to what a body is and what a body is becoming. In other words, through ANT we can imagine that tendencies towards certain visceral reactions exist, in the present and future, as behaviors learned in and through the limits and possibilities that our material body offers, as well as the bounds and potentials put forward by our socio-cultural world. In this sense of being and becoming, understanding students’ as agents within SGCP food decision-making would necessarily involve an recognition of all students visceral capacities (to taste, for example) as they have developed through specific relational contexts. Here ‘taste’ would not be considered pre-determined and non-negotiable (by way of nature) but instead relational and ever-emergent. Taste would be a progressive ‘becoming’ that would not be aimless in regard to the production of healthy bodies, communities, and ecosystems, but neither would it be determined by one dominant (expert) group.

Although this conception of agency is useful, particularly in studies of agriculture and food, it is important to note that other scholars have critiqued ANT for “flattening” power relations (Guthman 2002). In some sense, it certainly is hard to see the workings of power in a networked world of equally important, interacting agents. Yet of course, uneven power does certainly exist within our networked world. Social stratification, and racial and gender hierarchy, for example, greatly influence the patterns and strength of material interrelationships in local and global contexts. A network understanding does not necessarily have to lead to an erasure of power struggles. In fact, it is worth
remembering that many feminists have put forth a networked understanding of the self in order to bring to light the effects of power relations as they are embodied through social interaction.\(^{11}\)

*Food and Visceral Politics*

With a relational rather than individual conception of food-based decision making, we are free to ask a number of broader questions about the nature of visceral (re)acting. In our unequal economic structure, to what extent can food behaviors really be considered choice? What influence do the broader systems of “free” trade have on how different people viscerally evaluate food, and also what food different people can even have the opportunity to evaluate? Where does tradition, or culinary culture, or health knowledge fit in to the production of visceral attachment and desire? How are our habits of feeling or craving reinforced by social norms, gender roles or racial stereotypes? These questions are undoubtedly large, and they certainly need to be explored within the context of specific food events and specific communities. Nevertheless, they are also, in my contention, crucial and central questions to the task of furthering of the alternative food movement at large.

\(^{11}\) For many such scholars, of course, the relational self does not necessarily encompass biology at all, but rather is a thoroughly social/cultural phenomenon. Phelan (in Hirschman and DiStefano 1996), for example, defines relationality as an understanding that persons do not pre-exist their social relations, and thus that relations define and create persons (238). Here a body is embedded in a network of uneven social relations, of which it cannot be considered external. As another example, in *Bodies that Matter*, Butler is interested in how the subject is produced in a “gendered matrix of relations” (1993, 10). She asserts that the human does not come before the nexus (network), it is itself a nexus – a cultural production that is not fixed or pre-determined (10, emphasis added). Though material relationships are all but missing in these definitions of relationality, these scholars nevertheless use a network approach to highlight rather than flatten the power dynamics that necessarily accompany social embodiment. Their comments in many ways echo and strengthen feminist discussions of the biological body as fluid and relational, and suggest that a network understanding can enhance our understanding of relations of power.

Yet, in so much as this social relationality fails to consider the biological body as an active part of the network, such conceptions will not necessarily get us closer to solving inequities of power. In forgetting to imagine the ways in which bodies might physically change through their material interrelationships with the (unequal) social world, these scholars only tackle half of the problem. In contrast, we might consider a section of McWhorter’s (1999) book entitled “becoming dirt”. In this section, McWhorter begins to recognize that her body is produced from both the internal relations between molecule and meaning that take place in her body (as pleasures, judgments, sensations, etc), and also from the biological relationality that extends beyond her physical skin (e.g. to the fields and factories that produce her food). Food, for McWhorter, is an obvious place to encounter such recognition – for it is through eating that we continually experience the permeability of our material bodies. In her practices of gardening and eating, McWhorter begins to understand that the relationality of her “self” extends beyond the human world to include non-human processes, like soil formation and nutrient cycling. She further realizes that the judgments she makes about the food she eats have an influence on how, when, and where these non-human processes occur (e.g. on large or small scale farms, locally or far away, with synthetic or organic fertilizers). Although she does not specify the internal, bodily process of her judgment making, she does recognize that her bodily preferences do act back on the broader social/material world. Thus McWhorter, like Butler, recognizes that there is no prior, pre-social mind or body. But she also senses that it is in and through her physical body that the material consequences of social struggle are realized.
From the above discussions, we can begin to appreciate that individual visceral reactions toward food are neither a fixed biological phenomenon, nor a fully social enterprise. But how can we become more aware of the visceral politics that exist in the hybrid spaces in between? How can we give new weight to the personal as political? Many feminist scholars have stressed the political importance of understanding how the micro world of daily lived experience and embodied practice is articulated in and through our larger macro-political world (Dowler and Sharp 2001; Staeheli 2001). Can food help us to bring this project even further into the body?

Elspeth Probyn’s work on food and the body has been instrumental in helping to further an academic understanding of visceral politics through her discussions of food-body interactions. Probyn suggests that eating is a useful place from which to begin to understand the connections between the “micro,” molecular world and the “macro” level politics that define and produce social difference. In her view, the key is to this understanding is eating’s sensual, physical, or visceral nature. Probyn (2001) explains that there has been a great deal of abstract work done on the body in terms of the concept of embodiment, but that “the realm of the alimentary brings these considerations down to earth and extends them (3).” She is interested in showing how the everyday, micro scale of daily practices like eating reaches up into the macro-political realm – how it reinforces and reinvents it, and how it brings it to life. She therefore wants to articulate not just a politics of the body, but a politics that acts in and through the body. She asks: can we envision “a more visceral and powerful corporeal politics?”...Can eating help us understand “our visceral reaction to who and what we are becoming?” (14).

Importantly, Probyn wants to focus attention not only on positive responses to food (cravings, desires, attachments), but also negative responses (shame, disgust, fear). She suggests that in paying attention to all of the visceral moments of food, we will be better able to understand not only where we as a society are coming from, but also where we are collectively headed. Through Probyn’s work, we can imagine that different tastes for certain foods are materially developed in the body, brain, and tongue through a particular series of past opportunities, memories, histories, and vacancies. Looking backward, our visceral responses to food arise out of the same power-laden social networks that Bourdieu, Butler, McWhorter and many others have recognized as central to the development of our (always social) bodies. Our present visceral responses can confirm and reinforce these social relationships, but they can also potentially deny or resist them. By studying visceral reactions, we can learn something about the political topographies of our relational world that influence such opportunities, memories, histories and vacancies. But even more importantly, we can learn something about the conditions needed for certain tastes to remain, or to change.

Following Probyn, the politics of the visceral, then, is a politics of both society and biology, and is both internal and external to the body. It is necessarily a fuzzy and disorganized politics, where relations are far too numerous to recount or fully explain, let alone effectively control. Undoubtedly, this conception of politics can at first seem daunting for scholars and activists, for where are we even to begin? Yet, it is in this fuzziness and disorganization that many have also already recognized the exciting
possibilities for social change. It is the potential and inevitable fluidity of the living human body itself, with its social tendencies. *but not absolute fixities*, that opens us to the potential for newness or change (Hayes-Conroy and Hayes Conroy 2008). This is a part of what gives people the capacity to experiment with the visceral realm, to feel out new ways of being and becoming, and to resist the powers that constrain. And this is also part of what gives SGCPs the opportunity to become political instruments – of the alternative food movement, of nutritional science, or potentially of something far more radical and socially conscious than either of these. The fluidity of life means that play is possible, even somewhat inevitable, if only everyone had the resources, the support, and the space to play.

**Affect and Emotion in the Body**

The most direct and significant engagement that human geography has had in recent years with the internal mechanisms of the changing/changeable body has come through what has been termed geographies of affect and emotion. While not divergent or wholly dissimilar to the works discussed above (in fact, there is much convergence), scholarship on affect and emotion has encouraged intellectual attention to bodily moments of judgment and movement, and has focused particularly on imagining and describing how and why these moments unfold. Outside of health and disability studies, work on affect and emotion has been singular in calling for direct and specific attention to bodily judgments and sensations within human geography research. Scholars contributing to this body of work include affect scholars Nigel Thrift (2004, 2005), Derek McCormack (2003), and Ben Anderson (2005, 2006), among others, while a feminist response (focusing on emotion) has emerged from Deborah Thien (2005), Catherine Nash (2000), and Liz Bondi (2005), and others. The discussions and contributions of these scholars are unquestionably valuable in trying to imagine and enact a new visceral politics.

**Affected and Affecting Bodies**

Scholars of affect have particularly drawn on Actor Network approaches in promoting what Thrift calls a relational ontology. Thrift’s work on inter-personal affect puts forward “a different model of what thinking is,” recognizing that reflexivity is not just “a property of cognition” but is simultaneously a bodied phenomenon. Like Hall, Brison, and Probyn, Thrift and other scholars of affect want us to recognize that thought (judgment, decision-making) happens within and through bodies (as well as minds). Furthermore, they maintain that bodies affect and are affected by the world in ways that are not easily named or represented. Accordingly, this and much work on affect also falls under the name “non-representational theory” (NRT) because it involves a different kind of intelligence about the world that is continually unfolding in non-cognitive ways as people move through their daily lives – for example, as people choose what to eat. In this way, NRT seeks to move from epistemological to ontological argumentation.

Scholarship on affect and NRT has emerged in part as a response to more than a decade of research focusing on the politics and culture of representation, or what could more broadly be considered the post-modern / post-structural era. Scholars of affect and NRT
argue that the continuous focus on discourse, meaning, and social construction in much post-modern social science research has served to gloss over the role of the biological body in the production of thought and action. Much like ANT defines agency as a capacity to effect change that is born out of the relationship between material things, scholars of affect and NRT approach affect not as a matter of one individual body but as a relational event, occurring in and through the interaction of various ‘bodies’ (human, food, music, etc). Researchers in this field are thus especially interested in the ways in which, and the reasons why, the body thinks and acts in ways that they consider ‘pre-conscious.’ Importantly, however, this focus on ‘pre-conscious’ thought has not been without critique. As I will discuss in more depth below, feminists have particularly expressed concern that such a division between cognitive (mind) and non-cognitive (body) actually reinforces the mind/body dualism, and furthermore, that it assumes that all bodies (without the interaction of the mind) will necessarily (re)act in the same ways (as when alternative food activists claim that through sensory perception, food is a universal experience, and taste is a natural ‘fact’).

Despite these important critiques, though, this work has relevance to SGCPs in connection to both Brison’s concerns about bodily healing and to Foucault’s concerns about political power. For example, non-representational theorists have stressed the need to understand the experiences and knowledge of the body as part of one’s therapy (McCormack 2003), and also the body’s role in motivating a person to make certain decisions, for example, in regard to what music to listen to (Anderson 2005). Some scholars have also specifically suggested that affect is important in understanding and furthering one’s political practice. Thrift, as I discussed earlier, notes that corporations are now going to great lengths to increase their understandings of affect, and that this knowledge of affect is being used to further the political ends of the rich and powerful (2004). Thus, Thrift calls for research into the political implications and consequences of this buildup in capacity to manipulate affect - a capacity that Hardt and Negri (2001) and Rose (2002) have recognized as the latest version of Foucault’s ‘biopower’.

**Practices of Judgment**

Scholarship on affect has undoubtedly done much to pave the way towards a more material understanding of bodily motivation and behavior. Ben Anderson’s work on the practices of judgment (2005) is particularly useful in helping to draw attention to the workings of the material body in regard to the decision-making events of everyday life. Anderson tries to outline a specific theory of bodily affect, using empirical research to describe how ‘practices of judgment’ unfold in and through the material body. In his case, he focuses on judgments about listening to music; yet, Anderson’s work certainly has implications for other forms of judgment making – including (re)actions to food. His discussions of judgment making within the body help to specify the link between preference/taste and the social world.

Anderson claims that sociologists like Bourdieu have tended to discuss this link in a taken for granted way, focusing on the particular chosen content of beliefs or tastes, rather than on the material processes of choice itself. While Bourdieu’s work has been instrumental in showing how tastes are not part of the natural and essential self (as many
SGCPs leaders allege), Anderson worries that his explanations ultimately serve to trap our understandings of preference and judgment, thereby reifying the same social hierarchies that we want to dismantle (i.e. poor people will always have a taste for this kind of food, or Latinos will always have this reaction to SGCPs). Instead, Anderson wants us to recognize that a judgment does not necessarily result in differentiation and hierarchization, and that it is important that we allow the possibility for something different to occur. Indeed, this possibility for newness is where the political usefulness of visceral materializes. In terms of SGCPs, this means that we need to allow space for the performative moment – for the ability of students, teachers, and material life itself to disrupt the social tendencies of taste. In other words, Anderson seeks to re-materialize discussions of life and lived experience in a way that refuses to equate the biological with the essential or the “neuroreductionist” (Anderson 2006, 747).

Making a judgment is therefore not just about the social conditioning of an individual, rational human body to be affected in a certain way by a certain kind of music, or a certain type of food. It is a process that is continually varying through an extensive set of material relations that are particular to the time-spaces in which a specific judgment it taking place. The realm of the body that Anderson describes as active in judgment making is the ‘more-than-rational,’ suggesting that there is something chaotic and unpredictable about the practice of judgment making, and that within this chaos exists the potential for variation and change. Anderson later explains (2006) that affect takes place as “something more, a more to come,” because it is accompanied by a real but virtual (potential) “knot of tendencies and latencies,” which amount to divergences in what actually becomes (Anderson 2006, 738). While it is not always clear how the terms “tendencies” and “latencies” are used in affect-related work (Anderson 2006, Saldanha 2005), in this dissertation, I use these terms to draw attention to both the social context and the active process of judgment making. Therefore, as I use them, “tendencies” refers to the ways in which visceral reactions are cemented by social positioning into habits, while “latencies” refers to the always-present potential for something else to emerge.

Importantly, however, despite the thoroughly social intersubjectiveness of affect, and the potentialities for variation, Anderson explains that judgment making is experienced as a purely natural event – meaning that as we make judgments in regard to music, or to food, we sense them as pre-social, ‘gut’ reactions. He describes why this is the case. Anderson imagines that practices of judgment are a sort of coping mechanism of everyday life, one which allows us to respond to what is immediately confronting us (the interrelational web

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12 But what specifically happens in the body as everyday life is lived, experienced, and practiced? Drawing on William Connolly, Anderson imagines that deliberative judgments arise through background feelings within the body, which “act as proto-thoughts situated in culturally formed moods, affects and situations” (Connolly 1997: 27). He explains that, “before the moment of deliberative judgment, understood as a decision, the body enacts an uncertain, complex ethics of affection based on how bodies compose with other bodies” (653). In other words, everyday decision making (e.g. deciding what music to play) does not happen in clear patterns (album A on Tuesdays, B on Wednesdays) but through an intricate web of interacting bodies that emerges to subconsciously compel the moment of judgment (which is often narrated as, “album C just felt right today”). For Anderson, the “bodies” he speaks of are both human and non-human and include such ambiguous things as a body of music, or perhaps, a plate of food.
of bodies at that moment) and to achieve a mode of being that enables us to get by, or to continue with other life practices. This coping and continuing is reliant, Anderson explains, on the visceral belief that the judgments we make come naturally; “what underpins the making of a judgment is, in rather circular terms, a visceral, non-cognitive, belief in the veracity of the judgment” (2005, 646). In other words, in order for the world to make sense to us, we must always have a sense of trust in our own tastes and preferences. What we produce in judgment making is a visceral assumption that our feelings and emotions “express an evaluative stance that is ‘natural’” (2005, 653).

This recognition of the sense of naturalness or veracity that comes as we viscerally re-act to different life circumstances is important to an analysis of SGCPs for at least three reasons. First, it lends a compassionate understanding (rather than a blaming antagonism) to SGCP leaders who assume that ‘real’ taste comes naturally, as opposed to through different socio-spatial circumstances. Second, it offers a more specific interpretation as to why bodily practices of feeling or judging cement into habits or routines that become the likely ‘tendencies’ that scholars like Bourdieu have analyzed. If students experience bodily preferences for eating as natural and essential parts of the self, then it makes sense that the link between social identity and food is solid and hard to disrupt. Indeed, as I witnessed during many of my interviews with students and parents, “food is experienced as an intensely personal subject, any change to which is often felt as a threat or critique of one’s character” (field notes 2007). Third, if we recognize the power of affect to bring about social change, then it is important that we think about how students can experience this important sense of trust in bodily judgments even as we actively try to disrupt social tendencies. In other words, if we want SGCPs to encourage changes in eating behavior, how can we create spaces that allow children to make healthy eating ‘their own’?13

As I have already argued, it is vitally important to move beyond the essentializing discourse of fixed biology and pure nature if we are to understand and use affect as a political terrain. Anderson explains that it is only after we recognize the intersubjectivity of affect that we can “open up the social to the neuropolitical domain of hormones and synapses” (Anderson 2006, 747). Ultimately, what I wish to show in this dissertation is that, despite SGCP leaders’ insistence of the pre-social nature of taste, food related affect is political14, and is moreover an important political tool. It is political first because it is relational; it is produced out of webs of material and discursive interaction, which are neither equally accessible nor equally controlled by everyone. And it is political second because it is energetic; it involves the enhancing or depleting of the lived space-times through which students discover their agency as the motivation to do (or eat, as the case may be). Thus, to be political with affect, it seems, we must do more than discuss bodily sensations and judgments produced as “individual” or (even more improbably)

13 More on how this is different than Foucault’s (1991) ‘governmentality’ in Chapter 2
14 Others have also recognized the political quality of affect. David Harvey, for example, has shown how affect circulates through spaces of late capitalism (Harvey 2000). It is distributed not just haphazardly but also in socio-spatial patterns that reflect inequities and suffering. Sometimes affect is labeled or narrated as positive, but in its production is used to promote relations of injustice (Anderson 2006).
“universal” feelings. We must examine affect at a number of scales, and through a number of contexts. We must labor against negative affectivities of suffering or depletion that exist locally and globally, and we must work instead to cultivate the conditions needed for more positive, ‘empowering’ experiences of food. Most importantly, we must look not only at how affects are labeled or narrated, but also at the work that they do in advancing and/or retreating from progressive achievement.

*Emotions as Feminist Hybrid*

While this work on affect does much to extend the political ‘networks’ of our relationality into the realm of the biological body, it has not been without (rightful) critique. Feminists have come down on geographers of affect, particularly because they argue that the bracketing of the representational world in NRT serves to reinforce several pernicious dualisms: specifically those of mind/body and nature/culture. Nash (2000), for example, notes that while Thrift argues that cultural geography tends to take representation as a central focus while ignoring material, bodily practice, he himself privileges practices over representation, rather than offering strategies for connecting the two. Nash is worried that abandoning the knowable for the unknowable, or retreating to phenomenological notions of being-in-the-world, is not effective politically. It retreats from feminism and the politics of the body “in favor of the individualistic and universalizing sovereign subject” (662). Therefore, even though he argues that non-representational theory is “radically contextual” (Nash 2000, 658), Nash argues that Thrift’s conception is transcendent and thoughtless (and thus contextless).

Bondi (2005), Thien (2005), and other feminist geographers have articulated similar critiques. Both authors view emotion and emotional geographies as more useful for feminist theory, and want to break down the dualism between non-cognitive and cognitive, feeling and thinking, intellectual and sensual that is present within NRT. 

This is important for understanding SGCPs because ultimately we need to understand how the socio-biological interplay between minds and bodies unfolds into different experiences of alternative food. Moreover, as scholars like Julie Graham (2001) and bell hooks (1994) have illustrated, the work of the mind, in grappling with discourse and theory, can be crucial to opening space for new bodily becomings. This is a particularly important point in terms of understanding SGCPs as educational spaces that are at once sensory and intellectual. Graham notes that producing new discourse or language helps to “widen the field of intelligibility in order to enlarge the scope of possibility” (32). In this sense, imagining and enacting alternative (healthier) futures is simultaneously a process of body and mind, one that results in the production of what we might call new ‘visceral imaginaries.’ Similarly, as hooks suggests, “when our lived experience of theorizing is fundamentally linked to processes of self-recovery, [and] of collective liberation, no gap exists between theory and practice. Indeed, what such an experience makes more evident is the bond between the two – that ultimately reciprocal process wherein one enables the other” (hooks 1994, 61). Thus, like Probyn, hooks insists that

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15 To be fair, not all affect scholars seem to do this; Anderson, for one, does not suggest that the interrelational “bodies” in his conception of judgment making could not or would not include, say, a text, or even an intellectual thought; further, he does not imagine body parts as disembodied from a larger, thinking being.
we must come to understand how bodily epistemologies are already produced within our
discursive histories and identities, and thus how by attending to them directly, education
can be recreated and experienced (or felt) as a process of individual and collective
healing.

The Language of Feeling
In my mind, one of the great ironies of much of the academic literature on bodies, affects,
and relationality is that while it often rests so strikingly close to our experiences and
imaginings of the “real world,” the texts are often so dense and complex that they take
considerable time and effort to appreciate. Indeed, scholars of both affect/NRT and ANT
have been criticized for using language that is largely inaccessible to most academics, let
alone a lay population. Perhaps to some extent the fuzzy feelings that come from reading
these texts are meant to mirror the fuzzy feelings of actual interrelational becoming. But,
should it not be easier to describe what these authors ultimately imply is our most basic,
ontological condition? It is important that, in continuing to promote these ways of
thinking about and practicing (with) our bodies, we begin to develop methods of
communicating and explaining that resonate with a larger number of people. After all –
we don’t want to encourage visceral reactions of dismay or detachment among our
readership.

Of course, part of the reason for the somewhat convoluted communication is that (the
English) language (at least) does not have adequate words to describe the inter-personal
agency, socio-biological hybridity, or chaotic relationality that such scholars seek to
explain (that is, without using these very words). Another reason for confusion is that the
movement and fluidity of the social-material processes that these authors seek to explain
inevitably make it hard to ‘name’ what is in many ways unnamable. In large part, then,
this fuzziness is unavoidable, and even desirable, in that the indefinitiveness is both true
to present life and open/flexible to the possibility of different futures. Nevertheless, it is
worth trying to develop a language through which we can allow this fuzziness to be
understood and embraced in somewhat clear, simple terms. In order to do this, I first
want to briefly tease out how scholars of affect and NRT use words like feeling, emotion,
and affect to signify what are, in their conception, different moments of interrelational
life.

Part of the intent of Anderson’s (2006) work on affect is to specify a language for talking
about affect, feeling, and emotion in order to make it easier to understand what scholars
are referring to when using these terms:

1. Anderson imagines affect as the interpersonal capacity a body has to affect and be
affected by other bodies. Affect is the ANT moment of visceral judgment – when
agency is found in relationships. Anderson emphasizes that there is no a priori to
affect because it is always relational to the past. In other words, affect is the thing
that is materially produced as always-already-social bodies relate to each other.

2. Feelings on the other hand are the “proprioceptive and visceral shifts” in the
background habits and postures of the body, which act as the body’s
instantaneous and situational assessment of a particular affect (Anderson 2006,
For Anderson, in other words, feelings refer to a particular body’s personal, internal experience of a relationally-produced affect.

3. Lastly, emotions are what we name in trying to describe the way that affect comes to be experienced through intimate, distinctly personal ways of being (Anderson 2006, 737), or in other words, the narration of feeling.

Significantly, in Anderson’s conception, each of these three modalities are not independent but relational, and the sequence itself if not linear. What is important about these three definitions is that they allow us to recognize that the labels we use to describe certain feelings are not in fact naming universal sensations but rather contextualized, inter-body moments. This is not to say that people cannot appreciate, relate to, or even sense each other’s experiences, for indeed it is possible to have empathy, but we cannot assume to understand or know the experiences of others completely. Further, we cannot assume that a particular social event or activity will produce the same sensations in every body. Fear, disgust, or pride, for example, are words that attempt to describe and categorize what are in reality thoroughly contextual and ever-changing sets of interdependent circumstances, which differ from body to body, space to space, and time to time. While these categories are certainly important, then, they are not the only matter.

If we want to understand the body as a social process and political tool, it is therefore important not to stop at these narrations. We cannot take the emotional label as an end in itself, but instead must look at what these named sensations seem to do, motivate, or promote, in terms of social (and individual) change. I want to suggest the term “visceral” can help us to accomplish this goal, and to do so in a way that is perhaps easier to understand and relay than the language of affect, feeling, and emotion. To begin, it is obvious that visceral reactions lead to other events, whether everyday or historical: a saddened adult listens to a certain music album, a disgusted student rejects a plate of food, an energized voter casts a ballot for a particular candidate. Thus it is easy to talk about the visceral in a way that assumes interest in the processes and shifts of viscerality, rather than just the names.

In addition, to speak of visceral (re)actions is to simultaneously refer to the relationality of affect, the textuality of emotion, and the experiential qualities of feeling. It is easy to illustrate, as I intend to do, that despite a sense of ‘pure’ naturalness, visceral reactions are a thoroughly social phenomenon – experiences that are produced out of the discursive and material relationships of socio-biological life. As a broader term, it encompasses all of the important distinctions and nuances that affect and emotion scholars have articulated.

And finally, it is also quite easy to explain that visceral reactions can change: that we can become (more) conscious of our habits (i.e. our visceral tendencies) to react in certain ways, as they have developed in their broader contexts, and that we can work in various ways to begin to understand and promote the intellectual spaces and material opportunities that are needed to feel out new ways of being (i.e. our visceral latencies).

In this sense, the language of viscerality allows us to understand the political significance of a body within a SGCP classroom, and the way in which this body can be used as a both a method of social analysis and a tool for political action. At the same time, because
this visceral process is not ‘clear-cut’ and simply ‘rational,’ these acknowledgements keep us open to be able to anticipate and imagine, both individually and collectively, the possibility of new visceral futures.
Chapter 2: Political Ecologies of the Body – A Framework for Research

In keeping with my interests in practice and in doing, in my own search for a theoretical framework to guide my dissertation project, I wanted to develop an agenda for research that would allow me to explore the capacity of people to act and do. Specifically, as I explain in Chapter 1, I was interested in investigating the ‘visceral’ interplay between what has been called the representational world (of labels) and the non-representational world (of material being) as they co-relate and co-create in the human body. Moreover, I wanted to do this by enrolling food as a sort of ‘tracer element,’ – a way of following and making sense of the connections, contradictions, and chaos of the visceral realm. Thus, I decided to structure my project around the question of motivation, and more specifically, the motivation to eat healthy food. I wanted to look deeper into the materiality of food related motivation, to understand what processes and forces lead certain people to ‘choose’ particular foods, or to form particular habits, desires, and preferences for specific tastes.

In order to accomplish this task, I needed to develop a theoretical framework that would allow me to merge my interest in the chaotic materiality of bodies and their affects with the more traditional macro-structural concerns of critical theory – social inequities, race, class and gender difference. How might I understand bodily motivation to eat (or not eat) as a matter of both subjectivity and unpredictability, as a production of both social and biological forces, and as a process that is both normalized/normalizing and also constantly resistant to normalization? Such a melding is crucial for any project that ultimately aims, as I do, to redirect food activism, education and policy toward more progressive ends. For this charge, then, I turned first to the rich nature-society tradition in geography, and particularly to the field of political ecology. I saw that a political ecological approach to viscerality could help me to reconcile the unpredictable, micro-constructions of bodies and becomings with the purposeful and reasoned macro-structures of markets and states.

Political ecology seemed like a good fit for several reasons. Firstly, as a powerful influence within nature-society geography, political ecology has taken important steps toward bringing emancipatory concerns to the forefront of environmental questions. Political ecology’s focus on power relations and hierarchy, and its insistence on the political and economic contextualization of environmental problems, has therefore helped to advance progressive structural (e.g. Marxist) work in the discipline. Second, in a more post-structural move, the centrality of political and economic concerns to environmental problems within political ecology has also played a key role in calling into question the veracity of the nature/society dualism – the binary that sits at the center of the representation/non-representational divide that I wish to complicate. Finally, in the interest of a fluid approach to the material world, political ecology seemed promising because it is also (at least in theory) not only politically driven but ecologically oriented as well, meaning that political ecology’s underlying ontological assumptions are oriented toward a relational or networked material world. Indeed, though political ecology has been critiqued for not being ecological enough (that is, for focusing too much on structural/political explanations; see Vayda and Walters 1999), a political ecological
This chapter is meant to introduce the reader to some of the central ideas of political ecology, and to illustrate the relevance of the field to issues of human health, the body, and food-related behavior within the North American context of SGCPs. In the first section I do this by exploring the common ground between work in political ecology and studies of human health, relating this common ground to my research on SGCPs. In this section, I also offer two particular examples of contemporary human-environment scholarship that I find especially promising in how each seeks to combine the nature-society tradition in geography with studies of bodily health. In the section that follows, I then move forward from this discussion to explain and detail how political ecology and body-centered scholarship can be combined into a framework that I call “political ecology of the body” (hereafter PEB), which I contend is particularly useful for analyzing SGCPs, but is also important more broadly in advancing political ecological scholarship on bodies. In this section, I use diagrams and descriptions to specify how I particularly use this PEB framework to conceive of and analyze alternative food events within SGCPs. In the third and final section, I conclude with a specific discussion of how this PEB framework can contribute to recent scholarship on ‘neoliberalism’ within human-environment geography, which has become a particularly hot topic both within and beyond the field of political ecology. Here, I discuss studies of neoliberalism that especially relate to the alternative food movement, and to SGCPs. I use this section as an example of why the PEB framework is an important contribution to human-environment geography, illustrating how the framework can both speak to and broaden human-environment scholarship on the topic of neoliberalism by allowing for more materially situated and constructive evaluations of alternative food initiatives.

**Doing Political Ecology**

“...political ecology is something that people do, a research effort to expose the forces at work in ecological struggle and document livelihood alternatives in the face of change.” (Robbins 2004, 13 emphasis in original)

As a trans-disciplinary field, political ecology has both a firm tradition in the social sciences and a dynamic and expansive trajectory. It is also arguably a particularly relevant field for human-environment geography in that the political ecological effort to ‘expose the forces’ of environmental problems is central to our ability to understand and explain human-environment relationships. Indeed, political ecology helps to answer the most foundational human-environment questions: what is and what ought to be to be humankind’s relationship to nature? (Turner 1990). Moreover, political ecology has been and remains an active and critical force within the discipline, questioning previous
assumptions about the nature of environmental struggle, and working towards more nuanced and just interpretations of human-environment relations. Indeed, as the word ‘expose’ from the quotation above suggests, political ecologists have worked to make visible or heard what was previously hidden or silenced by uneven relations of power, and by an academic failure to account for these relations. By paying attention to the political economic and cultural circumstances that give rise to certain ecological perceptions and conditions, political ecologists have thus consistently offered more critical and more socially situated explanations of our ‘natural’ world than traditional environment and development narratives allow.

In this work of exposure, political ecology has been marked not by a singular focus or theory, but by a plurality of topics and philosophies. As Paul Robbins explains: “the term political ecology is a generous one that embraces a range of definitions,” (Robbins 2004, 5). Even so, Robbins continues, there seems to be some commonalities among works of political ecology that set them apart from other kinds of environmental scholarship – the most simple of which is an emphasis on moving away from the apolitical in environmental research. James McCarthy (2002) similarly recognizes the pluralism of political ecology, and suggests that it is arguably the presence of various themes, rather than any one methodological or theoretical approach to them, that defines the field. His list of some common themes in political ecology illustrates the type of ‘exposure’ that political ecologists are generally interested in ‘doing.’ For example, McCarthy notes that political ecologists have investigated: “access to and control over resources; marginality; … the importance of local histories, meanings, culture, and ‘micropolitics’ in resource use; the disenfranchisement of legitimate local users and uses; … and the imbrications of all these with colonial and postcolonial legacies and dynamics” (McCarthy 2002, 1283).

While McCarthy’s above list has derived from case studies mostly in rural, third world contexts, as he shows in his own research, many of these concerns and commitments are also relevant to doing political ecology research in the first world. As political ecology has gained in prominence within and beyond the discipline of geography, its focus has therefore also begun to shift and grow – for example, into rural areas of the global North (McCarthy 2002), and also into urban environments (Sywngedouw & Heynen 2003). There is, after all, much overlap to be witnessed between political ecology’s concerns with, for example, marginality and environmental disenfranchisement in the developing world, and the environmental justice movement’s concerns over inequity and racism on the urban and suburban US landscape. Indeed, the lenses and lessons of political ecology are widely applicable.

Through their varied scholarship, political ecologists have reminded us that what counts as a healthy natural landscape is not in fact self-evident from a strictly ecological point of view, but instead need to be investigated within the particular political and social contexts at hand. Political ecologists have shown how destructive and powerful the discourse of ‘pure’ nature can be, and thus how carefully and critically it should be handled. Political ecologists have also revealed how inequity in resource access and use in many marginalized communities stems from issues of structural racism, sexism, and economic
hardships. And, political ecologists have insisted on the importance and value of local knowledge over or alongside so-called ‘expert’ knowledge. All of these findings are relevant for an analysis of SGCPs, in which it is important to question assertions about what constitutes health, what defines the nature of taste, what drives differences in motivation to eat, and what constitutes legitimate food knowledge. What’s more, in all of these cases, the doing of political ecology contains also an undoing – of certain assumptions, definitions, power relations, modes of operating, etc – and perhaps at least the “seed” (Robins 2004) of a better re-doing. In this sense, political ecology is relevant not only to critiquing but also to re-imagining and re-building SGCPs in constructive and progressive ways.

Health Studies and Political Ecology

Most recently, political ecology scholars have also begun to expand the field’s reach into issues of human health (Turshen 1977, Mayer 1996, Mansfield 2008). Though the process has not been rapid, it is a promising area of expansion for political ecology, especially as political ecologists connect with work in health geography (Kearns and Moon 2002; Dyck 2003) and disability studies (Hall 2000), as well as medical science, epidemiology, and nutrition. In 1996, Jonathon Mayer made a particularly compelling call for such connections, suggesting a combining of disease ecology and political economy into what he termed a political ecology of health. He urged scholars to take seriously the impact of large-scale political economic forces on the micro-conditions and functioning of the (un)healthy human body. Although few have directly responded to this call, this type of convergence would be (and is) significant and unsettling for medical science because it opens up human/bodily health to the same sort of critical un/doing that political ecologists have afforded to landscape-level phenomena. We could ask: what hierarchies structure the geographies of dis/ease? In what ways is the spread of illness, or the experience of dis/ease, influenced by political economic struggle? Who has access to good health, or to healthy conditions, and how is that access achieved? Who gets to define bodily health, and how does this definition affect what we know and don’t know about human well-being?

While these questions may be new territory for medical science, for political ecologists the body itself is not necessarily or completely novel ground. For one, as discussed in Chapter 1 (in regard to the visceral), the body has long been considered the realm of ‘nature,’ in so much as the mind – viewed as distinct from the body – has been considered the realm of ‘culture’ (Grosz 1994). Indeed, to a large extent the body in the western world has been constructed and treated as a ‘purely’ natural space: e.g. visceral responses labeled as natural instinct, emotions considered untamed or animal-like, social behaviors explained as ‘human nature,’ or conversely, social behaviors condemned as unnatural or against nature. Furthermore, in western society, natural landscapes have equally been constructed in terms of the body: e.g.: pure or virgin terrain, mother earth, the raping of natural land, etc (Merchant 2003). Though a full discussion of the discursive and material links between nature-as-body and nature-as-land are beyond the scope of this discussion, it is important to recognize that these connections have been a

16 In this sense, political ecology is not unlike the activist-oriented field of social ecology, a philosophy developed by eco-anarchist author and theorist Murray Bookchin. (See Bookchin 1982)
powerful force in constructing how we in the Western world have come to understand and care for/about bodies. In this sense, many of the critiques that political ecologists have leveled against ‘apolitical,’ contextless accounts of the natural world are therefore relevant to the human body as well. Just as the ‘nature’ of landscapes is far from self-evident, and far from apolitical, so too is the ‘nature’ of the human body.

In addition, in terms of human health particularly, body-centered research is again not a far stretch from political ecological analyses of (un)healthy or otherwise ‘problematic’ landscapes. In the same way that development narratives assume the natural world to be self-evident, contextless, and apolitical, in medical science and in our health care system, bodies/selves are usually treated as isolated beings, wholly individual, and devoid of political context (Birke 2000). For example, we can see this in SGCPs emphasis on measuring individual choices or changes, rather than systemic and negotiated solutions. In perhaps the earliest self-labeled work of health-related political ecology, Meredith Turshen (1977) condemned this biomedical individualism for perpetuating social inequity, and especially class-based difference, suggesting that it is because of the prioritization of the individual that we have not been able to provide an adequate framework for solving public health problems. It is important to also note that this combination of political ecology and health geography also mirrors the work of environmental justice scholars and activists, and particularly black and latina feminists, who have long stressed the connection between race/racism and spatial inequity in the provision of health care, including access to healthy living conditions or nutritious foods.17 Much like the shortcomings of third world development strategies that have been critiqued by political ecologists, when the doing of medicine is predicated on this assumption of context-less isolation, the result are practices that fail to address the political economic and cultural situations in which dis/ease occurs – including the very defining of health itself.18

17 In the field of environmental justice, research on cancer clusters and poverty (Stein 2004) or asthma and racism in the inner city (Sze 2004), have helped to expose the inequalities and unevenness present within the broader landscape of health – and thus to highlight the fact that health is always more than an individual matter. Moreover, such research stresses the importance of moving beyond direct causation in terms of ethics and responsibility. Because it is often hard to draw direct causal links between, say, a child’s asthma attack and a particular polluting facility, it becomes crucial to expose the relationships between particular bodily struggles and larger structural inequities. This does not mean, of course, that we cannot hold particular people or institutions accountable, but rather that their accountability needs to be addressed in terms of their role in perpetuating such broader, structural inequities.

18 Health scholars outside of political ecology have also, and more recently, made this critique. For example, as health geographer Susan Craddock (2000) suggests, “biomedical interpretations of disease do not just elucidate the impact of particular pathogens on the human body…but situate disease and diseased bodies vis-à-vis dominant norms of conduct, morality, and social order”. She goes on: “The impacts of these moral organizing principles influence the kinds of ‘facts’ sought in medical research, and consequently determines the kinds of knowledge produced and the types of bodies prescribed as dangerous” (Craddock 2000, 160). In Craddock’s research on AIDS in South Africa, she finds that new conceptions of health and the body allow for new methods of ‘treatment’; for example, her study offers suggestions for health policy that go well beyond typical models of intervention, including projects in rural and community livelihood. Although Craddock does not label herself a political ecologist, her work certainly highlights the type of research and ways of thinking that political ecologists could bring to health studies (as well as visa versa).
From Landscapes (In)To Bodies

The combining of political ecology with health and body centered research has been a slow process thus far, but it is nevertheless a logical and promising direction for political ecological work. Furthermore, the shift from a focus on (un)healthy landscapes to a focus on (un)healthy bodies in political ecology is timely both within and beyond the academy. The move comes alongside both an increasing general interest in ‘the body’ in social science research over the last two decades, as well as an expressed public desire to address issues of health inequity, body image, and particularly the ‘crisis’ over what are considered ‘lifestyle’ diseases (e.g. type 2 diabetes and hypertension). In regard to SGCPs particularly, the vastness and intensity of the public attention that is currently given to ‘correct’ body size, shape, and condition in North America particularly demands that any analyses of or prescriptions for healthy bodies be couched in terms broader than the individual, and moreover in terms that question the very definition of health itself.

The recent works of two human-environment geographers are worth particular mention here, both because they are important and recent pieces of scholarship on human health, and because they represent somewhat different parts of the political-ecological-meets-visceral project that I wish to tackle in my own scholarship. The first is Julie Guthman’s work on what she terms the political ecology of obesity (unpublished), which follows from some of her earlier work on the politics of fatness (Guthman and Dupuis 2006). Guthman’s work can be summed up as a political ecological attack on expert knowledge, particularly in regard to how we have come to know and assess body size in the Western world. She argues that despite much of the mainstream (and even alternative) discourse on food and dieting, obesity is not in fact a clearly defined, measurable condition but a contested way to label and categorize bodies, and a symptom of much larger, structural problems and inequities (ones that go far beyond the “obesogenic environment” in terms of political power structures; Carter and Swinburn 2004). Nevertheless, because medical science constructs obesity as primarily a problem of individual origins, fatness and thinness have come to be considered objective measures of personal responsibility, control, or will power – or worse, measurements of one’s individual stupidity and mindlessness (for example, see Marvin and Medd 2006).

As Guthman notes, the construction of a un-thinking, un-refined “other” (a fat person) to bear the weight of a perceived crisis is not a new phenomenon to political ecologists; markedly, it mimics the narrative of the uneducated, overly fertile peasant women creating environmental havoc in the third world (and also the naïve, working-class American or Canadian student making unsustainable and unhealthy food choices). Further, this type of understanding also implies that health itself (like nature) is a status beyond scrutiny – that what it means to be healthy is both obvious and quantifiable (for example, through a measure of one’s Body Mass Index, or through changes in one’s food choices). While Guthman acknowledges that, to some extent, bodily health can and should be measured – that this is indeed an important way to document and combat health inequities that arise from unequal access to adequate living conditions or nourishing food – she also suggests that the path to bodily health, like environmental health, should not be examined in isolation from the social contexts and forces at hand,
including those that define the very image of health itself (e.g. healthy as skinny, or low-fat). Indeed, in studying SGCPs’ alternative food objectives, we would do well to question why and how fat and fatness themselves have seemingly become good health’s (unnatural) “other.”

In regard to research on SCGPs, Guthman’s points are especially important because parents, students, and leaders of the program often discuss healthy eating as 1. a taken-for-granted list of ‘good’ foods (Brown 2009), and 2. a ‘choice’ that ultimately falls upon the (ir)responsible individual (whose level of responsibility is (assumed to be) judged by body size). While there has been considerable research on economic and geographic ‘access’ to healthy foods (Wrigley 2002; Whelan et al 2002), few studies have gone so far as to define bodily health and nutrition as a thoroughly political/social phenomenon – especially to the extent that health and nutrition expertise itself comes under scrutiny (but see Lang 2005). In practice, most nutrition intervention initiatives ultimately place the responsibility of following nutrition ‘rules’ on the individual or family, rather than the capitalist market system, the state, and/or society at large. Further, most nutrition initiatives assume that what constitutes a healthy meal itself is necessarily pre-determined (by experts), and thus inherently apolitical. This is true even though corporations continually fund ‘scientific’ health studies to their benefit (Nestle 2003), while at the same time silencing other ‘non-expert’ forms of knowledge (Enticott 2003). To be sure, this is a very sterile and essentializing understanding of food, in an era where the sheer quantity of contradictory claims to the ‘truths’ of dieting should point us towards seeking other modes of explanation.

The second recent work in human-environment geography that I want to discuss here is a commentary by Becky Mansfield (2008), which addresses and frames a larger article of hers on the subject of ‘natural’ childbirth (Mansfield 2007)19. While Guthman’s above approach uses political ecology to critique the social structures that have limited our understandings and practices of health/care, Mansfield wants us to use the lessons of human-environment geography for a somewhat different project; she wants us to reconsider the very experience of health/care, as it is produced in and through the human body. In other words, Mansfield wants to put these lessons to work in the body, exploring the ‘biosocial’ (or socio-biological) realm, which I discussed in some depth in Chapter 1. Mansfield uses her own experiences with ‘natural’ childbirth to argue that physiology is neither set in stone nor superseded by social practice, but instead “translates social practice in the register of the biological” (Mansfield 2008, 1018). Thus, as she contemplates her birth experience:

“Maybe my stalled labor had nothing to do with my ‘incapable’ body, but was about being stressed out and uncomfortable because of bad information, a lack of connection with my central caretakers, and having my parents worrying over me.

19 It is noteworthy that much of Mansfield’s scholarship in geography has involved a combining of political economic concerns with studies of food (fisheries) and natural resources (oceans). Although her commentary is not explicitly political ecology/economy, her academic theorizing on the body (as she notes) has certainly been influenced by these fields – and more broadly by those interested in ‘the nature question’ (e.g. Braun and Castree, 1998; Haraway, 1991; Cronon, 1995; Merchant, 1980).
These are very social factors that call into question the biological nature of my experience. Yet it remained clear that switching from biology to the social was unhelpful as well. This was about explaining why my body did what it did in the very physiological terms of contractions, pain, dilation, and so on; these are not the sum of social context” (Mansfield 2008, 1018).

By so describing how her birth experience occurred at the boundary of what we conceive of as social and biological, Mansfield gives us a way to both comprehend and (re)create less dichotomized understandings of health and the body. In making this move, she urges human-environment geographers to use the lessons we have learned from nature critique to begin to rethink and repractice health/care in similar ways. Mansfield’s particular focus on the lived experience of health helps us to imagine how social relationships and informational flows can physically impact one’s bodily experiences in ways that produce health (as opposed to just defining it). In relation to experiences of eating, for example, we might recognize that a student’s particular social and informational connections influence not only what he or she eats, but how he or she experiences eating (as in the example of the organic banana in Chapter 1). This experience has consequences not only in the immediate event in which ‘healthy food’ is given meaning and materiality, but also in the bodily momentum that compels potential future eating behaviors. A SGCP teacher explored this idea with me, explaining:

“No, as I snip my green beans and put them into the steamer, so that I keep in all the nutrients, I can remember never having fresh vegetables, I can remember taking them out of the freezer and boiling them until they had no taste, and wondering why. And so for me, [eating fresh green beans] is an experience that I can value and appreciate. As a young person [like many of my students], I couldn’t make those connections.” (Teacher, CA)

In this teacher’s description, health is not bound up in the green beans themselves. Rather, health is produced out of the informational and social flows (or lack there of) that (now) allow this teacher to ‘make the connections’ that compel him to feel good about eating the green beans. The physical properties of the green bean and teacher matter too – for example, in how the beans taste on his tongue when steamed versus boiled – but in the experience of eating such beans, the boundary between social and biological is unclear. In this sense, the beginning that is represented by Mansfield’s commentary is central to my own research on SGCPs because it shines light on how a political economic critique of structural inequities (i.e. uneven access to certain social and informational flows) might begin to become translated into a more contextual and fluid understanding of the human body, and perhaps eventually into a progressive and negotiated practice of health/care & nutrition intervention. If a ‘good’ food experience is biosocial, then the inequities that preclude certain people from accessing positive experiences with healthy food must be brought to bear on the very formation of food habits, behaviors, and tastes as they develop in the material body. Simultaneously, as Guthman’s work suggests, the social construction of norms and understandings surrounding what constitutes ‘healthy eating’ in the first place must be understood through the registers of taste and bodily sensation, such that we begin to recognize and experience our senses not as pre-social
indicators of (nature’s) Truth but as political instruments for the strategic legitimization of (an always social) truth.

The Roots of Motivation

The above examples of scholarship at the intersection of political ecology and human health signal the need for a research framework that can effectively combine structural modes of explanation with descriptions that are true to the fluidity and specificity of daily life. As Guthman’s work highlights, structural modes of explanation are important because they can highlight the unevenness of power relations in regard to the politics of bodily health – including both analyses of whose bodies have greater access to healthy conditions, and also who gets to decide what constitutes a health body in the first place. At the same time, as Mansfield work suggests, fluid and specific descriptions allow for analyses that are often more true to the spatial and temporal arrangements of everyday life – in which there is necessarily a haphazardness to the configuration of informational and material flows within any given event (e.g. a birth). Of course, this dual problematic is by no means new within the discipline of geography, or within social theory at large. The task of at once privileging the agency of everyday life while also acknowledging and explaining the structures that codify and limit that agency is surely an ongoing one within the social sciences (Bourdieu 1984, Giddens 1984, Berger and Luckmann 1966). Nevertheless, in terms of understanding and describing bodily health, and particularly bodily motivation to eat healthy food, more work needs to be done in order to specify a research framework that can help researchers to negotiate these two modes of explanation.

In this next section, I move from the above discussions of recent scholarship within political ecology and health studies to explain how political ecology and body-centered scholarship can be combined into such a structural-meets-post-structural research framework. I call this research framework “political ecology of the body” (PEB). In what follows, I describe this PEB framework particularly in terms of the central focus of my research, which is to understand the forces behind students’ motivation to eat healthy food. Following the “hatchet” and “seed” model of political ecology (Robbins 2004), I use this PEB framework not just to interrogate and complicate structural models of explanation in regard to the agency of healthy food eaters but more importantly to build upon and renovate a particular political ecological concept – that of access – in a way that can further our understanding of what it means to be able to eat healthily within this structured and agentic world. First, however, I turn to discuss the structure-agency debate in greater depth, and in specific regard to food-related motivation.

Embodying Taproots and Rhizomes

In searching for what we might consider to be the “root” causes of motivation to eat, it is useful (for the sake of clarity and coherence) to begin with the suggestion that we have to contend with two general avenues of academic thought: the macro-structural, and the micro-unstructured. These two modes of understanding need not be and are not mutually exclusive, and indeed both often exist simultaneously (to some extent)
within much social science scholarship. Yet, these modes of thought are also often perceived to be in opposition – the macro realm imagined as a somewhat fixed space of congealed categories and arrangements, and the micro realm imagined as a flowing network of life happenings. Two metaphors that are frequently drawn upon to describe these two positions are, incidentally, both root-related; the latter (micro-realm) is frequently described as a “rhizome” – a haphazard and constantly evolving network or web-like root structure – while the former (structural, macro-realm) is usually referred to as a deep, consistent, tree-like “taproot.” Often, scholars are compelled to draw more from one or the other of these root metaphors as the basis of their ontological frame (although certainly many social theorists have also attempted to pull from both in their explanations). For example Marxist scholars tend to search for the “root cause” of our social ills, viewing capitalism at the central taproot. Post-structural scholars, on the other hand, tend to focus on diffusing the very notion of root causes, seeing power instead as circulating and web-like (Yapa 1996). Of course, both of these arguments deserve consideration; but I want to argue that it is how, why, and where these root structures intersect that especially demands our scholarly attention (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Typical language used to describe taproot and rhizome ontologies

It is worth pointing out that while few have attempted such a scalar bridging of macro-structural and micro-networked concerns in regard to one’s motivation to eat (yet see Probyn 2001), certainly many other scholars have made similar calls for such ontological combination in other areas of academic study (for a recent example, see Kirsch and Mitchell 2004, or Sharp 2008). Feminist geographers, for one example,

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20 Just recently, for example, Jo Sharp (2008) noted that geographies of affect, often critiqued for being politically flat, have yet to explore the how the topographies of this micro realm – that is, the differences in feeling and experience – are structured by the mundane, yet very important social categories of age, sex, ethnicity, race, and disability (Sharp 2008, 4). In this sense, not only can political ecology benefit from a more material-networked approach, but ANT and affect geographies also have much to gain from the combination. Certainly the bringing together of macro and micro explanations in regard to bodies and motivations is much needed on both ‘sides’ of the divide.
have done much to illustrate that it is the intersectionality of the personal and the political that gives form to our everyday life experiences, from laboring at work or rearing children, to experiencing pain or eating with pleasure. At the crux of such scholarship is a sincere attempt to get better both at explaining the complexity of human experiences, and at finding creative ways to decrease human suffering. Rather than offer either a teleological account or a totally haphazard and individual account of social phenomena, this sort of ontological bridging allows for explanations that describe and give weight to the macro structures of our world without advancing explanations that would imply that these structures alone control human behavior and experience. This balance is one that many scholars have attempted to achieve, with varying degrees of success (the quantitative/qualitative divide in the social sciences, for example, is evidence of this struggle, as is the strategic move between universal woman and particularly situated women within the feminist movement).

In terms of motivation to eat, this scalar bridging would mean that we would want to take seriously any potential structural causes of difference in regard to eating habits at the same time as we ensure that these explanations do not further reify structural difference itself. For example, what if we are to consider the possibility that ‘black’ students and ‘white’ students might like different foods (as some of the SGCP student research participants declared)? The potential structural forces in this are many: disparities in economic access, different historical precedents, targeted advertising, and varying levels of education, to name a few. But, even if we acknowledge that we are talking about (structural) tendencies rather than certainties here, it is obvious that none of these alone (or all together) are enough to actually explain human behavior. To make the leap between these large-scale influences and particular, bodily motivations would be a matter of probability and speculation. Furthermore, such a leap would not explain the variation and complexity in human behavior – nor allow the possibility of disruption. Nevertheless, neither should these structural conditions be overlooked or denied.

Rather, in order to begin to understand bodily motivation to eat, we might begin by considering these structural forces relevant in terms of their potential ability to influence a particular visceral experience. For example, we can start by recognizing that for any event – say a vegetarian school meal that is cooked and eaten by a diverse

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21 Connecting macro and micro scales has become one of the central motivations for feminist political geographers (Staeheli 2001). Dowler and Sharp (2001), for example, have called for a focus on “embodying geopolitics,” arguing that “women’s bodies are inherently caught up in international relations, but often at mundane or everyday levels and so are not written into the texts of political discourse” (168). This, they explain, is a move towards the recognition of the embodiment of geographical processes and geopolitical relationships. Thus, Dowler and Sharp argue that it is important to be able to research across scales, to relate the larger scales to those of community, home, and body. Domosh (1997) also makes this argument; “Only by listening to people’s experiences can we begin to unravel the complex, everyday impacts of macroscale economic and social processes” (83). In the field of health geography, Isabel Dyck has also stressed the importance of working with a conception of interweaving scales – “from political economy to the personal, from global neoliberalism to the body and emotions” (2003). Although the material processes of the visceral realm have not always been overtly present in such feminist work, viscerality may certainly be ‘read in’ to these analyses.
classroom of 6th graders – there is an assortment of potential visceral responses that any one student could have. This assortment is not haphazard and random to the moment, but instead develops as a jumbled node of ‘tendencies’ and ‘latencies’ that are built out of a rhizome of forces. Such forces are too many and too contextual to list, but could include things like: a headache, a hug, sunshine or rain, a familiar ingredient, a fight with a friend, low blood sugar, a new taste, a bad test grade, a pungent smell, good music on the radio, and so on. While some of these forces might be considered completely ‘random’ (the weather on a given day), and while the combination of all of such forces at any given moment is certainly too haphazard to attempt to predict, it is also fair to say that some of these forces can clearly be influenced by the very real structures of race, class, and gender, as well as a whole host of other structural differences and social hierarchies (see Figure 3). For example, what is a familiar taste or comforting sensation to one student can depend upon what kinds of exposure he or she has had to a certain food in the past. If access to fresh fruits and vegetables is a problem for the student’s family because of financial difficulties, or if faster, convenience foods are prioritized in a household because of time limitations and/or cultural attachments, then he or she may be less likely to have developed a ‘taste’ for such foods, and thus may be less likely than a more privileged peer to enjoy a bowl of slow cooked, freshly steamed veggies.

Figure 3: Imagining taproots and rhizomes in terms of forces of motivation

If we imagine that the bodies in this eating event are developmental – that the students exist as ever emergent assemblages of cells and bones and organs and brains – then we can begin to understand how their bodies have always already developed through experiences that are gendered, classed and raced, in addition to thoroughly random or haphazard. In this sense, the ‘taproot’ of forces (social hierarchies, economic disparities, and power inequities) can have a very real impact on the development of bodily tendencies to do, act, or be(come) in certain ways. At the same time, however, we would not want to assume that these forces are certain or inevitable in what kinds of bodies they help to produce. In fact, we would want to also allow for the possibility (indeed the probability) that a person’s motivation to eat certain foods is not defined solely on these
grounds. Thus, a student’s motivation to eat an unfamiliar bowl of steamed veggies (if indeed it is unfamiliar) might grow out of his or her connection to a certain teacher, out of peer pressure, or out of a daring mood to try something new. In this sense, the radical openness and hope that comes from the rhizomatic arrangement of life is that in the jumbled processes of any particular human experiences lies the latent potential for the unexpected – for the transgressive disruption of structural forces and norms. While this is indeed hopeful, however, we certainly cannot rely on such rhizomatic randomness to do our political work; we need to work actively and strategically to disrupt and unravel the structural inequities that have become embodied and embedded within our multi-rooted lives.

The Tendencies and Latencies of Access
Building on this ‘rooted’ understanding of how students become motivated through developmental and rhizomatic processes to make certain decisions about food, the next and related question to ask is how are we to influence this (admittedly chaotic) process of motivation? This question is important because it is also the central question asked by nutrition interventionists, SGCP advocates, and food activists; in other words, how do we get students to eat ‘better,’ more ‘healthfully’, or more ‘alternatively’? While I do not wish to entirely bracket the fact that the definition of healthy eating is itself in question (for certainly the politics of definition feature in motivation too, as I will show in Chapter 4), I venture to suggest that the question of how to motivate students to eat fresh fruits and vegetables can be politically progressive and empowering for disenfranchised youth – if we are sure to ask it carefully and with humility and respect. I want to suggest that we may do this by utilizing and complicating a theme that has become common to political ecological work: that of access.

Political ecologists have traditionally understood access in terms of natural resources and management, for example in recognizing the ways in which marginalized groups are physically denied access to land or water resources (Robbins 2004). Expanding into issues of bodily health, we could see this notion of access broadened to include (for example) access to healthy living conditions, clean air and water, and perhaps even other more intangible things like stress-free environments, intellectual stimulation, or emotional happiness. By framing these needs in terms of access, we can begin to take stock of how one’s agency to ‘choose’ a healthy life/style is dependent upon one’s ability to be in relation to/with a variety of other ‘bodies,’ spaces, or intangibles. But I want to suggest that access is more complicated still – at least in terms of access to healthy foods. In asking how we are to motivate people to eat healthier foods, our understanding of access (expressed as an ability to relate) has to go far beyond questions of economic ability or geographic proximity. Specifically, we have to go further into the body.

