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**EXAMINING COMMUNITY VALUES, IDENTIFICATION FORMATION, AND  
CONSUMER VALUE ASSESSMENT IN THE CONTEXT OF LOCAL FOOD  
COMMUNITIES**

A Thesis in  
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by  
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## **ABSTRACT**

The ways that individuals use their personal values to inform their attitudes, decisions, and even perceptions of products, are the focus of this dissertation. It is written in three essays, and uses two distinct data sets to explore issues of individual values, relationships, community, identification, and value assessment. Both data sets were collected in the context of consumption communities called Community Supported Agriculture programs (CSAs). The first essay is an examination of values that exist among consumers, and between producers and consumers (buyer and sellers). Specifically, the first essay explores the existence of and importance of congruent values to the community. The second essay moves to the realm of the individual consumer, and examines how consumers develop identification with an organization. Finally, in essay three the way consumers assess the value of the products they purchase is explored. This essay focuses on the role of personal values in conjunction with intangible attributes in the formation of consumer value assessment. Personal values is the common theme that is explored across all three essays.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements .....	v
Foreword .....	1
Essay 1. A FRESH LOOK AT VALUES THROUGH COMMUNITY SUPPORTED AGRICULTURE .....	6
Essay 2. LOOKING AT IDENTIFICATION FORMATION: THE IMPORTANCE OF CONGRUENT VALUES AND EDUCATIONAL INTERACTIONS .....	64
Essay 3. PRODUCT VALUE AND PERSONAL VALUES: THE IMPORTANCE OF INTANGIBLE ATTRIBUTES IN CONSUMER VALUE ASSESSMENT.....	123
Concluding remarks .....	188

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DAMN THIRSTY

First  
The fish needs to say,

“Something ain’t right about this  
Camel ride –

And I’m  
Feeling so damn

Thirsty.”

- HAFIZ

The Gift: Poems by Hafiz the Great Sufi Master. Translations by Daniel Ladinsky. Penguin Group, New York. 1999, p. 198

## **FOREWORD**

This dissertation addresses how individuals use their personal values to inform their attitudes, decisions, and even perceptions of products. It is written in three essays. Two distinct data sets are used to explore issues of individual values, relationships, community, identification, and value assessment. Both data sets were collected in the context of consumption communities called Community Supported Agriculture programs (CSAs). Personal values is the common theme that is explored across all three essays.

The first essay in this dissertation provides a foundation on which the second and third essays are built. The first essay examines the expression, change and growth of the values expressed by individuals in the CSA. The author will explore the construct of value congruence within the research context. Value congruence refers to the similarity or lack of conflict, in values between two parties. Specifically, in this context value congruence refers to the similarity in values between producers and consumers, and between organizations and customers. The first essay will begin an exploration into value congruence in order to assess and better understand the importance and impact of this construct. The second essay uses longitudinal data to explore how consumers develop identification with an organization. Similar values between producers and consumers play an important role in this process. The third essay introduces the concept of the complex product, and focuses on how consumers determine the worth of the complex product, in this case, the CSA. Personal values and intangible attributes of the CSA are extremely important in the consumers' assessments of the value or worth of the CSA.

CSAs are programs through which consumers can buy fresh produce directly from a farm. Typically they are contractual agreements in which consumers prepay for an entire season of produce, which is distributed to the members on a weekly basis, typically from May through

October. CSAs serve as an appropriate venue for study because they are membership-based organizations that are typically formed from and with strong values and ideals. The story of Berry Village CSA will be used to illustrate this point. Many farmers interviewed during the course of this research left secure and lucrative jobs to pursue organic farming. They all struggle to make ends meet, but they all seem happy about their choices and express that they feel like they are now making a difference in the world and in their communities. These value-based decisions sparked this exploration into a new conceptualization of value, within the context of the CSA.

Berry Village CSA was started 14 years ago by a couple, a banker and a saleswoman, who had been interested in gardening for many years and had little experience farming. They purchased a farm and ultimately Alex quit his job as a successful banker to work on the farm full-time. Courtney switched to part-time work in sales, and part-time on the farm. In this way, she could supplement their farm-income and still have some time to work in the fields. On their website they state that they began farming organically because it was the best way to grow food for their own family, and then decided to become certified organic so no one would have doubts about their food they grew. This is not an uncommon story. As such, it makes CSAs a good venue to examine and explore individual values.

### **A few notes before essay descriptions**

Because each essay in this dissertation is written for stand-alone submission to academic journals, the reader will notice some overlap across essays. This repetition is particularly clear in the description of the context of the CSA. While I encourage the reader to attend to each context section, as their subtle differences do serve as a compass, pointing to the aspect of the CSA that



is the focus of the essay, I also recognize the similarities across essays.

## **Essay 1**

Previous research into values has largely sought to define what values are, i.e. an end-state or preferred state of existence, a strong belief or deeply-held principle (Rokeach 1973). In marketing, scholars have studied values in an attempt to understand and predict human behavior (Kahle et al. 1986; Kahle and Kennedy 1989; Kamakura and Novak 1992; Richins and Dawson 1992; Schwartz and Bilsky 1987). Research into values has typically been conducted in the individual realm, however, rather than at the relationship level. That is to say, values have not been examined in terms of how they are expressed or how they change within a consumption community.

This essay explores and describes the values that exist within the CSA community, and illustrates common values among the producers and consumers in the CSA. It also provides a platform from which Essays 2 and 3 are built.

## **Essay 2**

Essay two focuses on how consumers develop identification with an organization (Bhattacharya et al. 1995; Bhattacharya and Sen 2003). Value congruence is a concept that received attention in the management literature during the 1990s (Ashforth and Mael 1989; Dutton et al. 1994). This essay highlights the important role that congruent values play in identification formation.

Values congruence will be introduced as an explanation for the initial attraction to the community that members experience. It will also be discussed as a reason why members report

great changes in values, and a reason why members of this consumption community inconvenience themselves to continue their membership.

### **Essay 3**

The third essay focuses on how consumers determine the value of the CSA. Put another way, the third essay focuses on how CSA members determine if the CSA was “worth it.” Past studies on value assessment have focused on means-end chain analysis, and have used simple products such as coffee, orange juice and hairspray to examine the value assessment (Gutman 1982; Hofstede et al. 1998). This essay uses in-depth interviews to examine the importance of intangible attributes in consumer assessment of the value of the CSA. Through in-depth analysis it becomes clear that CSA members rely heavily on the intangible attributes of the CSA when determining the overall value. CSA members also focus on how their personal values are expressed through their involvement in the CSA, and they relate the CSA to their personal lives.

The essays of this dissertation were written with two aims in mind. This dissertation was written with the intention of contributing to the marketing literature, specifically in the area of consumer behavior. It is also meant to further the current understanding of how individuals behave in consumption contexts that have a clear value referent. It is my sincere hope that the research presented in the following three essays accomplishes both aims.

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**A FRESH LOOK AT VALUES THROUGH COMMUNITY SUPPORTED  
AGRICULTURE**

Essay 1

## TABLE OF CONTENTS: ESSAY 1

INTRODUCTION .....	8
What is a CSA? .....	9
Focus of the paper .....	10
THEORY .....	11
Exchange relationships and communities .....	11
Defining values .....	14
A brief history of the study of values .....	15
The riches of CSAs: Cultural capital and Value congruence .....	16
Cultural capital .....	16
Value congruence .....	16
DESCRIPTION OF RESEARCH ACTIVITIES .....	17
THEMES .....	19
Value congruence and value expressions .....	21
Community values .....	21
General characteristics of community values .....	21
A word about context .....	23
Outward-looking/Community focus .....	25
Engage with time .....	26
A reach for tradition .....	27
Ecological considerations .....	31
Conscious consumption groups/ Not mainstream consumption culture .....	32
Live for the future, live for today: Well-being .....	34
Relationship-based .....	39
Forms and displays of trust .....	39
Education through personal experiences .....	42
Level of commitment .....	47
Complexities of CSAs .....	49
Alternate meanings of time .....	49
Value conflicts: shopping at WalMart .....	50
CSA does not guarantee financial security .....	51
COMMUNITY VALUES CONTRASTED WITH PREVIOUS VALUE STUDIES .....	52
CONCLUSIONS .....	54
What should we take away? .....	54
Future Research .....	55
REFERENCES .....	57

### List of Tables and Figures

Figure 1.1. Twelve values that emerged from this research .....	23
Table 1.1. List of Values and Rokeach Value Survey .....	60
Table 1.2. Demographics of Farmer-informants .....	61
Table 1.3. Demographics of Member-informants .....	62
Table 1.4a. Rokeach Value Survey values that compare well with Community Values .....	63
Table 1.4b. Rokeach Value Survey values that do not compare well with Community Values .....	63

## INTRODUCTION

It's a warm October afternoon when I approach the 100-year old barn at the "Berry Village CSA" in western Pennsylvania. Because it is nearing the end of the produce season, many members of the community supported agriculture (CSA) program seem both excited to be at the farm, but also sad that soon they will not return for almost nine months. Since June, the members of this CSA, who pre-paid for their whole season of fresh, organic produce, have come to the farm once a week to pick up their "share."

CSAs are programs through which consumers can buy fresh produce directly from a farm. Typically they are contractual agreements in which consumers prepay for an entire season of produce, which is distributed to the members on a weekly basis, typically from May through October. This model is discussed in more detail below. Berry Village CSA was started 14 years ago by couple, a banker and a saleswoman, who had been interested in gardening for many years and had little experience farming. Ultimately Alex quite his job as a successful banker to work on the farm full-time, and Courtney switched to part-time work in sales, and part-time on the farm. In this way she could supplement their farm-income and still have some time to work in the fields. On their website, they state that they began farming organically because it was the best way to grow food for their own family, and then decided to become certified organic so no one would have doubts about the wholesomeness of the food they grew.

The story of Berry Village CSA is not uncommon; many farmers who were interviewed left secure and lucrative jobs to pursue organic farming. They all struggle to make ends meet, but they all seem happy about their choices and express that they feel like they are now making a difference in the world and in their communities. These value-based decisions are the reason the CSA was chosen as the context for this research.

This essay focuses on the explicit study of values in consumption communities. It is proposed that the values that are expressed in the consumption community differ from those expressed in previous studies of values, and that the congruence of values of the producers and consumers strengthens the community.

### **What is a CSA?**

Community support agriculture (CSA) programs were started in the 1960s in Germany, Switzerland and Japan by consumers. With increasing amounts of food being imported and processed, consumers were concerned about the safety and security of their fresh food, as well as the loss of the local farmland to industry. Consumers solicited local farmers to grow fresh food for them in ways that they trusted. In Japan, this arrangement is aptly called *tekei*, which is translated as “putting the farmers’ face on food” (Leopold and Trumpetto 2005).

The CSA model came to the United States in 1984 when Vander Tuin brought the idea from Switzerland. He worked with John Root, Jr., Hugh Radcliffe, Charlotte Zannechia and with Robyn Van En at *Indian Line Farm* in Egremont, MA (<http://indianlinefarm.com>), which had its first season in 1986. In 1990, there were 50 documented CSAs in the United States (LocalHarvest.org 2006). Today there are over 1000 documented CSA programs in the United States (LocalHarvest.org 2006), but smaller CSAs tend not to be listed in the database and a better estimates numbers around 3000 (Weinstein 2006; Wikipedia.org 2006).

Consumers who join a CSA prepay for a season of produce, and in return they receive organically, locally, and sustainably grown produce each week during the growing season. The produce is harvested from the fields a few hours before it is distributed to the end consumers.

This socio-economic model benefits small farmers, providing them with a secure (albeit

modest) income. Farmers know ahead of time how much produce they need to grow to feed the families of the CSA members, how much of each vegetable to harvest each week, the budget they must operate within, and they know a minimum level of how much food they should ideally have, well before their growing season ever starts.

This model puts some risk onto the consumers. If there were a drought or blight then certain crops would fail and consumers would not receive as many vegetables as might be typical and expected. However, in most cases farms do not truly and completely fail. Certain crops may not do well, but CSA farmers plant a diverse range of crops to help mitigate against complete failure, and to promote the health of all their crops. In fact, on the October visit to Berry Village CSA, the farmers kept apologizing to members for what a lousy season it had been and each member in turn refused their apologies saying they had loved the CSA, had received plenty of produce, and would be back the next year. These consumers seem to see this risk as minimal when compared to the benefits of the CSA, and are overwhelmingly willing to accept it.

### **Focus of the paper**

Khale and Kennedy (1989) wrote that “most marketing efforts will be more effective if the role of values is considered (p.7).” Over the past 20 years, the importance of values to successful relationships has been noticed by the corporate world. Eight of the top ten companies on Fortune Magazine’s list of most admired companies (Fortune 2006) have at least one web page dedicated to explicitly expressing that company’s values. In addition to large companies, many smaller groups, such as organic and fair-trade food groups, and green and locally-owned businesses have recognized the importance of values to their companies. This emphasis on values comes from social and economic perspectives.



It is surprising that the consumer behavior literature has not directly engaged with this important topic in over a decade. One reason the explicit study of values has fallen out of favor in marketing is that researchers have not been able to use values to predict behavior (Bagozzi et al. 2003). Perhaps when values are studied in the context of communities, making predictions about behavior within those communities will become possible.

The findings indicate that the values expressed by individuals involved in the CSA have three unique characteristics, none of which has been exhibited in previous studies of values: (a) they express a concern for the community as well as the individual; (b) they engage with and reference time; and (c) they are demonstrated through relationships. These characteristics were observed precisely because values were studied at the relationship-level (i.e. within a community), rather than at the individual level. One important discovery is that similar values are shared between the producers and consumers in this community. Understanding the role that congruent values play within communities could be the key to creating groups that benefit the individuals involved, and strengthen the relationships that form the community itself. This paper provides a new way to think about and study values, and a fresh lens through which understanding relationships can be approached.

## THEORY

### **Exchange relationships and communities**

The marketing literature is no stranger to consumption communities (Arnould and Price 1993; McAlexander et al. 2002; Muniz and O'Guinn 2001; Schouten and McAlexander 1995b). Many scholars have described such communities as playing an important role in the lives of the participants – the consumers. Kozinets writes that “ideal communities are about caring about

and sharing with insiders while ideal markets are about transacting with outsiders.” (Kozinets 2002, p.21). Market structure and community structure mesh in CSAs to form a unique, and for some people, “ideal” situation in which to purchase their fresh produce. For many members, buying produce through the CSA is a way to have the relationships and value-sharing of communities, as well as the exchange relationships of the marketplace.

In classical economic theory, the goal of the firm is to maximize profits, achieved by balancing the cost of creating a product with the profit made from selling the product. We know that the goal of the consumer is to maximize utility by purchasing product X in the amount that corresponds to the height of his/her utility curve for product X.

The informants consulted for this research tell us that faster, cheaper, and more convenient are not always what they want. As marketing researchers, we must take the emotions and behavioral uncertainty of consumers into account when thinking about utility. Consumers will pay higher prices for convenience when they see their time as more valuable than the money they are spending (Messinger and Chakravarthi 1997). Consumers who desire companies to follow certain ethical and socially responsible guidelines will forego convenience and low prices in favor of more expensive and inconvenient, but ethical and socially responsible, products and stores (Memery et al. 2005). Similar behavior is observed among the informants.

While economics also tells us that economies of scale often lead to greater profits (Henderson and Quandt 1980), a model that national chain supermarkets may benefit from, CSAs provide a different paradigm of exchange. In a CSA, production is constrained by time, weather, soil conditions, and seasons, and the production scale is tied into the number of hours the farmers can work. Although farmers try to keep their costs competitive with those found in the grocery store, low cost is not the number-one concern. CSAs are about quality, taking time

to enjoy food, personal health as well as the health of the planet, and personal relationships.

CSAs focus more on small amounts of quality products than on economies of scale. Farmers talk about the produce that is available or ready, not the product that is on sale or the best deal for the money.

Most of the farmers who were interviewed had left (sometimes very) lucrative jobs to pursue organic farming. All the members shop at supermarkets, and make an additional stop to get produce from their CSA each week. In other words, the CSA provides a situation in which farmers and members both choose more difficult and less convenient options (for a job and for shopping) in order to do something they believe in. These are values-based choices. The farming life is much harder work for less pay for the farmer, and the consumer goes out of his/her way to purchase produce the farmer grows. Shared values and feelings of community seem to drive people to this unexpected behavior.

There are three defining characteristics of “community” that are largely accepted and used by academic researchers. The first is called consciousness of kind (Gusfield 1978). This refers to the sense of belonging to a group that individuals have, and the clear sense of who is an insider and who is an outsider. The second is having shared rituals and traditions. This kind of sharing ensures that the values and rituals of the community are strengthened and passed on to new community members (Muniz and O'Guinn 2001). The third is feelings of moral responsibility to the community and to the community members (Muniz and O'Guinn 2001).

CSAs possess the characteristics of “communities” listed above. One difference between the CSA community and other consumption communities studied in marketing is that in the CSA the location of the CSA is an important and distinct feature of the community. CSAs are inherently tied to the farm land, and the community is experienced with this connection to place.

In contrast, for example, an Apple Newton community (Muñiz Jr. and Schau 2005) exists online, or a Harley Davidson community (Schouten and McAlexander 1995), may meet in any number of locations.

## **Defining values**

For the purpose of this paper, *values* is defined as “an enduring belief that a specific mode of conduct or end-state of existence is personally or socially preferable to an opposite or converse mode of conduct or end-state of existence (Rokeach 1973).” Values have been studied in laboratory experiments. In the past, the goal in studying values has been to categorize consumers based on which values they hold most strongly, and then to predict their purchase behaviors based on their values. This goal has been largely unsuccessful, as we still do not fully understand how values relate to behaviors.

Values drive behaviors; they guide choices; they affect decisions. Although these ideas are accepted in the marketing literature, the way that values relate to behaviors is not well understood. According to Bagozzi et al. (2003), goals may work through values to produce action. They go on to write that the difficulty in studying goals is that goals do not predict specific actions and behavior. “What may be required for better prediction of particular actions are context-specific motives rather than general needs or goals per se (Bagozzi et al. 2003, p.915).” Frustration over lack of predictive power may be the reason explicit studies of values have been absent from the marketing literature for over a decade.

Research in Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) (Arnould and Thompson 2005) often implicitly address values in their search for other truths. For example, several CCT papers look at identity issues, which are rife with values. These identity issues include creating uncommon

experiences (Belk and Costa 1998; Kozinets 2002), looking at how consumers relate to their brands (Fournier 1998), redefining those things that are personally important (Schouten and McAlexander 1995), or looking for health options outside traditional Western medicine (Thompson and Troester 2002). The above papers could be thought of in terms of values: the quest for adventure; creating meaning through consumption; the desire for a meaningful life; concern for one's health and the health of one's family. Values are present in CCT papers at least in a tangential or oblique way. In this paper, the values associated with a specific type of consumption community (the CSA) will be directly addressed.

### **A brief history of the study of values**

The Rokeach Value Survey (RVS) was published in 1973. It was a first attempt at trying to understand human values in one survey. Rokeach included two kinds of values in his research: instrumental and terminal. Instrumental values refer to the preferred ways of acting or preferred patterns of behavior that individuals hold. Terminal values refer to the global goals individuals strive for throughout their lives. Terminal values are the focus of this paper. Literature on values has recognized that different people have different values and that because of their individual value systems they place importance in different areas in their lives.

Khale and colleagues developed the List of Values (LOV) (Kahle et al. 1986), which is a modification of the RVS. Khale's research showed that people only experienced about half the values in the RVS in their daily lives. She combined some of the RVS values, and cut others out, to end up with the (LOV), which contains nine values rated on a Likert scale (see Table 1.1 in the appendix for details).

Schwartz and Bilsky (1990) also called for a new approach to values. They claimed that

values are not activated one at a time, but that several values are activated together, and suggested studying values *systems* instead of individual values. Although much time and effort has been put into studying values, we still know little about how they function in daily life, how they may work together, and how they affect behavior.

The values these researchers focused on were looked at in terms of individuals. They wanted to know how individual people felt about certain values, and how strongly those values were held. They were not concerned about how the values interacted in various communal situations, which is something the informants highlighted.

### **The riches of CSAs: Cultural capital and Value congruence**

#### ***Cultural capital***

Individual members' involvement with CSAs may be influenced by cultural capital. Cultural capital is contained in the shared values that are passed on or socialized into individuals by a group to which they belong. Pierre Bourdieu (1984) defined cultural capital as the advantages a person has that give them a higher status in society. These advantages include knowledge, skills, education, and expectations of what one deserves as well as how to behave. Cultural capital is present and cultivated in CSAs.

#### ***Value congruence***

Value congruence is defined as the similarity between an individual's values and the value system of an organization (Kalliath et al. 1999). Individuals prefer to be involved with organizations that are aligned with their values (Ashforth and Mael 1989). When individuals are in situations where they feel conflict with their values-system, they feel the need to change their

situation or change their values (Burroughs and Rindfleisch 2002; Rokeach 1979). Having congruent values does not mean that everyone has identical values. Rather, the term *congruent values* is used here to indicate that the values held by farmers and those held by members are not at odds with each other. In other words, the values are compatible.

Value congruence has particular importance to the study of CSAs. Specifically, it is believed that congruent values are important to the functioning of this particular type of consumption community. By extension, if these congruent values are observed here, it can be assumed that they play a role in other consumption communities.

## DESCRIPTION OF RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

The goal of this essay is to examine the values that are present in this consumption community (i.e. a CSA), and how these values are used and demonstrated by farmers and members in CSAs. There are several values that seem to be inherently important to the individuals and to the relationships that are fostered in this community.

Because the goal is to understand how individuals express the values of the community, a phenomenon that should be fairly consistent across CSAs, data were collected using the “hunt and peck” method (Wallendorf and Belk 1989). Observations and interviews were conducted at several CSAs within one northeastern state.

Observations, interviews and questionnaires were the primary sources used to gain insight into this research topic. Secondary sources were used to check for validity of the findings, beyond the CSAs that were studied. These secondary sources include the websites and brochures from many CSAs, and several books and articles written on CSAs. The information in these sources was overwhelmingly consistent with the data.

Over the course of three months, several semi-structured interviews were conducted, and many hours were dedicated to observing the community at different CSAs. Data were collected from August through October, 2005, during the height of the growing season in Pennsylvania. Most CSAs begin distribution in late May or early June; beginning data collection in August allowed time for new members to become familiar with their CSA.

Interviews were recorded on a digital voice recorder. The files were transferred to a computer, analyzed for common themes, and transcribed. After each interview, notes on major themes and ideas were written down. Detailed notes were also taken during and after observation visits. A total of twelve farmers at six different farms were interviewed (see Table 1.2 in the appendix for more information on the demographics of farmer-informants.) Each of these interviews lasted approximately 60 minutes. Semi-structured interviews were also conducted with seventeen members. One of the researchers has been a CSA member for three years, facilitating the development of questions relevant to CSA membership. Her membership in a CSA also gave the researchers increased credibility with the informants. Member interviews lasted approximately 30 minutes. Informants were assured that their identities would be safeguarded, to be open about the procedures that were being used and to encourage them wanted them to be as candid as possible. It is worth noting that fifteen of the seventeen CSA members who were interviewed were female. This seems to be representative of who, in households, does the grocery shopping and the decision-making about where to shop.

It should also be noted the members who were interviewed are not extremists or activists. Although their demographics are not extremely diverse, they do seem to be representative of CSA members in general (Lass et al. 2003). The members who were interviewed were all Caucasian and well educated. The most diversity in this group came from their income levels



(\$20,000-\$150,000). See Table 1.3 in the appendix for more information about the demographics of member-informants.

During each interview, the participants completed a short questionnaire. This was used as a way to clarify the information gathered in the interview, and to make sure that certain information was gathered from all participants.

Observations were made on four different pick-up days at three different farms. Each observation period lasted between two and five hours. Observations and emerging theoretical ideas were compared to ideas put forth in published literature and information available online about CSAs. As suggested by Wallendorf and Belk (1989), in order to increase the integrity of the findings, major themes were verified with some of the informants, farmers and CSA members. The informants largely agreed with the etic findings that were discussed with them. Over 300 pages of transcripts were analyzed for using a constant comparative method (Corbin and Strauss 1990) to reach the twelve values that are discussed below.

## THEMES

Local Harvest is an organization that houses a database of CSAs across the country, along with information about CSAs: what they are, their history, and how they work. According to Local Harvest website (<http://www.localharvest.org/csa.jsp>), CSAs are important because:

- “• CSA keeps food dollars in the local community and contributes to the maintenance and establishment of regional food production.
- CSA supports the biodiversity of a given area and the diversity of agriculture through the preservation of small farms producing a wide variety of crops.
- CSA creates opportunity for dialogue between farmers and consumers.

- CSA creates a sense of social responsibility and stewardship of local land.
- CSA puts "the farmers face on food" and increases understanding of how, where, and by whom our food is grown."

The informants echoed the above reasons why CSA is important and went into much more detail as they described their experiences with the CSA. It is believe the informants who were interviewed are typical of individuals who are involved with CSAs. As the specific themes that emerged from the data are discussed, it will become clear that they encompass the themes mentioned in the national database.

As the themes that emerged from the data are discussed, all the CSAs that were contacted will be referred to as the consumption community. They are grouped them together into one community, because the values of farmers and members did not differ enough among CSAs to warrant dealing with each one separately.

The themes that came out of the data are focused on the values present in CSAs. People join CSAs for many reasons; most of them are focused on helping someone in their community, keeping farmers on their land, and doing something good for their own health. Reasons for joining also include the focus CSAs have on growing organic produce, using sustainable growing practices, and creating and maintaining personal connections between producers and consumers. Through interviews, observation, questionnaires, and secondary data, the values expressed by CSA farmers and members, reasons that farmers and members choose to be involved in CSAs, and the importance of congruent values to the health of the community is ascertained and illustrated.

## **Value congruence and value expressions**

The fact that the producers and consumers in this community hold similar values is sufficiently unique to deserve attention. Through discussions with informants, it became clear that the CSA farmers and members do hold congruent values. Examples of similar values expressed by farmers and members will be to illustrate values congruence among the informants. For example, both farmers and members talk about doing something meaningful for their community, both groups talk about environmental concerns, and both demonstrate trust. This will become clear as the community values are illustrated.

## **Community values**

In this section, the values that are expressed in this consumption community are explored. The interactions between farmers and members, as well as individuals' thoughts about the CSAs will be examined. To get a closer look at the behaviors and beliefs in this community, the values are divided based on common characteristics.

Twelve values emerged through data analysis. These values can be associated with three characteristics, as depicted in Figure 1.1. A discussion of specific characteristics will be included as the values are analyzed. Although all values are important to the community, due to space constraints only discuss the most complex and multi-faceted values are included below.

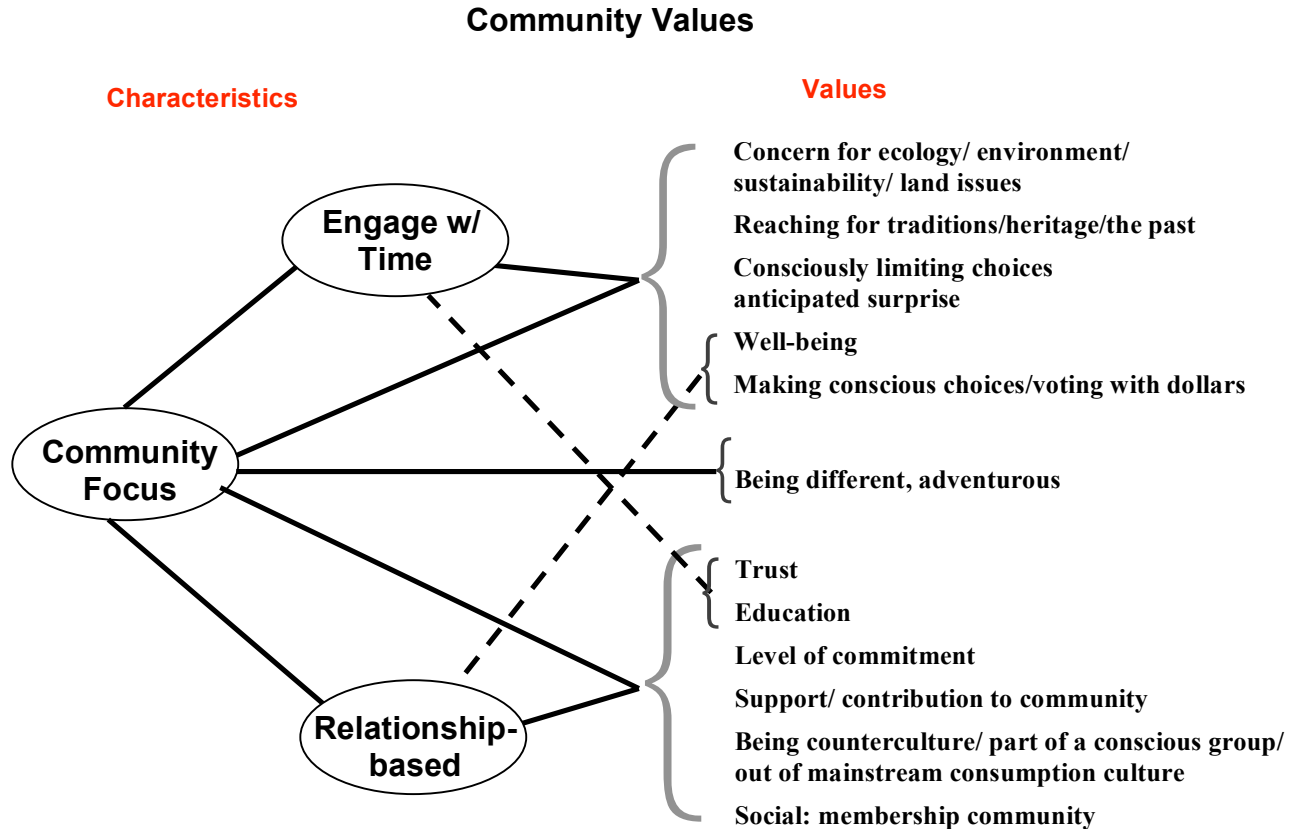
## **General characteristics of community values**

The values expressed by the individuals involved with CSAs are contextually-based. They emerged from the research in CSAs, and describe deeply-held beliefs of people involved

with CSAs. Values may make more sense if they are studied within specific contexts; this research will shed light on how studying values in context helps us understand consumers. These values have three characteristics that will be focused on here.

The first is that these values are outward looking; they focus on the community, in addition to focusing on individuals or their immediate families. They are most easily examined and demonstrated through relationships and may not exist at the individual level at all. The second is that the values held by these individuals include a recognition and engagement with time. The farmers and members of CSAs explicitly pay attention to the past and the future. The third is that these values are best studied at the relationship level, not at the individual level. Certain community values do not even exist outside of relationships, or without the context of relationships. The above three characteristics illustrate the unique aspects of this community's values and why they are important to study.

Figure 1.1. Twelve values that emerged from this research



### A word about context

Studying values in context may shed light on how values affect behaviors. The research presented here supports the claim that the expression of values is unique to the specific communities in which they are found (Holt 1998; McAlexander et al. 2002; Muniz and O'Guinn 2001). One reason group norms exist and are enforced through group members is to distinguish who is part of the group, and who is not part of the group (Feldman 1984). Research into group norms and cultural capital support this claim, as both norms and cultural capital are context specific and need a reference group to exist.

This does not mean the same values do not exist across communities and contexts.

Rather the data suggest that similar values are expressed uniquely across contexts. For example, in the data there are major differences in how each CSA distributes their produce. On some farms, such as Berry Village, CSA members go to the farm and pick their produce up in a 100-year old barn. Their produce is measured by the piece (i.e. three peppers, one tomato). This is in contrast to other CSAs, which deliver pre-packed boxes to several drop-off points and members pick them up at the distribution sites. Each distribution style has benefits. When members go to a barn, they get to connect with the farmer at the farm site. Members describe feelings of “homecoming.” When members go to a separate distribution site, the experience is more like a modern-day service, with diminished interaction with the farmer and the farm. The presence of the farm is, however, still in the produce.

