

**Cultivating Good Workers:
Youth Gardening, Non-Profits and Neoliberalization**

Elyse Gordon

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Committee:

Sarah Elwood, Chair

Victoria Lawson

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CHAPTER 1

Non-Profits and Neoliberalization: A Brief Introduction

Exploring Social Services and Subjectivities

Importantly, *distinctions between the deserving poor and undeserving poor that are over a century old have been reshaped in accordance with the ideology of market triumphalism (cf. Katz 1989, 1993)*. The deserving poor are now those who embrace the spirit of entrepreneurship, voluntarism, consumerism, and self-help, while the undeserving are those who remain ‘dependent’ on the state (Goode and Maskovsky 2001, 7-8).

Well, it’s a tough time for the City of Seattle... Less staff, you know, more work to be done in community that is also being stressed. So I think, you know, a lot of departments are kind of in survival mode... It’s a tough conversation, because it requires decision making that’s pretty painful (Alicia interview, 3 November, 2011).

The quotes above illustrate a persistent tension about the ways impoverished individuals and communities are positioned within a shifting, stressed social service sector that must make difficult decisions about *who* to serve. These decisions are often explained through language of “deservingness”, and have served as an explanation for persistent poverty for “over a century”. It is no surprise to anyone engaged in the non-profit or voluntary sector in the United States that service organizations have been dealt greater expectations along with fewer resources, thus leading to the “painful decision making” referenced above. Following thirty years of neoliberal policies, ideologies, and development initiatives, non-profits have found themselves bound up in, and reliant on, complex funding and program delivery structures, emanating from the state, foundations, and private donors (Herbert 2005; Martin 2004; Schram 2010).

In the midst of the state’s retrenchment of social services, Seattle remains a city with robust non-profit social services. Known historically for its homelessness services, and influenced by the high prevalence of philanthropic organizations (namely, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation), Seattle’s social service sector is fairly saturated (Sparke 2010; Purcell 2006). However, this does not guarantee a strong safety net for Seattle’s

populations that experience multiple processes of impoverishment, racialization and dispossession.

While Seattle's impoverished populations experience dispossession and marginalization based on identity vectors such as race, class, sexuality and gender, impoverished *youth* are further marginalized through the axis of age (Cope and Latcham 2009). Many organizations have arisen to try and provide services for low-income youth, ranging from drop-in centers to performance/art organizations, to queer youth spaces, to employment programs. These well-intentioned programs strive to equip and empower youth, namely with the goal of changing their experience of impoverishment, either in the short- or long-term. However, non-profits are often reliant on and bound to donors and foundations for fiscal support. This creates a complex power relationship, particularly when programmatic expectations are made to adopt donor values and ideologies. Still under theorized, there is much to be learned about how non-profits are positioned in relation to donors, how organizations respond to donor-driven neoliberal imperatives, and what this means for their participants.

This project seeks to better understand how non-profit youth empowerment programs are positioned within a neoliberalizing social service sector, how participants are positioned within these programs, and what political potentials emerge in the relation and articulation between non-profit spaces and the subjects they produce. Specifically, I am interested in the ways that organizations envision, convey, and operationalize their mission and goals, and how youth are positioned through these three processes. I explore these conceptual issues through the case of Youth Grow, a youth gardening empowerment program in Seattle. I am interested in how this organization has adapted

and restructured itself in accordance with fiscal, ideological, and practical changes to the landscape of social service provision. Further, I explore how these changes are actually experienced by youth participants and the unforeseen political processes that emerge through non-profit programming. It is critical to also situate this one organization within the ever-shifting non-profit sector, particularly considering the dynamic and contingent nature of social service provision in relation to the private sector, the state, and civil society. Underlying all of these potential contributions is a broader question, namely, when we critically examine non-profit community development and youth empowerment programs, what goes on below the surface, and what are the impacts and relationships across space and scale?

I have developed answers to these questions based on two months of qualitative research and field-work with a Seattle non-profit named *Youth Grow* that “empowers homeless and underserved youth through garden-based employment and education”. Amidst a dramatically changing landscape of social service provision, I explore how non-profits, and the youth they serve, are positioned vis-à-vis the neoliberal state, other non-profits, and community. Drawing on the work of critical geographers of poverty, youth, community development and relational understandings of urban studies, this study contributes to a better understanding of the neoliberalization of poverty, discourses and deployments of community development, and how youth subjects are positioned within social service programs.

In this chapter, I will frame the development of this project and my own relation and positioning within it. I briefly describe Seattle’s social service landscape, particularly around urban agriculture, youth programs, and overall shifts in funding and state support.

I introduce the primary scholars whose work guides this project, and present my conceptual framework. Coming from a position as a budding public scholar, I then explain the limits of my project, the audience, and the conversations to which this work contributes. Finally, I outline my research questions and the scope of this thesis.

Why Gardens? Why Youth?