I want to put forth an understanding of access in visceral terms; I want to suggest that in terms of how to encourage or motivate people to eat healthier food, and thus to develop healthier bodies and communities, we need to begin to come to terms with how the question of motivation itself is a question of access. Access to food can be understood viscerally: as a complex bodily process of motivation towards certain food behaviors or experiences that arise, once again, out of the rhizome of forces that are present within any
eating event, including the ‘tendencies’ that arise from social groupings like race, gender, and class, as well as the ‘latencies’ that exist within the random, more-than qualities of daily life (see Figure 4). In this jumbled node of tendencies and latencies, a student’s ability to positively experience healthy food depends upon not just her ability to exchange money for a product, but upon her habituated capacity to feel a certain level of comfort, excitement, affection, pride, etc. for what she is eating. This is salient particularly in SGCPs, where students are not often direct market ‘consumers’ of food, but rather collaborators or participants in a cooking and eating event. If change in eating habits is the ultimate goal of SGCPs, then a student’s ability to access healthy food comes particularly through the potential/random latent forces of SGCPs that can help to disrupt or shift certain tendencies in food attachments, leading to different experiences of food even within the same food event.

Of course, hunger itself could also certainly play a role in how quickly or emphatically a food item is accepted or rejected by different students (which is itself undoubtedly political, and yet also a random, latent force). Nevertheless, the capacity of a SGCP food event to generate positive (or negative) affective responses in certain bodies also goes well beyond hunger. In this sense we might ask, what conditions or arrangements of SGCPs allow for the reproduction and/or disruption of tendencies of bodily habits of feeling, leading to positive (or negative) visceral experiences of healthy food? While this

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22 in the language of feeling, this is the ‘politics of affect’
is admittedly a complex and multi-faceted question, one means to begin to wrap our heads around these processes is to narrow the scope of the inquiry. For example, to begin we might think about positive visceral experiences of food particularly in terms of comfort. For many North Americans, ‘comfort foods’ typically include an array of easy to prepare, home-cooked dishes like macaroni and cheese (Kraft Dinner) and mashed or twice-baked potatoes, which adults tend to associate with fond childhood memories. But of course, these foods are not always comfortable to everyone, everywhere, expressly because ‘comfort’ does not arise only from the food itself but from the way that a food comes to be (viscerally) associated with certain social interactions, intellectual ideas, and personal memories (i.e. childhood remembrances).

To link comfort to SGCPs, I want to relate this back to the assertion of some SCGP students in Berkeley that black students and white students (might) prefer different foods. In talking about this assertion with a black male teacher at Central School in Berkeley, my interview revealed a similar sort of story of the economies of access that are present within any eating event:

Teacher: “I think, to be honest, I think that what takes [black students] out of their comfort zone, more than the food itself, is how the kitchen operates, and the dynamics behind how the garden operates. It is less the food itself and more the other things connected with the gathering and the readying and the preparing and cooking and partaking of the food, that style is what I think that they truly perceive as more “white”

JHC: Because it is not what they are used to?

Teacher: I wouldn’t say that is not what they are used to, because everyone [prepares food]. But it sounds a little bit different, and smells a little bit different, and feels a little bit different. I mean in any household, division of labor has taken place, and the pans are rattling around the kitchen either way, but the sounds you hear, the smells you smell, the feel, the vibe, and the emotions are just coming from a different place. (Teacher, CA)

Similarly, Arun Saldanha’s (2006) work on the ‘viscosities’ of race hints at how comfort and social identity might be linked in such a way. After describing the rhizome of forces within a certain rave scene – clothes, music, alcohol, drug practices, peculiar sociability, etc. – that produce particular bodies as outsiders, and other bodies as insiders, Saldanha notes, almost in passing, that “…in this constellation, you’re either comfortable enough to star in the visual and hallucinatory economy, or you’re not, and you leave” (2006, 190). As Saldanha’s work shows, however, comfortability is not an individual matter but dependent upon one’s ability to relate to a variety of other things: previous experiences, enough money, the right clothes, a certain look, etc. In SGCPs, of course, students don’t usually have the choice to leave the classroom if they cannot relate – but this does not mean that they are always comfortable with staying.

Importantly, in this conception, social categories like race do not determine access but rather these identities are produced out of such economies of access. Saldanha therefore describes race as an effect of an interaction, as something that is created from the
proximity of (similar and different) bodies (2005). His work draws heavily on Deleuze and Guatarri’s (1987) work on ‘faciality’, which suggests that there is a sort of virtual machine at work in daily human interaction, a machine that determines which ‘faces’ are most probable. The assigning of ‘faces’ (racial, sexual, socio-economic, etc) are not labels stuck on bodies, however, but rather “regularities in the dynamic and heterogeneous assemblage of things, environments and bodies themselves” (Saldanha 2005). It is in this way that Saldanha discusses race in terms of ‘tendencies,’ a sort of stickiness of bodies that coheres according to phenotypic characteristics, but that is never a result of phenotype alone. It is the way that phenotype is intercepted by cultural economies, by history and experience, and by capital that allows for these segregating ‘tendencies’ (Saldanha 2005).

In this description, race is at once fluid and fixed. ‘Blackness’ and ‘whiteness’ is not pre-determined by phenotypic characteristics, but is instead the result of the ways in which phenotypic traits become associated with other bodies, spaces, behaviors, and objects. Social categories like race are thus fixed (or at least viscous) to the extent that these associations become embedded in our social structure and act back upon visible/presumed traits, such that the color of one’s skin, or the form of one’s body, becomes a barrier to accessing (financially, culturally, intellectually, and always viscerally) other associations or modes of being. In terms of alternative food, Rachel Slocum (2007) similarly discusses the tendency for a coagulation of ‘white’ bodies in farmers markets, where the space, the wares, the (high) prices, the foodie-ness (or snobbery), and indeed the overall feel of the market come to define and reinforce one’s ‘whiteness.’ In such a market space, there are certainly questions of economic access, but related are also questions of cultural and indeed visceral access – a sense of comfortability, familiarity and belonging – which tend to be, but are not always, linked to social identity. As France Winddance Twine explains, “Being culturally white requires being familiar with and comfortable functioning in milieus culturally controlled and dominated by whites” (Twine 1996, 229). As one black female SGCP teacher explained to me:

“there are certain ways that I relate to [the black students], because there are certain things that I understand, in coming from a black family and a black culture, like having certain relatives that are old school and will say certain things, or how someone’s granny [cooks, what types of things she adds to her food], so I can get it, or understand. But…there are some things that I don’t relate to them on…Like just the other day, Benny was asking us about different rappers, and it is just like sometimes, they might feel like, maybe I am not black because I don’t know every rapper. It is a tough and loaded question for me, because I probably come education wise, and growing up in a suburb, and going to really good schools and stuff, I probably come from more of a background like yours [white middle-class researcher] than theirs. …So, like Leah for example, I know she really likes me. But there are also the girls that don’t like me, that cut their eyes at me and maybe feel like, she is black, but she is not black. And somehow be annoyed by that…” (Teacher, CA)
In this case, Tiffany’s ability to relate to both ‘black’ and ‘white’ sets of associations put her in a precarious position vis-à-vis the black students in her class. Some black students became visibly angry or confused at Tiffany’s behavior when it did not conform to their understanding of the accessibilities of ‘blackness.’ Perhaps also, students could read her conformity to ‘white’ foods as a sort of practice of assimilation into ‘white’ culture, which is threatening to the continuation of ‘blackness,’ and thus uncomfortable. However, and despite these tendencies for race to congeal, such moments of tension and discomfort also illustrate that the tendencies of race (or gender, class, etc.) are far from fixed. In fact, as I witnessed frequently in the Berkeley classroom, there are many instances of what Twine (1996) calls “boundary events” – where the borders of ‘black’ and ‘white’ are called into question. Although these boundary events can be tense and unsettling, they also can be productive in that they allow new types of associations and connections to be made. 23

As Slocum (2007) makes clear, the coagulation of bodies in certain spaces is therefore not always or only a negative. As she explains of the farmers market customers in her study, “far from simply producing distance and cordoned off spaces, whiteness is also a process of reaching out toward brownness via efforts, in this case, to bring good food to others” (7). Here she is talking about the desire of white alternative food activists to reach out to non-white people, and to change the ‘face’ of whiteness (a desire I witnessed often in this SGCP research). As she explains, a bodily desire for proximity to brownness can also be a part of the ‘tendencies’ of whiteness, and can therefore also lead to new outcomes and connections. Certainly this is part of the story of SGCPs, where a diverse group of students are put into contact on a daily basis with a variety of (un)familiar foods and food spaces – a connection that in and of itself permits of a certain sort of access. Along these lines, Slocum, quoting Rajchman, suggests that to connect, therefore, is “to work with other possibilities, not already given” (7). In other words, in connecting we might find that tendencies can change, and so too our bodily habits of feeling.

However, lest we get too caught up in the romantic, creative potential of the rhizome, a warning also comes along with these theories. The erecting and dismantling of borders and boundaries, whether real or imagined, is fraught with uneven power relations. The experimentation and play that is called for in such conscious, embodied openness rarely comes in our society without heavy prices: public disenfranchisement, violence, poverty, and physical confinement (McWhorter 1999). Indeed, we rarely experience the type of freedom that would allow for such unhindered visceral experimentation or play. In this sense, “the work of anti-normalizing ethical self-transformation cannot be fully separated in practice from the work of cultural and institutional challenge and dismantling” (McWhorter 1999, 225). ‘Counterattacks’ must happen at multiple scales simultaneously – locally, nationally, and globally. We must ensure that we provide each other the spaces and tools that are required to play, experiment, and grow.

23 Optimistically, Alcoff similarly suggests that, “perceptual practices are dynamic, even when they are congealed into habit, and that dynamism can be activated by the existence of multiple forms of the gaze in various cultural productions and by the challenge of contradictory perceptions” (189).
**Assessing Access at all Scales**

As the previous discussion highlights, while social identities like ‘blackness’ and ‘whiteness’ do not simply pre-determine what foods a student will choose to eat, the act of selecting certain foods or even enjoying certain food spaces (including a public school dominated by white, middle class teachers and administrators) requires that students have a certain level of visceral access to such food/spaces. As political ecologists would remind us, this access is configured through (uneven) social and material relationships that take place at *all scales of interaction*, from individual bodies to global processes. While it is unreasonable and unrealistic to require SGCPs to tackle the entirety of this visceral economy of access, we can nevertheless consider how SGCPs work within the context of these nested scales to reinforce or resist certain patterns of (in)accessibility, and how SGCPs might (better) provide spaces for students’ experimentation and play. In other words, how do SGCPs provide situated opportunities for students to “take back taste” (Hayes-Conroy & Hayes-Conroy 2008)?

With these ideas in mind, I ask:

- How do SGCPs reinforce or resist notions of expert knowledge in regard to what (and who) constitutes healthy food?
- In what ways do SGCPs heighten or disrupt current patterns of geographic and economic access to fresh fruits and vegetables?
- Through what means do SGCPs provide students with opportunities to reify or reconfigure the boundaries of social identity?

These three research questions are a summation of the discussions above, and represent the type of questioning that a PEB framework allows. Together they address both types of “root” causes, and ask about both the material and the discursive construction of bodily health. They emerge out of a political ecological understanding of bodily experience as nested within various spatial scales, and are attune to the structural forces, relational ontologies, and discursive strategies that configure the reach of alternative food (see Figure 5). As I discuss in greater depth in Chapter 3, these questions, asked within a PEB framework, signal the basis of my research methodology, a methodology that revolves around three central axes of analysis: the production of knowledge, the structure of power/hierarchy, and the un-structured ontology of lived experience/social practice. It is a methodology that recognizes the latent, potential agency of all socio-biological relationships even as they are formed and constrained within the structured tendencies of our inequitable social world.
In the above schema (Figure 5), my research questions work collaboratively, and therefore need to be considered simultaneously rather than alongside one another; each question and answer needs to be understood as informing and defining the others. For example, as discussed in the sections above, the macro politics of food that influence availability and cost can affect the boundedness of bodily motivation (in terms of access to comfort, for example), as well as the defining of health itself (in terms of who gets to make such definitions). At the same time, visceral attachments to bounded food identities affect how definitions of health are assessed (by legitimating definitions as truth, or rejecting them as fallacy), and how macro political structures are reinforced (by forming structurally driven habits or tendencies). In this sense, in order to adequately explore SGCPs abilities to motivate students to eat ‘healthier,’ all three of these questions must be understood as interdependent.

A note about what kind of arguments a political ecology of the body (PEB) framework allows: As I explain in more depth in Chapter 3, the data presented within these pages do not rely on measurable or quantifiable visceral events, and do not focus specifically on feelings as outcomes or facts. I can imagine other studies, built from the ideas within that could (carefully) utilize more quantitative or mixed data to paint a larger and more calculated picture of the visceral geographies that are explored here. But my data present a different type of argument. It is an argument about how we can and should (re)imagine the visceral realm, and how this imagining is important to re-thinking and re-creating projects of nutrition and health education. In this sense, while I want to address the issue of motivation directly, I am not seeking to discover a formula for motivation, nor am I interested in pin-pointing one ‘right’ or ‘sure’ way to motivate. Instead, I want to discuss motivation as rooted and uneven, and as always negotiated. I do this so that we may begin, as academics, educators and food leaders, to take responsibility for creating spaces
and opportunities for motivation to occur in empowering ways – in ways that allow us to understand how “taking back taste” can become a strategy for progressive social change.

**PEB and ‘Actually Existing’ Neoliberalism**

With the task of progressive social change in mind, I want to move now to discuss one particularly important avenue of analysis and critique within literature on human-environment relations broadly, and alternative food and SGCPs particularly – that is, neoliberalism. Broadly speaking, neoliberalism refers to “an economic and political philosophy that questions…government interventions in the market and people’s relationships to the economy, and eschews social and collective controls over the behavior and practices of firms, the movement of capital, and the regulation of socio-economic relationships” (Heynen et al 2008, 3). In recent years, the topic of neoliberalism has garnered attention within many areas of academic scholarship, including feminist geography (Nagar et al 2002) and human-environment geography (McCarthy and Prudham 2004; McCarthy 2005), and also alternative agri-food studies (Guthman 2008; McCarthy 2006; Watts et al 2005). Neoliberalism is important to this dissertation, and particularly to my discussion of a PEB framework within this chapter, because it is a topic of concern that, perhaps more powerfully than any other contemporary force, places the overall progressiveness of SGCPs in question. In recent years, many of the geographers and food scholars who write about alternative food initiatives (both within and beyond schools) have warned about neoliberal trends within the events and sites that they study (Allen and Guthman 2006, Guthman 2008, Pudup 2008). These scholars worry, and not without good reason, that alternative food initiatives (like school gardens) can and do serve to further neoliberalization, through emphasis on such principals as volunteerism, individualism, personal responsibility, and consumer choice. As one example, Pudup emphasizes how gardens can become “spaces of neoliberal governmentality [that put] individuals in charge of their own adjustment(s) to economic restructuring and social dislocation through self-help technologies centered on personal contact with nature” (Pudup 2008, 1228).

Such critiques of neoliberalism are undoubtedly important for my analysis of SGCPs, not least of which because the threat of neoliberal governmentality (the making of subjects that serve to further the goals of neoliberalism) brings to light the complexities and contradictions of (food-related) motivation. The literature on neoliberalism and alternative food has played an important role in how I think about SGCPs, particularly because it has forced me to interrogate not only how SGCP leaders conceive of and discuss motivation to eat healthy foods, but also and more importantly because it has made me critically question what such motivation ultimately does or allows, and also what it precludes, in furthering progressive social change. The suggestion that motivation to eat more healthfully or more alternatively could be promoting neoliberalism (by creating neoliberal citizen-subjects, as in Pudup 2008) is a serious critique, and one that certainly demands thorough interrogation.
Neoliberalism is also an important topic within a discussion of political ecology because, as several scholars have suggested, neoliberalism is not only a political economic project but ultimately an environmental one as well (McCarthy and Prudham 2004; Heynen et al 2008). Neoliberalism has been implicated in the current (commodity-driven) configurations of many human and non-human relationships, including relationships that are (re)configured at the genetic level, which have direct impacts on human bodies and their food (Heynen et al 2008; Kloppenburg 2004). It is therefore not a coincidence that so many political ecologists have become interested in this topic; “The theoretical and methodological commitments to grounded engagement with actual places, people, and ecologies in political ecology provide a powerful way to check the idealist tendencies of neoliberal discourses and ideologies” (Heynen et al 2008, 12).

Nevertheless, a tension has also arisen in the literature on neoliberalism that speaks to this grounded engagement – a tension between the orthodoxy of neoliberalism that is pushed by its advocates and ‘actually existing’ neoliberalism on the ground, which is necessarily hybrid, partial, and specific in form (Guthman 2008, Larner 2008, Blomley 2008, Heynen et al 2008). Nick Blomley’s empirical work on neoliberalism within urban gardens, for example, serves to question the idea that “neoliberalism is monolithic and unstoppable” and instead suggests that when taken up by the complexities of everyday socio-material life, even projects that are largely conceived of as neoliberal can become something else (Blomley 2008, 187). While I do not wish to suggest that neoliberal critiques of alternative food or human-environment relations at large are insignificant, this counter-move is also important, particularly because it allows us to recognize the richness of both capitalist and non-capitalist activities within the event of daily life (as in Gibson-Graham 1998), rather than submitting to (and perhaps reifying) a purely neoliberal storyline. Indeed, it is important in our political ecological commitments to ‘actual people, places, and ecologies’ to make room for the possibility that “[t]he spaces and subject of neoliberalism…are more slippery than we may think” (Blomley 2008, 187).

It is therefore clear that in studying neoliberalism within alternative food, we need to attend to how activist initiatives both reproduce and resist neoliberal forces in discursive and material ways, and at a variety of spatial scales. In fact, I see this task as part of the necessary balancing of structural and rhizomatic epistemological positions, explained above. In the discussion below, I examine the critique of SGCPs as neoliberal in more depth, drawing particularly from the scholarship of Allen and Guthman (2006), Guthman (2008) and Pudup (2008). I give serious and critical attention to the concerns of these scholars, highlighting key points from their work in order to signal places of potential concern for SGCPs. I then move on to discuss and complicate their findings in light of my own empirical work on SGCPs.

*Critiquing Neoliberalism within Alternative Food*

As the above discussion of hybridity suggests, neoliberalism is a philosophy with a diverse range of meanings and practices; it is not a wholly constant and unitary force. Yet, as some scholars have gone to great lengths to illustrate, neoliberalism is worth naming as a singular and powerful ideological project (McCarthy 2004, Heynen et al
Despite grounded specificities and hybridities, neoliberalism does contain significant and dominant threads of consistency. For example, neoliberalism tends to promote the rollback of state regulation in favor of free market exchange, and tends to reinforce private property rights and the valuing of individual consumer choice over collective arrangements/engagements (Heynen et al 2008, Harvey 2007). These are a few of the consistent projects of neoliberalism, and they are also projects that have been roundly critiqued and resisted by many alternative food activists.

As Guthman notes, however, neoliberalism presents a dilemma to the alternative food movement because although many activists forcefully oppose the neoliberalization of food and agriculture, many activist strategies also seem to reproduce neoliberal forms and spaces of governance (Guthman 2008). This reproduction is considered to be both passive, through the filling of gaps in services left by state devolution, and active, through directly advocating privatization and localization, and by advancing the rhetoric of free market capitalism. For example, in regard to the former, Allen and Guthman argue that ‘Farm-to-School’ (FTS) advocates, who encourage local produce in school cafeterias, “in their efforts to fill the gaps created by political and economic neoliberalization …are in essence producing neoliberal forms and practices afresh” (Allen and Guthman 2006). Such passive instances of the reproduction of neoliberalism are important to consider, especially to the extent that alternative food initiatives fail to put pressure on the state itself to mitigate the problems and inequities of our current food system. In this section, however, I wish to focus on the more active (though not necessarily conscious or purposeful) reproductions of neoliberalism – for it is through these mechanisms that we can also witness how SGCPs can (begin to) counter the ideologies and resist the reach of neoliberalism. I will discuss three particular instances of active reproduction, in increasing order of significance in the literature: privatization of funding, localism as devolution, and neoliberal subject formation.

One important concern that arises in the literature on neoliberalism within alternative food initiatives is the source of funding for food-related projects, such as SGCPs or other farm-to-cafeteria type programs. Many of the attacks launched against SGCPs and related Farm-to-School projects (FTS) are predicated on the fact that such projects often rely heavily on private funds, as well as substantial volunteerism. Pudup, for example, notes that Alice Water’s school project, “The ESY [Edible Schoolyard,] has relied on money generated outside the public sector, chiefly through foundations, grants, and private giving, as is true with most farm to school projects” (Pudup 2008, 1236). The largest benefactor of the ESY is the Chez Panisse Foundation, a foundation which is connected to Water’s distinguished Chez Panisse restaurant, and which has funded ESY projects far beyond the means of a public school in the Unified Berkeley School District (Pudup 2008). The ESY also, partially because of its notoriety, attracts a large amount of volunteer labor.

Pudup, along with other scholars of neoliberalism, worries that such a strong emphasis on private and volunteer support encourages the retrenchment of the state, while at the same time legitimizing the non-profit sector as a less politicized and more humane location in which to carry out social projects. Along these lines, she asserts that local or community-
based food systems are generally assumed by alternative food participants to be unpolluted by politics, signaling the growth of voluntary and third sector involvement that is part of the “roll out phase of neoliberalism” (Pudup 2008 1233). Allen and Guthman (2006) are similarly concerned about the reorientation in school food from public to private and national to local within FTS type projects, which they note has resulted in increasing emphasis on producing profit from school lunches as well as the need for financial support beyond the national school food program (in the context of the US). They argue that while public funding for school food has in the past been universal and relatively steady, the turn toward privatization leaves local schools and communities insecure and evermore reliant upon private and volunteer sources.

A second and related problem that is voiced within this literature has to do particularly with the emphasis on localism within alternative food initiatives, whether through romanticizing the local as itself a resistance to the industrial food system (Guthman 2008) or through promoting localization of food as a means of building cohesive communities and emphasizing individualism and self-reliance (Pudup 2008). There is an important concern (expressed particularly in regard to FTS by Allen and Guthman 2006), that the localism or community control that is promoted by such alternative food initiatives serves to further the goals of neoliberalism by advocating a devolution of state responsibility to the scale of the local community. For example, DuPuis and Goodman (2005) note that devolution to local networks of self-governing actors is a “dangerous political bargain” that can “dismantle hard-fought government institutional capacities in utilities regulation, anti-trust, state protection of citizens’ health and welfare” (368). Guthman (2008) therefore suggests that the embrace of localism by alternative food activists inscribes “a turn away from the state, articulating with devolutionary tendencies [of neoliberalism]” (1177).

As an ideal that emphasizes community control and self-reliance, localism can also “bound the world to be cared for” (Guthman 2008, paraphrasing Allen et al 2003), by effectively confining the reach of one’s care and commitment to the local community, and by rendering invisible the larger political and economic realities of one’s actual social relations. Indeed, as Guthman notes, the discursive power of localism lies in the assumption that the local is “the place of caring” (Guthman 2008, 1177, emphasis added), particularly because it is promoted as the most natural and pre-political place to interact with human and non-human life. Pudup (2008) similarly worries about the goals of local governance and self-reliance in terms of a withdraw from wider political engagement with the state. She also sees the ESY’s ideals of organic localism as ironic in terms of the hegemonic ways in which the program attempts to build ‘community’ through such an uncompromising ideal/ism. As Pudup notes, Alice Waters’ writings “have become something close to holy scripture in their lessons about the cardinal virtues of eating simply, organically, seasonally and locally” (Pudup 2008, 1238).

This discussion leads to the third major problem of neoliberalism discussed in the literature on alternative food: that is, neoliberal subject formation. Beyond the discourse of localism, Pudup (2008) and other critics of neoliberalism take issue with the rhetoric of self-improvement and personal responsibility within alternative food particularly
because of the implied (and often explicit) ambitions of food activists to change individual participants. Pudup worries that the ESY’s principal goal is “to cultivate specific kinds of citizen-subjects,” noting that “if the ESY is successful, its participants will grow up to expect and demand organically and locally produced food as a right of their consumer citizenship and will eat simply and according to whatever seasonal bounty is available” (Pudup 2008, 1238). Allen and Guthman also worry that a focus on individual performance and consumer choice “endorse[s] and may further ways of producing people as neoliberal subjects” (2006, 10).

A related term that has been linked to such critiques of neoliberal subject formation is governmentality, which (in neoliberal terms) refers to “the ways in which various social spaces have been subjected to neoliberal mentalities of rule...[by] attempts to enforce market logics in their governance and to produce subjects who employ market rationales in their day-to-day behavior” (Guthman 2008, 1173). As Guthman illustrates, and as I discuss in earlier chapters, one way that alternative food activism pushes such a ‘technology’ of self is through the endorsement of accurate knowledge. Responsible individualism and consumer choice within alternative food activism are promoted through the widespread notion that right behavior stems from knowing where your food comes from—that with correct knowledge will come self-improvement. As Guthman (2008) points out, FTS type programs are therefore sold to communities and school boards with the idea that they will help children to make the right food choices, as well as conform to the correct body sizes. Along these lines, Pudup (2008) suggests that the ESY employs curricular structures and rigid rules that script students’ behavior, thereby undermining their rights as well as their abilities to define their own subjectivity. Pudup argues that the building of community is not left to chance within ESY, and thus that “the claim to community is undermined by the management and surveillance strategies aimed at children to ensure that they behave in a community minded way...” (1238).

From private funding to localist devolution to the formation of consumer subjects, neoliberalism has undoubtedly played a role in how SGCPs have been conceived and promoted, and indeed in how the programs daily operations have unfolded. Yet, it is also important to recognize that neoliberalism does not tell the whole story. The role and effect of SGCPs in promoting food-based change is far too complex to be unitarily neoliberal. Indeed, as Pudup also admits, “The Edible Schoolyard’s emphasis on organic localism may be hegemonic ideology in certain Bay Area circles, but it nonetheless defines itself in opposition to corporately controlled agri-food production and distribution prevailing in the global political economy” (Pudup 2008, 1237). Not convinced that that neoliberalism tells the whole story, Jack Kloppenburg and Neva Hassanein (2006) therefore ask “where’s the beef?” suggesting that there is a lack of evidence to support the notion that such alternative food programs are unequivocally furthering the spread of neoliberalism. The neoliberal story, in fact, “departs significantly from [their] own experiences with and understanding of the initiatives in which [they] have been engaged” (Kloppenburg and Hassanein 2006, 417). My own empirical studies, too, point toward a more hybrid and complex picture.
Allowing for Visceral Difference

In accordance with my PEB framework, I want to put forth an analysis of SGCPs that is attentive to both the structural and rhizomatic dimensions of food-related events, and to both the discursive and material productions of daily social life. Although the above analyses are crucial, following the critiques of non-representational theorists (Anderson 2005, Thrift 2004), I argue that the notion that the discourse “tells the story” (Pudup 2008, 1288) is not enough to understand the work of SGCPs in furthering alternative, healthy food. In addition to looking at what alternative food initiatives like SGCPs are “organized to do” (as Pudup does, 2008, 1237), it is also necessary to examine what they actually, materially, do – how and why they motivate (or demotivate as the case may be) and what this motivation does to further neoliberal and/or other non-capitalist goals. Not only would this sort of analysis help to further specify what neoliberalism is, and is not, but it would also lend considerably more agency and respect to the many activists, teachers, and students whose work keeps SGCPs functioning (instead of crediting only the ideologues like Alice Waters, who get to write the discourse).

In the arguments that follow, however, I don’t want to suggest that SGCPs clearly do not reproduce neoliberalism, for indeed I do not have enough material evidence to support this claim either. But, I would venture to say that with the evidence currently available, it is no clearer to me that SGCPs are successful at producing neoliberal subjects than they are at producing healthy eaters. In both cases, declaring such outcomes would require in-depth, longitudinal research – and even then the story would just be partial. It is important to recognize, however, that the leap between discourse/intention and actual behavior/feeling is a big one, and one that cannot be accomplished without attending to how such stories play out on the ground, in the everyday life contexts of a necessarily hybrid alternative food struggle. In this sense, my own evidence from this SGCP research points to (as one might expect) a contradictory set of ever-emergent effects that are neither clearly neoliberal, nor clearly beyond the reach neoliberalism, but also that also hold the potential to be ever more resistant to neoliberalization.

To begin, I want to be clear about the funding situation that was faced by both of the SGCPs that I studied. The Berkeley and Nova Scotia programs were both in public schools, and the funding for the garden and cooking classes in these schools was garnered through grants offered largely by federal and or state/provincial governments. While the SGCPs at Central and Plainville Schools made use of a lot of volunteer (or activist) labor, including several Americorp volunteers in the Berkeley case and many local community members in the case of Nova Scotia, the programs quite plainly did not have access to large pockets of private money, as is true of the richly endowed ESY program (Allen and Guthman 2006; Pudup 2008). Moreover, in both cases the grant money for these SGCPs was awarded on the basis of their broader contribution to social welfare, particularly in regard to targeting health problems among disenfranchised populations. Thus in Berkeley, the SGCP was funded through USDA monies directed toward the national free and reduced lunch program, while the Nova Scotia SGCP funded through a community health center. As a Berkeley SGCP leader explained:
“Network for Healthy California is a program that is funded through the USDA food stamp program, and the monies are dispersed through the CA department of health. They disperse the money to schools if they have over 50 percent eligible for free or reduced lunch. It is geared toward low income because they experience disproportionate impacts in regard to diabetes and obesity and also poor food security.” (Leader, CA)

In these ways, the programs that I studied differ substantially from the ‘model’ ESY project, which was not a project of the USDA, and did not receive food stamp monies. The distinction between where the funding is coming from, however, is not always unambiguous or relevant in the argument that SGCPs are, or are not, clearly neoliberal. For example, while much of Alice Waters’ money does not trickle down to Central School, it is also fair to say that the notoriety she has brought to ESY has helped both Central and Plainville School SGCPs to gain (public) financial and volunteer support. Indeed, the sense of importance that ESY lends to SGCPs programs overall was, according to my interviews with volunteers, a good part of the reason why they agreed to give up their time, or the chance for larger salaries, to commit to this type of work. In this sense, regardless of the public or private designation of grant monies, SGCPs do rely on a lot of underpaid individual ‘care’ work, which could suggest a roll back of state support. But then again, hasn’t this long been a problem of public education in general – well before the 1970s onslaught of rollbacks? As one interviewee put it, “yeah, the funding is tenuous, but that won’t change until the whole culture of education changes.”

In addition, teachers and activists in both Nova Scotia and Berkeley expressed concern that increased reliance on public funds from the US or Canadian government would not necessarily be beneficial to their SGCPs’ overall success. Many of my interviewees recognized that the US or Canadian government’s involvement in school food policies does not place SGCPs beyond the bounds of neoliberal capitalism. In addition, many feared that reliance on the government would lead to an increased rigidity in the rules and regulations surrounding what teachers/activists could and could not do in continuing the (potentially progressive) work of SCGPs.

“USDA wants to promote California produce. It’s [really] about creating some markets for CA growers; they want us to purchase fruits and vegetables.” (Leader, CA)

“I think community control [is best] because the community knows who is best for the job and you need a very particular person. [Also] the school board policy requires the union worker’s salary to be paid by the canteen…so it has to produce a profit. This program doesn’t because it is funded through the health center.” (Leader, NA)

“[Increased government support] would have pros and cons, because there could be even more rigid rules, like they may require a teacher doing the teaching, and now we don’t have to be certified teachers.” (Teacher, CA)
These statements suggest that the boundary between government involvement and neoliberal capitalist gain is not neatly drawn within SGCPs, both because governments themselves are tied to neoliberal interests, and also because government support comes with stipulations that might hinder the (potentially) progressive work of SGCPs. More to the point, however, this discussion as a whole does little to address what students (or teachers, and parents) are actually learning from these SGCPs, as they are situated in such ambiguous financial contexts.

In regard to the second complaint of neoliberal critics, localism as devolution, both of the programs that I studied did in fact strongly promote localism as an ideal that is connected to community coherence, accurate food knowledge, and environmental sustainability. SGCP leaders often discussed local food, and local work in the garden, as a way of encouraging responsibility and feelings of ownership among students. The ideal of localism was not necessarily promoted by these leaders as a way to shift governance away from the state, but it was certainly hailed as a path towards self-reliance and local control of the means of agricultural production (as Guthman and Pudup also both argue). Yet, this discussion remains at the level of discourse. We might ask: How do students relate to the discourse of localism? What do they actually learn to feel and do within SGCP classrooms? What types of visceral connections or associations does localism make possible for different students? Who does localism attract or repel?

If we consider neoliberalism in visceral terms, it becomes apparent that a turn away from the state does not necessarily mean a turn towards neoliberalism as an embodied practice. This would be a far too rigid and pre-determined outcome in light of an incredible amount of diversity and social inequity among SGCP students. Further, it is important to consider that students (in addition to teachers) already bring (embodied) knowledge, information, and ideas into the SGCP classroom. Considering the extent of neoliberalism within our broader Western society, there is no way to clearly pin-point where any potential neoliberal practices or identities originated. In this sense, while we could claim that local advocacy within SGCPs necessarily perpetuates neoliberal practices or identities, we could also simply suggest local advocacy still does not do enough to counter such hegemonic forces. Despite these contradictions, what is clear, however, is that SGCPs give students a space within which to talk about and interact with food in relation to these broader political and economic structures. For example, I heard many comments like the one below, spoken while chopping freshly harvested SGCP produce, which illustrate a general distrust of corporate agribusiness, alongside a growing favor for local (or do-it-yourself, or DYI) food sources:

“[The grocery store] stopped selling meat [because of] mad cow disease. Ain’t no chickens and stuff neither. I didn’t eat chicken for like a month. I seen a cow died on the news. I ain’t eat no milk too.” (Student, CA)

Given such sentiments, it is not clear that the promotion of localism within alternative food necessarily amounts to a lack of political motivation or a (re)producing of local space as pre-political. Indeed, in my fieldwork I would be pressed to find a respondent who did not view local food as (somehow) political – even as such politics were often
avoided for *viscerally* strategic reasons (not wanting to “turn people off”), or for constraints of time or school policy (being public, as both the schools were). More pointedly, in terms of government involvement in local food, most SGCP students that I talked with were at least somewhat under the impression that the SGCP programs as a whole, and particularly the *rules they followed* in the classrooms, were put in place or controlled by either state/provincial or federal governments of the US or Canada. Indeed, as teachers frequently repeated to students (often in an effort to stop complains about a ‘meatless’ kitchen): “We can’t get funding unless we meet the requirements of the [government’s] guidelines.” In addition, many of the students ultimately recognized the SGCPs as social welfare programs of sorts, intended to ameliorate problems of dietary disease in their ailing communities. In this sense, I would be surprised if the long-term outcome of SGCPs turned out to be a group of students viscerally committed to individual gain and anti-socialist sentiment.

Indeed, a visceral analysis of localism does not suggest that a turn towards neoliberalism is inevitable. There are many different ways to ‘access’ the local in visceral terms, and certainly not all of these ways are attached to an embodied commitment to the free market. To not recognize and/or allow for other potentialities is, I fear, to reify neoliberalism as “monolithic and unstoppable” (Blomley 2007, 187). In light of the myriad reasons (war, slavery, the prison system) why a deeply felt distrust of the government is totally reasonable for many teachers, students and families in my case studies, I argue that it is counterproductive to suggest that a turn away from the state necessarily indicates a turn towards neoliberalism in either ideology or bodily (re)action. The suggestion that localism necessarily perpetuates a withdrawal of government support assumes that there is one central government that everybody finds (feels to be) equally legitimate. It is worth noting that anarchist politics (to which many alternative food activists subscribe) are predicated on the assumption that local community *is* the rightful government, and thus that programs of mutual aid (Kropotkin 1945) are in essence government-sponsored socialism from the ground up. In this light, while Pudup (2008) seems to dismiss the ESY’s focus on the theme of systems (or relational) thinking, a focus on local community and ecology within SGCPs could alternatively be read (and/or *experienced*) as a way to further the ideals of collective work and social responsibility, as opposed to individual gain. Indeed, I do believe that this is the (visceral) lesson that many activists and teachers intend to put forth.

However, while anarchist principals seem to pervade many local food activist circles (at least in my fieldwork and personal experiences), anarchism is not the only place where we can find an embodied and historical distrust of centralized government, and thus not the only way that students, teachers, or parents may ‘access’ the local (in food-based terms). In the Bay Area, for example, there is a long history of DIY initiatives that include the Black Panther Party’s “Universal Breakfast Program” (Levine 2008), a program predicated on both a deep-seated distrust of the US government’s ability to adequately provide for the African American population, and on a hope for an alternative governing body that would truly empower the black community in ways that would further their ability to self-determine. As my fieldwork and interviews revealed, this and other examples of food-based activism among people of color (e.g. People’s Grocery, see
peoplesgrocery.org) have provided strong motivation for the development of SGCPs, urban gardens, and other healthy food initiatives in the area. With this history, SGCP advocates and academic critics alike would do well to consider that the experience or appeal of DIY initiatives and local control may feel different for students of color than it does for white students, or white program leaders like Alice Waters. Indeed, my interviews with black SGCP teachers and activists revealed a sense of collective black empowerment:

“I feel good about being a brown skin women among brown skin children, so that I can show them [eating fresh produce] isn’t just something that white people do, because sometimes that is how they feel. But, I share the same history with them, the same racisms.” (Teacher, CA)

As my interactions with several groups of black students also revealed, learning how to grow or cook their own produce was attractive in the sense that it widened the possibilities of where or how they could get food in the future, thereby empowering them individually and collectively (a point I come back to in the chapters that follow). While white students expressed interest in gardening and cooking in my interviews, few expressly agreed with the black students that the SGCP programs were empowering to them. At the same time, however, while many black students elected to attend SGCP classes because of interest in cooking and gardening, some black students also expressed their distrust of the school board (and by extension the government as a whole) for perpetuating white hierarchy at all times:

“I don’t think that they are racist, like they don’t like black people, I just think that since most of the people in the school district are white, and white rules everything [in this country], it’s gonna be white food.” (Student, CA)

In this sense, while the experiences of black students in SGCP classrooms were certainly mixed, it would be inaccurate for me to assume that the discourse of localism necessarily reveals a comfort with government rollback that is along the lines of neoliberal governance. Beyond discounting the work that many white and non-white teachers/activists contribute in an effort to dismantle the inequitable capitalist system, this assumption ultimately suggests that the students especially have no agency within SGCP classrooms, and that what they ‘bring to the table’ (i.e. racial identity or a distrust of Corporate America) is not significant enough to consider or discuss in academic argumentation.

This leads me to the third concern of neoliberal critics – that of neoliberal subject formation. Of course, I too am worried about the assimilationist/imperialist tendencies of SGCPs, and about the ways that alternative food knowledge is promoted as ‘naturally’ correct. Keeping with my interest in motivation, I take serious the notion that SGCPs may be compelling students to fall in line with neoliberal principles and practices. In my understanding, this is certainly a potential outcome of SGCPs. Yet, I also want to take seriously the agency of students themselves within the potentially neoliberal spaces of SGCPs. As Guthman (2008) importantly notes, “What has yet to be said is that such
Attempts at subject formation say more about the subjectivities of those doing the
proselytizing than those being subjected to it.” Certainly this is because those ‘subjected’
to SGCPs are not pawns of Alice Waters’ ideology, nor of the neoliberal system, but are
instead active agents in the production of ideas, food, and relationships within SCGPs. In
this sense, to not recognize that there is more to the story than the (strategic) discourse of
alternative food is to deny the capacity of (the) diverse student body/ies of SGCPs to
intellectually re-make and materially re-practice alternative food.

In regard to neoliberal governmentality, Pudup (2008) is particularly concerned with the
scriptedness of the ESY program, viewing it as limiting to students own abilities to self-
determine, and as countering to the promotion of diversity in the classroom. Undoubtedly
it is important to look at such pedagogical strategies, and to interrogate such outcomes (as
I do in Chapter 6). Yet in my experiences within SGCPs, the outcomes of such ‘scripted’
lessons are far from fixed. Students bring to the SGCP classrooms a varied array of ideas
and experiences that, according to the description of one SGCP teacher below, have led
to a variety of different outcomes:

“You’ve got kids in there who are cooking for their siblings already. And this is
giving them tools to make new recipes and new job skills too. For some kids this
could be a career path. And other kids just need the socialization and other kids
are just hungry.” (Teacher, CA)

These examples compel me to ask, do SGCPs “instill a [particular] logic of choice?”
(Guthman 2008), or rather, do they widen the imaginary potential for students to think
and act beyond/in the absence of choice? While it is undoubtedly important to consider
how SGCPs might influence students’ behaviors in ways that perpetuate neoliberal
subject formation, it is also equally important to consider how students themselves may
be capable of producing different outcomes through disruption, resistance, or reformation
of the SGCP’s ideals. Although ESY lessons are well-scripted, the (equally) scripted
lessons that I observed in my own case studies did not necessarily preclude students’ own
embodied agency – their own ability to participate in the formation of their subjectivity.
In fact, as I explore in Chapter 6, the repetition of scripts in my case studies sometimes
lent students a (visceral) access to alternative food that they otherwise (in our uneven,
capitalist food system) would not have been able to experience. In this sense, the scripts
themselves are not any more or less capable of actually producing conditions of
neoliberal governmentality, but may in fact be somewhat disruptive of the conditions of
neoliberalism.

Ultimately, to answer the question of what these scripts (or any other disciplinary
technologies) do, we need to look carefully at how they are taken up by students in the
actual lived spaces of the SGCP classrooms, and in the home experiences that follow
such scripted activities (a topic that I address in more detail in Chapter 4). In my
fieldwork, I witnessed students using scripted recipes to dialogue with their peers about
how they might alter the ingredient requirements in order to use them at home. And I
witnessed students engaging in structured games that led to fantastically creative
products:
“Creativity seems to emerge during the iron chef event, how they set the tables, come up with plates for judges...a table of boys did some amazing things with a mango, cut it up in the shape of a pineapple, very artsy.” (Teacher, CA)

As such experiences of creativity and alteration suggest, SGCP students undoubtedly do more in SGCP classrooms than embody the (potentially neoliberal) rules of leaders and advocates. Furthermore, while there is undoubtedly and perhaps necessarily some amount of disciplinary force within SGCP rules and activities, as Shilling (2004) suggests, the body has in fact always been part of a school education in such disciplinary ways, but these processes have not always been so obvious (as they often are in hands-on classrooms). In this sense, I ask, is it not equally possible that the scripting of SGCPs curriculum can help to address rather than ignore the governing and use of school spaces as neoliberal (as in, for example, the space of the school cafeteria)? Is ‘discipline’ always a negative force, or can it be something positive? What if, for example, ‘freedom’ were built into the lesson plan? As one SGCP teacher explained to me of her daily mode of operating in the kitchen classroom:

“I like to give the kids more freedom. It is a challenge having the kids use knives and so on. We negotiate and try it out, but its fun. The kids have a wonderful time. It’s a kid-driven program in my mind.” (Teacher, NS)

This teacher’s intentions and plans do not seem to be driven by a desire to limit the capacity of students to be involved in their own subject formation. Not only do students have the ability to take up these rules and recreate them or ‘play’ with them in ways that disrupt social norms and hierarchies (as in Tsing 1993), but it is also entirely possible that the disciplinary practices that the students are ‘subjected to’ can themselves be potentially freeing (McWhorter 1999). Certainly the notion that “discipline makes things easier” is not just a neoliberal script, but also an assertion voiced by many socialist and radical activists (Dead Prez 2000). Discipline exists within SGCP, to be sure, but we need to ask discipline towards what (potential) material ends? In the chapters that follow, I hope to offer a more hybrid and specific answer to this question than neoliberal critics have thus far allowed.

In closing this chapter, I want to return to Kloppenburg’s and Hassanein’s (2006) question “where’s the beef?” While the authors ask this question in order to suggest a lack of empirical evidence at large in regard to critiques of alternative food activism, I want to use it to put forth an even deeper, meatier agenda: that of a more visceral geography of alternative food. In visceral terms, to ask ‘where’s the beef’ is to ask about the diverse bodily experiences that weave in and out of SGCPs programs, defining them and recreating them anew. It is to ask simultaneously about the structural politics that make meat more prevalent in some areas, and about the rhizomatic ecologies that can lend access to veggie alternatives. It is to inquire also about the different socio-biological experiences of eating within a meatless classroom, and then a meat-filled house. And it is to listen to students who tell diverse and contradictory stories about their own
relationship to meat and vegetables, and about the relative meatiness of their own physical bodies. In the next chapter, I explore how this meaty inquiry has been influenced by my own doing of PEB as both a research practice and an ongoing analytical process.
Chapter 3: Visceral Methods

This chapter is meant to explain the methodologies and methods of my dissertation research on SGCPs. It serves as a link between Chapter 2, which explained my Political Ecology of the Body (PEB) framework, and the empirical subjects of the remaining chapters: Food Knowledge, Food Identity, and Food Pedagogy. After addressing how PEB functions as the guiding methodology of this research, I move toward my empirical evidence by first describing the particular methods through which I set about gaining knowledge and insights into SGCPs, and then by explaining how the data that emerged from these methods can speak to my overall research questions. Over the course of the chapter, I offer various examples of the different kinds of data that my research methods produced, explaining in each instance how I draw upon and analyze this type of data in answering my research questions.

Introduction

“…relationality is where knowledge is created, mediated, and ruptured, presenting itself for future relational events” (Springgay 2008, 31)

“We need to question the all-too-common assumption that there is one researcher, with an unchanging and knowable identity, and one project, with a singular unwavering aim” (Crang 2002, 652)

Doing research on visceral matters is not exactly a straightforward process. After all, if the data you seek to ‘collect’ are ultimately “non-cognitive, and in large part nonverbal, how can they be included in your research?” (Latham 2003). Though qualitative methods have gained considerable ground in geographic and social scientific research in the past decades, and have been increasingly acknowledged as acceptable ‘scientific’ practice, qualitative research on/with the body now threatens to push the established boundaries of academic inquiry even further (Crang 2002). Nigel Thrift (2000), for example, laments the wedgedness of qualitative researchers to traditional ethnographic procedures (interviews and observation), and calls for much more creativity in research method if we are to broaden the range of sensate life we register (Latham 2003). Others propose that it is not so much the methods we choose, but what and why we assume that we are ‘collecting’ that needs to change. Gail Davies and Claire Dwyer (2007) argue for a rejection of the idea that the purpose of social science research is to generate clarity and precision, or to reduce uncertainty and ambiguity, suggesting that we need to revise our understandings of what social science research actually achieves (258). Along these lines, Mike Crang (2005) notes that “qualitative research, despite talking about the body and emotions, frames its enterprise in a particular way that tends to disallow other forms of [emotional and bodied] knowledge” (230). In many ways, research on visceral matters requires that we approach our traditional research method/ologies with a new sense of dynamic, creative practice (Latham 2003).

But this is only half the matter of researching the visceral, for such research is not just on bodies but ultimately with bodies as well. As researchers we are motivated viscerally to
engage in the work that we do (Bennett 2004). We go into the ‘field’ already with a particular emotional attachment to our work – a visceral understanding of why it is important to do what we do. And we do our research with and through our emotionally articulated bodies, negotiating our way through various ‘field’ experiences and (re)acting to the different events and people that we encounter. For example, researchers trained in feminist methodologies that seek to disrupt hierarchy in the research relationship (Naples 2003) often feel responsibility towards our research participants, and empathy toward those in oppressed positions. We also can experience outrage, anger, hostility, or disgust if our research participants are engaged in oppressive acts, and thus we can have a sense of confusion over what to do or how to act towards such persons in light of such feminist training (Kezar 2003). In these ways and many others, we use our (always minded, developmental) bodies as “instruments of research,” and yet we rarely reflect upon how exactly we do this, or upon how this affects our data ‘collection,’ our ‘findings,’ and our subsequent ‘analysis’ (Crang 2003, Longhurst et al 2008).

This chapter reflects upon what it meant for me to do visceral research within the context of SGCPs. Over the course of my ‘fieldwork’ experience, I came to understand this research, like the (un)motivated bodies that I wanted to ‘get to know,’ as ultimately relational in nature. As the opening quote by Stephanie Springgay suggests, it is in the relation between people/bodies/or things that knowledge is both created and disrupted. In this sense, the process of ‘getting to know bodies’ in my research necessarily included my own (motivated) body, and it was through the interactions that I had with other-bodies that I came to really ‘know’ anything at all. This, of course, dramatically calls into question notions of ‘scientific objectivity,’ in which the collector of data is meant to remain distant from the objects of his research (a critique that feminist researchers have been advancing for years; Haraway 1988). And yet it also does much more than this. It also calls into question how and why we (come to) know, as well as what we can (rightfully) say that we know, during the course of a research endeavor. Research on/with bodies within SGCPs demanded that I research as a practice of daily life – that I not separate what I was ‘looking for’ from what I was living and doing. While I did engage in traditional ethnographic methods, including interviews and participant observation, I did not divide these research moments from other developmental moments of my physical and emotional life. What’s more, I came to accept and enjoy, rather than explain away, the complexities and contradictions of this daily research life, seeking in the end not a single unified picture of SGCPs but rather partial descriptions of the actual, as well as partial suggestions of the possible.

The remainder of the chapter proceeds as follows. First, I explain how the Political Ecology of the Body (PEB) framework of this project informed my research methodology. Although in the previous two chapters I have already explained much about my broader epistemological and ontological approach, I mean this section as a way to address how – in responding to the above calls to reframe the purpose of social science research – PEB offers a different sort of guideline for how to evaluate SGCPs than the (largely quantitative and positivistic) ones that are currently utilized. In the remaining sections that follow this first one, I then move through discussions of four different

24 A questionable concept, with fuzzy boundaries between ‘the field’ and ‘the ivory tower’
research methods that I used for this work: what I call Cooking & Gardening With, Talking With, Researching With, and Living With. The first and second of these sections address two fairly traditional research approaches – participant observation and interviewing, while the third and fourth branch into perhaps more creative (or mundane) avenues of investigation – participatory classroom activities and daily lived interactions outside of SGCP classrooms. In the last method, living with, I particularly explain how this SGCP research fit into the context of a larger life in Nova Scotia and Berkeley, including making friends, being invited to parties, traveling with my sister, and shopping for food.

PEB as Methodology

Beyond the discussions of neoliberalism and food politics within geography and related disciplines, much of the research intended to evaluate healthy eating/alternative food initiatives like SGCPs currently rely on methods of assessment that ultimately frame the success or failure of the programs in terms of their ability to produce a fixed set of results (Veuglers and Fitzgerald 2005, Morris et al 2002, Morris and Zidenberg-Cherr 2002). For example, Morris and Zidenberg-Cherr (2002) wanted to test whether or not nutrition lessons combined with planting and harvesting would increase students’ willingness to try new vegetables. They used questionnaires to assess students’ knowledge of nutrition, and also a vegetable preference survey (which involved sampling 6 different vegetables) to evaluate students’ openness to new foods. Their results suggest that “exposure to the [gardening and nutrition] curriculum improved students’ preferences for several vegetables…[and that] most of these improvements were retained six months after the completion of the lesson” (2002, 93; emphasis added). While this type of research is helpful for understanding general trends in students’ food habits in relation to SGCP-like initiatives, and while the results ultimately indicate that garden experiences do affect some sort of change, such studies are predicated on the dubious assumptions that there is one right way to know food, and that this way of knowing food is both fully testable and knowable by ‘external’ researcher(s). These assumptions, and the methods that they invoke, are not respectful of the social practices and the political contexts through which everyday life practices, like eating, actually unfold (Latham 2003).

As Chapter 2 describes, PEB research begins with a different set of assumptions. First, PEB research demands that we look at the broader context through which food preferences develop, and out of which food ‘choices’ are made. This means both that we have to be aware of the different experiences and connections that students bring into SGCP eating events, and that we must consider how issues of access (in a networked, visceral sense) can affect the potential impacts of any ‘healthy’ food experience (and thus the overall ‘success’ of the program). A preference survey or standardized questionnaire does not allow for such depth. Second, PEB demands that we understand eating as relational activity, bound up in the rhizomatic and often quite haphazard unfolding of daily life. Seemingly mundane or chance interactions with peers, teachers, and (even) researchers thus literally matter, and cannot/should not be ‘controlled for’ or written out of food studies as many nutrition/health researchers attempt to do (e.g. Perez-Rodrigo and
Aranceta 2001). Third, PEB recognizes that we must consider how knowledge about what foods are ‘good’ to eat, or what behaviors are said to constitute an ‘improvement’ are not in fact Truths from which we can assess SGCP achievements but rather socio-biological constructions that themselves require assessment. Thus, evaluating the ‘success’ of SGCPs cannot involve pre-determined tools of appraisal like multi-choice questionnaires or tastings of particular food but rather must be accomplished as a situated, co-creative, and dynamic process of reflection and (re)action by the participants themselves (students, parents, teachers, and whole communities). Indeed, the researcher alone cannot effectively evaluate improvement or success.

It is important to point out that the shortcomings that are redressed in the above paragraph through a PEB approach are not limited to quantitative analyses of eating events. In fact, Latham (2003) has put forth a very similar critique of ethnographic research—arguing that qualitative researchers too need to do a better job of respecting the social practices through which everyday life occurs. Latham’s call is worth reviewing at length because of how similar it is to a PEB methodology. His also has three parts: First, he says, we “must recognize that much social practice is different (but certainly not inferior) to the more contemplative academic modes of being in the world.” This means that as ethnographic researchers, we cannot expect our observations of material life to fall neatly into the discursive categories through which we seek to explain it, and neither can we expect our interviewees to readily articulate or reflect on their own life practices through such practical and cognitive means. Second, Latham suggests that our research “must contain a sense that practices (and thus subjectivities and agencies of which they are a part) are shot through with creativity and possibility (even though these are ‘constrained’ and limited by existing networks of association.)” In other words, we must recognize that there is a latent, material agency in all socio-biological interrelationships that exudes potentiality even as it is constrained by the structured tendencies of our uneven world. And last, Latham suggests that, “the everyday should not be viewed as a world apart from the more rationally grounded realms of social action such as ‘the state’, ‘the economic,’ ‘the political,’ or whatever.” In this sense, we also need to understand everyday practices like eating as processes in and through which broader political economic forces take shape and are constituted (as in Probyn 2001).

While the specific language of our methodological frames differ, both Latham’s call and my PEB framework revolve around the same three central axes of analysis: the production of knowledge, the structure of power/hierarchy, and the un-structured ontology of lived experience/social practice. My three main research questions are also meant to address these axes:

- How do SGCPs reinforce or resist notions of expert knowledge in regard to what (and who) constitutes ‘healthy’ ‘alternative’ food?
- In what ways do SGCPs heighten or disrupt current patterns of geographic, economic, and cultural availability of fresh fruits and vegetables?

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25 I was introduced to Latham’s (2003) approach after developing the PEB methodology
• Through what means do SGCPs provide students with opportunities to reify or reconfigure the boundaries of social identity and social practice?

Of course, while the above questions address knowledge production, structural forces, and rhizomatic ontology (in this order), it is also important to note that each question itself contains the potential for both fixity and fluidity, and no line of inquiry on its own is complete without being complicated by the other two. In this way, the PEB methodology that I use for this SGCP research represents a “rejection of singularity” as the objective of social science research (Davies and Dwyer 2007), and while it does not fully denounce the social science work of delineating tendencies or trends, it pushes this work towards addressing the realities of “everyday social practice in the articulation of these tendencies” (Latham 2003). The outcome or findings of PEB questioning therefore do not accomplish what typical social science research seeks or claims to accomplish: that is, a unified, logical distillation of the phenomenon at hand that is confirmable (by triangulation) and replicable (by future researchers). Instead, these questions have allowed me to pull together a description that is, like many feminists and qualitative researchers admit (Haraway 1998; Tsing 1993; Naples 2003), both partial and situated in the moment(s) of my research.

Yet my research also goes further than this. Although my ‘findings’ say more about the contradictions and complexities of specific events of visceral relating than they do about how we can predict specific visceral (re)actions or generalize about visceral trends of (re)acting, they are accounts that are infused with a sort of “fidelity to what they describe” (Latham 2003). Following a core of human geographers whose research takes on a practiced/performative approach (Latham and Conradson 2003; Thrift 2000; Dewsbury 2005), I see description as allowing for a more subtle and loyal interpretation or imagining of how everyday life practices like eating actually unfold. In describing such practices, however, I do not want to imply an interest only in the intimate and the personal (Latham 2003). And indeed, I do not see descriptions themselves as enough, or as being already in themselves political. Instead, I want to use such descriptive imagining to illustrate the need to allow the complex and contradictory visceral realities of everyday life to imbue our politics, inform our policies, and (re)invent our pedagogies. It is in this way that such description can ‘go beyond’ the limited case-study boundaries of being ‘moments-in-time-and-space’ and become something that, as we viscerally (re)imagine and (re)practice, can effect other political moments and mobilizations. It is also in this way that the expert based knowing that is so typical of most research projects can become replaced with a diverse set of knowledges that do not privilege one way of (scientific, intellectual) knowing as the right way.