The context of the CSA is unique in that it promotes relationships, consumer input, involvement, and community. Through membership in a CSA, consumers have a close relationship with the food they are consuming. They also have an opportunity to develop a relationship with the producer and the farm where the food is grown. CSA members perceive other members of their CSA as being “like-minded” or “someone [they] could talk to at a party.”

Studying values in context could show how values affect behavior. In the context of the CSA, several of the informants reported behavior changes since joining the CSA. These changes in behavior included increased recycling, looking for more opportunities to purchase locally produced or crafted products, changing cooking and eating behaviors, and increasing the amount of time they talk about food in daily interactions with others. Not every value will be discussed, however, attention will be given to the values that demonstrate each characteristic.

## **Outward-looking/Community focus**

Each of the twelve values are community-focused as well as outward-looking. The presence of community permeates the CSA, from the name “community supported agriculture,” and the membership community, to the outward goals and values of those involved. CSAs build and strengthen feelings of community through contact with the farmers, the members, the CSA’s newsletter and the food (McAlexander et al. 2002; Muniz and O’Guinn 2001).

Farmers and members both express a desire to support and contribute to their community. Farmers focus on their work, wanting it to be meaningful and have a positive effect on their community. Members focus on how they can help support their community (i.e. by supporting their local farmer), but this sentiment seems to go deeper to a more basic desire to help each other.

Supporting the local community, being a good member of the community, and buying food from local farmers are the main reasons the informants joined a CSA. One member put it plainly when she said she joined the CSA because she has “an interest in local produce, and to support people in my community.” Alicia has been involved in CSAs for one season:

Alicia: I feel like I’m supporting the general community. I guess when you live in a place you benefit from the infrastructure and you benefit from the community resources, the library and things like that, and you can exist very easily without giving back to the community at all. And with this I feel like I’m doing my little bit by supporting the farmers, the local farmers. Even if I have nothing to do with them socially, I’m supporting them a little bit financially and I’m supporting something that clearly they think is important and I think is important.

This value -- *outward-looking* -- is strongly connected to relationships. These relationships make members want to support their community. Alicia echoes this sentiment. She sees herself as a contributing part of the community, and not as someone who takes from the

community without giving something back. She also mentions the congruent values: she is doing something that she and the farmers think is important.

Of course, differences in the scope of the values between farmers and members can be observed. Farmers are talking about their life choices, how to survive, and how to be a positive force in their community.

The intention here is not to belittle the concern of the CSA members, or to diminish the impact of their actions. However, it is important to make the point that members' involvement in the CSA is a way that they get to contribute to their communities, and that this type of involvement with community is different than that of the farmers. It is a purchase choice, not a career path.

Dianna is 55 years old and has been a CSA member for six years. She is involved with ecological education in her local community.

Dianna: Uh, the little campaign, "Buy Fresh, Buy Local." It is important. In part because living in Deer Valley where money supports the farmers and the growers. It seems that business is getting more and more difficult and farmers are having more and more of a difficult time supporting themselves as a small family farm. It seems that what I can do to help that is to make sure that I'm buying stuff that they're growing and getting it from them and not from California.

Dianna reiterates the importance of supporting local farmers and growers and keeping money in the local economy, rather than buying food that has been shipped from elsewhere. She also takes it upon herself to have some responsibility to be a good community member and feels like her actions do affect the farmers in her community.

### **Engage with time**

Many individuals in CSAs hold values, which take past and future generations into account. This awareness of time is expressed in four main ways. An awareness of the past is



expressed through reaching for traditions and a “simpler time” when consumers had personal relationships with where their food came from. Concern for the future is expressed through a concern for the health of the planet (ecological concerns); wanting to do something good in the world and a concern for future generations. An awareness of the present is demonstrated through a concern for personal well-being including physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual well-being. Members wrote that when choosing a place to shop they think about “the philosophy of the store,” and “choose the least harmful [option].”

### ***A reach for tradition***

“Traditional knowledge (TK) is most frequently (and problematically) regarded as knowledge held or mobilized by ‘traditional, local or indigenous’ communities” (UNEP-WCMC 2003, p.15). This is often imagined as a simple farm life with a large extended family and a close-knit community. It is characterized by the absence of consumer goods, brand-names, and corporations. The traditional life is often near-subsistence living with no frills, and a feeling of richness that comes from intangible wealth derived from relationships and a sense of belonging (Puddifoot 1994), rather than from material possessions.

The CSA provides farmers and members a way to connect to the past; to a heritage and a set of traditions that they may or may not have been a part of. Through conversations with the informants, it became clear that there is a romantic notion of how things used to be, before mass-marketing multi-national corporations. The informants talked about this previous-time as more straight forward and simple, and something that they miss.

Farmers are aware of the necessity of growing food to sustain life and health, and they are aware of the ancient practice of farming. One of the key farmer-informants, Ben commented

that the nine to five, 40-hour workweek is unnatural. He chose to leave that world and to go into namely farming. This highlights his desire to be in tune with the natural rhythms of his own body as guided by the sun, as in pre-industrial societies, rather than cater to the clock-driven typical modern work world.

Aaron, one of the farmers, is aware of the change in American society over the past 50 years. He is aware of the loss of connections between people and food production, and cites this loss of connection as a large reason people like CSAs.

Aaron: If you think about it, 50 years ago every person in America had some sort of connection to a farm whether it was a parent, grandparent, uncle, aunt, you know somebody, a cousin has a farm down the road. There was a connection and they could go there and visit if they were living in cities. Now a lot of people are displaced. They don't have any connection, it's really foreign to them and it's a draw. They find excitement in it. It's something totally foreign. So they like to come here for that. I think that's a large draw, a large part of members like that part of it. And it's like a home. I think people feel like they're coming to homecoming, or something I don't know. There's something about it that has sort of the hearth feeling or the warm feeling of it. I think people like that. And um, yeah, so I think to label the people, they're just people who really value local agriculture and local foods regardless of their economic and political position in the world or whatever. So I think that's kind of the glue that's holding everything.

Aaron uses two important descriptors here: homecoming and hearth feeling. The homecoming conjures up the story of the prodigal son, and a reunion with something or someone that one has been separated from. The hearth feeling brings up the idea of a cozy, safe, warm place and the idea of home. As these descriptions highlight, CSAs offer the members a chance to connect to their ideas of an earlier time filled with familiarity and warmth. It allows members to live out this fantasy of comfort and safety.

Farmers, by their very choice of profession, elicit thoughts of ancient times and the American dream. Farmers are also aware that their members may be missing, or nostalgic for something intangible that came with having a connection to how and where their food was grown. Aaron says that "a lot of people are displaced" and have no connection to the land. He

believes this is a big draw to the CSA.

The traditions Aaron refers to are indeed perceived as missing by CSA members. These are often connections to childhood – a parent’s or grandparent’s garden or farm; or they are feelings of nostalgia for something that they never had – a real connection with their produce, a farm to refer to as “mine,” a freedom from bosses and deadlines and a life-rhythm dictated by nature rather than modern technology.

Indeed, members do seem to be reaching for some kind of tradition. This is represented by a desire for their children to learn about where food comes from, especially in cases where the parents came from rural backgrounds and now live in a town or city. These parents want to get in touch with how food used to be grown and remember their childhood relationships to food production. Many members want their children to understand that food does not come from a supermarket. All members said they like the relationship they have developed when buying produce directly from a farmer.

Katya: I think basically it [deciding to join the CSA] was because I have an interest in, not organic food or specific things like that. When it was an opportunity I thought it was an important cause to support, and also I have a young daughter. I grew up in a rural community and knew that vegetables didn’t come from the store, but from the ground, and I wanted her to have a more closer relationship to her food and appreciate where her food comes from. And also to acquire food. And so I thought it was sort of a learning experience for her, as well as a connecting back to my childhood when I grew up.

Katya says that when she was a child, “vegetables didn’t come from the store, but from the ground.” This statement implies the good old days, when things were what they seemed to be, unlike the confusing landscape of supermarkets these days. She also mentions the importance of her daughter learning about where food comes from, just as she did when she was a little girl. For Katya, being part of a CSA is a way for her to connect with her own childhood, and let her daughter experience some of what she had. Katya is just one example of the many

CSA members who talked about their own childhood, and their own connection to a garden or a farm.

Many CSAs have their members pick up their produce at a farm, or even in a barn. The farm and the barn are images of rural life and a simpler time. Members who pick up their produce at the farm, but also members who pick their produce up at another location, have a closer connection with their food source. This close relationship between members and the farm harkens back to an earlier era when most people grew their own food or had a family member that did, and responds to a desire for pre-supermarket era.

Edith: [I joined the CSA] to support the local farmers, support the local farm. I'm from Iowa, so to see farms go all big is just horrendous, and to see farmers lose farms.

In these statements Edith is recalling the past, which was a better time for farmers in Iowa. Edith also refers to her fear that all farmers will lose their farms, a fear that considers a time in the future. She goes on to talk about specific changes that she has seen to farms in Iowa such as turning from diversified small farms into mono-crop huge farms.

And finally, Janet talks about missing her parents' gardens, but it was clear from the conversation that it was not just the food she missed.

Janet: You know, you're renting an apartment, or you live in a small space, you don't really have a space to garden on your own. And I had always grown up with gardens, my parents had like five around the house, and... I missed having that garden-fresh food. And this is a way to have that. And often CSAs are organic, or right up against organic standards and um, you have that quality of it as well, and you're supporting someone in the community.

CSA members are aware of the connection between their past and their food. They are interested in getting "garden-fresh food" from the earth. Renting an apartment, Janet does not have the opportunity to grow her own food, but the CSA is a way for her to connect with her past and get the quality she desires.

### *Ecological considerations*

Environmental considerations are indicative of a concern for future generations, and for the planet itself. These values and concerns are so deeply held by farmers that they often focus on other issues. Most farmers talked about the personal responsibility they feel to be “good stewards of the land.”

Ellen grows food for and runs a cooperative CSA. They have been in operation for four years. She has a young daughter and her husband has a full-time off-farm job. Before buying a farm and starting the CSA, Ellen had a job doing technical support for a software company.

Ellen: Really right from the very beginning when we started selling up at the [farmers'] market, um we knew right away we wanted to be organic. Neither one of us wanted anything to do with chemical farming at all. When I started up at the farmer's market several people asked me, “well have you ever thought about a CSA?” Somewhere along the way I'd read something so I knew generally what the idea was but I didn't really feel like until I knew what I could grow and when and how the seasons worked, I was just basically new at farming – except for picking things at grandma's house many many years ago. You know, I didn't want that commitment to people, you know, what happens if I can't grow something? You know? And if I can't supply produce for that many people?

Ellen is clear about her feelings for chemical farming. She dismisses any thought process that may have taken place and says that neither she nor her husband “wanted anything to do with chemical farming at all.” She practically takes it for granted that they would have an organic farm. Ellen also demonstrates the level of responsibility farmers feel to their CSA members. Although members assume some risk, farmers are very concerned about being able to hold up their end of the bargain.

Members express concern for the environment and ecology as well. Conservation activities were also observed at the farms. Members brought plastic shopping bags for other

members to re-use. There is a magazine exchange in the barn. There is a compost pile outside the barn, which some members dump their compost onto that they have brought from home. What is most noticeable, though, is the talk about how much better (the taste/for health/for the environment) the produce at the farm is than produce from the grocery store.

### ***Conscious consumption groups/ Not mainstream consumption culture***

Time considerations in values were clear when farmers and members talked about their place in the world. Conscious statements, actions, and behaviors demonstrate other ways that farmers and members' concern with doing something good in the world. This value is rich with cultural capital. It shows how farmers and members think through their decisions and choose the authentic over the mass-produced (Holt 1998).

One way that farmers and members expressed the importance of doing something meaningful with their lives was through their deliberate choices to help people and support other members of the communities in which they live. These values focus on the state of the planet for future generations.

CSA farmers provide the opportunity for people in their community to purchase locally grown food. If there is a food security issue or a food safety scare, these farmers know they will be in high demand. Some of them see themselves as an insurance policy. Many of the farmers buy local products as well as supplying them; they are very conscious of the effect of their actions on the local economy as well as the environment.

Trevor works as one of the hired farmers at a CSA. Five years ago he had an epiphany about his life work, left his job in a computer lab, and went back to school to study horticulture. He hopes to buy his own land someday and start his own farm.

Trevor: I used to be a tech guy, I rode in with the tech boom, and I ran a computer lab at the college of engineering on [the] main campus. And, um, it was really wearing.... what I started to learn over time, too is that a lot of these people who were helping engineers, who while they were interesting in aspects, were sort of morally bankrupt. A lot of these guys went out to work for Lockheed Martin or others – weapon makers. So I really started feeling like what I was doing wasn't helping anything.

Trevor is very clear that his previous job “wasn't helping anything.” He did not want to work with people who went on to employment at weapon makers, causes of destruction in the world. Rather, he desired a line of work that would enhance life and benefit his community, and improve the world. Even in his morally bankrupt former employment, he was able to see the interesting aspects and make a deliberate choice for a different lifestyle.

CSA members also raised ethical issues, and pointed to their own conscious decision-making processes. For them, the issues were largely surrounding food purchases. Alicia is a new member of a CSA. She just finished her first season with a CSA and expressed several times how much she learned about food issues and growing practices. Alicia expresses how much she has learned as a CSA member, and expresses that she feels she is doing something good in the world by being a member.

Alicia: I feel like, you know, ignorance is bliss, when you don't think about something, when you don't know about something, there's no guilt associated with it. When you start to, by being a part of this CSA, thinking about where your food comes from, and thinking about what's done to your food, and thinking about the employment practices, and etc. etc. that comes along with farming, ethically a CSA makes sense. So just that reality of knowing, like the CSA, you read about it and you hear about farming and genetically modified food, and, has it changed my entire diet? No. But this makes me feel a little bit better.... It's also made me realize how we're so incredibly far removed from being able to take care of ourselves. That god forbid you couldn't just go to the grocery store and pick something up, like, what would you do?

In this quotation she talks about the things she has learned in her CSA. Alicia has learned about taking care of herself. As she talks about feeling removed from where her food comes from, she expresses a dichotomy of modernity: she is removed from growing her food and

dependent on grocery stores; she is empowered by having many choices of where she can shop and limited by her knowledge of food production. Alicia learned about control, or the lack of control she has had over her food prior to joining the CSA.

She says that after learning about “what’s done to your food...employment practices, ...genetically modified food,” she decided, “ethically a CSA makes sense.” Joining the CSA seems to have caused mental and emotional stress for Alicia. Not only did she learn about ethical issues associated with food, she also realized how “far removed [we are] from being able to take care of ourselves” and “god forbid” you could not go to the grocery store. Her membership in a CSA has disclosed an ethical dilemma she was not aware of before, and simultaneously given her a way to “feel a little bit better.” Through the discovery of a problem, and simultaneous involvement with the solution, Alicia became aware of her good deed.

### ***Live for the future, live for today: Well-being***

A large part of well-being is having a meaningful life, which means planning for the future as well as living for the moment. The informants spent a lot of time discussing well-being, and their journeys toward authenticity and deliberate living. The informants’ definitions of what a meaningful life is, or how to achieve one, was not focused solely on themselves. While they do take into account how their actions affect their own lives, they also think about the effects their actions will have on other community members, and the on the planet.

There are four things that the farmers emphasized: 1. The importance of being on a life path that makes sense to them and being a self-made person; 2. That the products they produce are enjoyed and used by others; 3. Understanding how to farm sustainably and being a good steward to the land; and 4. Developing a viable business and making a living. The value that



encompasses these desires “well-being.” Although the profession of farming typically carries a low cultural capital (CC) status, these farmers are high in CC. Why are the farmers high CC? Their search for deeper meaning in life, their dedication to building communities, their pursuit of the America dream of being “a self-made man,” and their awareness and desire to farm in sustainable and ecologically sensitive ways all elevate them to high CC. In these groups, CC is gained by those who seek out deliberate living and authentic lifestyles in their work and consumption.

Ben and his wife, Amanda, ran a CSA from the 1/3-acre back yard of their suburban house for two years. They recently bought 26 acres of land and took one year off from the CSA to prepare three acres for farming the following year, and to get to know how things grow in their soil. They are also doing a lot of marketing in their new community; visiting flower shops, bed and breakfasts, restaurants, as well as keeping in touch with their old CSA members. Ben is currently working full-time for a non-profit organization and Amanda currently has a part-time office job.

Ben: Well, part of it was my total lack of enthusiasm with the private profit oriented work that I was doing for about ten years. Filling out the time sheet every week. Billability is king. And I felt like *I was really straying from my roots*, which I felt had something to do with ecological goings on. So I went back to grad school. I was working full time at the time, going to classes at night, and I hopped over the fence and worked in the non-profit sector, which I thought at the time was the answer... [Amanda] was working as a professional gardener and getting really tuned on and being really the impetus for us to start thinking about what we could do. Because at that time I was working for [a local non-profit organization] and with all due respect to the work that they're doing, I was sitting in committee meetings talking about land use, and diversity and civic engagements and all this stratospheric crap. And I thought surely there must be more brick and mortar type examples of what you can do, and then she and I had, sort of an organic, magical child, a magical child was created, the farm, the CSA, and that was the living, breathing example of what we had in our heads bouncing around.

Here Ben takes time into account through the narrative of searching for his proper life path. He emphasizes that his years in “private profit work felt like straying from [his] roots.”

For Ben, finding meaningful work is a big part of having a meaningful life. He implies that non-profit work, although it sounds more fulfilling than for-profit work, was not the answer he was looking for. The non-profit work did not capture his desire to see his work benefiting others' lives.

Ben emphasizes that the non-profit work did not feel useful. He talks about sitting in meetings, not about affecting lives. This is a huge contrast with his use of language about his new, deliberate lifestyle. He says his wife was "getting really tuned on," and later refers to their farm and CSA as "a magical child...the living, breathing example of what we had in our heads bouncing around." This metaphoric talk calls to mind 1970s poetry, the phrase "tune in, turn on, drop out," and "love child." Ben's language calls destiny to mind. A "love child" happens; it is not something one can force, rather it grows out of the union of two beings who share the same life path.

Living a deliberate life is not different now than it was 30 years ago, and the language needed to describe it has not necessarily changed. In many ways, these young farmers have chosen a lifestyle that conjures images of hippies living off the land. Ben and Amanda did have a magical child. Their CSA is something that did not exist until the two of them came together and created it. By calling the farm and CSA his "magical child," Ben illustrates the deep importance they have for him.

Ben's transition to farming created meaning in his life in several different ways. Rather than accept imposed stresses in his life, he has chosen to create his own work, which, with his choice of farming, encompasses his entire life. This decision accomplished several things. Ben personally and consciously chose his lifestyle. He now has flexible hours and can be outside, he has a whole agricultural system to figure out, as well as a business plan, an opportunity to create

a product that other people will enjoy, and with this “deliberate” lifestyle, it seems he has found his path.

Amanda, Ben’s wife, and Ben both left office jobs that seemed to be stifling them, to create an opportunity for meaningful work that would be life affirming and have an effect on their community. They currently both have off-farm employment, but Amanda plans to be on the farm full-time this coming spring.

Members express well-being through their positive interactions at the farm, and through their eagerness to share recipes and information, largely related to food. They want to support the farmers who have chosen to grow food for them. They recognize that local, small, organic farmers are important for food security and biodiversity, and important for food security and supporting local economies. Purchasing from local farms gives members a personal sense of living ethically. Members are aware that the CSA is in line with their political and spiritual outlook and said that they feel they are doing something good for their community. They also talked about the benefit for their physical health (in terms of eating vegetables in general, and organic vegetables in particular).

Cindy: There’s a lot of things that went into [joining the CSA]. It’s a local business, supporting a local farmer and keeping them in business rather than buying food that’s coming from half way across the country or a different part of the world. The organic produce and the quality of it, it’s just so much better. Thirdly, the environmental impact of not only buying organic food, but also buying food that’s local...your consumption of foods that are very costly and harmful to the environment because they come a long distance and use a lot of fuel to ship, or because they’re produced with chemicals and pesticides and a lot of contaminants that harm the environment. Another reason is just eating healthier, to have all those fruits and vegetables constantly in your pantry.

Cindy is one of the key informants and has been a CSA member for three years. She is very articulate when she talks about her reasons for joining a CSA. She covers all the major bases that the other informants touch on: supporting local farmers, quality of the food,

environmental impact, eating healthier. The ease with which she rattles this list off indicates the level of thinking she has done about her membership in the CSA, and signifies that she feels good about these reasons. For her, joining the CSA is based on all the values she mentions, and because of those values, she feels like she is doing her part to help the earth and her community by being a member of a CSA.

Farmers expressed well-being in a number of ways, a desire to have satisfying work, to be around people who hold similar values, to feel like they are doing good in the world, to make their own opportunities and set their own hours, to live in a deliberate manner, see their work improving other peoples' lives, and to create a place for community. Many farms become the home of community gatherings throughout the growing season.

Members are aware that the CSA is in line with their political and spiritual outlook and said that they feel they are doing something good for their community. They also talked about the benefit for their physical health (in terms of eating vegetables in general, and organic vegetables in particular).

Farmers and members both express ways in which the CSA has affected the meaning in their lives, and affected their well-being. The farmers' well-being is expressed differently. Farmers made big sacrifices (stable jobs, money, known quantities) for a path that felt right. They left employment that felt like it didn't matter, to create employment that is deliberate and rewarding. Unlike the farmers, for members, the CSA is a corner of their lives, not the focus of their lives. Being a member of a CSA has several positive and also a few negative effects on their well-being. Members talk a lot about doing "something good" for themselves, their community and their family. This consumption community is a demonstration of a type of business and commerce that is predicated on relationships, and disclosure, trust and common

values for all parties.

In this section, the ways that CSA farmers and members express their values involving time, are discussed. Although the CSA farmers and members express these values in different ways, both groups share the values. These congruent values help build and strengthen the community.

### **Relationship-based**

While a few of these values could, arguably, be held by individuals as well as be expressed by independent agents, they are expressed uniquely through relationships and they aid in building relationships. These values are: trust; counterculture; education; being different/adventurous; level of commitment; support/contribution to the community; social/farmer as friend. Some of these values are discussed below.

### ***Forms and displays of trust***

Community values are expressed and visible through the interactions in relationships. Community values are expressed in a variety of ways. Trust is a value that members raised frequently when they spoke about their involvement with their CSA, or CSAs in general. Trust is a complicated value that has several dimensions, and develops over time. Through the observations conducted during data collection, trust was noted as something that is taken for granted by farmers and members (i.e. prepaying for a product, leaving car windows open and doors unlocked at distribution, not keeping a close eye on children, and eating produce directly out of the bin without washing it first). It is the norm in this community, which is illustrated by the way that farmers and members take it for granted. Trust is a multi-dimensional value that

can be both observed and heard in stories from informants.

Inherent in the contractual structure of the CSA is a notion of trust. Members prepay for a season's worth of produce and trust that they will receive something in return. In this quotation, Ellen, one of the farmers, talks about feeling the pressure of being able to deliver enough produce to the CSA members. This concern kept Ellen from starting her CSA for two years.

Ellen: The original idea of the CSA is that the customers share in the risk of the farm and if there's crop failure you're out of luck. I'm not entirely comfortable with that. I feel that if people are paying me, I need to deliver a product. And [before I started the CSA], I was trying to figure out how can I do that and make sure I have enough.

Ellen realizes that members trust her to do a good job growing produce, as demonstrated by their willingness to pre-pay for the vegetables, and she takes that seriously.

The trust between farmers and members is displayed in a variety of other ways as well. Farmers trust the members to take the amount of produce that they are offered each week, and not more than their share.

Alex comments on this aspect of trust:

We write everything that's on the table on a dry erase board and we tell everybody the upper limit of what they can take of each item. So they go through with their bag and they say ok, I can take 8 of these, I can take 4 of these... we have a trade table for people, like if somebody hates carrots and they get a bunch of carrots, they can put it on the trade table and take something else. Like if someone else left peppers there and they love peppers, they can trade the carrots for peppers.

In this quotation, Alex demonstrates what how farmers take trust for granted in this relationship. Here Alex talks about people taking their produce each week, and using the trading table. He assumes that no one will take more than their allotted amount of something, and that if there is something they don't like they will use the trading table as a way to honestly get something else they are interested in eating. Nobody watches.

Five hours were dedicated to observing a pick-up day at Alex's farm. Instead of checking to make sure members were taking their allotted amount of produce, Alex spent his time catching up with the members who came in. He asked several members about work and family, or about a recipe he had recommended or how a new pepper tasted.

Observation was a powerful tool in assessing trust in this community. During observation, it was noted that members did not roll up the windows or lock their car doors while they picked up their produce. They also let their children have some space at the farm, not watching them carefully or keeping them extremely close by.

Members picked produce up from the displays and eating it without washing it carefully, an indication that they trust the food to be safe to eat and free from harmful chemicals. Members checked their own names off a list to indicate they had received their produce. And members both turned in and picked up various personal items to/from the lost and found.

The members in this group want to do business in a way where they do not feel like they are being duped, gypped, or talked into anything they do not want. They trust the farmer's expertise to grow food as they say they do (organically, sustainably) and to grow food successfully, as demonstrated by their willingness to pre-pay for food. They also trust the other members do not take more than their share, so that everyone will have enough produce.

In addition to observation, interviews and questionnaires also shed light on the importance of trust to members.

Alicia: Our farm is organic, so they don't use pesticides. You know they explained it to us once in one of the newsletters they sent to us, how they actually plant the food, and when there's a crop rotation, and why you get certain things at a certain time and then you don't get them for a little while and then you get them again.

Alicia does not question whether or not the farm is organic, nor does she question their planting activities or whether the food is safe to eat. Rather, she trusts the farmers to comply

with organic standards, she trusts them to supply her with vegetables throughout the season.

Alicia's comments also demonstrate the transparency of the CSA, which contributes to feelings of trust. Members are encouraged to visit the farm and participate in community workdays and picnics, and they are given a newsletter that explains what is happening at the farm. The newsletter serves several purposes: it strengthens the connection between the members and the farm/farmer/CSA community; it explains technical processes or planting techniques as well as what to do with a new vegetable; and it educates members about the farm, the season, and the growing practices. The willingness to be transparent and the desire to educate the members are a big part of what builds and strengthens trust in the CSA.

*Trust* is not a value that can be expressed purely on an individual level. *Trust* is something that develops between people over time. In the CSAs that were observed, *trust* is the norm; it is part of the cultural capital of the CSA; it is held by and expected from farmers and members.

### ***Education through personal experiences***

Education is another value that is demonstrated through relationships at the CSA. Education occurs through conversations between farmers and members (in any combination), distribution of newsletters and other printed materials, the farm's website, and observation and personal experimentation on the part of the community members. This value can be observed (i.e. printed materials) to a certain extent, but is primarily demonstrated through accounts of personal interaction and personal reflection. There is a large educational aspect of being involved with a CSA, whether as the farmer or as a member. The effects of this education are strong enough that there is anecdotal evidence from the research presented here, as well as other



documented sources, which indicate that being a CSA member changes behavior even after the membership is over (Stagl 2002).

Farmers revealed how much they feel there is to learn about agricultural systems, and how food grows on their own land. They make an effort to pass some of their knowledge onto the members through newsletters, workdays at the farm, and casual conversations on pick-up days. Farmers are very involved with teaching members about unfamiliar vegetables, farming, food issues, through the farm newsletters that go out each week and through casual contact.

Several farmers talked about learning from their land and learning from the members of the CSA.

Samir: We're not the knower. I mean I do two things the same right next to each other and one works and one doesn't. We don't determine it. We're playing with factors beyond the realm of our control. That's a lot of what farming is about... In this CSA and the other three CSAs I've worked at, you see people with cancer and fibromyalgia. This woman comes out here was basically stuck in her house for 15 or 20 years and you see her pulling weeds and sweating and she's smiling in the sun ... I don't necessarily agree with everything about that person, but just to be able to provide, or be in the same space as someone who's going through that kind of transformation is just remarkable. But you know, for every person like that there could be two people who complain and say how they're wasting their money and come here and say we should be doing A, B, C, and D instead of what we're doing, this is why this is not successful. We get that kind of flack.

Education is not simple or straightforward. Samir illustrates that learning takes place when one is open to it. He mentions two different ways that farmers learn. One way is from the earth, the other is from the people at the farm. He talks about doing the same thing "right next to each other" and says that one crop fails and you don't know why. He takes the attitude that it is due to "factors beyond the realm of our control," and seems to take it in stride. Being a good steward to the land, rather than controlling the land is clearly important to Samir. Through his relationship to the land, Samir is constantly learning.

He mentions seeing transformations of people with illnesses, which seem to be another miracle of the farm. Lastly Samir talks about people who complain. Every farmer, when questioned, could recount different complaints members had expressed. Farmers who were employed seemed to be more ready to talk about it than farmers who owned or leased their land. This may be due to different levels of investment from the farmers, and different perceptions of ways to deal with the complaints.

Ellen talks about some experimentation they have done at her farm. During this conversation, she is clearly excited by this kind of learning, even though it turned out not to be practical from a business standpoint.

Ellen: Two of our biggest, not biggest sellers but fun things to grow have been garlic and hot peppers. So I kind of missed that because last year I think I had about 30 different kinds of hot peppers. At one point I think we put in about 25 different kinds of garlic but we planted way too much and we couldn't get it harvested so that kind of went by the wayside. We've just had two different kinds the past couple years.

Ellen enjoyed learning about growing different kinds of hot peppers and garlic. She was very excited both by her success at growing them and selling them. Ultimately it was too time-intensive and she stopped growing so much. The discussion will now turn to look at the members' perspectives on what they believe they have learned from their involvement in the CSA.

Members talked a lot about things they learned since joining a CSA, or had not thought about before joining a CSA. These topics included learning about seasonal eating and growing seasons, new vegetables and new recipes, the importance of the CSA in terms of sustainable practices, pest control, teaching their children where produce comes from, and why one would want to buy locally-grown food.

Joining a CSA has been a re-education experience for Alicia. She has been trained by grocery stores that food should look a certain way and be sterile.

Alicia: I learned, that for instance, when you plant things in a certain way, it can act as a natural pesticide. But I did notice, that for instance, some of the vegetables that we got, peppers for instance, that when we would cut open a pepper there would be a little bit of, I don't know what it was really, because the pepper was perfect, it looked almost like it was a cocoon that was being made, but you just cut it out and it was a perfectly good and perfectly fine pepper, but certainly it was obvious that bugs were there...

The fact that bugs could be present in her pepper and not ruin the pepper is almost revelatory. Here Alicia expressed what she has learned about farming practices. For example she talks about what it means to be an organic. She also learned that just because there were bugs on her peppers, did not mean there was anything wrong with them. She continues:

...[Being in the CSA] made me aware of how much must be done to the vegetables that I typically would have bought. Everything had its little tarnishes, nothing was not flawed. For instance, we would get these absolutely yummy peppers, yellow, orange, red peppers that were the size of, like my fist. Those huge ones you get at the grocery store, we never had anything even close to that. Tomatoes, sometimes you would get huge tomatoes but they were so ugly but so good. Just cosmetically I found that there was a big difference between the food that we would get in our share and the food that you would buy in the grocery store, in terms of taste though, it was so much better... I think when my vegetables start running out and I'm back at the grocery store, given a choice between a little pepper and a big one, I might choose the little pepper, because now I'm familiar with the little pepper, I know they're just as good, but I wouldn't choose something that looked kind of enh-enh over something that looked right. But in the grocery store, I can't imagine that it makes it there if it doesn't look, you know.

Alicia talks about becoming aware of the difference between produce she buys in the store and produce from her CSA. She learned that on the farm, flaws do not indicate that something is bad or damaged. The difference in cosmetic appeal and taste between the CSA produce and that from the grocery store are striking to Alicia. At the farm, she would be willing to cut small blemishes off produce from her CSA and knows the rest of the vegetable will be good, whereas she would not buy something blemished in the grocery store. This is also an

illustration of trust for the CSA. Even though Alicia makes these statements about the tangible differences (look, taste) of the pepper, she still attributes the taste to the look. She suggests that she might try a small pepper at the grocery store in hopes that it will taste like the pepper from the CSA.