I came to this project via a long path of varied work, starting when I was still an undergraduate in St. Paul, Minnesota. Beginning with an interest in my campus' community garden, I quickly joined the movement around community gardening that has taken root in progressive urban communities for the last decade (ACGA 2011). Believing in the potential for gardens to strengthen and heal communities via their multiple benefits (health, environmental, economic, social, educational, spiritual, empowering, just to name a few), I was known by close friends as a community garden proselytizer, spouting plans about how they can solve any and all urban woes.

By a stroke of pure luck, I was hired one summer to be a summer gardening intern with a group of low-income Hmong and Latino/a youth in St. Paul's East Side, a predominantly low-income part of the city that holds 40% of St. Paul's population. Having grown up at summer camps and working with campers, working with teens came naturally to me, though this had been my first experience mentoring low-income youth. I was impressed and intrigued by the questions youth asked throughout the day, but was left wondering, "What do they take home with them? What are they translating to their everyday experience?"

These same questions stuck with me when I transitioned into college access work¹ with Minneapolis Public School youth. The high schools I worked at ran the gamut, from a small afro-centric charter school to Minneapolis' most diverse public high school [my cohort of 31 represented 11 nationalities]. This program highlighted how structural inequalities and cultural capital play a significant role in the outcomes for the youth in my cohort. While this program had powerful intentions, and positive outcomes [98% of students accepted to college each year], I still wondered, "What else is happening with these youth? Are they adopting different values? If they don't go on to college right away, are there still any lasting structural changes that might occur? *Can we alleviate poverty through college access programs?*" Additionally, this college access program was increasingly professionalized and corporatized, as much of the literature on non-profit transformation in the 1990s and 2000s suggests (Fyfe and Milligan 2003). A program that had begun as run out of our director's one bedroom apartment had now exploded into a multi-city organization, where its directors have little contact with the youth they serve. In this corporatizing structure, where everything is accounted for, and "it's all about the numbers", what is being sacrificed for the sake of securing grants? (Admission Possible 2010).

I came to graduate school still a strong (though less pronounced) advocate of urban agriculture and community gardening, very curious about the efficacy and political economy of non-profits. I wanted to explore the theory of community development, while remaining firmly committed to youth work. Thus, when it came time to envision a

¹ College access work involves educating low-income youth about the possibilities of a college education, and then assisting students in the tedious application process, securing financial aid, and transitioning to life as a college student.

Master's project, I strove to work with a youth garden organization. I sought to explore how organizations respond to, transmit and potentially contest the trends of corporatization, competition and efficiency that work alongside and emerge from decades of neoliberalization. When I first conceived of this project, I thought I would be writing about how youth urban garden programs teach youth about the cities they live in: the built environment, urban natures, and connections across space. Within one day of fieldwork with Youth Grow, I quickly realized that this project would not, in fact, be about urban natures, but a different beast entirely: neoliberal subjectivities and the production of "good workers". After my first day at Youth Grow, I learned that Tuesdays (my volunteer day), were the only day of the week devoted entirely to gardening. The other days were spent unpredictably between education sessions, field trips, visits from guest chefs, collective feedback sessions, harvest prep, teambuilding activities, and job training sessions. Thus, while Youth Grow had initially seemed a good site to investigate gardens and experiences of urban natures, the iterative research process quickly revealed a new direction.

In this thesis, I explore theoretically and empirically how organizations' efforts to persist in the face of dramatically altered fiscal, institutional and cultural contexts shapes what they must do, and what they say about what they do. Particularly in the case of Youth Grow, I ask how an organization that is ostensibly about gardening conceives of, presents, and enacts their programs. I am interested in the incongruencies and mismatches between what this organization says it does, how this is conveyed to donors, and how it is actually experienced by youth.

Finally, this project exemplifies my own commitment to social justice oriented public scholarship. At the heart of my questions and intention is a deep concern with persistent inequalities, particularly ones that affect youth. In line with my personal goals to become a better scholar-activist, I hope to develop a lasting relationship with Youth Grow. I have and will continue to volunteer with them, and at the conclusion of the thesis project, will produce a more prescriptive policy memo exploring their programmatic mismatches and suggestions for future improvements.

Youth Grow: The Case for Urban Garden Empowerment Programs

Seattle is well known for its support of urban agriculture programs. It has one of the most well supported municipal community garden programs in the country, and its city government recently passed a city-wide urban agriculture initiative that allowed for much broader adoption of urban agriculture practices, such as raising goats and chickens in the city with fewer restrictions (Seattle Department of Planning and Development Client Assistance Memo #224, 2010). Additionally, Seattle's climate allows for a long growing season, meaning that raising food and animals is easier to do than in other parts of the U.S. Thus, the non-profit and community organizations that support urban agriculture and community gardening are robust and numerous. On the P-Patch website, there are over 30 resources listed alone, not to mention less formal forms of social and community organization that have grown around gardening and local food provisioning (Seattle.gov, P-Patch Useful Links, 2012). These organizations promote alternative food practices and markets, but are critiqued by geographers for being spaces of whiteness and reproducing white privilege (Guthman 2008, Slocum 2007; Ramirez 2011). In Seattle, there is a range of projects in this vein, ranging from food justice organizations pioneered