In this sense, I draw from a line of research ideas and practices that have urged us to study or research “with” (Pratt 2005, Sundberg 2005), whereby a researcher’s “objects of study” become instead “speaking subjects” whose words and ideas are central to the

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26 Throughout the three empirical chapters that follow this chapter, I offer periodic suggestions of how this leap from description to (visceral) mobilization might happen, and I discuss this process in greater depth at the end of Chapter 6, in my conclusions, and in the Afterword/Guidelines.
production of research knowledge and thus can directly effect social change (Sundberg 2005, 271). I also draw from researchers like Anderson (2005) and Springgay (2008) who take this task of “researching with” into the affective or visceral realm, insisting that speaking is just one means by which bodies and minds come to know and communicate knowledge. In this sense, the task of “researching with” also requires a certain attention to the affective processes of interaction between material bodies (including those of researcher and researched), recognizing that “listening with” (Anderson 2005) or “being with” (Springgay 2008) always involves more than linguistic communication, and thus that knowledge production in a research endeavor always involves more than cognitive thought. As Anderson’s work illustrates, researching “with” as a visceral method is therefore also a means by which a researcher and his/her research participants may begin to collectively experience, discuss, and make sense of visceral reactions; in researching with, we can begin to understand the ways in which our visceral judgments (in regard to food, music, ideas, etc) are variously articulated through the material networks in which we are embedded. In so doing, we may also begin to relationally explore and feel out other ways of being/feeling.

**Gardening and Cooking With**

The first method that I want to discuss in relation to my SGCP research is participant observation, or what I came to call a relational activity of ‘gardening and cooking with.’ This activity was ongoing during my 3 months at each research site, as well as my one-week initial visits to the schools, and involved participation in both gardening and cooking events, sometimes culminating in eating food with others. I recorded these events in a field journal, often jotting down notes during the events themselves, and then recalling and rewriting them in greater detail later in the evening. I also carried a tape recorder with me, into which I sometimes spoke verbal memos. All of these journal entries and memos were transcribed, reviewed for thematic patterns, and coded with labels that spoke to my three main axes of questioning: expert knowledge, peer knowledge, knowledge as power, economic inequity, geographic distance, racial boundaries, gender roles, class culture, pedagogical rigidity and redundancy, and flexibility/play in the classroom. Notably absent from this list are the perhaps more obvious themes of alternative food initiatives, including bodily health, environmental sustainability, and community development. These themes are not absent from this data but rather are reframed through the use of these other labels in a way that allows me to explore important and unanswered questions about alternative food: e.g. how knowledge about healthy eating is produced, who identifies with different types of local and non-local food products, and what practices and pedagogies affect change at the community level and beyond.

*Plainville School, Nova Scotia*

The specifics of gardening and cooking with at each school site differed in some important ways, but the overall tasks were similar at each school site (see Figure 7). Participant observation at Plainville School in Nova Scotia ran from the beginning of July 2007 to the beginning of October 2007. Although Plainville School was not in session
until the end of August, the garden was alive with both people and plants when I arrived in July. Part of the reason for arriving in July was to experience the garden during the height of the growing season in Nova Scotia (see Figure 6), where, unlike California, planting and harvesting is limited to the warmer months of the year. For most of the months of July and August, I was engaged in weeding, thinning, and eventually harvesting the produce from the garden. In fact, for this time I was the primary caretaker of the garden – as was arranged by the head of the SGCP program. In the beginning, I spent many days tackling the overgrowth of weeds that had accumulated prior to my arrival, and getting used to the no-see-em’s, mosquitoes, and other pesky insects that buzzed in my ears and bit my arms and legs. In the garden grew potatoes, tomatoes, cucumbers, zucchini, green peas, pumpkins, peppers, corn, carrots, lettuce, and a variety of herbs: basil, dill, and coriander.

Figure 6: The Plainville School garden in July

These initial days and weeks were in many ways primarily physical – involving little cognitive analysis or intellectual discussion and much body power. My journal entries reflect this, commenting on “the huge mound of dirt that is covered with lambs quarters and those deep set vines” (Field Notes July 2007). However, as I came to find my routine in the garden (and as the weeds became increasingly under control), I started to recognize how my minded body moved through the garden, experiencing it in ways that were relationally my own. For example, I recognized that my most physical days of sweat and toil in the garden were somehow comforting to me – comforting both because they relieved a sense of guilt that I had been carrying with me, worried about my inability to ‘give back’ to the communities I studied, and comforting also because in the frustration and exertion of tending to the garden, I came to partially comprehend what my researcher-mind was grasping to know – how the garden might be experienced as simultaneously exciting and mundane, energizing and depleting. As the summer rolled along, I came to appreciate the various opportunities that the garden afforded me (finding creative ways to prepare a never ending over-supply of zucchini, or swapping stories with other Nova Scotia gardeners about the struggles and joys of tending a garden).
Though much of my initial relating in Nova Scotia was between the plants and me, while tending the garden over the course of the summer, I also ended up interacting with a number of people. The school ran a summer program, for example, so kids were frequently playing in or around the garden area, and occasionally, as the produce was ready to pick, harvesting zucchini or tomatoes to bring home or to eat on the spot. There was also a vandalizing incident, in which the shed door (always locked when I was not around) was pelted and smeared with green tomatoes. Parents and teachers also frequently walked by the garden, striking up conversations with the researcher ‘from away,’ or (more commonly) agreeably answering my questions as I pestered them for information or interviewing opportunities. As the summer rolled on and the school semester began, my duties changed from gardener to cooking-assistant, and most of my time was spent in the school kitchen, where 6th grade students, in groups of 3-4 at a time, would be pulled out of their regular class activities for a week in order to cooperatively run the school lunch program. I would accompany students out to the garden where we would harvest potatoes, green beans, or whatever the recipe of the day called for. We would wash, chop, and cook the vegetables, adding them to other store-bought items in order to make soups, spaghetti sauce, pizza, or roasted potato wedges. Sometimes we sampled along the way, as we were urged to do by the main kitchen staff person, Ms. Dora.

We cooked to fill school lunch orders, which were collected at the beginning of each week, amounting to about a third of the total school population. (The rest brought their own lunch, as is typical in many Canadian schools, since unlike the US, Canada does not have a national tradition of government-subsidized school lunches). Any students who forgot lunch, or did not have lunch (whether for financial or other reasons) were always given something to eat by Ms. Dora. Teachers often ordered lunch too, and received bigger ‘adult-sized’ portions (I was included in this group). When the meals were ready, the students and I would deliver the food to each classroom, since there was not a central cafeteria. Then, we would return to the kitchen and eat our own food – either what we brought, or what was cooked (depending on if we ordered it or not) – negotiating over who sat on the three kitchen stools, and who had to stand to eat. After doing dishes (a generally unfavored activity), the students would go outside for recess, and I would sit down to write up the day’s events in my journal. For me, the school day was over by around 1:30 – the students went back to their classes, and I went on to other activities, or home to rest and reflect.
& harvest, informal play kept to minimum for 90 minutes. 7th and 8th graders take cooking and gardening (both) as an elective

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Kitchen</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Staff Involvement</strong></td>
<td>Dora (kitchen staff) coordinates school lunches &amp; purchasing of food not grown</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Community Involvement</strong></td>
<td>A chef volunteer times to do special cooking activities with students</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Student Involvement</strong></td>
<td>6th graders cycle through in groups of 3-4 for week long cooking responsibilities (each group does this about 4 times)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Two cooking teachers coordinate cooking classes with the assistance of a homeroom teacher</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Various volunteers or student interns occasionally visit and/or help to coordinate cooking classroom</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6th graders take cooking as required class, every other week for 90 minutes. 7th and 8th graders take cooking and gardening (both) as a bi-weekly elective</td>
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<tr>
<th>Eating</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Staff Involvement</strong></td>
<td>Staff often eat the school lunches informally in the kitchen, standing and chatting to each other</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Community Involvement</strong></td>
<td>Parents, politicians, and other community members are occasionally invited to eat a meal with the students</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Student Involvement</strong></td>
<td>Students will eat the school lunches if they ordered them, or sometimes as a sample while cooking</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teachers eat the prepared foods with students, sitting around a table together</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Occasionally visitors and student interns will eat with the students if present during eating time</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Students end the cooking class by setting the table and collectively eating together, talking and sharing stories</td>
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<th>Cleaning</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Staff Involvement</strong></td>
<td>Kitchen staff (Dora) coordinates students cleaning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Community Involvement</strong></td>
<td>Community members or visitors typically do not help clean</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Student Involvement</strong></td>
<td>Students are expected to clean and put away all dishes prior to leaving for recess</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Staff is left to clean what students don’t get to when the bell rings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Community members or visitors typically do not help clean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Students are expected to clean and put away all dishes prior to leaving the classroom</td>
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**Figure 7: Daily functioning of Nova Scotia and California SGCPs**

*Central School, California*
Participant observation in Central School in Berkeley, California took a somewhat different form. I arrived at the school in October, over a month into the school year. Because the school was much bigger than Plainville school, and the students could not be actively involved in producing school lunches for the entire student population, the purpose of the school garden and kitchen was instead to teach students how to grow and cook healthy meals and snacks for themselves, which they would eat as a group at the end of their cooking class. This group snack was in addition to anything they might have during their lunch period, although often what was cooked in cooking class and what was served at lunch were similar recipes. Thus, the lunch program was connected to the SGCP classes, and the food served in the lunch room was seen as providing a complement to what students were learning in their cooking and gardening classes.
My primary role in the school was that of a volunteer in the cooking and gardening classes (a role for which I had attended a workshop on volunteering in the Berkeley Unified School District, BUSD). I developed a rapport with one of the cooking teachers right away, Tiffany, who was young and (like me) interested in holistic nutrition and medicine. Tiffany invited me to sit at her table during cooking class, and I gladly accepted. I spent the first days and weeks glued to her table, letting the daily routine of the cooking room sink in (see Figure 8). Eventually, I began to float to other tables in the cooking room (there were three in total), interacting with the other (head) cooking teacher, Sally, as well as the various homeroom teachers that would accompany their students to cooking class. Most of my focus, however, was in interacting with the students themselves. I would help the students with whatever they seemed to need, but my tasks seemed to frequently involve taking over the chopping of onions when their eyes became red with tears, as well as cleaning up after them when they (conveniently) ran out of time.

There were two groups of students that would circulate into the cooking classroom: the 6th graders, who took (separately) ‘cooking’ and ‘gardening’ as weekly required 90-minute classes, and the 7th & 8th graders, who elected (or were elected into) ‘cooking and gardening’ as a 90-minute, bi-weekly class. The 7th and 8th grade students were the ones who I got to know most, as they were in the cooking classroom more frequently. By the end of three months, I knew all of them by name, and knew some of their life stories in depth (I interviewed about a third of them). At each 7th and 8th class meeting, one of the three tables of 7th and 8th graders would be pulled (sometimes with tired groans and complaints about the weather) out into the garden, for 60 minutes of garden activities, after which they would return to the kitchen classroom to eat with the other students. About half of the time when a table was pulled out, I would accompany the students outside into the garden. This decision depended on where my volunteer labor seemed to be needed most, or sometimes where it seemed I would get in the way least.

The garden was a larger space than the Nova Scotia garden, and we grew a lot more variety. We had some vegetables that one might expect: different types of tomatoes,
green beans, lettuce, radishes, and peppers, garlic, kale, collard greens and summer squash. We also had some more unusual items: lemon cucumbers (small round spiny cucumbers that have a lemon taste), and figs (which were harvested very occasionally). Harvesting rules were a bit more relaxed than in Nova Scotia, and students frequently came out to the garden to pick and eat tomatoes, radishes or cucumbers during their lunch break (maybe due to the fact that Central School was a middle school, and unlike Plainville, did not have young children who might need supervision in the garden). There were several different areas in the garden for sitting and relaxing, including a colorful bench. The Central School garden also had a chicken coop, with chickens that all had names and eggs that we would use in the kitchen.

I felt less comfortable in the garden than in the kitchen of Central School, particularly because it was less clear what I could do to help. It is not that I did not know how to garden (for I have been gardening for many years), but I was not in control of this garden, as I was in Nova Scotia, and I didn’t know its rules of operation. The cooking room at Central School appealed to me more because I felt like I could figure out how to fit in and what to do in order to be of use; in the Central School garden, it was unclear how I fit and what exactly I could do. There were many awkward moments in the garden. Like the students, I would stand around and wait for a prompt from the garden staff—a staff of three including one full time employee, and two Americorps volunteers. We forked beds, pulled weeds, sifted compost, planted cover crop, harvested produce, and sometimes played games like garden jeopardy. If I didn’t know what to do, I got a shovel or a rake and made it look like I was doing something. At the end of the class period, I would return with the students to the cooking room to sit and eat with the students. The garden staff usually remained behind in the garden, and often did not eat with us.

**Ontological Messiness**

In the process of ‘gardening and cooking with’ in Nova Scotia and Berkeley I interacted with a lot of different bodies. These bodies were not only human bodies—students, teachers, and volunteers—but non-human bodies—insects, weeds, shovels, rakes, and a variety of different raw and prepared foods. I related to these bodies, and they related to each other, in and through a variety of verbal and non-verbal forms of interaction—telling stories, sensing and describing sensation, smiling, resting, sharing tasks, asking questions, digesting, appearing unsure, slouching, feeling annoyed, being hungry, following orders, etc. All of these forms of interaction made me aware of the relationality of my own existence, as well as that of those around me. The data that I collected from these interactions describe such relationality with a sort of “fidelity” to ontological messiness (Latham 2003). They describe the randomness through which both chance and nonrandom factors/conditions come together in the lived experiences of SCGP programs. This fidelity is not to suggest that all forces or conditions are equally relevant or meaningful (as my interview data further specifies), but it is meant to emphasize the haphazard contexts in which eating decisions are made. For example, consider the following field journal entry from a day in Plainville’s SGCP:

<table>
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<th>Field Journal, Sept 2007 (NS)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Tina and Nick and Jim were in the kitchen with us, and the boys were really making a stink about the hairnets (taking them off whenever they could, and making a big deal</td>
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</table>
I quote my field notes at length here to give the reader a sense of both a typical day in a SGCP classroom, and also a typical field journal entry. In regard to how such an entry would speak to my research questions, there are a few points in this entry that stand out. The authority figure in this case is clearly Ms. Dora, and secondarily me (since Nick asked me for permission), but the mood of the kitchen overall did not reflect an authoritarian space or a strict set of rules; instead, it was easy-going and pragmatic, with everyone contributing and fun, informal interactions certainly ‘allowed.’ Tina, who often was most keen about eating whatever we cooked (partly because of the financial situation of her parents, and thus a lack of anything else to eat), today decided that she would eat something brought from home, because she didn’t care for tomatoes. Nick, the designated picky eater, was very put off by the idea of blending vegetables to hide them in the soup, and yet when I fixed a special bowl for him with only potatoes and carrots, he gladly tried some. There was a drama over hairnets between the boys, which Tina took no part in, though this was a fairly typical ritual in which many students engaged; hairnets were considered ‘dorky’ and carrying on about them perhaps a sign of ‘coolness,’ a hierarchy that Tina seemed to not want to be a part of. The dorkiness was most likely a result of various identity struggles that are repeated frequently in my data, including the association between hairnets and working-class food venues, and the gendered coding of hairnets as related particularly to women’s work in such basic food service jobs – i.e. the lunch lady. (The counter to these hairnets, costume wise, would perhaps be the chefs hat, which is often coded as both masculine and socially elite).

The point of such recounting, however, is not to try to explain the whys of particular actions: Tina’s lunch choice, the boy’s (re)action to hairnets, Nick’s acceptance of a bowl of potatoes. Rather, the point is to emphasize that because eating decisions are always made from within the haphazard but not fully random rhizome of life forces, the whys are
often as emergent as the what ifs. There are hierarchical structures that inform the above eating event, lending Nick an opportunity to get attention from an authority figure, and Tina a hungry belly with which to crave food. And yet there are disruptions and opportunities – a researcher in the room, a sense of hanging out, a wafting odor – that render particular outcomes uncertain and particular lessons unclear. While the whole event was conducted under the auspices of a ‘healthy’ lunch initiative, the complexities and contradictions of the (re)actions and behaviors also defy labeling.

**Talking With**

Beyond participant observation, interviewing was my primary means of data collection for this SGCP research. Similar to my participant observations, I want to frame my interview sessions as instances of ‘talking with,’ rather than one-way question and answer sessions. There are many reasons for this. First, my interviews ranged from semi-structured in some cases to open ended in others. I often did not follow a specific interview script because I wanted to dialogue with people about what was important to them about food, rather than allowing my interests and concerns to dominate the discussion. This follows from my desire to undo nutrition intervention as a de-contextualized and universal practice. While most of my interviews were audio taped, many of the dialogues that I had with people were also accomplished as part of a broader and more social event – usually involving eating or drinking – in which questions and answers were interspersed with other activities. To be sure, this is not to say that there was no perceptible hierarchy in the interview relationships. Especially in my interviews with students, but also frequently with SGCP parents, my status as a ‘researcher’ carried with it an air of expertise that led many to assume (at least initially) that I was there to test their knowledge, rather than learn from them or with them. I tried to dispel this assumption through how I framed my questions and my research motivations over all (I want to understand what the experience is like for you), and also through how I conducted the interviews (offering information about my own life and motivations, sharing a meal or a snack, and inviting students to dialogue with their friends in addition to me). In particular, almost all of the interviews with students were group discussions, with food (not usually or all ‘healthy’) as a centerpiece. Even so, there were occasional moments where I needed to directly address this perceived ‘expert’ identity, such as when a student asked me during a group interview, before deciding between a donut and an apple slice [both food items that I had brought for the group]:

“Are you writing down what food we choose?” (Student, CA)
My response was: “No. I am not here to test you on your food choices.”
[She then took one of each]

Another reason why I want to consider my interviews as instances of ‘talking with’ is because in conducting interviews, I frequently shared with participants my own interpretations and analyses of SGCPs, and also my own theoretical background (i.e. my interest in issues of social difference and diversity, my worries about economic and cultural access, and even my attention to how visceral judgments are made). This two-
way interview style is similar (but perhaps not as theoretically revealing) to Geraldine Pratt’s project in *Working Feminism* (2005), a project where she engages her research participants in conversations about social theory as a practice of bringing theory to bear on the research process itself. It is also similar to the concept that an interview relationship can be a potentially transformational one (Kezar 2003), one in which the objective is not (only) to gather information, but to collectively produce new understandings that might directly impact both the ‘writing up’ of the research and also the matter of the research itself (in this case, the functioning of SGCPs). In this sense, I engaged my interviewees – all of them to some extent, but especially the teachers/volunteers and activist/leaders – in a process of collectively thinking through how SGCPs work, and also how they might work better (that is, in more progressive, non-hierarchical ways). While sometimes my interviewees (like Alice Waters’ comment below) simply did not want to ‘go there,’ other interviewees seemed grateful for the opportunity to work through the complexities and realities of SCGPs, rather than trying to distil to me their program’s (perhaps non-existent) essence. For example, compare the following interactions:

Interviewer (AHC27): “[What if we] begin with a knowledge that… some people might find pleasure in McDonalds…and some might find it in…farmer’s market produce, and sort of like bringing all of that to the table, sort of this is what we have to deal with, all of these you know, our bodies have habituated our relationships with food in this way that we’re getting pleasure in this way, and then working from there, you know?”

Alice Waters: “I am, again, not wanting to bring the McDonalds onto the table; I really want to just feed people these ideas by actually feeding them.” (Leader, CA)

Interviewer (JHC): “[Do you] think that would play into how [the SGCP] is experienced by kids? I mean, what if the Black Panthers were credited [for the Universal Breakfast Program] in a way that allowed this [SGCP] program to emerge from that historical precedent? Like Alice Waters versus the Black Panthers, I mean how might that change the way that kids are motivated?”

Volunteer: “I think that that leads to the critical thinking and self-identification. I mean many kids have a hard time to identify themselves with Alice Waters, or people like her, even if they don’t [know who she is]. Like Jose, he made this comment, like wow I could never do this like the Mexicans in the field. And so, how do you work from his awareness of the issue?” (Volunteer, CA)

While the first set of quotations shows an interview interaction that was largely unsuccessful in being ‘transformational’ in any sense, the latter illustrates one portion of an extensive dialogue that was productive and informative for both ‘researcher’ and ‘participant,’ and that potentially could lead to changes within the SGCP program.

27 Some interviews were conducted jointly with my sister and research partner, Allison Hayes-Conroy.
A third way that my interviews became instances of ‘talking with’ is through direct
attention to the visceral body, and moreover, to the relational connection between bodies.
In mean this in two ways. One, as I described in the introduction to this chapter, I was
aware of my own visceral reactions and motivational drives as I engaged in the research
process. This included often-conflicting feelings like guilt, anger, responsibility, worry,
and excitement in response to what others were saying to me (even over the course of one
interview). This also included sensing and responding to the various non-verbal cues of
others: shifting uncomfortably, changing the tone of ones voice, smiling, appearing bored
or animated, etc. I often took note of these visceral inter-actions in my field journal by
way of a comment on the overall ‘mood(s)’ of the interview. These relationally produced
visceral (re)actions are important in that they propelled me during interview process,
compelling me to dig further into certain questions when it seemed appropriate to do so,
or to back off and try a different approach if the dialogue was feeling unproductive. They
also motivated me in terms of whose opinions I sought out overall (e.g. wanting
to talk
with food activists in the broader community, parents from diverse backgrounds, student
voices). At various points in the chapters that follow, I directly discuss these visceral
moments in explaining how specific questions were asked and answered.

The second meaning of ‘direct attention’ to the visceral body is in the sense of an
intellectual attempt to bring discussions and theories of the body into the interview
discussion itself. It is in this sense that Anderson (2005) uses the term “Listening With,”
a method whereby he listens to music alongside his interviewees and engages them in
dialogue about the visceral sensations that drive and comprise the listening event.
Similarly, many of my own interviews involved attempts to directly ‘get at’ what SGCPs
felt like to the different people towards whom they were aimed to “touch” (Springgay
2008), especially students and parents. In other words, I questioned how certain
food/events were viscerally appealing/animating to some and repulsive/chilling to others.
It is important to note, however, that in following this line of questioning I quickly
became aware that I could not expect my interviewees to have coherent answers to these
questions, nor could I expect their answers to remain consistent over time. While this
was at first a frustrating experience, as Latham notes of his own dilemmas with
explaining social practice, making sense of why this line of questioning is particularly
difficult to interviewees is part of what it means to take the “flow of practice and its
complex embodied subjectivities seriously” (Latham 2003, 2000). In asking myself why
these questions seemed to put people (especially children) on the spot, and why I initally
expected my participants to be able to explain and make sense of their actions, I became
increasingly aware that it was the difficulty of articulation, and the shifting complexity of
the answers, that best explained what I wanted to know. With this realization, my
questioning shifted from ‘why’ questions (which seemed to take food out of context) to
‘how’ questions (which asked about specific events):

JHC: “What is your favorite thing you make?”
Student: “Um, pizza”
JHC: “Why do you like it?”
Student: “I don’t know, it just tastes good, I just like the taste.” (Student, NS)
JHC: “Would you make any changes to the program if you could?”
Student: “More meat, I mean not too much, just a little more, and less on the vegetables. I like pepperoni pizza, but we aren’t allowed to have it. Stuff at school is healthier than at home, like we like to eat chips at home.”
JHC: “How does it feel to have different food at school and home?”
Student: “Sometimes it feels weird because when I am cooking at home I go for stuff we have at school and we don’t have it at home, so I am like, what am I gonna put in this now?” (Student, CA)

Over the course of this SGCP research, I conducted interviews with 144 people: 63 in Nova Scotia, and 81 in the Bay Area of California (see Figure 9). I divide my interviewees into four general types, in regard to their association with SGCPs: Teacher/Volunteers, a largely female group who are engaged in the daily running of garden and/or kitchen classrooms, Parents/Guardians, a group of mostly mothers whose children attend SGCPs and who may or may not also engage in volunteer activities in the classrooms, Current/Former Students, a diverse group aged 11-14 who either are currently enrolled in a SGCP class or have been enrolled in the past 2 years (as of 2007), and Leaders/Activists, a diverse group who are engaged in either promoting and lending ideological influence to SGCP-type projects broadly (or the SGCP projects that I studied particularly) – these are the ‘leaders’ – or who are engaged in promoting/pushing the boundaries of alternative food in other ways (for example in ways that critique alternative food’s ‘whiteness’ or ‘eliteness,’ or that provide alternative food opportunities for more people) – these are the ‘activists.’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types</th>
<th>Nova Scotia</th>
<th>California</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teachers/Volunteers</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents/Guardians</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current/Former Students</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leaders/Activists</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 9: Number of interviews by type**

These interviews lasted anywhere from 15 minutes to 3 hours, though many fell in the range of 30-60 minutes. The interviews with students and parents were typically shorter due to time constraints (most were accomplished during or directly after school hours). Interviews with teachers/volunteers and leaders/activists were often longer. All interviews with students were either conducted in a peer group setting, or in connection to an interview with a parent. Many interviews were tape recorded and transcribed verbatim, but others were recorded through written notes either by myself or by a research partner (my sister). A few interviews with parents were conducted over the phone, when a suitable meeting time could not be found, and two interviews were conducted by way of a series of email exchanges between two parents and myself. All of the transcripts from these interviews were subsequently coded and analyzed using the same thematic labels that I used in analyzing my field journal notes. To distinguish between field notes and interviews, all large excerpts from field notes in this document
will be presented within a framed text box, and in an alternate font (short quotations will be denoted with a parenthetical note), while all interview data will be distinguished by “quotation marks” and followed by a label: e.g. (Teacher, CA). While I often avoid using names altogether (because the quantity of interviews would make names superfluous), any of the frequently repeated names that I do use within this document – with the exception of public figures – are pseudonyms. At times, I also deliberately change the wording of quotations so as to not reveal other potentially identifying information.

Overall, my interview data speak strongly to all three of my central research questions. Often within the course of one interview, my discussions with research participants would reveal stories about how food knowledge is produced, policed and reposited, how opportunities for interacting with and experiencing certain foods/events are distributed unevenly across the social terrain, and how engagement with food in SGCPs is an emergent and unpredictable process. For example, all three of the following quotations belong to one interview with three black students, two male and one female, from Central School. They are all from similar neighborhoods in Berkeley/Oakland, and all come from families with comparable economic means:

JHC: “What do you think the purpose of this [SGCP] is?”
Student: “They want us to learn how to eat good. You know how a bunch of kids will usually eat hot chips and stuff? And so they want us to make good decisions…the only thing is, yeah we eat food, like junk food, but we run it off, we run it all off.” (Student, Male, CA)

JHC: “Would you be upset if they stopped having a garden class?”
Student: “Well, I think [the garden] is nice because all the places I’ve moved, I ain’t never had a garden. We didn’t have space to plant stuff in my yard.” (Student, Female, CA)

JHC: “Did you enjoy yourself [in cooking class yesterday]?”
Student: “I liked getting my hands in the bowl, there were spices, and you had to mix them all up together, the potatoes with the spices, and some oil, my hands got all oily.” (Student, Male, CA)

In these quotations, the students communicate three different ways in which they experience the SGCP. In the first, the student is slightly hostile to the program, implying that it ultimately doesn’t matter what students eat, so long as they “run it all off.” His comments suggest that the imagined premise of SGCPs (“learning to eat good”) can reinforce pre-established categories of good food and bad food (hot chips falling into the latter category), as well as social expectations of body size (keeping the weight off). (Although neither of these can be said to emerge from SGCPs alone). In this first quotation, it is obvious that the experts are a “they,” and that this “they” does not include students. In the second quotation, the student offers a more favorable interpretation of the garden in particular (a space that many students disliked in relation to the kitchen). She implies that the SGCP helps her by giving her entry into a physical space that she otherwise would not have access to, either for economic reasons, or reasons of time or
family priority. In this sense, we might say that SCGPs help to disrupt structural tendencies of access (physical, but also eventually visceral, through the developing a new relationship) by giving disenfranchised students opportunities to relate to and form visceral associations (both positive and negative) with school gardens and with the produce that is harvested from them. In the third quotation, the student offers a description of a cooking activity that felt good to him. Notably, this description does not necessarily imply that he ate or enjoyed the food he was making, but rather that a number of different experiences and associations are formed through SGCP that go far beyond a simple ‘outcome’ of food choice. In this sense, and even as the programs are evaluated along more rigid and pre-determined lines (changes in food behavior), the SCGP events and spaces themselves allow students to relate to food in a variety of ways that push the boundaries of food-body relationships beyond the act of eating.

It is important to point out that my interviews with students, and also parents, teachers/volunteers, and leaders/activists, were filled with moments of contradictory feelings and perceptions of SCGP programs. This was true not only between different interviewees, but also in terms of the ideas and sensations expressed by each individual participant. In fact, the female student above who spoke favorably about the school garden was also one who complained frequently about getting her shoes dirty and feeling too tired to work in the garden. (Later in the interview, I asked her, “wait, I am confused, do you think the garden is important or don’t you?” to which she replied, “yeah, it is, we eat that shit [the produce]”). Likewise, the boy who implied the program was irrelevant because the students “run off” the hot chips anyway was also an active participant in the cooking class, a class that he had elected (for two years) to take. In this sense, the data that I collected from interviews does not help to clarify why a particular student makes a particular choice, or how a specific social position configures a specific (re)action. Indeed, clarity is not what these interviews provided me. Nevertheless, such data do help to illustrate not only the complexity of food-based motivation, but also the different kinds of opportunities and moments of relating that SGCPs do and can allow. It is in understanding these opportunities and moments that we can (as teachers, leaders, activists, and academics) begin to rethink and reconfigure SGCPs in ways that nudge forward an ever-more progressive visceral politics.

**Researching With**

Beyond participant observation and interviews, I engaged in a number of creative, participatory classroom activities with SGCP students. These activities included Peer Interviewing, Field Journaling, and Letter Writing. Collectively, I call these activities ‘Researching With’ because they allowed me to accomplish a variety of important research tasks through direct inclusion of students in my research process – allowing that I, individually, was not alone in the task of conducting research. These activities began with visits to a number of ‘homeroom classrooms’ of the students engaged in SCGPs. Over the course of my research, I visited six classrooms of approximately 25 students each. In Plainville School, I conducted research activities in a Grade 2 class, a Grade 4/5 class, and a Grade 6 class (while only the Grade 6 students were involved in cooking, all
of these classes had some engagement with the school garden and the lunch program overall). In Central School, I conducted research activities in three 6th-grade classes (which I sought out instead of 7th or 8th grade classes because I had already interacted with 7th and 8th graders through group interviews). These classes were also chosen out of convenience, since the homeroom teachers of all of these classes requested that I visit and speak to their students about my research activities.

Peer Interviews and Field Journaling
In all of these classes, I conducted peer interviews and field journaling activities, tailoring the activities in ways that were appropriate to fit each age group. The peer interviewing and field journaling activities allowed me to introduce myself and my dissertation research to the students, and further to teach them how to engage in the types of activities that I was conducting at their schools. Peer interviewing began with a brief lesson about what research is in general, and what interviewing accomplishes as a method. After this lesson, each student was given a basic interview script that included several questions about their SGCP programs (see Figure 10): e.g. “Do you like the foods that you learn to make in the cooking class?” Or, “Do you think it is hard to eat healthily?” The students were also encouraged to be ‘good listeners’ and to respond by asking one or two follow up questions of their own choosing. Some suggestions were also listed: e.g. “If not → why not? What would you like better?” Or, “What would make it easier to eat healthily?” The students were instructed to write down notes about what their peers said to them, and then to switch interviewer/interviewee roles and repeat the process.

3. Do you like the foods that you learn to make in cooking class?

Follow up questions:
- If NOT → Why not? (Do you not like the taste? Would you like something else better? What?)
- If YES → Why? (What do you like about it? The taste? The experience of cooking it?)

RESPONSE:

because some things we make are wasty (in offense) yes i would rather have something not cook by kids but by adults.

yes because a lot of things your eat makes me want to quit second. i really like the bread. we make in cooking class.

Figure 10: Example of a question prompt and student answer from interview script

After the peer interviews were finished, I introduced field journaling as a take home assignment, building from the interview lesson. I briefly introduced the concept of participant observation, and I instructed students to engage in such an activity during one of the next meals that they ate outside of school (at home, or in a restaurant). The students were to take notes on their meal using a note taking guideline that encouraged
them to describe the experience in depth (see Figure 11): “Describe what you ate,” “Describe the setting,” “Describe who you ate with,” “How long did the meal last?” “What was the mood of the meal?” etc. These homework assignments were due the following week, and were collected by their homeroom teachers. Neither their homeroom teacher nor I graded the students on either assignment.

![Figure 11: Example of note taking guidelines and student response](image)

**Letter Writing**

In addition to peer interviewing and field journaling, I conducted a third ‘researching with’ activity, letter writing, with three of the same classrooms of students – two 6th grade classes from Central School, and one (the only) 6th grade class from Plainville School. These letter-writing activities began with a lesson on how to write a letter, which were conducted collectively by the homeroom teacher and me in Central School in December of 2007. Students were encouraged to think about what they wanted to know about the other SCGP, and to brainstorm some ideas about what was important to tell the students about their own garden. I gave them some prompts in this regard by explaining a little bit of some of the differences between the Nova Scotia and California SGCPs – e.g. different growing seasons, knowledge about fruits like persimmons or pomegranates, cooking for classes versus the whole school, etc. The students then were given 30 minutes to write a letter to a particular class member from the other SGCP (names were distributed randomly). Some students took longer, and even took the letter home to finish. These letters were then sent to Nova Scotia, where the Grade 6 teacher in Plainville conducted a similar lesson on letter writing. In March of 2008, response letters were sent back to Central School (via me in Pennsylvania). Excerpts from 2 of these letters are shared below (see Figures 12 and 13).
Through different means, all three of these ‘researching with’ activities allowed me to better understand how students talk about food in general, and SGCPs in particular, within a peer group setting. In short, they gave me insight into what students themselves really find important, as opposed to what teachers or parents say through speculation. Admittedly, the prompts for these activities came from adults. Yet, at the same time we purposefully encouraged a good amount of play within these activities, which led to a wide range of responses. For example, during the letter writing some students wrote relatively little about the garden or cooking classes at all, choosing to focus on other more seemingly pressing particulars of their life (other classes or interests, who their friends are, etc). Also, the details that students chose to focus on in the field journaling were wide ranging in both level of description and areas of concentration. One student explained: “I ate my dinner at a circular table, set for three, since mama is in Spain, Neko ate on the floor, as a dog should. Our kitchen is at the back of the house, and dark. We had a candle lit.” Another simply wrote: “I ate on the sofa, with crumbs everywhere!”
The data that resulted from these activities of ‘researching with’ are incorporated into my dissertation in several ways. Primarily they exist as background data, which came to inform the types of questions I asked during interviews, and also the ways that I articulated my questions (particularly during interviews with students and parents). These data also came to influence the ways that I pressed teachers and leaders to think about the contexts in which students are motivated to eat, and also about how students’ different backgrounds at home might affect their experiences at school. In addition, the actual experience of conducting these activities was itself something that I considered relevant as data, and thus something that I wrote about in my own field notes as well. For example, I was intrigued by the sometimes contentious dynamic that the peer interviewing seemed to set up between students who were not ‘accurately’ recording each other’s words, or who were not asking the ‘right’ follow up questions. At one point, one student said to another: “No, don’t ask me that; ask me about [this]” (Field Notes, September 2007, NS). Finally, I also occasionally include direct quotations (or images) from the homework or letter writing activities when I think that the data speak directly and succinctly to my research questions. In these cases, I denote the quotations by following them with (Peer Interviewing Activity) or (Journaling Homework) or (Letter Writing), or else I simply include a scanned image from the actual assignment in place of a quotation (as in the images above).

Living With

The last activity that I want to discuss is something that I broadly call ‘Living With,’ recognizing that the relational reach of ‘fieldwork’ goes well beyond the specific SGCP school contexts, and indeed calls into question the boundary of the ‘field’ itself. In my view, this research activity includes everything from initially choosing the sites of my research itself, to traveling and co-habitating with others, to personally making food choices. Over the course of my 6 months of fieldwork, my data ‘collection’ – the ways in which I came to know and understand what I did about SGCPs – involved much more than participant observation, interviews, and classroom activities. It involved many other practices of life as well: shopping, cooking, exercising, listening to music, making and meeting friends, reading, exploring, taking the bus, helping others, being invited to parties, etc. While ethnographers who are keen on ‘full immersion’ in one’s research context might not find it surprising to include these activities as part of one’s methods, I want to explain ‘living with’ not as an immersion situation so much as a bodied, relational activity that implicates the researcher even more directly in the production of her own data. In this sense, ‘living with’ is a method of its own particularly because it highlights how my own daily practices and habits of being came to influence my understandings and experiences of (researching) SGCPs. Below I discuss three instances of ‘living with,’ Choosing Nova Scotia and California, Engaging with Family and Friends, and Making Food Decisions.

Choosing Nova Scotia and California

The decision to choose Nova Scotia and California as the two sites for my dissertation research was (in my definition) a visceral one, based on both an intellectual
understanding of alternative food organizing in each place, as well as a sense of curiosity and challenge in regard to what I did not yet know. The thought of living and researching in both places intrigued me, but the choice of Berkeley was perhaps an easier and more obvious one to make. The ESY was written up continually in the media, often in ways that cited Alice Waters as a key figure head of a SGCP movement or “The Delicious Revolution” (Orenstein 2004; Waters 2006; Brown 2007). More generally, the Bay Area was frequently cited as a place where alternative food was happening, through a number of different farmers markets and urban community gardens (Severson 2008). Indeed, California is a unique and significant place to study alternative food (Guthman 2004). It is considered by many food scholars and activists (including many I met in Nova Scotia) to be the hotbed of alternative food activism in North America, from which lots of ideas and (organic) foods emerge. My impressions of Berkeley, based on my preliminary research and also discussions among activists and ‘foodies’ (those who enjoy alternative/fancy food), were largely confirmed upon arrival. As several of my student interviewees explained of the area:

“Berkeley is an oasis.” (Student, CA)

“Berkeley has all of these hippies. It is because people care more here. It is a really green city, and it is a really good thing.” (Student, CA)

In contrast to Berkeley, Nova Scotia is, at first take, a more curious choice. Alternative food activism is not nearly as commonplace as in Berkeley, and attention to food in schools was just beginning to gain ground as I started my research in 2007 (CBC 2006). In addition, local food is notably harder to do in Nova Scotia, as the growing season is fairly short in the region and the variety of produce able to be grown is much smaller. Part of the reason for my curiosity over Nova Scotia, however, stemmed from such differences from Berkeley. Unlike the urban context of Berkeley, situated within a metropolitan area of over 6 million, the rural area surrounding Plainville school consists of small municipalities of less than 2,000 residents. The nearest major supermarket to the school is 30 minutes away, and the nearest farmers market (other than roadside stands) is 45 minutes. Halifax, the nearest major metropolitan center (population approximately 360,000) is an hour drive. Although there are notable circles of ‘foodies’ and alternative food activists (mostly centered in Halifax), I also sensed that Nova Scotia was often considered the opposite of Berkeley food-wise: a rural province that was somewhat ‘behind’ the times in relation to the ‘cosmopolitan’ food cultures of urban places like the Bay Area. Indeed, when I arrived in Nova Scotia, many of my interviewees described the food ‘scene’ around Plainville in the following way:

“Here, we don’t really have any food traditions. It is rudimentary, simple.” (Parent, NS)

In other ways, however, the two sites and programs are congruous. The Plainville SGCP was inspired largely by the ESY and the ideals of Alice Waters, and it is supported in part by Nova Scotia’s Slow Food chapter, a group of motivated alternative food enthusiasts who share an interest in local, sustainable, and heritage foods. Like many of the SGCP
leaders in Nova Scotia, Alice Waters is too a member of the Slow Food Movement; in fact, she is currently one of the leaders of Slow Food International (Slow Food 2008). Similar to California, Nova Scotia has also received some recent media attention, due particularly to changes in school food policy passed at the provincial level (Nova Scotia 2006). Like California legislation (CA Gov 2005), these policies advocate a gradual but firm shift to ‘healthier’ foods in schools. Nova Scotia has also been an area of intellectual interest in regard to food, particularly around issues of hunger and food security (Williams et al 2007). In addition, both Plainville and Central Schools serve a diverse population of students: Plainville in terms of economic/social class differences and Central in terms of both class and racial identities. In both cases, program leaders and advocates imply that the SGCPs particularly target disenfranchised populations.

This combination of ideological similarities (in regard to alternative and healthy food) and geographical/social differences (food culture, diversity, urbaniy, etc) compelled me to take on this SGCP research at both locations, particularly because I was curious about how the ideological similarities would be taken up and transformed by the particular contexts of the school sites. Nevertheless, though a comparative analysis might be appropriate to such research, I came to understand these sites not as opportunities to find clarity through differentiation but instead as occasions to “witness” and be a part of the making of food decisions as a contextual practice (Dewsbury 2005). The more that I witnessed food in these contexts the more I was angered by the ideological claims of alternative food leaders and nutrition experts, claiming to have all the answers. How could anyone possibly have all the answers for everyone, everywhere, about what is ‘good’ or ‘right’ to eat? The more I witnessed, the more I found such claims absurd. At the same time, however, I also came to understand the power of such ideological claims, and thus also their potential/partial usefulness in re-doing alternative food. What propelled me through this lived research, then, was both a visceral determination to not simplify food practice down to any ideological claim, and also a visceral curiosity to keep open the possibility of multiple, contradictory answers.

**Engaging with Friends and Family**

Perhaps the most significant feature of this dissertation research experience is the fact that I conducted this research alongside my twin sister, Allison, who was at the same time engaged in a similar dissertation research project on the Slow Food Movement in Nova Scotia and Berkeley. Not only did we choose our research sites in (visceral) concert, but we also traveled and lived together during our fieldwork, and we often accompanied each other on research endeavors (although I followed her more than she did I due to issues of space and admission into the schools themselves). This dual effort is significant for many reasons, but three stand out in my mind. The first and perhaps most obvious is that in helping Allison with her research, which included accompanying her to many (~60) of her interviews with Slow Food members and other food activists, as well as outings and other activities (~15), I was able to gain great insight into the background of alternative food issues in each location. In addition, I was introduced to a variety of people that became informants in my own work; indeed as our research projects progressed, Allison and I conducted a number of collective interviews that were relevant to both her and my work (e.g. our interview with Alice Waters, and our interview with Susan, the head of the...
Nova Scotia SGCP). In seeking out and conducting these interviews, Allison and I also particularly became aware of the significance of looking like one another. The fascination that many people appeared to have over the joint (twin) effort of our research endeavors seemed to make rapport with research participants come easily, perhaps because the research was so noticeably enjoyable for us.

Second, researching with Allison is also significant from an intellectual sense in that she and I are interested in similar theoretical work – rhizomatic ontologies, feminist theory, affect and emotion. Thus, Allison and I were not only researching alongside one another, we were also (re)analyzing and (re)practicing our ideas and interpretations along the way. The impact of this is not minimal. For example, my research was largely motivated by feelings of responsibility towards those who I considered disenfranchised in/by the alternative food movement (those for whom the goodness of alternative food was not already a given), while Allison was meeting and dialoguing largely with the ‘other side:’ a group of alternative food activists that have been described as culturally homogeneous and economically elite (Leitch 2003). Seeing both sides of this alternative food struggle forced me to recognize the inconsistencies and contradictions of such polarizations, and also called me to question how anyone can really know or fully define the boundaries of progressive activism within alternative food. Similarly, my drive to understand the experience of alternative food through the lens of social difference compelled Allison to pose more questions to her research subjects about the homogeneity and (lack of) outreach in Slow Food, allowing me to witness (through her interview process) how my own research questions play out in her own work. This back and forth between our two projects was thus indispensable to how I came to understand and analyze SGCPs.

Third, the circumstance of traveling and researching with my identical twin sister brought me into contact with a number of other influential people who were not just ‘research subjects’ but who primarily became friends. These included two men who we lived with (at different times) during our stay in Nova Scotia, John and Paulo, and one woman that we lived with in California, Lisa. John is a food activist and enthusiast, and someone who we shared a house with and cooked meals with for a month and a half while in Nova Scotia. He not only gave us entry into the alternative food world in Nova Scotia, but he also gave very generously to us in terms of his time and his space. Through getting to know John, we learned much about his own food-based motivations, but also much about our own work and our ways of thinking about/approaching alternative food. I came to respect John’s opinions a great deal, and to see him as very knowledgeable and thoughtful in his approach to alternative food. At one point, Allison and I sat down to dinner with John with the tape recorder rolling (since our conversations often revolved around food and our research experiences, and there was never a moment when we really weren’t doing research). Our conversation that night was pivotal to how I came to understand food decisions:

I was arguing with John about elitism in alternative food, suggesting that the ‘positive politics’ model (avoiding negative confrontation) eschewed the fact that alternative food was already off-putting to some people. I gave him an example from my research: one girl whose working-class father came to a quite fancy SGCP event and told her,
“I’m not gonna eat that [a salad she had helped make]; I’m not a rabbit.” (Parent, NS)

I implied to John that alternative food activists weren’t paying attention to the visceral trauma that could come from what I read as a class-based clash between elite ‘foodies’ and working-class parents.

John responded to me:

“let’s just analyze what you said there for a second… A father who said well this is rabbit food; so does that mean the whole experience was a negative experience? Not necessarily… if you ask the kid in the presence of the father she might echo what the father said just because…but the father may have no understanding at all of what it was like for the kid to go out in the garden for the first time and harvest something out of it … whether it was lettuce a carrot, or the whole concept of harvesting something from the land and seeing bugs or dirt on it that you don’t see at the grocery store, or maybe it was a crisp sunny day and just being outdoors was an elation they weren’t getting sitting in a classroom … the parent has no idea what those things were like in terms of an experience for the kid, they are just equating one aspect of the contact of that kid with the experience to their preconceived idea about what constitutes good food, so because that comment is there it doesn’t mean the experience for the kid wasn’t worth while overall. There are so many dimensions to an experience … you don’t know what the impact is going to be, you can’t know what part of that experience somebody is going to run with and make a decision later on about based on that experience… like that kid – the kid may never eat another salad because dad says its rabbit food, or ten years from now she might grow a garden because the whole idea of going outside in the fresh air and picking something out of the ground resonated somehow.”

(John, Activist, NS)

I quote this response at length because it was a moment in which I realized that my intense feelings of responsibility towards any perceived ‘underdog’ were actually thwarting any opportunity for reading agency into such situations. Both he and I were right to some extent – the alternative food leaders that I was talking to were largely unaware of, and even outright antagonistic toward, these situations of class-based social difference within SGCP events. But still, this did not mean that the ‘outcomes’ of SGCPs were predictably negative. To the contrary, the ‘outcomes’ of SGCPs were highly unpredictable, at least in terms of affecting students long-term motivational drives. I had (and still have) no idea whether this girl will choose to shop at a farmers market ten years from now, but I do know that her experience of the SGCP event was multi-dimensional and complicated. Was that enough to come home with? Was that a ‘finding’? John’s answer was, well regardless, that is the truth.

Over the course of my research there were many other epiphanic instances like this one, some of which I describe in the chapters that follow. A section in Chapter Five, for
example, tells a “tale of two dinners,” a two-event evening to which my other friend Paulo accompanied me. While Paulo was neither a foodie/activist nor a local Nova Scotian, his presence at the events and his discussion with me following them gave me important insights into the community politics that surround Plainville’s SGCP. Similarly, many of interactions with Lisa, an alternative food/yoga enthusiast, and her young children, who both attended public school in Berkeley, influenced me in tremendous ways – particularly in rethinking the (non)centrality of leaders/ideologues like Alice Waters to the everyday playing out of SGCPs on the ground. These interactions with friends and family illustrate how the relational method of ‘living with’ goes well beyond an ethnographic ‘immersion’ situation. More than any other event or phenomenon in my research, these relationships called into question the boundary between researcher and participant in this SGCP research.

Making Food Decisions

The third instance of ‘living with’ that I want to discuss is the matter of my own personal food decisions. In light of the subject matter of this research, I think it is important to discuss and reflect upon the way that I myself make food decisions – acknowledging that as a researcher, my visceral (re)actions towards food itself are also relevant to this SGCP study. To the extent that it is actually possible to ‘know’ one’s own visceral judgments, then, I will try to explain my own positioning on food.

As my conscious mind distinguishes, my food decisions currently seem to fall into one of two categories: social decisions, involving not only food itself but also a broader context of other people eating and offering food, and personal decisions, where I am not very concerned with a broader social context and I am deciding what to eat based off of my cravings, habits, and/or needs. Socially, I will eat almost anything. Over the course of this research, I was offered and accepted food many times that under different circumstances I might not ‘choose’ for myself (e.g. coffee, pork fat and sea urchin at 9am). This is not to say that I often felt forced or obligated to eat food that I did not want or care for; on the contrary, I did usually desire to eat such food precisely because it was a shared experience, and because the sharing of food in social contexts is something that has always been particularly important to me. In this sense, I could even say that I enjoyed these foods more than foods I would choose on my own. SGCPs were a context in which I frequently felt enjoyment over the experience of shared food (even as I was aware that others might not all equally or similarly enjoy the experience as I did).

Still, there were times over the course of this SGCP research when I definitely would have preferred to not eat the food presented to me. Several of these times were in SGCP classrooms, involving food that students had prepared. While the vast majority of dishes I ate within the context of SGCP classrooms ranged from good to incredibly delicious, there were a few dishes that I felt nauseous trying to eat. In one dish, students had not adequately washed the sand from some leeks that we put in a soup. While few of the students seemed to mind or notice, I could not finish my bowl, and had to dump it in the compost bin. At another point, several students were coughing and sneezing into their hands, and then cutting the vegetables for a salad. Though hygiene was stressed in the kitchen, and this type of incident was unusual, the cooking teacher happened to be absent.
from the room at this time. Because I personally did not feel comfortable telling students to wash their hands, I let this continue, and did not look forward to the salad. In the end, I did eat it, but the knowledge of risking a possible cold or flu made the dish taste rather unpalatable to me (a truly socio-biological moment).

Outside the context of social eating events, when I am at the store or market by myself, my food decisions vary by what I can find in the place(s) where I am shopping, and what sort of financial capacities I have at that moment. While I consider myself somewhat of a ‘foodies,’ seeking out local and organic labels, I am also a graduate student on a limited budget, and thus cost frequently enters my mind. For reasons of cost and (lack of) culinary knowledge, I rarely buy meat to cook, though I am not a vegetarian, and I will gladly eat meat that is cooked for me (a social carnivore, perhaps?). I am more than content, though, with vegetarian and vegan meals. I am also particularly conscious of eating a variety of grains, and I enjoy experimenting with the fermentation and sprouting of wheat, oats, and rye. I am conscious of food allergies, including gluten intolerance, though I personally do not suffer from such sensitivities. Overall, I found SGCPs to produce food items that I would probably choose to make myself; indeed I frequently took recipe ideas home with me (e.g. for pear salsa, vegetable stew, fruit turnovers, or homemade pizza).

Two particular food trends of late that I am most adamant about resisting are the low-fat craze, through which many North Americans learn to avoid butter, animal fats, and other saturated oils, and the low-cal craze, through which artificial sweeteners like sucralose, aspartame, and saccharin end up in both adults’ and children’s food supply. I consider these trends to be critically damaging to the overall health and well-being of North Americans, both in what they imply about correct body size (i.e. slimness is best), and in what they do, or more accurately what they do not do, to nourish human bodies (i.e. they are defined not by food itself but by the absence of food). Certainly, I carried these personal judgments about such food trends into the SGCP classrooms. I was worried about how SGCPs might reinforce (either actively or by omission) a low-fat and low-calorie food culture, and I was intensely critical of SGCPs on these grounds when I found evidence of this culture’s presence. Nevertheless, I also found it difficult to pinpoint where exactly these ideas were coming from. Notions of good foods and bad foods, or of correct and incorrect body size, certainly circulate within the relations and interactions of SGCP participants (both teachers and students), but the question of who was instigating the entry of these ideas into SGCP classrooms is less clear – parents, television, teachers, peers, the school board, the federal government. In this sense, the reproduction of expert-based knowledge systems within SGCP is less straightforward than my initial adamant stance allowed, and with a lot more disruption than I had expected. This broader story of ‘food knowledge’ within SGCPs is the subject of the next chapter.
Conclusion

In serving as a link between my research framework and my empirical analysis, this chapter was meant to introduce the reader to the methods of this research, and to explain how these methods came to address my research questions through the accumulation and analysis of empirical data (field notes, interview transcripts, student letters, etc.). The next three chapters, I now turn to explore three specific themes that emerged from the collection of such empirical data: Food Knowledge, Food Identity, and Food Pedagogy.
Chapter 4: Food Knowledge

This chapter is one of three empirically focused chapters in this dissertation. Here I explore issues of knowledge production in regard to food and food practices, recognizing that the topic of knowledge production is a bodied, viscerally-relevant topic. Working from the theoretical framework developed in Chapters 1 and 2, this chapter explores the ways in which SGCPs can be simultaneously limiting/chilling and enabling/animating in how they motivate different bodies through the production of food-based knowledge.

Knowing Food

“We need to realize that cooking and gardening issues are everyone’s issues, gender or race is not important.” (Teacher, CA)

The above quotation from a teacher at Central School raises important questions about the nature of food-based knowledge within SGCPs. In what ways are cooking and gardening issues everyone’s issues? Does this mean that the information that is presented within SGCP classrooms should be equally relevant for all students? Does this imply that certain segments of the population currently don’t know enough, or don’t care enough, about alternative food production and consumption? If cooking and gardening issues are important to everyone, in what ways could gender or race not be important?

As the introductory chapter discussed, the alternative food movement has often framed its initiatives as enlightenment endeavors, where a select few are ‘in the know’ and thus need to educate the unknowing ‘others’ about what is best to eat (Guthman 2008). The widely acclaimed film short *The Meatrix* exemplifies this type of an enlightenment framing to an extreme: a happy-go-lucky pig is introduced to the real world of industrial farming by ‘Moofius’ and his entourage after choosing between a blue pill, which would keep him in his fantasy land, and a red pill, which would show him the truth ([www.themeatrix.com](http://www.themeatrix.com); 2003). This type of framing has been effective at exposing some of the ecological and social damage that industrial methods of agricultural production and distribution have generated, including pollution of waterways, rampant antibiotic use, and disruption of small-scale agricultural livelihoods. Indeed, it has worked successfully to counter the hegemonic power of agribusiness by bringing these issues into public view (along with other activist initiatives in the past several decades). Nevertheless, in presenting alternative food knowledge as something that is obtained rather than produced, this type of enlightenment endeavor also threatens to eschew the diversity that is present within food-based knowledge(s), creating yet another food hegemony.

Furthering this enlightenment push within school based food initiatives is the field of nutrition science, upon which the nutritional guidelines of many government programs and school food policies are based (USDA 2008; Nova Scotia 2006). Because nutrition science is also predicated on the notion that knowledge is obtained, rather than produced, many school food policies are driven by a set of nutritional ‘shoulds’ – lists of foods that a person should or should not eat. Although in some schools the simple “good food / bad food” dichotomy has been downplayed (because of concerns over schools perpetuating
eating disorders and body image problems), in many cases the dichotomy has simply been replaced by a less pernicious sounding set of labels: “anytime foods” and “sometime foods,” (Leader, NS), or “Maximum, Moderate, and Minimum Nutrition” (Nova Scotia 2006). These new labels still carry the assumption that experts can dictate ‘best’ nutrition practices, and that what is good for one is good for all, regardless of gender, race or any other social difference.

In this chapter I want to dig deeper into the questions of what/who constitutes ‘legitimate’ food knowledge, and why and how the process of knowing food matters to the success of SGCPs. My intention is not to fully dismiss the claims of alternative food advocates or nutritionists, for I feel to do so would be a disservice to all of the people who struggle daily to feed themselves and their families in more nourishing ways. There are real and important ways in which the industrial food system does not adequately contribute to the health and well being of many North American families and communities, and it is important to make these ways known. Yet, I do want to suggest that SGCPs need to move beyond the goal of enlightenment in order to really effect meaningful social change – most significantly because an enlightenment goal ultimately frames food choice as a matter of individual responsibility. Indeed, the final segment of The Meatrix offers: “it is you, the consumer, that has the real power…it is up to you” (Meatrix 2003). While the knowledge that alternative food activists and nutrition scientists offer is significant (though also not beyond the bounds of critique), it is at best a partial knowledge: one that is not universal but rather situated within particular social, geographic, and bodied contexts that enable and constrain how it is taken up and acted upon in a variety of ways.

Thus, it is important to understand how SGCPs frame and approach food knowledge, and how SGCPs enable and constrain its production. The remainder of the chapter proceeds as follows. The chapter is broken up into two sections: knowledge as limiting (or in visceral terms, ‘chilling’), and knowledge as enabling (and perhaps also ‘animating’). In the first section, I explore the ways in which SGCPs limit students’ and their families’ access to alternative food by furthering an enlightenment-based model of food intervention that disengages them from the processes of knowledge production. Here I explore three instances of limitation: the perpetuation of universal knowledge claims, the construction of school and home as antagonistic spaces of knowledge, and the furthering of disempowering motivational drives (i.e. fears over body image and fatness). In the second section, I then move on to explore the ways in which SGCPs enable students and their families to engage in the production of food-based knowledge by allowing flexibility and diversity in the classroom. Here I explore three instances of enablement: the disruption of hierarchy through opportunity, the encouragement of student agency and

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28 To clarify this truth claim further, my goal in this dissertation is not to suggest that complete relativism is the only true answer. This academic position is both apolitical and unprogressive, and it is not a position that either the feminist theorists or other social theorists that I draw upon would agree with (e.g. McWhorter 1999, Brison 2002, Foucault 1990, Deleuze and Guatarri 1987). The point is to understand how to do political work in the midst of uncertainty and partiality in regard to truth. I do believe that much alternative food activism has been largely helpful in this regard (e.g. in drawing attention to some of the environmental and social ills of industrial agriculture), but I also think it important to highlight places where such activism becomes stuck, or overly authoritarian and hegemonic, to the detriment of certain groups or communities.
peer-based knowledge sharing, and the application of food knowledge as creative potential. The chapter ends with a brief summary and concluding thoughts.