Cindy talks about the importance of her children learning from the farm and getting out of their daily routine.

Cindy: [My kids] like the farm because they have a larger experience there as well. In the fall here. They've given tours before where we see the fields and we have the sense, "oh this is a tractor." Otherwise my kids would probably never go on a farm because I don't have any family or other circle of friends, I don't have anybody who has a farm where the kids could see the process of oh, this is really how food is made, you know, it doesn't just show up miraculously at a grocery store. It's like the bank, "mommy you can just go to the machine and get money." There's no sense that there's a greater process that produces money, like there's a greater process that produces food. So I really appreciate that they can see that and learn from that.

Cindy wants her children to understand the process behind food appearing in a grocery store. It is important to her to have a place where her children can actually see "how food is made." Several members echoed this sentiment, saying they wanted their children to be familiar with how food is grown as well as with the seasonality of food.

Stacey says that fresh food was not important to her before she was in the CSA. It is not something she was exposed to as a child.

Stacey: [Fresh food] only became more important as I was in the CSA. I didn't grow up thinking fresh food was that important. And I could have gone a lot of different ways with that, like shopping at the grocery all the time, but this kind of opened up a whole new world of shopping for me as far as buying locally and supporting all the people who came to Percy farm, like eggs and milk, and meat was another thing that we started and just continue....

As Stacey illustrates, CSA members are consumers. These are not ascetics; rather CSA members are also excited about buying opportunities. Stacey is thrilled that the CSA "opened up a whole new world of shopping" for her, and she lists items she now buys locally, including

eggs, milk, and meat.

Some people have dramatic learning experiences from joining a CSA, others encourage learning in their children, and others try a vegetable for the first time. Whatever the extent, education is part of being involved with a CSA.

### ***Level of commitment***

Dutton and Dukerich (1991), Dutton et al. (1994) and Bhattacharya et al. (1995) found varying levels of commitment to and identification with the values of the organization. Varying levels of commitment to the organization and to its values were discovered through the interviews with CSA members. For some members, the CSA is their primary source of food, and they are very committed to the CSA model for political and ideological reasons. Some people sought out the CSA. Others joined on a recommendation of a friend and have developed a dependence on the CSA for a certain quality of produce.

Lynn: So I made this commitment to [eating local food] at 30% [of my diet] because I thought that was an attainable goal, it was one meal a day, and it was so easy to go to two meals and just a little stretch to go to three meals. Now, it's like 90% of my diet is local, but it would have been impossible to do without the CSA.

Martha: It [the year-round CSA share] works really well because we love all the root vegetables. I know for some people it doesn't work well because they don't like root vegetables. But for those people who do, there is nothing to compare with...the potatoes. Our daughter had to buy some at the supermarket and she said she ended up throwing them away. She's so spoiled. I mean the potatoes we get there [from the farm] are so great.

Martha's story shows how CSA members use modern consumption language to talk about their CSAs. Martha illustrates how some CSA members come to rely on the CSA for their vegetables. Martha is boasting that her daughter is "spoiled" by having high-quality produce from the CSA. One can assume that Martha is also "spoiled" by her CSA. This story illustrates

how some CSA members start thinking differently about the produce found in grocery stores. CSA members are committed to their CSA, and would prefer to get produce from their farm.

This quotation also raises problematic issues with the CSA, which are related to cultural capital. Martha's daughter bought potatoes from a regular grocery store that she ended up throwing away. There was nothing wrong with the potatoes; they were not rotten or old. They simply did not taste as good as the fresh potatoes from the farm. This is an illustration of the high cultural capital of CSA members. Martha is demonstrating that she and her family are familiar with what a "good" potato should taste like and demonstrate their high CC by rejecting inferior potatoes from regular stores. Purchasing and eating potatoes from a small, local farm makes the potatoes more special, and indicates to others that Martha's family knows quality. Martha says jokingly that her daughter is spoiled, but the implication is that her daughter really knows what is good and is not willing to settle for less. It is an indication of the level of embeddedness in the community and a level of commitment to the CSA.

Values that are demonstrated in relationships are a cornerstone of CSAs. It is through these values that one is able to gain a sense of the depth of the exchange relationship that takes place in the CSA. Many members use the CSA as a place where they can feel good about what they are doing for themselves, their community, and the world. Trust, education, and level of commitment are just two important ways that values are demonstrated in the relationships in CSAs. Again, value congruence between the producers and consumers in this community is demonstrated. The environment fostered by congruent values allows for reciprocal learning, trust, and exchange to take place at many levels. It is difficult to imagine the CSA surviving as a community without a base level of value congruence.

## **Complexities of CSAs**

For many CSA members, the CSA seems to be a positive bubble where commerce is honest and people have increased information about and feel good about their purchases. However, this is not a Mecca of happiness, cooperation, environmental purity and sustainability. Several large cars, SUVs and trucks were observed in the parking lot at the farms, and members were quite open about their (sometimes extensive) shopping habits. These are not ascetics; rather they are consumers.

That being said, CSA members are aware of ecological, environmental, and sustainability issues, and they do make some choices that support those values. The CSA is something members can participate in to feel like they are helping to remedy the environmental issues of the world. Several members expressed the sentiment that they may not be able to do much, but at least they can reuse their bags and buy their produce locally, try to keep farmers on the land, and not support chemical farming. The CSA is a place for members to focus on the values that are important to them and make them feel good. It is also a place where they can be with others who share their values.

## **Alternate meanings of time**

CSAs are not for everyone. Only one CSA member who stated she would not join the CSA the following year volunteered to talk with us. This particular woman works full-time, as does her husband, and they are the parents of two young children. For this family, the extra stop at the farm, the unpredictable and strange produce, and the extra preparation time all made the CSA a burden rather than a pleasure. Her point was that her local grocery store has a decent

organic section, and it also has prepared foods and everything else she needs for the house. This level of convenience is what she wants. When asked what was most important to her, she replied, “Time. Time and family relationships.” The characteristics of the community values are not present in this member. Her very real time constraints and the needs of her young children cause her to focus on her own family as her core community rather than her CSA community. Clearly a CSA is not for everybody. There must be many others like her, but it is difficult to gain access to those CSA members who do not plan to join a CSA again.

### **Value conflicts: shopping at WalMart**

Several CSA members experienced values conflicts when it came to shopping at WalMart. This particular store name was not solicited during interviews, rather it was offered in response to a question about which stores they like to shop in. One member expressed her conflict between wanting to save the money, and not liking the values of the store.

Martha: I feel strongly about WalMart, and I also feel dependent on WalMart. Our daughter has a membership at Sam’s Club [owned by WalMart] and it happens to be the best way for us to buy paper products in bulk. And she can get that for us. I use the regular WalMart stores as a last resort because I resent the effect they have on the community. I have a strange feeling that they have in a sense caused a revolution in marketing that we have to pay attention to. Because what I observe is that a lot of people who could not afford many things in other stores can afford them in WalMart, so I’m thinking that many people in the middleclass and lower middle class especially benefit from WalMart, but the community at large doesn’t benefit. So I feel I’m in a position to choose, and I choose not to go there.”

Martha speaks in fatalistic terms about WalMart’s changing the community, and yet she still shops there. Although she does not like the store and only shops there as a last resort, she seems perfectly happy to have her daughter buy paper goods from Sam’s Club to give to her.



Lynn, who is committed to eating locally-grown food, also shops at WalMart:

Lynn: Sometimes I find myself going to WalMart and it just annoys me so much, there isn't a really good midrange kind of local store for things like [furniture]. It's either you pay twice what you pay at Walmart for something of comparable quality at a local store or you go to Walmart.

Lynn's point is that money does matter. Even though Lynn does not like WalMart and does not want to shop there, she feels she has no other viable options because of the cost of the items she needs to buy.

People join and remain members in CSAs because they think it is a good thing to do, and because it is worth the money. CSAs represent an opposite paradigm to WalMart. CSAs are small, local, and focused on building community. They are also perpetuated through common values, ethics and quality, not through low prices. Some members seem to enjoy the psychological benefits of being part of something that they do not need to question the ethics of, something that does not cause these conflicts. These members seem to use CSAs as a way to purify themselves from the conflicts of shopping at stores that may not in line with their values.

### **CSA does not guarantee financial security**

Although CSAs do provide farmers with a known income and operating budget, it is usually not a living wage. This can be seen in the number of farmers who have off-farm jobs, or who have spouses with off-farm jobs (see Table 1.2). Consumers, although they like the connections and community, will pay \$500-600 for their season of produce, but they will not pay twice that. As it is, many CSA members mentioned that the CSA is more expensive than buying produce at a grocery store, or that they are not sure whether it is more expensive or not. Cost is something that is on the mind of each consumer; they want to know they are getting a good deal,

or a good value for their money.

As consumers become more interested in eating local food, farmers are becoming increasingly creative with the way they run their CSAs, and are increasingly looking for ways to earn a living wage while doing meaningful work. Ben and Amanda have a new model for their CSA. Rather than a straight exchange (pay upfront for produce throughout the season) they have people pay a fee to “join” and then pay for produce on an individual basis each week. Their hope for the future is to sell most of their produce at the office park where Amanda has been working part-time. Over 500 people are employed in this office park, and this could be a great opportunity for sales. They have also spent a lot of time developing relationships with the businesses near their farm, and currently sell produce to local restaurants and bed and breakfasts, in addition to individual consumers. Amanda and Ben also grow cut flowers, which they sell (fresh in summer and dried in fall and winter) to florists, doctors’ offices, and other businesses. The new model that Ben and Amanda are exploring is farther away from the community-based idea of the traditional CSA and may affect the relationships that they form with customers and the feeling of community. As mentioned above, they spend time promoting their values and their growing practices, which will help trust develop in their relationships with their customers. Once they leave the community-based model, congruent values may not be as powerful a draw to new customers.

## COMMUNITY VALUES CONTRASTED WITH PREVIOUS VALUE STUDIES

The Rokeach Value Survey (RVS) was created in 1973; before the Internet, before the world was hyperlinked, before the Reagan era. In the 1970s it was impossible to imagine how connected the world would be at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In 1973, discussions of global

warming and globalization were hard to imagine, whereas in 2006 they are on the front page of the newspaper several times a week. In this kind of connected society, thinking about values in terms of relationships makes increasing sense, as people have easier access to each other, and as environmental and food security and food safety issues slowly become something that affect everyone.

In some cases it may seem like a stretch to compare the *Community Values* derived here with the RVS (see Tables 1.4a and 1.4b). The aim here was to be inclusive with the RVS values, and to look at each value from a broad perspective, to see how they related to the values in the focal community. Before some of the *Community Values* are discussed, an explanation of certain values will be provided. First, “well-being” in the *Community Values* has to do with having a balanced life, being content with choices in one’s life, and having a broad world view. RVS values having to do with well-being all focus on personal well being, personal happiness, and personal salvation. There is no inclusion of how that well-being might be achieved. Second, the *Community Values* “concern for ecology/environment...” is paired with RVS “a world at peace” because both have to do with individuals’ world-views. Third, *Community Values* “level of commitment” is important to the survival of the organization.

Tables 1.4a and 1.4b, highlight the differences between the Rokeach Value Survey and the values that emerged from the research. As discussed throughout the paper, the *Community Values* have a different focus than past value surveys. *Community Values* engage with time, are relationship-based, and look inward at the self in addition to looking outward at the community. These values are also shared by both parties in the relationship dyad.

## CONCLUSIONS

### **What should we take away?**

Thinking about values in terms of relationships provides insights into the workings of communities. The characteristics of community values, and value congruence are the keys to functioning of the consumption community. In a sense they are the main reasons people join CSAs, and the main reasons farmers begin CSAs. The values found in the CSA are different from values that were previously studied because of their community focus, engagement with time, and demonstration through relationships. Without looking at values in the community context, these differences would not have been noticed.

It has been shown that farmers and members in CSAs hold congruent values and express them in their individual ways. It is proposed here that value congruence contributes to the success and, indeed, the existence of CSAs.

Understanding values is becoming increasingly important to companies, as managers begin to understand that individuals want to take part in their communities, and that what many individuals care about is not a given company, but the values that are offered through the company's products and services (Senge and Carstedt 2001).

Although conducted in the context of the CSA, this research may have broad reaching implications and possibilities to create change in business and in communities. Many companies have begun to take their employees' and customers' values into consideration in designing and offering new policies and new products (i.e. General Electric, energy star, hybrid vehicles), being able to understand which values are present in relationships and which are important in relationships could help companies succeed. Understanding how value congruence affects the

community and how to foster value congruence could affect the way management deals with employees and customers.

The data presented here may complicate the way cultural capital is defined and thought about. One way that people can gain cultural capital is through education; the greater the level of education, the higher the cultural capital, generally speaking. This paper suggests that perhaps cultural capital comes from a desire for education, or a willingness to engage in re-education, rather than the current level of education an individual has.

The research on CSAs presented here supports Kozinets work, which suggests that commercialized communities are places that “weaken social ties.” (Kozinets 2002, p.34). In contrast to commercialized communities, the values in CSAs build communities, strengthen values, and change lives. People involved with CSAs gain benefits far beyond the produce they have purchased. There seem to be great psychological benefits to being part of a group of people who share congruent values, goals, and commitments. Members also have access to as much information as they want about the food they are receiving, and are invited to “see for themselves,” and get involved in work at the CSA.

## **Future Research**

Thinking about values in terms of relationships provides us with lessons and insights into consumer desires that could benefit other models of business. There are great opportunities for future research on Community Values. If managers learn about the values present in their companies, and the ways in which value congruence affects motivation and commitment, business could become more successful and more rewarding to all parties involved in the exchange.

CSA members want the personal relationships and connections to the land and to their community that go along with the exchange relationship of the CSA. These individuals also want a way to purchase products that gives them a feeling of being an important and contributing member of their communities. Understanding the values of communities and the impact of congruent values on communities could have important implications for understanding consumer desires, and understanding how to reach key consumers.

Another avenue for future research is in the area of how individuals purify themselves after doing things that are in conflict with their values. For example, when consumers shop at Wal-Mart even though they dislike the values of the store, what do these individuals do to make up for these transgressions? Do they see spending money with a local farmer as a penance? How do consumers deal with this dissonance? Future research should look at these phenomena in broader contexts, and begin to develop a method for consciously implementing these ideas into other business models, and other consumption communities.

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Table 1.1. List of Values and Rokeach Value Survey

List of Values	Rokeach Value Survey
Being well-respected	Comfortable life
Excitement	Equality
Fun and enjoyment in life	Exciting life
Security	Family security
Self-fulfillment	Freedom
Sense of accomplishment	Happiness
Sense of belonging	Inner harmony
Self-respect	Mature love
Warm relationships with others	National security
	Pleasure
	Salvation
	Self-respect
	Sense of accomplishment
	Social recognition
	True friendship
	Wisdom
	World of beauty
	World at peace

Table 1.2. Demographics of Farmer-informants

Farm No.	Approx. Location	Name	Sex	Age	Years w/ CSA	Size of farm	Farmer Status	Off-farm Income	Delivery options
1	Pittsburgh	Alex	M	59	13	85 acres, 29 farmed	Owens farm	Wife works part-time	Pick-up at farm/delivery
1	Pittsburgh	Courtney	F	59	13	85 acres, 29 farmed	Owens farm	Part-time, sales	Pick-up at farm/delivery
2	Pittsburgh	Lori	F	38	2	10 acres, 2 farmed	Owens farm, CSA is a co-op	Husband works full time	Delivery to set locations
3	Pittsburgh	Amanda	F	29	4	36 acres, 4 farmed	Owens farm	Works part-time, office job	Pick-up at farm/delivery
3	Pittsburgh	Ben	M	38	4	36 acres, 4 farmed	Owens farm	Wife works part-time	Pick-up at farm/delivery
4	State College	Aaron	M	31	3	24 acres, 8 farmed	Hired farmer	Wife works full-time, research asst.	Pick-up at farm
4	State College	Rachel	F	30	3	24 acres, 8 farmed	Was hired farmer	Works full time as research asst.	Pick-up at farm
5	Philadelphia	Tova	F	37	9	100 acres, 12 farmed	Leases farm	Part-time, yoga teacher	Pick-up at farm
5	Philadelphia	Micah	M	39	9	100 acres, 12 farmed	Leases farm	Wife works part time	Pick-up at farm
6	Philadelphia	Samir	M	25	5	100 acres, 8 farmed	Hired farmer	No	Pick-up at farm
6	Philadelphia	Kendra	F	34	5	100 acres, 8 farmed	Hired farmer	No	Pick-up at farm
6	Philadelphia	Trevor	M	25	3	100 acres, 8 farmed	Hired farmer	No	Pick-up at farm

Table 1.3. Demographics of Member-informants

Name	Gender	Age	Years with a CSA	# of people in household	Household Income (self-report)
Alice	F	55	1.5	2	---
Henry	M	57	1.5	2	150K
Martha	F	69	5	2	70K
Emily	F	36	2	4 (2 kids)	150K
Ely	M	61	14	2	38K
Becky	F	61	10	2	80K
Kate	F	51	7	2 (1 kid)	---
Stacey	F	30	3	4 (2 kids)	20K
Gayle	F	60	5	2	---
Janet	F	33	3	2 (1 kid)	40K
Katya	F	32	2	3 (1 kid)	30K
Cindy	F	38	2	4 (2 kids)	Over 100K
Edith	F	71	1	2	---
Lynn	F	30	2	2	80K
Audrey	F	59	2.5	2	120K
Alicia	F	34	1	2	65K
Dianna	F	55	6	2	---

Table 1.4a. Rokeach Value Survey values that compare well with Community Values

<b>Community Values</b>	<b>Rokeach Value Survey (RVS)</b>
Well-being (meaning in life ) Physical	<i>A comfortable life (a prosperous life)</i> <i>Health (physical)</i>
Mental	<i>Wisdom (a mature understanding of life)</i> <i>A sense of accomplishment (lasting contribution)</i> <i>National security (protection from attack)</i>
Emotional	<i>Pleasure (an enjoyable, leisurely life)</i> <i>Happiness (Contentedness)</i> <i>Self-respect (self-esteem)</i> <i>Mature love (sexual and spiritual intimacy)</i>
Spiritual	<i>Inner harmony (freedom from inner conflict)</i> <i>Salvation (saved, eternal life)</i>
<b>Support/ contribution to community</b>	<b><i>Family Security (Taking care of loved ones)</i></b>
<b>Concern for ecology/ environment/ sustainability/ land issues</b>	<b><i>A world at peace (free of war and conflict)</i></b>
<b>Social: membership community farmer as friend</b>	<b><i>Equality (brotherhood, equal opportunity for all)</i></b> <b><i>True friendship (close companionship)</i></b>
<b>Being counterculture/ part of a conscious group/ out of mainstream consumption culture</b>	<b><i>Freedom (independence, free choice)</i></b>
<b>Being different/adventurous</b>	<b><i>An exciting life</i></b>

Table 1.4b. Rokeach Value Survey values that do not compare well with Community Values

<b>Community Values</b>	<b>Rokeach Value Survey (RVS)</b>
Trust	
Education/farming as friend	
Level of commitment	
Consciously limiting choices/anticipated surprise	
Making conscious choices/voting with dollars	
Reaching for traditions/heritage/the past	

**LOOKING AT IDENTIFICATION FORMATION: THE IMPORTANCE OF  
CONGRUENT VALUES AND EDUCATIONAL INTERACTIONS**

Essay 2

## TABLE OF CONTENTS: ESSAY 2

INTRODUCTION .....	66
Context .....	68
Which values? .....	71
What happens when members pick up their produce from the farm? .....	73
THEORY .....	74
What is identification? .....	74
Identification and organizational benefits .....	76
Congruent values .....	77
Congruent values and identification .....	78
METHODOLOGY .....	79
Farm Information .....	79
Procedures .....	81
FINDINGS .....	83
Development of congruent values .....	84
Education through Relationships .....	88
Formally Organized Opportunities for Relationship Building .....	89
Informal Interactions .....	91
Personal exploration .....	95
Education .....	97
What are new CSA members learning? .....	97
Food information .....	97
Environmental impact .....	99
Food system .....	100
Personal growth .....	101
Consequences of Identification .....	103
Benefits to the organization .....	104
Individual change .....	107
Relationship of Member to CSA .....	109
Relationship of the member to the wider community .....	110
DISCUSSION .....	112
Identification with what? .....	113
Contribution to theory .....	114
Future directions .....	115
REFERENCES .....	117

### List of Tables and Figures

Table 2.1 Demographic Information and Reasons for Joining CSA .....	120
Figure 2.1: Likelihood of Identification Formation from Bhattacharya and Sen (2003) .....	121
Figure 2.2: Identification Formation .....	122

## INTRODUCTION

Identification is a cognitive construct in which an individual personally experiences the successes and failures of the group with which s/he identifies (Ashforth and Mael 1989; Dutton and Dukerich 1991; Dutton et al. 1994). When individuals identify with organizations, the relationship has the potential to affect, and perhaps benefit, both the individual who identifies with the organization, and the organization itself (Bhattacharya et al. 1995).

In their 1995 article on identification, Bhattacharya et al. write that “by aligning themselves with worthy causes or implementing policies that are radically different from industry practice, organizations enable consumers to identify with what the organization represents (p.46).” In other words, when an organization distinguishes itself to its customers, those customers may identify with the organization’s values.

Researchers have explored antecedents to, and consequences of identification, but how identification forms and what causes identification to form is not addressed in the literature. A body of research, as well as our own experiences, informs us that consumers have different responses to an organization when they identify with that organization. For example, Harley Davidson riders use the Harley as a religious icon and organize their activities around the product and other people who own the product (Schouten and McAlexander 1995), and art museum members who identify with their art museum go to and talk about the museum more often (Bhattacharya et al. 1995). Knowledge in this domain could lead to greater and more focused benefits to companies in terms of employee-employer and consumer-company relationships and interactions. For example, if an organization understood how and why some of its patrons developed identification with it while others did not, the organization could adjust the ways that it communicates with its patrons in order to facilitate identification formation across a



greater number of its patrons. Understanding how identification forms could greatly affect how businesses communicate with their constituents.

In addition, knowledge about how identification forms could bring unknown benefits to consumers. There are currently two types of unknown benefits that consumers may reap. The first is benefits to consumers that are not yet known in the literature. This is largely because research into identification has primarily focused on benefits to the organization. For instance, when a consumer identifies with an organization, the organization tends to reap the benefit of added loyalty from that consumer. But what the consumer gets out of the relationship is not well understood. The second benefit to consumers is more abstract and refers to those benefits that consumers themselves do not know they want. For example, perhaps when consumers identify with an art museum they get some benefit in the form of cultural capital or social standing from their membership with the art museum. But what about other benefits? The consumers may benefit from having art in their lives on a regular basis, from developing personal relationships with various staff members who work at the museum, and they may benefit from their own personal explorations into art history or art making that come as a result of their identification.

This paper contributes to the research on identification in consumer behavior in several ways. The major contribution of this paper is the exploration of how identification between a consumer and an organization develops. Because the process of identification formation is not well understood, the benefits of identification to consumers and to organizations cannot be fully appreciated or realized. The identification formation process will be examined within the context of Community Supported Agriculture programs, these are member-based organizations and will be explained in detail below. Congruent values, education, and relationships seem to play important roles in identification formation. These findings will be discussed in detail

below. Outcomes of identification, including several outcomes not previously documented in the literature will also be presented.

## **Context**

This research was conducted in the context of one Community Supported Agriculture programs (hereafter, CSA). A CSA is a program through which consumers can purchase produce directly from a farm. When consumers “join” a CSA, they prepay for a season of produce. Each week during the growing season (in many Northeastern regions this is June-October), members receive a “box” of fresh produce that is usually organically and sustainably grown. The produce is usually harvested between 12 and 24 hours before the members pick it up. Along with the produce, members receive a newsletter that often includes information about an unusual vegetable that is being distributed that week, a recipe, a report about something that is going on at the farm (i.e., a description of the vegetables that are coming into season; information about farm improvements; a brief essay on pertinent land-use or food-system issue).

It is possible that during any given year there could be a terrible growing season and consumers would not end up with much produce. Likewise there could be a terrific season and consumers could end up with much more food than they had hoped.<sup>1</sup> Of course farmers take steps to mitigate both these situations. Farmers plant a diverse variety of crops at different times to increase the chances of a good harvest, thus reducing the risk of a terrible growing season. Farmers also talk to their consumers about their experiences in the CSA. The CSA contract symbolizes the trust that consumers have for farmers, and the sense of obligation that farmers have to consumers. The two sides of this contract, the acceptance of risk and trust on the part of

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<sup>1</sup> Receiving too much food is the top reason that many farmers believe consumers do not join the CSA again.

the consumer, and the feeling of obligation and desire to please on the part of the producer lower keep the risk the consumer takes on at an acceptable level. The consumer knows the producer will try to please so the customers will come back the following year, and the consumer trusts the producer's farming knowledge and skill.

A CSA was chosen as the context for this research for several reasons. CSAs are an ideal context within which to study identification formation, because the structure and logistics of the organization are unique. When an individual gets a job, even if it is the first job that individual has held, (s)he has encountered friends, parents, teachers, mail carriers, and supermarket workers, for example, who have all modeled the concept of "job." Similarly, when someone goes to college or to a museum, that individual has an idea of what to expect based on prior knowledge gained through acquaintances, or through representations on television or in books or movies. By adulthood, most people have had some interaction with such types of jobs and organizations. When an individual joins a CSA for the first time, that person has most likely never had any interaction or been involved with a similar organization. Although individuals would have experience going to a grocery store, or perhaps even with growing food in a family garden, the closest experience to the CSA most people have ever experienced is purchasing food from a farm stand or at a farmers market. The difference between a farm stand and a CSA is largely the long-term commitment an individual makes to the CSA. This commitment to and weekly contact with the CSA allow consumers to get to know the people who work at the farm, to become familiar with the seasonality of the farm, and to feel personally invested in the organization. Because of the lack of experience with CSAs, it is possible to get a good sense of the process of identification formation in relation to these organizations.

CSAs have a simple structure because the distribution channels are simplified. In CSAs

the distributor, the producer, the marketer, and the retailer are one and the same. Studying this simple structure cuts down on noise that could affect identification in several ways. For instance if consumers state they like a particular product sold in a store, it can be difficult to determine whether the customers really like the product and would buy the same product if it were sold in a different retail outlet, or whether the customers actually are biased because they like the store. CSAs also promote interaction and trust. Because it is necessary to *join* a CSA as a *member* in order to participate in the program, the organizational structure is rife with antecedents to identification. Thus, the CSA organization itself creates a prime situation for identification to develop.

From their conception, CSAs have been related to individual values held by consumers. CSAs were started in Switzerland, Japan, and Germany in the 1960s. CSAs were started by groups of consumers who were concerned about where their food was coming from and how it was grown. These consumers were also concerned about preserving farmland.

By supporting a local farm in this membership-based way, consumers are accepting a certain amount of risk. The weather could be terrible and the harvest slim. However, membership means that from the initial moment of “joining,” CSA members assume a certain level of embeddedness in and connection to the organization. The fact that consumers join as members and prepay for future produce is important for several practical and symbolic reasons. One thing it does is allow farmers to know their operating budget before their growing season begins. During the season, it allows farmers to know the number of people they need to harvest food for, so they can leave food in the fields according to that knowledge. Symbolically, this prepayment is a leap of faith on the part of the consumer as (s)he accepts the risk associated with the CSA.

CSAs are inherently value-laden. This comes from the fact that many CSA farmers have chosen their profession for value-based reasons, (i.e. “to do something meaningful in the world,” or “make [their] own way”), and many have left lucrative jobs to pursue farming. This is important because we will introduce value congruence as an antecedent and lubricant of identification formation. (See Essay 1 for more details)

Farmers communicate the values of the CSA, which are reflections of their own personal values. Unlike typical farmers who were born into the profession, many CSA farmers left lucrative jobs and successful professions to start their CSAs (Lass et al. 2003). This choice to leave a secure job in order to “do meaningful work,” (see Essay 1) and the explanation and communication of this choice to CSA members is an important part of communicating their values. Specifically, farmers tend to explain why being a farmer with a focus on sustainable practices is meaningful work and why they left their jobs as bankers or computer programmers to pursue this life. Their explanations focus on their strongly-held personal values. Often the farmers like being in the role of educator, whether it is teaching a member how to use a type of pepper or squash he or she is unfamiliar with, or explaining why pesticides are used, or not used, on their farm.

### **Which values?**

The farmers, and therefore the CSAs in our sample, provide the standard for the values we are working with here. We refer to the farmers’ values as the standard because it is their values that (often) led them to choose their profession. See essay 1, “A Fresh Look at Values through Community Supported Agriculture,” for a specific discussion of the farmers’ values and the specific values present in the CSA. Farmers’ values are accessible via the marketing

materials for the CSA, and other formalized information such as brochures, a website, and weekly newsletters. The farmers are in the position of owner and educator in the CSA. The three categories of the values found in CSAs will be briefly discussed below.

There are three main characteristics of values found in CSAs (see Table 1.3 for the three characteristics and values that represent them). These are an outward-focus (or community orientation), an engagement with time, and a presence (or ease of observation) in relationships.

Outward focused is the description for values that affect the individuals as well as their communities. Traditionally in the marketing literature, values have been studied in terms of individual desires and preferences (Kahle et al. 1986; Kahle and Kennedy 1989; Rokeach 1979; Schwartz and Bilsky 1990; Schwartz and Bilsky 1987). Values found in CSAs, however, demonstrate a concern for personal desires and preferences, but also an awareness of the needs of the local community, the wider society, and the earth.

Engagement with time encompasses the values that indicate an awareness of the past, present, and the future. Values in this category suggest nostalgia for a simpler time in the past, a desire for present comfort and fulfillment, and a concern for the wellbeing of future generations. These values include a concern for the environment, making conscious choices, reaching for tradition, and an interest in wellbeing.

The relationship characteristic of values describes values that, although they could exist on an individual basis, are expressed differently and uniquely through relationships. These include values such as trust, education, and level of commitment.

### **What happens when members pick up their produce from the farm?**

For many CSA members, going to a farm to pick up produce is an important ritual through which values are communicated and socialization occurs. Some CSAs (especially those that serve large cities) distribute food at drop-off locations. This changes the ritual of obtaining the produce, but the rituals of caring for and using the produce once it is in the CSA member's house (i.e. cleaning, storing, chopping, preparing) are the same. This research was conducted with one CSA where members picked up at the farm.

Members who pick up their produce at a farm experience natural smells and the vividness of being where the produce was grown and harvested. As you approach the barn, natural smells permeate the air. This is the barn where produce is distributed to CSA members. First the smell of cut grass, then the compost pile next to the barn and cow manure from the cows across the road, then soil, and the pungent confrontation of the wall of garlic that has been hung out to dry in the barn. As CSA members enter the barn, they are met with a white board filled with information about the week's distribution. One look around the barn is a feast for the eyes as several different kinds of produce are displayed in reusable boxes. Each box has a piece of slate hanging above it, which is used as a chalkboard to indicate the kind of vegetable that is in the box.

There is also a sense of getting back to nature, getting in touch with where food comes from, and a concern and desire to care for the environment and ecological systems. This is demonstrated in several ways. The produce is displayed in boxes or on shelves. It is not individually packaged, not sterile (or even very clean), there is no packaging to throw away, and

no cellophane separation between the consumer and the food. The washing stations are right outside the distribution areas and the barn floor is covered in years of dirt. It is clear that the produce in the barn came from the field (literally) outside and not from a refrigerated truck, a grocery store, or a giant distribution center.

To better understand the context and reason for this research, a discussion of existing literature on identification and value congruence will be presented below. The following discussion of extant literature will demonstrate how the research presented in this dissertation begins to fill an important gap in the theory of identification formation. After the theory is presented, the methodology, findings, and future directions for this research will be presented.

## THEORY

Theories about identification and value congruence were used as a foundation for this research. These theories complement each other in that the congruent values greatly help build the antecedents to identification, and identification strengthens the common values.

Organizational benefits of identification are discussed below, because concrete benefits that an organization reaps when its constituents identify with it must not be overlooked. Relevant aspects of these theories will be presented below.