by communities of color to urban farms in low-income neighborhoods, to food bank P-Patches. Amidst this alternative food landscape and food justice movement, Youth Grow stands out as an eclectic model: combining job training, agricultural education, marketing locally grown organic foods, and contributing to the alternative food movement in the University District of North Seattle. Interestingly, while Youth Grow works with low-income and youth of color, it is overseen by a larger non-profit organization, Food Connection. This organization is located in one of Seattle's wealthiest and whitest neighborhoods, a fact that has given Food Connection a reputation for being an organization for "white, middle class women" (Julian, Youth Grow staff, November, 2011). Given the prominence of urban agriculture in Seattle, and the mission statement of Food Connection, it seemed prudent that Youth Grow would emphasize and champion its garden-based education about local food systems, alternative food movements, and urban agriculture practices. However, through my time with this organization, I found that these stated goals and actual outcomes do not always align neatly.

Neoliberalism and Community Development Studies

Two bodies of research inform my theorization of how non-profits are positioned in our contemporary urban landscape and the impacts of programming on urban youth subjects: neoliberalization and community development. I draw on these two bodies of work to theorize the mismatches between the organization's stated gardening goals and their disparate outcomes and practices, and the resulting impacts and experiences on youth participants. First, geographers' research on neoliberalization and the neoliberalization of poverty illustrates how the non-profit and social service sectors respond to the imperatives and processes of neoliberalism (England and Ward 2007;

Bondi and Laurie 2005; Leitner et al 2007). Second, research on community development especially its critiques, exposes how different notions of ‘community’ are deployed strategically by non-profits, and how this impacts and implicates youth subjects (Joseph 2002; Elwood 2002; Fraser 2003; Martin 2004; Herbert 2005; Purcell 2006; Thompson 2011).

Broadly, then, I contextualize and situate the role of non-profits in areas of neoliberal urbanization. I conceptualize this at four sites: the position of non-profits within the neoliberalization of the social service sector; the non-profit deployments of differing notions of ‘community’; the positioning of youth subjects within these non-profit programs and projects; and the political possibilities that can emerge through non-profits as sites of governmentality, subjectivity formation, *and* potential sites of resistance.

Neoliberalism / Neoliberalization

At its economic core, neoliberalism is understood as a privileging of market logics above all else, or, as David Harvey states, “in the first instance, a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can be best advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade” (2005, 2). This understanding certainly conveys the ways that political economic decisions are made at the state level to promote privatization, or what are at times referred to as “actually existing neoliberalisms” (Brenner and Theodore 2002; Peck and Tickell 2002; Jessop 2002; Heynen and Robbins 2005; Peck 2004). There is another body of literature that draws on Foucauldian ideas of governmentality, tracing the ways that

market logics are conveyed and enforced through subjectivity formation. As Guthman writes, this governmentality approach explores how neoliberal projects result in “attempts to enforce market logics in [their] governance and to produce subjects who employ market rationales in their day-to-day behavior” (2008, 1173). Thus, whether at the political economic or the socio-discursive level, there is a well-established tradition in geography of understanding neoliberalism as a predominant framework and set of spatial practices through which governance is enacted.

I take these understandings of neoliberalism as my starting point, recognizing both the political economic realities of actually existing neoliberalism as well as the resulting governance that takes place through conditioning to ideologies and values such as competition, efficiency, self-sufficiency and responsibility (Larner 2000; Schram 2010). However, this work only gets us so far in understanding the political impacts of our critiques of neoliberalism because it often takes a structural and political-economic perspective. To deepen our understanding, feminist critiques of neoliberalism understand that there is not one monolithic experience of neoliberalism. Instead, individuals and social groups experience processes of neoliberalization in geographically and socially contingent ways. Depending on one’s social position and experience of difference along age, race, gender, class, etc., neoliberalization will be embodied and enacted differently.

While contingent, feminist and post-structural critiques of neoliberalism have circulated for over a decade, Wendy Larner’s initial challenge to move beyond singular analyses of neoliberalism remains incredibly fruitful. As such, she recognizes neoliberalism as, “both a political discourse and about the nature of rule and a set of practices that facilitate the governing of individuals from a distance” (2000, 6). Emerging

from this understanding, though, Larner calls for a richer, deeper exploration of neoliberalism, informed by “feminist and other critical theorizing, in which [the] contested nature of discourse is centered” (2000, 6). It is with this aim that a more situated and critical understanding of neoliberalism will enrich our readings and potential for political intervention. In response to this call, my own work will hone in on the embeddedness of non-profits in, and contradictory relationship to, processes of neoliberalization. Building on this, I approach Youth Grow asking how notions of community are deployed at various sites throughout their work.