Knowledge as Limiting

In the preceding chapters, I explored how knowledge is a visceral matter: how bodies know alongside and in connection to the mind in ways that ultimately call into question the boundary between the two. Furthermore, I stressed that visceral knowledge is a matter of lived experience: something that is articulated through the varied developmental processes of the body, and something that in turn influences how we (differentially) experience future life events. In these ways, knowledge can be considered a contextual and embodied practice that both defines our daily experiences and drives our daily actions – including what and how and where we eat. Further, because the outcomes of such a practice are not pre-determined, knowledge is also continually questioned and revised during this process – including our established tastes and preferences. Following from this, the section below explores how the enlightenment-based ways of knowing that SGCPs promote can limit students’ access to alternative and healthy food experiences by ignoring what students already know, and by prohibiting their own understandings of food from informing the processes of knowledge production.

Expert and Universal Knowledge

By September of 2007, I had engaged in two months of gardening and cooking with students, teachers, and parents from Plainville School. I had lived and eaten with many food activists, and at the urging of a local farmer and activist, had taken up experimenting with the fermentation of dairy, grain, and vegetables. In the middle of September, carrying all these experiences with me, I went to visit two local dietitians who were engaged in trying to promote school gardens in Nova Scotian schools. As I entered their office building, I was struck by “how different the space felt” from the spaces in which I had been researching and living (field notes 2007, NS). Their office was housed within a medical center, at the end of a long bright corridor that had “not even the slightest suggestion of food”: no smells, no pots steaming, no sounds of plates clanking (field notes 2007, NS). It was a sterile environment, isolated from food as a socio-biological practice. And it was also cultureless in a very real sense – “my yogurt, sourdough, and sauerkraut would not have been happy” there (field notes 2007, NS). In this space, food was treated like medicine.

It was during my interview with these two dietitians that I began to realize how different food is in the places where people make it, and eat it, from the places where people make claims about it. In claiming food, food becomes abstracted, universalized, and made the terrain of specialists or experts. What emerges from such spaces is a fixed set of information: policy recommendations for what to serve in schools, tips on how to get students to eat more healthily, and lists of what constitutes maximum, moderate, and minimum nutrition. In the alternative food world, a slightly different list has emerged, but it a list nonetheless, abstracted from the spaces in which we actually make food decisions. We are told to eat locally, seasonably, sustainably, organically, naturally,
consciously, and slowly. In this abstract space, “food [becomes] our common ground, a universal experience,” (Waters 2005b), even though in our lived realities it is everything but that.

What happens when SGCPs combine these two food models? What is precluded from happening when food knowledge becomes a fixed set of ideas? Over the course of my research, many leaders and teachers articulated an enlightenment-based model of food knowledge, explaining that SGCPs “are really about reaching people, those people who don’t understand…who don’t have a love of eating” (Leader, NS). To such leaders, being knowledgeable means knowing and being attached to food in a very specific way. Having “a love of eating” in this case does not and cannot mean loving McDonalds or Cheetos, it means loving fresh fruits and vegetables from the garden. To love McDonalds is to not really love food, to not really understand. As another SGCP leader explained, fast food represents “a sort of trough style eating…eating to live, versus living to eat,” (Leader, NS); fast food in this view is too quick and too processed to constitute a thoughtful, rational choice. In making such claims, a category of people defined as food ‘experts’ emerge – those who know the truth about food, and who have the wisdom to tell the rest of us what we should and should not eat. In SGCPs, the ‘experts’ are those in a position of power in the programs: the leaders (from ideologues to administrators), and also perhaps the adults who teach and volunteer in the classrooms. Indeed, many students came to view me as an ‘expert’ of sorts.

In many of my interviews with SGCP leaders and teachers, the distinction between good foods and bad foods was quite clearly drawn in both discursive and visceral terms. In these discussions, it was clear who was in the know and who was not:

“When we [started this program], it was fried chicken, McDonalds, you know, garbage” (Leader, CA)

“When I came here, the [school] food was the worst in the nation. Extreme burritos, chicken nuggets, corn dogs, pizza pockets, all frozen crap” (Leader, CA)

“It is all pretty set [in the curriculum]…we present the info [about eating healthily], and then we see how they can incorporate that into a recipe” (Leader, CA)

“There are three groupings, Maximum, Moderate, and Minimum. We want to work towards 100 percent whole grain, no hot dogs, and look at the fat and salt, no processed foods. We allow cheese because you don’t want to limit fat too much with kids, but we don’t have meat because really [most kids] have too much meat everyday anyway, so I don’t think they need it at lunch” (Leader, NS)

“It was sickening, what we saw going into students bodies” (Teacher, NS)

The above quotations illustrate how ‘healthy,’ ‘alternative’ food has become a fixed category in SGCPs, with distinct and rigid boundaries that are policed through both the
rules and language of experts. As food knowledge is fixed in this way, it also becomes naturalized as a category beyond social critique. Food becomes the same for everyone, everywhere, not because everyone currently eats in the same way, but because it is assumed and accepted that everyone really should. According to the leaders and teachers quoted above, hot dogs and pizza pockets are unquestionably bad for everyone, being equivalent to garbage or crap, whereas 100 percent whole grain is a pre-defined universal good (and cheese is ok too, at least for kids). Of course, SGCP leaders and teachers are not the only ones making these claims. In fact, most students who I talked to about food knowledge claimed multiple experts: parents, television, internet websites, the back of cereal boxes, and their community at large, in addition to their cooking and gardening teachers. Nevertheless, SGCPs become an educational space in which these assumptions are confirmed. When asked about what constitutes healthy food, most SGCP students that I talked to would offer very similar answers:

1. Describe what you ate. For example, what was the taste like? Was it healthy?
   It had hot dogs, buns, cheese, and lettuce. It tasted good. It wasn't healthy.

1. Describe what you ate. For example, what was the taste like? Was it healthy?
   For dinner I had steak and french fries and the steak tasted like steaming hot at the stove. It was juicy, and the french fries tasted like grease. And I think that the food that I just described is not healthy.

1. Describe what you ate. For example, what was the taste like? Was it healthy?
   Tonight we had fettuccine alfredo with chicken and broccoli. It is a pasta dish with a cream sauce and shredded chicken. We had the broccoli on the side. The broccoli was cold since though it was healthy even.

1. Describe what you ate. For example, what was the taste like? Was it healthy?
   I ate a vegetable sandwich. It was good and juicy. It was very healthy.

In the above four examples, taken from the students’ take-home field journaling assignments, students respond to the question: 'was [what you ate] healthy? All four
students (two from Nova Scotia and two from California) assess health in effectively the same way; meat, fat, and grease are unhealthy, while vegetables are healthy. These are the types of answers that would suggest to SGCP leaders that the program has been successful – that students are learning the ‘right’ information. And it is these learned *shoulds* that in turn define for SGCP leaders the ‘universality’ of food – the commonness that binds different SGCP students together. Indeed, in my interviews with SGCP leaders, many imagined that it was the universal goodness of such healthy food that provides the opportunity for a ‘shared’ experience. Food, when it is ‘right’ becomes our common good:

“[People need] to understand that food is the one thing we have in common, besides sleeping” (Leader, CA).

“Putting people together at a table can overcome differences, if you focus on the commonalities, on sustenance, you can move beyond petty differences” (Leader, NS)

In these examples, the nourishment or sustenance that comes from SGCP food is assumed to be the same for everyone at the table, allowing students to overcome “petty” differences and focus instead on the common *shoulds* that bind them all together. In this sense, food knowledge is not something that arises out of difference, but rather something that erases difference. Goodness is to be accepted as fact. Students are not expected to share what they bring to the table (or even to bring anything at all); on the contrary, they are required to put aside their personal experiences and tastes in light of a common good. It is in this way that it does not matter if you are black, Latino, female, poor, young, or middle-aged, because healthy/alternative food is ‘good’ for you regardless; nutritionists, experts, and, as Chapter 1 discussed, even *nature itself* tells us so. Indeed, SGCP food is deemed as ‘good’ ultimately because our taste buds will also (supposedly) confirm that this is true. Thus, the success of SGCPs is measured in terms of changes in tastes, or developments of the palate, that will bring us closer to such (natural) unity, rather than allowing us to explore our social diversity:

“[The SGCP] has refined their palates, [which] were unsophisticated” (Teacher, NS)

“School lunches have improved dramatically, and the kids know the difference; they have improved their palates” (Leader, CA)

“The program has increased his palate. He will eat more vegetables now.” (Parent, CA)

In the above examples, development of ‘taste’ is singular in its developmental path; palates are ‘improved’ from a state of unsophistication and narrowness to one of refinement and acceptance. Because, as discussed in Chapter 1, such changes in taste are perceived as ultimately natural and inevitable, many SGCP leaders consider these shifts in taste to be unproblematic. They are not seen as a matter of homogenizing assimilation.
or cultural imperialism, but simply a matter of natural development. Furthermore, such shifts in taste are considered easy for all students to access, since all it requires is the use of one’s tongue. In this imagining, issues of cost, geographic availability, cultural difference, or racial identity ultimately don’t matter because all students have to do is “use their senses”; in this way, “no one has a hands up on anyone” (Teacher, CA).

But my empirical evidence suggests otherwise. Students come to SGCP classrooms with plenty of visceral topography; their senses do not lead them all in the same direction, and their “petty” differences are not overcome by a shared meal. For many students, the goodness of food is not something that can be defined solely by their SGCP class, but is instead something that is experienced as negotiable and differentiable among families and communities. A good example of this comes from SGCP students’ reactions to the vegetarianism of their cooking classrooms. In both Nova Scotia and Berkeley, the absence of meat from the kitchen was something that some students lamented, while others celebrated. In the following conversation, four students in Central School were discussing whether or not it was appropriate to have a meat-free SGCP classroom. I asked them to reflect upon what it was like to not have meat in class:

“Well, I am a vegetarian; eating veggies makes my body happy. I am happy [without meat].” (Student, CA)

“…But to some people meat is like their important thing to eat in life, like other than, I mean, to go along with fruits and vegetables.” (Student, CA)

“Yeah, for some people some families have meat traditions and so those people get excited about that, and cutting meat out can get them less excited.” (Student, CA)

“I try to eat as little meat as possible because I think … it’s just in America where people eat a lot of meat. This video we watched in class, it said people in Asia don’t eat as much meat, they have a lot of fish maybe, and they [don’t even] eat… that much fish, like sushi.” (Student, CA)

The lack of meat in SGCPs was a frequent complaint voiced by many of the students who ate meat at home, an issue that I discuss in more depth below. But the point here is that far from being equalizing, a vegetarian classroom exposes and highlights students’ varying levels of experience/knowledge with regard to SGCP food. Some students’ preferences are confirmed and legitimated by school policy, while others are refuted. When students and parents voiced complaints over the type of food cooked and served by SGCPs, however, the typical recourse of SGCP teachers and leaders was to call upon the ‘experts,’ via government guidelines, scientific findings, or public health dictates, to make the rules seem universal. In other words, it is not the SGCPs that are making the rules; these programs are simply messengers of the Truth:

“You take away the personal nature by [saying] there are guidelines to follow, this new food policy…we can’t serve [unhealthy foods] anymore.” (Teacher, CA)
“Some students and parents don’t understand why we can’t have hotdogs for one day, for field day, but they are coming around. The publicity on obesity helps, I think.” (Leader, NS)

“We like pepperoni pizza, but we can’t have it because it isn’t healthy. [The teacher] told us that is was the school board that made the decision.” (Student, NS)

In none of the gardening and cooking classrooms in which I participated was there much to any direct nutrition education, although nutrition was frequently discussed in an informal manner between peers and teachers alike. Both SGCP programs were also linked with more formal nutrition education curricula in students’ homeroom classrooms, in which students learned everything from the function of digestive organs to the four major food groups. Because teachers and leaders often discussed and framed SGCPs as instruments of nutritional truth (via school policy, or nutrition guidelines), this educational setting helped to further the assumption among students that there are fixed ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ ways to eat. Within and beyond SGCP classrooms, students engaged in self-policing frequently. In my interviews and participant observation, students continually evaluated food along such fixed lines, and sometimes in ways that were more stringent than the SGCPs themselves:

Field notes, September 2007, NS:

We made pizza today. I was in the kitchen with Ms. Dora and three new students, Beki, Fred, and Kayla. We made the pizza dough from scratch, and then the sauce too, blending in the vegetables again to ‘hide’ them from the students. Beki grated cheese (a lot of it) to top the pizzas with…. When they came out of the oven, they were really melted and cheesy. Fred and I put slices on plates for the grade one students who had ordered, and we walked over to the classroom to deliver it. He looked at me and said, “I don’t understand, I mean, they want us to eat healthy, but look at all the fat.” He pointed to the grease on the pizza and made a disgusted face, shaking his head.

Similarly, a student in Central School evaluated her own food decisions at home:

“I mean, I still eat healthy and everything [at home], except I do use butter and cheese instead of oil and soymilk. It’s not like I eat fast food or anything. I mean, [the SGCP] does have an effect on what I eat at home, but I don’t try to do everything the same.” (Student, CA)

And a parent (father) discusses his daughter’s (re)actions to home-cooked food:

“She gives us feedback at home, and if [our food] it is not very healthy, we hear it! [She’ll say,] ‘That’s too fatty,’ or something like that; she is very conscious of what healthy is and then that is fed back to us at home.” (Parent, CA)
In these examples, students have learned to evaluate food in terms of individual opportunities to make the ‘right’ decisions. Eating high-fat foods, fast foods, or foods with grease or butter, are considered bad choices, while soymilk and oil are good or better. Food becomes ‘common’ as children learn these rules and incorporate them into their bodily routines of perception, i.e. seeing pools of grease equates to feelings of disgust – a perception that I witnessed quite often in both SGCPs. It is in coming to know food in these particular ways that students are able to then bond over shared experiences and beliefs. Still, not all SGCP students were eager to take on such ways of knowing. Indeed, many SGCP students also resisted these guidelines, insisting that such conceptions of good and bad are too narrow or constricted:

“There are times when I am like, this needs more oil and salt, and it is not going to hurt me to put it in! I ask if I can add more, but they are like no, we want it to be healthy.” (Student, CA)

“I think it would be better if we were able to use butter, but not all the time. So it is not, I mean, we don’t have to be healthy all the time, because a little bit of butter is not going to kill you, especially if you eat a salad.” (Student, CA)

“This is not racist or nothing, but black people use grease and white people use olive oil, why do they do that…because it doesn’t have fat in it?” (Student, CA)

“How are we going to learn to eat healthy if we never have a choice?…I mean, if the only options are like healthy choices, how will that teach us how to make good decisions? I think we need to have more variety of junk food and good food, because that’s what the real world is like.” (Student, NS)

All of these students articulate a struggle with SGCP food guidelines. While these students still discuss food in terms of good and bad – a healthy “salad” versus a “bit of butter,” they also suggest that they know food in ways that go beyond these guidelines – “it’s not going to hurt me” or “black people use grease.” In this sense, these students are struggling to find a place at the SGCP ‘table’ that will allow them to be more than what they sense the SGCPs want them to be: that is, eaters of healthy alternatives. Further, as the last quotation by a student from the Plainville SGCP suggests, such students are also trying to come to terms with their own agency in regard to food decisions beyond the SGCP table; they are struggling with how they can find their role in a world that is much broader and more uneven than SGCPs allow. Unfortunately, however, instead of using such struggles as opportunities to discuss difference in SGCP classrooms, or to complicate choice in the broader world, some leaders of SGCPs seem to thwart students’ struggle for agency by instead advocating a strong ideological push in the other direction. Rather than meeting students where they are, for example, Alice Waters insists:

“I won’t go into the cafeteria of that school because it is contaminated in a certain way with fast food values, I don’t want to go there, I want to bring the kids into a park and sit at a table and set the table differently, so it is a surprise…They know
when people care about them and don’t care about them. You get it by what you put at the table.” (Alice Waters, CA)

At Waters’ table in the park, kids do not have agency; they are offered food of her choosing, in a place where she decides. Not only do comments like this disempower students from playing an active role in the production of food knowledge, they also deny the diverse realities that SGCP students’ face in regard to food choice/practice. While the ideologies of SGCPs often insist that a table is the most appropriate place to eat, for example, in many students’ lives beyond school a table is just one of many potential places to have a meal. Consider the following three student examples (all from Central School) in response to a take-home note taking assignment about a dinner meal in which they participated outside of school:

2. Describe the setting. Did you eat at a table? On the sofa? Outside? Explain
   I eat at the table with my mom and dad.

2. Describe the setting. Did you eat at a table? On the sofa? Outside? Explain
   I ate in my room on my bed.

2. Describe the setting. Did you eat at a table? On the sofa? Outside? Explain
   We ate on the couch because it is the most comfortable place to sit.

According to Waters’ comment above, only one of these students’ answers would be acceptable by SGCP standards. The others are “contaminated” by a different set of food values that are (supposedly) antithetical to her own, and thus in need of change. By policing the boundaries of good and bad food/practices, SGCP leaders like Alice Waters end up making not only scientific and political assessments of students’ food practices, but ultimately moral judgments about the students’ broader familial and social lives. To sit at a table with one’s family is to be cared for. It is, according to Waters a natural situation, because it is something that the students will simply intuitively recognize as right and good. At odds with this notion of care are those who, by contrast, seemingly ‘don’t care,’ the ‘others’ who are responsible for feeding children: parents, grandparents, guardians, and friends, but most usually in my SGCP research, mothers. This conflict between school and home is the subject of the section below.

The Knowledge of School and Home
Largely by way of the enlightenment frame of SGCPs, the spaces of school and home are sometimes constructed as antagonistic. If food practices at home do not conform to those in SGCP classrooms, the two spaces are often deemed to be in conflict. This was true in my interviews with adults on both ‘sides’ of the divide: parents and guardians on the one side, and teachers/leaders on the other. Nevertheless, these ‘sides’ are not equally constructed. SGCPs have the backing of government policy, nutrition science guidelines,
and alternative food advocates’ claims to naturalness. Further, those involved with SGCPs are said to ‘care.’ In contrast, parents who deviate from the accepted best practices of SGCPs have none of these supports; and it is they who must defend their ‘uncaring’ actions.

Leaders and Teachers of SGCPs often discussed parents in terms of an obstacle or difficulty. When I asked them about the problems that SGCPs faced in the future, the role of parents often came up. “Really, parents have been our biggest hurdle,” said one SGCP teacher from Plainville School, “but they are coming around” (Teacher, NS). Another leader explained:

“The idea was to influence the parents by getting to the kids. There is more bang for your buck that way, because you are reaching them early in life” (Leader, NS)

Others took a more dismissive approach to parents, suggesting that there was a futility in attempting to bring them on board. For this SGCP teacher below, the goal was simply to have an influence on student decisions in the future, after they leave their homes:

“That’s all you are hoping for, you plant a seed, and when they are an adult [on their own] they will remember” (Teacher, CA).

During my research, a frequently repeated sound bite among SGCP leaders and teachers was “get to the kids early” (Leader, CA). The reasoning behind this was multi-faceted; early on, students have less developed tastes and preferences, and introducing kids to vegetables when they are young means a better rate of success in later years. If students became used to growing and consuming fresh fruits and vegetables in elementary school, by the time middle or high school rolls around, the whole process would be second nature. While such a chain of events sounds plausible, the implied assessment behind this pedagogical sound bite is that the parents are currently not doing an adequate job at home (whether simply for lack of care, as was often implied, or for more dire reasons of financial and time constraints). After all, if parents were doing what SGCPs do, then getting the kids early would not be such an issue. I brought up this dilemma in an interview with a food activist in Berkeley, and he confirmed my interpretation, joking:

“Getting the kids early…yeah, everyone says that. Kindergarten isn’t early enough. Take them out of the home when they are born [Laughs].” (Activist, CA).

Of course, to many parents this is no laughing matter. Many of the mothers who I interviewed did not find it easy to feed their children. Some struggled with financial or time constraints, others with ‘picky eaters’ or food allergies. Most mothers described a home practice of food that in some way or another differed from school in minor or major ways. From ethnic traditions to veganism to ‘meat-and-potatoes’ households to takeout pizza, many families did not practice the same food habits as SGCPs encourage. The judgment that several of my interviewees leveled against parents for this lack of congruence was harsh and unforgiving:
“They [the parents] eat carrots and peas and that is it. Broccoli? [They ask,] what is that? No thanks [they won’t eat it]… It is a lack of intelligence or education” (Leader, NS)

“The kids…are hungry for food, but they are hungry for someone to care about them, so this food comes with care and a whole different set of values. With authenticity” (Alice Waters, CA)

In these two quotations, leaders blame the students’ primary care givers for not doing an adequate job of caring and being a role model for their children. They question parents’ ‘intelligence,’ or the sincerity of their ethical practice, and imply that SGCPs can do a better job at parenting, at least around issues of food. SGCP leaders, however, were not the only ones to level such criticisms. I heard similar assessments from parents and students:

JHC: “Where is the problem coming from?”
STUDENT: “Some kids just eat crap for breakfast.” (Student, NS)
JHC: “Why?”
STUDENT: “Because their parents don’t care and they aren’t old enough to be exposed to good food.” (Student, NS)

“I noticed on some field trips there are kids with lunches that I am like, fire hot Cheetos and a Pepsi, and then this kid from Pakistan had his mom’s homemade Pakistani food. So some were really good and others were like, oh my god, mom is poisoning you!” (Mother, CA)

“Hopefully what the program is doing is changing cultures. I mean, it is definitely changing families, but hopefully cultures. [My] kids have grown up with the truth, real good information. There are other families that this isn’t true for, and you can see it, they are all overweight, they are huge, and they have health problems. But my kids look very healthy…” (Mother, CA)

In these assessments, we can see that judgments leveled against certain parents do not just arise from the leaders of SGCP, but from student participants and other (‘on board’) parents. In my view, this trend reflects a broader societal assumption (rather than an assumption simply arising from within the programs themselves) that food choices and behaviors are ultimately a matter of individual or familial responsibility. In this sense, we could say that the SGCPs are not doing enough to counter this assumption, or to teach about food choices within their broader social context. For example, I did not hear similar judgments voiced against the industrial food industry, the neoliberal economic structure, or the socio-spatial inequities of health care provisioning. In fact, when I brought up issues of purchasing power, or geographic availability during these interviews, many of my interviewees refused to deal with such issues, insisting that
ultimately it came down to setting individual priorities and making appropriate choices. “Healthier food is cheaper anyway,” one leader in Nova Scotia told me, “you just have to take the time to prepare it, and you have to know how” (Leader, NS). Others went further to contend that ultimately the problem had to do with parents’ taste buds; that certain parents did not have control of their bodies, and allowed themselves to be swept up in the culture of “instant gratification.”

“A perfect example is Picante, that Mexican Restaurant with Alice Waters’ style influence. I love that place, and the food is good, but you know, it is not authentic [because the cooks have] ditched lard and heavy, bad ingredients. So, Mexicans won’t eat there – it is not greasy enough. Their taste buds are locked into this instant gratification thing, not a nutrition thing at all.” (Father, CA)

In many of the above statements, there is an underlying implication that SGCPs are therefore particularly important because they can help students whose parents’ food practices and tastes differ in bad or innutritious ways from SGCPs. In this view, by introducing such students to new kinds of food/knowledge, SGCPs can perhaps undo the bad habits that such parents have imparted to their children. The idea that SGCPs help kids that are particularly ‘at risk’ is confirmed also by the funding sources of SGCPs, which are meant to help school programs target disenfranchised youth – students from poor and/or minority communities who have higher rates of dietary disease. But in what ways do these children actually need ‘help’? And how are these programs addressing these children’s actual needs (i.e. helping them to negotiate and find agency within the broader inequitable food system)? Certainly it does not help their parents to feel judged about the way that they feed their children. And certainly such judgments are not empowering for these children either. Further, my interviews with parents, teachers and activists suggest that it is not always disenfranchised youth that are being ‘helped’ the most by SGCPs. In fact, several interviewees suggested that SGCPs helped instead to further bolster the kids whose parents were already ‘on board:’

“Families who have more food culture around fresh ingredients are probably benefitting from the program more because the kids know [those ingredients] and they can make the recipes we make at home” (Teacher, CA)

“My kids get more reinforcement at home than other kids…They were watching something on television about the health risks of meat and they said to me, ‘but mom, why don’t they just use TVP [textured vegetable protein]? So, the program really solidifies what I teach them at home” (Parent, CA)

In both of these examples, it is the children who already eat similarly to SGCP programs that are benefiting the most, by having their home food experiences confirmed and legitimized by their school’s practices. Many of my discussions with students also confirmed this story, suggesting that what students learn in SGCP programs is not equally

To clarify, these comments do suggest the presence of neoliberal ideology; however they do not prove that this neoliberal ideology is coming from the programs themselves, nor do they imply that such an ideology is pure and lasting in its subject formation.
transferable to every student’s home life. These discussions frequently revolved around differences in ingredients, and particularly meat. Students suggested that if they learned how to cook with meat in the SGCP class, they would be more able to transfer what they are learning to their home practices:

“I mostly eat meat in my house. My family is all about meat. If they taught us nutritious things about meat in the cooking class, we could use [that information] at our house.” (Student, CA)

“The food we cook at home isn’t as healthy, I am gonna say. They don’t let us have meat here, and like if we was to make kale, we’d put some meat in it. And theirs is organically grown, which [we don’t have]…. It feels weird.” (Student, CA)

“We eat deer at home, but we can’t cook any meat here, because there is a policy or something, I am not sure why. I think it is not supposed to be processed, like by machines and stuff. Sometimes I think it is nice to have an equal amount of meat and vegetables. There should be some vegetables [in the SGCP], but not too many.” (Student, NS)

By disallowing meat and other ‘bad’ ingredients from the SGCP kitchen classrooms, the cooking lessons offered in SGCP spaces often end up being more relevant to the students who already eat similarly to what the programs teach. The students quoted above are less able to use the recipes and lessons at home because they often cannot find the same ingredients in their homes, and because their schools do not teach them how to work with what they have – i.e. how to incorporate meat into the vegetarian dishes that they cook. Beyond issues of physical availability, however, there are broader issues of access here. This food is not just unavailable to some students because their parents cannot or do not buy it, but also because of the tension and confusion that emerges when school and home food practices conflict. Both students and parents from such families articulated feelings of discomfort, anger, frustration, and hostility towards their SGCP program, particularly in (re)action to the perceived judgments coming SGCP leaders:

“Food is a really personal thing for a lot of parents, and they take the [school food changes] as a personal attack, like they are being judged, or they aren’t good enough parents because they give their kids pop…” (Mother, NS)

“Some people get their bird up, like you aren’t gonna tell me what to put in my kids lunch. I mean, I don’t think it hurts to have a hot dog once a year, but I understand the school is trying to be a good model, so I dunno…” (Mother, NS)

“One thing we haven’t addressed in schools is the parents. Because there is this whole dynamic when the kid is being taught about [fresh foods] at school and then comes home and the single mom pops a frozen pizza in the oven, and the kid says something about how this isn’t what she is supposed to be doing. Of course, the mom is just kind of really not turned on by the whole thing” (Teacher, CA).
In these quotations we can see that there is a broader visceral barrier to taking SGCP ideas home, or to getting “on board” with healthy alternative food, that has to do with feeling judged or being told what to do. Because SGCPs are framed as messengers of the truth, as I discussed in the section above, there is no space for flexibility and negotiation between school and home. In this situation, not only do students lack agency in the production of food knowledge, but parents lack agency as well. Notably, both of the above quotations from mothers came from participants who had a somewhat favorable attitude towards SGCPs, and who were discussing other parents’ (re)actions. The parents who really did not like the program also did not want to talk to me about it, most likely because I too was perceived as another food ‘expert’ – someone who would place further judgment on them.

In the Plainville SGCP, there was a particularly revealing story of such a dynamic that was repeated often in my interviews with leaders, teachers, parents, and students. Every year, the school holds a special event in which a locally famous (male) chef is invited to the school to cook with the students. He arrives with his chef hat on and a car full of fancy equipment and spices. The day proceeds in the chaotic fashion of an upscale restaurant: hectic, exciting, fast-paced, and entertaining. One year, parents were invited to this cooking event, to partake in the creations that the chef and their children had created. The scenario did not go as leaders and teachers had hoped. Some parents were noticeably turned off by the food, and refused to try it; it was too spicy, or unusual for their tastes. As one SGCP teacher told me, some parents even said “ewww. What is in there? I am not going to eat that!” (Teacher, NS). The students were disappointed that their efforts were not recognized, and teachers were shocked and upset. The following year, the SGCP school committee decided that the parents would not be invited; instead, the school decided to invite local politicians, people who they could count on to make the students feel proud:

“The next year we invited people who we could be sure would appreciate the food, and validate the students’ effort. Politicians. They were all very impressed, and that made the kids feel good” (Teacher, NS).

This story is a complicated one. Many students enjoyed meeting and working with a trained chef, and were excited to be working alongside him. Although the students did not all like what they cooked, the experience itself was a positive one for many of them, and many articulated as much to me. Nevertheless, while the negative reactions of some parents to the food did not necessarily change students’ other experiences of the day, it surely made them feel confused or invalidated, as many of my research participants expressed. While some of the teachers of Plainville School suggested to me that they were not worried about such conflicts, because it is “only through conflict that you can make change,” (Teacher, NS) most others were upset at the feelings of negativity that this conflict produced, and thus took steps to avoid conflict in the future (by inviting politicians the following year). However, as Elspeth Probyn points out in her own work with food (2001), in avoiding such negative visceral responses, we lose the opportunity to understand each other through our differences, and to recognize and dismantle the
hierarchies that such food conflict reveals. By allowing only positive (re)actions to food, SGCPs conceal the diversity that is present within all food relationships, and relinquish the chance to engage students and parents in meaningful dialogue about food. I return to the importance of negative (re)actions again in Chapter 5.

Unproductive Motivation

A third way that the production of knowledge within SGCPs can be limiting to students is through what I call unproductive motivation. Although motivation tends to be considered an energizing and positive visceral drive, motivation can also be unproductive when it reproduces social norms that are damaging and restrictive to students’ development. While I make this claim with the knowledge that the definition of ‘unproductive’ is itself necessarily hybrid, situated, and negotiated in particular contexts, I think it is helpful for me to be explicit about what I want and hope SGCPs to be working towards, and thus what I mean by progressive social change. In the case of unproductive motivation, then, I base my understanding of what it unproductive upon what I, along with many scholars and social theorists, have expressed concern over: i.e. trends that signal the reproduction of neoliberal subjectivities, the normalization of inequitable or oppressive gender roles, or the reinvention of social inequity on the basis of class or racial identity or body size. Along these lines, there are several types of unproductive motivation that I particularly witnessed within SGCPs, including desire for capitalist gain, pressures of conformity, and competitive one-upmanship. Here I want to talk briefly about one type of unproductive motivation that I found particularly troubling: fears related to body image and fatness.

Fear of fatness was the most obvious of the unproductive motivational drives that I witnessed during my research, and was the most frequently mentioned within SGCPs classrooms. As I already discussed in the sections above, SGCP students’ evaluative standards of what constitutes good and bad food typically revolved around the presence or quantity of fat in their food. Vegetables and fruits were deemed healthy because they were low in fat and were fresh. Cheese could only be healthy in small quantities, because too much was fattening. Indeed, the manner in which most students (and some of their teachers) categorized food typically illustrated a fear of eating too much fat. Of course, it was not the eating of fat that was itself considered the problem. This fear of fat in food was translated into body image—an fear of looking too fat, or being too fat, and thus also being ‘unhealthy.’ When I asked students why they had such an SGCP program in their school, students told me that the objective was to make sure they kept a slim appearance:

“I think it is to help us not get obese when we are older.” (Student, NS)

“It’s because kids are obese.” (Student, NS)

“Too many people are fat. They want us to be healthy.” (Student, CA)

“Because we eat food that’s hecka bad. People be getting obese.” (Student, CA)

30 As I discuss in Chapter 5, it was female students particularly who tended to focus on such issues of body image. However, both boys and girls understood that the purpose of the program was to reduce childhood obesity levels.
Although I did not hear teachers in either SGCP place a particular emphasis on fatness during their daily classroom activities, the students were certainly aware that the reasoning behind the SGCP programs was to prevent childhood obesity. This was indeed common knowledge. Perhaps this widespread understanding was due in part to the large media attention that has focused on issues of fatness and dieting in general. To be sure, many students talked about reality TV shows like “The Biggest Loser” (Field Notes, September 2007, NS) and dieting fads like the “South Beach Diet” (Field Notes, December 2007, CA). Thus, as students engaged in activities within the SGCP classroom, many students tended to associate their gardening and cooking activities with the prevention of fatness. Notably, students frequently discussed their food choices not just in terms of the quantity of fat in an item, but in terms of how it would make them look. Although boys engaged in such conversations as well, it is important to mention that I often noticed girls bringing up the notion of fatness more frequently:

Field Notes, November 2007, CA:

I was sitting at table three, helping Latisha, Shaunna, and Paula make tortillas, while two other students were sautéing veggies. The girls were talking about what they put in various dishes that they make at home, and Latisha mentioned bacon in a rice dish. Shaunna said that bacon had fat in it, and was fattening. They started talking about cheese, and asking each other if cheese was bad. Paula said, yeah, cheese has like lard in it, or like fat from an animal or something, so it is bad. It will make you fat. The others agreed. (Emphasis added)

The focus on fatness or being fat was not just something that I witnessed among students themselves, however, but something that seemed more broadly a part of the SGCPs programs as a whole. For example, in Berkeley one SGCP teacher mentioned that the cafeteria staff members were all given gym memberships at reduced rates. “It’s about health with the staff too, some of the staff…are [too big], we all need to be good role models” (Teacher, CA). In Nova Scotia, one of the central reasons behind engaging students in garden-based activities was to encourage physical exercise, which would keep students slim and healthy. As one leader told me during an informal discussion in the garden “It is a shame that so few students like to garden these days. But they will play video games…It is laziness” (Field Notes, August 2007, NS).

When I mentioned issues of body image or the potential development of restrictive eating habits (anorexia, bulimia), however, many of my adult research participants nodded their heads knowingly and expressed concern over the issue. “There are so many pressures on students to diet…especially girls” (Teacher, CA). Nevertheless, many of my research participants did not seem to think that SGCPs were a place where eating disorders could develop. Some SGCP teachers and leaders suggested that students at this age were “still too young” to really be thinking about such issues (Field Notes, July 2007, NS), while others simply did not see SGCPs as places where food restricting was encouraged. Yet the students that I talked to expressed otherwise. Dieting came up frequently in my conversations with students, and most often when I was talking to girls. When I asked
students whether they found it difficult to eat healthily, female students often responded with a diet-related answer:

“Yeah, I try to not pig out on candy and cookies. It is [hard].” (Student, NS)

“Sometimes I am doing really well, and then I have something sugary and I feel all bloated and huge, and I have to start all over again.” (Student, NS)

“A lot of girls these days are dieting, low-carbing it or whatever…. I am not on a diet.” (Student, CA)

Regardless of whether SGCPs are framed as ‘dieting’ programs, then, many of the female students that I talked with seem to experience them as such. Through being labeled as healthy eating programs, and through encouraging less meat consumption, SGCPs seem to give students the impression that they are just another outcome of the general societal push towards dieting. SGCPs are an opportunity to practice the food lessons that they learn in the broader social world. But sometimes this situation can be frustrating:

“We get it at school, we get it on TV; It is everywhere. Sometimes I just want to eat, and not have to think about it.” (Student, CA)

At the same time that such food lessons are not gender neutral, neither are they race or class neutral. As feminist researchers have shown, body image and standards of beauty are not experienced in the same ways across lines of social difference (Thompson 1996). In Berkeley, because the SGCPs had connotations of middle-class whiteness, dieting and keeping a slim appearance were also frequently associated with being white, and also well-to-do (students frequently commented that eating healthier was more expensive, despite leaders claims to the contrary). A teacher thoughtfully commented to me:

“…We don’t want to sound like we are preaching or we are better, and to be honest, how are we [better]? Many of us are thin, white women, and you know, I know what a farm market is. But if I didn’t, and I went in there and they charged me three dollars for a little pepper, I’d be put off.” (Teacher, CA)

As this teacher points out, motivation to eat as the SGCPs encourage implies not only a particular choice of food, but also a particular social identity. Indeed, food choice and social identity are interdependent and co-constituting, a point that Chapter 5 discusses in depth. Thus, we might ask, what type of ‘becoming’ do SGCPs seem to encourage? Do SGCPs motivate students to become a particular type of person, or a particular type of body? And how is this body-type gendered, raced, or classed? Another way of asking this is: does the motivation that SGCPs generate limit or enable diversity in terms of food identity? One food activist in Berkeley wondered with me: “Are [students] being guided and led by people that are culturally competent enough to create a curriculum that is relevant to them and their real lives?” (Activist, CA) In the example below, a black female student was in conversation with several students at the table, commenting on her
dieting plan for the evening. Her understanding of what constitutes a desirable body size and practice are linked with particular identities that she does not consider her own:

Field Notes, October 2007, CA:

Paula said she would have a salad for dinner tonight, because she was on a diet. I said, really you are on a diet? And she said, yeah, but it is hard because she likes salad with cheese and ham and onions and croutons and dressing all on there. She said her mom told her that if she wanted to lose weight, she better eat one of those vegetarian salads with no taste. She and her friends explained to me that the food they eat in the classroom is all vegetarian, like Berkeley hippie food, but the food they eat at home is different.

Examples like these point to the need for SGCPs to pay closer attention to what motivation does beyond changing eating habits. The topic of social identity and food is a large one, and one to be continued in Chapter 5, but here it is important to consider how fixed ways of knowing food can translate into fixed ways of being and becoming, which ultimately preclude SGCP programs from being open to social difference. To the extent that students are motivated to all be the same type of person, or have the same type of body, the knowledge that SGCPs offer can be seen as limiting. However, SGCPs also offer much more than this. The remainder of this chapter discusses the ways in which knowledge production in SGCPs can be considered enabling.

Knowledge as Enabling

Because knowledge is a visceral matter, a matter of both physical body and intellectual mind, the outcomes of knowledge are not fully pre-determined. While there are important ways in which the knowledge produced within SGCP programs can be limiting to certain students, there are also ways that SGCP programs produce knowledge that is enabling and animating to these same students. In the section below, I explore some of the ways that SGCPs programs enable students to engage in the production of food-based knowledge, thereby encouraging rather than eschewing diversity. In particular, I want to discuss three instances of enablement in regard to food knowledge: the disruption of hierarchy, student agency and peer knowledge, and information as creative potential.

Disruption of Hierarchy

“\'I hate shopping for food in the neighborhoods I grew up in, but only because I’ve traveled enough to know the difference. If you never leave the hood, you have no way of knowing how bad the produce is.\'” (Kweli 2007)

The above quotation is taken from the website of Talib Kweli, one of several recognized ‘socially conscious’ contemporary rap artists. I begin with his words because they were important to my own development as I engaged in this SGCP research. Kweli’s album
“Eardrum” came out in October of 2007, as I was transitioning from Nova Scotia to my Berkeley case-study. The lyrics in this album, which are summarized in part by the quotation above, served as my reminder that SGCPs are not just about limitations and restrictions, they are also about providing opportunity. Through listening to Kweli’s words, I came to recognize that SGCPs could potentially help to disrupt the hierarchies that currently structure students’ uneven access to fresh fruits and vegetables – in economic, geographic, cultural, and ultimately visceral terms. SGCPs can and do provide disenfranchised students with opportunities to relate to food and food practices that they otherwise would not have – thereby expanding students’ rhizomatic reach.

In this understanding, it is not so much the food or practice that is the point, but rather the opportunity to relate that is itself significant. To focus on a particular food (broccoli) or food practice (sitting at a table) is to focus on the outcome – ‘improved’ palates or habits. But the opportunity is something different. In an ANT sense, the opportunity to relate does not oblige a certain outcome of relating, but rather suggests an openness of possibility to what might be produced in the process of forming a relationship. In providing opportunities to relate, new types of knowledge can emerge. As Kweli’s quote suggests, this knowledge can be both devastating (in what it reveals) and empowering (in what it allows). A minority food activist in Berkeley explained her work in this way:

“The African community in South Berkeley has no grocery stores, not one in a 3 mile radius. There are 11 liquor stores, and fast food, Jack in the Box, and McDonalds. How can you read and learn and be a productive citizen if you don’t have access to real food? We don’t need scientific research on that, it is just basic common sense. So we said we are going to provide opportunity and outlets, not just bringing food to people, but helping grow that value of basic raw food, because it wasn’t there…” (Activist, CA)

When I began to look at SGCPs in terms of what opportunities they provide, I discovered a whole new way to analyze the programs – even down to the visceral level of sensory perception or taste. I asked myself, what opportunities do SGCPs provide not only to taste, but also to feel out new ways of tasting? In other words, if some students never have opportunities to taste certain foods, what might the act of tasting allow that would otherwise not exist? The answer to this question is not fully attainable because, as previous chapters discussed, the outcomes of tasting are not pre-determined. Nevertheless, by discussing SGCPs in terms of opportunities, we can begin to imagine and to allow for the possibility of disruption and difference. In thinking about taste in these terms, comments like the following can carry new meaning:

“If you grow up in a family eating well, you may go to junk as a rebellion, but you will come back because it is engrained in you. But the schools can influence those kids who never got the chance to taste quality food at home; it can be an epiphany” (Teacher, NS)
“I don’t think you can like something unless there is a sensory relationship to it. If all you ever eat is canned beans, why would you touch a [fresh] green bean?” (Teacher, CA)

Rather than interpreting these comments in terms of their implied end goal (eating healthier food), I began to understand such claims as descriptive of the potentialities that SGCPs allow in bringing things into relation: bodies, foods, ideas, tables, etc. From this perspective, SGCPs are not about trying to convince ‘others’ to eat in one particular way, but rather about the opening of possibilities for new ways of eating that could disrupt current uneven tendencies in our food systems:

“The CDC says one in three Caucasian kids, and two in three African American and Hispanic kids will have diabetes in their lifetime. So, we do see the obesity crisis growing, and faster in communities of color…” (Activist, CA)

“If I ask minority students what is the one thing we do here that you don’t do at home, but you’d like to, the number one thing they say is eat together. It isn’t even so much about food as the community and feeling a part of something.” (Teacher, CA)

“I am a privileged, well educated and traveled man; I have seen what local food can do in Italy, but a poor underprivileged kid from rural Nova Scotia, where does he or she get that opportunity? So, that is the educational aspect for me…” (Leader, NS)

While SGCPs do not generally go beyond school to address the issues of economic or geographic availability that lead to such statistics, in bringing poor and minority students into relation with new foods and new food ideas, they widen the scope of possibilities that are available to these students. ‘Possibilities’ in this sense refers broadly to students’ abilities to develop new visceral imaginaries – to have novel experiences with food/practices that allow them to disrupt current habits of bodily (re)action and begin to feel out different ways of being and becoming (and perhaps to ‘access’ healthy food in their own way). This is different from the assimilationist interpretation of taste education because the focus is on the disruption of hierarchical patterns (as in Figure 4 of Chapter 2), rather than on the construction of an (hierarchical) end goal. For example, in many of my interviews, leaders, activists and students discussed the need to disrupt patterns of relating to fast and processed food:

“We have to make a huge effort to get out of the addiction, especially when they are trying to figure out every conceivable way to get you hooked. You got the ads on the bottom of your gym shoes…so we have to create events that reach people in all the seductive ways of culture…[because otherwise] you are at the mercy of fast food nation” (Alice Waters, CA)
“Childhood memories are the strongest, and [that’s why] you have to start early. Right now they are building their nostalgic connections with Cheetos.” (Activist, CA)

“Like McDonalds is addictive, it is like smoking a cigarette, and you can’t stop. Serious. It is like, McDonalds, they’ve got something in their food that’s addictive. (Student, CA)

In focusing on the disruption of attachments or addictions, we can begin to understand how the idea of sensory education could be important to dismantling inequitable power structures; in these examples, this is true particularly in regard to our capacity to undermine corporate interests, advertising, and agri-business. In this sense, these examples are not unlike what Thrift (2005) suggests when he warns of the capacity of those in power to produce affects that control our life practices or limit what we deem possible. With the above quotations in mind, then, I want to take seriously the possibility that SGCPs could help disenfranchised students to ‘take back’ their taste buds – not in any pre-defined way (as Alice Waters seems to suggest), but in a way that allows them to interrupt the economic and social forces that tend to keep them in connection with foods that they describe as addictive. Over the course of my research, many poor and minority students expressed gratitude for what their SGCPs allowed as far as new ways of relating to food:

“It teaches me that I can do things in my own house, for myself, I can make food and I don’t have to rely on fast food or on my family members” (Student, NS)

“People think that if you eat healthy it’s nasty and there is nothing good about it, but here they show you how to put more flavor in your food, but it is still healthy” (Student, CA)

Here we can see that the production of knowledge in SGCPs is not only or always limiting to students. Knowledge can be enabling to the extent that it allows students to develop new visceral imaginaries that open up possibilities in the food spaces of both school and home. As the students above describe, SGCPs offer them the opportunity to relate to ‘healthy’ food in new ways (a point that I pick up on in depth in the section below, “information as creative potential”). SGCPs show these students that they have different options in terms of both what they do with food (buying fast food versus cooking) and also how they feel about it (assuming that healthy food is tasteless versus expecting even healthy food to taste good). In this sense, students are an active part of the production of knowledge within SGCPs; knowing food is not about holding the ‘right’ information but about realizing how information can expand one’s opportunities to know.

**Agency and Peer Knowledge**

“It is coming from her, she owns it” (Parent, NS)
“Kids often want to rebel against their parents at this age, so this way my kids can have it be their thing” (Parent, CA)

“It’s our garden, we work in it, we go to school here, we plant the stuff, and then we get to eat it. It is ours” (Student, NS)

A common claim about SGCPs is that they ‘work’ because they allow students to make healthy eating ‘their own.’ But, what exactly does this mean, and what processes and opportunities does this entail? Over the course of my research, I witnessed many instances where students’ agency was encouraged in SGCP classrooms, and where students were invited and even expected to contribute their own ideas to a collective production of knowledge. One way that SGCP teachers encouraged student involvement is through the flexibility of their pedagogical style (an issue discussed in more depth in Chapter 6). Although flexibility was more easily accomplished in the kitchen classrooms, because the gardens required a more rigid and longer-term plan, both the kitchens and gardens of SGCPs were places where teachers embraced a flexible approach:

“There is a lot of flexibility in this type of [garden] work, letting them use their own skills and passions, and teaching to specific children, letting them shine where they can.” (Teacher, CA)

“I am really flexible, that is my style. The kids take it seriously, but they also have a lot of freedom. We talk about anything in [the kitchen].” (Teacher, NS)

Students also discussed this flexibility, particularly in terms of what they were and were not allowed to do, or how much freedom they had in the daily operations of the kitchen or garden. Students often associated flexibility with a potential for more creative moments, where they could not only take control of the activity, but also use their own ideas and interests to steer the project in different ways. Again, students also found that this “freedom” was more available in the kitchen than the garden:

| Our gardening program is okay. We don't plant stuff and water things all day. We play gardening games. We have chickens and cucumbers. We dig a lot. I like our cooking class better than gardening. Cooking we have more freedom, I know that wouldn't be dangerous but it's not they talk about safety before we cook. |

In addition to being flexible and creative, having freedom in the kitchen or garden classes is also a signal to students that they are trusted. Many of the students that I interacted with in the SGCP classrooms were most animated when they were asked to do something out of the ordinary – something that illustrated that their teachers had confidence that they could handle the task. For example, one day at Central School three students and I
walked 5 blocks down the road to collect coffee grounds for compost for the school. We brought along a wheelbarrow, and came back with a good amount of compost material. The students were “visibly animated” (smiling, walking faster than usual) at the opportunity to engage in such a task, particularly because it required “going off school grounds in the middle of the school day” – something that was not usually allowed (Field Notes, November 2007, CA). Teachers also discussed the issue of trust during interviews:

“A lot of people who visit say, how can you trust the kids with these knives? But you can. The kids know how serious it is…and they appreciate us having enough respect and trust for them to use these tools. They live up to these expectations. We never have a problem, they don’t mess around” (Teacher, CA)

Trust was also something that came up frequently in regard to taste. Students seemed to enjoy the opportunity to alter recipes, to sample and make changes while cooking, or to have some say over the way food tasted. SGCP teachers often asked students to try a dish and figure out what they thought it needed more of – spices, salt, a certain ingredient, etc. When students are asked or expected to play such a role in decision making, they are shown that their visceral judgments matter. Rather than legitimizing those visceral judgments that fall in line with certain accepted food habits or behaviors, in trusting students’ to make decisions about taste, students are shown that all experiences and judgments have value. In other words, it shows them that they can be co-producers of food knowledge:

“We found that when we conducted taste tests, there was buy in. The kids felt their opinions were valued” (Teacher, NS)

Field Notes, November 2007, CA:

One kid today was telling me how he put some extra pepper in the recipe to spice it up a little more and make it taste good. He asked [the cooking teacher] if he could put a clove of garlic in and was pleasantly surprised that she said yes. He told me that he was going to put a little more olive oil too, and did so without asking.

In these examples, the taste education that SGCPs offer does not point towards some final end goal where every student will come to like the same foods. Instead, the pedagogy is one of encouraging different students to provide input and suggestions in producing the final meal or snack. The end result is not fixed but negotiated. One teacher at Central School discussed with me how this pedagogical strategy was a change for her. Initially, she had considered the work of SGCPs to be more focused on a fixed idea of health. However, after working in the school for a while, she came to the realization that fixity was not the best strategy for reaching students. She needed to recognize where the kids were coming from, and allow that to inform her educational practice:

“When I first started I had a different vision, also for my own health I had a different vision, and I really believed that if you could encourage kids to eat more
fruits and veggies and beans [that was the ultimate goal.] But as the years have gone on I find that I am trying to meet the kids closer to where they are coming from, so we may use butter or eggs or white flour, or some sugar, but good quality…. I find with the middle schoolers a lot of lecturing about health doesn’t impress them. It’s not my style either.” (Teacher, CA)

Often in the SGCPs I studied, teachers not only encouraged but expected such active participation from students. Through such expectations, the SGCPs emerged as spaces where a diversity of tastes and experiences can and do exist, and where a diversity of students can and do take an active role in the production of food knowledge. In this sense, the ‘goodness’ of SGCP food can be assessed by examining the process in which food/decisions are made, rather than by focusing on the final product. Several SGCP teachers focused on the idea of process over product during their interviews, explaining that SGCP programs were consciously designed to bring together a diverse group of students, with varying ideas and experiences with food. The expectation was that through the process of such interactions, students would teach each other about food not in any pre-established ways, but rather in the diverse and haphazard contexts of their lives:

“There are different reasons why we have selected students to be in there. Some kids need to have training about how to cook for their own survival; others have a lot of background [with vegetarian food], others need a creative outlet. We want a heterogeneous class so that kids bring in different perspectives.” (Teacher, CA)

The notion that SGCPs provide a space for students to teach each other is an important one. During my research I witnessed that SGCPs do provide daily opportunities for peers to collectively engage in the production of knowledge, with little to no involvement by teachers or adults. The significance of this is two fold. One, students are able to play an active role in their own education, which has significant impacts on their experience of the programs overall – i.e. whether or not they get the sense that what they are learning is relevant to them. Secondly, as a food activist in Berkeley pointed out to me, students of middle-school age are often more likely to listen to each other than they are to an authority figure. As he explained of his experience working with kids, if your best friend wants to talk about healthy alternatives, you are less likely to feel judged or attacked by such comments, and are often more likely be open to hearing what s/he has to say:

“When it is your peer, it is more of a conversation, it is more about sharing and less hierarchical. You are being taught, but there is a dialogue, a certain vernacular. It is easier to receive when you are dropping knowledge on a comrade.” (Activist, CA)

In my observations of peer knowledge sharing within SGCP classrooms, I witnessed a variety of different scenarios. At times students were gentle and forgiving with their information, offering suggestions and advice rather than strict critique:
“Healthy eating isn’t like never eating pop, it is about finding balance. I mean, I never really liked pop anyway, but if I did, that would be ok too” (Student, NS)

At other times students were harsh and abrasive to each other with their information:

“Bull shit! Do you know how nasty [KFC] is? They breed their own chickens and they are born beakless and featherless. I read about it” (Student, CA)

Although peer relationships were certainly not free from hierarchy, they were undoubtedly strong forces within SGCPs that influenced students’ experience of food in powerful ways. The strength of peer relationships calls into question the centrality of SGCP teachers and leaders to positions of power within the programs. Often in my daily experiences with SGCP classrooms, peer relationships appeared more persuasive than anything a teacher suggested or demanded. As a teacher at Central School said to me, “If you can get a popular kid to say, ‘this is hella good,’ it is a powerful force at the middle school level.” Indeed, it was for this reason that some SGCP teachers made rules about students saying negative or nasty things about SGCP food:

“One of our teachers wants us to only say hmmm, interesting after tasting our food. She doesn’t want us to use words like nasty….because you could be a bad influence on other kids. But that really bugged me, and none of us liked her” (Student, CA)

Despite some teachers’ attempts to limit negative comments or interactions, however, they were a common occurrence in SGCP classrooms, alongside many other responses: positive, intrigued, aloof, etc. Students frequently changed their minds in unison, and often quite dramatically, about what they would or wouldn’t eat, or about what tasted good to them. I came to call this phenomenon “visceral peer pressure:”

Field Notes, September 2007, NS:

All the kids were out in the garden, passing around a basil leaf and smelling it, at the request of their teacher. One boy made a face and said “ewwww, gross!” as he passed it. After that, every student had the same reaction down the line, until one girl smelled it and said, oh! This smells great, what are you talking about? So then the door was open again for a variety of reactions, and others agreed with her. Could we call this visceral peer pressure?

Whatever we call this phenomenon, what is clear from these accounts is that students affect each other a great deal within SGCP classrooms. In this sense, it is important to remember that a lot more occurs within SGCPs than nutrition lessons and gardening/cooking instruction. Whether direct student involvement is a matter of pedagogical strategy, a happenstance, or a force that is avoided, students play a large role in how food knowledge is produced and reproduced within SGCPs. Paying attention to this function is therefore important in understanding how SGCPs function, and what they are actually capable of doing in terms of their capacity to motivate.
Information as Creative Potential

The third instance of enablement within SGCPs that I want to discuss is the role of information in allowing for creative possibility. This refers specifically to the fact that SGCPs provide students with information that allows them to (re)act and respond to their particular social contexts in creative and important ways. Although the alternative/nutrition knowledge that SGCPs impart is a partial knowledge, it can nevertheless be an important tool for many students’ lives – including especially those students who do not encounter such information elsewhere. As a food activist in Berkeley said of school and community gardens:

“Talking about empowerment of the black community, it is something we can have control over. We often feel like we can’t control much, but we can take this into our own hands. We can grow our own food. It is very empowering in that way.” (Activist, CA)

Similarly, some of my student interviewees, and especially those from poorer and/or minority families, suggested that the information that the SGCPs imparted was important to them because it gave them new ideas for how to respond to various life contexts and experiences.

“Yeah, I bring some of the recipes home…because I cook at home a lot. My mom works, so I can make a healthy dinner for her and my sisters and my grandma.” (Student, CA)

“It teaches us new things, like if I was at home, my mom would have never thought about cooking pears.” (Student, CA)

“If we learn how to garden, we can eat the stuff that we do in class at home, and we can have the ingredients.” (Student, NS)

Many of SGCP leaders and teachers also looked at SGCPs in this way, seeing their role as one of providing information that could be useful in broadening the life options of disenfranchised students. In the case of the Plainville SGCP, this interpretation could be used to re-examine the chef event, to which many parents reacted negatively. While initially I read the event as a class struggle of sorts, the chef himself gave this explanation (as one of several) of what he was doing there:

“The majority of kids in this area do not have access to a diversity of experiences, so [meeting a real chef] is a treat for them. It is one more opportunity to know what you might do in your life” (Leader, NS)

While some parents clearly also interpreted the chef event as elitist, like I did, the children themselves seemed to have mixed experiences of the event, at least according to those with whom I spoke. It is certainly possible that by meeting this chef, and spending an afternoon cooking with him, some students were able to recognize that cooking might
be something to which they could aspire as a profession. Of course, one might ask whether this reinforces the importance of cooking as a money-making occupation over other forms of cooking (as care work, domestic labor, etc). However, the experience of cooking with this chef is undoubtedly one that many students would not have had otherwise, and thus needs to be considered also in terms of its potential for expanding students’ horizons.