### **What is identification?**

Identification is a cognitive construct in which an individual personally experiences the successes and failures of the group with which s/he identifies (Ashforth and Mael 1989, p.21). So, when an individual identifies with a group, the group's values become more salient and distinct from outside values.



Several studies look at the antecedents and correlates of identification, both in an employee-company context (Dutton et al. 1994), and in a member-organization context (Bhattacharya et al. 1995; Mael and Ashforth 1992). There has even been one study on “brand love” (Carroll and Ahuvia 2006) that indicated additional benefits to brands (the companies that own them) when consumers love (i.e. are loyal, identify in some way with) them. Consequences to the company/organization when employees/members have feelings of identification have also been documented and include positive WOM advertising (Carroll and Ahuvia 2006), recommending the organization to others (Mael and Ashforth 1992), not frequenting similar organizations (Bhattacharya et al. 1995), increased satisfaction and increased willingness of employees to help each other and to help customers (Dutton et al. 1994).

Past research into identification with organizations has shown that organizations benefit in a variety of ways when individuals identify with them. Employers gain loyalty from their employees; universities receive more money from their alumnae; and art museums receive more money, visitors, and publicity when their members identify with them.

In their theoretical paper, Bhattacharya and Sen (2003), propose a model of the likelihood of identification development (see Figure 2.1). In addition to antecedents to identification, they include individual perceptions and assessments of the attributes of the company. They focus on two links in their model. The first is the link between how a company is perceived, and the assessment of how attractive the company image is to the consumer. The second link they highlight is the link between the attractiveness of the company and consumers identifying with the company. Bhattacharya and Sen’s model informs us that individual assessment of company attractiveness is important to identification formation, but how identification forms, in other words, what happens between the links, is not addressed.

Understanding the antecedents to identification, and the likelihood of identification formation is a great platform from which to start to understand how identification actually forms. In the next section, specific research on the importance of identification to organizations will be discussed.

### **Identification and organizational benefits**

As mentioned above, previous articles provide insight into the antecedents to identification (Ashforth and Mael 1989; Mael and Ashforth 1992), which Battacharya et al. refer to as correlates of identification (1995). These studies provide insight into consequences of identification to the organizations with which individuals identify (Bergami and Bagozzi 2000; Bhattacharya et al. 1995).

Organizations are shown to reap benefits when their employees (Dutton and Dukerich 1991), members (Bhattacharya et al. 1995), or customers (Carroll and Ahuvia 2006; Muniz and Schau 2005; Schouten 1991) identify with them. Several studies have looked at relationships between employers and employees (Ashforth and Mael 1989; Dutton and Dukerich 1991; Dutton et al. 1994), (largely in the management literature) and at members and organizations (Bhattacharya et al. 1995; Bhattacharya and Sen 2003), (largely in the marketing literature).

In a consumer behavior context, consequences to identification could be seen as loyalty, i.e. loyalty to a brand or a store. But, as Bhattachary and Sen 2003 propose, when consumers identify with companies they experience a “higher-order...source of company-based value...[that] enhances the importance of the relationship and results in certain company-directed behaviors” (p.77). Thus, identification is a cognitive connection that goes beyond loyalty and is associated with certain behaviors that are beneficial to the company.

Bhattacharya and Sen (2003) build on Dutton, Dukerich, and Harquail (1994) to propose how a company creates and creates its identity. Bhattacharya and Sen (2003) call this the *constituents and communicators of identity*. Thus far in the literature, only a before/after model of identification had been conceptualized. Because past studies were conducted using a one-time survey, and contain no longitudinal data, they cannot provide insight into the process of identification formation. This paper addresses what happens during the time between the introduction of an individual to an organization (i.e. the presence of antecedents to identification), and identification formation.

### **Congruent values**

Value congruence is defined as the similarity between an individual's values and the cultural value system of an organization [or community]" (Kalliath et al. 1999). The management literature looks at values congruence in workplace contexts. It looks at how the perception of congruent values between employees and companies affects employees attitudes and behaviors. This body of literature indicates that when employees perceive shared values with the companies they work for, they tend to be more satisfied with and more committed to their jobs than when they do not perceive congruent values. A clear set of values on the part of the employer and the employee is thought to have intangible benefits to the employee and to the employing company (Posner and Schmidt 1993). Organizations benefit from clearly stated values, and we believe this should transfer to other situations.

Previous research indicates that individuals prefer to be involved with organizations that are aligned with their values (Ashforth and Mael 1989). It has also shown that when individuals are in situations where they feel conflict with their values-system, they feel the need to change

their situation or change their values (Burroughs and Rindfleisch 2002; Festinger 1957; Rokeach 1979).

Beyond providing benefits to companies in the form of increased commitment, congruent values may provide a scaffold upon which identification can develop. Without congruent values, individuals would not begin to consider the organization they are involved in on a personal level, or in relationship to their personal identities. In the context of this value-based organization, having congruent values does not mean that everyone has identical values. Rather, the term *congruent values* indicates that the values held by farmers, those held by members, are not at odds with each other. In other words, the values are compatible.

### **Congruent values and identification**

When consumers perceive they have congruent values with an organization, identification may begin to develop. Bhattacharya and Sen (2003) acknowledge the importance of an organization's values and how they are communicated. As with Bhattacharya and Sen's (2003) proposed model, values found in CSAs are communicated to members in a variety of ways, which we will discuss in detail below.

The perception of congruent values may be essential to identification formation. The direct messages from the owners/farmers and the rituals that go along with being a CSA member (i.e. making an extra trip to pick up produce and caring for produce each week) also communicate the company identity and contribute to identification. Ashforth and Mael (1989, p.27) write that indications of identification are transmitted symbolically – through words and actions, rather than through explicit information. In a CSA, symbolic and ritualistic actions abound.

Chapter 1 highlights the existence of congruent values between the producers and consumers in the CSA. The importance of these values become clear in this chapter as identification formation is explored. The methodology used for this research will be presented in the next section, followed by an in-depth discussion of the findings.

## METHODOLOGY

Data for this research were collected through in-depth longitudinal interviews, observations, and questionnaires. Interviews were conducted with six first-time CSA members at one CSA in a northeastern state. Each informant was interviewed at three different points in time between June 2006 and February 2007: early in the CSA season, late in the CSA season, and once after the CSA's growing season was over.

### **Farm Information**

The CSA where the data was collected has about 300 members each year. The land at this farm has been owned by one family for several generations. The current owners hire farmers to work the fields. There are about ten acres of farmland, six of which are farmed at any given time. The farm is located seven miles outside of a town center. This town has approximately 40,000 residents, according to the most recent census (U.S.CensusBureau 2003). CSA members drive to the farm to pick up their produce, or their "share" once a week. There are two distribution days at this farm: Tuesday and Friday, and members choose one day to pick up their CSA share. If a member must miss his or her set distribution day, she/he may either arrange to pick up on the other distribution day for that week, or arrange to have the farmers set the share of produce aside until the member can make it to the farm.

There is a shop at the farm. The shop sells locally made jams, dairy products, bread, snacks, as well as crafts from local artists, plants, and a variety of gifts. Several CSA members stop into this shop when they pick up their produce. CSA members receive a 10% discount on all products sold in the shop.

This CSA has a unique distribution model. Some CSAs pre-box the produce for members to pick up, and then have additional choice items, or a “trading table.” Some CSAs bundle the produce into “units” and have a list of how many units of each vegetable members can take. This farm gives members a pound allotment. For example, each week members can take 10 pounds of pretty much whatever they want. There is a large scale hanging in the center of the barn. The produce is kept in wooden crates that are arranged on display in a U-shape in the barn. Members choose their produce and can decide how much of each item they want within their pound limit. Highly prized items, like strawberries or snap peas are usually limited in some way, for example to half a pound, or one quart. No one watches to see that members take only their allotted amount, rather everyone is trusted and expected to be trustworthy.

Occasionally, especially toward the end of the summer, members are given the opportunity to take “seconds.” There may be a bunch of tomatoes that are slightly squished, or a box of apples that are too small for eating or selling, but are great for making applesauce. These items are simply given to CSA members.

These characteristics of the farm are extremely important in terms of both making the values of the farm transparent, and increasing the possibility for a growth in value congruence. The trust and flexibility demonstrated on the part of the organization (the farm), as well as the fact that receiving the produce and paying for the produce are separated, engender a feeling of friendship rather than a feeling of producer-consumer. This natural setting allows for a high

degree of co-creation of value, and of focusing on the produce and the atmosphere rather than on the chore (buying groceries) or the logistics (standing in line and paying). Details of the research procedures are discussed below.

## **Procedures**

The first interviews took place in June 2006, three weeks after the individuals began to receive produce from their CSA. During the first interview, informants were asked several questions about reasons for joining the CSA and to describe their experience thus far, including the members' likes, dislikes, and expectations.

The second interviews took place in September/October 2006, which was at the height of the harvest and the CSA members were receiving the largest quantity of produce. The focus of this interview was how the individual related to and thought about the CSA. Projective techniques were employed during the second interview. Each informant was asked to draw a picture of what the CSA would look like if the CSA were a person. Informants were then asked to talk about their drawing and how the drawing related to their own lives.

The third interviews were conducted in January/February 2007, two to three months after the CSA's season ended, to ensure that changes in attitudes and behaviors that CSA members talked about during the height of the growing season were not just fleeting ideas that were related to the produce they had in their house. Instead these attitudes would be reflective of something enduring.

The six first-time CSA members had significant demographic differences. It is important to have significant demographic differences in this study because these differences provide the best chance that there will be variance among the informants' responses. Because the purpose of

this study is to understand a phenomenon, a high degree of variance among the informants provides a better chance to understand the variables that affect the phenomenon.

The first-time CSA members ranged in age from 29-50, and in level of education, from Bachelor's degrees to multiple higher educational and terminal degrees. Household income varied from \$25,000 for a single mother with two children who live in a trailer park, to over \$200,000 for a married couple with two children who live in a newly-built very large house. Types of jobs these informants had were also varied, as were the primary reasons each member joined the CSA. See Table 2.1 for details.

Interviews lasted between 30 and 90 minutes. Each interview was recorded on a digital voice recorder, transcribed, and analyzed for common themes, and any indications of attachment or identification with the CSA. Interviews were treated as individual cases and analyzed in two different ways. Initially, all the interviews from a specific time were analyzed together for common themes. For example, all interviews at time 1 were analyzed, then all interviews at time 2, etc. The second way interviews were treated was to look at all three interviews for each individual and analyze them for themes that changed over time (Eisenhardt 1989). This two-step analysis process shed light on common themes at each time period, as identification developed for the group, as well as allowed the researcher to focus on individual changes within each informant.

In every case, the themes and constructs that emerged pointed to the same processes. Namely, identification forms over time and is lubricated by the presence and strengthening of congruent values, and education that takes place through formal and casual relationships. These themes will be discussed in detail below.

This essay also draws on data collected for Essay 1, especially in regards to



understanding the values of CSA farmers, where these values come from, and how they are communicated to CSA members. For a detailed description of farmer values, see Essay 1.

## FINDINGS

New CSA members went through several changes during their first season with the CSA. These changes seem to be the result of large amounts of education that take place through a variety of relationships. The education that takes place through relationships is what leads to identification with the CSA, and ultimately to several outcomes beyond mere benefits to the organization. The education, relationships, and outcomes will be discussed below.

A model of identification formation was created based on the data collected for this essay. The model will be presented here, and the discussion of the findings will be structured around the flow and contents of the model, see Figure 2.2. This model of identification formation has three main pieces. The first piece of the model is development of congruent values. This means that over time, the individual values held by members become more aligned with the individual values held by the farmers. For example, as new CSA members learn about the CSA model, they begin to share the importance of community, engaging with time, and highlighting the importance of community.

The second piece of the model is education through relationships. This is the heart of the model. It is through education and relationships that CSA members' values become closer to farmers' values, and that CSA members form identification with the CSA. As relationships develop between new CSA members, the farm, and the produce, and CSA members learn about the organization, they begin to identify with the organization. These relationships build through formally organized opportunities for contact, and through informal interactions. Formally

organized opportunities for contact are organized by the CSA and include a high degree of control on the part of the organization. These include pick-up days, community workdays, and the newsletter. Informal interactions include conversations that members may have with farmers or other members while they are selecting their produce, conversations CSA members may have with friends or relatives about the CSA or the produce, and personal exploration with the produce that CSA members may do in their own kitchens.

The third piece of the model is the effects of identification. Past research has shown that organizations reap benefits when their members identify with them. The research conducted for this paper reveals several additional effects of identification, including personal growth, changes in the relationships between the members and the organization, and changes in the relationships between the members and the wider world. Each piece of the model will be discussed in detail below, and informant quotations will be used to illustrate each point.

### **Development of congruent values**

Over time, the personal values the CSA members held become more closely aligned with the values of the farmers and the CSA. As new CSA members learn more about issues promoted or surrounding CSAs, they begin to align more closely with the CSA. These issues include things such as land use and development issues, fertilizer and pesticide use, environmental and biodiversity issues, and information about why one might choose to eat seasonal and local food.

The specific reasons the members join the CSA for the first time vary from person to person, however, each new CSA member shares certain aspects of their personal values with the values put forth by the CSA. Tony is 40 years old. He is a bachelor, overweight. He is an engineer, and is very chatty and personable. After our first interview he walked the researcher to

the door of his office building and stepped outside to smoke a cigarette. Tony is concerned about his weight and says he “makes terrible food choices,” but this is not why he decided to join the CSA. In the quotation below, Tony describes why he decided to join the CSA.

Tony, time 1

I was actually a little bit concerned about petroleum depletion. Basically, it seems that worldwide, we've gone through half the oil that's available, and consequently production has peaked, and now that we're on the down slope of oil production, the cost of petroleum is just going to go up, and that's going to affect a lot of things, including food... You know, aside from getting better quality food it seemed to me, eating food that's locally produced, and I think that's you know, gonna become more important in the future, I think uh, you know that the variety of food that we're used to now you know, might not be available in our lifetimes. You know we're used to out of season fruits and vegetables from all over the world, but if the cost of transporting them to here is gonna go up, you know I think they'll become a little bit more scarce. So that's sort of the round about way I got into Community supported agriculture.

Tony's decision to join the CSA was largely influenced by his concern about peak oil. Peak oil is when half of the world's oil supply has been used, and we are essentially at the peak of a bell curve of oil use (Staff 2005). During our first meeting, he focused on that one issue, and did not really reach out to other issues. Over time, through his contact with people and produce from the CSA, Tony became much more concerned with the quality of the food, and the enjoyment of the experience. He started to spend more money on locally produced food items, to cook more at home, and to bring snacks to work rather than buy something from the vending machine. Tony started out in a place where his values were not in conflict with those of the CSA, but as he learned more about the organization, and more about local food, his concerns and the things that he placed the greatest importance on, broadened to embrace the values of the CSA.

For some members, the CSA is a way to connect with the place they live and the food they eat. Mary is a very educated woman, and the main food purchaser and planner in her

household. She is married, a professional woman, and a mother of two. She prides herself on the healthy food she purchases and cooks for her family. During our first meeting, she assured me that the only reason there were potato chips on the counter was because they had recently had a party, but otherwise “you would never find them” in her house. She lives in a very large house, which was recently built on old farmland.

During the course of our interviews, Mary changed from focusing on the logistics (day of the week for pick up; time it takes to drive to the farm) of the CSA, to focusing on the meaning and the relationships that exist in the CSA (“strange kind of bonding”), and relating those to her own life. In this first quotation, Mary talks about what happens when she picks up her produce at the farm. She makes several comparisons to buying produce at a grocery store.

Mary, time 1

You make a special trip to get in your car and go to [the farm] and you get out of your car and you walk into a barn, and it’s [the produce] in a crate and there’s no, uh, there’s none of that hideous cellophane between you and your vegetable – you know, which is something I’ve always inherently hated – um, but you look at it and you select it in its natural habitat... it’s something special and isolated...

After only three weeks, Mary has formed pretty serious judgments about purchasing food at a grocery store. Not only does she see the CSA as a special event, she also sees it as a more “natural” way to obtain food. She emphasizes the distance that customers have with their food when they purchase produce in a grocery store. Not only is it a less natural habitat, but consumers are also kept at a literal distance because of the cellophane that separates them from their food.

Over time, the logistical aspect of the CSA became less novel, and Mary began to focus on relationships and symbolic meaning. The quotation below is from the second interview with

Mary, and comes from a conversation that took place based on projective techniques. In the quotation below, Mary talks about the people in her neighborhood, and how she sees her CSA. From this quotation it is clear that Mary has begun to identify with the CSA, and to identify herself as a CSA member. She also identifies CSA members as people who are concerned about their families and their community.

Mary, time 2

This area I live in is a neighborhood where people are caught up with themselves. I live in a neighborhood where people talk about their cars and people talk about their jobs...I don't hear people talk about their kids that much and you know it really kind of disturbs me. My idea, and this may be right or it may be wrong, but it's my ideal image of my 'CSA mother,' that she is someone who has true concerns with not only themselves and what that have and what they own, but the outcome and benefit to the world and the community. And [the CSA] regards her world as her community.

Through her experience in the CSA, Mary has started talking about values and how the CSA fits in with her values, and how she fits in with her neighborhood. Mary contrasts her view of the very natural and idealized "CSA mother" with the materialistic people in her neighborhood. Mary describes the people in her neighborhood as materialistic because they are focused on their possessions rather than on their relationships. She contrasts these materialistic people with the idea of the CSA as an altruistic entity that is concerned about both their own health and how their choices affect their community and world. For Mary, the CSA is able to see her community as a representation of the whole world – a sharp contrast to her neighbors who cannot even recognize their children as important enough to talk about. Mary seems to have sacrificed some comfort with her neighbors for values that suit her better. She does report that occasionally she brings vegetables to her neighbors when she has too many, which reflects the importance of caring for her community. Caring for the community is one of the main reasons that farmers want to have CSAs, and want to grow organic, produce. Over time, new CSA

members begin to embrace the values of the CSA as their own values.

Tony and Mary are drawn to different aspects of the CSA and their involvement with the CSA. Throughout all three interviews, Tony focuses on the educational components of the CSA and how these relate to his own life, while Mary focuses on the relationships that exist and develop over time. This variance is due to individual differences between the CSA members. There are many values that are expressed in the CSA, and the ones that stand out to each member seem to reflect the uniqueness of that individual. Mary is raising two children and has a husband. She recently moved back to the part of the country she grew up in and is close to her family and trying to develop connections within the community. These personal factors may explain why she would feel a connection to the relationship potential of the CSA. Tony, on the other hand, is just discovering that he enjoys vegetables. Along with each new discovery (garlic scapes, kale, rutabaga) comes a large education component that includes information on how to prepare the vegetable, whether he actually likes the vegetable, whether he needs to try a new recipe. Not only is Tony learning about each vegetable, he is also learning about the seasonality of food. This preoccupation with the education component also reflects who Tony is, and what interests him at this point in his life. The education and relationship components will be discussed further later in the paper.

### **Education through Relationships**

The values of the new CSA members become more closely aligned with the CSA through education that takes place within relationships. These relationships can be divided into two main categories: formal and casual relationships.

### ***Formally Organized Opportunities for Relationship Building***

Information in a CSA is passed through several different sources, both formal and informal. Information about CSAs in general is widely available online and in books. During the past year there have also been articles about CSAs in various newspapers (Arnett 2006; Ellen 2005; Weise 2005), magazines (Halweil 2006; OCA 2005), and books (Pollan 2006; Weinstein 2006).

CSA members have several formally organized opportunities for relationship building, starting with their official status as a CSA member. CSA members receive a newsletter each week, which reinforces this relationship and provides information from the farmers in a controlled way. Other formal information is stored in the CSA website or brochure.

A newsletter is distributed to CSA members along with the weekly produce. If a CSA has a website, a copy of the newsletter will also be posted online. The newsletter contains information about the foods that are available that week. Every newsletter that was encountered during the course of data collection had a recipe that used at least one ingredient that was distributed in the CSA for that week. The newsletter will often have some information about what is happening on the farm, and what will be in season in the near future, and often some reflection about the upcoming season, the environment, or the process of farming. Some members feel that the newsletter is a very good way to connect with the CSA. Mitch talks about his most recent newsletter:

The newsletter that [the farmers] do...has a lot of thoughtful kinds of discussions. [One farmer's article] about the fall coming and life changes from the summer to the fall, I was reading it again last night. It's quite beautiful. I guess I just think that [the CSA] is just bringing people together...

Mitch refers to bringing people together in both a literal and figurative sense. Literally he talks about the community workdays and the time people spend there. He also talks about spending more time with his family, cooking and eating meals. Figuratively, Mitch talks a lot about people of the community and the world coming together and living in more natural and sustainable ways. Mitch says the newsletter is “beautiful” and indicates that he reads the newsletters several times. He treats the newsletters as poetry or works of art that are meant to inspire, rather than just inform the reader. For Mitch, the newsletter is a backbone for staying connected to the CSA and the farm, and the food.

Some CSA members treat the newsletter in a more mundane way and focus on the practical information they provide. Sandra gives a much more literal example of how CSA members use the formal information. Below she talks about her experience going to pick up her produce at the farm:

I might have an idea of something based on the e-mail that they send us. They send us what we have this week and I might have a recipe in mind, so I want to make sure I get rhubarb or something.

Formal communication is a way for CSA members to fantasize about what they will receive when they finally go for their pick-up day. This anticipation and prolonged fantasy about recipes and types of produce contributes to members’ excitement about the CSA. Through the printed material and formal communications, new CSA members learn what it means to belong to a CSA. It also gives members an opportunity to ask questions, talk to farmers and other CSA members, and to learn about the food they are eating.

The most formal way information is distributed about a specific CSA is through the website, and if there is no website, through the brochure. This source typically has information about what a CSA is and how their CSA works, as well as information about the values and



goals of the CSA. Often it also includes personal information about the farmers and historical information about the farm. This information is available to CSA members and the general public alike.

These opportunities for relationship building not only include the printed material from the CSA, but also include formally organized contact with the CSA. This contact is achieved through interactions at the weekly pick-up, through organized workdays on the farm, and through events that are organized on the farm. Most CSAs have three to four workdays when they invite all their members to the farm to work for a few hours (usually planting or weeding), followed by a potluck or lunch. Most CSAs also have an organized potluck or party for all members at least once during the summer months.

Informal information exchange also takes place in the form of casual conversations with the farmers, volunteers, or other members of the CSA. Perhaps the greatest source of informal education that CSA members have is through their own interactions and experiments with the produce they receive each week.

### ***Informal Interactions***

Informal interactions are extremely important for identification formation, and often facilitate the most profound education new members experience. Talking with other people, whether with other members, friends, or family, about the CSA helps solidify the individuals' feelings about the CSA. Several members said they had talked to family members about how to prepare certain vegetables, or had talked to friends about what it's like to be part of a CSA. The opportunity to talk casually with the farmers also seems to change and strengthen the members' convictions about the importance of their involvement with the CSA.

Tony was surprised by his reaction to the farmers at the CSA, as he explains below. This quotation is from our first interview, when he had had contact with the CSA for only three weeks.

Tony, time 1

[The first time] I saw farmer Tim there, I recognized his picture from the website. I was gonna shake his hand, because like uh, previous to my experience with the CSA I always kind of imagined farm work as, like you know, work that people would do who couldn't do anything else. You know I had a prejudice against menial work because I am a professional, and I've come to realize that farmers are heroes because they feed people. I think that not too long ago, like a hundred years ago a lot of people were involved in farming in this country, and you know the post WWII advent of factory farming has reduced that to almost two percent. And I've come to realize that it's a really really important skill to have. And so, I kind of would like to talk to the people who work there more to find out what they know, because I've come to realize just how valuable their knowledge is, because everybody needs to eat.

The speed at which Tony changed his opinions is startling. When questioned about this, he responded that, "Yeah, I'd say that's an accurate...it just kind of snowballed..." Tony starts to connect with his CSA almost immediately. His emotional reference to farmers as "heroes" shows the depth of his change of attitude. Heroes are people who are noted for their "feats of courage or nobility of purpose" (Pickett 2001). It is interesting to note that Tony talks about farmers as heroes and in the next sentence he refers to WWII, a subject often associated with heroes, (i.e. war heroes). Often people feel indebted to heroes and want to thank them and be near them. These feelings may lead to a desire to identify with this type of person. It is not that Tony wants to be a farmer, but that he wants to be near that greatness, and be associated with such a hero.

Tony enjoys the casual encounters he has with the farmers and people who work at the farm and in the shop. During the second interview he reiterates his enjoyment of the formal and casual parts of the relationship. Tony looks forward his formally scheduled pick-up time, the

produce and the newsletter, and he enjoys the casual contact that happens while he is there.

Tony, time 2

I have to say in all honesty that I enjoy driving out to the farm and the newsletter and going through the vegetables and seeing what they've got. Going to the store and talking to people...[seeing] interesting things for sale. It was kind of fun. I was never a big cook you know. I like to eat more than I like to cook, but sometimes you can find fun things to do. I have a sister-in-law that's a chef and I can call her up and say what do you do with this thing and she will give me advice and she is all happy talking about it. I will call my mom and dad. They are knowledgeable about these things too. "You can do this and you can make that." "Oh, that's a good idea." I found it less complicated than I thought it would be.

Tony demonstrates a few different relationships that have formed and/or strengthened since he joined the CSA. Tony highlights casual relationships that take place as a result of the CSA, such as chatting with someone in the store, or having a reason to call his parents or sister-in-law for quick information about how to prepare his produce. and he highlights how the CSA facilitates other casual contact. His relationships with his parents and his sister-in-law have changed since he began calling them regularly to get information about the produce he receives. He also learned that cooking is not as scary or difficult as he previously thought.

Informal interactions with other CSA members occur at the pick-up location. This usually takes the form of cooking ideas or instructions, or opinions about a particular type of vegetable. This type of contact also happens at home through discussions about what to make for dinner, or how to cook a particular vegetable, or trying to come up with creative ways to use a particular ingredient that has been abundant for several weeks.

There are many opportunities for informal interactions to take place between CSA members and the actual produce. Because this produce is not pre-washed, pre-cut and ready to be used, members end up spending a lot of time preparing the produce for use. Members also spend time looking up recipes online, calling friends or family, or looking in cookbooks in their

quest to learn how to use the produce they have in their kitchens.

The private care, preparation, and exploration in the kitchen contribute to a personal relationship with the produce, which is then reinforced through the informal interactions and through the formally organized contact. Mitch is 50, married and the father of two teenagers. He was the one in his household that pushed to join the CSA. He is very knowledgeable about sustainable agriculture, and talked in each of our meetings about how he could get his children to think it was important. Mitch has spent a lot of time in the past year thinking about how he allocates his time in terms of his job and his home life. Spending time with his family and his social community is very important to him. This is a theme that came up during each of our meetings.

In this quotation, Mitch talks about his experiences when he goes to the farm to pick up his produce.

Mitch, time 3

I really loved talking with [the owner of the farm], so I like running into her. I have enjoyed talking with [the farmers] about just the farming stuff...So in terms of relationships for me and other people that has been nice. We [my family] have actually done more, I would say, looking at cookbooks during the summer than we would have otherwise, quite a bit actually, and then experimenting in cooking. We like to cook together or at least one of us likes to hang out in the kitchen while the other is cooking and have a glass of wine or something. And there has been more of that and that's good, that's helping. That's a good point of sharing some time together, so that's another way that has happened in that way.

The casual relationships that Mitch talks about happen both on the farm and at home. Taking time to cook and “hang out” in the kitchen is important to Mitch. This behavior seems to be a barometer he uses to measure the quality of his life and assess how he spends his time. During our talks, Mitch often referred to the CSA as a catalyst for his noticing how he is spending his time, his wanting to cook more again.

New CSA members learn a wide range of things through the casual relationships and encounters that occur through or because of the CSA. They connect with farmers and other CSA members, they learn about farming and food supply issues, how to prepare food, and they learn new recipes. These experiences all contribute to the new member's greater understanding of the CSA and help to deepen the relationship towards identification.

### **Personal exploration**

The new CSA members all had a chance to explore their produce both in public, at the farm, and privately, in their own homes. This produce does not come ready to use, rather it must be washed, cut, prepared. This produce demands attention and new members have ample opportunity to try new things. Several members talked about getting information about new or strange vegetables from family members or on a web site. Mary said her family tries everything raw before cooking it. Mary's daughter formed a "special bond" with the CSA. Below Mary talks about her daughter pushing the experimentation and level of cooking they tried.

Mary, time 3

It was kind of the earthy environment. You walk in and pick what you want from the crates, as opposed to shelving – you know, a very sterile display. [My daughter] kind of has the potential to be one of these earth mother kind of people in a way, so I think she enjoyed that. I'll tell you something else that she would occasionally do. They would have a giveaway bin and you can have all the tomatoes you want out of this bin. Oh, perfect example, you can have all the little tidbit apples, you know the uglies that are even too small to eat, that you want. So we took a bunch of them and went home and then got a recipe for apple butter and she made her own apple butter. So she really kind of got into that process and she really enjoyed that process. I think she took a lot of pride in putting stuff up and things like that. The green peppers were another example. They were giving away for all these peppers and tomatoes. They had these tomatoes that weren't very pretty and we froze those and made salsa out of them. So she really got into that.

Mary talks several times about how her daughter “bonded” to the CSA. Going to pick up produce from the CSA became an event her daughter would not miss. Mary prides herself in the way she “puts up” food for later consumption, and in the above quotation she demonstrates that her daughter is excited to do the same. They freeze vegetables together, and even learn how to make apple butter. These are new experiences for Mary and her daughter. Through these experiences Mary and her daughter develop a relationship with the food. The “earth mother” daughter rescues the “uglies,” the apples that would not be used if they had not been taken by someone like Mary’s daughter, is able to see the beauty in them and give them another life in the form of apple butter. Had she not taken the tiny apples, they would have been put in the compost bin. This act of rescuing the unwanted food is a demonstration of self-reliance that Mary and her daughter can take pride in. Through these experiences, they both grow more attached to the CSA.

Some CSA members experiment with food in the way that Mary and her family did. Mary already cooked a lot; the experimentation she did was with a particular type of vegetable, or making a certain recipe, like apple butter. Other new members, like Emily, experience a more radical shift in their relationship with food. The way Emily plans meals has completely changed since she joined the CSA. She has become much less rigid and much more free-flowing and experimental with her habits.

Emily, time 2

I am cooking more. I think I’ve switched a lot from looking at a recipe and thinking, “Okay, if I make this recipe I need to go get this, this and that.” Just going to the farm and seeing what looks good and what they have a lot of. They send out an e-mail and say what they are going to have and there are surprises or something that looks really good that I wasn’t prepared for. And I’m just kind of standing there in the grocery store going, “Well, what will go with that well? I need to cook those.” I look at the recipe from the newsletter, which I usually have to modify because a lot of them call for cheese and oil and things my husband won’t eat, so it’s always a challenge. I think it’s just a switch

from going from the recipe first to getting the ingredients and then thinking about what the recipe is going to be...[Before] I would look at the flyer and see what's on sale and plan what I was going to get. It's a little more fun to just say, "Okay, here's some Swiss chard. I don't know what to do with that, but I'm going to get a ton of it."

Emily has become more flexible in her cooking habits. She is now willing and excited to modify recipes to accommodate her husband's needs, and she is able to start cooking based on what she has in the house, and what looks good. She also reflects on this new style of cooking being more enjoyable than her old, rigid ways.

Personal exploration comes not only in the acts of trying new recipes and approaching food in a different way, but also in the desire to do so. The new CSA members all talked about experimenting with vegetables they had never seen before, and actively searching for recipes and for ways to use and store these new ingredients.

## **Education**

### ***What are new CSA members learning?***

New CSA members learn four types of things: food information; information about the environmental impact of their actions and choices; information about the food system; and information about themselves.

#### *Food information*

The new CSA members interviewed for this research talked over and over about the new types of vegetables they encountered, whether it was a garlic scape, celery root, watermelon radish, rutabaga, or a bunch of kale. New members talked about trying and learning how to prepare new types of vegetables, and when those vegetables were in season. New members also made many comparisons between getting their produce from a CSA and getting their produce

from a supermarket.