Community and Community Development

As an outgrowth of neoliberal urbanization, cities across the global North, primarily the U.S. and U.K., saw a retrenchment of social service provision by the state (Goode and Maskovsky 2001). What followed, unsurprisingly, was heightened inequality and social exclusion, particularly along lines of race, class and gender (Fraser 2003). In concert with neoliberal urbanisms, many cities adopted policies that prioritized economic development, ostensibly as a means to correct for the greatly fractured spaces of urban inequality (McCann 2002).

Scholars have documented the rise of the “shadow state” in response to the lack of social cohesion and the collapse of the safety net (Wolch 1990; Fyfe and Milligan 2003; Fyfe 2005). This voluntary, non-profit sector has picked up the slack where state services have disappeared or been drastically scaled back. In the U.S., following Clinton-era welfare reform, many non-profits have had to adopt the responsibility and care for impoverished populations who no longer meet the strict rules and qualifications for an overly governed and disciplinary welfare system (O’Connor 2001; Schram 2010).

In many cases then, following a drastic devolution of responsibility to local entities², policy makers have, somewhat ironically, adopted a powerful discourse of “the local”. Namely, that the best way to solve social problems is at the local level, with local expertise, and with local resources. Mark Purcell deems this the “local trap” (2006), pointing out how a powerful discourse of local control and community governance is appealing not only to policy makers, who then have devolved responsibility, but also to community members, who often perceive this discourse as one of empowerment and possibility.

Geographers have numerous critiques of this community-centered model, pointing to the fractured and patchwork style of service provision, the slippery slope of state devolution, and the contested and contingent nature of the concept of *community* (Elwood 2002; Joseph 2002; McCann 2003). Deborah Martin’s critique of non-profit community development projects is particularly illustrative. Not only has the state devolved responsibility to the private sector and non-profits, but the same non-profits are often reliant on the benevolence of donors, philanthropists, and stringent foundation based grants. Nonprofits lack public accountability, and lack substantive long-term prospects because of the fragile funding streams. On the other hand, there is also strong belief in the transformative potential of community development projects, particularly when they are, in fact, empowering, rather than enlisted by the state, co-opted by private development, or limited by strict funding guidelines (Martin 2003; 2004).

Assuming that non-profits can provide the potential for political action and opportunities, I investigate the types of politically transformative work that can emerge at

² Though, notably, this has not coincided with a devolution of sufficient *resources* (Herbert 2005)

Youth Grow specifically. I also explore the unforeseen consequences of non-profit programs like Youth Grow, specifically as they relate to youth subjectivities. Rebecca Dolhinow's work in the US-Mexico border illustrates these contradictions and tensions well. She finds that, "...although many NGOs... attempt to use their position within civil society to work for social justice, they often become a site of neoliberal governance and end up reinforcing the very production of neoliberal political subjects they seek to deconstruct" (2005, 174). Additionally, my work responds to Fraser's point that community development is "much supported but under-criticized", and that we need more work to see, "the benefits that impoverished neighborhood residents actually acquire from these initiatives" (2003, 418). By exploring the ways these programs secure funding, deliver programming, and present themselves, I bring a critical geographic lens towards answering if, in an era of neoliberal urbanization, non-profits can be part of actual poverty alleviation, or if this is discursively presented as a goal without being realistically attainable.

Drawing on this contribution, I will deepen our understanding of the relationship of non-profits, the neoliberal state, civil society, and the formation of youth subjectivities. I use the concept of community to help illustrate points of disjuncture and congruence as non-profits interact and negotiate their position and service provision to their constituents, clients, and participants. In the case of Youth Grow, how are notions of community deployed, and what work does this do? How are communities constituted and imagined at different scales and in different places? Additionally, how does a relational understanding / approach elucidate the co-constitution of community subjectivities between participants, supporters/donors, and program volunteers/staff?

Framing the Project

This project addresses the following questions in order to better understand the impacts of neoliberalization on non-profits, their participants, and the political potential that arise between their relationship and articulation. First, how are non-profit organizations responding and adapting to neoliberal imperatives and processes of neoliberalization? How are gardens and youth positioned as subjects within neoliberal non-profit restructuring? How is community deployed both by non-profits and by youth subjects, and what are the corresponding impacts on subjectivities? Finally, what, if any, potential exists for non-profits to serve as sites for transformative political and social change?

In Chapter Two, I expand on the neoliberalization and community development literatures, presenting their contributions and gaps. Namely, while neoliberalization studies have been complex and rich, they lack attention to youth and the nuanced work that non-profits play at various scales. Community development scholars have made valuable contributions to our understanding of social service provision, but they have presented dichotomies of the non-profit model that do not seem to fit that of Youth Grow and other youth empowerment programs. Thus, I start the literature review with brief attention to the contributions of relevant youth geographers for the ways they do position youth as political subjects and actors. Chapter Two elaborates my conceptual framework and identifies gaps and areas for relevant contributions.