There were many other moments of re-evaluation and re-interpretation over the course of my SGCP research. My initial impressions of the Berkeley SGCP, for example, included feeling put off by the fact that one of the cooking teachers (a middle-class white woman) began each class with the gong of a singing/meditation bowl – which is also a very typical way to begin and end a yoga session, a common practice among many wealthier Berkeley residents. Because of my interviews with minority food activists, who called into question the ability for white teachers to teach non-white students about food, this bowl ringing practice initially struck me as elitist, and potentially off-putting to students for whom this practice is unfamiliar or weird (at the same time as could be legitimizing and animating for those who are familiar with meditation). In other words, within the context of Berkeley, this singing bowl represented to me the side of Berkeley that students described as hippie/yuppie and white, and thus I interpreted it as a potential barrier of access for students from poor and non-white households. Yet, as I came to recognize, few students seemed to mind the sound of the bowl, and many were actually interested in ringing it themselves. The bowl had a gentle tone that felt soothing to me, even as I interpreted it as elite. When I brought up my initial reaction to one teacher during an interview, she responded:

“I supposed that the program could be more sensitive in terms of [recognizing differences among students comfortableness with the space/food] but it is also just about who is running the classes. [The cooking teacher] brings her own sensibilities, and another teacher would bring theirs. Like, she starts the class with a singing bowl, and although not all kids are familiar with that sound, it is a nice sound and a nice tradition.” (Teacher, CA)

While I think that my initial juxtaposing of the meditation bowl experience to the concerns of minority food activists was a valid response, as this teacher points out, this was certainly not the only thing that the meditation bowl allowed. I agree with the concerns voiced by minority food activists that suggest that we need to ask, “What can these institutions do so they can be empowering to a wider range of students?” (Activist, CA). But, I also want to suggest that even in being familiar to some, and unfamiliar to others, the meditation bowl can be empowering to both. To not recognize this, I think, is to “discredit students’ ability to learn” (Activist, CA) from their interactions with a wide range of people and experiences, and to use this knowledge in creative and significant ways. In this sense, it is important to point out that many students (both white and of color, rich and poor) enjoyed taking turns gonging the meditation bowl.

One of the most surprising revelations over the course of my SGCP research was the extent to which the programs encouraged students to think and act creatively in regard to
food and food practices. This was true particularly in the Berkeley SGCP, where approximately every month the students engaged in a group cooking contest. On these days, students were given no recipe or instruction, but instead just a pile of potential ingredients, out of which they could make whatever they desired. The results were imaginative and diverse: with eggs students made omelets, fried rice, bread, and meringues; with beets they made salads, roasted vegetables, garnishes, and food dyes. The following field note excerpt describes one of these contest days:

Field Notes, December 2007, CA:

At the end of the day today, the group at table three was by far the most clever and amazing I had seen. Their classroom teacher even commented on what an opportunity it was to be trusted to make a dish all on their own, what that allows in terms of their own motivation and excitement. The girls were so excited about their dishes, and asked me if I liked the garnishes that they made (a bit of rosemary on every plate). Another group made corn chips for their salsa, by making tortillas, cutting them up, and frying them. Another boy carved intricate figures out of the radishes and an apple.

As the discussion above suggests, this sort of creativity that was encouraged within SGCPs seems to reach over into other areas of the students’ lives, beyond the cooking room and the school. Through these events, I began to see the recognize that the information and technical skills that SGCPs offered students – everything from learning how to turn on a stove or oven to learning how to peel a winter squash – was perhaps fixed in the curriculum, or in the nutrition guidelines, but certainly not in the lived spaces of the students daily lives. SGCP information was put to use by students in a variety of different ways, both within and beyond the school classrooms. When viewed as partial knowledge instead of universal knowledge, the ideas and insights that SGCPs offer students can be seen as potentially enabling of their creativity, adaptability, and survival.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has discussed ways in which SGCP programs can both limit and enable different students’ access to new ways of thinking about, preparing, and experiencing food. The first section explored questions of what/who constitutes legitimate food knowledge, and asked how some students might be precluded from participating in the production of food knowledge within SGCPs. The second section offered a different interpretation of SGCPs, in which the opportunities, interactions, and information the programs offered could be seen as potentially enabling, and thus also viscerally animating. Both of these stories have merit, and both are part of my own research experience of SGCPs. In Chapter Six, I take up these issues again, illustrating how various pedagogical strategies can help to encourage SGCPs to become more enabling, and less limiting. In order to do this, however, it is necessary to examine the ways in which SGCPs engage students in practices that reinforce and resists social norms and expectations surrounding various social identities – e.g. gender, race, class and age differences. I turn to this discussion in the next chapter.
Chapter 5: Food Identity

This chapter is the second of three empirically focused chapters within this dissertation. I draw on interview and participant observation data to explore how food-based social identities are reinforced and resisted within school garden and cooking programs (SGCPs) in ways that influence the visceral (re)actions of students and parents to healthy, alternative food. I begin with a section that explains how I understand and use social labels in this chapter, such as those based on race, class, gender, or age. I then move on to explore these four axes of social difference in regard to the role that SGCPs play in both reproducing and disrupting bounded food identities. I discuss in turn, race, class, gender, and age, focusing on how SGCP food practices (re)define each individually, while at the same time acknowledging the intersectionality of all such identities. The chapter ends with a brief summation and conclusion of the visceral significance of this discussion.

Pockets of Subjectivity

“It is hard to overcome students’ pre-set feelings to certain foods. It is hard, you can only do so much” (Leader, NS)

“I think children are clean slates when they are born. As adults, we impress upon them so much, so [certain tastes] are set in them. But, it doesn’t matter what age you are, 10 or 50, the brain is still pliable” (Parent, CA)

This chapter explores the intersection between social identity and food. I begin with the above quotes because I want to discuss food identities in terms of their viscerality – that is, the ways in which food practices and tastes become bodily habits of being and feeling, from which we practice and perpetuate our social identities. Students come into SGCP classrooms with a variety of different food identities, which are not necessarily ‘set’ or ‘fixed’ but certainly habituated to some extent into their daily life practices. Building on previous chapters, we can think of food identities as the visceral intersection of social subjectivities and food practices – that which propels judgments like “this is my kind of food,” or “I don’t eat this way,” (although such judgments are not always consciously articulated as such). These food identities are at once discursive and material. They are defined based on already established social categories: black, white, middle-class, women, youth, etc, but they are also always more than these categories in that they are taken up and reproduced through bodily practices that do not always remain within the boundaries of one discursive grouping.

SGCPs provide a space for students to both reproduce and resist the existing boundaries of food based identities, particularly in regard to race, class, gender, and age. My contention in this chapter is that SGCPs do their work within and through food identities, and that food identities can both be limiting and enabling to progressive social change within SGCPs. Rather than promoting an understanding that eating good food together will overcome our differences, as many SGCP leaders suggest, we therefore need to begin to attend to how difference itself is a crucial (and visceral) proponent in even
bringing us to the table. Talking about social identities in visceral terms, though, is a tricky task, particularly because it is necessary to make use of discursive categories at the same time as we allow social identities to spill beyond these boundaries and be(come) more than these categories. In regard to issues of race and geographic identity, for example, France Winddance Twine (1996) discusses black women’s concurrent need to recognize and celebrate the black community as a distinct(ly oppressed) group, while also working to break down fixed assumptions about what constitutes blackness to begin with. What, then if we wanted to call for better access to healthy foods that are culturally relevant for a black community? How would we define what healthy eating is for a black community, while holding the meaning of both ‘healthy’ and ‘black’ in question?

While these conflicts may sound unanswerable and perhaps overly philosophical, perhaps one strategy is to try to practice, rather than solve, the problem. That is, perhaps we can begin by consciously attempting to live our lives in the midst of such tension – as though these modes of identification are significant, but not enduring, parts of our daily, bodily existence. In this light, feminist geographer Audrey Kobayashi advocates recognizing “all forms of social identification (especially race and gender) as temporary and dissolvable political coalitions rather than fixed groups…” (1994, 78). Instead of attempting to overcome or ignore social labels, she insists, quoting Seamus Deane (1990, 4) that:

“‘the divisions of [the past] must be lived through in the present. It is therefore necessary to sustain commitment to them under the aegis of irony. Otherwise the oppressive conditions they bespeak will merely be reproduced.’” (Kobayashi 1994, 78)

This strategy is notably similar to Gilles Deleuze’s and Felix Guattari’s notion of “becoming indeterminate” (2004), though the phrase might not initially sound parallel. In Deleuze and Guattari’s discussion of such dilemmas of language, they explains that they wants to maintain a radical openness to the possibilities of (material) human becoming – to what we are to be in the future. In this sense, Deleuze and Guattari seem to eschew labels altogether by advocating an ideal ‘goal’ of total indeterminacy, where terms like ‘black’ or ‘girl’ or ‘healthy’ cease to define or distinguish us from each other. Like Kobayashi, however, Deleuze and Guattari do not outright dismiss these labels. They also recognize that because we exist in the midst of already established social hierarchies, in this ‘open’ process of material becoming it is necessary to retain “pockets of subjectivity” – little bits of (bodily) faith in the labels themselves – in order to be able to (quite literally) feel our way forward (Grosz 1994, 171). In other words, Deleuze and Guattari realize that without any sort of temporary sense of ‘blackness’ or ‘healthiness,’ for example, we would be left unable to act at all – we would be rendered socially ineffective. In a way, then, our political agency comes in and through the (temporary) fixity of these labels – and simultaneously through our (bodily) ability to throw them into question. In this sense, the becoming of “becoming indeterminate” is perhaps the more important word of the phrase, for it is the active, visceral practice of “living through” the impermanence that matters more than the imagined (and unattainable) end solution.
Another important point to consider here is that the very (material) practice of indeterminacy or impermanence is itself always already influenced by past hierarchies and social orderings. Thus the ability of a person or group to practice these “pockets of subjectivity” as temporary is itself determined by their already (somewhat) structured place in society. For example, Mona Domosh (1997) reminds us, identities are “fluid and never fixed, although dominant powers structure the terms and extend of that fluidity,” (85, emphasis added). This is similar to my discussion in Chapter 2 of the effect of structural and rhizomatic forces on the production of tendencies (fixities) and latencies (openings) in bodily social practice. Therefore, it is important to recognize that those in a place of privilege in our social world are often much more likely to be able to engage in the fluid practice of indeterminacy or impermanence than those in positions of relative disenfranchisement. While I can quite easily practice impermanence in my academic writing and my interpretation of text, it is not my access to such practices that ultimately matter for SGCPs. In this light, it is not enough to simply advocate the practice itself, we must also work to make this practice accessible to disenfranchised ‘others.’ One of the questions propelling this chapter is, therefore, do SGCPs make such a practice accessible to all students?

As I discuss social identity and food in this chapter, I try to take seriously these responsibilities both in my own writing, and in terms of how I analyze the work of SGCPs. I use terms like ‘black’, ‘middle-class,’ ‘healthy,’ and ‘women,’ frequently in my writing, reflecting the language that my research participants used during interviews and classroom activities. I use these terms with the recognition and insistence that they are significant ways to distinguish between social groups that have distinct histories and knowledges, and also that these labels are constantly and actively being shifted, altered, and resisted from both within and beyond the bounds of their current meaning. The remainder of this chapter discusses four different instances of food-based social identity: race, class, gender, and age. I choose these four for several reasons. One, feminist scholars have traditionally been interested in the intersectionality of race, class, and gender – what has become considered the feminist triad, as it is frequently used as a way to analyze and assess across lines of social difference. I also discuss age because working with youth made me recognize that age is another important food-based identity marker, one that many of my student research participants discussed and practiced frequently. While I separate these four in this chapter for the purposes of illustration and clarity, I also recognize that the four identities are not mutually exclusive but rather co-constituting. Racially-based food identities, for example, are also often formed within the context of class-differences, and gender-based food identities are further distinguished by race or class difference. I discuss these intersections below while also maintaining the separate categories in order to be able to demonstrate how the work of SGCPs both reinforces and resists the boundedness of each category.

Race and Food

The intersection of racial identity and food was a topic that became apparent during my research in Berkeley, CA. Because the population of the area surrounding Plainville
School was predominantly White (approximately 99 percent), racial identity as a form of social difference within SGCP spaces was not apparent in my Nova Scotia case study. Central School in California, however, was a notably more diverse. According to school estimates, approximately 44 percent of the schools’ students are African American, 20 percent are White, 15 percent Latino, and 9 percent are Asian. Though not calculated by the school, these categories also include many students with a multi-racial identity.

Though Central School was racially diverse, much of the student-led discussion around racial identity and food in my research was in reference to two racial identities: black and white. To a lesser extent, some students also referred to Latinos as a distinct group, while there was little to no mention of an Asian identity. This is perhaps partly due to the fact that most students within the SGCP classrooms identified as either white or black, and thus the majority of students with whom I spoke discussed racial identity along such lines. At the same time, however, students also seemed to use the term black to refer to a general ‘other’ to white – the dominant category that was perceived by many non-white students to color the space of the SGCP classrooms, and the school as a whole. In this sense, the label black also seemed to encompass a variety of (mixed) racial identities, and co-existed along with Latino as an ‘other’ to white.

In addition, it is important to note that ‘whiteness’ as a label or identity marker was not discussed or used as such by the white students or teachers who I interviewed or came to know. For this reason, while I present a great deal of data (below) on how black students experience and construct their identity vis-à-vis food, I have little to no direct data on how white students (or teachers) negotiate their own racialized food identities. The reasons for this are perhaps various, but one particular explanation is that white students and teachers do not recognize their food identities in directly racial terms because white identity is often experienced as racially neutral (Twine 1996). As Twine illustrates in her own work on whiteness and black identity, in many places within our contemporary North American society, whiteness is invisible insofar as those associated with a white identity view their own racial categorization as culturally and politically neutral (even given, and perhaps because of, the hegemonic character of whiteness). In this sense, white students and teachers would be less inclined to experience their attachment to food in terms of race, whereas for black students race would be a more salient marker of food-based identity and difference.

The two sections below discuss the intersection of racial identity and food practice, drawing from interviews mostly with students, and also from my participant observation experiences within SGCP classrooms. I first discuss ways in which the fixed racial categories of black and white seemed to be confirmed and reproduced through students’ experiences of SGCPs, such that two categories of food emerge: white food and black food. In the section that follows, I then move on to discuss how the bringing together of a racially diverse group of students within SGCP spaces encourages what I call “boundary events” (after Twine 1996) – moments in which the boundedness of such racial categories as black and white is called into question.
White Food and Black Food

“If we left it up to self selection, it would be a group of 20 white girls. So we really attempt to recruit kids to get more diversity” (Leader, CA)

The above quotation is in reference to a summer program that is run every year at another SGCP within the Berkeley school system. While this comment does not refer to Central School particularly, it is telling in terms of who such programs in general tend to attract within the Berkeley community. If SGCPs are meant to be relevant beyond racial differences, then we need to ask, why is it that most of the children who would attend such a summer program are white? Given that the alternative food movement at large has been noted and critiqued for its whiteness, it is important that we examine how SGCPs are also constructed around such racial lines. Do non-white children see SGCPs as relevant to their own lives? Is the motivation to eat healthy alternatives something that is coming from them – from their experiences and attachments? And what would such self-determined motivation actually mean or entail?

Unlike the summer program discussed above, during the school year at Central School the SGCP classrooms are racially diverse. The racial breakdown of the classrooms is roughly representative of the overall percentages of the school at large. For the 6th graders who take the class as a requirement, this needs no explanation. However, for the 7th and 8th grade elective class, it is important to understand why this is the case. The reasons for this diversity are somewhat contradictory. To begin, teachers and administrators recruit students from a variety of backgrounds to participate in SGCP classrooms. There is a concerted attempt to bring a diverse group of students together within the cooking and gardening classrooms. As Chapter 4 discussed, this attempt is meant to encourage students to share ideas and information with each other, and to engage in a process of peer knowledge production. According to student interviewees, however, recruitment takes place in the reverse direction from the summer school situation – that is, teachers often recruit white students to partake in the SGCP classes. In a group interview with three white girls, we discussed this issue:

Student A: “Our English teacher recommended us to publishing but some people didn’t get into it because they wanted to make [the classrooms] more diverse; so now there are people in [publishing] who don’t want to write, and people in the cooking room that don’t want to [be there].” (Student, CA)

JHC: So did a lot of the African American kids want to get into cooking, and not publishing?... Is publishing considered more educational or academic?

Student A: Yeah, well a lot of kids enjoy eating and cooking, if you want a more hands-on type of class. But it is weird because it is true that more of the kids getting 4.0’s are white, it is a fact, but then [teachers] recommend people [for publishing] and then [the administration says] no you can’t go, sorry, because we need more balance….It’s [related to how] the superintendent talked about the gap in achievement [between white and black kids] and how that [needs to be dealt with]…” (Student, CA)
This discussion illustrates that at the 7th and 8th grade level, white students were actually recruited into the SGCP classroom in order to make it racially more “balanced,” something that my discussions with other SGCP students and teachers also confirmed. In this sense, we could say the SGCP program is more attractive to black students than white. However, this misses the point that during the school year, SGCPs are seen as a less academically rigorous and more hands-on, “fun” class, where it is not difficult to get a good grade. As the student above notes, participation in such classes is tied to a broader issue of an achievement gap between black and white students (an issue that undoubtedly goes beyond Central School). Under these circumstances, then, while black students seem more inclined to sign up for cooking and gardening, this does not necessarily indicate that they perceive SGCP classes as relevant to their lives or as consistent with their food-based identities. In fact, later on in my interview with these same three students, I asked the girls about a term that I had heard black students use to describe SGCP food – the term “white food.” They responded:

Student A: “Yeah, we heard that…if you look around Berkeley you will see that the people who are all about organic happen to be white hippies, not like African Americans or Latinos.” (Student, CA)
JHC: “Why do you think this is?”
Student A: “I don’t know, it is just what they are used to, what they grew up with” (Student, CA)
Student B: “Yeah, I think if you were walking in a farmers market, I mean no one thinks it is a bad thing, but you would notice if you saw a bunch of African American kids. It is not the norm.” (Student, CA)
JHC: “Do you think this also applies to the [SCGP]?
Student B: “I think so. If you go around and look at people who buy nachos at 7-11 it is the black kids, so sometimes they are less affected by the cooking, because they are like, whatever, we will just eat chicken. It is one of those things, like how you notice a lot of the super achieving kids tend to be white.” (Student, CA)

During my discussions with students, I heard the terms “black food” and “white food” used several times. Generally “white food” referred to the types of foods that students were learning how to cook in SGCPs – vegetarian, low in fat, lacking in animal products, organic, unrefined, and whole foods. This is notable especially because in terms of culinary diversity, the recipes themselves reflected a wide range of cultural and ethnic traditions: Indian, Chinese, Mexican, European, American, Southern/Soul, etc. However, particularly because this food was associated with the labels ‘healthy’ and ‘organic,’ what was cooked in the SGCPs was perceived and discussed by some black students as “white food.” When I asked some of the black students that I was interviewing whether the food they cooked in the SGCP class was like the food at home, their responses reflected that there were significant differences:

JHC: “Is the food we cook in here similar to what you eat at home?”
Student C: “Pssssh, no.” (Student, CA)
Student D: “No” (Student, CA)
Student E: “No” (Student, CA)
Student D: “Some stuff I eat at home” (Student, CA)
Student C: “Yeah, some of it. Like the green beans.” (Student, CA)

JHC: “So is the food here similar to what you eat at home?”
Student F: “Nope” (Student, CA)
Student G: “No.” (Student, CA)

JHC: “What is different?”
Student G: “The food over here is nasty, we be eating like, I be eating tacos, hamburgers.” (Student, CA)
Student F: “Jack in the Box” (Student, CA)
Student G: “Jack in the Box, I be eating spaghetti and meatballs. Yup.” (Student, CA)

JHC: “So what would make this program more important to you?”
Student F: “Make better food. Cause like if the food wasn’t… I mean, they make smoothies, and they don’t got any of the right stuff. They gotta have soy milk, they can’t have regular milk. When we want to use sugar, they gotta have fake sugar. Like we want the white sugar, like just plain.” (Student, CA)
Student G: “We can make a deal with them, like they have some nutritious food, and then some good food, and then some nutritious food.” (Student, CA)

Differences in food at school and home in my interviews often seemed to revolve around the lack of meat in the SGCP classroom, as I have noted, but the comparison also took other dichotomous forms: slow food versus fast food, ‘fake’ sugar (rapadura or turbinado) versus ‘plain’ white sugar, soy milk versus cow milk. However, these differences are more than just a matter of biophysical taste, and more than simply what these students are used to. They are linked in important ways to these students’ racial identities, and are indeed experienced as bio-social. As one of the above students went on to tell me during the interview: “I feel like the teachers are trying to make us be someone we don’t want to be….” And, in the latter of the above interviews, the two male black students with whom I was talking went on to particularly discuss how race is associated with this dynamic:

Student F: “Like black people is different from white people. You guys eat different food. Not saying you, but white people. They eat all that healthy food and stuff. We eat a lot of junk food. And they are always trying to control us.” (Student, CA)
JHC: “White people try to control you?”
Student F: “Yeah you think we too hyper.” (Student, CA)
Student G: “And black people eat different food from white people, like we even eat different food from Mexicans.” (Student, CA)
Student F: “You guys make a lot of healthy food that is not good.” (Student, CA)

JHC: “So is the food you eat here white people food?”
Because I had developed a particularly good rapport with these two young men, I pressed the issue a little further. I went on to talk about some of the food activists and farmers that I had met around the Berkeley area, who were interested in healthy and alternative food, and who were not white. I explained to the two boys that in my understanding, being black does not necessarily mean that someone is uninterested in the type of food we produce in the SGCP program. I asked these two students, “So, what do you think about that?” They answered:

Student G: “I have white friends who don’t eat healthy.” (Student, CA)

Student F: “I have some white cousins and they eat good food just like the other black people. So like, alright, [but] any healthy food we eat, all you gonna see is like 5 or 10 black people eating like white people food.” (Student, CA)

To these boys, the association between racial identity and food is very firmly bounded; even if black people do sometimes eat healthy food, they perceive this to be an irregularity in the ‘normal’ patterns of black behavior. In this view, then, even their own practices of eating healthy food within SGCPs would not be enough to shift the boundaries of food-based racial identity. Instead, they would simply be temporarily eating someone else’s (white) food. During the course of my research, I went on to question several SGCP teachers about this distinction between white food and black food, noting also that many of the black students did not like to work in the garden. (This was true of many students in general, but the majority of the black students that I spoke with mentioned that they particularly did not like to get their shoes or clothes dirty.) Some teachers seemed to think that the issue had to do with the historical memory of the black community, particularly in regard to connotations between working in the garden and slavery. A teacher at a related Berkeley school recounted a story to me as I was visiting the school one day:

Field Notes, December 2007, CA:
She mentioned that at [her school] she had had some conflicts about gardening and racial hierarchy. Like, she said, one kid yelled at her and said “you aren’t going to get me to put my hands in that dirt. I am not working for you.” She explained to me that gardening seems to have this stereotype for certain people, not only black but also Hispanic kids, that the teachers want to get away from. She said, “so, what do I do with that? How can I tell him that this isn’t what it is all about?”
Here we might ask why this child needs to be told that, “this isn’t what it is all about?” What if the point, for him, is that it is what it is about – that to him it feels like oppression? While some SGCP students (and teachers) might have positive (re)actions to being in a garden, perhaps because their past experiences are legitimized and confirmed as ‘good,’ we can imagine that other students might not have access (in a broad, visceral sense) to these same positive (re)actions. These students may feel undervalued or misunderstood when teachers try to distance the group from these negative responses, or when they try to explain away such reactions as not really “what it is all about.” This eschewing of negativity disallows such students from playing an active role in (re)defining the purpose of the SGCPs, and ignores the diversity of identities that SGCPs touch in a variety of different ways.

Another teacher in the Berkeley School system that I interviewed also admitted that there are “definite differences” in how students experienced the program based on class or race. Yet, this teacher did not seem to want to actively address these differences, insisting instead on the power of repetition to overcome them:

“I think the concept of getting dirty is one interesting thing. Like, when we first started [a recycling program] the middle class kids could do it, no big deal, whereas the ones who had relatives who would recycle for a living, it was too close to home. That was lowering yourself. And when they did farm fieldtrips some Latino parents were upset – cultural sensitivities. I think because there has been more access and experience, those experiences aren’t so as foreign, and there is more openness with regard to food, etc.” (Teacher, CA)

While many SGCP teachers talked about issues of race and class informally with their students, there did not seem to be a common practice of addressing these issues as part of the formal instruction within SGCP classrooms. Perhaps this is due to the fact that there is very little formal instruction in SGCP classrooms, leaving such issues to be taken up in other classrooms (which I did not spend time in during my field work). Of course, this division of lived space and intellectual space is not uncommon in schools, but it is nevertheless questionable as a SGCP practice, in a space where hands-on learning takes primacy. While schools teach about race and class abstractly through social studies and history, they often fail to address how social identities are also reproduced in the daily practice of life at school in ways that structure students’ tendencies of feeling and behaving, and lead to differences in their motivations to do, including their motivations to eat. Ultimately, though, it is this living out of identity in school that comes to matter to students’ academic ‘success’ – both in terms of how it is defined and experienced (Beattie 2003).

Undoubtedly the reproduction of race and class hierarchies is a sensitive subject that is not easily discussed in school settings, and that also threatens to undermine the authority of the school itself as a disciplining force (which I would argue is probably ultimately productive). The subject is also undoubtedly sensitive for students, who may not feel comfortable discussing their economic or social struggles and inequities with their peers or teachers. As I will discuss in more depth in Chapter 6, however, SGCPs could help to
bridge this gap between students lived, visceral realities and their abstract, intellectual work in ways that would make education overall a more relevant and productive part of their lives. Indeed, from the experiences that I had within Central School’s SGCP, food seems like a good starting place for schools to begin to bridge this gap. Yet such work was avoided in Central School’s SGCP particularly because it brought up negative feelings – shame, embarrassment, anger, sadness, etc. – that the teachers did not want to encourage or allow. Instead, many teachers encouraged SGCPs to remain a space of what I came to call ‘positive politics,’ where the goal was to encourage only positive experiences. There is value in this attempt, and yet there is also missed opportunity (Probyn 2001), particularly in terms of addressing more directly issues of race and other social differences.

In an interview with a black male teacher at Central School, I discussed the SGCP students’ identification with black food and white food, and he suggested to me an important connection between students’ racial identity and their experiences with poverty. For him, the issue was not ultimately a racial one but instead came down to one of economic privilege. Because many of the black students at Central School were also poorer than many of the white students, they grew up in families that did not have the purchasing power to buy fresher, healthier foods, nor the time to cook them. His explanation illustrates not so much a desire to keep racial identity flexible, as an attempt to eschew race altogether in favor of more straightforward, easily explainable causes:

“What [the black students] don’t understand is that those are the food choices that the economy makes you make…and now I got my associates degree and my bachelors degree and I started eating healthier, and I feel a lot better. So I am not sure that the students who told you that is was white food, they just don’t have the life experience to understand that what they perceive with a color is actually healthy or less healthy and that that dynamic is directly related to your economic position” (Teacher, CA)

In this explanation, it is again the students who do not understand, and the (educated) teachers who can offer the students clarification. While this teacher’s analysis is valuable, his black students’ identification with food in racial terms is also significant and real. Yet when I asked him later if he felt this was something the school should address explicitly in SGCP classes, he said no; “perhaps in a black student union” or something like this, but not during regular school hours. The implication was that school was not a place to try to tackle these potentially difficult matters.

Nevertheless, regardless of how the black students with whom I spoke understand their economic position vis-à-vis other white students at Central School, it is clear that these issues of race and class are present within SGCPs, even as they are not discussed formally. Black students experience of SGCP’s cooking and gardening activities (at times) reinforces racially based food identities by confirming their perception of a black food/white food distinction based upon the food’s ‘healthfulness’ (which is understood in fixed terms). This perception was an issue that also concerned all of the non-white food activists with whom I spoke while in Berkeley, and one that many such activists are
aggressively trying to disrupt through various projects and educational initiatives within and beyond schools. But, as several of these activists commented, the problem with school-based SGCPs is that the ratio of white to non-white teachers in Berkeley is still very high; thus, such associations continue to be made in part because most of those in a position of ‘authority’ in SGCPs are white (and/or middle class, and highly educated). Moreover, beyond the schools themselves, as the students above discussed, the other alternative food spaces in Berkeley – farmers markets, organic food stores – are also coded as white. By not dealing with these issues directly, therefore, the classrooms of SGCPs too become reinforced as white spaces.

**Boundary Events**

To label SGCPs a white space, however, is just half of the story – the half that leaves agency to the dominant racial group. We need to ask also about how the perceptions and boundaries of race-based food identity are resisted and repracticed within the spaces of SGCP classrooms. And, we need to attend to how the black students themselves are an active part of this process. Indeed, if black students are in fact a dominant group (percentage wise) within SGCP classrooms, then how could they not also be engaged in remaking their SGCP experiences in ways that make them less ‘white’? Over the course of my research in Berkeley, I witnessed many examples of what I came to call “boundary events” (Twine 1996), which are events in which the boundaries of racialized (as well as classed/gendered/aged) food identities are called into question. I want to begin with the claim below, grounded simply in the opportunity that SGCPs provide for students to eat together:

“It’s promoting fundamental human contact, that cooking and eating is a basic human activity, and we only share food with people who are near and dear to us. Eating is celebratory, it’s many things, it’s about humanity. And if we are going to talk about a world at peace and a world that respects diversity, then a lot of it is how do we share food. How many black people do white people invite to their homes to eat? How many blacks invite white people? And the cooking program is about that sharing. They eat the food they make collectively. That’s a very rare opportunity and for nothing else, forget organics, that’s invaluable in itself. But we have so much strife in our world, this is an opportunity for peace and love and sharing.” (Leader, CA)

Here we can again, as in Chapter 4, see that the work of SGCPs is also about providing opportunity. Regardless of how the food is coded – as black or white, healthy or unhealthy, delicious or nasty – SGCPs do provide students with unique opportunities to relate to each other through food. While there are undoubtedly hierarchical forces at play within the context of the school, the outcome of this relating within SGCPs is not predetermined by such forces. In fact, the opportunity of relating opens up the possibility for new experiences and perceptions of food to emerge. For example, one of the cooking teachers in Central School, Ms. Tiffany, was a young, well-educated, middle-class African American woman. As I discussed in Chapter 2, her presence in the cooking room called into question the boundedness of healthy food as ‘white food.’ She frequently shared her interests in holistic nutrition with the SGCP students, and
sometimes in ways that created tension among black students who were uncomfortable with her (lack of) performance of a (typical) black identity. However, I came to recognize that these moments of tension were also productive moments, where the act of relating to Ms. Tiffany allowed students to recognize that not all ‘black’ bodies prefer the same kinds of food. She explained her role in the classroom in the following way in regard to black students:

“Before I am African American, I am human, and I always try to interact with kids on a very basic human level. But I think that would be really good, I suppose, I would be a good role model for the African American kids in particular, probably, that it is nice for them to see a different representation, do you know what I mean?” (Teacher, CA)

Another teacher similarly reflected on the visibility of teachers in the SGCP classrooms:

“When we give people role models that look like them, they tacitly understand that they could be them. It has nothing to do with food” (Teacher, CA)

And yet, in context of SGCPs, such visible identity markers also have everything to do with food. In relating to Ms. Tiffany as simultaneously a black woman, and also someone who was deeply interested in healthy alternative food, students’ rigid perceptions of race-based food identities can be called into question. In my field journal, I commented on Ms. Tiffany’s relationship with her students:

Field Notes, November 2007, NS:
Pete and Derron were talking to Ms. Tiffany about racism, and Pete was saying that his grandma was hecka racist because she would always say mean things about the white kids he was skateboarding with. Ms. Tiffany explained that his grandma lived through some tough times in American History, and that she was probably reacting to this. Later that day, one of the boys was climbing on a high wall, and Ms. Tiffany told him to get down. Derron said, you told him to get down cause he is black right? She laughed, and said yes, right (sarcastically). He obviously had said it to get a reaction. I realized that this SGCP space was a sort of open space in which to test out these ideas, to joke around. Like, some of the black girls were teaching Tim and Matt [two white boys] how to dance to hip-hop, and everyone was laughing and getting into it.

Though race was not formally discussed in relation to food within SGCP classrooms, neither was it the ‘elephant’ in the room. Students took up the topic of race frequently in their interactions with each other, testing boundaries and ‘playing’ with race as a marker of identity. In fact, some students even suggested that this was part of what occurred during my interviews with students. When I mentioned to another group of black students (female) that in a previous interview some students had called the SGCP food white food, their response suggested a sense of play:

JHC: [Kids] “I was talking to earlier called the food we eat here white food.”
[STUDENTS LAUGH]
Student H: “They were trying to be funny.” (Student, CA)
[STUDENTS ALL TALKING AT ONCE]
Student J: “It’s not white food, really, there is no such thing as white food or black food; it is like saying fried chicken is black food. They were playin’”

(Students, CA)

JHC: “So you guys don’t think it is true?”

Student H: “Well, yeah but… [it’s more complicated than that]” (Students, CA)

Through interacting with SGCP students in the cooking and gardening classrooms, I came to realize that unstructured ‘play’ was an important part of their experience of SGCP, and an important way in which they were able to make the SGCP experience ‘their own.’ In part, this play was encouraged in SGCPs by the great amount of flexibility that these classrooms offered, in relation to the students other classroom experiences. That is to say, the lived experiences of SGCP classrooms were less controlled and routinized than in other more instructionally-based classes. This was especially true in the kitchen classroom, but also somewhat in the garden. Students were at liberty to turn on the radio, sing or dance while cooking, tell stories or discuss life problems while chopping, tell jokes, etc. There were also more formal ways in which play was ‘structured in’ to the classroom experience: i.e. the cooking contest days, or a rainy-day game called garden jeopardy, or the wooden-spoon activity discussed below:

Field Notes, November 2007, CA:
We had to wait for the potatoes to cook for a while, so while we waited, Ms. Lisa decided to play a game in which students were blindfolded and had a big wooden spoon in their hand. The blindfolded student had another student placed in from of them, and they had to figure out who the student was by touching them with this big spoon. The game was very interesting, because race and gender became quickly obvious as two important factors in determining who someone was. If the student had long hair or short hair, in a ponytail, or braids, etc., they were more readily identifiable. The kids started joking around and giving false clues like, it is a black girl, when it was a white boy, and stuff like that. They made comments about someone’s braids being fake, when actually the student was white and did not have braids. Everyone was laughing.

Although these games did not directly address issues of social identity and food, they reproduced the SGCP cooking classroom as a space in which these issues were ‘in play,’ and therefore not fixed or pre-determined. In this sense, the cooking classroom became a space where all students were actively engaged in the creative production of food knowledge, and the creative negotiation of food identity. During an interview with Ms. Tiffany, I asked her how she would reply to the critique that alternative food spaces like SGCPs are ‘white’ spaces. She responded by illustrating how important students’ agency is to the daily running of the cooking classroom:

“I am also finding that some kids who come from disadvantaged neighborhoods, they really take pride in what they are creating here, and also that they are capable of that. Especially at [my table], some of the girls that won the last cooking competition, they just went all out, got really into it. They were like, no don’t put that tablecloth on there, put this one. They switched the one I had put out for them. You know, so they really take ownership over how the table looks. So, that is really positive… and so, you know, I think what is racist is actually saying
that these [SGCP] programs are ‘white,’ because it [discounts the work that] these kids put into it.” (Teacher, CA).

As Ms. Tiffany relays, in analyzing SGCPs it is crucial to account for how students take up the task of healthy eating and make it ‘their own.’ At the same time that SGCPs encourage healthy alternative eating, which is typically coded as white, they also provide the opportunity for students to actively relate to such food in ways that call into question such social codes. In addition to students’ agency, however, if we label SGCPs as simply white spaces, we also discount the ability of teachers (both white and non-white) to disrupt this label by inspiring students in a variety of ways to make the food ‘their own.’ Indeed, the strength and depth of the relationships between teachers and students, both black and white, also can allow for a disruption of the boundaries between black and white. As one black girl said to me during an interview, “I consider you guys [to be] role models, because you are actually doing a program that makes us change the way we like food.”

Class and Food

While racial identity was an obvious influence on food experiences and practices within the Berkeley SGCP, class-based food identities were more apparent in my Nova Scotia case study. Rural Nova Scotia is racially homogeneous but varied in terms of levels of income and education, and indeed in terms of access to food (Williams et al 2007). Class identity, however, can be more difficult than race to name and discuss, particularly because many North Americans consider themselves to be ‘middle-class,’ despite a tremendous amount of discrepancy in purchasing power, education level, and cultural capital within this social grouping (Warner et al 1998). In this dissertation, the class identities of research participants are bound up in a variety of different social characteristics, including level of education, occupation, family background, travel and worldliness, and also one’s relationship to urbanity. They are also, as I will show, bound up in particular food preferences and practices.

In terms of alternative food, I have already discussed how the alternative food movement has been coded and critiqued for its ‘elitism’ (Guthman 2008, Leitch 2003), which broadly signals that alternative food tends to be a practice of the upper classes, as opposed to what we might consider the working class, the lower middle class, and/or any person or family for whom food security is an issue. As I have argued, this sort of identity-based attachment to particular foods can have strong implications for who tends to be tuned on or ‘animated’ by alternative food practices – or who can access positive visceral (re)actions to such food – and who tends to be ‘chilled’ or turned off, unable to access such positive sensations. In the following section, I discuss how class-based food identities are both reinforced and resisted through SGCPs in ways that have implications particularly for how parents (re)act to the programs, as well as how the students themselves (re)act. I focus mostly on Nova Scotia, although these issues were somewhat apparent in Berkeley as well. I contend that SGCPs further a ‘gentrifying’ trend of the alternative food movement in regard to ‘simple’ and ‘local’ eating, while at the same time
providing opportunities for the re-claiming of healthy food as a rural, no-nonsense practice of non-elites. I begin with a lengthy excerpt from my field notes that exemplifies the class-based tensions that surround food within my Nova Scotia case study site. In this excerpt, which I title “A Tale of Two Dinners,” I juxtapose two of my own food experiences in Plainville in order to describe the class-based divide within the community, and to situate myself within this split.

The Gentrification of Simple Eating

September, 2007 (NS) – A Tale of Two dinners:

Firehouse Potluck:
I wanted to attend this potluck that I had seen advertised in the local paper because it was right down the street from Plainville School. I brought my friend Paulo along with me, because I didn’t want to go to the potluck by myself. I felt like I would feel out of place and uncomfortable. I had an invitation to a dinner later at Kim’s, but not to the potluck, so I wasn’t sure what to expect: probably, rural people, and lots of food I didn’t really want. I told Paulo this. We approached the fire hall and it looked pretty packed with cars. The inside had lots of empty seats though. I put on my social side and smiled and asked how much it cost. 6 dollars each, which I happily paid to a nice man who talked to me about the weather. We scouted out places to sit…Paulo was such a great sidekick, very social. We got in line and got paper plates and started dishing out food from the choices. There were lots of potato salads, macaroni salads, cold cucumbers and tomatoes (the only fresh veggie on the table), and some picked green beans. There were lots of baked things…tuna casserole and lasagna, and potatoes in butter, rice with beef, chili, and things like this. Most of the people there had white hair…in their 70s or 80s. There was one woman firefighter, all the rest men. The men served coffee and tea, and there were all women in the kitchen bringing out food. The tables were set with white paper on top, and metal ware, with napkins, and plates of cakes on the table (kinda weird) in addition to baskets with rolls. There was also milk for tea and coffee. Obviously they were expecting older crowd, but maybe mixed…grandparents and grand children. The cakes were chocolate, carrot and blueberry, and there were cookies too. And then a whole table of pies (Kim’s group later said, oohhh knowingly when I mentioned pies). Paulo and I both agreed the food wasn’t very good: It was packaged, and processed and not very fresh. But, we still enjoyed ourselves. We ate off paper plates, but had real mugs for tea. The firehall was right next to the school, and I saw one woman who recognized me from the garden in the summer, and another girl who I knew from the summer rec program. Paulo and I sat across from an older couple, in their 70s. They were very nice and told us we could sit wherever we wanted. So, we sat across from them and I started a conversation about how I was new to the area. We talked about their grand kids, and how they wouldn’t come to the supper because they were picky eaters. What do they like? I said. Steak, French fries, lobster. They eat their veggies too though. They are in middle school and high school…. We talked small talk, the weather, etc. and they talked to Paulo too, about Brazil, and wished him good luck and told him to enjoy his time in Nova Scotia and they welcomed him here. He said he felt like they were very genuine and sincere. The old guy to my right didn’t say much, but they knew each other through a religious network. Lots of people know each other through church or ministers. The little kid down the table was too picky of an eater, and he just had a piece of cake for dinner. Nothing else. The man had two pieces of pie, and the woman said ‘you go right ahead.’ Paulo and I talked about all of this afterwards: the food was not the main issue, it was more of a social time to people to get together and talk about the community, and food was secondary to this. It was also of course to raise money. Some of them were poor, we could tell, and some were richer or had more money saved (summer house, retired) but no one pretentious.

Kim’s Dinner:
After showing Paulo the school garden, we drove down the road to Kim’s house for another dinner party. Kim had invited me over for dinner (partly, I think, since I had mentioned I’d be alone this weekend). But, I brought Paulo along, an unexpected second guest. We were greeted jovially, by people and the dog. We sat around in the garden talking for a while about wine and grapes, and about
other food related stuff as well. Other people I knew [as foodies] were there, with their partners or friends. A bunch of foodies, talking food. Paulo had very little to say, and I was feeling anxious about how he might not have been having a good time. After a while, we stand up because dinner’s ready. Paulo and I hang around outside, because we aren’t actually sure that we are invited for the dinner. But, I quickly count the placemats and see places are made up for us. So, I sit. The dinner is almost totally from Kim’s garden, as I expected, with the exception of a few things: garbanzo beans, olive oil, feta cheese. The whole meal looks delicious, and I take a little of each of the fresh veggie dishes (broccoli, green salad, green beans…I leave the bread and the chicken, because I had already eaten and don’t want to look piggish). I made a comment about how there weren’t many fresh vegetables at the potluck, and Kim’s husband says, yeah well veggies would be an anomaly there. While we are inside, he strikes up a conversation with Paulo. He asks about where he goes to school. [the University]? No, Paulo says, [the local community college]. Oh. What are you taking? Office management. Oh ok. I am glad that people are talking to Paulo at all, but then Kim’s husband starts talking about Brazil, and how Rio is the scariest place he’s ever been. I say, scariest? Really?...trying to get him to qualify? But, he says yes, again, adamantly. Great, I am worried now, because I know he can sometimes say stuff that comes out pretty rude. Well, he says, it’s because I was wearing a suit. We were walking targets, he says. Did anything happen to you? I asked. No, he said, but some of my friends were held up, and stuff like that. He tried to fix things by saying that the mountains were beautiful, and the ocean was amazing. Yeah, let’s change the subject, I thought. Later someone asks Paulo why he is not eating. Not hungry, she says? I explain that we just came from the Firehouse Potluck. Oh, I was supposed to cook for that! She said. But I didn’t. Is that bad? What were you going to make? I asked. No, she says, I never even called back. Kim explains that she gives money a couple times a year. She would rather just pay the money, and not be bothered. So, I am thinking to myself, but the whole point is not the money but socializing. I mean, money is nice but it is meeting others in the community. Paulo talks to me about this later, he noticed this too. It is like they are too good to go down to the Fire Hall and eat that food. But, the food wasn’t really what everyone was there for, even though they were enjoying it. At Kim’s, food wasn’t the only thing, but it was definitely given elevated status. We were drinking home brewed beer and wine, eating the harvest of her garden, etc… Kim believes so much in what she is doing, and that it is the right thing to do. She comments often about how hard it is, how much work it is to do this. She talks about how her meal preparation begins with the seed catalogue in the spring. Another foodie says, no, with shoveling compost. At this point, Paulo is not talking much at all, and I am feeling kind of bad about that. I try to bring him in on a conversation about language, but I miss my opportunity and the conversation shifts. Paulo left the evening really in a low mood, being very turned off and put down by the later experience of the night, and I felt bad that I had told him to come to the party.

I begin with this lengthy excerpt from my field notes because it helps to depict the tensions that I experienced during my fieldwork in Nova Scotia, which I interpret to be largely class-based. This story is particularly interesting because it highlights how the ‘doing’ of alternative food, in the form of gardening, cooking, and eating local produce, can and has become an elite practice, even (or especially) within a rural area like Nova Scotia. This phenomenon is one that I began to call the “gentrification” of simple eating, by which I mean that the practice of growing one’s own food becomes taken up as a morally based leisure activity by the educated, upper (in relative terms) classes. This is not to say that those like Kim took the act of gardening lightly, as leisure, but rather that for those like Kim, gardening has become an individual choice that is driven by one’s access to time, money, and most importantly an belief or faith that gardening is the ‘right’ thing to do (for one’s body, the community, and the earth). In contrast to the ‘choice’ of gardening stands industrial food (the processed pies, cakes, casseroles, of the firehouse potluck), which has taken the place of subsistence production in many rural areas like Plainville, Nova Scotia, because these foods are (now) cheap, easy to prepare, processed,
and fast. As the two accounts above suggest, preference for local versus processed foods in Plainville has become a way to distinguish between the (relatively) elite and educated on the one hand (including myself as a researcher ‘from away’ who also admittedly preferred Kim’s food), and the less educated, rural folk of Plainville on the other.

Perhaps the most important part of this story is that Kim is also one of the central leaders of the Plainville SGCP – sort of the Nova Scotia equivalent to Alice Waters. Her sense of moral correctness in regard to her own gardening therefore directly translated into the way that she defined and coordinated the running of the school SGCP as an enlightenment project. Kim and other leaders of the Nova Scotia SGCP often discussed the program in terms of bringing knowledge and ideas to a community in which these qualities were perceived to be lacking or even entirely absent. Of course, as much scholarship in rural and urban identity has shown, this perception is consistent with how rural places are typically constructed as backwards and empty (Ching and Creed 1997), in contrast to an educated and urban elite (including those who are ‘rural’ only by choice). In the Plainville case study, a large part of this construction particularly revolved around how the SGCP leaders regarded the food traditions (or lack thereof) in the community:

“Traditionally people are very basic, poor people food. Dried cod, green peas...there was no elaborate food tradition like in Italy or the southern US, just an inexpensive, rudimentary approach to cooking...[so], it very easily transferred over to canned and industrial foods, and fast foods.” (Leader, NS)

Because the tradition of food preparation in this rural area of Nova Scotia is a ‘basic’ one, defined largely upon what is available and cheap, some of the SGCP leaders interpreted this heritage as simply lacking or devoid of real value. The chef who came to do a yearly event with Plainville School students, for example, described the area as “unsophisticated” in terms of food preference, and suggested that his job was to bring culinary refinement to the area (as a labor of enlightenment). In his interpretation, there is little room for active participation in the SGCP on the part of the local community:

“If you were to have 20 people at [Plainville] send in recipes you would probably get ten different recipes for mac and cheese.... This is a still a relatively white bread area, you know, with relatively unsophisticated palates...[your] idea of sending recipes in is interesting, but I don’t think you would come up with a wide range of things, nobody is going to send in a boc choy recipe...it’s problematic, I was brought in to show them that there is diversity, rather than the same old same old; we did a soup and put everything in the blender, and my god!, it shocked everyone...parsnips and apples [in one soup]...so my role is to widen their variety, and so the parents themselves, who really don’t have any idea how to cook beyond the box...[I can help them] to create healthy food and also develop tastes for their kids.” (Leader, NS)

Earlier in this interview, I had tried to suggest ways in which more members of the local community could be brought into the process of food production within SGCPs (perhaps through recipe sharing), such that the negative (re)actions to SGCPs and feelings of
judgment that were articulated by some parents could be avoided. This chef, however, suggests that this is not a possibility because those in the local community lack the correct food attachments (preferring mac and cheese to boc choi), and thus the correct food knowledge (not knowing how to make anything beyond the box). Also earlier, this leader had also told me that those who shop at big supermarkets rather than farmers’ markets are “lemmings…” and that “[they] are being led by [their] noses…” adding “I don’t want to sound elitist, [there are] rich lemmings [too]” (Leader, NS). In such comments, there is an implication that the local community members of Plainville – those who are not highly educated, or who have not lived elsewhere and experienced other culinary traditions – are not smart enough to make the ‘right’ food decisions, or to feed their kids. This way of thinking in turn has an impact on what the SGCP leaders imagine the overall goal of the program to be; in short, to change these parents:

Leader: “I guess the one negative that I hear is that it hasn’t really [changed parents] to the extent that we would have liked. It’s hard to change parents’ habits. And it’s hard to change how they’ve been brought up and what they are used to and even though we try, and students do go home and say you know let’s try this, I’m sure that sometimes the parents will cook it for their children but then still not….refuse to eat it themselves. So I think… because we’ve had comments made about different functions we’ve had and the parents and refusing to eat.”

JHC: “Well, I heard about that at the event that you were talking about with the chef.”

Leader: “Yeah and so in terms of getting that message to parents that perhaps they might want to try some of it. And I would say that if the parents aren’t going to eat it they are not going to cook it, most of the time. So the carry over may not be as strong at home yet.” (Leader, CA)

In this explanation, it is clear that the role of the school is imagined to be one of enlightenment and that the SGCP can be considered effective if they succeed in the mission to “change parents’ habits.” Yet, it is not all parents in this imagining that need changing; it is just the ones whose eating preferences do not fall in line with the schools notions of healthy eating. Such preferences, however, are not randomly distributed across the population of Plainville. In fact, according to some of my interviewees, two fairly distinct groups of people have emerged in the community, with two distinct food identities: the locals (who now typically eat processed, industrial foods, as I experienced at the potluck) and those ‘from away’ (who prefer alternative food and shopping at farmers markets, as I experienced at Kim’s house). As a parent ‘from away’ described to me of this dynamic:

“There is a large community feel [here], but there is an alternative community consisting of people from away, and then a local community. They don’t mix much. I think the alternative community has to put more effort into integrating and bringing along the local people, to a festival or a market or whatever…” (Parent, NS).

A SGCP teacher also articulated a similar split, offering:
“There are people in this community that are always willing to try new things. They are educated, and well traveled, and open to new ideas. And then there are those that aren’t.” (Teacher, NS)

This social grouping of Plainville residents into two distinct categories also translated into how some of the SGCP students experienced food at school. For example, during a peer interviewing exercise, I witnessed this dynamic between two students interviewing each other, one from each ‘side’ of the divide (both were white). The one student was obviously well traveled, and knew a lot about other food cultures beyond rural Nova Scotia. He asserted that none of the school food was actually good enough for him, even the healthier food, because it was all too simple and plain. The other student was from the local community and had a family who had been there for generations. He was indifferent about the school lunches and the SGCP, but said little because the other boy dominated the conversation. I wrote about this incident in my field journal, noting:

Field Notes, September 2007 (NS):
This one kid was interviewing another, and acting very superior, saying he didn’t like the food here because it wasn’t from other countries. He had obviously had a lot of food experiences, and his superiority came in the form of him wanting to differentiate himself from his classmates and even Canada. He said that he had been to 10 different countries, and said that everyone here [in Plainville] drinks at least one pop a day, besides him.

This student ‘from away’ represents somewhat of an anomaly in the school, in terms of how adamantly he refused school food. Still, for the most part what was cooked and served for school lunches did seem to fall somewhere in between the food habits/preferences of the two ‘distinct’ camps. That is, while those from away (mostly parents) had suggestions for how to make SGCP food more healthy, or more alternative, those from the local community tended to want some flexibility in the school between ‘healthy’ food and ‘junk’ food. For example, one ‘local’ mother asked me, “What did you have growing up? White bread, right? So why can’t our kids just have white bread some of the time?” (Parents, NS). In contrast, when I mentioned to a mother ‘from away’ that the school sometimes uses yogurt with Splenda in it, she gasped: “No! That’s sucralose! They feed that to the kids?” (Parent, NS). Thus, when I asked ‘local’ students how the food they learned to make in the SGCP compared to what they made at home, the typical response was, it’s different. Often these differences revolved around the use of processed, easy-to-prepare foods:

Student Z: “Different.” (Student, NS)
Student Y: “Different because they cook stuff like Side-Kick Noodles [processed]” (Student, NS)
Student X: “Different.” (Student, NS)
Student W: “I have like fish sticks at home. And we don’t have to do work at home.” (Student, NS)
Student V: “I eat, ummmm, different foods. Like I eat Kraft Dinner.” (Student, NS)
The lack of attention that the SGCP leaders in Nova Scotia give to such issues of class-based food identity is surprising, especially considering the academic and activist work that has been done in the area to expose issues of food security (Williams et al. 2007). It is also surprising considering that many students and parents expressed openly to me that access to fresh, local ingredients outside of school was a financial issue for their families. Part of the reason for this lack of attention seems to be that the SGCP leaders interpret healthy eating as ultimately a matter of individual choice/responsibility. As one leader in Nova Scotia insisted to me repeatedly, “processed foods actually cost more, it is cheaper to eat healthily” (Leader, NS), adding that “education could cure most of the health problems in the area” (Leader, NS). While she never repeated such beliefs directly to any SGCP student or parent, undoubtedly this type of understanding fed into the structuring of the SGCP as an enlightenment project, and thus also to the feelings of judgment that many parents articulated or alluded to during interviews. Because the leaders interpreted the local community as ‘lacking’ any significant food tradition, their own familial attachments to food (be they processed or local) were undermined, rendering parents passive in the SGCP’s process of teaching their children how to eat ‘better.’

**Rurality, Resourcefulness, and Scrapper Identities**

“So, you have [this dilemma] where a kid feels bad because he goes home and is like, well we don’t set the table, or have a table cloth, or flowers. But I think Alice [Waters’] dream is that they go pick some daisies or do the scrapper thing, which is what I did. Eventually you are like, ok, how can I get this without paying for it? Like real peasant food…and you have the skills [from the SGCP] to turn it into something delicious. People who are motivated will do that, and others will just be bitter.” (Activist, CA)

Although some of the leaders of the Nova Scotia SGCP are inattentive to issues of class-based food identity, and are implicated in the reproduction of class-based hierarchy within the local community, I also came to recognize that the daily operation of the SGCP itself also allows for moments of hierarchical disruption. Once again, this disruptive role is related to the opportunities that SGCPs provide to students and parents to relate to alternative food/practices. As the quotation above from an activist in Berkeley points out, one way that SGCPs do this is simply through encouraging the development of new skills. Indeed, by providing students with a connection to the daily, lived space of the SGCP kitchen and garden, the Plainville SGCP teaches students a great deal about how grow and prepare home-cooked meals. Therefore, although parents did express feelings of judgment or critique in regard to SGCPs, many parents, and particularly mothers, also acknowledged the importance of cooking and gardening as skills that were rapidly being lost:

“I think it’s great, it’s good for the kids to see food grown, planting seeds and actually seeing the lettuce and the carrots. Because I find now, not so much everyone has gardens anymore, we don’t have one, and it’s wonderful for them to make the food with it.” (Mother, NS)
“There are so many kids whose parents [both] work now, so supper is usually a rushed fare and it is so good to see things being prepared, not coming out of a can or a package. And we don’t eat a lot of that food in this house, but for those who do, it opens their whole horizons to what can be done.” (Mother, NS)

It is also important to note that in Nova Scotia, few if any of the meals that SGCP students cook on a regular basis are ‘fancy’ relative to the meal that they cook once a year with the professional chef. Indeed, the “simple, no-nonsense” meals that they normally make in the kitchen with Ms. Dora include “salads, veggie wraps, pizza, potato wedges, and vegetable stews like Hodge-Podge, which is [actually] a local culinary tradition of rural Nova Scotia” (Field Notes, September 2007, NS). Although some parents were skeptical to the overall changes in the lunch menu (from hot dogs and chicken nuggets to such vegetarian fare), the students themselves have had mixed reactions about the changes in their school menu – viewing them as “important” and “good” overall, while at the same time offering (me) suggestions for how the daily selection could be more “balanced between healthy and junk [or processed] foods” (Student, NS). Further, in the daily, lived space of the SGCP itself, I sensed little of the tension that was expressed by some ‘local’ SGCP parents, and to the contrary, I witnessed much interest and excitement on the part of the students towards growing and cooking if not actually eating the food. As a leader of the school’s PTA explained to me, many of the parents who were initially put off also came to admit that their children did often enjoy the (vegetarian) food, and also the opportunity to be in the garden.