Below Tony talks about trying new types of produce he had never heard of.

Tony, time 1

Well, I have to say like I've never been a big vegetable eater. And I think that now that I've had the chance to try produce from a farm, I think that the quality issue had a lot to do with it. Um you know everything is fresh and everything just tastes much better than what you would get in a supermarket. And uh, another thing I like is the quantities, like one reason I'm hesitant to try new vegetables in a supermarket, is that you know they seem to be packaged for families and not individuals. And I don't know if I want to, like, buy Swiss chard without having tried it first, maybe I wouldn't like it, and I just wasted my money on it. What I like about the CSA is you can get smaller quantities of things, so you can experiment. You know, I never knew what a scape was, but after getting a brief description of one I figured, well I'll try a little bit of scape, you know, and so the portion sizes, I think are one thing I really like about it.

Tony attributes his lifelong dislike of vegetables to the poor quality of the produce he was buying. Because he has formed the opinion that things taste better when he gets them from the farm, and because he is able to take a small amount home with him, he is willing to try many new things that he can get through his CSA. Emily also talks about the difference in quality between food from her CSA and food from the supermarket.

Emily, time 2

It's made me think differently when I go to the supermarket. If they have something that's local I will definitely buy that before I buy something that's from California or Florida, especially with lettuce, which [my CSA hasn't] had lettuce lately. It's not in season anymore. When I get a head of lettuce at the supermarket, I almost stop buying it because when I would get it home it would go bad like the next day. It would be all slimy and disgusting. Then when I get the lettuce at [my CSA] it would last like a week in my refrigerator even if I don't touch it. I think before I would be like these are cucumbers and these are cucumbers, so I'm going to buy the ones that are cheaper. Whereas now, if they are local they will probably taste better and they will probably last longer. It's really something that I believe in and it's not using a big truck to get it here...I think the taste is a lot stronger...I think the local stuff too I'm more likely to either eat raw or cook really plain whereas something that's come a longer distance and maybe not as flavorful I'm more likely to do a lot of cooking and try to add a lot more things to it.



Emily learned about the freshness of food by how long it will keep in her refrigerator and how it tastes. She sees such a large contrast between lettuce purchased at the grocery store and lettuce from the CSA that she threatens not to buy lettuce at the grocery store anymore. Emily now puts great weight on food that is locally grown and not transported long distances. Learning about different vegetables, storage issues, and issues associated with freshness and shipping are typical topics new CSA members talk about. This type of learning is clearly tied in with the casual relationships and encounters facilitated by the CSA, and with their personal exploration with the CSA produce.

### *Environmental impact*

Through greater awareness of their purchasing habits, new CSA members become more aware of the environmental impact of their actions and purchases. Several members talked about the importance of keeping farmland and open spaces, and their belief that by supporting a CSA they are contributing to the long-term viability of their community.

Mary, time 1

I really respect people who farm around here. I mean I think that people could easily sell these pieces of land to developers, I mean, look where we're sitting on, and I really do respect folks that do this for a living, and uh, I like the idea that these things [CSAs] support the local farmers, and I feel good about it, and that might be because I'm sitting on old farm land and I feel guilty. I mean, I don't know, but uh, but for me I think it makes me feel very good to support these people who I think are so important.

Mary recognizes the importance of farmland and open space for a community, and she freely admits her guilt about living in a large house that is built on old farmland. Her involvement with the CSA helps to assuage some of the guilt she feels. She repeatedly talked about her support of local farmers as having a large "feel-good factor." She also talks about

farmers as heroic, noting her respect for farmers and those who choose not to sell farmland to developers.

### *Food system*

Learning about and caring about the food system was very new for most of the new CSA members, although Tony's main reason for joining the CSA was because he was concerned about peak oil (Staff 2005). New members were very interested in the real price of food including the cost of fuel for shipping and storing, and ultimately were willing to pay more for the produce than "whatever is on sale at Wal-Mart." One theme that surfaced repeatedly for parents was having the opportunity for their children to learn more about where their food really comes from (i.e. NOT from a store), how things are grown (e.g. Brussels sprouts), and what types of produce are available locally and seasonally.

#### *Sarah, time 3*

Being able to show the kids where the food comes from and being able to have them help me pick it out and being able to help out [were some of my favorite things about the CSA]. The kids go in on the workdays and weed the asparagus and stuff.

Showing her children how food is grown and what really goes into it is very important to Sarah. Her kids get to experience collecting produce on distribution days. They also get exposure to the fields where the food is grown, including the reality of weeds. Tony talks more about the supportive relationships that form in a local food system.

#### *Tony, time 2*

This kind of goes back to something I thought about at our first interview. I said if I'm there for them, they will be there for me and I wasn't sure how to explain that, but I think that the CSA farmers in general provide food security for the community and the CSA member is probably providing money up front to the CSA to provide financial security

for the CSA. So I think I would be a friend to [the CSA] and we would have a mutually beneficial relationship. We would both need each other.

Tony is demonstrating his level of embeddedness in the CSA. He has formed a real connection with the farm, the CSA, and the people there. He is committed to supporting farmers in his area to ensure food security to the local community, and is willing to pay for that. He sees this relationship as a mutually supportive friendship, not a sterile business transaction. Becoming more aware of the food systems that they are involved in is something that all new CSA members go through. Over time, they learn more about issues surrounding the global food system, and in general, they become more excited and dedicated to the local food system they have recently joined.

### *Personal growth*

Through the nine months that these members were followed, all of them went through personal changes, both large and small. Several members talked about enjoying vegetables, and realizing that when they had good-quality produce it was actually very easy to prepare. Tony went from not enjoying vegetables and eating a candy bar for a snack at work, to liking vegetables, eating vegetables for his snacks, realizing he could and should lose weight, and appreciating being part of a local food community.

Tony, time 3

[Being part of the CSA] kind of made me realize for a long time they [my eating habits] were pretty bad. You know just personally I got to the point where I would say, "I'm fat, why bother. I may as well just eat whatever anytime and I'm not going to get any skinnier." I've come to realize that garbage-in, garbage-out. It's worth it to eat better quality food...I'm forty and what I do now is going to affect me later in life."

Mitch went through major changes at work and talks about the CSA as a catalyst for his decision to spend less time at work and more time with his family – cooking, enjoying and appreciating life.

Mitch, time 3

As long as you are being a good steward in your life...It's a result of the consequences of the way that we fill our time up and that's what it's about. It's about accepting that you want to be a little less busy by knocking a little bit more off next year. That's kind of the goal...I just feel if I'm going to be running around that much, let me be sure I'm running on the right things. I don't mind running, but I really want to be sure that I'm much more careful about what I'm running off to and the consequences of running off. It's been an interesting time for me... And the CSA has helped to keep that in front of me a little bit in an interesting way. I see that as something I need to be working more on... just in reminding you about the importance of slowing down and being a part of something bigger than here and it's been good in that way.

Mitch uses the term, “being a good steward,” which is often used in the sustainable agriculture community in the context of being a good steward of a piece of land, as opposed to owning land. Mitch uses the term to refer to how he chooses to spend his time. His involvement in the CSA has pointed out how much he runs around, and he has become aware of wanting to “slow down” and recognize himself as part of a bigger picture. From our first meeting, Mitch talked about how busy he was. During the third interview was the only time he reflected on how he spent his time, or expressed a real desire to become less busy.

Before she joined the CSA, Emily did not really care about food and never ate dinner with her husband. She now spends a lot more time cooking and preparing meals and eats with her husband almost every night.

Emily, time 3

[My husband] was never home for dinner so we didn't eat together...We eat a lot more together now.... Before we joined the CSA he had gone on this really drastic diet and he wouldn't try new things and [was] really conscious about what he was eating and a lot of his food was processed. I didn't really want to eat that. I don't care how cheap it is or

how fat free it is. It's not food. At the time, I was still a little bit more eating potatoes, so we were eating completely different things. So I think he's kind of opened up his diet a little bit more. He will try more things that I'm having. I think my cooking has resolved to be more things he will eat because I'm experimenting a lot more and have a whole new range of things to cook... today if I have a little break at work I'm looking at recipes or something. I liked to cook, but I'd do it once every two weeks and now it's like just more incorporated into my life.

Over and over Emily reinforces how much more flexible she has become since she joined the CSA, and how much her cooking and eating habits have changed. She and her husband have been able to compromise with their diets and eat dinner together now. She also cooks every day and spends her free-time looking up recipes online.

Not only are new CSA members learning about their CSA, local and seasonal produce, and the environmental and structural issues surrounding the food they eat, they are also realizing things about themselves, and reassessing their own relationships with their jobs, families, and community.

### **Consequences of Identification**

Previous research points to one main consequence of identification: benefits to the organization. While benefits to the organization are very important, and provide managerial relevance to the importance of research into identification, the research presented in this paper points to three additional consequences of identification. These are individual change; changes in the relationship of the member to the CSA; and changes in the relationship of the member to the wider community.

### ***Benefits to the organization***

Bhattacharya and Sen (2003) propose five consequences to organizations from consumer identification: company loyalty; company promotion; customer recruitment; resilience to negative information; and stronger claim on company (see Figure 2.1). These consequences can all be called benefits, aside from the equivocal consequence of consumers feeling a stronger claim on the company. The reason “stronger claim on the company” is labeled equivocal is that in addition to positive outcomes such as being more forgiving and trusting a company, when consumers feel a stronger claim on the company their expectations for the company could be higher, consumers could be more demanding and have higher expectations for the company. These five consequences are present in the CSA.

The majority of CSA members we interviewed heard about CSAs from a friend, and many reported talking to their friends about their CSA. CSA members were not overwhelmingly disappointed if they received one week of produce that was not great, or a few vegetables that were bad or had a bad spot on them. CSA members do feel a claim on the CSA, but in this case they are the stakeholders in the organization and it seems normal.

These CSA members revealed that there are consequences to identification that go beyond the five that were previously reported. These additional consequences include: individual behavioral changes and changes in the relationship the member has with the wider community, as well as towards the CSA. Promotion of the organization is a well-documented benefit of identification. Below, Sarah talks about how happy she was to be able to tell an old friend about her experience with the CSA.

Sarah, time 3

Well, it almost felt like a good deed to do it. You know it was good for me and good for the environment. I was talking with an old college friend. I graduated from college 25 years ago. Well, not quite that long, 21 years ago or something like that. He mentioned something about local produce and I said that I joined the CSA and he got really excited. He said, "Oh, I've been wanting to do that. What is it like?" He's in Cleveland. So that was neat. So yes, it's almost something to be proud of doing that and you feel really good about it.

Sarah is in the position of teaching others about her CSA and what it is like to be part of a CSA, and she also feels good that she was part of it. Most CSA members learn about CSAs from other members, so this type of informal promotion is very important to the health of the particular CSA, and to all CSAs, since most people have not been exposed to this model of buying produce before.

The CSA largely reaps the same organizational benefits from identification as those that have been documented previously. The new CSA members develop loyalty to the organization, and they are key promoters of and recruiters for the organization. CSA members who identify with the organization are resilient to negative information about the CSA, and to crop failures (i.e. small strawberry crop due to rain). These members feel a strong claim on the CSA; they feel like the investors that they realistically are.

Emily, time 3

I think the different way of interacting with the people who are supplying the things that you need rather than you hand somebody the cash and you get something. And feeling like you have a vested share in it. Like if we get weird weather I'm going, 'What is that going to do to the crops?' I'm not just like, 'Oh, they're having freezing weather out in California, so oranges are going to be more expensive.' I feel a lot more invested and can I get my oranges locally. 'If the weather is bad is that going to affect the crop differently?'

Emily demonstrates her connection to the CSA. She is concerned about crops when the weather is bad. This statement indicates that she is aware of the weather patterns, the crops that are growing at the farm, and what kind of weather is good for which crops. Emily also compares the feeling of purchasing produce locally and being aware of and invested in minutiae, like the weather, which she would not care about in such a tangible way if her food were traveling across the country. She makes the distinction between being concerned about the actual crops, and being concerned about the price of oranges.

Sandra compares the organic food she gets from the CSA to organic food that is available in “an average supermarket” and at “Wal-mart.” She believes the quality of the food from the farm will be far superior.

Sandra, time 2

But the intangibles I love it and the food. I am spoiled now. Not that the food is spoiled, but the food is so beautiful. It is difficult to buy anything else...a regular supermarket, an average supermarket, doesn't have the quality that I have now ... Well, I have in my refrigerator a beautiful mix of little baby heads of Romaine bunches. They are not round, sort of oval and beautiful sort of purply- green and they are lovely. They are fresh.... Yes, absolutely. You know Wal-Mart is going to carry organics and that's great in a lot of ways. That's really wonderful news in a lot of ways. But I know enough about Wal-Mart to know that what they'll have vs. what I can get [from the CSA] are going to be worlds apart. They are going to be a very different product in terms of quality.

Sandra qualifies her statements about Wal-mart carrying organics. She says it is “great in a lot of ways,” implying that in some ways it is not great. When she talks about produce from the CSA she is excited, but when she talks about produce from a supermarket she seems skeptical about its origins and its quality. These sorts of feelings and comments about CSAs do benefit the organization. These customers have a strong preference for getting their produce from their CSA, over getting it from the grocery store. These vocal and articulate preferences directly translate into benefits to the organization.



## **Individual change**

A body of anecdotal evidence exists, as well as a few articles, stating that individuals change their behavior as a result of being a CSA member (Stagl 2002). The data collected for this paper suggest that this is true.

As new CSA members develop identification with the organization, they experience personal changes. One reason research into personal values has largely been abandoned by marketing research is that understanding personal values does not shed light on how individuals behave (Bagozzi et al. 2003). The clear changes in behavior that new CSA members display as they develop identification with the organization may have important and wide-reaching implications in a variety of settings. After becoming a CSA member, individuals are more likely to try new things, more likely to purchase organic food in a supermarket, that they are more aware of issues with the food system in general, that they form new associations with bad spots or bugs on CSA produce, and, perhaps most striking, that they seek out opportunities to purchase locally-made items. It should be noted that this last behavioral change is in opposition to the Bhattacharya et al. (1995) finding that engagement in similar organizations made art museum members less likely to identify with the art museum.

Below, Tony (time 2) talks about changes to his eating and shopping habits, and his ideas about produce in general, since he joined the CSA:

I stopped buying apples in the supermarket because I thought the apples taste bad. Then I got apples from the CSA and I'm like, 'This is what an apple should taste like.' The same thing with tomatoes; I was never a huge fan of tomatoes. I get them from the CSA and I'm like, 'How come I haven't been buying tomatoes all along?' And it's because they are not as good in the supermarket as they would be from the CSA...It's funny, I used to think these things [locally-made items] were expensive, but now that I think about what goes into making cheese or yogurt it seems like the prices in stores are

artificially low and I guess it makes sense because Kraft has a whole yogurt factory whereas I'm buying yogurt made on somebody's farm. I decided I'm willing to pay for the quality and it isn't made in a factory somewhere...then I practically stopped buying meat in the supermarket...You're never too sure where your stuff is coming from in the supermarket.

Tony is clear that food tastes better when it comes from the CSA. He also makes the point that locally-made products are worth the price because of the quality and the fact that his money is going to a real person in a real town down the road. Since joining the CSA, Tony is buying locally-made products, and refusing to buy certain products from the supermarket. His attitudes about the price and the cost of the products have also changed dramatically. Below, Sandra talks about her shift in what she sees as "wholesome."

Sandra, time 3

Well, kind of in a way that I guess the most concrete example is this notion of the pantry, the food on our shelves that looked so wholesome to me 6-8 months ago doesn't. A can of kidney beans, perfectly healthy food to have, but now I'm remembering some of those things they use in the lining of cans are endocrine destructors, aren't they? And those beans where exactly did they come from? They are not really organic and they came from far away. The food miles and the global warming thing here it is; it's happening...Why does food have to come from California? It's nuts. It's stupid when they could come from my back yard or they could come from the farmer, and we certainly have a farming community here. So I'm just intrigued by trying to match those things up. So where do I get them? If I don't grow them where do I get them?...the local food piece is the new kind of "ah ha" moment, but I've always cared about food.

During our third interview, Sandra talked a lot about eating locally-produced food. She said that she and her husband have vowed to make as much of their diet locally-grown as possible during the next year. She is already doing research into the different types of products farmers in the area grow and produce.

New CSA members demonstrated individual change in varying degrees. For some it was buying different products at the supermarket, or eating a different kind of mid-morning snack.

Others completely changed the way they purchase, prepare, and think about food. Several new CSA members talked about the shift they made from thinking that local food meant expensive “boutique food,” as Tony said, to understanding where their money was going and feeling good about the tangible and intangible benefits to buying local products.

### **Relationship of Member to CSA**

Through their identification with the CSA, new members experience a strengthening of community values, the values expressed by farmers and older members of CSAs. They also experience feelings of increased ownership and greater embeddedness in the CSA.

Tony talks about his very rapid shift in thinking about the CSA. Here he talks about how his membership in the CSA has changed from being an issue about having access to local food to really wanting to support his local community. He talks about buying other locally-produced items from the shop at the farm.

Tony, time 1

[Joining the CSA] kind of started out with a concern about peak oil but now it's kind of mutated into 'well, I'm getting better quality food at a price that I think is comparable to what I'd be paying in a supermarket.' I also feel good about contributing to the local economy. Like sometimes I look at the price of the block of cheese I'm buying in the harvest store and I'm like, man, this is five bucks. But, you know, it's going to some lady in Milesburg and not to like, ADM. So it's kind of worth it to me because, um, if I'm helping my community, I'm helping myself... So it did start out as a concern with oil depletion, but now it's sort of become, I think a quality of life issue.

Tony is aware of where his money is going, whether it goes to a mega-company or an individual who lives just a few miles away. His concern has shifted from the abstract issue of “oil depletion,” to a more concrete issue of “contributing to the local economy,” while purchasing things he wants anyway.

Mitch brings up a different way new members connect to the CSA. While Tony referred to logistics, economics, and community, Mitch talks, very personally, about the details of the community and what they mean to him.

Mitch, time 2

The conversations in the field with strangers more or less...and you are there in the field for four hours side by side doing something, sweating together and discussing interesting things together...I think about that connectedness, and in a time where there is such a lack of appreciation for diversity and ethnicity and culture, language, religion and everything; the CSA is a garden for me where you can somehow reconcile the seemingly hopeless mirage of things that we see in the newspaper every day at the national level and international level; where you start to feel like there is hope, and you see that there is hope, for me at least, at the local level, with something like this...

The CSA is a place of hope and connection for Mitch. At the CSA, during the work days, he was able to reconcile the information he hears and sees in the newspapers every day. For Mitch, the CSA is a place where the negativity of the media is replaced by the experience of human-ness and life that comes from a garden, a community, interesting discussions, and diversity. As members develop identification with the CSA, their relationship to the CSA changes. New members begin to focus on relationships and on being a contributing part of the community.

### **Relationship of the member to the wider community**

Members in the CSA develop a greater understanding of the food system, and how they fit in with the wider world. They recognize their in-group status as people who are concerned about their community and support their actions and desires with their money. These new members also see the CSA as a place to integrate their personal values with their shopping experiences. Buying produce through the CSA takes away any worries or anxiety new members

had or developed, as they began to identify with the CSA and to learn more about the food system. These anxieties tend to be related to lack of trust of food that is labeled “organic” in the supermarket, concern about the freshness or nutritional content of food, being concerned about workers’ conditions or wages, and concern about environmental issues with growing, transporting and storing food. Here Sarah talks about understanding what her money is paying for and how she feels about it.

Sarah, time 3

Just knowing that the farmer is getting a living wage. I mean with produce grown in Mexico or whatever which some stuff sold here is you don’t know. Yes, like I said [being a CSA member] something you can be proud of, so the feeling you’re doing something good for the environment and for your local community and your health. Those are all positive things.

Sarah does not want her money to go towards things she does not support. Her involvement with the CSA is a way for her to see the effect of her dollars and be more aware of the effect of her choices – here it is a living wage for the farmers, sustainable farming practices, and community and personal health. She is proud of her membership in the CSA.

Emily has reconfigured the way she thinks about buying, preparing, and consuming food. The changes she has gone through go beyond her CSA and touch many parts of her life. She relates her experience buying meat directly from a meat farmer to going to a fancy restaurant.

Emily, time 3

I guess I’m starting to think about the way I pay for food in general a little bit differently. Sometimes I buy meat at the farmer’s market in Boalsburg and before when I bought meat I always looked at 99 cents a pound or \$1.95 a pound, whether it’s good percentage fat or not, that is how I picked my meat. But to actually go and talk to the farmer about which cut of meat would be best for this or talking about how the meat is cut. ‘It supposed to be cut like this and it was cut a little bit differently and here is how you want to prepare it.’ I stopped thinking I’m paying \$4.00 a pound for pork chops or something from the freezer. Now I’m paying more for it, but I understand more about how to prepare it and where it came from and it’s going to be better meat. So, I think a year ago

if I looked at the price for the food I was getting I would have said, “That’s not a really good value.” But having gone through [the CSA] and just knowing that I’m paying not only for the food, but the whole experience that goes with it. If you go to a restaurant and you have a really nice meal and the atmosphere is good and there is nice music and the waiter talks to you and when you look at the bill and you go, “I spent \$200 on dinner for two.” But if you count the whole evening experience then it’s worth it...Right? Dinner has become a lot more, not just what are we ordering out? What kind of specials are there in the restaurants in town? It’s a lot more like this is what we’re eating and what’s the nutritional value if it’s prepared this way? There is a lot more thought that goes into it.

Emily demonstrates the increased thought and appreciation she has developed for food. She states that the way she thinks about paying for it is different, but it seems that her whole relationship with the food is different. Whereas she used to be focused on price and the food, she now seems focused on the experience, the preparation, and the enjoyment of the food.

## DISCUSSION

Our data show that identification formation happens over time, through education that occurs within relationships. As CSA members learn about their CSA, their farmers, and the food system, they grow to identify with the CSA. The opportunities CSA members have for formal and informal contact with the CSA and the produce are the heart of how identification forms.

This research shows that many CSA members adopt their membership in the CSA as a personal character trait, and a way they relate to the world. Over and over again, each member talks about feeling good about being part of the CSA, about changes in personal relationships and lifestyle choices, and about future food choices and cooking plans. The new CSA members idealize the CSA, and use the metaphors of sustainability, time, and seasonality to look at their life and work choices.

## **Identification with what?**

Scholars have suggested that one difference between identification and commitment is that identification is organization-specific, i.e. (Ashforth and Mael 1989; Dutton et al. 1994). For example, an individual might be committed to the values of a company, but they would feel no psychic pain if they left that organization for another organization that supports the same values.

The question remains here: What are these CSA members identifying with? Is it with the farm; with their CSA; with their farmer; with the business model of CSA? Even though new CSA members do form personal relationships with the particular CSA to which they belong, as well as to that farmer, that piece of land, and other CSA members, it is possible that if these members were to move to a different area, they would seek out a new CSA to join. Because of this, it is possible that these new CSA members have identified with the CSA model, in addition their particular CSA. If this is so, these CSA members should be able to transfer their identification to other CSAs. Of course, this is an empirical matter, which deserves more attention in future research.

The interviews conducted for the research in Essay 1 were with more tenured CSA members. Many of these members have moved to different places and joined several different CSAs. These more experienced CSA members demonstrate identification with CSA, but do not seem to have experienced emotional suffering from their moves and the new CSAs they have joined. Rather than dwell on other CSAs they had been members of in the past, the more tenured CSA members expressed excitement about being a member at their current CSA, and being able to access fresh produce.

Another indication of identification is that individuals perceive they share a common fate

with the organization. This is true of CSA members. Not only do they perceive that their membership affects the local farm and the local community, they also perceive a common fate with other people in the world, such that they are concerned about oil, the environment, and food security and are changing their behaviors in response to their concern.

### **Contribution to theory**

This essay contributes to the literature on identification by taking an initial look at how consumers develop identification with organizations. Identification develops over time as consumers' individual values begin to mimic those of the organization, and as consumers' relationships with the organization strengthen and develop. The research presented here shows the importance of congruent values to identification formation. Congruent values have been missing from lists of antecedents to identification, and their importance to identification has not been addressed in previous literature. Over time, CSA members seem to adopt the values of the CSA as their own.

Another contribution is to highlight the importance of education to identification formation. Opportunities for education occur in formal and informal ways in the CSA, helping to build relationships in the CSA. As individual relationships to the organization develop, and the individual is exposed to new knowledge and has time to process that knowledge into his or her own life, the individual begins to identify with the organization.

The final contribution of this research is to identify the benefits that a consumer receives from identification. Yet, previous research only recorded benefits to the organization as an outcome of identification. The three additional outcomes of identification observed here contribute to theory and knowledge of identification. In addition to benefits to the organization,



individual change, changes in the relationship of the member to the organization, and changes in the relationship of the member to the wider community are also observed and discussed. Each additional outcome of identification has significant meaning for the individual and for the organization. As the new CSA members become more embedded in the organization, and as their values grow in congruence to those of the organization, the members do become more focused on how their actions affect their well-being and the well-being of the community.

### **Future directions**

Three important areas of research that stem from this paper are investigation into other value-based consumption communities, alternative relationships that exist between producers and consumers, and events that may sever identification. For example, do conflicts that are based on individual values result in faster disintegration of the relationship than other types of conflict?

The proposed model of identification formation should be tested in different circumstances, with different types of organizations. The importance and development of value congruence should also be explored further to see if it is possible for identification to form when values are not congruent. Along those lines, the source of the values of the organization should be examined. In the case of CSAs, the organization's values come from the farmers and are very personal and accessible. However, in different settings, the values of an organization may come from a board or a corporate office, and thus be less personal and accessible, and may change the ways identification forms.

Individual change as a result of identification should not be overlooked as a striking outcome of identification. Not only could individual changes be the key to greater insights into

what consumers want in a product or organization, but this information also implies that the ways in which consumers relate to organizations actually affect the consumers' decisions in a broader sense than previously thought. For example, the relationship consumers have to a gym may affect other behaviors and attitudes the consumers have. If consumers identify with their gym, it could affect the clothing they buy, the music they listen to, the type of food they eat and where they purchase that food, their daily routine, and indeed their personal goals and values.

The kinds of exchange interactions that individuals want when they make value-based consumption choices are not well understood. Investigation into these types of exchange relationships will become more necessary as individuals are given more opportunities to purchase products in ways that are aligned with their personal value systems. Research into the types of relationships consumers want with the people or organizations they use would be extremely helpful in beginning to understand what an ideal purchasing situation looks like for many individuals, especially when it comes to value-based purchase decisions and lifestyle choices.

As the number and variety of choices consumers have increases, it becomes more necessary to understand what an ideal situation for consumers really looks like. Is the ideal situation a low-cost store with a faceless cashier, or has the ideal situation changed to include the relationships that are built during exchange relationships? This rich and complex area of research is filled with nuances that would benefit both consumers and organizations if better understood, and deserves much more attention.

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Table 2.1 Demographic Information and Reasons for Joining CSA

Name	Age	Rel. Status	Kids at home	Education	Profession	Household Income	Primary reason for joining CSA
Emily	29	Married	0	MA	Librarian	64k	Wanted to support her community
Mary	42	Married	2	MD, MBA, PhD	Medical Administrator	Over 200k	Wanted to support local farmers
Mitch	50	Married	2	PhD	Professor	120k	Wanted to support sustainable agriculture
Sandra	36	Married	0	BS	Freelance Writer/Editor	30k	Wanted fresh vegetables
Sarah	42	Single	2	BA	Manager in Human Services	25k	Concerned about having vegetables around
Tony	39	Single	0	BA	Engineer	60-90k	Concerned about peak oil

Figure 2.1: Likelihood of Identification Formation from Bhattacharya and Sen (2003)

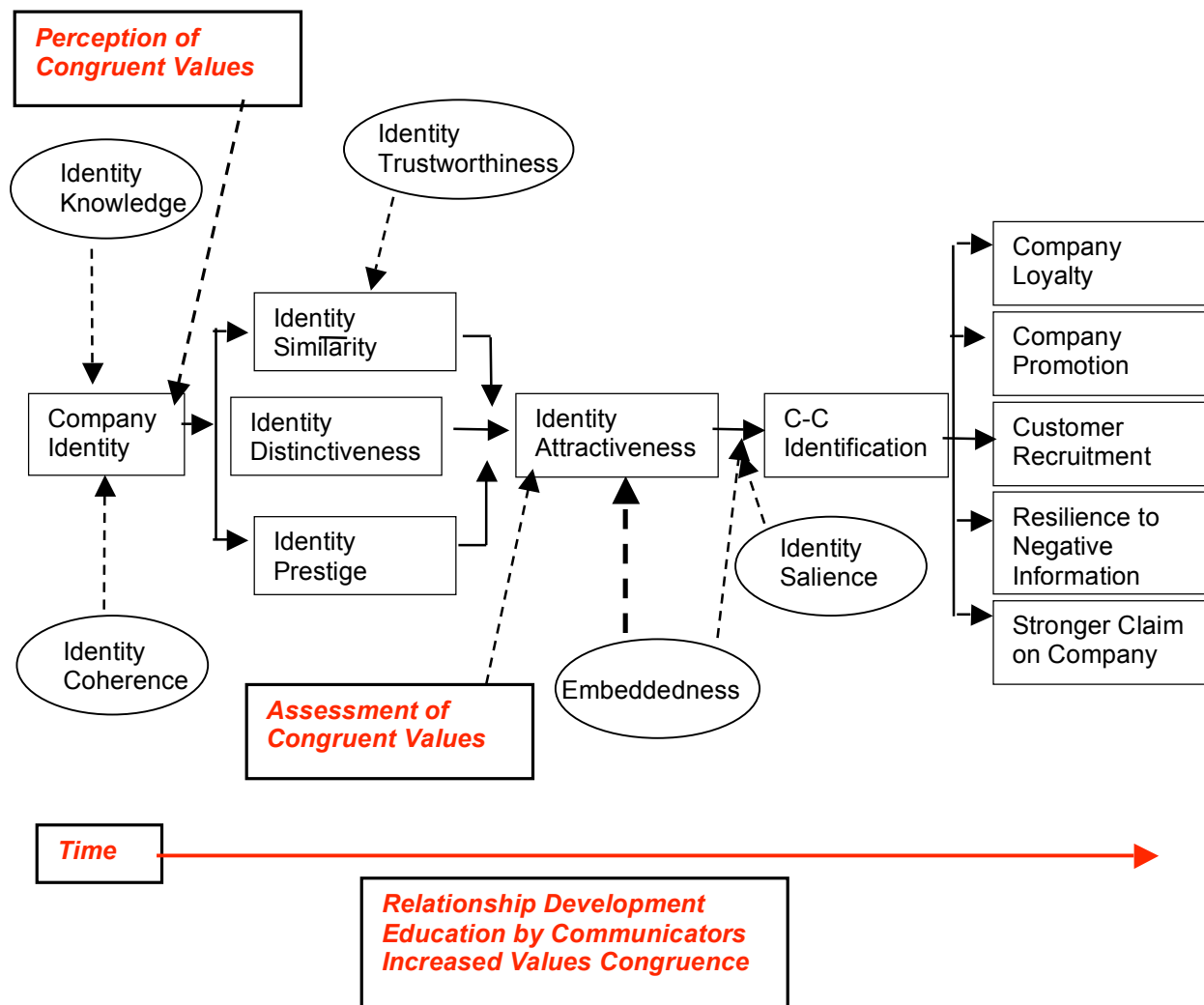
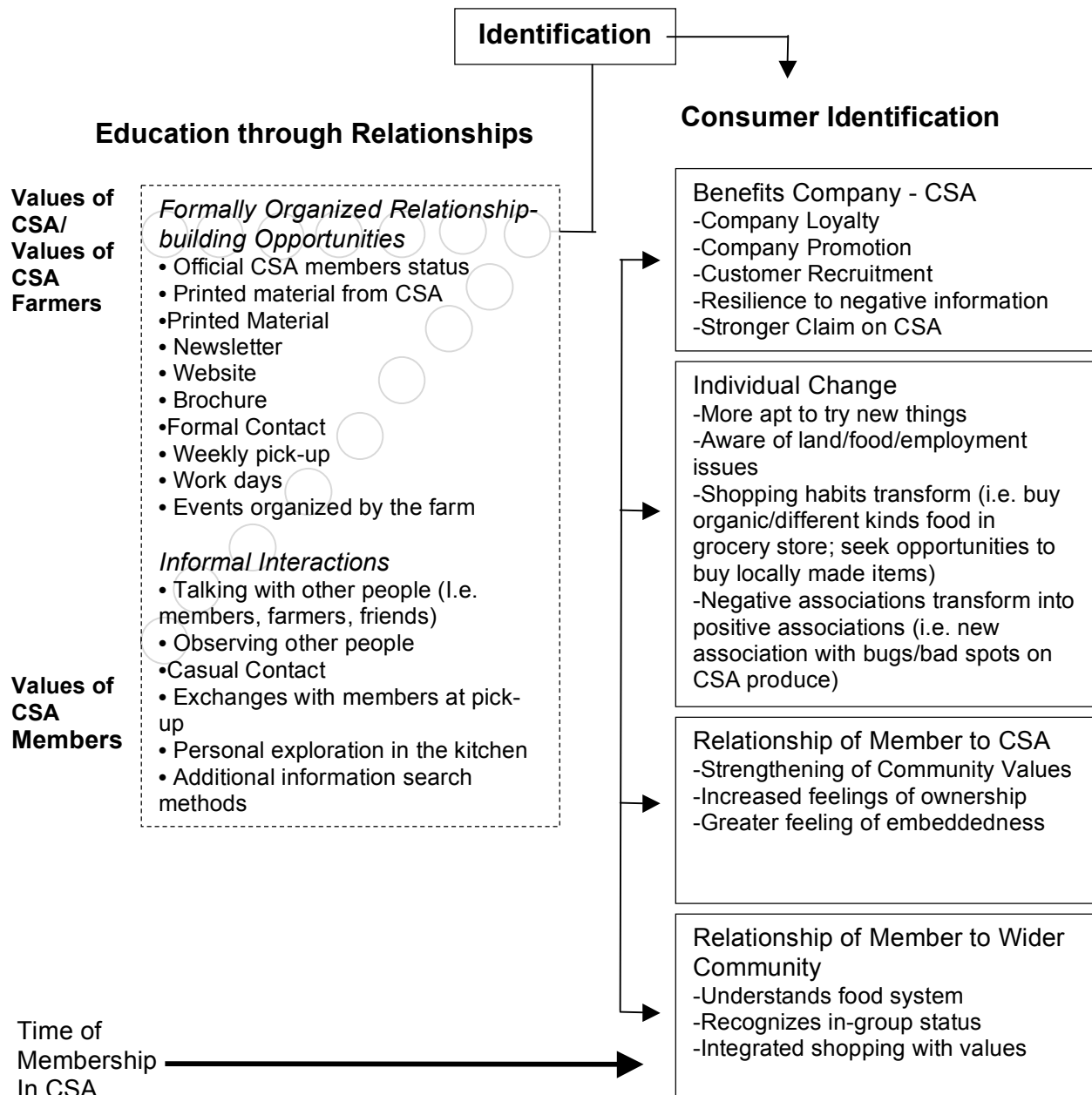