Chapter Three outlines my research design, sources of evidence, and methodologies, with particular attention to why I chose Youth Grow as a relevant research site. In this chapter, I also explore the context and positioning of Youth Grow

within the City of Seattle, and within the landscape of urban agriculture and youth empowerment programs, respectively.

Chapters Four and Five present my empirical and theoretical contributions. Chapter Four emphasizes my findings on *community*: how community is deployed by the City of Seattle, how this framing impacts Youth Grow's notions of community building, and how social groups and categories are presented to different stakeholders in order to advance Youth Grow's mission and existence. Specifically, I show how youth are positioned within three stages of Youth Grow's work: through envisioning their goals, conveying these to donors, and putting them into practice. Chapter Four begins by situating Youth Grow in relation to community development from the City of Seattle and moves into the detailing of my ethnographic work with the organization and their participants.

Chapter Five explores my findings on youth and middle class subjectivities. Primarily, I demonstrate how youth are positioned not as good *gardeners*, but as good *workers*. Additionally, youth subjectivities are defined based on their future middle class potentials. Through their experiences and demonstration of good work and aspiring middle class identities, youth are deemed as either deserving or undeserving. This differentiation occurs through the work at the garden, through their multiple workshops, and in their efforts to raise revenue.

Finally, I close the thesis with a concluding Chapter Six. I examine how the mismatches between Youth Grow's stated goals and actual outcomes result in an apolitical positioning of Youth Grow and the youth they serve. Pursuing Leitner et al.'s (2007) framework on the articulation of contestation and neoliberalism, I address the

actual political outcomes of Youth Grow's work, finding that little actual political work can emerge from the currently existing structure. The conclusion also addresses the limitations of this study, and the openings for future work that emerge from this study.

CHAPTER 2

Politics, Identity and Contestation: Intersections of Neoliberalization and Community

Youth, Gardens and Gaps

The most obvious place to position a project about youth garden programs would be in the literatures on youth geographies and community gardening. Within this arena, youth geographers contribute to a better understanding of how young people interact and experience social and political geographies. Community gardening literature has covered a huge variety of the social, political and economic impacts of community gardens via both their practices, their theoretical foundations, and their outcomes. Yet as I develop below, neither serves as an appropriate theoretical backdrop for this project and the questions it seeks to answer.

Youth geography has undergone a resurgence in the last decade, detailing young people's and children's spatial practices in highly descriptive, but theoretically weak studies (Thompson 2005; Wood and Beck 1994; Gough and Franch 2005; Matthews et al. 1998). Many youth geographers responded to this gap by asking critical questions about young people's engagements as political subjects (Matthews and Limb 2003; O'Toole 2003). However, young people often fall outside of conventional understandings of political subject-hood based on their position outside of formal citizenship systems (based on age, as is the case in the US). In order to engage in questions about multiple forms of youth politics, geographers have expanded their understandings of the political, young people's everyday actions, movements and relationships (Philo 2000; Skelton and Valentine 2003; Horton and Kraftl 2006; Hopkins and Pain 2007; Skelton 2010).

Additionally, many scholars have called for a broader platform for theorizing youth geographies, beyond the explicitly political. Recognizing that an “inward looking” exploration of young people limits the relevance and significance beyond youth geographies, scholars have called for an “upscaling” of youth geographies (Ansell 2009; Hopkins and Alexander 2010). One realm has been expanded attention to young people and education (Thein 2008; Hollingworth and Archer 2009; Holloway et al. 2010). These studies usually focus on young people’s experiences of educational spaces, and how these spaces influence youth identities and spatial practices. Similarly, other scholars have explored how young people understand and experience processes of globalization (Ruddick 2003; Katz 2004; Barker et al 2009; Jeffrey 2010). These studies range between global north and global south experiences of migration and globalization, and show a huge range based on age (children versus youth, aged 15-25).

For my own understandings, a few geographers stand out who have explored and theorized youth in productive ways. Cope and Latcham (2009) argue that youth are embedded in processes and narratives of “urban decline”. Low-income youth of color are positioned as threatening and also seemingly responsible for the decline of rust-belt cities in the US, absorbing both the blame and risk for urban renewal / decline, though simultaneously denied formal forms of citizenship and investment in processes of urban revitalization. This work illuminates tensions that emerge from young people’s actual experiences of urban spaces. Jeffrey (2010) argues that structural change and social-spatial marginalization in a globalizing economy have significant impacts for the ways young people experience the world. In neoliberalizing US cities, these effects can be seen

in the ways that youth experience labor markets, education, and overall demands for entrepreneurial attitudes and practices.

However, while these scholars ask highly relevant questions, they fail to directly situate young people within, and as subjects of, urban neoliberalization. Theoretically, these scholars begin to dabble with questions around youth subjectivities, but remain more focused on shifting their focus “outward”. Given that these scholars are responding to critiques of work that is too *inward* looking, this emphasis on broader impacts is appropriate. However, it is impossible to fully theorize young people’s political potential within neoliberal processes and institutions without also theorizing and understanding their position as *subjects* within these processes and institutions. Thus, while I draw on these youth geographers, my project is inherently more concerned with processes of neoliberalization and their impacts on youth rather than the geographies of youth themselves.