Other parents suggested to me that they were grateful that they could be sure that their kids were getting at least one healthy meal a day, even if they could not provide that meal at home. Many of the teachers and administrators of Plainville School were also aware of this function, and thus they saw the SGCP as providing students with a daily material connection to healthy food that they did not already have, which undoubtedly encourages new visceral attachments. This understanding mirrors the discussion of non-white food activists above in regard to race and food in certain areas of Berkeley, where economic and geographic connections to fresh fruits and vegetables were minimal in the black communities. In the physical act of relating, new possibilities can emerge:

“Again it goes back to I think that time and money play a role in you know, let’s get something frozen we can put it in the microwave that kind of thing. And I understand that and I think those kids who come from situations where the parents work late. Very often they might be getting supper on their own and it is easier to open up a can of something you know those kids are really benefiting because they might not have ever eaten turnips. I think that there are a large percentage of students who are eating the turnip who never would have. Either because they never had it or they didn’t think they liked it or whatever. But the whole experience… and then they realize that it’s not so bad. So that whole door to all kinds of different foods has been opened that maybe it wouldn’t have been before.” (Leader, NS)
Beyond providing physical access to healthy foods, another way that the Plainville SGCP promotes resistance to class-based hierarchy is by inspiring members of the rural community to identify with healthy, alternative food through re-establishing cultural roots with the area’s subsistence past. As several ‘local’ parents pointed out during interviews, a rural area like theirs is the perfect place to establish such a school garden because of the long tradition of family-based, small-scale agriculture in the region. Some parents implied that teaching students how to garden was a way to honor this tradition and to reclaim the importance of rural community, rather than educating students to want to leave rural areas and livelihoods (Corbett 2007). Certainly the concept of local eating – even in Alice Waters’ ideology – rests in a kind of nostalgia for the rural ideal, in which life becomes based in simple, modest practices that do not require much elaboration or fanfare (see Waters’ book *The Art of Simple Food* 2007). In this sense, the philosophy of SGCPs and the cultural traditions of the ‘locals’ in the community are not necessarily that far apart. As two mothers offered:

“Being in a rural area, we have the space for [such] gardens. And [in this type of community] you know everyone, so if you don’t know how to farm, you know someone who does.” (Mother, NS)

“[It’s relevant to us because] healthy eating is really about getting back to the basics, getting away from pre-processed foods and fast foods, and living off the land again.” (Mother, NS)

In these mothers’ understanding, SGCPs can help to legitimize the importance of rural livelihoods, and can encourage students and parents to be proud of their rural identities. SGCPs can recognize rural communities as places out of which knowledge emerges, rather than as places where knowledge is lacking. Through my discussions with these and other mothers, I came to recognize that parents play a crucial role in the functioning and relative ‘success’ of SGCPs, although their role is also often under-regarded. Parents’ (re)actions to SGCPs matter in significant ways, and their involvement with SGCPs impacts how effective the programs are at bringing change (of any kind) to the school and community. As one father in Nova Scotia commented, “The [SGCP] just has to realize the real change is gonna come with the parents; how you get the parents involved is really important” (Father, NS).

Following the cue of this parent, as well as my own growing discomfort with the class-based tensions in the Nova Scotia case study site, I therefore decided to use my interviews with parents and leaders as opportunities to explore how parents could be involved more effectively. In this sense, my interviews themselves also became (partial) spaces of hierarchical disruption or resistance to bounded class-based identities, although my interviews with parents were generally more successful in this regard than were my interviews with leaders. Several parents, both local and ‘from away,’ had important and interesting ideas about how to change the contentious dynamic:
“They should make good hearty food, not fancy and gourmet [with the chef]…I think in the city where people are used to that, they would like it, [but] people around here, we have a very particular way of preparing food.” (Mother, NS)

“What if the grandmothers of the community could come together with [the chef] and prepare a menu that would appeal to the community? I am just thinking of these suppers that the local churches and firehouses do, with bakes beans and brown bread and hodgepodge. I mean, as simple as it sounds, squash soup is not something that these people would eat… the idea of [the chef] coming out here to [the school], sounds immediately wonderful to me, and to people who know about him, but as I think about it more, I realize it may not be the best approach. I am sure there are a variety of other ways to make it more comfy…but one way I think is to actually have the grandmas come in and offer what they have, recipes, cooking experience, or maybe both, start with grandmas and then have someone like [the chef].” (Mother, NS)

“The fact is that women do more of the cooking if not all of the cooking in this area culturally. [Women, and especially grandmothers, hold the] cooking experience and stories that go with it . . . so, they could bring that. I think the grandmother thing would be good. . . . [the chef] is a very down to earth kind of a guy, very sensible to and sensitive to these ideas, and [when] he makes a potato leek soup it is something…with some coriander...it’s something that some people have not had in their lives. . .” (Father, NS)

There was a sense among some of the parents that I interviewed that it was very important that the SGCP meet the parents “where they are coming from” in regard to their own food traditions, if they want to bring parents ‘on board’ (Mother, NS). In this sense, the question to be asked by the Plainville SGCP is not how can we convince the (local, less ‘educated’) parents to think/act differently (or like us), but rather how can we include all parents as already thoughtful and active participants? In other words, how can we legitimize all parents’ food identities in a way that allows for and even encourages a diversity of opinions and practices within SGCPs? Moreover, as the last two comments regarding the involvement of grandmothers suggest, this re-framing of the parent question is important not only for disrupting class-based social hierarchy, but also for disrupting a gender-based hierarchy as well. Indeed, it is problematic and counterproductive that, in the Nova Scotia SGCP, the sole example offered to the students of a ‘successful,’ professional chef is also a male chef. This representation of what it means to be ‘successful’ (economically and socially) stands in stark hierarchical contrast to both Ms. Dora as the lower-class ‘lunch lady’ figure-type, and also to the myriad mothers and grandmothers who (according to my interviewees) constitute most of the non-paid cooking population of the Plainville community. To deny that these women hold important knowledge about how and what to cook is to undervalue the work of these women as mothers, wives, and members of the local community. I address the issue of gender in the next section.
Gender and Food

“I don’t think [gender makes a difference]. There is as much enthusiasm from the boys as the girls, and the fathers will come to the [cooking events] too.” (Teacher, NS)

“Well, at home, with some parents, the mom mostly still cooks, but cooking is more often shared now. In our house, cooking is shared.” (Mother, CA)

Gender matters within SGCPs in many different ways. Although during interviews many of my direct ‘gender’ questions were largely dismissed as no longer relevant (mainly for the reasons expressed above), my research experiences overall reflect that gender affects the formation of food-based identity in important though perhaps hidden ways. Many of interviewees sensed that the gender norms surrounding food and cooking have changed with the current generation of mothers and fathers, such that both boys and girls would feel equally comfortable in garden and cooking classrooms. This does not explain, however, the disproportionate number of women in every aspect of the SGCPs that I researched – in leading, teaching, volunteering, and also parenting (since the vast majority of ‘parents’ that answered my request for interviews were mothers). It also does not explain the differences in both behavior and assessment of the programs that I witnessed between male and female SGCP students. Certainly gender has an influence on how students experience these programs, even if it does not observably demarcate their levels of comfortability. In the following sections, I first explore how the SGCPs that I researched were involved in the reproduction and enforcement of traditional gender roles, particularly in regard to the practices of cooking and eating. I then go on to explore how SGCPs also became spaces in which these gendered norms and practices could be tested and disrupted, particularly by the students themselves.

Food as Feminine

“There is something motherly and nurturing about gardening and cooking. The first time I worked in a garden and we were harvesting and we had armfuls of squash and it was like carrying babies. It’s nurturing. Very feminine. And for me in my house my mom did all the cooking.” (Teacher, CA)

“Some women are able to connect to the nurturing and emotional side of these programs, and I think people who are food activists, I mean, there are a lot of men involved, but there are [more women].” (Teacher, CA)

The most striking way that gender is present within this research is the fact that the vast majority of my interviewees were women – from the SGCP leaders, to dietitians, to teachers, and to mothers. This amounts to 85 percent of a total of 100 interviews with adults. More than any interview quotation or field note excerpt, this fact alone suggests that gender still does matter a great deal when talking about food-related issues. The realm of food, at least as a matter linked to the feeding of children, is still largely women’s work within (and beyond) SGCP programs, regardless of whether or not it is
viewed this way. I questioned many of my interviewees about why it was that so many
women were involved in every aspect of SGCPs, and their answers were various,
including issues like a perceived femininity embedded in the act of harvesting produce
(as in the quotation above) to issues of salary and unpaid labor. As two volunteers in the
Berkeley program explained of the latter issue:

“I wish there were more men involved. For women we, there is a layer of feeling
like they can deal with less money and men need to provide more money….Yeah
it bothers me, it shouldn’t be all women. I mean we like this work but we want to
be doing the policy decision making too. It would be interesting to do the gender
breakdown.” (Teacher, CA)

“One interesting thing I started to feel about AmeriCorps is that comparing
women’s job searches and men’s, I think it’s hard for men to accept the amount of
money we get because they are feeling a pressure to earn money. I know [another
guy] was AmeriCorps last year, but he has had problems with the fact his
girlfriend makes more money than he does, so that is a big deal getting into this
field.” (Teacher, CA)

Considering that many more women than men occupy leadership roles within SGCPs
(that is, as instructors, or ideologues, or adult volunteers), we might ask what this uneven
ratio teaches kids about who belongs in the cooking and gardening spaces. If we agree
that “when we give people role models that look like them, they tacitly understand that
they could be them” (Teacher, CA), then how could gender not matter under these
circumstances? As one parent commented to me:

“We do learn in the subconscious…. I think [who teaches the kids] could have
more of an impact on who cooks at home. I think the more male teachers you
have in general for the classes the better. Balance the female teachers.” (Parent,
CA)

Besides the question of who is doing the teaching, there is also the issue of how women’s
work within the SGCPs themselves are compared to or valued against men’s work
outside of the program. Undoubtedly the reduced salaries (and heavy volunteer
workloads) of the two women above suggest that this work is monetarily undervalued in
our society. This is especially true considering that these women’s salaries/stipends do
nothing to reflect the great amount of interest that so many in North American have
expressed in regard to issues of healthy eating, obesity, and dieting – and especially in
regard to how we feed our children. Of course, this is an issue within the teaching
profession in general, and is therefore not just related to SGCPs. Still, it is important to
consider what the lack of men in this occupation might teach the students about the social
worth of a cooking teacher, as opposed to, for example, a professional chef. The Nova
Scotia case study site gave me an opportunity to explore this issue with a number of my
interviewees. Below I discuss with a SGCP leader the juxtaposition of the ‘lunch lady’
figure, Ms. Dora, who teaches the children how to cook on a daily basis, and the
professional chef, who visited the school once a year (and, one year, created tension with some of the parents).

Leader: “Oh I’m sure they love Ms. Dora, but when you got the chef, who is a professional chef, wearing his uniform. I think that they take something more from that. I mean working Ms. Dora is great for them and they love doing it…”
JHC: “Did he wear a hat?”
Leader: “Yeah. He’s all decked out.”
JHC: “So it was obvious that he was a celebrity chef?”
Leader: “Oh yeah, because he comes in and just the way he cuts the things. He doesn’t even look half the time [makes swishing sounds for cutting] and he’s cutting this and putting this in here and you can just tell by the way he moves that this is what he does professionally and the kids pick up on that. It’s kinda like, you can play baseball with me, or you can play baseball with a professional baseball player. You know, I’m great to play with but…you know, what are you going to remember when [you’re older]?…it’s that kind of thing.” (Leader, NS)

The SGCP leader who is speaking here is actually a male school administrator, who has little direct involvement with the daily running of the SGCP itself. His interpretation of the importance of the chef versus Ms. Dora, however, is telling of the social worth that is placed on cooking as a professional occupation, as opposed to something that is practiced as a domestic task or within a care-giving role. Moreover, his interpretation also underestimates the Ms. Dora’s own professional skill, considering that Ms. Dora is called a “saint” by many of the other teachers in Plainville School for her ability to teach the kids and keep calm in the kitchen in the midst of much inevitable chaos (Field Notes, September 2007, NS). I heard this type of undervaluing repeated by students in both SGCPs as well, and more often by males than females. Comments from male students included statements like, “I’ve got skills to pay the bills!” (Field Notes, November 2007, CA) which was said in self-reference to his chopping ability, while comments from female students more frequently referred to domestic labor: “My grandma would put ham in this,” or “I am gonna take this [recipe] home so I can make it for my sister and mom” (Field Notes, November 2007, CA).

Considering this reproduction of a gendered division of labor, we might ask whether female and male students tend to experience SGCPs as relevant to their lives in different ways, even as they both express a comfortability in being in the classes. A few of the SGCP cooking teachers that I interviewed suggested that they felt this to be the case, offering that in their experience, boys were less likely to follow through with ‘chore’ like activities of washing dishes, or sweeping the floor, while they seemed to be more engaged in the traditionally masculine tasks like lifting heavy objects, carrying loads, and using a knife. In the garden, SGCP garden teachers noted that both boys and girls complain about getting dirty, boys will sometimes respond well to gendered tasks. For example, one male garden teacher that I spoke with suggested that he can use “the sort of fear factor culture,” valuing strength over weakness to convince male students to try vegetables that they wouldn’t otherwise try:
“Like, if I say the radishes are really bitter, so I don’t know if those boys will really like it…then they [will] eat it, try it.” (Teacher, CA)

Male and female students might also experience these programs differently on the basis of what they bring to the SGCPs from their home life situations. Despite what some parents told me, many of the students with whom I spoke told me that their moms do most of the food preparation for their households, with dads (if present at all) perhaps cooking on the weekend or on special occasions. In addition, a lot of the female students that I talked to suggested that they too were involved in their household’s daily cooking activities, while male students more frequently expressed that they cooked for friends or themselves. In this sense, perhaps these female students experience SGCPs as relevant to their gendered identities and practices in ways that male students cannot (often or usually) experience. As one teacher told me:

“I also think the level of empowerment I was talking about is more just like feeling like you are doing something positive in your everyday life, like if you learn how to cook something then you can make something. One of the female students, she cooks a lot at her house and she and another woman, you can tell they want to be adult, and feeling like they can cook at home is really important and doing something good when they are doing bad in other classes is really important personal development, whether you argue its related to food or not. Even just feeling like you have a role in creating something. That’s not standard for many kids on multiple class levels.” (Teacher, CA)

In addition to the practice of preparing food in general, the particular foods that students prepare in SGCPs are also gendered in significant ways. For one, ‘healthy’ foods, which carry connotations of fewer calories, lesser fat, etc., tend to be associated with dieting and body image. Although these issues are issues that affect men and women both, they tend to affect women disproportionately (Thompson 1997). In my participant observation in SCGP classrooms, I witnessed both girls and boys talking about fat in food. However, the word fattening, a term that particularly relates to body size, was a word that I heard used particularly often by female students, along with the phrase “pig out” (Student, NS). In one group interview with two male and three female students, I asked the group about whether the program was equally relevant for boys and girls. One of the boys responded, “Wasn’t it women who started the idea of dieting?” (Student, CA). My discussions with SGCP teachers further confirmed that there is a gendered dynamic to students’ practices of eating at school. Male students tended to downplay lunch time as an important event of the day, and were less inclined to talk about food in general. Two boys who I talked to in Central School even told me that they often sold their lunch to make money, explaining to me that lunch time was “business time” (Student, CA). The boys were able to do this since they qualified for a free lunch under the National School Lunch Policy. They also told me that they sold Halloween candy, soda, and other food and non-food items during lunch time, perpetuating the notion that men and food only mix when engaged in a professional activity. In Nova Scotia, a Plainville School teacher recounted a similar sort of dynamic, where boys distance themselves from the act of eating:
“Some boys think it’s uncool to bring a lunch, like they are embarrassed to eat in front of people. For girls it has been a weight thing and for boys I dunno, almost like it’s a girl thing to care about food. But they both cook it, cause they get out of class to do it.” (Teacher, NS)

The above discussions suggest that despite many of my interviewees’ insistence that gender was no longer really an issue for the SGCPs, many students’ experiences of these SGCPs were undoubtedly influenced by the gendered norms and expectations surrounding preparing and eating food. The simple fact that both boys and girls are cooking the SGCP food does not mean that their experiences of the programs are the same. What motivated boys to engage in the programs was more often than not a desire to acquire what they saw as professional skills, while female students were often inspired by learning how to cook for their families and friends, or by the desire to engage in ‘healthy’ dieting practices. These visceral impulses surely help to reproduce the traditional gendered division of labor in the public/private sphere, as well as the gendered social norms surrounding body size and diet.

**Gender Disruptions**

“I think me being a woman reinforces gender roles…but there are teachers in here who are men who set off light bulbs. That makes a difference.” (Teacher, CA)

Despite the obvious ways in which traditional gender roles are reinforced through SCGPs, it is important to recognize that there are also moments of disruption. These moments, although small, are not insignificant. For one, there are some male teachers who do serve as role models for the students, and who in my experiences actively and consciously try to encourage students to think differently about who belongs in the kitchen. In Central School, for example, one of the students’ male homeroom teachers would frequently help out in the kitchen classroom, and would talk often to a group of male students about how important the SGCP program was. On one particularly memorable day, he engaged a group of boys in the task of crimping pie crusts for three pies. He explained that “his grandmother had taught him how to do this, and that he had passed in on to his children” (Field Notes, November 2007, CA). All of the boys were interested in learning how to do it, and they all watched this teacher intently.

At another time, this same teacher made a comment about the importance of women’s work to the group of students (both female and male) that he was coordinating. Although the comment itself conformed to traditional stereotypes, the effect was empowering for the female student, motivating her to be confident and take pride in the work that she was doing. The comment also called into question the devaluation of ‘women’s work’ in general:

**Field Notes, November 2007, CA:**
Mr. English made a comment about needing a girl to coordinate the table, partly because Sally was already taking charge and telling her peers what to do. He was trying to diffuse the situation by showing that her strength and initiative was a positive thing. One of the boys was complaining that she was bossy, and he said, try running your house for
In addition to such attempts to disrupt gender norms among student interactions and practices, a few teachers also told me that the SGCP programs also give the teachers themselves an opportunity to reflect upon and alter their own expectations and judgments in regard to gender. As one cooking teacher explained to me:

“The more I am able to open to these students, the more I reach them, so developing personal relationships is important….and over the years I have had a lot of judgments about behavior, especially with what I expect from the boys, like more misbehaving and disruption, and I have to get past it and be open…. More and more I am developing those relationships with students. I am not saying I reach every child in that way, but we have moments, and for me that’s a personal development, to be more open.” (Teacher, CA)

Here this teacher suggests that through SGCPs, she came to understand that gendered behaviors are much more fluid and negotiable than she initially expected. In becoming more open to new possible outcomes, this teacher allows students some agency in the production of their gendered identities. And indeed, students do have agency in this regard. In my interactions with students, I found that standard gendered identities were frequently called into question in momentary but not insignificant ways. These disruptions often occurred in the context of ‘play.’ For example, in a group interview with four boys, two students bantered back and forth about the importance of the SGCP to their lives:

Student K: “It’s not a girl’s job, it’s just a job, everyone’s job. I think it is important to have this class because when I grow up, I will know how to cook. If both husband and wife know how to cook, it’ll get done fast.” (Student, CA)

Student L: “Well, I think it is important because some of us aren’t gonna get married” [implying that the other student could never get a girl to marry him] (Student, CA)

Student K: Yeah, right, some of us aren’t. (Student, CA)

Through a harsh but friendly back and forth between two friends, these students call into question the traditional role of woman as the domestic cook. While Student L implies that it is only important to know how to cook if one does not have a wife, the tone of this conversation is sarcastic. The boys remain comfortably within a heterosexual, masculine identity, but at the same time, the topic of their conversation allows for the possibility of something beyond traditional gender roles to emerge. In another small but not immaterial moment, three students were joking around with each other while chopping onions:
Field Notes, December 2007, CA:
Today there were a lot of onions to chop for the recipe (a bean stew) that we were making. One of the boys at Table 1 made a comment that “real men eat raw onions.” He held out an onion for another boy to try. A girl who was listening to the conversation blurted out, “No, men with real bad breath eat raw onions.” Two other girls laughed at her comment. The other boy didn’t eat the onion.

Here again students engage in disruptions of traditional gender roles through unstructured ‘play’ in the SGCP classroom. This example is perhaps a counter to the bitter radish story, in which the SGCP garden teacher encouraged male students to be strong (in a fear factor type practice) and eat the spicy, bitter radishes. Here, a girl points out the absurdity of such a claim to masculinity, and the boy backs down from the act. These moments of disruption happened in the garden as well as the kitchen. Although SGCP teachers sometimes claimed that it was the girls who disliked getting dirty in the garden, a field journal excerpt from an early day of planting in the Plainville garden revealed a different dynamic:

Field Notes, May 2007, NS:
The boys didn’t want to touch the soil because they were grossed out by the horse manure. When I asked them to cover up the seeds, they kicked the soil with their feet rather than touching it. The girls from the same group knelt down and pushed the soil over the seeds. They told me that the boys wouldn’t touch the soil because they were wimps. One girl then actually picked up some of the manure, which was in clumps, and dropped it behind her, saying “it’s like…” and making a gesture like she was imitating a horse pooping. All of the girls roared with laughter, and their teacher shot disapproving glances at both me and girls.

Through unstructured ‘play’ in the Plainville garden, these girls disrupt the gendered expectations of their teachers both in terms of who was more likely to get dirty in the garden, and also who was more likely to be a disturbance to the class. Although this might have shocked (and perhaps annoyed) the SGCP teachers, leading to disciplinary action (an annoyed glance), the opportunity for disruption developed in and through these SGCP activities, and thus such disruptions must also be understood as outcomes of the SGCPs, along side and intertwined with any concurrent reinforcements. Indeed, many parents also reported being shocked, and often pleasantly surprised, when their sons particularly showed an interest in cooking. As one teacher explained:

“The feedback I get from parents is you know, my son or daughter, but often son, it shocks them because now their kid wants to cook. Parents respond by saying I have a child who loves this. Often the boys, they discover a new fun thing to do.”
(Teacher, NS)

The opportunity for boys and girls to both participate in the cooking and gardening classes together was something that many parents agreed was a good thing, something from which new understandings and new practices could emerge. As one mother explained of the Berkeley SGCP:

“It’s way better [than what we had to go through]. Home economics was very sexist, it was for house makers and you didn’t see men in the classes often. Even in high school in the early 90s we had men in the class and they were there
because they wanted the food not because they wanted to learn how to set a table.” (Mother, CA)

In these ways, SGCPs provide a space in which traditional gendered identities surrounding food and cooking can be called into question and resisted. As the discussion above suggests, this resistance takes place not only through the actions of the students themselves, such as through their unstructured ‘play,’ but also through the actions of both teachers and parents. Overall, the relationship between gender identity and food could certainly be addressed more directly within these SGCP classrooms, rather than leaving disruption largely to unstructured play. Nevertheless, the programs also provide these children with a space for disruption that would otherwise not exist for them. The SGCPs give students a collective, school-based opportunity to explore, (re)act to, and (re)create their gendered food identities.

**Age and Food**

Agency in food-based decision-making is complicated when talking about children. The common societal belief that food choices are ultimately made as rational, individual choices often means that responsibility to make the ‘right’ decisions falls upon the person who buys or consumes a particular food. This is not usually the case, however, when discussing children’s food choices. For example, in marketing and public health documents, children are often deemed to be an *irresponsible* party, while the accountability and agency falls upon their parents (Colls and Evans 2007). In SGCPs, of course, the programs do assume that children have some amount of agency in making or controlling their food decisions – both inside and beyond the boundaries of the school itself. Indeed, teachers and leaders of SGCP frequently repeated phrases such as “children are the seeds of change,” (Teacher, CA) indicating a hope and faith in children’s ability to shift the ‘bad’ or ‘unhealthy’ food choices of their families and communities. Yet, as we saw in this and earlier chapters, parents are also blamed for their bad parenting abilities when their children make poor food decisions, or when their children look visibly ‘unhealthy’ (read: fat). In addition, SGCP teachers and leaders sometimes assume that children are not ‘in control’ or ‘responsible’ enough to eat healthy foods without some amount of trickery (i.e. blending vegetables to hide them) or some amount of mood control (i.e. teachers’ insistence on students only saying positive or neutral statements about the food). Indeed, Alice Waters’ vision of “seducing” the children or making them “fall in love” with vegetables assumes that children’s food choices are not informed by cognitive thought but instead through an instinctive (and somehow pre-social) desire for sensory pleasure (Colls and Evans 2007).

It is important to question how SGCPs conceive of and (re)produce students’ agency as children consumers. How are children positioned vis-à-vis adults and the wider social community in terms of their respective responsibilities to make food decisions? What assumptions are made about how children, in contrast to adults, are able to make food decisions? And how do these positions and assumptions inform the way that the SGCPs seek to motivate children to make healthier choices? While it is also crucial to question
the notion that individual choice ultimately drives food decision-making, since varying socio-economic and material conditions certainly shape the contexts in which any individual can act ‘responsibly,’ it is also important to acknowledge the ways in which children are able to negotiate and (re)practice their own personal food-based identities in respect to their relative youth. The section below discusses how SGCPs offer students important opportunities to practice their agency as food-decision makers, at the same time as the programs reproduce some unhelpful assumptions about the ability of children to make ‘responsible’ food decisions.

Kid Food

“We couldn’t get anyone to listen to us, so we said, let’s start with the kids, they are a captive audience” (Leader, CA)

“We working with kids, we have a captive audience, they don’t have a choice, and you are making a change early, so hopefully the benefit will last a lifetime” (Teacher, NS)

Consistent with the enlightenment frame of SGCPs, many SGCP teachers and leaders typically position children as inactive recipients of food education, who are easy to reach because they are a “captive” audience. In these quotations, students are envisioned as passive tools of the alternative food movement; they are empty vessels that can be filled with information (regardless of their consent), and then used as vehicles for passing along this information to parents (Colls and Evans 2007). These quotations are typical of the way that SGCP teachers and leaders describe the role of children in promoting alternative/healthy food, positioning kids as passive in the production of food knowledge. As many of my interviewees noted, the role of children in SGCPs is similar in this sense to that of the anti-smoking campaigns of the 1980s, in which health education in schools was meant as a way to reach smoker adults. In this understanding, change takes place only by reaching the truly responsible party – that is, the parents:

“We started talking about the language of healthy eating and we could put the words in the kids’ mouths. So, when we asked, why are you eating that? They respond, because it is healthy and prevents diabetes, and it is good for my heart, or whatever. We put the words in their mouths. And then we got the parents, because if you give the kids a language, it becomes a reality. The kids took the language home, and it became a real cultural shift.” (Leader, NS)

In this quotation, the leader assumes that children have internalized food preferences simply because they know the ‘right’ words to say about what and why they are eating. In my interviews and daily interactions with students, I came to realize that many students were indeed conversant in SGCP ‘speak; students were aware of what it was that adults wanted to hear. This came through very strongly in my interviews with students, when I asked them why the SGCP programs are important to them. The students’ already knew the correct sound bites to repeat, assuming that this was what I was out to hear: “this food is local,” (Student, NS) “it’s fresh and healthy,” (Student, CA)
“[the program] teaches us how to make better choices,” (Student, CA) etc. But the ability to repeat such sound bites does not imply that these students believe what they are saying, or that they have actually taken it to heart. It only shows that they are good at repeating the information that is ‘poured’ into them, as a “captive audience.” This parroting does not confirm that the program is ‘working.’ As one student told me to the contrary:

“It’s not really working; kids still eat junk. I mean, it’s all good, but the kids will still go to 7-11 and buy their hot chips. Last year there was a big group that would go every day to 7-11. I only go once and a while.” (Student, CA)

If simply convincing kids to eat healthy, alternative food is the ultimate goal of SGCPs, as this student implies, “it is not really working” for some students. One reason for this might be that SGCP leaders and teachers tend to give little credence to the ability of students to think about and (re)act to food on their own terms. For example, students go to 7-11 to buy hot chips not only (or even primarily) because of the types of foods there (i.e. healthy or not), but for a variety of reasons related to their social position as youth: it is a walkable location, it is accessible by students without the presence of an adult, it has cheap snack foods, and it is a designated hang out space for many middle-school aged kids. The decision to go to 7-11, though not ‘right’ in SGCP terms, is therefore in many ways a thoughtful and logical choice that illustrates that children are capable and active decision makers.

Nevertheless, there are specific ways in which SGCP leaders, teachers, and even parents do not acknowledge and allow for students’ agency. One such way is through the trend of tricking kids through hidden vegetables, as seen in cook books like Deceptively Delicious (Seinfeld 2007) and The Sneaky Chef (Lapine 2007), and as repeated in the kitchen of my Nova Scotia case study site. The assumption behind this trend, as teachers and also many parents expressed to me during interviews, is that children will not eat healthy food if you tell them that it is healthy. This assumption stems from the belief that there exist two general types of foods – kid foods and adult foods – which are both mutually exclusive and naturally determined by age. Vegetables therefore need to be hidden (through blending, or fine chopping) in order to convince children to eat them. Of course, as some SGCP teachers acknowledge, this practice backfires when you actually teach students how to do the hiding:

“I think sometimes some of the kids love the food, like spaghetti or pizza or something, and then they go in there [to the kitchen] and they realize that there is a green pepper in it or something, and it is like, I am not eating that anymore. It is funny because you were eating it one day, and nothing has changed except now you know what might be hidden in the sauce, so it is all a mind thing sometimes” (Teacher, NS)

Rather than talking to students directly and discussing options for including vegetables in a dish, these teachers assume that their challenge as adults is essentially to engage students in a mind-game of sorts, whereby they can trick them into liking something that
they would otherwise not like. Parents also articulated a similar methodology in terms of convincing their children to eat vegetables:

“I think Alice Waters is a bit out of touch, but she is also right; you can’t have the kids eating healthy by telling them broccoli is good for them. You have to have them fall in love with broccoli.” (Parent, CA)

While it is important to approach foods in a variety of ways, and not only through intellectual discussion (or a lecturing monologue, as the case may be), this assertion raises the question of why we think that we cannot actually talk to children about food. One answer is that adults often assume that kids operate on a more bodily level, driven by visceral drives for pleasure or fun, which are considered in opposition to the cognitive work of the adult mind (Evans and Colls 2007). Hence, we see advertisements for kid food and kid friendly spaces, which are usually brightly colored, creatively named, and covered with ‘fun’ games and activities. But are students really disinterested in talking about food, or rather are we (adults) disinterested in hearing what they actually have to say? I would venture to say the latter is more the case than the former, especially when what children have to say about food is negative.

The practice of not talking directly to kids about food (at least in ways that might be perceived as negative) also translated into other absences within the SGCPs that I studied. For example, the politics of alternative and conventional food was rarely if ever discussed in the SGCP classrooms, particularly because politics were seen as too controversial and potentially off-putting or demotivating to students, again because of the possibility of negative visceral (re)actions. Instead, leaders and teachers advocated a “positive politics” or “politics by osmosis” approach, whereby simply showing the kids how ‘fun’ food can be (and avoiding all negativity) would lead to changes in behavior and preference. In addition, the social pressures surrounding weight and body image were also rarely discussed in the SGCPs that I studied, at least by the SGCP teachers and leaders. As one dietitian instructed me:

“You never mention weight with kids, you never mention their looks. You don’t want them to feel guilty.” (Leader, NS)

This approach to food education seems counterproductive to encouraging students to develop a healthy and positive relationship to food. Many SCGP leaders and teachers engage in activities that ‘trick’ kids, or attempt to ‘seduce’ them, and that ultimately seek to use them as vehicles to get to a more important and responsible party, their parents. They avoid talking to children directly about the negative aspects of food because they assume that children cannot handle such discussions, or will be turned off to healthy food as a result of hard conversations. Yet, at the same time, SGCPs have a very particular set of ‘rights’ and ‘wrongs’ when it comes to food. They encourage children to learn these rights and wrongs, and indeed to internalize them, but they do not encourage children to take an active role in the production of such food knowledge. In these ways, SGCPs reproduce unhelpful assumptions about the (in)ability of children to make ‘healthy’ food decisions.
Adult Tastes
Despite the fact that some SGCP leaders and teachers do not actively encourage students to find their agency within the processes of food decision making, however, many students find and assert their agency regardless. The lived space of the SGCP classrooms is one of many social spaces in which students find an opportunity to do so (in addition to spaces like 7-11, the cafeteria, or their homes). In some cases, students’ agency emerges as a disruption of a planned SGCP activity; at other times, students’ agency comes through their engagement with the ideas and information that the SCGP classrooms provide. During my participant observation in the SGCP classrooms, I frequently witnessed students engaging in disruptive or dissenting activities that served to underscore their position as active participants in the processes of making and eating food:

Field Notes, November 2007, CA:
None of the kids really liked the salad that we made at all today. Ms. Tiffany and I both said we liked it. But Melissa asked the other students if they liked it, and no one said yes. She told us that it was an adult taste, and that they should have been able to alter the recipe to their liking (specifically, to leave the dressing off the salad). Ms. Tiffany had said that they should use the dressing as it specified in the recipe, and to try it like that. But she said she felt bad that she didn’t let the kids do that, and the next class she let them keep the dressing on the side.

In this example, a student named Melissa uses her social position as a youth to question the decision-making ability of the adult authority figure, Ms. Tiffany. Melissa draws on the notion of adult tastes to suggest that what tastes good to an adult authority figure might not taste good to the rest of the participants. Although Ms. Tiffany does not immediately accept this proposition, she eventually responds by changing her own behavior in regard to how she approaches the instruction of her next class, suggesting that Melissa’s critique of her food choices was both legitimate and effective. Besides this kid food/adult taste dichotomy, I also witnessed many students using another youth-based food identity – the ‘picky eater’ – to similarly assert their authority in the SGCP cooking classroom. The picky eaters of SGCP classes were often well known by all members of the class, and widely acknowledged as hard to convince; they could use their identity either to remain hidden and distant from the eating activities of the class, or to garner the attention of teachers and classmates.

Many SGCP teachers were certainly conscious of how students used such identities to gain authority and agency in the classroom. While some teachers found this dynamic unhelpful and disruptive, other teachers understood that students used these identities to carve out a space where they could feel like ‘themselves’ within the SGCP classrooms, and indeed within the broader food system at large. These teachers saw the role of SGCPs as one of providing students access to other kinds of identities beyond picky eating:

“Yesterday we had a girl say, I don’t eat vegetables, and she had a plate of vegetables in her hand. So I said, that’s interesting, what do you have in your hand right now? And she said, well I mean I usually don’t. I said, well I hope
you are changing your image of yourself because you certainly look like someone who eats vegetables to me! But, you know, some of them have these sort of identities around food: I am the one who never eats the skins on the apple, or this and that. So [the SGCP] gives them other ways to think [about how] they could identify themselves instead of being the picky eater, because they are always looking to be noticed. The picky eater gets noticed.” (Teacher, CA)

If we analyze the information and ideas that emerge from the SGCPs in terms of opportunity, then certainly SGCPs do provide students with access to other identities and knowledges that can expand their visceral attachments to food beyond picky eating. When students are included as active participants in the process of creating food knowledge, the shoulds of the alternative food movement become instead bits of situated information that can evolve into discussions and “teachable moments” within the SGCP classroom. In this sense, SGCPs become spaces where students can learn to assert their agency:

“[It is] not so much of a judgment thing, just information [that SGCPs give them]; like you guys need to understand that you are being targeted as consumers…and I talk to them about these little things, like how do you feel when a store says no more than 3 students at a time? What does that sign mean, you know? Do you want to support people who think you are a thief?...or demanding better food choices…so there is a lot of politics to it but it is sort of just something that is more a teachable moment that might arise, not something [planned ahead of time].” (Teacher, CA)

Many students expressed to me how important it was to learn the information that they did within their SGCP classrooms. Although some did not agree that SGCPs were ‘empowering’ to them, as SGCP leaders claim, some students felt that SGCPs did increase their ability to effectively navigate their own food worlds outside the bounds of the school. Certainly the knowledge that students gain from SGCPs influences their ability to make food decisions in the broader world – both in their home spaces, and in other social spaces beyond the home. In this sense, SGCPs encourage students to assert their agency within these broader spaces. Some of the parents that I talked to acknowledged this effect, suggesting that it is actually the children and not the adults (the parents) that really hold the knowledge about what and how to eat:

“Ask the children, they know and they will tell you, you put the thing in the wrong bucket, and I think that is how this garden thing is going to work, if the kid knows, and the kid is telling the mother, know what, we could have a baked potato, that is another way of having a potato, the kids…that is where the power is, little dictators.” (Parent, CA)

One of the most important ways in which this assertion of agency comes to matter in the broader world is through children’s disruption of the notion that kid food is equivalent to fast or junk food. Indeed, it is important to recognize that beyond hidden vegetables, another way in which students might be “tricked” is through the advertising industry. For
example, scholars have recently discussed the ability of the McDonalds label to “trick” kids into buying fast food products (AP 2007). As my interviews revealed, many SCGP teachers and parents also often worry about the marketing of fast food and processed foods towards kids, and are compelled to find ways to get kids “away from [such] influences” (Parent, CA). In this sense, it is significant that SGCPs can function as a space in which kids are encouraged to question and shift the association between kid food and fast food:

“Outside of school, there is a lot of unhealthy stuff. There is preservatives in food, like McDonalds – a lot of kids go there to eat. It shortens your life. I only go once in a while.” (Student, CA)

There are many, often contradictory ways in which students assert their agency as food decision makers both within and beyond their SGCPs. The overall point here is that despite the fact that youth is often associated with a lack of ability to make food decisions, SGCP students are obvious and active participants in food decision making. In some ways, SGCPs acknowledge and encourage this engagement of students, while in other ways SGCPs limit and undercut students’ participation. In order to be successful at making SGCPs relevant to students’ lives, SGCP leaders and teachers would do well to recognize and attend to how, why, and where students’ assert their age-based food identities in an attempt to make food decisions ‘their own.’

**Conclusion**

The links between social identity and food are numerous and varied. This chapter has addressed the production of four different (but not mutually exclusive) food-based social identities: race, class, gender, and age. I have shown how SGCPs both reinforce and reproduce these identities in fixed and bounded ways, and also how SGCPs provide opportunities for the disruption and re-practicing of food-based identities in new and emergent ways. At various points in this chapter, the discussion has hinted at the pedagogical strategies of SGCPs that create these different affects. In the next chapter I turn to discuss the educational approaches and policies of SGCPs in more depth.
Chapter 6: Food Pedagogy

This chapter is the third of three empirically focused chapters within this dissertation. I draw on data from interviews, participant observation, and in-class activities in order to explore how the pedagogical practices of SGCPs both limit and reinforce students’ agency in regard to food-based decision making both within and beyond the classroom. In particular, I examine the effectiveness of two broad pedagogical strategies in the promotion of visceral diversity and bodied agency: rules/repetition and flexibility/novelty. In the first two sections, I describe how each strategy both constrains and promotes SGCP students’ access to healthy, alternative food as something that is (relationally) their own. After this discussion, I then move on to a more speculative section, in which I describe and analyze my own experimental attempt at developing a bodied curriculum. In this section, I introduce data that I collected through an interactive, graduate level course on bodied education in order to illustrate how SGCP teachers and leaders could further the ‘bodying’ of their curricula by more explicitly addressing the interconnections of intellectual and physical bodily learning. The chapter ends with a brief summary and conclusion.

Bodied Classrooms

“How might explicitly addressing body knowledge in education contribute to the philosophical sophistication of students’ understanding of individual and collective agency?” (Springgay and Freedman 2007, xix).

The previous two chapters of this dissertation explored how social differences impact students’ experience of SGCPs through viscerally propelled mechanisms of knowledge production and identity work. This chapter moves forward from these analyses to address how the pedagogical strategies that SGCPs employ both discourage and support diversity in students’ visceral attachments to food. This discussion addresses the question of how bodies learn and develop within SGCP classrooms, giving particular attention to the degree or rigidity of the ‘scriptedness’ of classroom activities. The focus on scriptedness follows from Pudup’s (2008) concern, addressed in Chapter 2, that tightly scripted classroom activities thwart students’ agency within SGCPs, producing (potentially neoliberal) subjects that all think and act alike. To review, Pudup’s worry is that the disciplinary spaces of schools function as an instrument of ‘governmentality,’ in which students learn to self-discipline themselves in ways that reproduce a fixed and unprogressive structuring of food and bodies.

In examining and critiquing the pedagogical strategies and effects of SGCPs, I therefore want to consider how the SGCP curriculum is (or is not) “bodied,” following Springgay and Freedman (2007). In this chapter, a “bodied curriculum” is not just a statement that recognizes the body’s presence within all forms of learning, although a bodied curriculum may begin with this recognition. Instead, it is an educational program that effectively bridges the gap between diverse, lived experience and abstract, intellectual work that is often so present in our academic experiences. Further, as the opening quote
of the chapter suggests, it is a curriculum that consciously includes the body in order to encourage students’ agency as individuals and collective beings. In essence, a bodied curriculum is opposite to ‘governmentality’ or (neoliberal) ‘subject formation’ (as in Pudup 2008, or Guthman 2008). A bodied curriculum involves a type of learned, bodily discipline that does not limit but rather encourages diversity, and that fundamentally depends upon the engagement of all students as active, collective agents. A hands-on, sensory learning approach can therefore be part of a bodied curriculum, but it is what this approach sets in motion that is ultimately of consequence.

In this chapter, I want to examine first how the pedagogical practices of SGCPs are (or are not) involved in helping students’ to locate their (visceral) agency, and second how SGCPs can potentially do this better. In my understanding, a bodied curriculum requires that educators use a conceptual framework that encourages students to understand their intellectual and bodily learning as an interconnected, developmental and embodied process – and also as a political practice. In such a program, students would be encouraged to locate their agency within the rhizomatic, but sometimes structured, flows that make up their perceptual experiences. They would be encouraged to find ways to experiment with visceral (re)action – to play around with not only the way they think about things like healthy, alternative food but also how they feel about such ideas and things, recognizing that it is the interconnection of both that drive how/who they are becoming. As I explore below, these practices require both discipline and flexibility, repetition and novelty, but they can also be constrained by such pedagogical forces.

Below, I take the discussion of pedagogical strategy beyond the oft-repeated sound bite that “it is the hands-on learning” (Teacher, CA) that makes SGCPs effective. In doing so, I ask not only how a hands-on program does its work (e.g. through repetition/scriptedness, or flexibility/unscriptedness, etc), but also what work a hands on program actually does (e.g. encouraging diversity, or homogeneity). Moreover, I want to stress the importance of both positive and negative visceral reactions in this educational process, understanding that for reasons of promoting SGCPs, “it is important to talk about the positives” (Leader, NS), but also that it is crucial for the promotion of diversity to allow for and address the negatives. In this sense, it is important to keep in mind the practice (in both SGCPs that I studied) of promoting a positive politics approach, in which negative associations or experiences of healthy, alternative food are eschewed in an attempt to promote positive experiences. There is an openness and potentiality to this practice, but as I have suggested in previous chapters, I think there is also a limiting, rigidness to such a practice – a significant loss of opportunity. As Elspeth Probyn discusses of the importance of negative visceral (re)actions:

“By bringing the dynamic of shame and disgust into prominence, we are forced to envision a more visceral and powerful corporeal politics” (Probyn 2001, 9).

Thus, in the sections that follow, I want to promote a balanced tension not only between scripts and spontaneity, rules and flexibility, or repetition and novelty, but also (and at the same time) between positive and negative experience: comfort and discomfort, excitement and anger, animation and antipathy. I want to suggest that not only are all of
these experiences okay, and also somewhat inevitable, but they are ultimately productive to the process of understanding and promoting visceral diversity and bodily agency. In this sense, both positive and negative reactions should be acknowledged and discussed, even as SGCPs work to produce more of the former.

**Rules and Repetition**

Rules and repetition in SGCP classrooms can have both negative and positive effects – effects that either turn students off to alternative food and limit their control over food-based decision making, or that encourage student involvement by making healthy, alternative eating more accessible and desirable. Students can become bored by the fixity of SGCP events, most notably when they feel as though their own role in producing food and food knowledge is limited by such fixity. Yet, as I witnessed during the course of my research, students can also come to appreciate the sometimes repetitive, perhaps ritualistic character of SGCPs. This occurs particularly as the routines of SGCPs allow students to develop new associations and familiarity with alternative food over the course of months and years of participation in the SGCPs. The routines and scripts of SGCP classrooms are therefore complex mechanisms of change that require balance and negotiation, but not outright dismissal.

**Boredom**

Well I have to tell you about the garden. In the garden we have a bunch of staff that I can't name because I can't remember that much. Our garden is ruined in the winter. I'll tell you about the kitchen instead. I like the kitchen a bit, but sometimes I don't because we don't get to put food in the oven/stove. One

The above statement is taken from a letter written by a SGCP student in Nova Scotia to a SGCP student in California. I begin with this statement because it is typical of how many students describe their experiences of the kitchen relative to the garden. While not many students are as dismissive of both the kitchen and garden experiences overall, most students in the SGCPs that I studied seem to greatly prefer the kitchen activities to those of the garden. The reasons for this are multiple, but one explanation is that although both kitchen and garden involve some amount of rules and structure, the kitchen is more often a flexible space where students are able to negotiate their own role in its functioning. Because gardens require a good amount of advanced planning, a teacher or adult supervisor often pre-arranges the daily tasks to be undertaken in the garden. By contrast, the kitchen is a space where there are some rules (e.g. not touching the oven in the Nova Scotia SGCP, as the above student notes), but also where there is quite a bit of negotiability in terms of what can each student can do to contribute to its functioning.
That being said, both of the garden programs that I observed also incorporated quite a bit of flexibility into the garden routines, as I will discuss in more depth in the section on flexibility and novelty below. In fact, relative to stories that I heard from other garden programs in Berkeley, in which “strict garden rules prevent[ed] any sort of negotiated experience between students and teacher” (Field Notes, November 2007, CA), both Plainville and Central Schools embraced a good amount of unstructured activity in coordinating the students’ garden experiences.

As Pudup (2008) claims, however, “the real [or most important] action is in the kitchen” (Pudup 2008, 1236). While gardening for most students does not represent a familiar activity of everyday life, cooking and eating are common activities that are positioned to have more of a direct impact on the daily life habits of individual students. Indeed, the imagined act of “taking the lessons [of SGCPs] home” (Teacher, CA) usually referred to taking a recipe or cooking idea home, rather than a method of raking or weeding. It is for this reason that Pudup (2008) particularly worries about the ability of students to find agency within a SGCP kitchen class. Scripted routines and repetitive acts in the kitchen are arguably more likely to influence the food-based decisions of students, because kitchen activities are, by their commonness, ‘closer to home.’

While the kitchen spaces tended to be less scripted than those of the garden, over the course of my fieldwork I certainly witnessed struggles between students and teachers (or other adult authority figures) that were related to the rules and rigidity of the kitchen classrooms. These struggles demonstrate that students’ sometimes feel as though the rules of the kitchen undermine their ability to assert themselves in cooking activities:

“We like to cook, but not with the teachers on our backs, like we are gonna burn something.” (Student, CA)

“I cook all by myself, when there are no grownups. Then I would like to eat it… cooking is fun [here] but you always have to follow rules and stuff.” (Student, NS)

The above comments suggest that the presence of adult authority figures, who enforce rules and structure cooking experiences, can detract from students’ enjoyment of the SGCPs. Particularly, these comments reveal that students would be more inclined to enjoy cooking and eating (healthy) food if they did not feel pressure from adults to do so. While fixed rules and routines can add to this sense of pressure in the kitchen, the amount of rules and rigidity in the kitchen activities is also determined by particular personalities and moods of different teachers. Though there were indeed some ‘fixed’ rules and standard routines in the SGCPs that I studied, such as “no running with knives,” “don’t touch the oven,” or “each student must wash their own dish,” a tightly controlled cooking experience was often reflective of a teachers’ personal management style, which sometimes changed depending on the circumstances of a particular class. For example, in Central School, Ms. Tiffany tended to have a different approach to guiding her tables than Ms. Lisa, which influenced their students’ relative experiences of daily SGCP
classroom events. Ms. Tiffany’s morning table consisted of a group of 8 students that tended to ‘slack off’ and thus require more direction, according to Ms. Tiffany:

Field Notes, October 2007, CA:
Ms. Tiffany is pretty controlling with her morning group of kids. She came in late today, because she got caught in traffic, so Ms. Lisa had already said to the kids that she was going to take a back seat approach and let them practice their self-organizing skills. But then Ms. Tiffany came in and started micro-managing. Put this in this bowl, and that in that bowl. Some of the kids were obviously a little taken aback, and one girl actually said, “I thought that we were supposed to do it on our own.” But Ms. Tiffany didn’t hear or acknowledge this. Melissa was cooking the rice and one of the twins wanted to help, but Melissa sort of wanted to control it because other girl was kind of flaky and kept on walking away and not really taking control. But then Ms. Tiffany got harsh with Melissa and said that she needed to share the responsibility. So then, Melissa let the twin stir for a while, but then the twin left again and she took it back over. Later there was a problem with the rice because someone hadn’t added enough water, and so Ms. Tiffany had to add more and fix it. When we were sitting down to the table, Melissa sort of got blamed for this, even though I don’t think it really fell on her.

This field note excerpt illustrates that strict control over the practices of a kitchen classroom can lead to tension between students and teachers, as well as hostility among the students themselves. Ms. Tiffany’s style of ‘micro-management’ clashed heavily with Melissa’s personality as a leader in the kitchen, making Melissa frustrated with both Ms. Tiffany and the other (less engaged) students. This sort of tight control can thwart students’ abilities or desires to take control over the practices of the kitchen, making them less likely to want to engage with alternative food practices in the future. Furthermore, this type of rigidity reinforces the notion that the adults are the experts in the situation—the only ones capable of management—and that by contrast the students are there to learn from them (rather than with them). By so limiting students’ role in the collective production of food-based knowledge, micro-management can thus limit their ability to locate their agency within such food events.

Beyond cooking practices in the kitchen classroom, rules about what specifically is good to eat also certainly factor into the scripts and routines of SCGPs. For example, many of the complaints voiced by parents in Nova Scotia were based upon the notion that the food itself was too strictly policed, that there was not enough variation (of junk and healthy food), thus that their children would not eat it (a claim that was not always confirmed by the students actions). In addition to parents, students also complained during their interviews about the rigidity that surrounds what is allowed to be cooked/served in the kitchen:

“I think that you can use guides to figure out stuff, but you also have to figure it out for yourself. I think you have to find your own way to eat. You can’t always be healthy because it gets boring. Eating the same thing every day is boring.”
(Student, CA)
“The thing that now in schools, everything has to be healthy, that is going a bit overboard. Because I like junk food too. There should be a mix. How will we learn how to make choices?” (Student, CA)

“There is no pepperoni anymore, just cheese. I mean, I am not complaining because I believe in healthy eating, but some of the stuff...[is over the top].” (Student, NS)

These students’ comments suggest that that rigid guidelines are not only boring or off-putting but are ultimately unproductive in that they do not give students an opportunity to learn how to make their own decisions – to “find [their] own way to eat.” Notably, the students do not necessarily or entirely reject the guidelines themselves, but rather reject the rigidity with which they seem to be enforced. I found that this was especially true in regard to lessons or claims about the healthfulness of particular foods. Students found health information to be important, and relevant, but they also stressed that it could be overbearing if health concerns structured every eating experience within SGCPs. One girl complained during a group interview:

“You hear the gardening teachers and cooking teacher talking about how you need to eat healthy and you hear it all the time, everywhere, and I am really tired of it all. I just want to eat my food!” (Student, CA)

Similarly, during a peer-interview activity, another student similarly suggested that emphasizing health detracts from the otherwise positive experiences of cooking in SGCPs:

### 3. Do you like the foods that you learn to make in cooking class?

**Follow up questions:**
- If NOT → Why not? (Do you not like the taste? Would you like something else better? What?)
- If YES → Why? (What do you like about it? The taste? The experience of cooking it?)

**RESPONSE:** Yeah, in cooking class, not at home. It’s harder at home without all her friends energy around. Some things are good, definitely broccoli. The pancakes were a disaster, a disgrace. The healthy outlook ruins the food, especially if the make it an obvious point. She likes the cooking, but also the atmosphere. Some things don’t work at all.

In the above excerpt, a student discusses her reaction to SGCP foods. It is obvious that she enjoys many aspects of SGCP foods, and especially to being in class with her friends.
However, she says adamantly that “the healthy outlook ruins the food, especially if the[y] make it an obvious point.” Her comments imply that healthy eating as a rule-based activity is unappealing; she would rather not know about a food’s health status, and would rather not practice food activities in terms of following such guidelines or rules. In this sense, repetition and rigidity in terms of not only the food itself but how the food is discussed is an important factor in how students come to experience SGCPs as (potentially) overbearing and strict. Certainly there are many ways in which rules and repetition in SGCPs can limit students’ visceral access to alternative food.

**Familiarity**

In other ways, however, rules and repetition in SGCPs can be productive in allowing for new experiences of healthy, alternative food, especially by encouraging students to become familiar with particular foods or food practices. In this sense, the familiarity and comfort that come from repeated actions can allow students to relate to, and possibly even come to enjoy, healthy alternatives that they otherwise may not have had a chance to experience. Indeed, many of the SGCP teachers with whom I spoke recognized that the rituals, scripts, and repeated actions/recipes of their SGCPs were an important mechanism through which their particularly disenfranchised students—those with less ‘access’ to alternative food, for example—became more accustomed to new foods and food spaces.

In garden activities, SGCP teachers commented that repeated labor in a particular area of the garden seemed to encourage feelings of responsibility and ownership among many students. In fact, during my research tenure, several garden teachers/volunteers in Central School were in the process of trying to brainstorm about ways to further a sense of stewardship or ownership through such repeated association. In giving each class a space in which they could labor and make decisions, the teachers hypothesized that students would come to feel more personally connected to the garden:

> “I think that I would really like to have more distinct spaces in the garden where they can hang out, so they feel like they have their own special space…you can build ownership that way.” (Teacher, CA)

Other teachers similarly commented that not only is repetition of work within certain spaces important, but that repetition of particular bodily actions can also be helpful in ‘reaching’ or positively impacting some students. The repetition of particular actions like raking or digging served as a sort of ‘guided meditation’ according to some teachers, which allowed students to make use of the garden space in a way that furthered their own emotional and physical well being:

> “I have heard of counselors who do walking or gardening counseling and I think that’s really good. I think some of these kids have never learned to control their bodies and that allows them to calm down and focus. [One girl] got herself suspended for using her arms inappropriately. So I think this can make her aware of her body… And even other girls who even complain about gardening, I notice the conversations, once I get them working; by having something to be focused on
physically they are able to reflect and have conversations that are important to their development...So, I work on that personal development level and support and self empowerment and how to use your body and be focused.” (Teacher, CA)

In the kitchen classrooms of SGCPs, a similar sort of effect can be witnessed in regard to the function of repeated actions and routines. The routines of the SGCP kitchens that I am referring to here include everything from the standard ways that chores were divided up and carried out within the programs to how the act of eating itself was repeatedly conducted. Some teachers even called such routines ‘rituals,’ reflecting that there is a sense of greater purpose and higher cultural meaning in the act of engaging in routine:

“We have a routine here were the students go around the table and say what we are thankful for, prior to eating in cooking class. I would think that most of us would agree that it is healthy for families to eat together and share chores together, and use that as a chance to communicate, and so they are getting that in a school setting, even though they might not be getting it at home.” (Teacher, CA)

As the above quotation suggests, in the Berkeley SGCP, students repeatedly ate collectively around a table, often sharing with each other reflections on their day as they ate together. This collective eating was an activity that students quickly came to expect as the finale to their daily cooking routine. (Students in the Nova Scotia site also ate together following the cooking activities of the day, in a less formal though still anticipated manner). In regard to the act of gathering collectively at a (set) table, many of the student participants in my research found this routine to be comforting, even if they did not engage in such an act during their food-based practices at home. In fact, many students commented that eating collectively around the table was something that they were particularly fond of, both for the opportunities it afforded to socialize with friends, and for the time it allowed them to withdraw from a busy school day to relax and eat a snack. This is particularly noteworthy because, as I discussed in Chapter 4, the ritual of a shared meal around a table also signifies a sort of moral correctness for some SGCP leaders, which could lend itself to the production of sensations of judgment or resentment among students who do not eat in such a manner at home. However, for the most part the repeated act of eating together at a table was something that – even in contrast to other modes of eating – came to be expected and enjoyed by many students.

Like the routine of a shared meal, the act of collaborative cooking (or even cooking at all) was also new to many students. While some students are therefore hesitant or unsure when first entering a SGCP kitchen, the incorporation of cooking into the daily routine of SGCP schools allows the activities of the kitchen to become familiar to these students. As students become used to the smells, sounds, and general bustle of the cooking class, cooking itself becomes something that is more accessible to them. In other words, with repetition, even cooking itself becomes less strange, and thus more fun:
As the above student simply suggests, “if you cook food long enough, it won’t be weird [to cook], it will be fun.” The same can also be said for particular items of food that are strange or unfamiliar to students. In addition to the act of cooking, teachers, parents, and students often repeated a similar story about the SGCP food itself: that while the initial reaction of students might be, “this is bad, or I don’t know this food” (Teacher, NS), by having the food in the kitchen repeatedly, “it becomes less foreign” (Teacher, NS).

Indeed, this particular function of repetition was one of the reasons why so many SGCP teachers and leaders suggested that it was important to “get to the kids early” (Teacher, CA). After years of relating to a particular food, the teachers observed, the food becomes more accessible to students:

“Openness to new foods is much bigger now than it was before, because many kids have cooking since kindergarten. Brown rice used to be foreign and tofu, no one wanted to touch. Now um its not that foreign, and from the beginning and end of year, the kids didn’t like a lot and by the end of the year you saw a progression. So there is more awareness around food.” (Teacher, CA)

“I think kids are more open this year. I think that’s testament to kids having been through programs at elementary schools. We see the effects. And it’s not just the Berkeley hippie parents, its kids from all different classes. I saw two African American girls making fun of another for not knowing the difference between a cucumber and a zucchini.” (Teacher, CA)

While these points may seem obvious, it is important to point out that there is more than one way to interpret this process of what we might call ‘normalization.’ While on the one hand the work of repetition could be seen as a homogenizing force (in that it encourages the development of familiarity with similar tastes) it could also alternatively be read as a developmental process that expands rather than precludes visceral difference. Indeed, in the SGCP’s that I observed, the latter scenario is more likely an accurate reflection of the work of repetition, especially because over years of engagement\textsuperscript{31}, it appears that most of the SGCP students that I spoke with have effectively negotiated particularized relationships to SGCP food and food practices that would not be considered especially homogenous. For example, certain students look forward to particular recipes, while others may enjoy working with a particular area of the garden.