Figure 2.2: Identification Formation





**PRODUCT VALUE AND PERSONAL VALUES: THE IMPORTANCE OF  
INTANGIBLE ATTRIBUTES IN CONSUMER VALUE ASSESSMENT**

Essay 3

## TABLE OF CONTENTS: ESSAY 3

INTRODUCTION .....	126
LITERATURE REVIEW.....	128
Means-end chains.....	128
Product attributes .....	129
Product assessment .....	133
Product types .....	134
Price and value.....	135
Personal values .....	136
METHODOLOGY .....	137
Description of CSA.....	137
Procedures .....	140
FINDINGS .....	142
Three case studies .....	143
Case 1: Tony .....	143
Who is Tony?.....	143
Tony's personal values .....	143
Food discovery.....	144
Concern with health.....	146
Conserving natural resources.....	149
Conclusion of Case 1 .....	151
Case 2: Mary .....	152
Who is Mary?.....	152
Mary's personal values.....	153
Community involvement .....	154
Connecting to her past.....	155
Feeling good about her choices.....	157
Conclusion of Case 2.....	159
Case 3: Sandra.....	161
Who is Sandra? .....	161
Health.....	162
Environment.....	164
Community .....	166
Conclusion of Case 3.....	168
Conclusion linking all three case studies.....	169
Cross-case analyses.....	170
Price and value.....	170
Comparison to means-end chains .....	176
Food discoveries as an example.....	177
DISCUSSION.....	178
Dismissing price.....	179
Changes in value assessment over time .....	179
Two aspects of experiential products.....	180
Values relate to intangible attributes.....	181
Managerial implications.....	181

Future directions .....	182
REFERENCES .....	183

### **List of Tables and Figures**

Figure 3.1. Relationship between values, attributes, and consequences.....	176
Table 3.1. Demographic Information and Reasons for Joining CSA .....	187

## INTRODUCTION

The way consumers assess the value of products is a topic of great concern to managers and all makers and sellers of products. Consumer assessments of value directly affect purchase and consumption behaviors. Even the concept of “value” has been defined in a multitude of ways (Woodruff 1997; Zeithaml 1988). Woodruff (1997) synthesizes several definitions of value into one unified construct with two main features: value is determined subjectively by the consumer; and value involves a “trade-off between what the consumer receives (e.g., quality, benefits, worth, utilities) and what he or she gives up to acquire and use the product (e.g., price, sacrifices) (p.141).” Researchers who have delved into this complex area have called for further research, both to broaden understanding, and to increase the contexts in which this phenomenon has been examined (Cronin Jr. et al. 2000).

One way to look into consumer assessment of value is to relate consumers’ personal values to the product value they place on the goods and services they consume. Means-end chains provide a technique through which one may discover linear connections between product attributes and personal values (Gutman 1982), such that products and product attributes fulfill certain values that individuals deem important. However, values may play a larger role in determining which product attributes consumers focus their attention on, and thus may play a larger role in determining the prominent features of a given product than previously thought. In other words, rather than having a linear chain that begins with product attributes and ends with personal values, personal values may be a pervasive, playing an important part in bringing certain product features into focus for individual consumers. If this conceptualization of the relationship between personal values and product attributes were correct, there would be significant implications for the way managers present and market products.

Another way to look at consumer perception of value is to examine the product attributes consumers focus on when they make product assessments. The product attributes that are focused on in previous studies of product value have been largely tangible attributes. For example, a study of morning beverages may include the taste, ease of preparation, look of the packaging, and price of the product. However, intangible attributes are also important. In this morning beverage example, intangible attributes may include the level of nutrition, or the belief that a certain beverage “is good for me and my family.” When such beliefs are viewed by the consumer as attributes of the product, they should be treated as intangible product attributes. With more complex products, the number and importance of intangible attributes may increase. If this is true, then the way that marketers view complex products should expand to include the intangible attributes of the product.

This paper has two goals. First, it will focus on tangible versus intangible product attributes, and will analytically illustrate the importance of intangible attributes in consumer assessment of product value. Second it will analyze how the product assessment is linked to individual values, through illustrations of the pervasiveness of individual values throughout the levels of the traditional means-end chain (i.e. product attributes through personal values).

This essay contributes to the literature in three ways. First, by looking at a broader scope of product attributes, a new understanding of how consumers conceptualize and place value on products can be gained. Second, looking at the complexities of certain products allows us to conceptualize these products beyond price and quality, and is a way to discover important brand meanings. And third, by incorporating consumers’ individual values into the product assessment of value, we learn about which aspects of the product are most important to consumers as they incorporate the product into their lives and lifestyles.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### **Means-end chains**

The ways that consumers perceive value, and the value that consumers get from products has been related to the sacrifices and benefits they derive from the product (Woodruff 1997; Zeithaml 1988). Means-end chains are a tool to link product attributes to the customers' personal values in hopes of being able to predict or manipulate consumer choice. Means-end chains are a popular way to connect product attributes with consumers' personal values. In this paper, the linear laddering technique that means-end chains use to go from product attributes up the chain to product consequences and then up to personal values, is questioned, as it seems that personal values affect every part of the chain, not just the top level.

Means-end chains have three levels and work sequentially from the lowest level to the highest level. Product attributes make up the lowest level. Product attributes used in previous studies have included physical attributes of the product such as packaging, taste, and comfort (Gutman 1982; Hofstede et al. 1998). The second level of the means-end chain is consequences of the attributes in the lowest level. The consequence of a brightly-colored package may be that a consumer feels good when (s)he sees it at home. The consequence of a comfortable car may be that a consumer wants to drive it more often. Consequences tend to have affective or experiential components (Gutman 1982), as well as concrete components. The third, and highest, level of the means-end chain is values. In most of the means-ends research that has appeared to date, the values at the end of the chain are typically based on Rokeach's Terminal Values (Rokeach 1979). Rokeach (1973) defined values as "an enduring belief that a specific mode of conduct or end-state of existence is personally or socially preferable to an opposite or

converse mode of conduct or end-state of existence. To continue with the example, a comfortable car may illustrate the value of wanting to live a comfortable life. Having bright colors in the home may elicit the value wanting to live in a beautiful space. In this way marketers are able to connect product attributes to consumer values.

The most direct way to relate product attributes to customer desires has been the Grey Benefit Chain. This chain attempts to link and quantify the functional, practical, and emotional payoffs of products (Young and Feigin 1975), and it is easier to transfer into managerial techniques than other means-end chains. See Gutman 1982 for a review of various means-end chains.

### **Product attributes**

Although the importance of product attributes to value assessments is widely recognized in the marketing literature, there is little agreement on how to label or conceptualize product attributes that contribute to product assessments. The wide variety of products consumers encounter makes conceptualization especially difficult. Typically, product attributes are organized according to levels of abstraction that can be pictured as moving up the means-end chain from the level of physical properties of the product, to the level of personal values.

Because the language of product attributes varies widely, the most common conceptualizations of product attributes will be discussed here. One way to conceptualize product attributes is according to those attributes that are inherent to the product (such as the taste or texture of a snack), called intrinsic attributes, and those attributes that can change without changing the product itself (such as the price or brand name), called extrinsic attributes (Olson and Jacoby 1972; Rao and Monroe 1989; Zeithaml 1988). Another way to think about

product attributes is by those that a consumer can know before purchasing a product, referred to as search attributes, and those attributes that a consumer can only know through using the product, referred to as experiential attributes (Zeithaml 1988). The last two conceptualizations of product attributes that will be discussed here are concrete vs. abstract attributes, and tangible vs. intangible attributes. These two conceptualizations appear to be similar in meaning, but are not clearly defined in the literature.

Some studies that refer to concrete/abstract and tangible/intangible attributes do not define the terms, rather they assume that the terms are self-explanatory (Allen and Ng 1999; Lewis and Klein 1985; Orsingher and Marzocchi 2003; Shaw et al. 1989). Other studies define tangible attributes in terms of concrete attributes, but do not define intangible attributes, or simply define them as lacking the characteristics of tangible attributes (Horsky et al. 2004; Shostack 1977). Still other studies say that for each intangible attribute, there is a tangible attribute that consumers refer to when interpreting the intangible attribute (Lewis and Klein 1985). Abstract attributes are not defined or mentioned as often in past research. Finally, some studies discuss intangible attributes as higher-order attributes that are consequences of concrete product attributes (Snelders and Schoormans 2004). In this way, intangible attributes are pushed up the means-end chain from the lower level of product attributes to the middle level of consequences. Although a few studies attempt to bring intangible attributes down to the product attribute level, more attention needs to be paid to the importance of intangible product attributes at this lowest level.

*Tangible* and *intangible* are the terms that will be used to describe product attributes in this paper. Horsky, Nelson, and Posavac (2004) define a tangible attribute as being “concrete, real, easy to define and describe, easy to quantify” (p. 133). That is, tangible product attributes



are perceived by one or more of the five senses. Tangible attributes include color, smell, size, comfort, price (Woodruff 1997). Intangible attributes are not perceived by the senses (Woodruff 1997). Rather they are experienced and often have an affective component. Intangible attributes include convenience, prestige (Horsky et al. 2004), good service (Zeithaml 1988), and friendliness (Lewis and Klein 1985).

It is important to clarify the difference between the intangible attributes and the benefits of products. The distinction comes from the consumers. Health advantages could be a reason that a consumer purchases a product, as well as a benefit of using a certain product. However, if the consumer sees the health advantages of the product as an attribute of the product rather than as a benefit of the product, then we can call it an intangible attribute of the product, not just a benefit of the product. In other words, it may not be important to the consumer to distinguish or choose whether a given intangible attribute is also a benefit of the product, but it is important for academics to distinguish between the two, so that we can better understand how consumers relate to the products they choose.

Quality has been defined as a tangible and intangible attribute, depending on the context. For example, the quality of a bed sheet may be felt, and thus is tangible, whereas the quality of many wristwatches must be discovered over time (i.e. how long it remains in good working condition), and thus is intangible. Likewise, service quality is known through several experiential factors (Orsingher and Marzocchi 2003), and thus is intangible. This paper will illustrate the importance of intangible attributes to consumer assessment of product value.

The study of intangible attributes is related to credence goods. Many authors have described products as lying on a continuum that goes from easy to hard to evaluate, based on the level of asymmetry of product information (Darby and Karni 1973; Hsieh et al. 2005; Nelson

1970). There are two types of credence goods, both of which are high in asymmetrical product information. For one type of credence good, the consumer can learn more about the product through use of that product. Some studies refer to products as credence goods before they are purchased because a consumer cannot know how a product tastes or functions before, and sometimes even after purchase (Hsieh et al. 2005). Credence goods can imply that after use, a product will no longer be a credence good. For example, if a consumer purchases a new flavor of ice cream, that consumer has limited ways to determine whether (s)he will be satisfied with the product before actually tasting it, or experiencing the taste. According to the definition used in this paper, *taste*, is defined as a tangible attribute because it can be experienced by the senses.

The second type of credence good is a product about which the average consumer cannot know the quality because of a lack of expertise or familiarity about the product. This type of credence good may be a product such as education, or financial investments, where a consumer may never really be able to evaluate the quality of the product because the consumer does not have the expertise (Lovelock 2001).

In certain cases, product attributes that are unknowable are in fact intangible attributes. For example, a vitamin C package may state that there are 500mg of vitamin C in the pill, however a typical consumer has no way to tell whether or not this is true. Here, the vitamin C pill is a credence good, and the actual level of vitamin C is an intangible attribute of the pill. The individual taking the vitamin C cannot truly know how much vitamin C there is in the pill, but the consumer may believe the package and feel that (s)he is doing something good for her/himself.

Likewise, intangible attributes are referred to frequently with experiential products (Klein 1998). Experiential products tend to have many intangible attributes, such as high entertainment

value and excitement, but the product itself (i.e. a movie or rafting trip) is what the consumer pays for, not the physical product attributes. The focus in this essay is not with this asymmetry of information, but rather on the importance of intangible attributes in the assessment of value itself.

The following six sections are dedicated to clarifying constructs used in this essay. Starting with a section on product assessment and ending with a section on personal values, these paragraphs also help illustrate the concept of a complex product, and how product choices are tied to the personal values of consumers.

### **Product assessment**

The first goal of this paper is to illustrate the importance of intangible attributes to consumer assessment of product value. Classical economics gave marketing two types of products: goods and services. The problem with the way economics categorizes goods is that they tend to be physical products or clear services. The marketing literature has identified experiential goods (Arnould and Price 1993; Schouten and McAlexander 1995) as a category of product that does not fit nicely into either the goods or services dichotomy. Much effort in marketing has gone towards understanding how consumers interact with, value, and use physical products. Likewise, a whole strain of research has been dedicated to service encounters. Experiential products, or those products that are consumed for the understanding, feelings, and excitement that are evoked, have been explored in the postmodern and consumer culture theory literatures (Arnould and Thompson 2005).

## **Product types**

Physical, service and experiential products are, for the most part, contained within their category. That is, the physical product is primarily judged on its physical aspects, the service product on its service aspects, and the experiential product on its experiential aspects. The next few paragraphs will be dedicated to examining different types of products.

Service products seem to be left out of means-end chain research. Some service products that are frequently investigated are hotels, restaurants (Lewis and Klein 1985; Moorthi 2002), and vacations (Carr 2006; Fodness 1992). These products tend to be evaluated on such attributes as service quality, cleanliness, comfort, and friendliness. These attributes are a mix of tangible (i.e. price, comfort, cleanliness) and intangible (i.e. friendliness, prestige). Thus, the literature has not investigated how the product attributes of services link to consequences and to individual values to the same extent as physical products.

Explorations into experiential products include river rafting (Arnould and Price 1993), Burning Man (Kozinets 2002), rodeos (Penaloza 2001), and coffee shops (Thompson and Arsel 2004). Experiential products are evaluated in terms of how much entertainment pleasure they bring to the consumer. Such attributes include *communitas* (Kozinets 2002), personal growth and renewal (Arnould and Price 1993), and are largely focused on intangible product attributes. Again, experiential products are not explored in terms of means-end chains. However, the researchers who have conducted investigations into experiential products provide us with clues about how experiential products are linked to individual values. These include ways that personal values guide choices (Thompson and Troester 2002) and color experiences (Schouten and McAlexander 1995).

There seems to be another type of product that is a hybrid of two, or even all three of the

product categories (physical, service, experiential). This new product category will be referred to here simply as *complex products*. Complex products are products that cross the boundaries of physical, service, and experiential products. They have tangible and intangible attributes, and can be evaluated in terms of all three types of product categories. An example of a complex products is a Mega-supermarket that sells typical grocery-store products as well as prepared foods, pharmaceuticals, film services, and perhaps provides a coffee shop with wireless Internet service.

### **Price and value**

The relationship of the price of a product to how consumers perceive the value of the product is a topic that has interested consumer researchers for decades, as it directly affects the willingness to pay and satisfaction of consumers. However, the ways that consumers interpret price in relation to the quality of a product have been studied by many researchers with mixed results. Some studies find that consumers use price as an indicator of quality; other studies show that consumers do not make price-quality inferences (Monroe 1973; Zeithaml 1988). When cues other than price are available to consumers, consumers tend to rely on these other cues more heavily (Olson and Jacoby 1972). However, it has also been shown that price can affect perceived quality as well as the actual efficacy of products (Shiv et al. 2005), i.e. the ways cues are interpreted.

Price is often seen as a sacrifice, or the thing that is given up in order to get a product (Zeithaml 1988). There are two parts to price: objective price (the actual cost paid for a product) and perceived price (the assessment of that cost: i.e. cheap or expensive) (Olson and Jacoby 1972). Although price has been shown to affect consumer judgment of a product (Monroe

1973), the role that price plays in the value assessment of the complex product presented in this essay remains unclear.

The research presented in this essay was conducted in the context of a membership-based organization called Community Supported Agriculture (CSA). CSA will be described in detail below. The informants consulted during data collection dismiss the price of the product in favor of other attributes of the product when assessing the value of the CSA, most likely because these other attributes are more salient and available to them (Olson and Jacoby 1972). In general, informants express uncertainty about whether the price of the CSA is cheap or expensive, and do not rely on price when assessing the value of the CSA.

### **Personal values**

The role that personal values play in determining how consumers assess the value of a product (i.e. see the study of means-end chains), and predicting consumer behavior is important, but not well understood (Bergami and Bagozzi 2000). The study of personal values in marketing is largely based on Rokeach's (1973) work on categorizing universal human values. This work has been continued in marketing by several authors (Kahle and Kennedy 1989; Richins and Dawson 1992; Schwartz and Bilsky 1987; Thompson and Troester 2002) who worked to define human values and expand the application of human values to marketing. This essay takes another look at the connection between personal values and the way that consumers determine the value of a product, which is intensified by the complexity of this product. Unlike previous studies of this relationship, the data presented in this essay reveal a pervasive presence of personal values that affects which product attributes that consumers notice and how consumers perceive and assess the overall product.

As mentioned above, this research was conducted in the context of Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) programs. Through CSA, consumers can purchase fresh produce directly from a farm. This relationship between producer and consumer provides an excellent laboratory in which to study personal values and consumer assessment of product value.

## METHODOLOGY

This research is intended to further our understanding of how consumers use product attributes to assess the value of the product, which product attributes they focus on, and how these attributes are connected to their personal values. (Note: Once again, please recognize that we are talking about two different concepts here: the value of a product, i.e. is it worth what one paid; and individual values, i.e. deeply held individual goals, beliefs, desires).

### **Description of CSA**

This research was conducted in the context of Community Supported Agriculture programs. A CSA is a program through which consumers can purchase fresh produce directly from a farm. When consumers “join” a CSA, they prepay for a season of produce. Each week during the growing season (in many Northeastern regions, this is from June through October), members receive a “box” of fresh produce that is usually organically and sustainably grown. The produce is usually harvested between 12 and 24 hours before the members pick it up. Along with the produce, members receive a newsletter that often includes information about an unusual vegetable that is being distributed that week, a recipe, and perhaps a report about something that is going on at the farm (i.e., a description of the vegetables that are coming into season; information about farm improvements; a brief essay on pertinent land-use or food-system issue).

It is possible that during any given year, there could be a terrible growing season and consumers would not end up with much produce. Likewise there could be a terrific season and consumers could end up with much more food than they had hoped. Of course farmers take steps to mitigate both of these situations. Farmers plant a diverse variety of crops at different times to increase the chances of a good harvest, thus reducing the risk of a terrible growing season. Farmers also talk to their consumers about their experiences in the CSA. The CSA contract symbolizes the trust that consumers have for farmers, and the sense of obligation that farmers have to their consumers.

From their conception, CSAs have been related to individual values held by consumers. They were started in Switzerland, Japan, and Germany in the 1960s (Leopold and Trumpetto 2005). CSAs were started by groups of consumers who were concerned about where their food was coming from and how it was grown. These consumers were also concerned about preserving farmland.

CSAs are inherently value-laden. Farmers communicate the values of the CSA, which are reflections of their own personal values. Unlike typical farmers who were born into the profession, many CSA farmers left lucrative jobs and successful professions to start their CSA (Lass et al. 2003). This choice to “do meaningful work” and the communication of why farmers made this choice, and why being a farmer with a focus on sustainable practices is meaningful work is the first step in communicating their values to the CSA members. Many farmers are starting from a place of choice, and do have strongly-held values that they desire to communicate to the CSA members. Often the farmers like being in the role of educator, whether it is teaching a member how to use a type of pepper or squash he or she is unfamiliar with, or explaining why pesticides are used, or not used, on their farm.



The CSA is a good place to study value assessment because the CSA is a complex product. CSA members are often not able to articulate precisely what they paid for, nor are they sure if they “got their money’s worth.” There are several reasons for this uncertainty. CSA members prepay for the entire season of produce, and thus do not know the quantity, quality, or variety of the produce they have purchased until the growing season comes to a close. Further, consumers never see their entire purchase (i.e. the quantity of produce) at one time. Another reason for this uncertainty is that consumers are unsure about how the value of produce that is locally grown relates to the value of produce that is available for purchase in a supermarket. Because this uncertainty about the product itself and the price of the product exists, CSA members use many other attributes when assessing the value of the CSA.

There are a few things that are important to note about the particular CSA where this research was done. The first is how the actual distribution occurs. Each week, when CSA members show up to get their “share,” they are given a pound allotment. For example, they can take ten pounds of produce. The produce is arranged in a U-shape in wooden bins, and each box of produce has a piece of slate hanging above it with its name written in chalk (i.e. green pepper; watermelon radish). Certain types of produce will have a limit, for example members may be limited to half a pound of snap peas. Sometimes the allotment is given in pounds and numbers, for example, “10 pounds plus 1 quart of strawberries,” or “ten pounds plus one watermelon.” In the findings section, informants make references to their “allotment” or to “making [their] pounds.”

The second thing to note is that at this CSA, members drive to the farm and pick out their share while they are there. They walk up a small hill into an old barn, which is where the food is arranged. Several members do not make a distinction between the farm and the CSA, because

the only reason they ever go to the farm is for something to do with the CSA (i.e. pick up their share, or participate in a work day). Members talk about all the experiences they have at the farm as if they are all part of the CSA.

The third thing to note is that there is a small farm store on the property of this farm. The store mainly sells jams and conserves that are produced on the farm, but it also sells locally made baked goods and dairy products, as well as produce, plants, and arts and crafts (i.e. gifts). Several members make a habit of gathering their share and then going into the farm store to pick up some other products (i.e. a loaf of bread, a brownie, some cheese or yoghurt). Again, CSA members do not make a huge distinction between the way they feel about or talk about the CSA and the way they talk about the farm store. Thus, in the members' quotations, they will refer to the CSA, the farm, and the farm store almost interchangeably.

Interviews were conducted with six first-time CSA members at one CSA in a northeastern state. Each informant was interviewed three different times between June 2006 and February 2007: early in the CSA season, late in the CSA season, and once after the CSA's growing season was over.

## **Procedures**

Interviews began in June of 2006, and consisted of three separate interviews with six informants, for a total of 18 interviews. The first interviews took place in June 2006, three weeks after the individuals began to receive produce from their CSA. During the first interview, informants were asked several questions about reasons for joining the CSA and to describe their experience thus far, including the members' likes, dislikes, and expectations.

The second interviews took place in September/October 2006, which was at the height of

the harvest and the CSA members were receiving the largest quantity of produce. The focus of this interview was how the individual related to and thought about the CSA. Projective techniques were employed during the second interview. Each informant was asked to draw a picture of what the CSA would look like if the CSA were a person. Informants were then asked to talk about their drawing and how the drawing related to their own lives.

The third interviews were conducted in January/February 2007, which was 2-3 months after the CSA's season ended. The third interview took place after the CSA ended to ensure that changes in attitudes and behaviors that CSA members talked about during the height of the growing season were not just fleeting ideas that were related to the produce they had in their house, but were at least somewhat enduring. The goal of this interview was to ascertain the value of the CSA and whether it was "worth the money" they had paid for it.

The six first-time CSA members had significant demographic differences. They ranged in age from 29-50, and in level of education from Bachelor's degrees to multiple higher education and terminal degrees. Household income varied from \$25,000 for a single mother with two children who lives in a trailer park, to over \$200,000 for a married couple with two children who live in a newly-built very large house. The employment of these informants varied, as did the primary reasons each member joined the CSA. See Table 3.1 for details.

Each of the three interviews lasted between 30 and 90 minutes. Each interview was recorded on a digital voice recorder, transcribed, and analyzed for common themes, and any indications of how the members dealt with the value of the CSA, as well as what they got out of the CSA. Interviews were treated as individual cases. Initially, all the interviews from a specific time were analyzed together for common themes. For example, all interviews at time 1 were analyzed, then all interviews at time 2, etc. Then, all three interviews for each individual were

analyzed for themes about the value of the CSA (Eisenhardt 1989). Interview transcriptions were analyzed for broader themes that would shed light on higher-order operations (i.e. relationship to personal values or emotional or spiritual fulfillment) that also affect the individual's value assessment of the CSA.

The first interview with each informant was analyzed for common themes. Each interview transcription was analyzed for comments about the ways in which the individual determined the value of the CSA. Initially, long lists were created. With each new interview, new items were added to the list. These were compiled and combined using a clustering method, and by constantly comparing the themes from all 18 interviews as they were completed. As comparisons between the interviews were made, lower-level attributes were combined into higher-order themes (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Strauss and Corbin 1990). This process was repeated for the interviews at time 2 and time 3. Due to space constraints and the consistency in the common themes that emerged from all six informants, three case studies will be presented below to represent the findings.

## FINDINGS

Overall, the informants found the CSA to be a “good enough” value, and were satisfied enough with the CSA that all six informants joined the CSA for the following year (the third interview took place after registration for the following year of the CSA already began). Because of this development, we can assume that the informants ultimately did place a positive value assessment on the CSA.

The findings will be presented in several parts. First, case studies of three informants will be presented. These will be followed by a cross-case analysis on how informants deal with

the price of the CSA. Finally, the way personal values are expressed will be examined in terms of means-end chains.

### **Three case studies**

Case studies for Tony, Mary, and Sandra will be presented below. These three informants were chosen for their demographic variation, as well as the variety in their personal values and current life situations. For each informant, a brief biography will be presented, followed by the personal values that the informant focuses on. Then the main themes of the individual will be presented and analyzed through quotations from that individual. The importance of intangible attributes in value assessment will become clear through each case illustration. A summary of the three cases will be discussed at the end.

#### ***Case 1: Tony***

##### *Who is Tony?*

Tony is a white, 40 year old engineer. He smokes, is overweight, and refers to himself as a bachelor. He reported earning “60-90k” but did not want to be more specific. When asked to describe himself, he says he’s “pretty much sedentary...kind of a sloth.” Tony is personable, a good conversationalist, and self-reflective. Tony seems to enjoy being interviewed and offers many anecdotes and insights about his experience of the CSA.

##### *Tony’s personal values*

Tony’s personal values guide him to focus on specific attributes of the CSA. The three values he focuses on are education, personal health, and environmental preservation. The values

direct his attention to specific attributes of the CSA, and affect his assessment of the value of the product. Tony expressed these values through the course of our interviews. They influenced how he perceived the attributes of the CSA, and which aspects of the CSA he focused on during our interviews.

Tony started off by expressing himself as a bachelor with very few cooking skills and little knowledge about food. Before joining the CSA, Tony rarely cooked and he rarely ate fresh produce. When he did eat a salad, he would “buy a bag of salad mix, you know, in the supermarket.” He reported that “dinner might be like the drive thru on the way home,” and that he purchased a lot of “convenience foods,” or prepared foods and frozen dinners.

Throughout our interviews, Tony talks about several intangible attributes of the CSA. These intangible attributes are extremely important to Tony’s assessment of the value of the CSA, as they seem to provide the connection between the product and how Tony uses the product in his daily life.

### *Food discovery*

Tony’s focus on education is largely expressed through his food discoveries. Before joining the CSA, Tony’s knowledge of produce was slim. He avoided several foods because he did not know if he liked them or not, or because he remembered he did not like them as a child. Discovery is a theme that Tony brought up during all three interviews.

“For a long time I avoided tomatoes despite the fact that I would eat tomato sauce and when I had tomatoes from the farm they definitely did taste different. I think it’s because the tomatoes they grow are *tomatoes*. The tomatoes you might find in a supermarket are designed to be picked unripe and then ripen on the way to the store and be ripe at the supermarket, so they just taste different than what I would get at the farm... [The CSA] is a lot of stuff that I was exposed to, but never really eaten a lot of. I would always get something and I could go read about it on the Internet and see how it’s prepared or what family it’s from – tomatoes are a member of the nightshade family... Then there are just

other vegetables that I didn't quite eat. Maybe I tried them when I was a kid and didn't particularly care for them and just never bothered, like eggplant. My mom always made eggplant Parmesan and pickled eggplant and I never ate it. I got an eggplant, a little one, at the farm and tried it and I said, 'Oh, this isn't bad...' Sometimes it was a case of just experimenting with something that I would never have considered trying before. Squash for example, I figured, "Well, I try a squash. Give me a squash." It turns out they are pretty good. They serve well and they are easy to prepare."

Tony makes several references to tangible attributes of the CSA. The quality of the produce he receives is something he talks about repeatedly. Tony says the quality of the produce from the CSA is better than the produce from the supermarket ("they just taste different"), and he provides reasons for the quality difference (ripening "on the way to the store"). He even refers to the tomatoes from the CSA as *real* tomatoes to emphasize the difference in taste that he experiences. Tony seems to see the tomato from the CSA as the prototypical tomato, one that comes to him directly from the earth, ripe and tasty; ready to be eaten; a different food from the tomatoes in the supermarket. He also refers to other attributes of the produce, such as the level of ripeness and the size.