Over the last decade, scholars have given much attention to community gardens and urban agriculture for their histories, agricultural practices, and positive community, health, and economic benefits. Loosely defined, community gardens are spaces where groups of people, often in densely populated towns and cities, come together to produce food (ACGA 2010). Geographers draw from a broad range of disciplines in their discussions of community gardens, from historians, agricultural scholars, community and urban planners, non-profit programs, and fellow geographers and other social scientists (Armstrong 2000; Trauger 2004; Saldivar-Tanaka and Krasny 2004; Pudup 2008; Parr 1997; Ferris, Norman, and Sempik 2001; Baker 2004; Lawson 2000). These studies are primarily focused in North America, with notable exceptions in Barcelona (Domene and

Sauri 2007) and urban centers of the Global South (Hovorka 2006; McLees 2011). This diverse engagement emphasizes the political, agricultural and cultural work that takes places in these urban spaces.

Much of this literature is descriptive and cross-sectional, relying on snapshots of places, temporal periods and their patterns of community gardens. For example, a survey of upstate New York highlights the positive health and community benefits that had been derived from community gardens, highlighting the prevalence in low-income neighborhoods, and their capacity for social, economic and health benefits (Armstrong 2000). Other research has traced the history of community gardens in cities like Seattle (Hou et al. 2009), or across the United States (Lawson 2000). These works pay close attention to the motivations and historical conditions of garden growth, noting that in recent years, motivations are often tied to the power of green space, community involvement, locally-grown foods, and economic savings (Lawson 2000).

One of the cornerstones of recent work on community gardens surrounds their potential for numerous community benefits. These authors argue that when community gardens are implemented, often a distinct set of benefits follows: greater equity and environmental justice (Ferris et al. 2001), better access to local foods (Englander 2001), ability to practice culturally relevant agriculture (Baker 2004; Salvidar-Tanaka and Krasny 2004), and environmental and nutritional awareness (Lautenschlager and Smith 2007). The American Community Garden Association also boasts at least ten additional benefits on their national website, ranging from economic incentives to improving urban green space (ACGA 2010). The benefits of community gardens are well established across the United States, and remain a staple in the urban landscape.

Finally, a small but rich body of work by geographers delves into the spatial politics of community gardens. Given the propensity of *urban* community gardens, garden users and urban planners/developers frequently contest the use of urban space for gardening. In the gardens of New York City, citizens challenge the use of urban space for development, and demand their ‘right to the city’ to make decisions about usage of urban space (Schmelzkopf 1995, 2002; Kurtz 2003; Eizenberg 2011). In Minneapolis, Hilda Kurtz explored the “multiple meanings of community”, and how “community” gets deployed and understood along axes of difference depending on the site and situation of particular gardens (Kurtz 2001, 256). Gardens can be seen as political spaces of resistance to unwanted urban development, as sites of contestation about the use of public spaces, or as potential spaces for defining and/or finding “community”.

While these are robust and thorough engagements, they leave empirical and theoretical gaps for future study. Much of the work has looked at gardens as micro-scale sites of political engagement, exploring the historical ties to neighborhood spaces, community identities and contestation over urban development and green space. While productive conversations, these projects rarely place community gardens within the context of neoliberal urbanism and sites of subjectivity formation. One scholar, Mary Beth Pudup, does explore the problematic tendency for organized garden projects to be sites of neoliberal governmentality (2008). However, her study fails to engage directly with subjectivity production and the political potential for contestation and resistance to processes of neoliberalization. Other scholars have begun to explore subjectivity formation, but not at the site of community gardens. Julie Guthman and Rachel Slocum have both given rich and critical attention to intersectionality, whiteness, and racial

formation within alternative food movements (Slocum 2007, 2008; Guthman 2008a, 2008b, 2008c). These studies bring more of a critical voice to the study of community gardens and urban agriculture. Even so, their focus remains on the *gardens* as the primary site of investigation without situating these projects within processes of neoliberalization, and as arbiters of subjectivity production at multiple sites and scales.

Neoliberalism: History, Tenets, Assumptions

Over the last three decades, processes of neoliberalization have been well documented by geographers and other social scientists. Neoliberalism has been traced at a variety of scales, processes, sites, networks, ideologies, outcomes and policies. Given the incredibly rich canon of work in this field, I focus here on literature that explores actually *experienced* neoliberalism (Brenner and Theodore 2001; Peck and Tickell 2002). Rather than a macro-level analysis, research on contingent and relational neoliberalisms allow for a nuanced exploration of the geographic contexts of a restructuring non-profit sector, and how individual subjectivities are implicated in and produced through non-profit organizations (England and Ward 2007).