\textsuperscript{31} In the case of Berkeley especially, the SGCPs are standard programs beginning in kindergarten.
Moreover, some students may still hate eating zucchini or cucumbers, even if the idea of eating these foods is no longer new. I witnessed all of these scenarios, as well as others, while working within the SGCPs.

A final way in which repetition is important to the functioning of SGCPs is through the act of alternative food activism more broadly. In this sense, I use repetition to signify the act of continually ‘sticking with it’ despite hardships or setbacks. In other words, the process through which SGCPs come into being is often long and hard, perhaps involving criticism from the local community, lack of ability to garner funds, or simply a never-ending time commitment in terms of keeping the program afloat. In such scenarios, repeating one’s actions, even to the point of rigidity and inflexibility, is sometimes a necessary means to an end:

“I just kept my head down and kept doing it, the only way to make change is to keep going with it for some years. So I didn’t go out to find out what people were saying.” (Leader, NS)

“Alice [Waters] really believes in [her vision] and there is something very powerful about that. You have to have that intensity and rigidity to get stuff done. So that’s cool, nothing wrong with that except she’s a little Francophile and that’s not appealing to everyone” (Activist, CA)

In these statements, the activist/leaders suggest that some amount of rigidity is necessary for strategic reasons in order to get the SGCP programs off the ground, and also to keep them going. While it is also certainly important to examine the ways in which rigidity in activism precludes certain individuals from acting, these activists’ statements suggest that flexibility and fluidity are not the only (potentially progressive) modes of operating. Indeed, much like the role of repetition in regard to the familiarization of food itself, my research also revealed that the very act of repeatedly running a SGCP within a local community, year after year, is also a routine that is crucial to the functioning of the SGCPs. In fact, many leaders and teachers from both programs simply credit the repeated presence of the program itself as a central component of their SGCPs overall success, by slowly but surely familiarizing parents with alternative food, and by eventually even convincing some that the programs are worth supporting. In this way, many parents who were at first skeptical of the programs came eventually to view SGCPs as beneficial (or at least benign) over months or years of relating to these programs.

**Flexibility and Novelty**

Like rules and repetition, flexibility and novelty within SGCP classrooms can have both negative and positive effects, either by making students frustrated and uncomfortable with alternative food, or by making such food more pleasing and exciting. Students can become overwhelmed by chaos within SGCP events, and can come to feel directionless in regard to their own role in the programs. Yet students can also thrive within
conditions of flexibility and novelty, especially because such characteristics lend an openness to SGCPs that is conducive to encouraging active input from students. Thus, the flexibility and novelty of SGCP classrooms are, too, complex mechanisms of change that require balance and negotiation with pedagogical practices of repetition and rigidity.

Discomfort
To be sure, this dissertation has stressed the importance of flexibility and fluidity in both theoretical and practical terms. This emphasis is important for many reasons. Yet, insisting on flexibility always and everywhere can certainly be counterproductive. There are moments within SGCPs when flexible, unstructured activity can become too much, meaning that it can produce sensations of discomfort or unease among some students that detracts from their ability to engage with alternative food or located their agency within SCGP activities. Of course, as I have argued in previous chapters, it is not possible to fully predict when or for whom these negative sensations will arise. Yet, even so, it is important to try to understand how flexibility in SGCPs can lead to such negative reactions, so that educators can more effectively negotiate a balance between structured and unstructured events.

In regard to the garden work of SGCPs, my fieldwork reveals that while many students cherish some amount of unstructured play, unstructured activities that go on for too long, or are very chaotic, often produce sensations of boredom or frustration among students. Students sometimes view the garden as a place to relax and unwind from the other more structured activities of their school day, and yet at times the leisurely feel of the garden seems to produce less favorable experiences:

To the above student, the space of the garden is both relaxing and also potentially boring – a combination that suggests, perhaps, a need for a more coherent aim. In my discussions with teachers about the frequency of student complaints about gardening, I came to interpret the boredom or frustration that some students expressed as stemming from a lack of direction or purpose in the garden. In this interpretation, too much flexibility is limiting to students’ ability to access the garden, particularly because in the (often) unfamiliar space of the garden, the students require more guidance as to how to approach their garden work. In other words, some students (at least) seem to be at a loss for how or where to fit themselves into the garden activities, and thus tend to resort to simply following (boring) orders; these students need help ‘accessing’ the garden.
In addition to teachers, I questioned SGCP students as well about their relationship to the garden, particularly in terms of their sense of “ownership” (a oft-repeated SGCP soundbite). I often asked whether not the students felt as though the garden was “theirs.” Although some students suggested to me that they do feel as though they have some claims to the garden, having worked in it, few said that they feel connected to it in the sense of being active agents in the reproduction of the garden space. In other words, few students felt like they were in control of the garden, or that they knew the garden well enough to take a leadership role in garden activities. I came to understand this lack of connection as central to the students disinterest in the garden (relative to the kitchen), and as stemming at least partially from an inability to sense their own positionality within the broader picture of the garden as a whole. Garden activities seemed haphazard and pointless to students, because the larger functional plan was inaccessible to them. Consider the following dialogue that I had with one student (during a group interview) at Central School:

JHC: “So, you don’t like the garden part of class, then?”
Student: “Yeah gardening is weak because … it’s weak. I didn’t sign up for no garden class.” (Student, CA)
JHC: “OK, so what do you think would make it better?”
Student: “Um like. I don’t know. Just make it better, and stop wasting time. We waste too much time. I mean it ain’t on you all, it’s on us [too] cause we don’t pay attention and be talking and stuff, [so] like less of that.” (Student, CA)

As the quotation above suggests, this student becomes frustrated with the garden class particularly when she feels as though the teachers are just “wasting time.” As her comments imply, more structure (and potentially more rules – i.e. requiring students to pay attention and refrain from talking) would probably help the garden class run more smoothly. My interviews with some SGCP teachers also revealed a similar interpretation:

“I think one thing missing from the garden is a purpose. Sometimes they don’t understand why they are there. And we can give them a small skill idea like forking, but sometimes they aren’t even planting the next week and sometimes the bigger sense of why that space is important and why they should feel good about working in it isn’t really there.” (Teacher, CA)

In this teacher’s assessment, the students feel disconnected to the garden when they cannot sense a greater purpose for their being there. Activities in the garden are not structured enough to allow students a sense of consistency and coherence in what they are doing, and thus the lessons feel overwhelmingly haphazard at times. I also witnessed a similar dynamic in SGCP cooking classes. Although students generally tend to enjoy the cooking classes better, the SCGP kitchens also have the potential to become frustratingly haphazard spaces. The event with a professional chef in Plainville School, for example, seemed to border on uncomfortable chaos for some students. Even though many found the process thoroughly entertaining, the rushed and hectic event was too unstructured for
students to do much else than follow the chef’s orders. In this sense, some students did not find the event particularly engaging or relevant to their own lives.

Most of the SGCP cooking teachers that I spoke with, however, seem to recognize the importance of at least some amount of routine within the processes of cooking and eating food, and thus tend to incorporate a balance of structure and flexibility into their lessons. As a cooking teacher from a related school within the Berkeley school system suggested to me, too much flexibility can indeed be overwhelming to students, while a routine can make cooking seem more accessible (and therefore, more fun):

“It is really important to establish a sense of rituals, and have some structure because it is overwhelming when there is no structure. I divide class up into a very clear beginning, middle, and end, with distinct tasks like cutting, or boiling, or setting the table. It doesn’t [seem like a lot of work] that way, it seems do-able and fun.” (Teacher, CA, emphasis added)

Beyond cooking and gardening activities, flexibility in regard to taste itself can also sometimes become counterproductive to the goals of SGCPs. That is, insistence on a flexible approach to eating can sometimes produce feelings of discomfort or distaste among students and parents alike. As other chapters have discussed, when SGCPs ignore the established food habits and routines of certain students, families, or communities, reactions to SGCP food can be negative. We saw this dynamic, for example, when the Plainville chef produced exciting, novel tastes for the ‘unsophisticated palates’ of parents and students within the school’s local community:

“Honestly, I didn’t really like the taste. It was a little weird for me.” (Student, NS)

“I think the things he made were just a but too different from what people are used to. The things they make with Ms. Dora are more recognizable to the parents. It is a balancing act.” (Teacher, NS)

Although many SGCP teachers obviously find it important to encourage students to be increasingly open to new tastes, as the above quotes suggest, in order to reach segments of the population that do not already have a way to viscerally ‘access’ alternative food or flexible eating in general, it is also necessary for SGCPs to pay attention to the routines and rituals of the broader community. Indeed, particularly rigid food habits, preferences, and traditions need to be acknowledged and negotiated if SGCP programs are to encourage increased participation and increased ‘openness’ to alternative food from a more diverse population. Moreover, as Chapters 4 and 5 explored in regard to education and class-based food hierarchies, insistence on flexibility or openness in regard to taste can ultimately eschew a broader point about the implied ‘shoulds’ of eating within SGCPs. Indeed, flexibility can come to describe not inclusive eaters, per se, but rather cosmopolitan eaters with a wide array of food habits that nevertheless are usually not open to foods deemed unsophisticated, processed, or unhealthy. At the same time, inflexibleness to food can contrastingly signify the food preferences of unrefined, ‘white
bread’ populations with a limited food vocabulary. Surely this is not a productive way to promote openness to alternative food. In attempting to encourage all students’ agency within SGCPs, then, it is important to recognize that inflexible eating habits are legitimate ways of knowing food alongside openness and flexibility. Indeed, in regard to taste, “it is a balancing act” between novelty and routine.

**Comfort**

While flexibility within SGCPs can sometimes create problems, my research experiences revealed that more often than not, a flexible approach to food-based learning invites students to negotiate their own identities and positionalities vis-à-vis alternative food, and thus allows students to move forward in the task of making healthy eating ‘their own.’ In regard to the pedagogical strategies of teachers, flexibility in this sense refers to anything from allowing for informal conversation among peers to welcoming spontaneity in classroom decision-making to including students’ desires or interests within the broader educational process of planning and structuring the SGCP. Often, but not always, such flexibility was more readily found in the SGCP kitchens than in the gardens:

“I feel more like it’s my kitchen when I am in the kitchen then in the garden, because you are assigned what you do [in the garden]. In the kitchen, you can pick. And they are a lot more flexible. You can use the knives when you want. They aren’t like don’t do this and that. And in the kitchen you feel like you are contributing more because you eat the food. The garden feels like it stays the same the whole way through but in the kitchen you make a good meal and eat it.”

(Student, CA)

As I have suggested, in both of the SGCPs that I studied, the kitchen space was frequently deemed the more ‘fun’ space to be. Usually this was because the kitchen was where students were encouraged to choose what part of the meal they wanted to help with, which spices they should add or leave out, or how they would set the table, among other such activities. Flexibility as an understood but unstated practice in the kitchen seemed to encourage students to take control of the functioning of the kitchen space in a variety of different ways, perhaps partially because a flexible approach on the part of the teachers illustrated to the students that they were both trusted and counted upon to take a leadership role. In contrast, as I have discussed, the garden was a space where there was less room for flexibility, both because the options for picking tasks were more limited, and because the students themselves were less sure what sort of tasks were available as options to choose from. In this sense, student-led activities in the garden were hard to come by.

In other ways, however, even the garden space was experienced as a flexible space. For one, in contrast to other standard classrooms within both SGCP schools, the garden represented a respite from the normal(ly more rigid) structure of the school day. In addition, the emphasis on hands-on learning, as opposed to intellectual or book learning, provided different sorts of opportunities for more flexible educational experiences. As one classroom teacher described:
“I think it gives a chance for kids to experience a space that can be theirs and figure out how to move in that space and … I just think it gives them a chance to get out of a classroom setting.” (Teacher, NS)

In addition, the SGCP garden teachers also acknowledged that they benefited especially from the opportunity to interact with students in relatively small groups. The informal feel of the garden classroom, combined with the closeness of the bond between SGCP teachers and students, as well as the opportunities in SGCP classes for intimate and free-flowing communication, allowed for experiences that could not have come about in a standard, structured classroom:

“We can have closer bonds with the kids, different bonds than a classroom teacher. We have smaller groups, and we can hang out with them more. If we know about their own lives, chat with them, they are more likely to listen. We have that luxury.” (Teacher, CA)

Indeed, in my experiences in the SGCPs, the garden spaces provided students with opportunities not only for open communication with teachers, but also free-form interaction with the land and with other students. For this reason, the garden teachers often deemed the end result of a garden activity as less important than the collective, haphazard process of working the land together. In fact, some of the garden teachers approached their teaching in a purposefully flexible way, inviting daily activities to unfold as they may, rather than sticking insistently to a pre-planned objective:

Field Notes, December 2007, CA:
Liz had an interesting group today. She got them together to smooth out the bed, which was sort of tedious for a lot of the kids (who were visibly looking tired and annoyed). But, then they planted cover crop, and they really seemed to like this. Liz had the seeds in a bowl and explained that they will help the soil to have nitrogen in it, for nutrients. One girl said the seeds looked pretty, like African rice. Another boy asked if he could taste it (and Liz let him). All the kids really wanted to get their hands into the seeds, to really plunge them deep into the bowl. Latisha looked at me and said she wants to have a spa when she gets older, where people can put their hands into bowls filled with seeds. (She usually hates gardening). We went to the beds, and poked small holes all over the top, putting three seeds in each hole and pinching them closed. One of the boy’s said, pinch pinch pinch in a weird voice over and over again, and told me that he was tucking the seeds in. Liz told them to sprinkle some more on top, and then each make a wish.

In the description above of a particularly successful garden activity, the garden teacher (Liz) employs some amount of structure in the format for the class (i.e. she had some particular goals in mind – smoothing beds and planting top soil). Nevertheless, it is the unstructured events of the day that quickly became most important to the garden experience. For example, all of the students want to plunge their hands deep into the seed bowl, in order to feel the interesting sensation that the seeds provide. Liz welcomes and heeds this request, as well as the request to taste a seed, and the result of this welcoming is not insignificant: Latisha, who normally hates gardening, actually has an enjoyable and memorable experience in the garden. So, too, do the other students, who all enjoy planting the cover crop. In this sense, by allowing and encouraging unplanned events,
Liz encourages the students to connect to the garden in their own way, giving them a sense of interest or even commitment to the space (i.e. the ‘tucking in’ of each seed).

During my fieldwork, SGCP kitchen teachers often took a similar approach to the kitchen classroom. Being flexible in the kitchen was certainly a way for the cooking teachers to remain sane in the midst of potential chaos (as many of us can imagine, the task of teaching multiple middle school age children to cook is not easy), but it was also a way for the cooking teachers to convince the students that cooking could be fun. In my observations, if the cooking teachers allowed students to turn on the radio, talk about a dispute with a friend, or try to make a recipe that was different than expected, the result of such allowances was more often than not a positive experience for all. Importantly, for several of the cooking teachers, this flexibility included talking only minimally or indirectly about the healthfulness of food or the supposed ‘shoulds’ of healthy eating:

“I have to be very relaxed. That is why it works. I don’t talk about healthy eating outright. I just show them that cooking can be fun. It gets them thinking about food a bit more.” (Teacher, CA)

“They can talk about anything in here, and they are told not to repeat it outside. I mean, if something is very serious I would report it to the principal, but generally speaking this is an open forum to talk about whatever is on their mind. And they have a lot of fun, they can be relaxed…I am pretty laid back, you have to be to do this.” (Teacher, NS)

“I don’t know if I teach them, I don’t really. They just learn by doing.” (Teacher, CA)

As the above comments reveal, in these cooking classrooms, there is very little, if any, formal instruction. Indeed, part of the appeal of SGCP classes for many students is the break in the day from normal classroom activities. In addition, the kitchen spaces themselves are, much more than other classrooms at the school, often also used as informal ‘hang out’ spaces for the schools’ teachers and staff (as well as for straggling students who are late for other classes). Most likely, this ‘hang out’ function develops overtime as the food cooked in the kitchen attracts the attention of passers-by, who come in to the room to see what is going on. This scenario was true especially in Plainville School, where the SGCP kitchen was also the place from which school lunches were served. The administrative staff would therefore often drop by to chat with Ms. Dora or the students, and to get a taste of the food. This informal and unplanned use of the kitchen space demonstrates to the SGCP kids that the kitchen is a fun place to be.

Both SGCPs that I studied also have special events in which flexibility is encouraged above and beyond what tends to occur in the everyday activities of the SGCP kitchens. As I have described earlier in this dissertation, at Plainville School this event is the once-a-year cooking engagement with a professional chef. In Central School, the event is a monthly cooking competition in which the teachers take a back seat approach and give students (almost) full reign of the kitchen space. In both of these events, students are
invited to be especially creative with their cooking endeavors, and teachers remain flexible to the students’ interests and whims. The result, in both cases, is contained chaos:

“They all love it. It is craziness in the kitchen, wild.” (Leader, NS)

Beyond wild and crazy cooking, flexibility in the kitchen also comes to be important to the success of SGCPs in terms of actual tastes or food preferences. Flexibility in the sense of taste has two meanings. First, I found that SGCP teachers generally have more success with convincing students to try something new when they are flexible in their demands. In other words, flexibility as a practice in persuasion seems to be important in motivating students to taste new foods. One teacher told me particularly that she “was trying to meet the kids closer to where they were coming from,” because doing so made it easier for students who were unfamiliar with alternative foods to relate to the program. Another SGCP garden teacher explained that she invites students to sample food from the garden without making it a requirement:

“I think…[the idea of] exposing kids without pressure is important…having that free access to something enables kids to be like huh, what is that?...I find that by the end of the year you can get a kid to taste something.”

The second meaning of flexibility in regard to taste has to do with the novelty of the food experiences themselves – the wildness or craziness of the tastes. While I have already expressed the need to pay attention to pickiness and rigid habits when it comes to tasting foods, it is equally important to allow for and encourage variation and experimentation when it is feasible to do so. As several teachers expressed to me, allowing for variation in the recipes and routines of the cooking class is often a way for them to promote interest among students and attract their attention or peak their curiosity in regard to alternative food. Unusual events or opportunities can also signal to students that the SGCP programs as a whole are unique, and that what the SGCP offers to students is valuable and significant. In this sense, the novelty of unique foods and food events also can provide students access to sensations of intrigue in regard to alternative food:

“Doing something unusual is important, like the BBQ in the garden, it is unusual and it is free, and you don’t make them do it, you offer it. And they all want it” (Teacher, CA)

“I like it cause you come here and get something really different every day. Most of the stuff we cook here I never ate. And the stuff is healthier than the stuff we eat.” (Student, CA)

In all of the above ways, flexibility in the SGCP classrooms encourages students to become actively engaged in cooking and gardening activities, and allows them to more effectively negotiate their own particular relationships with alternative food in ways that matter to them. Undoubtedly, some amount of unstructured activity – balanced by a
repetition or routine – is therefore crucial to the successful functioning of SGCPs in regard to their ability to motivate students to eat ‘healthier,’ alternative foods.

Becoming Mac and Cheese: An Experiment in Bodied Learning

In the above sections, I explored how the pedagogical practices of my two case study SGCPs both encourage and limit students’ visceral ability to ‘access’ alternative food, through scripted and unscripted activities. This discussion lends insight into how such programs may both strengthen and restrict students’ ability to find agency not only within food decisions made at the classroom level, but ultimately within decisions made at the larger level of the food system beyond the school walls. In the final section below, I move on from this discussion to describe and analyze one specific attempt at developing a particularly “bodied” curriculum that is constructive to the goal of encouraging students’ agency. This experiment was something that I conducted after returning from my case-study field work to Penn State University, in State College, Pennsylvania, where I was completing coursework for my doctoral degree. Within a graduate class on curriculum and the body, I was able to develop and test a food-based classroom activity that is “bodied” in the sense of purposefully engaging classroom participants in co-creative knowledge production at the intersection of mind and body, or society and biology. The goal of this experiment was to develop a greater understanding of how classroom educators can actively and creatively engage in the project of bodily transformation as a mechanism of progressive social, political, and ecological change.

Like my dissertation as a whole, much of the theory behind this project stems from the rhizomatic/network logic of theorists like Deleuze and Guattari (1987), Stephanie Springgay (2007), Arun Saldanha (2005), and Elspeth Probyn (2001), as well as from phenomenological philosophy, drawing upon the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1964), Linda Alcoff (2006) and others who are interested in (the changeability of) lived experience and perception. The pedagogical practices of eating that I developed and that I describe here are related particularly to the rhizomatic (yet structured) notion of “becoming” (Deleuze and Guatarri 1987, Kennedy 2000, Grosz 1994) and specifically, in this particular project, to the idea of “becoming mac and cheese,” in which classroom participants experiment with the changeability of food-based experience through semi-structured engagement with macaroni and cheese as a (not always) typical ‘comfort food.’ This experiment in “bodied” education therefore follows from the understanding, discussed in previous chapters of this dissertation, that bodies are relational, situated, and changeable, and thus that our agency in regard to (social) change within educational settings comes in and through active and collective engagement with our particular bodily/embodied relationships.

Below, I draw upon qualitative data that I gathered from interviews and structured classroom activities with graduate students of art education and education policy at Penn State University in the spring of 2008. I first introduce interview data from interactions with these adult learners in order to highlight the importance of recognizing how food affects them variously through their differential abilities to viscerally ‘access’ food. I
argue that such an understanding is important for teachers in the development of pedagogical practices that are attentive to visceral difference in both its haphazard and structured forms. I then move on to draw attention to the (potential) changeability of such visceral (re)actions within a classroom setting. To do this, I introduce data from a food-based class activity, which I both developed and participated in, in order to describe how food may be used in an educational setting to encourage experimentation with visceral (re)actions. Finally, I conclude this discussion with a brief analysis of what these pedagogical practices mean for the development of a bodied curriculum.

*Exploring Comfort and Discomfort through Dialogue*

As I have explained in previous chapters, when I began fieldwork for my dissertation project, interacting with middle school students, parents, and teachers from a variety of economic and ethnic backgrounds, my training in women’s studies compelled me to try to understand students’ experiences of growing, preparing, and consuming food in terms of their varied life histories. Although the promotional materials on school gardens suggest a somewhat uniform (and positive) student response to these hands-on, largely nutrition-focused initiatives, I wanted to know how students’ particular economic, social, and cultural contexts influence their experiences of and visceral responses to these healthy eating programs – particularly in terms of their motivation to change their eating habits. To put it in different terms, I wanted to understand how and why food ‘touched,’ and thus ‘moved,’ these students variously. I believe that this level of understanding is also an important first step in developing any sort of food-based curriculum that is attentive to the diversity of students’ life experiences. In conducting this experiment with adult learners, it was therefore important for me to first engage individual class participants in discussions about their own food attachments and experiences.

My initial step in conducting this “bodied” educational experiment was to become more aware of the participants’ own personal food histories and experiences. I thus began this project with 7 short (10 to 20 minute) semi-structured interviews with members of our graduate level class, which I subsequently transcribed. (This amounted to roughly 80 percent of the class; I did not have the chance to talk to every student formally in regard to this project, though I talked to all of the students informally about the experiment). The semi-structured format of my interviews allowed participants to freely discuss their personal experiences of food with me, while at the same time having some direction as to how to focus their stories (i.e. on the topics of comfort and discomfort, and on the question of what is required for such feelings to materialize). As is common of semi-structured interviews, my questions were not tightly scripted, but were also not entirely random; I used prompts and open-ended questions to facilitate discussion (See Figure 14). This format therefore was an attempt to negotiate the sort of balance between flexibility and structure that I witnessed within SGCPs (and which I have described above).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Comfort Food Mini-Study: Discussion Guide</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Focus: Comfort and Discomfort</strong></td>
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<td>1. BEGIN: In starting to think about foods role in creating comfort or discomfort in your life, maybe it is easiest to begin by asking what role does food play in your life in</td>
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general? When you are asked to think about food and your own food choices/habits, what first comes to mind? Do you generally think of food as comforting or discomforting? How often do you think about food, eating, and/or your particular food choices or habits (or those of your collective family)?

2. **COMFORT:** What about food is comforting to you? What ideas about food are comforting? What types of foods make you feel most comfortable, comforted, or at ease? What habits or rituals of eating make you feel comfortable? Why? How do you think that these ideas/things actually produce a feeling of comfort in/for you? What do you need to feel most comfortable while eating? What would help to make you feel more comfortable?

3. **DISCOMFORT:** What about food is discomforting to you? What ideas about food are discomforting or cause concern/worry/anxiety? What types of foods make you feel most uncomfortable? What habits or rituals of eating make you feel uncomfortable? Why? How do you think that these ideas/things actually produce discomfort in/for you? What would make you most uncomfortable while eating?

**PROMPTS:**
**COMFORT:**
- Culturally significant, self-determination
- Celebratory, family and friends, nostalgia, warmth
- Supporting farmers, local workers
- Healthy, nutritious, vitamins, “good” fats
- Familiar tastes, spices, aromas, textures, temperature
- Providing for others, mothering/fathering, performing a role
- Home, eating out, being a guest/host

**DISCOMFORT:**
- Body image, fat, calories, oils
- Health, cancer, toxins
- Industrial production, environment, animal rights
- Social justice, inequity
- Cultural disenfranchisement, racism, class difference
- Picky, unfamiliar tastes and textures, temperature, color
- Need for social graces, fitting in, being judged
- Work of cooking, hosting, feeding family, femininity/masculinity
- Expense of food

**Figure 14:** Example discussion guide for comfort food mini-study

I conducted these interviews out of the classroom only because of time constraints. Ideally, I think that this initial task of exploring comfort and discomfort through personal dialogue could itself (along with the latter classroom activity) be much more effectively conducted during in-class exercises, group discussions, and/or through other collective means of flexible-yet-structured communication. Indeed, to do so would encourage not only the ‘teacher’ or ‘facilitator’ to get to know the other participants, but also (and more importantly) would help the other participants to become better acquainted with each other’s food-based attachments, and perhaps more comfortable with the idea of sharing both food and the stories that come along with it. Developing this sort of group rapport is certainly important to such a (relationally) “bodied” project, but in this case I was not overly concerned with this task, because many of our class members already knew each other well.
As I have said, my interviews/discussions focused particularly on the subject of comfort and discomfort in regard to food. I chose this topic because I wanted to direct our attention as a class to how the mind/body interface influences our visceral experiences of eating. Comfort and discomfort are visceral reactions to which many people can relate (in one way or another), and thus are an easy way to begin a conversation about food and bodily experience. This is certainly true at the level of a graduate class, yet it would also most likely be true in the middle school classes that I observed within the SGCPs. More specifically, I found that the notion of ‘comfort food’ was an idea through which I could explain and direct the attention of the class towards how the experience of eating a particular food at a particular time can materially produce comfort for a certain individual, while perhaps producing discomfort for someone else. I described the rationale of my interviews in these terms, explaining to each participant that the purpose of our discussion was to allow me to better understand the social and physical mechanisms through which they came to find certain foods comforting and/or uncomfortable. These conversations became building blocks upon which the later in-class activity was built.

I collected and documented this interview data for the specific purpose of developing a food-based educational activity that would be reflective of and responsive to the particular experiences and attachments of my interviewees. I give examples of this data below in order to give a sense of the type of information that I collected and used in developing my classroom activity. My interviews with adult learners revealed, as one might expect, a diverse array of structural and haphazard forces in the production of a ‘comforting’ food event – illustrating that ‘comfort food’ is more complex than a food item itself. Memories, traditions, and social norms mix with smells, temperatures, and cooking equipment, making the experience of comfort food a complex, developmental, and somewhat unpredictable affair:

“I was making the soup and I am thinking of the jars that my mom and grandma store it in the fridge. I am thinking of what the smell is like coming into the kitchen. You smell the meatballs, and the garlic, and sausage, and that is your mom’s house. She always sends you off with something.” (Teacher/Scholar, PA)

“For me, almost anything can be a comfort food. It is more dependent on the environment or the context in which I am eating it. For instance, Mac and Cheese can be a comfort food for me, but if it is Mac and Cheese because I am too lazy to make myself dinner and so I am eating the leftovers off of my kids plates, then that is not comforting…. But at 11 o’clock at night, in grad school, when I was writing my dissertation and made Mac and Cheese, when there was a need for something in my body, [then that would be a] comfort food…. There are almost these rituals that [need to] go around it.” (Teacher/Scholar, PA)

What is materially happening in these eating events (as they are recalled)? As I interpreted this interview data, I did so with the understanding that the experience of food as comforting happens at/as the interplay between conscious/intellectual mind and
remembering/reacting body, where the experience of a comforting smell, or sight, or taste depends upon and recalls the learned knowledge of both the mind and body. Through dialogue with these adult participants, I was therefore able to develop a better picture of what they might require to feel comfortable in a food-based event: in these cases, links to particular culinary cultures, or the presence of tradition or ritual. Of course, these requirements are specific to the moments that they discuss, and do not necessarily extend beyond the events that these interviewees recall, nor to other people’s experiences with food. However partial, though, they are a starting place for a project that seeks to actively experiment with visceral sensations.

Through my interviews, I also wanted to similarly consider what might produce uncomfortable sensations among the class participants. The following descriptions from my graduate class interviews are examples of the data that I collected:

“[I become uncomfortable] just thinking about carbs and calories, and then also, on another level, health wise, what is in it: dyes and things of that nature. My discomfort around food would be about those sorts of issues, things that relate to the body in appearance and in health.” (Teacher/Scholar, PA)

“I always trace my state back to my last meal. And if I have to think about discomfort and food, it always has to do with death that food can cause. Especially [when eating] things that we know we aren't supposed to put in our bodies.” (Teacher/Scholar, PA)

Here again we can see that in the experience of food as uncomfortable, particular societal knowledge about what and how one should eat is blended together with the food being eaten, such that how the food feels physically is materially affected by how it is conceived intellectually by a particularly situated human being. Potential requirements for discomfort in these cases included concerns about fatness or body image, and worries about dietary disease, but again these are contextually derived from particular food-body moments. Collecting these personal accounts of comfort and discomfort was the first step in my “bodied” educational experiment. They were a small (but not insignificant) way of allowing me, the facilitator of the activity, to become more familiar with the mechanisms through which these participants’ visceral access to (dis)comfort food was determined and arranged. In doing so, I was able to develop a better sense of how this access could be ‘played’ around with, negotiated or otherwise made palpable through a food-based activity within an educational setting. I turn now to discuss that particular activity.

Becoming Mac and Cheese
As the above discussion confirms, the practice of eating is unavoidably somewhat haphazard and unpredictable, but it is also somewhat developmental and disciplinary, involving learned and habituated ways of knowing that can come from structured social processes (links to particular cultures, familial habits, or social values and norms). To be sure, comfort and discomfort are based upon cumulative intellectual and physical experiences that differ for many reasons, some of which are explainable in terms of the
varied opportunities available to people to relate to certain foods/knowledges. I have argued earlier in this dissertation that these opportunities are part of what determines different people’s visceral ‘access’ to food. In this next section I want to stress that it is precisely because such socio-biological experiences are both developmental and disorganized that our embodied experiences can become a material place where teachers can begin to find pedagogical and political agency. Food and eating can be particularly useful in this task because, as Probyn (2001) explains, food reveals the strangeness of the body’s workings, the instabilities of inside and outside, illustrating that in eating there is always the possibility of change. Indeed, food can be a helpful tool in experimenting with the processes of visceral “becoming” – access, disruption, and change – within a classroom setting. But, this process is by no means straightforward; what follows is therefore not a blueprint but rather a description and invitation to experiment.

In developing the educational activity that I call “becoming mac and cheese,” I wanted to create a classroom scenario in which eating could become a conscious practice. I wanted to draw the class’s attention toward how the experiences of food that I came to know in conducting my interviews may come to change alongside our deliberate, collaborative action. This is not to say that any experience of eating is able to be developed or predicted ahead of time, but rather to suggest that, with effort, we might be able to direct our (embodied) knowledge of food in cognitive ways that allow us more agency within the “becoming” processes of eating. In this sense, such deliberate action is not something that can be replicated and repeated in every instance of curricular eating, but rather is a contextual and negotiated practice of individual and collective experimentation with particular intellectual and physical processes of change.

In order to explore how we might do so within a classroom setting, I wanted to direct the attention of the graduate level class toward the complexities hidden behind one seemingly simple “comfort food” dish: Macaroni and Cheese. (The recipe, at least, is simple: mix pasta, cheese, butter, salt, and anything else you think would taste good in a casserole dish, and bake in a hot oven until crispy!). My idea was that we would sit together around a table and share in a meal together. Sharing would entail not only eating but also reading and offering reflections about what and how we were tasting (perhaps differently from one another). In developing this activity, I specifically wanted to address some of the potential components of comfort and discomfort that my interviews had revealed. Thus, as one aspect of the event, I developed five different stories that I had written about mac and cheese, which were based partially off of five different components of comfort and discomfort that had emerged from the interviews, and that I wanted to bring into ‘play’: tradition/habit, ethnic culture, body image/fatness, health/dietary disease, and personal meaning (see Figure 15). As the class ate together, I had us read out loud these five stories. Through this directed eating and storytelling, my hope was that the class would come to experience this ‘simple’ food in a variety of different ways over the course of the eating event – not only as comforting or uncomfortable, but as perhaps both, neither, and more. I wanted to draw from different students experiences in order to encourage them to try to imagine how the experience of the food might differ for different members of the class.
In terms of the food itself, as it happened, I decided at the last minute to bring not one but four different kinds of mac and cheese, of varying degrees of chaotic ‘wildness.’ The dishes ranged from the plain or original mac and cheese recipe that many of us are familiar with to three cheese, to feta and sundried tomatoes, and finally to (a sweet cheese) coconut and banana. This unplanned addition to the eating event, which played on both ritual/tradition and novelty/change, seemed to expand the possibilities for conversation, reflection, and comedic interaction. Perhaps the addition of a sort of continuum of strangeness to the supposedly simple dish helped to lighten the mood, and thus the playfulness, of our (food-body and body-body) interactions. As the later dialogue with students revealed, it certainly allowed for more diversity of experience.

After reading the stories, and beginning our shared meal, I then engaged the class in dialogue about the experience. I wanted us to reflect collectively upon how we each came to know this particular food – upon the material processes that made up our own embodied knowledge of these dishes of macaroni and cheese. And I wanted us to think through how our ways of knowing this food may have shifted, as we listened to the different stories about mac and cheese, and as we learned from one another about what the food meant to each of us. Thinking about the (hi)stories that we tell and enact – through text, media representation, family tradition, super markets, government recommendations, the medical profession – I wanted us to further ask ourselves: what do these (hi)stories do, what role do they play, in the production of our eating experiences? In asking ourselves these questions, and in beginning to rethink our ideas on health and fatness or retell our histories of food, my hope was that we could begin to understand how to begin to feel our way towards new ways of experiencing food.

In the discussion that followed the structured mac and cheese eating event, class members shared their reflections on my stories, as well as other stories offered by their peers. One
class member suggested that the stories that I had shared took him on a particular emotional journey because of their specific sequence, moving from historical anecdotes to scientific studies to a personal account (my own story of mac and cheese). He narrated feelings of interest, then anxiety, then calmness, and then closeness. Read in a different order or with a different sort of developmental trajectory, he suggested, his visceral responses might have been different. Other class members responded to my stories by recalling their own personal memories of mac and cheese as well as other comfort foods, which varied in mood from soothing and nostalgic to unsettling and ominous. In recalling these stories, we were able to reflect upon how our own historical experiences of food have helped to articulate the varied visceral responses that we were having to eating and thinking about the mac and cheese at that moment. In sum, the eating event and discussion that followed succeeded in drawing out some of the complexities of our particular lived experiences of food, and perhaps in doing so allowed us to begin to better understand the visceral implications of these experiences for furthering the visceral projects of our bodies, our food, and our futures.

While this mac and cheese eating event in itself did not accomplish any sort of significant destabilization of structural forces or social categories (in regard to the participants), by allowing for different patterns of visceral ‘access’ it did help to pave the way for that possibility. In focusing our attention as a class on the intellectual and visceral interactions that an eating experience provides, we were able to start sensing what “becoming mac and cheese” might look and feel like as a diverse, collective and negotiated pedagogical practice (where the becoming is more important than any potential end result). Through sharing and reflecting and eating together, we offered each other tools for not only thinking differently about mac and cheese but simultaneously for sensing it differently as well (in terms of both comfort, and discomfort, and more). Far from being insignificant or bracket-worthy, our subjectivities and identities in relation to the food gave us the texture or gripping material from which we could begin to move around and feel out new ways of relating. By encouraging and being attentive to the different possibilities that our own experiences offered, the eating event transformed the classroom into a kind of playful space, where attempts at destabilization were both welcome and possible. While perhaps the stakes that each of us had in this experimentation were not tremendously high, the discomfort of health and body image related anxieties, or of recalling hard family moments, are certainly not insignificant. Furthermore, this eating event is not isolated from future events in which any of us might participate, involving different recipes and different contexts. Our class practice of becoming mac and cheese was certainly partial, but the experience has the potential to influence and direct other sorts of destabilizations of food and identity beyond those that we encountered in our classroom.

Conclusion:

In a similar but perhaps less deliberate way as the activity “becoming mac and cheese,” the structured yet flexible SGCPs that I studied in Plainville and Central Schools offered students opportunities for playful destabilization around issues of food, identity, and
knowledge, at the same time that the programs also served to reinforce certain social categorizations, identity constructions, and knowledge hierarchies. The above discussions suggest that SGCPs can and do provide students with opportunities for trying out new ways of relating to food that are less oppressive and hierarchical. Moreover, these experiences offer that in an open and playful classroom setting, the politics of food emerges not out of the object of food itself (as local or healthy) but out of the potential freedom to “become” that such experiential interactions with food can allow. Eating as a pedagogical practice can therefore function as an ethical and relational activity of self-production that differs substantially from ‘governmentality’ (as discussed in Chapter 2), most specifically because the end goal is not pre-determined but collectively negotiated. In the concluding chapter that follows, I turn to examine and discuss the broader implications of this sort of visceral work in more detail.
Chapter 7: Conclusions

“Judgment is really toxic when it comes to food, and I think that the… pooping cheetos and twinkies and so on, what that is doing [to] children is it is creating these complexes where children feel bad about themselves when they want to eat those foods. I think there [needs to be] room for everything, and room to listen in. Food is cultural and emotional and social and nutritional and we need a space for it to be all those things.” (Activist, CA, emphasis added)

“[Our school system] is one of the few places where [empowerment] has to happen…because that is where our kids are most of the time. That is where I was most of the time, and I wasn’t empowered. I look back and think, gosh man, where would I be if I actually was given meaningful information, information that would really strengthen me and my esteem.” (Activist, CA, emphasis added)

In this dissertation, I have explored School Garden and Cooking Programs (SGCPs) as instruments of both nutrition education and the alternative food movement. I have approached SCGPs particularly as viscerally driven programs, meaning that I have chosen to focus on how and why these programs physically motivate students to make changes in their eating habits, also addressing when and why they do not do this. In order to accomplish this analysis of SGCPs, I have drawn attention to the role that food knowledge(s), food identities, and food pedagogies play in the production of visceral ‘access’ to alternative food. I have allowed for explanations that draw attention to both structural and random forces, and have insisted in paying attention to both how SGCPs reinforce and resist social norms, groups, and hierarchies. In doing all of this, I have described in detail how two particular SGCPs, one in Nova Scotia and one in California, come to be interpreted and experienced in a variety of different ways by students, parents, teachers, and food activists.

In what ways is such an analysis unique to SGCPs? Why do SGCPs matter especially in exploring such mechanisms of viscerally-driven social change? In one sense, the answer to these questions is simple; SGCPs are not particularly distinctive to the PEB analysis that I have developed and conducted. What I describe in this dissertation is not an exceptional phenomenon in the catch basin of worldly events. No, the point is in fact quite the opposite. What I describe in this dissertation is true to life in many places; it is not unique but rather commonplace. Race, class, gender, and age are everywhere present as aspects of identity in our society, and they are always significant as axes of difference that structure how we come to know and relate to the world around us. Certainly these distinctions are by no means particular to SGCPs, nor are they unique to the alternative food movement at large. Furthermore, in most social events or phenomenon there will be instances of both reproduction of and resistance to these structured-yet-rhizomatic differences – for life itself both contains and contradicts such groupings. In justly describing any particular visceral existence, all of this is indeed present.
So why look at SGCPs as places in which these dynamics unfold? My point is not to claim that SGCPs are unique to such an analysis but rather to suggest that we must begin to allow such understandings of social life to inform our political practice in a variety of places, both within and beyond alternative food. To return to a point that I made in Chapter 3, drawing from Latham (2003), as researchers we must learn to develop explanations that are always and everywhere infused with a “fidelity to what they describe” (Latham 2003) – a fidelity that allows for messiness and contradiction, incompleteness and potentiality, structure and agency. Indeed, as I have argued in this dissertation, it is this sort of approach to research that can recognize and account for social difference in its full, visceral complexity. But we must learn to do this not just for the purpose of accuracy in our research, for this fidelity is needed beyond our academic scholarship. We need to begin to appreciate what it takes to put such an understanding to practice in activism, education, and policy-making.

As an example of the importance of this task, SGCPs draw our attention to how such a viscerally oriented analytical approach can become important to the promotion of progressive social change in social organizing, in curriculum development, and in health promotion and protection. My contention in this dissertation has never been that SGCPs are the only place where such activities are important, but rather that the focus on ‘alternative’ nutrition education within SGCPs is a useful place to begin to figure out how best to think through and indeed work through such complexities of everyday life. At least, the focus on SGCPs has been helpful to me in accomplishing this task. I began this research through my academic and personal interests in the alternative food movement, insisting that alternative food activists were not doing enough to reach out beyond lines of social difference (Guthman 2008). I wanted to explore both why the alternative food movement was largely unsuccessful at attracting a diverse base of supporters, and also how movement leaders could begin to reach out more successfully. At the same time, I was attracted to this project because I was concerned about the way that education more broadly was being conducted in North American schools. I saw that the purpose and means of education were becoming increasingly limited and ever more conservative (Strober 2003), and I worried about the implications of these trends for the promotion of knowledge(s) as a collective and negotiated process. Finally, my interest in bodily health and nutrition as an inclusive practice led me to question the persistence of distinct shoulds in regard to ways of eating (Lang 2005), as well as to question the expert mentality that comes alongside such health claims. I was therefore interested in searching for other means of attending to nutritional health in ways that were less judgmental and more engaging.

For me, then, SGCPs became a way to better understand how progressive social change can happen in the midst of social difference, and particularly, how the material body itself can become an instrument of such change. I saw these two projects as linked because, as I came to recognize, it is in and through bodily experiences of life – through our visceral (re)actions – that social differences are both reinforced and resisted. In this sense, by paying attention to bodily motivations to eat, I learned how we, as activists, educators, and health care professionals, might better “listen in” to a variety of personal stories and
attachments (as the first activist above describes). In doing so, I was able to come closer to understanding and specifying how we might begin to move towards the elusive but nevertheless profound goal of individual and collective “empowerment” (as the second activist above encourages).

In concluding this dissertation, I want to now turn to briefly examine the lessons of this SGCP dissertation work for social activism, public education, and nutrition policy. In light of my Political Ecology of the Body (PEB) framework, I will organize each of the discussions below in terms of my three central axes of analysis: the production of knowledge, the structure of power/hierarchy, and the un-structured ontology of lived experience/social practice (not necessarily in this order), keeping in mind that it is at the intersection of these three axes that everyday life unfolds.

**Social Activism and Visceral Difference**

Feelings are important to activism. Many have argued this point (e.g. Thrift 2005, Wang 2008, Hayes-Conroy 2009), and many more have experienced it as true. Indeed, in regard to SGCPs, motivation is what makes social change happen. As this dissertation has argued, visceral reactions drive students to make judgments or choices about food, some of which lead them towards alternative ways of eating, and some of which steer them away from such foods and practices. There are many reasons for this, and many potential outcomes, but the first point to make about social activism and visceral difference is simply that bodies matter. In connection to and along side of the stated beliefs and ideals of any social movement, bodily sensations and experiences ‘move’ us to act and (re)act. That our visceral reactions are not predetermined or fully predictable is central to this movement as well, for it is the haphazardness of our interactions that allows for new possibilities to emerge. All of these points serve to describe social activism as it unfolds within the un-structured ontology of lived experience. The stories from SGCPs remind us that activism in daily life necessarily takes place through complex, contradictory, and chaotic networks of relation. To know and practice this ontological claim as a leader or organizer of social action is to recognize and encourage difference in knowledge, social position, and experience within a social movement.

Secondly, in regard to the structure of power/hierarchy, this SGCP research illustrates clearly that visceral reactions are not natural, pre-political bodily impulses. On the contrary, visceral reactions are always already imbued with a certain politics – a developed array of tendencies (yet also latencies) that tell broader stories about the inequities of access that color our social world. Such stories include a wide array of structural injustices – in this research, for example, discrepancies in geographic placement of food markets in different racial neighborhoods, or disparity in purchasing power among different families. Such stories can also highlight variations in cultural capital, education level, or availability of social services, or they can give us information about the social norms and expectations that confront a variety of individuals and groups. To a social activist, then, recognizing visceral reactions as socio-political is an important step toward understanding how to respect and reach out to groups of people who are “other” to the social movement or organization at work. This is a particularly important point for the alternative food movement, which has been critiqued for its homogeneity,
yet it is also a critical lesson for many other social movements. By beginning to recognize how our bodies have developed differentially in and through the social hierarchies we wish to dismantle, we can better learn how to resist those hierarchies through developing new and accessible opportunities for inter-action.

Finally, this SGCP research points to the need to question and dismantle expert knowledge claims within ‘progressive’ social activism. In insisting on the hybridity of mind and body, we can begin to appreciate how knowledge itself comes to matter materially in the production of bodily motivations. Knowledge is indeed one way to ‘access’ motivation, not just in the sense of what one knows, but also and more importantly in the sense of how one actively participates in knowing. In this sense, to pay more attention to the visceral realm within social activism is also to recognize how knowledge is produced through social organizing, and who is included in the processes of knowledge production. As this research has shown, SGCPs sometimes rely on knowledge claims that preclude other ways of knowing, creating hierarchies between those who hold ‘correct’ food knowledge (nutrition experts, teachers, food activists) and those who are by contrast naïve or lacking. Not only does this reinforce false and oppressive understandings of whose knowledge should count, but it also ultimately precludes alternative food activism from inviting the active, bodied participation of those that are ‘other’ to the movement. The insistence on ‘correct,’ ‘pure’ or ‘natural’ ways of bodily knowing on the part of some SGCP leaders therefore hinders diversity in alternative food. In order to attract participation from diverse groups, social activists need to begin to pay more attention to how the process of knowledge production within social activism can more effectively embrace the diversity of experience and ideas, practicing knowledge not as a static goal but as a collective process and progressive practice of situated, relational, and viscerally driven people.

Bodied Education
Public education in North America has been impacted in recent years by cuts in federal spending, as well as increases in demands for standardization in testing (such as the Bush Administration’s “No Child Left Behind” program). The effect of these conservative measures has been to severely restrict the concept of education itself. Many public schools have been forced to limit their educational curricula to ‘core’ subjects like science and math, while dropping what are considered less important subjects of study, such as art and music. What counts as ‘legitimate’ knowledge in our education system has therefore grown increasingly limited. More broadly, hook’s (1994) notes that the increased conservatism of knowledge production in North American schools has also derived from the wide-spread conception of education that Paulo Friere calls the “banking” system. In this system, knowledge is seen as something that teachers ‘have’ and students ‘receive’; learning is not, in other words, a democratic, collective process.

This dissertation has illustrated that attending to the role of the body within the processes of knowledge production is a valuable and constructive part of public education. The stories of the SGCPs that are presented in this dissertation point to the need to broaden rather than limit the meaning of knowledge within public schools in the United States and Canada, particularly in terms that address the ways that different bodies come to know.
The fact that so many schools have become concerned about food and nutrition suggests that such a broadening is possible, if not already underway, yet this broadening must go well beyond an expansion of accepted subject areas. As I have suggested, claims to ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ ways of knowing in schools can reinforce race, class, gender, and age-based hierarchies in the classroom, and can prevent students from being able to find agency within the educational system. As this work has shown, even as SGCPs are based upon innovative pedagogical strategies of hands-on learning, they can preclude active participation from certain individuals and groups by insisting on a “banking” system approach to alternative food. Nevertheless, this research has also illustrated that SGCPs can and do provide students with structured-yet-flexible spaces in which to negotiate their own roles in food decision-making. These lessons are important to the development of effective and inclusive food education in schools, but they also are significant beyond garden and cooking classrooms, even or especially within what have become the ‘core’ subject areas of public education. Indeed, if education is to become relevant to a diversity of students and communities, it is important for teachers to attend to and encourage the active presence of minded-bodies within all aspects of formal learning.

In broadening what learning looks and feels like, and what counts as valuable knowledge, public education can become more responsive to all students’ needs, and can provide important counter-experiences to the structured events of inequitable social life. Along these lines, Strober (2003, 142) provides an important critique of the conservative trend in the education system, arguing that the ways in which education has been restricted and streamlined reflect a deep seated neoclassical economic assumption that only market transactions produce value. The long-standing idea in the US that education can, and should, be responsive to the needs of society is certainly threatened by such a notion. As Strober points out, public education in the US has roots in the belief that education was central to the building of a better society, and to the functioning of a democratic political system. However, the individualism that is promoted by a neoclassical economist conception of education further limits these necessarily collective ideals (Strober 2003). Furthermore, hooks argues that “the objectification of teacher within [such] bourgeois educational structures …denigrates notions of wholeness… reinforcing the dualistic separation of public and private, [and] encouraging teachers and students to see no connection between life practices, habits of being, and the role of [teachers]” (Hooks 1994, 16).

In both of the above ways, the dominant conception of education in the US does not currently offer students any way to connect their classroom learning to their different life experiences, and does not offer them a way to make sense of or (re)negotiate their social position in light of their academic training. Rather, the current education system seems to reinforce the idea that learning has worth simply in an individualistic sense of market value. Yet this dissertation suggests that the hands-on, interactive kitchen and garden classrooms of SGCPs have the potential to offer something different. Although SGCPs have, too, been critiqued as neoliberal (Pudup 2008), this research has shown that SGCP programs can and do offer students opportunities to relate to new foods and food practices. SGCPs offer arenas in which students can ‘play’ with their social identities vis-à-vis food. And, they offer models of collective work that do not (necessarily)
promote individualism but rather suggest that the public school system is a place for the promotion of social health and welfare.

Both in ensuring active student engagement in knowledge production and in connecting education to broader social change, this SGCP research illustrates that it is important to recognize the dynamic role of bodies within educational settings. Although the body has, of course, always been present within formal education, its presence has not always been known or promoted as a means of active and meaningful engagement in the learning process. As Stephanie Springgay insists, a truly bodied curriculum requires understanding and encouraging the presence of material bodies in the classroom not as docile and coded but as “redolent, fleshy, and becoming” (Springgay 2008, 72). This understanding points to how bodies are present in education particularly in unstructured ways, ways that preclude educators from being able to fully predict or control the path that learning takes, and that open the learning process up to the realm of the potential.

As this research has illustrated, it is important to recognize and allow for such unstructured, visceral work. In my own research methodologies, attention to the haphazard ontologies of SGCP events allowed me to recognize not only that SGCPs could both reproduce and resist the structures of social life, but also that both tasks could occur simultaneously. For example, as Chapter 6 discussed, pedagogical strategies like flexibility or repetition are involved in both such processes by simultaneously offering opportunities to viscerally access alternative food, and by discouraging or disabling such access. This recognition is important because it stresses that in attempting to construct a bodied curriculum, it is not possible to create blueprints for action. Lesson planning must instead be a negotiated and collective process in which the intended outcomes cannot be fully known or pre-planned, because the outcomes themselves are determined through collective engagement. Such a concept is inherently disruptive to the standardization of schooling that so many academics and educators have critiqued, and it is a way to shift public education away from a focus on the ‘individual.’

Towards Feminist Nutrition

In this dissertation, I have also repeatedly expressed concern about the tactics and claims of nutrition science in promoting bodily health. These concerns have arisen in regard to the ways that knowledge is produced and policed, the eschewing of broader political economic contexts, and the lack of attention to the relational character of health/healthy experience. My study of SGCPs both confirms my worries about nutrition education as an exclusive and alienating project, and also points toward potentially helpful alternatives.

This SGCPs research has helped me to argue for a dismantling of expert-led knowledge within dietary science and nutrition education. In light of the contextual and situated ways in which students experience healthy, alternative food, it is impractical to think that food experts (either within or beyond the alternative food movement) could possibly come up with an answer to what everyone, everywhere, should eat. Instead, this dissertation work has shown that in order to encourage participation in any sort of nutrition program (such as SGCPs), it is important to acknowledge the presence and
legitimacy of multiple forms of nutritional knowledge – both in cognitive and visceral terms. Indeed, my case studies suggest that it necessary to highlight difference within nutrition education.

Other scholars have also articulated such a position. Enticott (2003), for example, wants us to become more attentive to the ‘lay epistemologies’ (both in the realm of social life and in the wisdom of the body) that are important to nutrition and dietary choice. Thus, he suggests that we need to democratize science by extending it to lay knowledge’s privileging of (bodily and communal) experience. In other words, nutrition education must begin from the understanding that there are multiple ways in which people have come to know food, and that all of these ways are legitimate and important in the advancement of health. By being attentive to such testimonies of experience, nutritional programs can challenge the limited, scientific understandings of healthiness, recognizing that there is not one nutrition but in fact many competing nutritions both within and beyond ‘accepted’ nutritional science. In this scenario, (scientific) claims to expert knowledge are unproductive, but the knowledge produced by dietary science is not totally rejected. Instead it is considered to be partial – existing alongside rather than above other ways of knowing.

Beyond dismantling expert knowledge, this dissertation research has illustrated that it is important to consider health as a situated and contextual phenomenon. This understanding recognizes the inequitable structure of health and health care in North America, as well as to the broader unevenness of our social system at large. In considering food preference not as an individual matter but as a visceral, socio-biological production, I have argued that motivation to eat healthily, and indeed ‘access’ to healthy food, must be examined in light of SGCP students’ different social positions. Although SGCPs can hinder such a project by promoting healthy eating as a universal act or a common experience, my field work within Central and Plainville SGCPs shows that these programs also allow teachers and students to engage with food in more situated, contextual ways. Many SGCP teachers, for example, encourage students to experiment with recipes in ways that make sense to them, and also to experiment with other aspects of their lives, like racial or gender identities. In doing so, SGCPs stand to highlight that bodies are not just ‘individual’ processes but systems that are necessarily in relation and negotiation with structures and systems beyond the bounds of the skin.

Other scholars and health care workers have promoted a similarly broad understanding of health as well. Kearns and Gesler (1998), for example, endorse a similarly expansive definition of health as, “a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity” (10). Likewise, Collins suggests a notion of ‘sustainable health’, a term that recognizes health as connected to other aspects of sustainable development, land and livelihood security (Collins 2001, 238). Turshen offers Marx’s definition: “A society in which men [sic], liberated from the ‘alienations’ and ‘mediations’ of capitalist society, would be the masters of their own destiny, through their understanding and control of both Nature and their own social relationships” (Turshen 1997, 59). And Lang argues in specific regard to nutrition concerns that, “nutritional science can and should contribute to social rather than individualized
interventions” (731). All of these ideas are significant to SGCPs, but also more broadly signal the need for health care scholars and practitioners to take power into account. These discussions invite the possibility that nutrition science could become a politically progressive or even radical force in resisting oppressive and inequitable social structures.

Finally, my SGCP research highlights the need to consider nutrition in its broadest sense as a collectively produced and negotiated process. This understanding speaks to the *rhizomatic ontology of nutrition* – the ways in which nutrition knowledges and practices are produced through haphazard (yet also structured) networks of interrelating bodies, ideas, and things. In terms of SGCPs, this means that what emerges out of the programs is neither solely the product of the SGCPs themselves, nor clearly the result of one particular larger force (e.g. neoliberalism, fat-loathing, or racism). Such a recognition is important within nutrition education because it can allow students the opportunity to understand bodies not in terms of fixity and deviation from norms, but instead as both changing and changeable in relational connection to a variety of social and biological forces.

In the pedagogical practices of SGCPs, as many teachers suggested to me, students often learn more about healthy food as a collective social process than they do about healthy food as a strict dictate of nutritional science. As my research has illustrated, SGCPs can provide space for students to learn how to find agency within the food-systems both within and beyond the school. Although some students complained that strict rules or guidelines hindered their ability to take control of the kitchen activities, or of their eating habits more broadly, many students also suggested that SGCPs provided opportunities to relate to food and food ideas that were both helpful and fun. Moreover, SGCPs allowed students to interact with *each other* in myriad ways, through sharing stories or recipes to working and sitting together. As my research illustrates, such opportunities are not tangential but rather vital to the success of SGCPs in motivating children to make healthy eating something that is (relationally) their ‘own.’