Although Tony talks quality, which in this case is a tangible attribute and is related to the physical product, he also refers to an intangible attribute of the CSA: his *discovery* of what different types of produce taste like. This intangible attribute is related to his experience of the CSA, not just to the tangible piece of produce. Discovery is a theme that affects Tony's enjoyment and assessment of the value of the CSA. Not only does he get to eat food that tastes good, he also gets to learn about his likes and dislikes, and he gets to learn about food that grows locally. Tony starts with the physical, tangible tomato (how it tastes; when it is picked), and ladders up to the intangible attributes of the product (discovery; distance traveled).

The CSA provides Tony with opportunities to revisit produce he did not like as a child, and has avoided for a long time, such as tomatoes and eggplant. At the CSA, Tony feels

adventurous and willing to try new things. His previous experience with tomatoes, eggplants, squash, of believing he did not like them, and then trying them to discover he does like them is something Tony really likes and looks forward to:

“It’s sort of like Christmas. They send a notice, typically on Monday, ‘this week we’ll have this,’ but sometimes they will have that, plus a few other things. So you never really know what you’re going to get and that’s kind of good because I think if I knew each time what they would have, I would be less likely to try new things. I tried fava beans, and it’s like the only place I heard of fava beans was *Silence of the Lambs*...they turned out to be pretty good.”

The element of surprise (i.e. Christmas presents) helps to embolden Tony to try new items, which he echoes over and over, “turned out to be pretty good.” Before he saw them at the CSA, fava beans were strictly something out of Hollywood. The experiential aspect of the CSA is highlighted by Tony’s focus on the element of surprise, and guides Tony up a ladder from the food to the intangible attributes.

Tony offers several examples of the importance of *discovery*. He is able to consume good-tasting, good quality food, but he is also inspired to learn more about the foods he is eating. Tony’s personal value, *education*, directed his attention to the vast amount of learning he was experiencing through the CSA, and particularly to the discovery attribute. The theme of discovery is closely related to his concern for his personal health, which will be addressed next.

### *Concern with health*

Personal health is a value that seems to occupy a lot of Tony’s mental space (“I’m not the healthiest guy in the world,” “I know my diet could be a lot better”). He has been concerned with his health for a long time, which was one of the reasons he originally joined the CSA – he figured he would eat more vegetables if he had more vegetables in his house. Throughout our



interviews, Tony raised issues about fat, calories, losing weight, becoming healthier, and implications these things have to his future.

Certainly the CSA was a result of [my concern about my weight]. And since I've joined the CSA then my mom had colon cancer and it sort of made me think, 'Well, if I eat healthier food I can reduce the likelihood or reduce the severity when or if that times comes...' [Being a CSA member] has made me kind of realize for a long time [my eating habits] were pretty bad. You know just personally I got to the point where I would say, 'I'm fat, so why bother. I may as well just eat whatever anytime and I'm not going to get any skinnier.' I've come to realize that garbage-in-garbage-out. It's worth it to eat better quality food. I'm getting to the point... I'm forty and what I do now is going to affect me later in life. Both my parents had a type of cancer. But my mom had colon cancer surgery recently and it made me think what I'm eating now is going to influence development or polyps in the large intestine, so maybe I should think about the health effects of what I'm eating and eat with a goal towards limiting that in the future."

This quotation illustrates three aspects of Tony's concern with health. The first is his awareness of needing to improve his diet, which is closely linked to the second, controlling his weight. The third aspect of Tony's concern with health is a concern about his future health, based on the experiences his parents have had. In the above quotation, Tony refers solely to intangible attributes of the CSA. Eating "healthier food," which he has discovered he likes to eat, has the potential to "reduce the likelihood" or "severity" of cancer, should he get it later in life. *Future health* is another intangible attribute of the CSA.

The discovery attribute is also echoed in this quotation, as membership in the CSA made Tony realize how bad his eating habits had been in the past. It seems like the coincidence of Tony joining the CSA and his mother's colon cancer have emphasized the health benefits Tony gets from being a CSA member. Tony emphasizes the intangible attributes of the CSA in terms of his future health. In the above quotation, these intangible attributes refer to Tony's experience as a CSA member, not specifically to physical attributes of the CSA.

Tony's future-orientation about his health, and the role the CSA plays in improving his

health do not fit neatly into the physical, service, or experiential aspects of the CSA. Rather they are psychological and, possibly, physiological benefits that he receives from the CSA, but he describes them as attributes of the product.

Tony reiterates his health concerns in the meticulous way he talks about allocating his calorie intake. Below Tony talks about purchasing sweets from the farm store, which he visits each time he goes to the farm to pick up his CSA share. He does not distinguish very much between the produce he gets in his CSA share and the items he purchases at the farm store. For Tony, “it’s one big shopping trip.”

Well, I’ve gotten to thinking recently I’m trying to lose some weight and you know if I have 500 calories to devote towards junk food I’d rather eat something better than something worse you know like Tasty Cakes, HoHos, whatever. They are very convenient. You can buy them anywhere and they are cheap, but that’s their big selling point. I realize they are cheaper, but they are not particularly good... They don’t taste as good as the homemade brownies [at the farm store] and I don’t think they are as good quality-wise. You know I haven’t looked at the ingredients for this woman’s homemade brownies for example because they are not listed. But I’m pretty certain she is not adding hydrogenated vegetable oil or high fructose corn syrup or polysorbate. I think it’s more like what a typical mother would bake from scratch. So by good I mean good in terms of quality and taste.”

Tony uses tangible product attributes (price, taste, brand name) and intangible product attributes (“hydrogenated vegetable oil,” “what a typical mother would bake” to describe the brownies he buys at the farm store. Although the type of fat used in the product is a real, physical product, there is no way for the consumer to know or experience the product with his/her own senses, thus it is an intangible attribute. By comparing the “goodness” of taste and quality between the “junk food” and the “homemade brownies,” Tony creates a clear dichotomy of good vs. bad in the junk food he eats.

Not only does Tony make his assessment of the product by the taste, but he also makes one-sided comparisons of the product ingredients, and the care with which they were baked. The

“homemade” brownie from the farm store is a credence good in that Tony does not know the ingredients. However, even though the ingredients are not listed on the brownies from the farm store, Tony is sure that they do not have the bad things he knows are part of the HoHos, such as high fructose corn syrup and polysorbate. Rather, Tony believes the brownies from the farm store are like those a “typical mother would bake from scratch.” Tony has a close relationship with his mother, and looks to her for advice about cooking, eating, and health, and of course he would trust a brownie that his own mother baked. The feeling of *trust* that Tony has for the farm, and by extension products from both the CSA and the farm store, is another intangible attribute that Tony uses in his value assessment of the product. Trust is not experienced by one of the five senses, rather it is an emotional or psychological experience, and thus is an intangible attribute Tony sees as important to the CSA.

### *Conserving natural resources*

Tony has a very strong value of environmental preservation, which largely manifests itself as a concern about petroleum usage. Peak oil is the point in time when the world has used up half its oil resources and many people believe we are currently there (Drake 2006) (“[peak oil] is something that will always be a concern in the back of my mind”).

It’s funny, the farm gives out newsletters every week and one thing they mentioned was the distance their produce travels to get to market. I’ve heard it called the 1,500 mile Caesar salad. One thing I like about buying local is that you eliminate that transportation. And it’s good in terms of it’s less resource intensive to get your produce and also I think it contributes to the quality because if you pick apples in Washington State and send them to Pennsylvania you have to pick them so they ripen at the time they get to the grocery store, whereas here they pick apples in the morning and I go pick them up in the afternoon, so the quality is an improvement. So yeah, peak oil is still a concern even though we found the Jack oil field in the Gulf of Mexico and the price of gas is coming down. I think petroleum is going to be more expensive in the future and everything that relies on that is going to go up, which includes food, which is shipped by diesel trucks and uses petroleum based fertilizer. So I think that in the future, more people are going to

come to rely on local food production. At least I hope they will. Me personally, I will continue to do it.”

Conserving natural resources is one of Tony’s values. This value is manifested through Tony’s preoccupation with the amount of petroleum used in food production (fertilizer) and shipping (gas/diesel). Tony gives food that is not shipped from “Washington State” two reasons for being “good.” The first is “less resource intensive,” and the second is that the process “contributes to better quality.” Once more, Tony refers to tangible and intangible attributes. Here, his reference to quality could be interpreted as a tangible attribute (i.e. tastes better, looks better) or as an intangible attribute (i.e. better for you, healthier). *Protecting petroleum* is an intangible aspect of the CSA that Tony uses when explaining why he “will continue” to be a CSA member. *Protecting petroleum* could be seen as a benefit of the product, but because Tony refers to it as part of the CSA product, it is also an intangible product attribute.

Tony expands the features of the CSA he uses in making his value assessment beyond the physical, service, and experiential aspects of it. *Protecting petroleum* is an attribute of the CSA. This intangible attribute is strongly tied to Tony’s values, and refers to emotional gains that he gets from the CSA because he feels he is doing his part to help the environment, and because he feels that purchasing local food ties him into a stable food source. Thus, this intangible attribute is most closely aligned with experiential aspects of the CSA, but the experience is one of inner reassurance and contentment, rather than outward excitement.

Tony’s value about conservation of natural resources may be what guides him to notice the ways that the CSA addresses, or supports, this value. Thus, he uses attributes of the CSA that refer to his personal values in his product assessment.

### *Conclusion of Case 1*

Three values (importance of education; personal health; and natural resource conservation) led Tony to take note of several tangible and intangible attributes of the CSA. The tangible attributes Tony referred to are mainly quality, quantity, size, and taste. The intangible attributes Tony talks about are food discovery, future health, trust, and protecting petroleum. Intangible attributes contribute significantly to Tony's overall value assessment of the CSA.

These tangible and intangible attributes bring up different aspects of the CSA. For example, the taste and size refer directly to the physical product. *Trust* refers both to the service aspect of the CSA as well as to the experiential aspect. Intangible attributes that Tony uses in his value assessment tend to refer to experiential aspects of the CSA.

Based on Tony's analysis, it seems useful to split experiential aspects of the CSA into two parts: outwardly experiential (exciting, cooking, learning) and inner experiential (emotional, feelings of security). Tony expresses the outward experiential aspects of the CSA when he talks about the intangible attribute: food discovery. Things that go along with this attribute are experimentation with cooking, talking with people at the farm and with his mother about how to prepare certain foods, and learning about foods he had previously avoided. Inner experiential aspects of the CSA are captured in Tony's discussion about protecting petroleum. The sense of security he feels from knowing that he is involved with a local food supply and is not contributing to the further depletion of oil (and rise of petroleum prices) is an emotional response to his concern about natural resources (one of his values) and to this intangible attribute of the CSA.

Through these dominant themes, Tony assesses the value of the CSA in several different ways. Tony includes elements from the product ("[the apples] are not sprayed with wax"... "better quality product"... "small portion size"), service ("If there's something I don't

know...I'll ask the kid and he seems pretty knowledgeable about what's what"... "the interactions between the staff and customers are a lot more positive [than in a typical supermarket]), and experiential ("it's Friday afternoon, go down to the farm...it's something to do"... "I'll take the dog once a week...and go out to the farm...it's kind of like a little bit of Zen") aspects of the CSA. Because of his inclusion of these three aspects of the product, Tony uses both tangible (price and portion size) and intangible (feeling good about the CSA, enjoying his time at the farm) attributes to describe the value he places on the CSA. However, he relies most heavily on the intangible attributes, which link his personal values to his value assessment of the CSA.

When Tony talks about the CSA, he refers to the physical, service, outwardly experiential, and more inwardly experiential (emotional) aspects of it. Although Tony includes tangible and intangible attributes in his value assessment of the CSA, he spends much more time talking about the intangibles. The reason for this is the large role experiential aspects of the product play in his value assessment.

## ***Case 2: Mary***

### *Who is Mary?*

Mary is extremely well educated. She holds a M.B.A., Ph.D., and an MD. She is married and has two children, age 13 and 8. She works part-time as a medical administrator. Her husband is a professor at a large Northeastern university. Together they earn over \$200k per year, but she did not want to be more specific about their household income. They live in a very large, newly built house in a newly built housing development. Some people refer to developments like hers as McMansions. She is keenly aware and seems guilty or embarrassed

that her house is built on old farmland.

After being away for almost 20 years, Mary recently moved back to the area where she grew up. She is trying to build relationships in the community that, on the one hand, she feels attached to, and on the other hand, she feels like an outsider. She sees herself as a good mother and wife, which is reflected in the care she takes in her meal preparation, the cookbooks she has displayed in a built-in book shelf in her gourmet kitchen, and her boasting about her children's vast knowledge about healthy eating.

### *Mary's personal values*

Mary focuses on three values during our interviews. The first is community involvement, the second is connecting to her past, and the third is feeling good about her choices. As with Tony, Mary's values influenced her perception of the product, and her perceptions of attributes of the CSA.

Being an active member of her community is important to Mary. She expresses this in several ways: through her shopping habits ("I like to support the local economy"); through her CSA ("this is something I felt was environmentally sound that allowed me to participate in a sense of community"); and through sharing with her neighbors ("I would take a couple of my neighbors...and say get what you want").

The CSA provided Mary with the opportunity to connect with good memories from her past ("some of my best memories of where we used to live...are memories of farmers"... "it reinforces something about my upbringing"), which is the second value. The third value Mary focuses on is feeling good about her choices. This value is expressed over and over throughout our interviews in several different ways. She likes "supporting local farmers, she "feels good"

about buying produce directly from a farm, she “feels better” about feeding her family food that has not been sprayed with pesticides and herbicides, and she “continue[s] to feel good about doing [the CSA]”.

### *Community involvement*

Feeling like she is part of her community is important to Mary. She likes the idea of connecting to other people in her community and of helping those who need it. The CSA is one way that Mary has found she can “participate in a sense of community” both socially and economically, and also benefit from the exchange.

I think that whole idea [of CSA] promotes the notion of community, which I think is the whole basis of why we do this...I found out about [CSAs] from an article on NPR. I thought it was such a good idea. I thought it was so supportive of farms and it was so important to help the community farms and ‘aren’t they part of my community?’ Yes. ‘Don’t I have the obligation to support the community?’ Yes. So I’m going to do this. So for me going [to the CSA] and integrating into the system with other people as part of a community I think really enforced the reason why I got into it to begin with.

The idea of having an obligation to her community is something that Mary brings up several times in our interviews. Mary is acutely aware of her financial good fortune and how the area she grew up in has changed since she was a child (i.e. great loss of farmland). The CSA is a great compromise for Mary; it assuages some of her guilt about living on (“I’m sitting on old farmland and I feel guilty”); she gets to feel part of a community; and she gets good quality produce. Mary expresses two intangible attributes here. The first is *community involvement*, and the second is *lessening guilt*.

Mary wants to be one of many people who is supporting a system that will help preserve farmland and support the community. When Mary talks about her value of community involvement, she does not refer to the physical or service aspects of the CSA. Rather, she



focuses on the inward experiential aspects of the CSA. “I feel really good about what I’m doing... it has helped me...to feel more integrated into the community.”

One way Mary expresses her guilt is through her “obligation to support the community.” Several times during our interviews she states that farms are part of her community and that she has a desire to support them. These statements are often coupled with an admission that her house is sitting on old farmland. It seems like Mary is seeking to make up for her housing choice through other purchases she makes. The CSA is key to *lessening guilt*.

### *Connecting to her past*

Connecting to the past happens naturally for Mary every time she goes to the farm to pick up her CSA share. Mary’s 13-year old daughter has become “quite attached” to the CSA and insists on going every week. These mother-daughter trips have become a way for Mary to connect to her daughter and also to her own childhood.

Other intangibles, for me having grown up in Central Pennsylvania and we had a huge garden and canned a lot of stuff and put up a lot of stuff, well, I’m not ambitious enough to can, but I am moderately ambitious enough to freeze stuff. So we’d freeze some stuff and it provided an opportunity to do stuff like that with the kids. The other night once again we made pesto out of all the basil that they had and froze it. It does bring up nice memories about doing that sort of thing, which are important memories to me about my childhood and now my kids have those memories.

Mary talks about her experience of canning and preserving food when she was a child, and now she is doing the same things with her children. Making pesto and freezing it helps Mary connect to positive memories from her childhood, while building similar memories for her own children. In her descriptions of the CSA, Mary often refers to these sorts of intangible attributes. Because she received so much basil from the CSA, she was able to make pesto with her children. Mary gives the impression that freezing and making things like pesto happen on a

fairly regular basis (“once again we made pesto”). This way of connecting to her CSA is important to Mary, and goes beyond the tangible attributes of the CSA. Creating memories and accessing “important” memories are intangible surprises Mary receives from the CSA.

The tangible attribute Mary talks about is the basil, but her focus is on the memories that she builds and accesses through transforming the basil into pesto and freezing it. The intangible attribute “*accessing and creating memories*” comes out of an experiential aspect of the CSA, that is, these memories are formed through interactions with the CSA.

You know [the CSA] reinforces something very earthy and organic for me and it is kind of funny because towards the end of summer... we began to take our neighbors [to get food] and they very much enjoyed it. So I think for me [the CSA] does reinforce something about my upbringing or how I was brought up and the way I do things and it was nice to see that maybe in spite of everybody’s hustley-bustley life they can have a piece of that nature too.

The CSA not only provides Mary with opportunities to access her memories and create new memories for her children, it also reinforces the choices she currently makes. She talks about getting her neighbors involved and sharing not only her food, but also the calmness (vs. hustle-bustle) that the natural environment of the CSA provides. These intangible attributes (*accessing and creating memories* and *community involvement*) of the CSA are significant to Mary’s assessment of the value of the CSA.

Mary heavily evaluates her CSA on its experiential aspects, such as going to the farm, bringing neighbors to the farm, and using the produce she gets from the farm. Although the physical product plays a key role in these experiences (the reason for going to the farm, the food that she cooks and gives to her family), the experiences, the emotions that result from the visits to the farm, and the time spent preparing the food are what she focuses on. The service aspect of the CSA is almost entirely absent from Mary’s evaluation of it. She does occasionally talk about “the people who grow the food,” but service is not an aspect of the CSA that is very salient to

her. As with Tony, Mary's focus on the experiential aspects of the CSA cause her to focus on the intangible attributes when she talks about the product, and when she creates her value assessment.

### *Feeling good about her choices*

The third aspect of Mary's values, and valuation of the CSA is that her involvement with it makes her feel good about the choices she makes. She is very aware of her shopping habits and how she feels about them

I will say, with an element of embarrassment, that I always feel very very guilty about throwing out food. And you know everyone, I guess, in the States ends up throwing out some fraction of whatever they consume and one thing I have noticed [with the CSA] is that I don't throw out as much. And even if I buy... the mesclun mix or something like that, which, you go to [the supermarket], you buy a bag, you open it, it's good for a day, you know, maybe. Maybe you'll get two days out of it, but you know, I've had bags [from the CSA] last upwards of a week and they're still great. Uh but, so not only do I think that the process itself lends itself to a longer shelf life for the vegetables, I tend to value them more I think and make real efforts not to throw them out.

Not throwing out food saves Mary from the feelings of guilt that come along with being wasteful. She provides two reasons for not wasting as much of the food she gets from the CSA as compared to the food she buys in the supermarket. The first reason is that the CSA produce has a longer shelf life, so Mary has more time to use it. The second reason is that she "tend[s] to value" the produce more. This is because she feels connected to the community and the farm, and she feels "a strange kind of bonding" with the CSA that causes her to make the effort to use or give away all her food.

With this aspect of Mary's values, she refers to tangible and intangible attributes of the CSA. The tangible attributes she discusses are referred to directly and obliquely. She directly refers to bags of mesclun salad mix, and how long they last. However, she indirectly refers to

the quality of the product, as she compares the CSA with the supermarket in terms of the shelf life of the produce. Mary is specific with the intangible attributes of the CSA that she is highlighting. In the above quotation, Mary clearly talks about feeling guilty about throwing food away and how being part of the CSA has helped her cut down on her waste. This intangible attribute of *lessening guilt* is something Mary talked about several times throughout all three interviews (guilt of living on old farmland, guilt about shopping at Wal-Mart, guilt about not buying her meat from local farmers). *Lessening guilt* is related to the experiences Mary has with her CSA. The *lessening of guilt* is an emotional experience that Mary has as a result of her involvement with the CSA, but happens on an internal, personal level.

Mary is specific about how she sees the CSA, what she gets out of it, and why she joined. She knows that she cares more about the intangible aspects of the CSA than the produce. In the CSA, personal values come together with shopping, and it provides Mary with a situation where she does not have to choose between her values and products she wants to buy. Rather, the CSA gives her the community connections she desires as well as removes the guilt she carries from other areas in her life.

I honestly think that I get more intangibles out of [the CSA] than tangibles. I think it's so much more than the food. The food to me is kind of an added benefit... I almost see this as making, not really a nonprofit contribution, but contribution to something in the community that serves a worthwhile cause and I get the food on top of it. Do you know what I mean? I can go and I can get food and granted some of this stuff is much better flavor and much more interesting than what you can get at [the supermarket] and stuff like that, but you can get it [at the supermarket] and fancy it up so it's pretty good. But when I joined this [CSA], I joined this to be doing something that I considered to be good for the community and everything else. And by the way, I happen to get all of these wonderful vegetables on top of it. That's the way I look at it.

Intangible attributes are heavily weighted in Mary's assessment of the value of the CSA. Mary makes direct comparisons between the food at the CSA and food at the supermarket, suggesting that food at the supermarket needs to be fancied up in order to taste "pretty good."

However, although she refers to the food she gets at the CSA as having better flavor and being more interesting in terms of selection, she dismisses the food as an “added benefit” of the CSA. Her focus is on the intangible attributes, which include supporting a “worthwhile cause” and “doing something I consider to be good for the community and everything else.” For Mary, the tangible product receded and the importance of the intangible product attributes dominate her perception of the product as a whole. These “intangibles” support Mary’s personal values and affect her product value assessment.

### *Conclusion of Case 2*

The values that led Mary to focus on certain aspects of her CSA were community involvement, connecting to her past, and feeling good about her choices. Because these values are important to Mary in her own life, she sees the attributes of the CSA and evaluates the CSA, through the lens these values provide. The result is that Mary focuses on several tangible and intangible attributes, but weighs the intangible aspects of the CSA most heavily in her value assessment.

The tangible attributes of the CSA that Mary talks about are freshness, quality, and taste. The intangible attributes she refers to are *accessing and creating memories* and *lessening guilt*. The attributes Mary focuses on reveal different aspects of the CSA. The tangible attributes illustrate which aspects of the physical product are most important to Mary. These are primarily the quality, variety, and shelf life of the food. The intangible attributes refer to experiential aspects of the CSA. Here also it is useful to split experiential attributes into outward and inward parts.

Mary talks about *accessing and creating memories* in reference to the memories the CSA

brings up from her own life, as well as how experiences she has with her children and the CSA create memories for them to have in the future. The other intangible attribute Mary focuses on is *lessening guilt*. This attribute plays a large part in her value assessment, and comes up in inward and outward aspects of the CSA. Part of her guilt comes from throwing out food, an outward experience. However, part of her guilt comes from living on former farmland, an inner experience. By sharing food with her neighbors and being involved with the community in positive ways, Mary helps to assuage her guilt. The CSA is a big part of that.

Mary uses these attributes to assess the value of the CSA in many different ways. She includes elements about the product (“longer shelf-life,” no “pesticides,”), the outward experience (“you pick out whatever produce that’s available,” “you make a special trip”), and the inward experience (“I tend to value [the produce] more,” “a strange bonding takes place). Mary hardly recognizes the service aspect of the product.

Mary refers to her experiences many times as she talks about the attributes of the CSA. She uses her experiences to highlight and access the intangible attributes that she finds so important. Mary uses the tangible attributes and the experiences she has with the CSA to demonstrate the importance of the intangible attributes. Through anecdotes of her experiences with the CSA, she highlights the intangible attributes that are most important to her.

Although Mary uses tangible and intangible attributes to describe the CSA and assess the value of the CSA, she focuses mostly on intangible attributes. This could be because of her emphasis on the experiential aspect of the CSA, as opposed to the physical aspect of the CSA. If Mary’s value assessment were confined only to tangible attributes of the CSA, the CSA would be extremely flat, rather than the rich experience it has been for her. Intangible attributes add personal connection and depth to Mary’s assessment of the value of the CSA

### ***Case 3: Sandra***

#### *Who is Sandra?*

Sandra is in her mid-thirties, married, and has no children. Just over one year ago, she quit her job as working in a computer help center to follow her dream of being a writer. She currently works as a freelance writer and editor. Her husband also quit his job to pursue a Master's degree in sociology. Sandra and her husband have managed to make ends meet, although with her bringing in the only household income of 30K, money is tight.

Sandra and her husband have both gone through major life shifts during the past few years. She describes it as “we were in our mid-30s doing the 9-5 grind... we decided we wanted to kind of live out our values more and do our life's work.” Part of this transition is making conscious choices in all areas of their lives, including what they eat.

Personal health, environmental issues, and community connections are the values that are most salient to Sandra. Unlike Tony and Mary, Sandra's values are intertwined to the point that it is difficult to separate personal health from environmental issues from community connections. This is a reflection of Sandra's concerted effort to live a life that is integrated and “according to [her] values.” She does not separate work life from home life. Sandra is concerned about becoming healthier and more “wholesome.” Specifically, she is dismayed by the buildup of harmful chemicals in her own body and on the planet, largely because of chemicals and pesticides used on food. This use of chemicals in conventional farming is a large part of her concern about the environment. One way she approaches her environmental concerns is to try to eat as much organic, locally-grown food as possible. Having a connection to a local farm, indeed, being part of a CSA is a large part of how Sandra achieves this goal. Again, we see how

Sandra's values are intertwined. Not only does the CSA provide her with healthy food to eat, which was grown without chemical fertilizers and was not shipped long distances (environmental issues), but it also provides her with a way to feel connected to her community. Throughout our interviews, Sandra brings up these three themes in many different contexts.

Sandra's values bring her attention to certain aspects of the CSA. When speaking about the CSA, she focuses on physical, service, and experiential aspects of it, and uses both tangible and intangible attributes of the CSA to form her value assessment. Because "money is tight" in Sandra's household, she is very aware of what she is buying and why she spends her money where and how she does.

I'm paying for the tangibles and the intangibles. I'm paying for food, good nutritious high-quality food. I'm paying for those things that [I] just described... the community, environment and local that mean something to me. And there is almost a spiritual thing because I'm not part of any organized religion, but I feel a connection to the earth that's spiritually important and inspirational. I'm inspired by beautiful places and inspired to live better and (inaudible) beautiful things.

### *Health*

Sandra is concerned about health. She is "a very picky shopper," and always wants the "most wholesome" foods she can buy. Her idea of wholesome food has changed over time, as she has learned more about food and food systems, "I mean that changes constantly. I thought I was being healthy in '95 because I'd have a bagel and pasta three times a day because that's what we thought was healthy." Sandra is now focused on eating fresh food because of her beliefs about the healthfulness of the food, "the closer it was to the vine that I eat it, the more nutrients it has." The CSA provides Sandra with an easy place to purchase healthy food that she can feel good about, "I mean I certainly feel wholesome [eating food from the CSA]. It just feels good... I feel good." Sandra connects her concern about personal health with her concern for the environment.



The local aspect [of the CSA], the community aspect and the environment and they are all sort of interrelated, but local – it’s nice to know the person who grows your food. It’s not an anonymous thing coming to you from the system, it’s coming from [the three farmers]. I know who they are; I like them. It’s great. But that’s the local aspect. The environmental aspect is – I’m well aware of the problem with pesticides and very concerned – concerned about wildlife, concerned about the buildup, concerned about the fact that we all have chemicals that we’re born with and have a background of chemicals in our bodies and there’s nothing healthy or pure or wholesome about that. It’s an unfortunately reality of the world that we live in. That means cancer and it means endocrine destructors and it’s a health hazard to me. So that’s on the environment front. So I feel good that in some tiny little way I’m not buying products that are sprayed with a bunch of chemicals that are going to be persistent and affect the birds and the bee populations and add another endocrine destructor to our system and cause fertility issues for some species somewhere.

Although Sandra includes both tangible and intangible attributes of the CSA in her discussion of it, she relies heavily on intangible attributes of the CSA. The main tangible attribute she refers to is that she knows the person who grows her food. However, she uses this attribute to contrast food from the CSA with anonymous food that comes from “the system.” Knowing and liking the farmers who grew her food references another attribute that is extremely important to Sandra: *closeness to food*. These inward, experiential, “spiritual” benefits Sandra gets from *not* buying anonymous food clearly go beyond the physical fact that she can see and meet the farmers who are growing the food. For Sandra, the intangible attribute seems to carry more weight. In this case, the people who grow the food that is available in the supermarket are not “real” people to Sandra, but are part of “the system,” which is a sharp contrast to the “real” people who grow food at the CSA. Sandra wants to get her food from the real, tangible growers at the CSA, rather than from the impersonal “system” that is available at the supermarket.

Other intangible attributes Sandra points out are *trust* and *proactive choice*. *Trust* refers to her believing that the food from the CSA is not grown with pesticides. The toxic effects of pesticides on her and on the environment are clearly a concern for Sandra. *Proactive choice* refers to Sandra’s quest to act in ways that are inline with her values. As far as the environment

and health go, *proactive choice* refers to her conscious decision to purchase her food, and nourish herself in a way that does not harm her or the planet. Sandra can interact with this intangible attribute by foregoing other options to join the CSA. This attribute of the CSA gives Sandra an opportunity to feel like a responsible, considerate, and caring person who is “making a difference.”

Sandra refers to service and experiential aspects of the CSA. She talks about the service aspect of the CSA in terms of the farmers who grow her food, but she does not go into much detail. Sandra’s focus is on the inward experiential aspect of the CSA; that is, how it makes her feel, the effects she believes eating “wholesome” food will have on her health and the health of the planet.

### *Environment*

Sandra has strong environmental values, and vast knowledge about environmental issues for a typical person. She expresses these values through a desire to be close to the food she eats, wanting food with no pesticides for herself and for others, and a great awareness and concern for her personal health and the health of the planet.

In terms of environment and social things, [my husband and I] generally understand but are disappointed with the idea of chains stores everywhere and national chains and generic big box stores and that seems be how everything is going, but if you can opt out wherever you can, that’s good. So environmentally, it’s probably the thing we focus on. Environmentally, I’m a huge believer in organic agriculture. I study about pesticides and endocrine destructors, Silent Spring<sup>2</sup> all of that and I’m very aware of what the real cost

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<sup>2</sup> Silent Spring was written by Rachel Carson in 1962. Many people believe this book helped to launch the environmental movements in the Western world. Published by Houghton Mifflin; Silent Spring claimed that pesticides had harmful effects on the environment. In the book, Carson accused the chemical industry of spreading false information and she accused public officials of accepting what the chemistry industry said without looking into it.

is of growing conventional food.

Sandra echoes the intangible attribute *proactive choices* in her environmental perspective. She does not like the presence of chain stores, and feels it is “good” to opt out when she can. In other words, the CSA provides her a way to opt out of purchasing food from big supermarkets, where she does not know how the food was really grown and when it was harvested. Sandra, like Mary, does not have to choose between her values and the products she wants to buy at the CSA.

I’m very aware of the cost of growing conventional food [in terms of the] health of human beings and for the planet as well. For example, as a writer I’ve written about the Dead Zone in the Gulf of Mexico, which is a huge hypoxic zone about the size of Massachusetts, which showed up in the Gulf of Mexico because of all the fertilizer, which comes down the Mississippi and into the Gulf. We just know conventional agriculture is problematic. There are a lot of problems, so it’s a wonderful thing to be able to in some small way take our dollars and support something that’s organic and wholesome and is not polluting the Gulf of Mexico or the Chesapeake Bay water, or whatever local water source.

Her concern for the environment caused Sandra to seek work as a writer that would give her the opportunity to learn more about environmental issues and hazards. Through her work, she has learned about various environmental issues that exist as a result of conventional farming methods. The environmental piece is one reason Sandra likes the CSA, but the community part is also important, and the two are connected.