Beginning in the late 1980s, scholars were already critiquing the emergent forms of neoliberalism and how they were being enacted in the United States and Western Europe. This predominant, monolithic neoliberalism privileged a market ethic above all else, seeing the solution to social inequality through more efficient and less government driven service models. One of the leading social theorists of his time, Stuart Hall employs a Gramscian understanding of ideology and hegemony to explain the emergence and strength of neoliberalism in the UK, what he calls, “Thatcherism”. He explains, in great detail, how we have come to see a “striking reversal of values: the aura that used to attach

to the value of the public welfare now adheres to anything that is private – or can be privatized” (Hall 1988, 40). Hall shows how neoliberal ideologies have come to be dominant as the “common sense” way of doing things. Hall focuses on the ideological staying power of neoliberalism, but also traces where it takes shape materially, “through the practices of state regulation in the apparatuses of the state – in education, in schooling, in family policy, in the administrative apparatuses of local and central government...” (Hall 1988, 46).

Advancing this analysis of neoliberalism, Peck and Tickell (2002) explore how neoliberal policies take material form, particularly in their transition from *roll back* to *roll out* processes. The *roll back* form was signified by a cutback of government-funded programs, as progressive politics and plans were effectively retracted from the public sphere. For instance, the state actively withdrew its attention to the “public welfare” and cut the fiscal support for local governments, and privatization schemes replaced publicly funded programs. Efficiency and competition became dominant values, and cities removed government structures that interfered with the needs and want of business. Yet also emerging were forms of *roll-out* neoliberalism as a more concerted effort to implement programs with neoliberal ideologies. These new programs emphasized efficiency, conditionalities, and service provisioning that emphasized individual responsibility rather than “entitlement”.

Political economists and Marxist geographers have spent much of the last decade investigating examples of roll out neoliberalism, in the form of privatization, government restructuring, the re-regulation of social services and entitlement programs. These scholars do not frame neoliberalism as a singular project or path, but rather, see it, “as a

historically specific, ongoing, and internally contradictory process of market-driven sociospatial transformation, rather than as a fully actualized policy regime, ideological form, or regulatory framework” (Brenner and Theodore 2002, 353). This body of research has examined the moments and places of actually existing neoliberalism: for instance, how social service programs as sites of roll-out neoliberalism articulate the ideologies and values of privatization, market ethics, efficiency and individual responsibility.

It was in the *roll-back / roll-out* transition period that non-profit and social service programs saw their primary rise, as organizations had to fill the gaps in service provision triggered by state roll-backs. Katharyne Mitchell explores this process in great detail in her work in British Columbia, where the growth of the voluntary sector obscured and allowed for greater movements of capital and neoliberal business interests. Due to a robust and growing voluntary sector, “conservative politicians in the 1980s were able to roll back many welfare state programmes in British Columbia without a corresponding loss of legitimacy occurring from the immediate truncation of services” (Mitchell 2001, 1). The roll back of state social service led to a stark rise of social inequalities, as well, especially along lines of race, class and gender (Wolch 1990; Lerner 2000).

In order to compensate for these heightened inequalities, the state began to roll-out service programs that took new forms, such as urban development and community governance models (Peck and Tickell 2002; Herbert 2005; Elwood 2002). These new government structures embodied many neoliberal values and ideals. In addition to market logics and a privileging of business interests came an emphasis on the rational economic actor, responsible for his or her own well-being, financial decisions, health, and

prosperity (Schram et al. 2010). Following a strict structuring of appropriate behaviors we can see a shift towards governmentalizing individuals to “follow the rules” of neoliberal urbanisms (Foucault 1978; Rose 1999). This shift has led to both discursive and material changes through re-regulation at the state level, alongside a non-profit and voluntary sector programs that encouraged particular behaviors through new spaces and organizations. The changes emerging from neoliberal devolution have dramatically altered the role and activities of non-profits as well as the discursive priorities they must use to explain and justify their work.

Changing Roles of Non-Profits

Beginning in the 1990’s, scholars began to explore how non-profits were situated within the neoliberalizing social service landscape. From vital services such as housing, health and hunger to social, cultural and environmental programs, non-profits now dominate the landscape of social services (Wolch 1990; Fyfe and Milligan 2003; Elwood 2002; Herbert 2005; Martin 2004). For the most part, existing critiques of the non-profit sector focus on the problematic devolution of responsibility to non-profits (Larner 2000; Morison 2000; Fyfe 2005; Schram et al. 2010). Other critiques explore the fallout of this devolution, and how the state hails non-profits and community based organizations to pick up the slack (Elwood 2002; Kendall 2003; Herbert 2005). Moving a step beyond these organizational-development approaches, some scholars examine how organizations are bound and limited by their reliance on grants and the values of foundations or large donors (Martin 2004; Dolhinow 2005; Incite! 2007). Grassroots organizations have difficulty fulfilling their missions, as many are either too committed to radical projects to accept politically watered-down mandates, or cannot fulfill the capacity for which large

grants strive. Thus, a binary exists in the non-profit critiques between more corporatized, quasi-state projects, and the struggling grassroots organization.