Taken together these three shifts in nutrition education – from expert to partial knowledge, universal to situated health, and causal to haphazard explanations – amount to a new mode of ‘doing’ healthy food that I have come to call ‘feminist nutrition.’ Much like the work of feminist scholars in promoting partial, situated, and collective knowledges, and the work of political ecologists in promoting contextualized understandings of health, feminist nutrition is based upon the understanding that any truly progressive nutrition program must emerge as a negotiated practice of particular people, in particular places and social positions. Feminist nutrition is a way to connect the socio-spatial understandings of human-environment geographers, and the politically inclusive work of feminist scholars, with the good intension and strong dedication of alternative and healthy food advocates. It is a framework that is specific to nutritional health, and yet it is also an example that could be relevant to many other health projects, as well as to the concerns of social activists and educators discussed above. In short, feminist nutrition can help to open the alternative food movement to the task of “listening in,” and in doing so, can bring nutrition education closer to the elusive goal of “empowerment.”
AFTERWORD:

Grounded Nutrition and Food Education:
A Primer to Encouraging and Unearthing Geographic and Feminist Principles in School Garden and Cooking Programs

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Table of Contents:

Introduction 3
  Purpose of this Guide Book 4
  The Many Projects of SCGPs 5
  Why Geography and Feminism? 6
  Using this Guide Book 8

Questioning Expert Knowledge
  Key Principles 10
  Achievements and Potentials of SGCPs 13
  Obstacles and Concerns for SGCPs 15
  Suggestions for Pedagogical Practice 18

Understanding Body Knowledge
  Key Principles 20
  Achievements and Potentials of SGCPs 22
  Obstacles and Concerns for SGCPs 24
  Suggestions for Pedagogical Practice 26

Encouraging Relational Knowledge
  Key Principles 29
  Achievements and Potentials of SGCPs 32
  Obstacles and Concerns for SGCPs 33
  Suggestions for Pedagogical Practice 36

Summary & Conclusions 39
Introduction

“We made corn tortillas from masa and water, and put cheese on them and baked them in the oven. We had these with a pear salsa – red and green pepper, red onion, tomato, a little jalapeño, pear, the juice of half of an orange and a whole lemon, and salt to taste. It was really very good; I’d make it at home. Almost all of the kids liked it. They were sneaking pieces of pear and spoonfuls of the salsa, and of course all fighting over the last of the tortillas and cheese. One boy just ate up all the leftover salsa with a big spoon. Another girl got an extra tortilla from a neighboring table and was dancing around and showing it off to everyone. I’d never seen such excitement over school food!” (Author’s field notes, October 2007, Berkeley)
Purpose of the Guidebook:

The purpose of this guidebook is to identify and promote progressive geographic and feminist principles within School Garden and Cooking Programs.

This guidebook is written in response to 6 months of eye-opening fieldwork at two distinctive but similar “school garden and cooking programs” (what I will abbreviate here as SGCPs), both of which have taken at least some inspiration from the “edible schoolyard” project of Alice Waters and the Chez Panisse Foundation (www.edibleschoolyard.org), though one was initiated before Waters’ program began. As is standard in academic research, the specific sites that I studied in my research remain unnamed in this document, but they are instead referred to by pseudonyms – Plainville School and Central School – as well as their respective locations – rural Nova Scotia and Berkeley, California. The research at these two sites was conducted as part of a dissertation project for a dual degree in geography and women’s studies - two disciplines that, I came to realize, have a great deal of theoretical work to contribute to school food research.

I write this document primarily as a way of “giving back” to the two educational communities that offered me the extraordinary opportunity to engage in this fascinating research, as well as a great deal of motivation and support along the way. All too often, academics end up writing documents that are inaccessible and unhelpful to the communities that they research. Instead, I wish to write something that will allow me to share my academic labor with those who have helped me most in this learning process. It is also my hope that this document will be useful to a broader audience beyond my specific case study sites – useful to other educators, communities, and groups who are engaged in or interested in initiating SGCPs.

On both accounts, I write this as a guidebook that explains and explores the key theories in geographic and feminist research that I have found to be salient to such school food initiatives. In doing so, I wish to offer educators and advocates new tools both for understanding the important work that is currently being accomplished by such SGCPs, and for effectively encouraging the continuation, expansion, and improvement of these progressive programs.
The Many Projects of SGCPs:

*Through their connection with alternative food, SGCPs play a role in a variety of social and ecologically driven projects, from health and nutrition to community development and social welfare.*

As I understand them, SGCPs are involved in many different types of “work” within our schools and communities. As concerns over the childhood obesity epidemic, food safety and security, corn syrup, trans fats, and more make school food an increasingly hot topic, these programs have begun to receive a wide array of funding and support primarily for their role as healthy eating initiatives. Viewed in conjunction with phase-outs of “junk” food in cafeterias, processed foods in vending machines, and food-based advertising in hallways, SGCPs function largely as nutrition education projects that are intended to encourage and enable healthier eating habits among school-age children and, by extension, their families.

“I think the program is great. There are a couple of different purposes. Kids get to know where their food comes from, and it is also great that they use food [from the garden] to promote healthy lunches at school. And the [older kids], they learn to cook [this healthy food].” (Author’s interview with parent, September 2007, Nova Scotia)

But, SGCPs are also a lot more than this. For one, the type of food promoted by such projects is usually considered *alternative* – an alternative not only to the junk foods that have predominated in school cafeterias, but also to the conventional food system at large. SGCPs often emphasize the importance of locally-produced, organic or low-impact, and minimally processed foods not only for matters of freshness and personal bodily health, but also for larger matters of ecological and social well-being. In doing so, SGCPs become instruments of what many call the “alternative food movement” – a broad array of initiatives, groups, and forces that reject the large-scale, industrial food system for its destructive impacts on social and ecological communities. By providing opportunities to link local gardens with local kitchens, and by encouraging children to find pleasure in hand-sewn produce, SGCPs contribute to a growing network of food-based alternatives.
This “alternative” role is not secondary to the health-based work of SGCPs but is in fact central to it. As children and parents accept that local, organic, and non-processed foods are healthier, and thus (at least nutritionally) more desirable, such “alternative” foods gain in social value. Moreover, the very concept of healthy is expanded as alternative food systems are linked through the acts of collective gardening, cooking, and eating to notions of community togetherness, local economic vitality, familial stability, environmental awareness, and social welfare. Through these connections, SGCPs work to encourage and inspire alternative visions not only for the future of our individual human bodies, but also for the future of our relationships in these broader social and ecological networks that make us the individuals we are.

In short, we could consider that many SGCPs are projects in:

- nutrition & health (fresh fruits and vegetables)
- alternative food (such as local & organic)
- community development (collective work, gathering)
- family stability (daily meals together around a table)
- alternative and/or local economies (capitalist and not)
- social welfare (fair wages, anti-hunger)

**Why Geography and Feminism?**

*Geography and Feminism have allowed for the combining of academic theories with activist goals, giving rise to explanations that embrace rather than avoid the complexities of the real world while offering solutions that particularly benefit those who are disadvantaged or disempowered by our social system.*

With all of the (at least potential) projects above to bear in mind, understanding the scale and scope of SGCPs influence becomes evermore complex. Far from being simply of caloric or nutritional significance, food in our society today touches on and reflects a wide array of socio-cultural, economic, political, and ecological processes that cannot easily be distilled down to a few essential dietary “shoulds”. The fields of geography and women’s studies are helpful in this regard because they provide a foundation
in social and spatial theories that can help us to make sense out of such
complexity.

Geography, for example, is a discipline that is interested in explaining
spatial networks and patterns in both our social and ecological worlds. We
can therefore use geographic theories to help us to understand (and
influence) a variety of human and environmental relationships, including the
interrelations between people, places, and food. In offering explanations of
such interrelations, geographers are especially aware of the influence of
forces at a variety of geographic scales, including everything from
international and global dynamics down to local and even personal or
“embodied” motivations. In short, the discipline of geography provides a
variety of tools for weaving together an informed comprehension of the
multifaceted and multi-scalar system of food production and consumption in
which SGCPs are now engaged.

As a discipline that grew out of a broad social movement, women’s studies
offers a mode of explanation that is at once academic and activist (or social
change) oriented. Not unlike some of geography’s more progressive work,
many of the feminist principles emanating from women’s studies
deptas are theories that not only critique mainstream policies and
norms but also push for progressive social change. For example, leftist
geographers and feminists both are attentive to the power dynamics that
surround various socio-spatial relationships, and they advocate the
development of relationships that are more democratic and non-hierarchical.
This is true not only in regard to gender relations, but also to other social
inequities such as those involving differences in race, class, age, and
physical ability.

In recent years, feminist researchers (including many geographers) have
become increasingly interested in understanding and exploring the role that
our physical human bodies play in influencing our experiences of this inter-
relational world. Feminist theories of the body and “embodiment” (a term
explored in more depth below) offer ways of explaining how the global and
local complexities of the food system (and our social system at large) are
experienced in a variety of ways through (culturally, socially, economically,
and physically) different human bodies. These theories also help us to
understand the roles that human bodies play in motivating and propelling the
social and ecological relationships that make up our food system. In short,
feminist theories provide a way of talking about food systems and human
behavior that not only enables us to explain the power-laden complexities of human-food relationships, but also allows us to advocate a vision for a more progressive future.

Using this Guidebook

This guidebook is meant to help educators and other advocates of SGCPs to better understand how knowledge about food is both cognitively discovered and subconsciously produced in these hands-on, interactive programs.

Ultimately, like many other hands-on pedagogical approaches, SGCPs provide students and teachers with an in-school space to explore new, interactive and more-than-cognitive ways of knowing (in this case, knowing about food). SGCPs tend to encourage not only the expansion of conscious and purposeful knowledge about one’s eating habits but also the development of new emotional or visceral linkages to food habits and preferences. Taken together, such conscious and sub-conscious understandings of food are what drive SGCPs effectiveness as an instrument of the various social and ecological projects discussed above. In this sense, these programs can be considered projects in food knowledge – that is, projects that involve students not just in the discovery of new ideas and foods, but also in the production of new ways of feeling and being in relation to these foods and ideas.

In this light, this guidebook is meant as a resource to help teachers and other SGCPs advocates to understand and to direct how food knowledge is both encountered and produced in such programs, with a stated focus on encouraging evermore democratic and non-hierarchical modes of learning. The document is divided into three sections – Expert Knowledge, Body Knowledge, and Relational Knowledge – each of which discuss a distinct but interrelated theory about the production of knowledge in SGCPs from a geographic and feminist perspective. The information in these three sections is cumulative, and should be read in order for best comprehension.

Each section begins by briefly outlining the key geographic and feminist principles (and/or critiques) that are associated with the type of knowledge examined. Next, the sections move on to discuss the potential and realized achievements of SGCPs in regard to these principles and critiques, followed by the potential obstacles and concerns that SGCPs face in maintaining or
promoting such achievements. Finally, each section ends with some simple suggestions for pedagogical practices that may help those involved in SGCPs to ensure a democratic and egalitarian trajectory.

As evidence for the validity of its explanations and arguments, each section offers quotations from interviews and field-note transcripts that were collected during research at the California and Nova Scotia sites. As is standard in academic work, no real names are attached to the quotations in order to ensure anonymity of the research subjects.
SECTION I: Questioning Expert Knowledge

“This is still a relatively white bread area, with relatively unsophisticated palates...The parents themselves don’t really have any idea how to cook beyond the box...My role is to widen their variety, to develop a taste for their kids” (Author’s interview with food activist, August 2007, Nova Scotia)

Key Principles

Feminists and Geographers question knowledge systems that promote authority of experts over other groups in society. If we consider knowledge as something that is collectively produced rather than individually discovered, we can begin to dismantle the social hierarchies that characterize our current educational system.

To begin to understand how knowledge in our society is not just discovered but produced, one important question that geographers and feminists ask is who gets to decide what counts as legitimate knowledge? Often, the answer to this question is the same: experts know best. Today’s educational system promotes increased specialization in particular “fields” of study, leading to the rise of what we might call “expert knowledge.”
Even though geography and women’s studies are specialized fields too, some academics in these disciplines question why we tend to give so much legitimacy to such highly trained forms of knowledge production. Is specialization in one particular field necessarily better than a more generalized or holistic understanding of a problem or system? Is it possible for an outside expert to know something better than a community member who is intimately connected with the situation or dilemma? How much training does one need to be able to effectively contribute ideas or skills to a certain initiative?

One potential problem that comes along with the rise of expert knowledge is that it is backed by a strong faith in Western (Euro-American) science. Although there are some obvious and good reasons why the scientific method has become the dominant mode of investigation, it may be worthwhile to ask whether one particular method is able to adequately explain or address all the complexities and variability that exist in the global and local phenomena that we want to understand. People tend to trust in the explanations of experts over those of “lay” people, even though there are numerous examples in geographic and feminist research of “specialized” experts failing to adequately understand or address local complexities.

In this sense, one critique of expert knowledge comes from the realization that such highly “specific” training does not always allow for the type of flexibility and particularity that local communities often require in addressing their specific needs. In fact, such expert knowledge tends to be based upon a standard or norm from which deviations are measured and assessed. The problem is that these standards are not “universally” applicable – like all social values they are derived from a particular culture, worldview, and way of life. Because the dominant systems of knowledge production tend to be peopled by those in society with more rather than less power, this means that the standards that are developed in these systems tend to reflect the values of a wealthy, Western, white, male-dominated culture. Other voices – poor, non-western, minority, and female, for example – do not carry the same weight and are silenced in this system (See Table 1). For this reason, many geographers and feminists are wary of the claims of “experts.”
### The Hierarchy of Knowledge

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dominant Knowledge</th>
<th>Marginalized Knowledge</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Experts</td>
<td>Non-Experts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scientific</td>
<td>Non-Scientific</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Universal</td>
<td>Local</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White, European Lineage</td>
<td>Ethnic and Racial Minorities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wealthy</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men</td>
<td>Women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rational, Cognitive</td>
<td>Emotional, Embodied</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educated</td>
<td>Less Educated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worldly</td>
<td>Parochial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>Rural</td>
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</tbody>
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Table 1. Commonly accepted hierarchy regarding the relative validity of certain types / origins of knowledge

A second problem that comes from this faith in “expert knowledge” is that it makes invisible the very system of production that gives experts their power and legitimacy. In other words, when we believe in the explanatory power of expert knowledge, we are assuming that knowledge is something to be “discovered” and not “produced.” The idea of a category of people called “experts” is based upon the assumption that some people have or hold key information, while other people lack it. With this assumption, education becomes a one-way street, where the job of those who hold knowledge (powerful experts) is to give it to those who are, by contrast, “ignorant” (the disenfranchised in society).

There are, thankfully, other ways to think about education and knowledge. If knowledge is not something that we have but something that we make, education can become a two-way street. In this alternative knowledge system, some people might have specific sets of experiences or information that they share with others, but it is a back and forth dialogue between a variety of concerned people that ultimately creates knowledge or wisdom of real value. Many geographers and feminists would argue that it is this collectively produced knowledge, and not always the knowledge of experts, that is most needed in understanding particular phenomena and solve real-world problems. This two-way educational ideal also has the potential to be vastly more democratic, and more inclusive of disenfranchised populations, than a model based on the unquestioned veracity of “expert” knowledge.
Achievements and Potentials of SGCPs

*SGCPs promote context-specific knowledge by putting emphasis on the importance of local food.*

One obvious way that SGCPs challenge the primacy of expert knowledge is by operating as an “alternative” to the mainstream, conventional food system. By maintaining that locally produced food is fresher, healthier, and more desirable than food that has been packaged, processed, and shipped great distances, SGCPs call into question the very sanity of large-scale food systems. Instead of relying on outside experts – advertising agencies, multinational corporations, agribusiness, and the like – those who advocate growing and eating local food require a more interactive and place-based type of knowledge about producing and consuming food. Such knowledge cannot be replicated and repeated as experts move from place to place but must be derived from the particular social and ecological specificities of a local community or school.

Geographers and feminists call this context-specific type of understanding “situated knowledge.” SGCPs require and promote situated knowledge over expert knowledge by putting emphasis on the importance of local food production and consumption – a process that necessitates a much more context-specific system of understanding than conventional food systems allow. While chemical fertilizers, technological apparatus, and genetic modifications in the conventional food system allow one type of food to be grown in many different locations, alternative production methods demand much more attentiveness to what grows best in each particular place, often *without* chemical additives or modifications. This is certainly true for most small-scale school gardens.

In addition to situated knowledge of local ecosystems, SGCPs also tend to require situated knowledge of local people too – particular preferences, traditions, habits, and the like. For example, a nutrition expert might hold important information about why carrots are good for students to eat, but a local schoolteacher would probably have a much better understanding of what would motivate his or her particular students to actually want to grow and eat those carrots. Experts could come into a community and provide advice for setting up a SGCP, but it is only through interaction and dialogue with local community members that an effective SGCP could be developed, accepted and embraced. Like many community-based initiatives, SGCPs
therefore require the co-creative educational processes through which situated knowledge is produced.

“We had a student come in and...she didn’t eat fresh food ever. For her to try a piece of celery, it was the most unusual thing she had ever eaten, and so we made a big deal about it; I got out the calendar and wrote in it, you know, ‘Michelle ate celery today,’ and she was like ‘YES, I did!’ So you have to – I think that that’s the other big thing I have learned besides allowing them to say no and meaning it – is also really acknowledge where they are starting from.” (Author’s interview with teacher, November 2007, Berkeley)

SGCPs also challenge expert knowledge by encouraging opportunities for active, hands-on learning. In gardens and kitchen spaces, where physical movement and communication is central to the tasks at hand, it is much harder for children to be passive learners. Education in these spaces is often and necessarily less structured than in a classroom setting, and learning comes less from someone or something and more through the dynamic (and often somewhat chaotic!) processes of interaction. In these learning environments, everyone – quite literally – brings something to the table. Every child has their own set of experiences, skills, stories, and memories of preparing and/or eating food, and each of these sets influences what and how children learn from one another. While a garden expert or master chef may facilitate the class, in these interactive spaces, knowledge circulates through and is produced by the collective more than any one individual.

A third way that SGCPs are (at least potentially) challenging the primacy of expert knowledge is through a reassessment of what type of learning is most valuable in schools. In an era where art, music, and other “elective” type classes are being cut to make way for an increased focus on a few key “standards” in math, science, and English, SGCPs stand in stark contrast to this trend. While gardening and food preparation certainly can be relevant to a math, science, or English curriculum, SGCPs show that such skills are also important in their own right.

More broadly, by focusing on more local or situated knowledge, SGCPs can also suggest to students that it is important and valuable to take the time to learn about their local ecological and social systems. This is especially
significant in lower-income rural and urban communities, where students are often led to believe that educational success means getting out and staying out of their communities – and becoming “experts” elsewhere.

Furthermore, SGCPs challenge contemporary notions of time and efficiency, offering that faster is not always better. In contrast to the ever-decreasing time and thought dedicated to feeding children at lunchtime, SGCPs value longer lunch periods, with more time for children to sit collectively around a table, and to socialize and interact.

Obstacles and Concerns for SGCPs

*SGCPs can potentially further the hierarchy of expert knowledge by focusing on the shoulds of eating that are promoted by mainstream nutrition.*

*A more democratic nutrition education system would acknowledge the cultural, ethnic, and economic complexity that surrounds food choice.*

In other ways, SGCPs further the cause of expert knowledge. One area of concern is SGCPs’ overarching focus on nutrition and dietary habits. Much of the funding and support for these programs has come about through widespread interest throughout North America in reducing childhood obesity rates. Governments and non-governmental bodies often promote SGCPs for their role in encouraging healthier eating habits among school-age children. This is, without a doubt, an important function; however, the dietary standards that SGCPs embrace (often as a requirement of funding) do not position children as active learners and producers of food-based knowledge. On the contrary, nutrition and health-education in schools continues to be reduced to simple disciplinary shoulds and shouldn’ts. Salts, fats, and meats, for example, should be avoided; vegetables, fruits, and whole grains should take their place.

These sorts of simplistic messages circulate not only through our education system, but through media, advertising and public discourse. While perhaps a useful starting place for nutrition education, they do little to challenge the expert-based knowledge system of nutrition and dietary science. Within this system, we assume that experts have a better understanding of the needs of individual human bodies than those individuals themselves. With obesity reduction as an ultimate goal, this seems an absurd presumption considering the complex social and ecological processes that influence food access,
choice, and behavior. Nevertheless, over and over again we are led to believe that “experts” – nutritionists, the USDA, medical doctors, dietary consultants – hold the knowledge of how to eat right, while we passive (and seemingly ignorant) consumers must simply follow their lead.

There are many reasons why this expert knowledge model in nutrition education should be avoided. The most obvious is that it teaches children that they are not expected or supposed to be actively involved in knowing their own bodies – that an outside expert can more effectively tell them about what they need to be healthy. Such a system distances the learners from the very things that they are supposed to be learning about and from. This is especially problematic because despite what experts claim, the fields of nutrition and dietary science still know relatively little about the complexities of food intake and digestion. Obesity and malnourishment are not well understood, and thus suggestions for what and how and how often to eat fluctuate as wildly as do trends in fashion or music (or the stock market).

What’s more, nutrition education often fails to account for the broader social and economic system in which food habits are developed and food choices made. The standard mantra of low fat dairy, whole grains, unsaturated oils, and lots of fruits and vegetables appears over and over again in SCGPs, suggesting to students and parents that such nutrition knowledge is unwavering and universal. Fat in particular continues to be equated with descriptors like bad and unhealthy, despite the fact that our bodies require and produce significant quantities of fat to remain well. Such nutrition claims are complicated for a variety of social reasons as well. In terms of fat, for example, different ethnic groups tend to have different beliefs about how ‘good’ or ‘bad’ fat really is, and also what types of fats are best. Furthermore, dietary fat has become largely associated in our society with concerns over body image and fatness, an issue that particularly affects females (although both males and females can develop eating disorders).

“This is not racist or nothing but like black people use grease and white people use olive oil and stuff, because it doesn’t have fat in it” (Author’s interview with student, December 2007, Berkeley)

Although it is not necessarily a bad idea to teach students about the assertions of nutrition science, it is clear that standardized nutrition ‘shoulds’
are not the whole story. We also need to consider what happens when cultural traditions or family food habits come into conflict with what students learn at school. When we teach about food choices, habits, and behaviors in such a way that they are removed from their social and ecological contexts, we miss much of the complexity of such real-life matters. At the same time, we also miss an opportunity to discuss with students these real-life complexities of food in a way that can help them to more effectively negotiate such complexities – including not only different cultural traditions or family habits, but also inequities in the distribution of food, or issues of uneven access to healthy food.

Ultimately, an expert-based system of nutrition education can end up furthering knowledge-based hierarchies, which can alienate certain individuals or groups of people from the cause of SGCPs. In such a system, students, parents, and communities at large become distanced from their own role in the production of food knowledge, which can lead to feelings of resentment or hostility. The alternative food movement at large – including organic food and farmers markets – has been critiqued for its tendencies toward both elitism (excluding the poor) and whiteness (excluding minorities). Scholars have noted that descriptors like organic or local tend to be valued highly by white, middle-class families, but are less valued by the working-class and by non-whites. This is because both culturally and economically, the food systems that such groups have access to are often very different. If SGCPs teach children to value food that is a sign of middle-class, white values, what does this say about the food knowledge that is “other” to this? What does it say about poor or minority students’ ability to understand their own bodies, or contribute effectively to the production of food knowledge? If student empowerment is to be a central goal of SGCPs, these inequities are certainly a cause for concern.

“The [African American] communities we were trying to reach didn’t know about [organic food]. They had this…notion of what organic was: it was hippie food, it had worms in it, it wasn’t good. So we took the label ‘organic’ out of it. We still served organics, still sold it, but we called it ‘old school food,’ what your grandma used to grow. Did your grandma have a fruit tree in the backyard? This is it. So, that let down a whole barrier” (Author’s interview with food activist, November 2007, Berkeley)
A more democratic, inclusive version of nutrition education would be a model in which food knowledge is not something that we individually discover as “right” or “wrong”, but rather something that we collectively produce as workable and effective within the particular contexts that we are working. This latter model of nutrition education would be based upon a more collectively produced and situated knowledge of food, rather than a standardized and expert-led understanding of healthy eating. In this model, there can be no experts that hold all the answers, because not only the answers but also the questions must be determined within the particular contexts in which people, places, and food come together.

Suggestions for Pedagogical Practice

“I think that both [nutrition rules and your personal preferences] are important; you have to have a guideline, but also find your own way to eat. You can’t always be healthy because that gets boring – eating the same healthy things every day.” (Author’s interview with student, September 2007, Nova Scotia)

As experienced teachers are bound to recognize, any pedagogical idea or tool has the potential to be both appropriate and effective or unsuitable and unsuccessful in a particular educational setting. An individual teacher can far more successfully anticipate the possible responses that his or her students will have in reaction to any activity or discussion. After all, the best classroom learning is derived from the situated knowledge of particular educational contexts, and not from the standards imposed by outside experts. The following, therefore, are suggestions that will necessarily require modification and adaptation to the particular social and environmental situations in which these activities are to be attempted.

- FOOD PREFERENCE: Discuss food habits and preferences and ask students to consider how their own likes and dislikes come about. Are their preferences changeable? What does it mean to “develop a taste” for something? Do adults like foods that kids don’t? How are we persuaded by advertising, family, or society at large to like certain foods? Can one student convince another to like something? Give it a try… bring in a variety of food items that certain students like but
that others claim not to, and see if any tastes can be developed/persuaded. Urge students to be creative with their tactics, and then discuss the results!

- **FOOD SYSTEMS**: Make the system of food production and consumption less of a mystery. Trace a food item from production through consumption (chocolate works well). Highlight inequities and power relations in the system. Talk about different methods of large and small scale growing, about the effects of advertising on consumer preference, and about the processes of food distribution globally and locally. Introduce the concept of fair trade. Talk openly about food costs, access to food and markets, and economic options for buying, trading, or growing one's own food.

- **FOOD KNOWLEDGE**: Introduce the concept of food knowledge as something to which everyone contributes. Ask students to bring in a story, idea, or recipe from their own experiences to share with the class. Talk about how food knowledge travels around the world along with people and food itself (e.g., where are potatoes, cocoa, and tomatoes from originally? With what country do we tend to associate these products?). Explain how traditions change and meld together as people interact with new people, places, and ideas. Can anyone think of examples, even from your own homes? How do new ideas of habits make their way into the students’ lives? Discuss how and why some groups of people have to work hard to keep their traditions of food production and preparation alive (e.g., indigenous populations).

- **FOOD AND HEALTH**: Have students bring in several examples of health or nutrition advice that come from the media and advertising. What do these experts suggest? Are there any contradictory statements? How are we to weigh all of these claims and figure out what is most healthy for us? What does it mean to be healthy, and what do we need to achieve this? Have the students discuss, write, or draw about what concerns them most when it comes to food and their own wellbeing. Topics can include: food scares, access to food, dietary standards, body image, etc. Make a collective poster or collage of all of the media claims and personal concerns.
SECTION II: Understanding Body Knowledge

“Ms. Dora had three students go out with me to pick carrots, beans, and potatoes for the hodge-podge (a stew). They all walk-ran all the way to the garden... All three picked carrots, getting down on their knees and carefully pulling. It was hard and frustrating, as many of them were too wormy or small to eat. The two boys ran back to the kitchen to start cutting the viable ones. Mary stayed out with me in the garden to pick the potatoes. She really got down in the dirt with the plants. It surprised me. You have to really dig deep to get all the potatoes, and she just jumped right in, plunging her hands down into the soil, and pulling out each clump of potatoes gingerly.” (Author’s field notes, September 2007, Nova Scotia)

Key Principles

*Geographers and Feminist Scholars think of the body as a place where social norms and cultural traditions become solidified as habits and preferences. Understanding body knowledge is important if we want to influence the food choices of a diverse student population.*
In recent years, some researchers in geography and women’s studies have become more interested in theories of the body and “embodiment.” Geographers understand the body as another scale at which we can research and analyze certain phenomena – much like the scale of the local, regional or global. Feminist scholars tend to think of the body as a particularly important scale of analysis because it is at the scale of the body that things like social expectations and cultural norms become bodily habits, preferences, and learned behaviors. This is what the term embodiment refers to; it is through daily interaction with the biological and chemical processes of our very beings that our social world becomes materialized or “embodied.” For geographers and feminists both, then, an analysis at the scale of the body provides the best way of understanding how particular phenomena that we want to study are experienced and lived out in our everyday existence.

After many years of focusing on language, texts, and cognitive ways of knowing the world, some geographers and feminist scholars have begun to argue that we need to start paying more attention to bodily ways of knowing. In other words, when we focus on intellectual or conscious thought processes, we miss a lot about the subconscious and intuitive ways that our bodies come to “know” the places in which we live. Besides conscious thought and visual assessments, we use our senses of smell, touch, taste, and hearing to understand the world around us. These more sensuous ways of knowing are often under-recognized in a school setting, where education remains focused on intellectual learning. Regardless, though, we are constantly learning and understanding in more-than-conscious ways – and it is important to begin to understand how this is actually happening.

Recent calls for a more “bodied curriculum” in academia have addressed this sensuous lack in current day pedagogical practice. In geography, this turn has led to the development of what is called geographies of emotion and affect. In women’s studies, the trend has led researchers to focus on how bodily habits and perceptions develop, and how these embodied actions can both reinforce and resist oppressive social forces. Collectively, we can consider this academic line of work as pertaining to the notion of “body knowledge,” which is distinct but not mutually exclusive from cognitive or intellectual knowledge. For example, some feminist scholars have discussed the role of muscle memory in social interaction, while others have highlighted the mechanisms behind how different people come to perceive
race. In both cases, intellectual work helps to initiate the type of behaviors that eventually become subconscious habits of being.

Body knowledge therefore exists alongside and is interconnected with cognitive knowledge, to the extent that it becomes hard to disentangle the two in questions of causation (what causes what). It is important to understand that body knowledge, like cognitive knowledge, is developmental – that is, it is a process of learned behavior. When feminist scholars or geographers discuss body knowledge, they are usually not referring to something that precedes a person/body’s place in society, nor something that is innate or natural to everyone’s body (this would be a mistake). Instead, they are referring to the ways that a body’s biological and chemical processes interact with the social and ecological world in the developing of a body’s knowledge of that world. In this way, we can consider that body knowledge is not static or fixed within a person from birth, but is learned and also malleable throughout the course of one’s life.

How do we study body knowledge? This is a tricky question, and one that academics have been struggling with for quite some time. One starting place is simply to focus our attention on the more-than cognitive world. This means becoming more attentive to sensory experience, to feelings, impulses, bodily sensations, emotions – and it means allowing these things more explanatory power. If, for example, we want to know what motivates certain individuals to eat a particular food, we would need to ask not only what the stated, intellectual rational may be, but also what the bodily experience of eating that food is like – what senses, memories, emotions, or impulses it triggers. In this line of questioning, we are bound to find that bodily experiences differ vastly from person to person, but we also may find some overlaps or similarities within particular groups. Regardless, becoming more attentive to body knowledge is undoubtedly important for SGCPs because a central goal of these programs is to more effectively understand and influence students’ eating habits.

Achievements and Potentials of SGCPs

*SGCPs are attentive to body knowledge because they emphasize hands-on learning that involves all of the senses.*

218
In many ways, SGCPs are already ahead of the game when it comes to understanding the importance of body knowledge. Like other hands-on learning initiatives, SGCPs emphasize active learning and learning by doing. In addition to talking about cycles of food production and consumption, many SGCPs engage students in digging, planting, harvesting, cutting, cooking, eating, and composting their food. The hands-on learning environment allows students to get “a sense” for how food is grown and prepared, from the toil of garden work to the smells, sounds and tastes of the kitchen.

Because food is the primary focus, sensory engagement comes easy within SGCPs. Senses that are normally reserved for the cafeteria – particularly smell and taste – can be called to use in the garden and kitchen. Students come to learn that their body knowledge is important and useful – for example, when assessing whether a dish needs more salt or spices, or when testing the ripeness of a fruit or vegetable. Students bring and share their own familiarities and memories to these sensory experiences, and they build upon them continually in the development of ever new bodily knowing.

“The lottery search out there shows that when kids do something, they learn by doing a lot more than if they are just listening or reading. Kids retain the information more; it’s in their bodies, a first hand experience. Also it’s a great way to tap into multiple learning styles. Kids do better by being outside and learning by doing, it’s great for them.” (Author’s interview with SGCP Leader, November 2007, Berkeley)

Educators have long recognized the effectiveness of this kind of learning for many different students and types of learners. Teachers have also noted the ability of such programs to attract students who otherwise do not show much interest in classroom learning. Moreover, at a time when standardized tests and book learning seem evermore dominant, emphasizing the importance of more active types of work and bodily modes of learning can suggest to students that there are multiple ways to excel or succeed in our education system. SGCPs provide the space for educators and students to experiment with their school experience and to try out new ways of teaching and learning within the school context.
Of course, body knowledge forms and develops regardless of whether we have programs that directly recognize this. Some geographers and feminist scholars would remind us that learning in and through our bodies is a constant and ongoing process – one that many scholars and educators have tended to ignore, and one to which we should therefore begin to pay more attention. SGCPs are well positioned in light of these academic critiques because they allow schools to highlight and frame what was for many years simply a background activity. Schools are now beginning to realize that significant learning does already take place in lunchrooms and cafeterias, and that we need to begin to influence and direct this learning if we are to see positive changes in students health and well-being.

**Obstacles and Concerns for SGCP**

*SCGPs should be careful to become attentive to the diversity of body knowledge among different students, and to recognize that experience of food can differ based on cultural and economic background in addition to other more random influences.*

Even though SGCPs lend themselves well to sensory engagement and bodily learning, such programs are not inherently attentive to the variety of potential experiences that students can have in a kitchen or garden classroom, the potential socio-economic and cultural reasons for this variety, and the effect that such experiences can have on students’ motivation to eat certain foods. For example, in some of the literature about SGCPs, there is an underlying assumption that getting out into the garden will necessarily be a positive, motivating experience for all involved. The same is often said for preparing and cooking the garden produce. The idea behind this assumption is that when students actively work at growing and harvesting their own food, they will also be inclined to want to eat it.

While this may be a fair assumption for many students, it is certainly not accurate for all students at all times. As most educators would agree, in educational contexts it is particularly important to pay attention not only to what works for the majority but also for the outliers – especially since outliers in our education system tend to be the most disadvantaged and the most in need of attention. Assuming that all students will respond similarly to gardening and cooking replicates a standardized vision for SGCPs that promotes “expert” as opposed to “situated” ways of knowing.
SGCP educators need to be aware that bodily experiences of gardening and cooking can and do vary greatly – and often do so along race, class, gender, and other lines of social difference. Students who are used to eating together at a table, or who regularly shop with their parents at farmers markets, are more likely to be comfortable with the notion that growing and eating local produce is desirable. Students whose families cannot afford farmers market prices, or who are not accustomed to cooking homemade meals, may not value local production and consumption as highly. Students who are highly aware of dieting and calorie consumption may feel differently about meal preparation than those who give little thought to what and when and how much they eat.

In all of these examples, and a myriad of others, students bring to the table a unique set of bodily memories and habits, all of which have an influence on their sensory experience of growing and cooking food. From fond memories of fast-food restaurants to negative associations with farm labor, students socio-economic and cultural backgrounds can certainly influence the effectiveness of SGCPs in motivating their own eating habits. These differences are, of course, certainly acceptable. In fact, they are more than that – they are opportunities for learning and sharing, and for encouraging diversity and openness among the student population. To achieve this, however, SGCPs must recognize that stress, panic, disgust, shame, and anger are also among the potential student responses to being in a garden or kitchen, and that these are acceptable too.

“I was with Liz flattening out the beds, and I noticed that one girl was just raking the same spot over and over again, and not really doing anything except creating a big hole where there was supposed to be flat ground. She obviously was not very into what she was doing. All of her friends (all African American students) were [not really focusing on the garden either] and were really worried about getting their shoes dirty. One girl spilled some dirt on another girl’s shoes and the girl said ‘oh no you didn’t’ and looked positively annoyed. Another girl ran back inside to get her other shoes from her bag because ‘suede and the garden doesn’t mix.” (Author’s field notes, November 2007, Berkeley)

In light of the recent critiques of the alternative food movement as being overly “middle-class” and “white,” such attentiveness to difference in regard
to students’ body knowledge is not only important for reasons of student motivation, but also for student empowerment. Instead of learning that certain foods are “right” or “good” and others are “wrong” or “bad,” students need to first understand that their bodily reaction to and experience of different foods is legitimate and important, and also that these reactions can change. They need to know that their own body knowledge counts for something in our educational system, and that it can help them and others to learn even more about foods, bodies, health and difference.

Moreover, these students also have to be given the opportunity to encounter and develop more positive experiences in the kitchen and garden. In the quest to further the progressive goals of the alternative food movement, many minority activists have noted that local food advocates need to pay increased attention to what it will take for poor, non-white consumers to embrace the ideals of alternative food and make them their own. Along these lines, such advocates need to ask, what is it about alternative food particularly that can help to address the needs and further the goals of disenfranchised populations – or that can help to empower disenfranchised students? SGCP leaders need to pay particular attention to how low income or minority students can come to experience bodily feelings of pride, or excitement, or interest in SGCP cooking and gardening. These programs need to encourage increased sharing of food values from diverse populations, and they need to operate under the assumption that legitimate food knowledge is a collective project that is driven by a variety of differently motivated and always changing human bodies.

Suggestions for Pedagogical Practice

“[When we engage in hands-on activities] I just think that we are working different parts of our brain. You know, when we are touching it we are working one part, when we are looking at it we are working another part, when we are smelling it we are working another part and we have all these different parts of the brain firing off. It is [more significant than a textbook].” (Author’s interview with SGCP leader, September 2007, Nova Scotia)

It is difficult to make generalized suggestions for how to address the particulars of students’ body knowledge. Two important core values,
however, are openness and activeness. In addition, talking about body knowledge and making students and teachers more conscious of the processes of bodily learning are valuable for addressing the above potentials and obstacles. Even more important, students should be encouraged to think of body knowledge as both changeable and always changing, and therefore as something that they – in connection with their teachers and peers – can influence a great deal. Of course, these discussions could arise over a meal or snack together, or while harvesting or chopping produce – they don’t have to be structured “lessons.”

- FEELINGS AND FOOD: Engage students in a lesson on “comfort foods.” What are comfort foods, and how do these foods differ among families, generations, or cultural groups? What causes comfort or discomfort in regard to food, and what do students need in order for an experience of food to be comfortable? Collectively make a comfort food dish, and then see what it takes (or if it is possible) to make everyone equally comfortable.

- HABITS AND PERCEPTIONS: Encourage students to brainstorm about their own food habits and preferences. What foods do they immediately think they will like or dislike? Ask them to consider how their habits and perceptions have developed. Are they changeable? Can we develop “tastes” for things that we currently don’t like? Over the course of a month or semester, have students regularly try, perhaps in different recipes or contexts, a food that they have labeled as undesirable. Try eating it alone, or with friends that like it, when it is cooked for you, or when you cook it or grow it yourself. Use journals to record any potential changes in perceptions and habits.

- SENSING FOOD: Include more activities that deal directly with comparing sensory experiences. Encourage students to use their senses of smell, touch, and taste in the garden or kitchen. Can they taste the difference between one apple, and another one? Do two different herbs smell similar? How does this texture compare to that one, and which one does each student prefer? Sounds could also be important – crunching, or sizziling, or squishing. And what about the overall “sense” or “feel” of a day or event? Have students take note of the mood of the activity, and how the mood can shift or change depending on different individual and collective circumstances (a stressful test, some happy music, lighting or decoration, etc.)
- MUSCLE MEMORY: Discuss body knowledge directly with students. In what ways do our bodies learn or remember? Use muscle memory as an example of body knowledge. Choose a bodily activity – shoveling or planting or chopping or even dancing and come back to the motion of that activity regularly over the course of the month or semester. Have students take note of how the motions – at first learned cognitively – eventually can become habitual or subconscious. What other activities in everyday life are like this?
SECTION III: Encouraging Relational Knowledge

“I like the garden because everywhere I moved I ain’t never had [the space to] garden, to plant stuff in my backyard.” (Author’s Interview with Student, December 2007, Berkeley)

Key Principles

Some feminists and geographers emphasize an understanding of the body as relational, rather than individual, in order to put emphasis on the social and material relationships that define any one person. A relational understanding further suggests that bodies are changeable, though not always or equally able to be changed.

Many of the same geographers and feminist scholars who are interested in theories of the body have also shown particular interest in furthering what we could call a “relational” view of the world. The metaphors of a network, and in ecological terms a rhizome, have become central to this relational view because such images help us to picture the interconnectedness of all things. In the same way that knowledge can be thought of as collectively produced, so too can individual people, places, or other more material things be considered the result of collective interaction.
A relational way of thinking destabilizes the notion of individuality, and suggests instead that the uniqueness of “individual” things or people comes about only by way of their relation to other things or other people. In this view, the static or fixed idea of an object or an individual is replaced by the flowing and dynamic idea of an interaction. The purpose of this switch is to emphasize the significance of relationships, and to illustrate that it is actually never individual things but things-in-relation that make the world what it is.

For example, preferences for certain foods develop as the foods come into contact with our noses, tongues and taste buds. It is the process of interaction that allows for such “tastes” to develop, and not the food and taste buds in and of themselves. If this seems like an obvious point, it is. But it is a point that also runs contrary to the widespread acceptance of individualism in capitalist society – an individualism in which we are defined by our “unique” personal preferences for consumer goods. If we can begin to identify ourselves as relational beings, whose habits of life are continually developed in interaction with other people and things, then we can start to take stock of and perhaps even begin to direct the relationships and forces that make us what we are.

For instance, instead of grouping ourselves into fixed categories defined by consumer preference – say, a Pepsi versus a Coke drinker – we can recognize that this consumer identity is based upon a habituated interaction with a particular soft drink (and all of its related sensations, memories, and promises). Perhaps we would prefer to not interact with either, or with any soft drink. What sorts of disentanglements and/or new relationships would this require? What obstacles or challenges might this new habit of being bring up for us?

Some geographers and feminist scholars argue that it is at the “scale” of the body that we can find our ability to have influence over the world in which we live. Another way to say this is that our “agency,” our ability to decide and act in this world, is located within our own living, changing bodies. Of course, because our bodies are continually developed in relation to other bodies and things, our “agency” is not an individual or isolated force but an interactive and dynamic one. Some look at this fact as daunting, that we can never escape the systems and networks in which we find ourselves. But others look at this fact as promising, that it is exactly because we are relational beings, because we are constantly bumping up against other beings.
and things, that through living our lives we can encounter opportunities for change.

To look at the world relationally is therefore to consider that no identities or categories are fixed or inflexible – that there is always the potential for maneuverability, fluidness, and change in the world. This is not to say that there is not fixity in the world – for certainly habits, preferences, and static modes of thinking and feeling are a part of our daily lived experiences. But, relational thinkers tend to embrace rather than shun the chaos of our social and ecological worlds, because it is by playing around with the uncertainties of life that we can shift and change our sometimes rigid habits of being. In this view, living life itself becomes a way to resist power and affect change in the world.

One mistake that people make with this line of thinking is to assume that everyone has equal abilities to engage in this sort of real-life “play.” Just because there is an aspect of co-creation to our relational world does not mean that everyone or everything has an equal ability to direct the movement or course of these interactions. Unequal power relations still abound in our relational existence. Thus, we can consider, for example, that while “white food” and “rich people’s food” are not fixed categories, neither are they categories that all students and teachers have equal space and capacity to shift.

“My dad said he wouldn’t eat the salad [that the students] made; he said he wasn’t a rabbit.” (Author’s interview with student, August 2007, Nova Scotia)

We might consider first what might go into any person’s tendency to perceive food in such fixed terms. The influences are bound to be varied and numerous: family habits and traditions, access to foods within one’s neighborhood, food costs, cultural differences, friends food habits and peer pressures, past personal experiences, etc. The network of relations in regard to a person’s identification with food is undoubtedly complex and chaotic. Still, some geographers and feminists have noted that even though racial or economic categories like “black” or “working-class” are not written in stone, these groupings develop tendencies that can be linked to the unevenness of power relations in our social interactions. A farmer’s market therefore
might be perceived as “not for us” by some non-white communities because years of inequity in income have led to a different set of habits among many minority populations. The point here is that “playing” with how people identify with food is not simply a matter of individual choice. Some people have a lot more room to “play around” with such categories than others.

Achievements and Potentials of SGCP

*SGCPs offer a space for students to play around with and push the current boundaries of social norms and roles.*

Perhaps the most promising aspect of SGCPs is their capacity to encourage playfulness among students. The opportunity for “play” in unconventional classroom spaces like gardens and kitchens is particularly high. Students often sense that such hands-on learning activities come with a different set of expectations than more traditional styles of classroom learning. The tone is often more open and experimental. Many teachers have commented that the space of a garden or a kitchen classroom seems to give students the chance to socialize with peers in a much different way than their other classrooms. Students who may not excel or feel comfortable in more traditional learning environments have come into new sorts of social roles in a kitchen or garden setting.

“At my table last year there were all boys, half the table was black and the other half was white, and they all bonded about being boys. And they joked about race too: oh yeah, you wont give him this because he is black, or whatever, but they just like to play around with it, because they can get reactions and test boundaries, see how far they can go with something like that.” (Author’s Interview with Teacher, December 2007, Berkeley)

In regard to the broader impact that social and economic inequities outside the school have on student food habits and choices, SGCPs certainly do much to offer all students the opportunity to engage in cooking and gardening activities. While individual teachers may feel somewhat powerless in enabling access to food and influencing food habits outside of school, within the school walls SGCPs bring many students into direct
contact with foods and ideas that they otherwise would not experience in their daily lives. In this way, we could consider that SGCPs open up occasions for the development of new relational body knowledge, for the formation of new bodily habits or preferences, or in more general terms for the capacity to at least begin to play around with the fixities of food.

Educators involved in SGCPs are also certainly aware of the potentially damaging habits and preferences for food that currently exist among students, and are cognizant also of the in-school contexts that enable these habits and preferences to form in the first place. Indeed, the whole premise of SGCPs is that the currently available options for students’ interactions with food in school cafeterias is at least part of what has led to the rise in childhood obesity and related dietary diseases. Furthermore, by teaching nutrition education in a setting where opportunities for experimentation abound, SGCPs encourage students to take an active role in their dietary health. By engaging the students in hands-on, active learning projects – ones that highlight not only cognitive but also bodily ways of knowing – SGCPs can help to give students the sense that they can and do have considerable agency in their daily lived experiences. Perhaps not all students are able to bring the practices they learn into their home lives, but they are at least exposed to the idea that they are capable of influencing their own habits and patterns of being.

Obstacles and Concerns for SGCP

SGCPs do not exist in a social vacuum, and they must therefore negotiate hierarchies and inequities that exist beyond the boundaries of the school, especially in regard to the students’ home environments. Teachers may also find it hard to broach ‘political’ or touchy subjects with young students, particularly in a public school setting.

One potential problem that arises in these sort of “retraining” type projects is that they have the potential to further alienate or divide certain individuals and groups (for example, on the basis of race, or class – but not only these), rather than breaking down such categorical divisions. One reason for this is that it is that it is hard to control what access students have to food outside of school. The school/home divide is something that many SGCP teachers lament or agonize over. Others simply ignore it. While differences between school and home food do not necessarily have to be a problem for SGCP –
and indeed could become an opportunity for diversity, flexibility, and play – the impact of these differences on the students themselves should not be overlooked.

Encouraging students to become open to new foods may seem like positively a good idea – after all, what could be wrong with promoting student preferences for fresh vegetables and fruits? But, SGCPs also have the potential to create conflict between students and parents at home, or between parents and teachers, or the school as a whole. Parents (and especially struggling parents, like single mothers) may feel like the thrust of SGCPs is ultimately to question their own ability to adequately provide for their children, or their capacity to make sound nutritional decisions at home. Parents may also feel like their family habits or cultural traditions are being ignored or insulted. Of course, many parents may react positively to their children’s newfound preferences for fresh produce – but it is important to not assume that this will always be the case.

“In a discussion with Amy [a parent], she told me that she doesn’t completely agree with the whole wheat focus at the school – the rule that everything must be whole grain. “Why” I asked her. “Why?” She replied, rather angrily, “Because, did you grow up with whole wheat when you were a kid?” I said, “not really, I guess.” She replied, “see, yeah, we didn’t grow up with it either. It’s just not how we did things.” She didn’t do the completely healthy all the time think when she was a kid. And so, she asked, “Why does my child have to do it all the time?” (Author’s field notes, September 2007, Nova Scotia)

Like any project that attempts to reform life habits and preferences, SGCPs run the risk of reinforcing rather than resisting the very social norms that lead to the fixing of social categories and behaviors into hierarchical structures. For example, SGCPs often tend to invite “celebrity chefs” and other “successful” role models to talk to and cook with students. In the very least, many teachers invoke images of cooking from television and the media to entice students to become interested in kitchen-based learning. On the one hand, this is a wonderful opportunity for students to see that their active work in the garden and kitchen can lead them somewhere exciting and promising. Interacting with a celebrity chef can truly be an exciting and
memorable experience. On the other hand, this tends to reinforce the patriarchal idea that cooking is most important or interesting as a money-making profession, and not as the day-to-day unpaid activity that so many (mostly mothers and grandmothers) have engaged in and perfected over centuries.

SGCPs can also run the risk of reinforcing more mainstream or conventional eating habits, as opposed to “alternative,” because many teachers and schools in general fear holding a too obviously “political” (and particularly a leftist) stance – whether it be colored as socialist, green, or simply community-minded. Some of this political distance is strategic. Schools and even SGCPs can benefit financially from corporate grants or sponsorship. To further their nutritional goals, SGCPs may find it necessary to appease rather than oppose certain powerhouses of the conventional food system. In addition, especially in light of increasing complaints regarding “academic freedom” from the political right, schools may find it hard to engage in what many would consider (food-based) social activism – especially when public funds are involved.

“[Privately funded SGCPs’] funding is different, not that they totally have a different vision, but our funding requires us to do a lot more nutrition education [than privately funded programs do]. They don’t have to get curricula approved by the USDA. So, we have much stronger nutrition focus.” (Author’s interview with SGCP leader, October 2007, Berkeley)

Teachers might also find it difficult to include direct critique of the conventional food system in their SGCP lessons because of the risk of distancing or alienating certain students or groups. For example, while SGCPs might want to promote shopping at a local farmer’s market over, say, a superstore, it probably would not be effective for a teacher to simply criticize the latter – especially when many students and/or their parents shop there, and many perhaps for reasons of economic or cultural access. On the other hand, attempting to draw students into a real discussion of the social, cultural, and economic complexities of our food system (for example, discussing what economic or cultural access to food might mean for their families) may seem like too daunting a task, or too touchy a subject. Simple answers to the questions of eating are sometimes much easier for students to
grasp, and thus they can be more effective at promoting certain eating habits. Simple answers, though, are arguably not the most empowering answers for students.

All of these political dilemmas are complex decisions that ultimately each school must weigh according to their own needs and goals. In general, however, in order to have effective SGCPs, schools cannot be afraid to take a political stance. The belief that education should be “politically neutral” or “value free” is misleading – there are no educational interactions that are void of value judgments. As many SGCP advocates would acknowledge, schools have always and inevitably engaged in food-based value judgments – ones that in the past decades have strongly favored large-scale corporate food industries and agribusiness. The decision to start questioning these choices has already proven effective. It is clear from this history that schools must continue to question and revise many times along the way.

Suggestions for Pedagogical Practice

“The cooking is more fun...I like both [cooking and gardening] together, but cooking lets you actually get something done, you get the food [and] you get to make the food. It's more interesting [than the garden], like what you can actually do with the food.”
(Author’s interview with student, November 2007, Berkeley)

The idea of encouraging “playfulness” in students’ experimentation with food habits and preferences seems promising. The fact that there are no easy answers to questions of how to eat can be experienced as both daunting and liberating for students. Students and teachers can find purpose and direction within this openness by recognizing that our food habits are part of our relational existence, and thus are a place where we can find some agency in bringing about the changes we wish to see in the world. The types of food behaviors that we encourage through experimentation and play can in turn help to influence the future trajectory of our social and ecological relationships.

- PLAYING WITH FOOD: In some SGCP kitchens, students work with recipes, while in others they rely more on the directives of a
teacher or leader. Some programs encourage experimentation and play in students’ relationships to food by occasionally allowing students to bring in or make-up their own recipes – to be taste-tested by other students, teachers, or even outside guests. Many students have responded positively to these opportunities, viewing their work as a kind of art project and including elaborate decoration on their dishes. If the taste of the dishes is less favorable, students can discuss what went wrong in their experimentation and can share ideas about what to do differently next time. Students could also be encouraged to experiment with the setting for cooking and eating – changing the lighting or set up, or the way that the food is served.

- PLANNING THE PLANTING: SGCPs engage students in a variety of ways in the planning and maintenance of garden plots, from picking the types of seeds to be planted to deciding on methods of growing and composting. It is arguably harder to encourage students’ experimentation in their relationship to gardening simply because the fruit of one’s labor takes much longer to appear than it does in a kitchen classroom – and children’s attention span for “play” often runs out well before harvest time! Still, students can be encouraged to take responsibility over a plot of the garden – to come up with a vision for what, and how, and why they want to grow, and to bring it into being. Garden-related games, art projects, and other creative tasks can also help to encourage experimentation and play.

- PARENTS AND HOMELIFE: SGCPs should include parents as much as possible in the vision and carrying out of the program. Parents can be included in a variety of ways, from welcoming the submission of recipes or cooking ideas that have familial or cultural significance to inviting parents, guardians, and other family members to attend or help to cook a meal with the students. Parents should also be encouraged to communicate with kitchen and garden educators so that the teachers and parents can share information, visions, and ideas about where the program could and should be going. Kitchen and garden classrooms could also send home recipes and newsletters, or even set up a small “farm stand” or “café” of their own for families to visit during after school hours. There are numerous creative ways for encouraging increased home and school connection in SGCPs. It is admittedly difficult for parents and teachers to coordinate schedules
and find time for such a task, but it is undoubtedly an important connection for SGCPs to make.

- **WHOSE GARDENING AND COOKING?:** It is a good idea for SGCPs to discuss the networks of the food system more broadly, including the labor involved in both food production and preparation – who historically has been involved in these tasks, what roles different individuals and groups have taken in engaging in this work, and even how (if at all) they were compensated or acknowledged for their labor. Teachers could have students take on and act out these different roles (e.g. chef versus housewife, or farm laborer versus agribusiness executive), and then discuss how differences in workload, level of authority, and compensation influence the work experience. Classes could touch particularly on gender roles and the varying social expectations of different cultures and generations.

- **QUESTIONING FOOD ANSWERS:** SGCPs should directly address the issue of “simple answers” to questions of food habit or behavior by examining the students’ broader relationships to media and advertising through which these “simple answers” are developed. Students could look to the media and advertising to find examples of different claims to certain truths about food or eating. Students could make a poster or collage that introduces these different claims to their classmates, and teachers could lead the class in discussing the assumptions that are behind these different claims. The class could discuss the persuasiveness of advertising and marketing, and how these claims make them feel about eating or not eating certain foods. The emphasis should be on listening to (and not necessarily dismissing) but also questioning the claims – teaching students how to wade through the mounds of information that exists about food and eating in order to make decisions or experimentations that will work best for them.
Summary & Conclusions

SGCPs are an exciting and promising new trend in nutrition and food education. Their roles in promoting a variety of social and ecological projects – from local food advocacy to community development – vary greatly from place to place and school to school. Nevertheless, while the research presented here is derived from two particular sites, the key principles discussed are certainly relevant to a wide array of food-related educational initiatives. The goals of questioning expert knowledge, understanding body knowledge, and encouraging relational knowledge are necessary if we want to expand the boundaries and effectiveness of any health and nutrition program. These goals are central to the furthering of a two-way approach to food education that can encourage both individual empowerment and collective action.

Moreover, in teaching about and through food, many teachers have recognized that the topic of food is particularly well suited to introducing the types of discussions that this guidebook has intended to encourage. Certainly expert knowledge, body knowledge, and relational knowledge are relevant to life outside the garden and kitchen. Still, because food is so central to our daily existence, it provides a good starting place to think (and feel!) our way outside the box. As a system of interactions itself, food can help us understand and embrace the complexities of our relational,
embodied, contextual existence. As we become more at ease with flexibility, complexity, and chaos, food can help us to recognize the follies and shortcomings of expert knowledge. And food can also help us to become more in touch with our own bodies, and with our non-cognitive abilities to “think” and “feel.” Certainly other educational topics could do the same – but food is one of the most accessible and basic ways to introduce these concepts. As such, it stands as a promising area for continued political activism and social change within and beyond our formal education system.
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SELECTED PUBLICATIONS:
Book Sections

Book Chapters

Journal Articles
“Taking Back Taste: Feminism, Food, and Visceral Politics,” co-authored with Allison Hayes-Conroy, 2008, Gender, Place, and Culture
“Hope for Community?: Anarchism, Exclusion, and the Non-Human Realm,” 2008, Political Geography
“Military Contamination and Natural Purity: Landscape and Development in Vieques, Puerto Rico,” co-authored with Sasha Davis, 2007, GeoJournal
“Ecological Identity Work in Higher Education,” co-authored with Robert Vanderbeck, 2005, Ethics, Place, and Environment

SELECTED GRANTS AND AWARDS:
- Alumni Association Dissertation Award, Penn State, April 2009
- Society of Women Geographers Fellowship Award, Penn State, Jan – May 2008
- Miller Graduate Student Fellowship, Penn State, Sept – Dec 2007
- Graduate Student Fellowship Program Grant, Canadian Embassy, Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, Canadian Studies Program, Feb – Dec 2007