It’s a much more aesthetically pleasing experience to go out to the farm and see across that road and see a real live house instead of parking lot. It’s nice to be in an old barn instead of a box sort of building. It’s nice to see the people that grew your food. You know it’s maybe that the connection is very direct. It’s very specific; it’s very direct. This is the land the food has been grown on. Here is the person that grew it instead of a pile of lettuce from California, from far away. I knew who grew it. I know when it was cut – that’s a big one too. I have no idea how long [produce at the supermarket] has been off the vine. You see apples [at the supermarket] and I know enough about the food industry to know that that apple has been off for a while, so there is that freshness factor and that’s very pleasing.

Once again, Sandra echoes her pleasure in knowing the people who grew her food, and the personal connection between the producer and the consumer. She knows which piece of land her food was grown on and when it was harvested. Again, she talks about the lack of anonymity the CSA provides and the *closeness to food* that it allows her to have.

Sandra refers to tangible aspects of the CSA, including the look and feel of the barn, and the taste and freshness of the apples. She seems to be very aware of the aesthetic differences between going to the farm versus going to the grocery store, and clearly prefers the “aesthetically pleasing” aspects of the farm. These tangible, aesthetic attributes of the CSA refer to the physical aspect of the CSA and affect Sandra’s experience of the CSA. They are an outward experiential aspect of the CSA.

Throughout our interviews Sandra also focused on the inward experiential aspects of the CSA – the intangible, emotional, and spiritual benefits she gained from being a CSA member. These benefits are reflected in the attributes she highlights: *trust*; *closeness to food*; and *proactive choice*.

### *Community*

Being part of a community is important to Sandra, which is one reason she originally joined the CSA. She “feel[s] part of the farm,” because, as she says, “I eat the food from there and it’s in my life and because of the time I spent doing productive things there.” By “productive things” she means helping out during community work days, talking to people while she is there, and enjoying herself while she’s there (“I love going to the barn; I love seeing everything that’s there”).

The community aspect [of the CSA] is cool. I like to be invested in it. I like to be part of

a group that's contributing for a greater good whether it's the garden club or the quilt club. I realize those things are important to me. I think they are important, but particularly I work alone from home and that's my community. Those are my ways I plug into the rest of the people around here, so those things are important

The importance of community to Sandra is reflected through her stories about how she chooses to be involved and the various clubs she belongs to. The CSA is a place Sandra can go where people share some of her values; she classifies it as a group that is contributing to the "greater good." This *community involvement*, is an intangible attribute of the CSA that Sandra is drawn to, and that she names as an attribute of other clubs she belongs to (the quilt club and the garden club). Because she works from home, finding ways to be involved in the community is how she connects with other people and how she is able to "be part of something bigger."

Sandra and Mary express *community involvement* in different ways. Mary seems to want to be involved by economically supporting something (i.e. joining forces with other community members to support a farm), while Sandra focuses on the experiential aspects of feeling like she has a place in her community. Both Sandra and Mary express an interest in being part of something larger than themselves, and doing something "good" that goes beyond their own lives.

In the above quotation, Sandra expressed outward experiential aspects of the CSA, that is, the mere coming together of people who are contributing to something larger than themselves. She also refers to inward experiential aspects of the CSA as she talks about her investment in the CSA. Sandra is in touch with emotional and spiritual aspects of the CSA (i.e., feeling invested in the CSA model), which are the inward experiential aspects, as well as the outward experiential aspects (i.e., knowing the people who grow her food).

Because of Sandra's global perspective, her focus is wider than the community right in front of her. She is concerned about more global issues as well.

My husband is very tuned into issues about cheap labor or child labor or sweat shops and

that kind of thing, so we're very aware when things are cheap it's because there is a cost somewhere. Somebody's suffering, so it's no bargain. So I would consider Wal-Mart being at one end of the spectrum and the CSA to be at the other. Yes, Wal-Mart exists for a reason but there are a lot of things in our culture that made these conditions for Wal-Mart to be there.

For Sandra, the CSA exists as the antithesis to Wal-Mart. She, like Tony, is aware of the "real cost of food." Sandra extends this to goods in general and contrasts Wal-Mart with the CSA. Where the CSA provides *closeness to food*; Wal-Mart provides anonymous packages. Where the CSA provides a natural landscape; Wal-Mart provides the box-like store with the big parking lot. Sandra knows who grew the food at the CSA, and thus knows about labor issues on the farm, but in the Wal-Mart she believes cheap items always have a cost somewhere. She *trusts* the CSA, but seems not to *trust* Wal-Mart.

### *Conclusion of Case 3*

The significance of Sandra's values of health, environmental issues, and community involvement affect how she views the CSA. Because of the importance of her values, Sandra focuses on attributes and aspects of the CSA that highlight those values.

Sandra uses tangible and intangible attributes to describe the CSA. The tangible attributes she refers to are freshness, knowing who grows her food, knowing the place (literally) where her food was grown, and the look of the barn. The intangible attributes she points to are *trust*, *closeness to food*, *community involvement*, and *proactive choices*. The attributes Sandra focuses on emphasize different aspects of the CSA. Here, freshness refers to the physical product of the food. The description of the barn and the farm refer to her experience of going to pick up her food. Her acknowledgement of knowing who grows her food is a recognition of the service aspect of the CSA. And, as with Tony and Mary, Sandra focuses on the inward

experiential aspects of the CSA. Specifically, she focuses on the inner emotions she experiences while at the farm, and because of the CSA: i.e. trusting the food is not grown with pesticides, feeling like the CSA is a “better choice,” and enjoying the intimate relationship she has with the food. Sandra expresses these intangible attributes in her assessment of the value of the CSA.

### ***Conclusion linking all three case studies***

The ways that Tony, Mary, and Sandra view the CSA seem to be affected by their personal values. They all focus on aspects of the CSA that are directly tied in with their salient personal values. As they discuss the CSA, they use both tangible and intangible attributes in their assessments of the value of the CSA, but they all rely heavily on intangible attributes. The informants refer to some different intangible attributes, and some similar intangible attributes. Reasons for the differences could be that each informant focuses on different values, and have individual backgrounds. Reasons for similar intangible attributes could be because the informants share similar values, but it could also be because there are certain intangible attributes that are really part of this complex product called “CSA.”

In addition, they all address at least two aspects of the CSA: the physical, service, or experiential. Interestingly, all three of them divide the experiential aspect of the CSA into outward and inward experiences. Outward experiences are more social and include going to the farm, calling friends and family for recipes, talking about the CSA, and experimenting with food. Inward experiences are more emotional and personal and include feeling good for being part of the CSA, recalling childhood memories, and being close to the food source. Although their personal values are different and the attributes of the CSA they focus on are different, Tony, Mary, and Sandra all use their values as a guide for which aspects of the CSA they notice, and

which attributes are most important.

### **Cross-case analyses**

The next section will be dedicated to a cross-case analysis of two issues. The first issue is the relationship between the price and the value of the CSA. The second issue that will be analyzed below is the relationship of product attributes and personal values that are expressed by the informants, and how they differ from means-end chains analysis.

#### ***Price and value***

Price was deliberately left out of the individual case studies for two reasons. The first is that it is an extremely dominant issue in past studies of value assessment and thus deserves clear and focused attention in this analysis. The second is because the issue of price cuts across all three cases. Thus, the way each of these CSA members deals with price will be examined here in a cross-case analysis. Before that discussion begins, recall that each of these informants joined the CSA for the following year – an indication that each member found enough value in the CSA to repurchase.

Past research shows that consumers use price when they determine the value of products. These CSA members deal with price in a much different way than has been documented in the past. Tony, Mary, and Sandra had a hard time figuring out whether the CSA was “a good deal.” They were confused about whether it was expensive or cheap, and they seemed to feel guilty about thinking it may have been expensive.

Mary:

First of all, it's expensive. I mean, I shouldn't say it's expensive, check that. Relative, uh, you know if you figure out how many weeks you go, and uh, the number of weeks, and the amount of vegetables you get, and I did this, um, you get a price per pound, and it



is more, a little bit more expensive to buy this than it is to go to Walmart and get you know, whatever is on sale, three for a dollar or whatever, I don't know. So I think, I think that there's uh first of all a price issue, but second of all, I appreciate it more. I mean, I think that there's kind of a strange bonding that takes place where you go, you pick it out yourself, see it, you know you see it in the crates, you know that people actually brought it in from the field or whatever, and I think there's an inherent feeling that it's more valuable than what you do at the grocery store.

Part of the uncertainty these CSA members felt about the value of the CSA comes from the credence aspect of the CSA. That is, until any given growing season is over, the CSA member cannot know the extent of the produce that (s)he has purchased. In order to overcome this asymmetry of information, CSA members use the information they have to try to estimate the value. That is, they attempt to figure out the quantity of produce they are getting and compare it to the same quantity from a grocery store to see which would be more expensive.

Mary:

You know I actually did the calculation if you count it out, um, dollars per pound and I think if you compare it to organic food [in the grocery store] it's pretty comparable. If you don't, you can compare it to [conventional food in the grocery store] it's probably about twice as expensive and that didn't faze me. We were talking about a term like value. I think the value increased, but in terms of cost I think it's probably comparable to getting organic food at the store.

Sandra:

Side by side I don't know that we saved as much on our weekly produce purchases to equate, but we probably did. I mean, it hasn't cost us that much. It's probably not a huge difference. But I think we were thinking that's we'd see how much we spend on produce. So it's \$25 and that's \$100 a month okay so that's \$600, but [the CSA] only cost \$350... So I think we were expecting a big savings, but I don't think that represents a big savings. It was more of a wash. Does that make sense in terms of just the money?

Tony:

It definitely costs more than the supermarket, but I'm willing to pay it, you know, after years of eating cheap food, you know, I guess I finally realized, you do get what you pay for, and so it's worth the added cost to get better quality, for me.

Tony:

I used to think the CSA might be expensive because I paid \$350 for six months. I guess

that's like \$50 a month and I don't think it's more expensive than a supermarket. It's on par or cheaper. So I think that helps stretch my food dollar a little bit. I think now with some hindsight if I went to the supermarket and bought six pounds of produce in a week I could pretty much come close to what I spend on my CSA share and not get as good quality food.

Each member has a slightly different situation. Mary is comparing the CSA with conventional produce, or "whatever's on sale," and one would expect organic produce of any kind to be more expensive than conventional produce. Sandra is unsure about whether or not she saved money through the CSA, but she does not think she spent more money. Two quotations from Tony are included above to illustrate his uncertainty about whether the CSA was expensive. At first Tony says the CSA is clearly more expensive than the supermarket, but that he is willing to pay more for a better product, however, a few minutes later he changes his mind. In his second statement, Tony thinks the cost of the produce is comparable to what he would spend at the supermarket, but he would not have been spending so much money on produce (or eating so much produce) if he were not part of the CSA.

Rather than focusing on price as an indicator of quality (Zeithaml 1988), or as a dominant attribute of the product (Shiv et al. 2005), these CSA members practically dismissed price all together. When asked directly if the CSA was a good value, they did not focus on a physical product, rather they almost ignore price and focused on the experiential aspect of the CSA and the intangible attributes of the CSA.

Sandra:

It's so difficult to put a price on it... How do you put a number on it? In the mainstream world it's all about numbers. A lot of it is about numbers... I think of it as an investment. I think in the long term it's an excellent, excellent value. In the short term I don't know. I mean I just don't know. I haven't really looked at every receipt and looked at whether we are saving enough on produce. It's hard because we're on a very tight budget. So it's a challenge for us to make those kinds of investments. But the one thing, you can look at

our lives and if you observe it long enough you will see we cut a lot of corners. Our clothes are getting a little ragged; our shoes are getting ragged... but weren't not going to skimp on food. I am not going to eat Raman noodles; those days are over. I know you get from your body what you put into it and I'm too wise now to do those things. I think that the best investment is health. So that's the long-term view, it's an excellent, excellent value in the long term, no question. We will do it again provided we can; provided they will take our installments because it was a good chunk [of money] at once.

The uncertainty that many CSA members feel about whether the CSA is expensive is echoed by Sandra. The first thing Sandra achieves in this quotation is separating herself from the "mainstream world." Sandra is a woman who makes life decisions based on her personal values and goals, and labeling the value of the things she buys solely with a price does not capture the importance of the good. However, because of her tight budget, she is conscious of how and where she spends her money and ultimately, is uncertain about the value of the CSA in terms of the price.

Sandra deals with this uncertainty by separating the money from the value of the product in the long term. Sandra clearly states that she does not know if the CSA is a "good value" in the short term, but seems positive about the "excellent, excellent value" of the CSA in the long term. The investment in future health reflects Sandra's personal values. She would rather give up buying new clothes than "skimp on food." The CSA fits in with the new, more conscious lifestyle that she and her husband have chosen, and judging the CSA solely based on price does not make sense to her. Joining the CSA was a decision that was made based on her personal values, and as long as she can afford to pay for it, she will continue to be part of it.

Mary reinforces the difficulty of putting a price on the CSA. Unlike Sandra, Mary is not thinking about her future health (although she does think about the future health of her children), rather in her description of the CSA she is thinking about how being part of it makes her feel in the present.

Mary:

First of all I was buying into an idea of the local farms and supporting the local farmers and things like that, so I was very much in a sense buying into an ideal that I believe in. The other thing I was buying was some discipline because I am one of these people that will go to the store and buy a lot of stuff and put it in the freezer, but you never like to do that with produce... I think I said I bought an ideal and I think I did buy an ideal. I got a lot of feel good out of it. I bought some elements of self-satisfaction because I've always kind of been the kind of person that has felt better about buying organic food and stuff like that, although I never really trust the organic label at the store because I don't know what it means. And I know enough about food that anything can mean anything. But I feel if I go to [the] farm and they say we don't use chemicals on the food that we're talking the same language... I bought an ideal and I bought feel good and I bought food.

Money is not an issue for Mary. She is in a "high income bracket," although she describes herself as frugal. Aside from a few comments about her uncertainty about the price (above), she focuses on intangible attributes and experiential aspects of the CSA. Mary lists several things she "bought" when she joined the CSA: an ideal; some discipline; "feel good;" self-satisfaction; a way to buy organic food that she trusts; and finally, food. This list is comprised of one physical aspect of the CSA (food) and several inward experiential aspects of the CSA. She heavily weighs the intangible attributes of the CSA in her description of the product. Being part of the CSA gives Mary several positive emotional experiences, which are hard to label with a price.

The chance to purchase food in a way that is in line with their personal values is important enough to these CSA members that it causes uncertainty about whether the price of the CSA is a good value. They cannot completely separate the food from the personal and emotional benefits they receive from the CSA, thus they seem reluctant to judge the price of it. When asked if she thought the CSA was a good value for her money, Sandra responded:

I can tell you it's valuable. How do we assess that? Just by the way it feels. One little phrase that struck me is 'food that is good for the soul.' Kind of, what is this food we are talking about; what does it mean? It's not just good for the mind, but it's good for the soul too. It feels right on all those parts of life. It feels right to me.

These CSA members discount the importance of price in favor of how the CSA fits in with their personal values, and that they are discounting the importance of the physical aspects in favor of the experiential aspects of the CSA. This phenomenon does beg the question: why are they doing this? We know that price is an important factor in consumer expectations of and satisfaction with products (Zeithaml 1988). It seems that the CSA members are satisfied with the quantity and quality of the physical product (i.e. the food they take home) and that they believe the price they paid is similar enough to what they would have paid in a grocery store, that they do feel the CSA was “worth the price.” Tony has been surprised by what a “good value” the CSA is, and although he says he does not buy organic food in the supermarket, he likes getting it from the CSA.

It’s actually more than I can eat, it’s uh, it’s a really good value... I generally don’t buy organic produce in a supermarket because it seems to be a little bit too expensive, which is like in contrast to the stuff I get at [the CSA], which I think is pretty reasonable. But I still wouldn’t buy organic. In general I wouldn’t buy organic produce in a supermarket because it seems to be a little bit too expensive, even though it is a concern of mine, but I mean, if you’re gonna buy organic you may as well join the CSA and buy it that way.

It is possible that if the CSA members did not feel they were getting a good product, or enough quantity to warrant the price, then rather than discounting the price to focus on intangible attributes of the CSA, they would have concentrated on the tangible attributes of the CSA. Perhaps having a product that they are satisfied with allows them to see benefits of the CSA that go far beyond the food, to focus on experiential aspects and intangible attributes of the CSA, and to connect those to their personal values. However, if they were not satisfied with the product, it is possible that they would not be able to see past their disappointment, and would remain focused on the physical aspects and tangible attributes of the CSA.

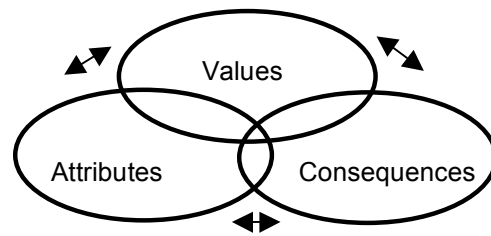
### ***Comparison to means-end chains***

Means-end chains are one way to connect product attributes with individual values (Gutman 1982). Analysis using means-end chains typically use laddering techniques to move informants from the lowest level, that is the attribute-level, up through the consequence level, to the highest level, which houses individual values. The laddering technique involves an interviewer constantly asking the informant why certain aspects of the product are important to him/her (Hofstede et al. 1998).

The research presented in this paper did not use laddering technique and was not a means-end analysis. However, because the research presented here deals with product attributes and individual values, the relationship between the findings of this research and the findings from means-end research will be compared here.

Individual values have a clear place at the top level of the means-end chain. This placement at the top suggests that through product attributes and consequences of products, individuals are able to obtain their higher, value-level goals. Conversely, what is shown through this research is the pervasiveness of individual values throughout the entire chain. Personal values provide a lens through which individuals focus on the product. They affect the attributes that are salient to the individual and thus affect the assessment of the consequences of using the product. Rather than the relationships presented in the linear diagram that is used in means-end chains, the research presented here suggests an interdependent relationship between individual values, product attributes, and product consequences such that each piece influences and is affected by the other two. See Figure 3.1.

Figure 3.1. Relationship between values, attributes, and consequences



### ***Food discoveries as an example***

In the means-end chain, product attributes are the lowest level, followed by consequences of the attributes, and then by individual values. However, the research presented here points to a pervasiveness of values, which influences which product attributes are most salient to individuals. To demonstrate, the intangible attribute, *food discoveries* from the case study of Tony, will be used as an example.

*Food discoveries* can be thought of as the product attribute at the lowest level of the means-end chain. Some of the consequences of *food discoveries* are that Tony has a wider variety of food he may choose to eat, he has formed strong opinions about where he wants to purchase his produce, and he is no longer stuck in his mental image of himself as a child avoiding certain foods. Tony's value of education is satisfied through his food discoveries, however it is also this same value that makes these discoveries so salient and important to Tony in the first place. In fact, Tony's values seem to be the lens through which he views the product attributes. That is, Tony is very concerned about his personal health and about conserving natural resources and the environment. These values guide the individual attributes he focuses on.

Rather than a linear relationship from product attribute up to personal values, the relationships between attributes, consequences and values illustrated here seem to affect each other at every piece of the means-end chain. Tony's values affect which attributes and which

consequences he notices, which in turn affect his experiences, and most likely reinforce or inform the personal values he started with.

## DISCUSSION

This essay had two primary goals. The first was to illustrate how personal values affect the ways that consumers view complex products. The second was to examine the place of intangible attributes in the assessment of value of the complex product, the CSA.

Personal values seem to be guiding consumers to focus on product attributes that are in line with consumers' salient values. They appear to function as a lens through which consumers approach a complex product like the CSA. In the three cases examined above, CSA members are shown to direct their attention to those aspects and attributes of the CSA that relate to their personal values, and to spend time discussing how attributes of the CSA reinforce their personal values.

In addition, the CSA members detailed in the cases above focus on intangible attributes when describing and forming their value assessment of the CSA, and they talk about physical, service, and experiential aspects of the CSA. Although the CSA members refer to both tangible and intangible attributes of the CSA, they are most focused on the intangible attributes of the CSA. The reason for this seems to be that they highlight experiential aspects of the CSA more than service or physical aspects. Experiential products have intangible and emotional attributes but have very few tangible attributes, while physical products have tangible and intangible attributes as do service products.



## **Dismissing price**

Indeed, even in the discussion of price, intangible attributes play a prominent role. Largely because of the credence characteristic of the CSA, members are not sure if the price they paid for the CSA was a good deal. However, it seems that if the members are satisfied with the quantity and quality of the physical product, and they feel the price they paid is within the same range they could expect to pay somewhere else, they dismiss the importance of price. Once price has been dismissed, CSA members focus on intangible attributes of the CSA to verify the value of the product.

## **Changes in value assessment over time**

Time may be a factor that affects how CSA members interpret price. For instance, because price seems to be dismissed once CSA members are comfortable that they are getting a good product, it could be that the relative importance of tangible attributes decreases over time. Specifically, when consumers first join a CSA, the price, quantity, variety, and quality of the produce that members receive may be more salient and most important. However, as the members become more familiar with their CSA, they could begin to trust and expect a certain amount, quality, and type of product. If their expectations were confirmed week after week, the physical aspects and tangible attributes of the CSA may become less important. This would be because the members are no longer preoccupied with whether they are getting “their money’s worth.” Once this concern is lifted, they may be free to focus on other aspects of the CSA, which include service and experiential aspects. This is a rich area for future research.

If this speculation is true, over time the stated importance of intangible attributes and experiential aspects of the CSA should increase, and the stated importance of tangible attributes

and physical aspects of the CSA should decrease. This does not mean that CSA members would not notice if they suddenly got poor quality produce, or very little produce. It is possible that the first time members received produce that was below their expectation, they would forgive the CSA, but if it happened repeatedly, one would expect that members would become quite dissatisfied with the CSA and begin to focus on the tangible attributes once again.

Over time, the stability of the quality and quantity of the produce the members receive from the CSA, as well as the underlying satisfaction with the product, provide a base from which the members can focus on how the CSA fits in with their lives and their personal values. Without that base, which must take time to develop, the members would probably remain focused on the tangible attributes of the CSA.

### **Two aspects of experiential products**

Although the CSA members focus on experiential aspects of the CSA, they refer to two different kinds of experiential aspects of the CSA: outward and inward. The outward experiential aspects tend to be social in nature and include things such as interacting with people and produce, going to the farm, walking into the barn, and the sounds and smells that are present at the farm. The outward experiences are easy to focus on and are often tangible experiences that happen within the confines of a certain event (i.e. picking up produce), and thus are confined to a certain time frame (i.e. the half hour spent picking up produce, or Friday afternoon).

The inward experiential aspects tend to be more personal and emotional in nature and include things such as personal realizations, relieving feelings of guilt, feeling connected to something bigger, and gaining access to personal memories. The inward experiences do not take place in the confines of specific events. Rather, they may be the lingering results of outward

experiences, the emotional culmination of weeks of reading or thinking about, or using the produce from the CSA. There is no set time (i.e. Friday afternoon) or time frame (i.e. a few minutes; few hours) in which these inward experiences take place; they seem to exist in the individual, without the confines of a timeline. These inward experiential aspects of the CSA help illuminate the connections between the various aspects of the complex product, the intangible attributes, and personal values.

### **Values relate to intangible attributes**

These CSA members have an interplay between their personal values and the intangible attributes of the CSA that they highlight. Their values seem to direct their attention to the attributes of the CSA they focus on, which in turn strengthens their values. This is seen in the way Tony focuses on his value of education and then talks about his food discoveries at length throughout each of his interviews. This interconnected relationship between attributes and values provides another way (i.e. beyond means-end chains) to think about the connection between product attributes and personal values. The research presented here suggests that personal values affect which product attributes and consequences are most important to the consumer.

### **Managerial implications**

The reflexive, as opposed to linear, relationship between product attributes and personal values that we see in these data have practical implications for the way marketing managers try to connect with and influence customers. Rather than appealing to demographics, sending messages that appeal to consumer values, and then having product attributes to back up the

values could be an effective way to market complex products.

The research presented here suggests that there are many intangible product attributes that are not apparent when a complex product is first examined. For example, *proactive choice* and *lessening guilt* would not necessarily come to mind when asked to describe a CSA. However, if the CSA is looked at as the complex product it is, and examined in terms of a small number of pertinent individual values, then such intangible attributes emerge from the product to illuminate important and personal ways that consumers view the product and incorporate the product into their lifestyles. The presence and importance of intangible attributes should not be dismissed when it comes to advertising and marketing decisions. Rather, managers should search for prominent intangible attributes of products as a way to connect with consumers' personal values.

### **Future directions**

One limitation of this research is that it is bound by its context. Thus, future research should seek to increase external validity by exploring the relationship of personal values, and intangible attributes in other complex products. Along those lines, future research should examine boundary conditions of the importance of intangible attributes. Perhaps intangible attributes lose importance when consumers are dissatisfied with the physical product; this must be verified. Also, the question remains open as to whether intangible attributes are important for physical, service, and/or experiential products, and if so, for which types of products they are most/least important. A final place for future research is to look at the interplay between value assessment and personal values over time to investigate whether and how this relationship changes, as the tenure between the consumer and the product increases.

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Table 3.1. Demographic Information and Reasons for Joining CSA

<b>Name</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Relationship Status</b>	<b>Kids at home</b>	<b>Education</b>	<b>Profession</b>	<b>Household Income</b>	<b>Primary reason for joining CSA</b>
Emily	29	Married	0	MA	Librarian	64k	Wanted to support her community
Mary	42	Married	2	MD, MBA, PhD	Medical Administrator	Over 200k	Wanted to support local farmers
Mitch	50	Married	2	PhD	Professor	120k	Wanted to support sustainable agriculture
Sandra	36	Married	0	BS	Freelance Writer/Editor	30k	Wanted fresh vegetables
Sarah	42	Single	2	BA	Manager in Human Services	25k	Concerned about having vegetables around
Tony	39	Single	0	BA	Engineer	60-90k	Concerned about peak oil

## **CONCLUDING REMARKS**

This dissertation focuses on the personal values present within consumption communities, and how these personal values affect individual actions and the value assessment of products. This research was conducted within the context of Community Supported Agriculture programs, thus the way that individuals relate to inherently value-based organizations was highlighted in the data. An analysis of the values that exist within CSAs illustrated the importance of congruent values both to consumers and to the organizations. In general, the research presented here suggests that personal values play an important role in determining which organizations individuals join (value congruence matters), in the process of identification formation, and in assessing the value of the product.

Why should we look at organizations that have a clear focus on values and express them clearly in their marketing materials? Many organizations are starting to state the values of the organization on their websites and in their annual reports. Yet we do not know how consumers relate to, respond to, or interpret these statements of company or individual values.

### **Discoveries and questions**

The research in this dissertation shows that in certain communities, a high degree of value congruence exists. It suggests that when consumers and organizations share values, identification formation is possible. Developing relationships and building communities is directly related to individual values. The informants in all three essays highlighted the importance of relationships and learning from other community members in their daily lives. Having an opportunity to interact with the farmers, other CSA members, and produce from the CSA helped create feelings of connection as well as identification with the CSA.

There is a strong connection between individual values and how individuals perceive organizations and products. Research presented in this dissertation points to a scenario in which individuals seem to use those personal values to form their overall assessment of the value (or worth) of their involvement with the organization, or in this case, of the product they are purchasing. If the general values of an organization are clearly stated, and if individuals can make concrete and persistent connections to that organization, that value to the individual increases.

Intangible attributes are extremely important both to the assessment of the value of the CSA, and to the members' experience of the CSA. Some people have a real and deeply felt desire for local food and personal connections to their food sources. The produce is only a small part of what fulfills this desire. Rather, the experience of joining and being a CSA member, going to the farm to pick up the produce, and knowing they are doing something *good* for their communities and themselves is what satisfies these needs.

The CSA members make mental connections between their personal health and the health of their community and planet, and they watch their actions closely. They seem to put a high level of thought into how they spend their money and time, and during our interviews, several CSA members use the CSA as a lens through which to examine other parts of their life. Through this type of personal examination, the CSA members seem to re-assess their personal values, their work situations, their relationships with family members, their ideas about health, and their vision for the future.

The way individuals satisfy needs is an important marketing issue. The research presented in this dissertation shows that some CSA members satisfy their needs through the intangibles of the CSA – both the intangible attributes of the CSA product, and the relationships

that are formed through the CSA. The important connections that CSA members make between the organization, the product, their individual values, and their personal lives can teach us about the possible roles that organizations can play in communities, and the variety of meaningful relationships individuals can have with organizations.

Perhaps this is an initial look at something we could call a “values-based product.” A product that not only represents individuals’ values, but also helps individuals define their values and shape their lives. This type of product opens the door for a new level of connection between producers and consumers.

### **Personal reflections**

I was surprised by the amount of thought CSA members had about their food choices. Not only were they articulate about their relationship to the farm and the CSA, they were also aware of their relationships to the food system in general, and concerned about where their money went when they paid for food. New CSA members went through amazing transformations during the year I knew them. Tony went from not liking to eat vegetables and eating out or eating frozen dinners every night of the week, to loving the produce he gets from the farm, and trying new recipes. I just received an email from Tony saying he had tried a recipe I gave him a few months ago, and offering me a soup recipe he likes. Sandra’s idea of what it means to be healthy has changed drastically, and she and her husband are now determined to eat a diet of primarily local foods for the next year. Mitch used an idealized version of the CSA model as a way to assess and evaluate his own life, and has removed himself from several responsibilities in his work life so that he can spend more time with his family and in his garden.

The personal transformations of the new CSA members were surprising to me. Even

though I set out to see how CSA members relate to the CSA, I was amazed to see how quickly the new members became attached, and what a profound effect the CSA had on each of their lives, and their food choices.

## **Limitations**

A major limitation of the research presented here is that there are additional questions that should be answered, but were not asked at the time the data were collected. For example, it would be useful to know how the CSA members perceived the CSA, i.e. did they see it as a physical, service, or experiential product? There are also other questions regarding the cost of the CSA and the value that members received from it that would have been nice to probe, such as how perceptions of the cost of the CSA changed over time as the CSA members began to identify with the CSA.

Another limitation of the research is that it was conducted in one context. In order to increase the external validity of the theoretical contributions proposed here, additional contexts should be explored and compared to the data from the CSA.

## **Future directions**

There are many possible ways to continue this research, all of which are important and needed. Looking at other contexts that deal with complex products, or other value-based organizations would provide more information about the ways individuals use their personal values and direct their behavior, and how those values affect how they interact with the organization. Focusing on other contexts for similar research would shed light on the values that exist within various organizations. It would also provide an opportunity to learn more about the

process of identification formation, and either give the research presented here greater external validity, or shed light on issues with the current model that need to be explored.

The way consumers relate to or use their values in decision-making situations is not well understood in the marketing literature. Focusing research efforts on products with a clear values component would be a good way to increase our knowledge. Some consumers are concerned about matching their personal values with their consumption experiences. Gaining a better understanding of what drives their decisions and behaviors could prove enormously beneficial to any manager interested in consumer-company relationships. Finally, further exploration into how consumers relate to products with many intangible attributes and a high level of co-creation of value would shed light on how consumers find and use the meaning and symbolism of products in their assessment of the worth of the product.

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**RESEARCH INTERESTS**

Values, Communities, Identification formation, Relationships, Consumer assessment of value, Trust, Mental accounting

**CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS/ PROCEEDINGS**

Robertson, Diana, Press, Melea, and William T. Ross, Jr. "Contemporary Relationship Marketing Challenges in Buyer-Seller Relationships," will be presented at the American Marketing Association's Winter Educators' Conference, February 2008

Press, Melea, "Alternatives to Mass-Consumption: The Desire for Relationships and Information Disclosure," presented at the joint conference for the International Society for Markets and Development and the Macromarketing Society, Washington, D.C., June 2007

Atalay, A. Selin and Melea Press\*, "Stinkin' Inconvenience! How Consumers Experience and Respond to Disgust," presented at the Working Paper Session, 33<sup>rd</sup> Annual Meeting of the Association for Consumer Research, Orlando, FL, September 2006

Mish, Jenny and Melea Press\*, "An Influential Minority: Reaching the New Values-Based Consumers," presented at the Working Paper Session, 33<sup>rd</sup> Annual Meeting of the Association for Consumer Research, Orlando, FL, September 2006

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**AWARDS**

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