In addition to these binary critiques, attention has been paid to state devolution of responsibility to the neighborhood or community level. Herbert's work (2005) seeks to explain the outcomes following this devolution to non-profits and the voluntary sector in Seattle. Herbert traces how, within neoliberal urbanism, communitarianism has come to stand in as a vehicle for governance. Following the tropes and values of self-sufficiency, responsibility, and entrepreneurialism, communities are seen as, "potential recipient[s] for responsibilities off-loaded by a governmentalizing state" (2005, 851). And this off-loading is often received positively, due to the positive associations carried by community (Williams 1976, Herbert 2005). However, at least in Herbert's case study of community policing, residents end up having diverging views about the capacity for community-based non-profits. Rather than forever embracing local projects, most residents,

do not generally wish for community to bear the political weight that projects like community policing wish to place upon it. They do not see community in primarily political terms and recognize a range of obstacles that inhibit neighborhoods that seek any way to organize toward some goal (2005, 852).

These beliefs held by community residents reflect their acknowledgement and skepticism of community capacity to enact change and provide necessary social services. However, on another level, Herbert's work also exposes a deep contradiction within this neoliberal tendency towards communitarianism: devolution of responsibility is rarely matched with devolution of resources (Herbert 2005; Lerner 2005; Schram et al. 2010).

When resources do make their way to non-profits, community groups and the voluntary sector, it is often with strong conditions that carry deeply governmentalizing

effects (Martin 2004; Dolhinow 2005; Gibson 2011). While filling vital services, ranging from housing to job skills, organizations compete for limited funding resources, and focus immense attention on meeting the complex criteria that makes them eligible for grant money. In response to grant and foundational conditionalities and expectations that desired efficiency and market logics, many organizations' internal structures began to mimic a business model (Fyfe and Milligan 2003). This said, most work in this arena has focused only on shifts in NGO mission in relation to *philanthropists'* funding, not public funds (Martin 2004; Ballin 2003; Faber and McCarthy 2005; Ostrander 2007). Little work has been done to explore the range of *new* funding structures, such as umbrella or parent non-profits, the move away from foundation grants, or membership-driven revenue programs. It is as yet difficult to discern how these new structures may affect values and ideologies, program development, fundraising and program implementation. In particular, geographers must give attention to the ways that changing non-profit structures result in new spaces that encourage neoliberal ideologies, while simultaneously appearing less regulated based on their turn away from restrictive grants.

Amidst the shift away from foundation grants described above, non-profit and voluntary organizations are still bound together in a common struggle to secure funding by appealing to donors. Whether these donors are large foundations, granting organizations, or individual households, non-profits must continually justify their social/cultural and political economic value. This justification requires appealing to donors and adapting programming in a way that will guarantee or elicit support. So, while non-profits have assumed greater responsibility in the decades following the introduction of neoliberal values and processes, they have simultaneously had to adapt to the priorities

of the public and potential donors (Larner 2000; Fyfe 2003; Martin 2004; Larner 2005; Mayer 2007; Incite! 2007; Gould 2010).

In order to appeal to donors and remain viable, non-profits are now enrolled in the governing mentalities of a neoliberal agenda. Primarily, they can act as vehicles for discipline, “in which the state acts through nonprofit and for-profit agents to advance the project of ‘governing mentalities’ in low-income target populations” (Schram et al. 2010, 1). In order to guarantee funding, appeal to board members, and justify their cause and significance, the hegemonic narrative of social service provisioning at the private, non-profit and state levels has become inextricably linked to ideologies of neoliberalization. Yet while there are similarities between the social service and voluntary sectors in the United States, it is also well understood by geographers that organizations carry their own politics. The restructured and reworked spaces of social service provisioning result in new subjectivities for their staff, donors, participants and communities.

The Neoliberalization of Poverty: Impacts on Subjectivities

As explored above, the logic of individual choice that accompanied the neoliberalization of social service provisioning has had devastating results for the welfare state and social safety net in the United States. Social welfare programs of all kinds were re-written and re-formed in the 1990’s to have stricter conditions and guidelines in order to encourage welfare only for those who “deserved” the services (O’ Connor 2001).

The landscape of social service provision in the US today is one of villainization and discipline. Those who cannot play by the new rules are deemed as undeserving of social services and government welfare support; they must seek assistance from voluntary programs, church groups and charities (Lawson et al 2008; Schram et al. 2010).

In light of this shift, one troubling outcome is the move away from actual poverty alleviation, instead focusing on filling manageable gaps in the patchwork of necessary services. Government programs are so scaled back and restricted by shrinking budgets that only a bare minimum of services are possible (Brown et al. 2000; O'Connor 2001; Mercer 2002; Martin 2004; Schram et al. 2010). Deeply embedded into the actually existing and actually experienced neoliberalism of the contemporary urban landscape is a shaming and discipline associated with welfare and social service support, where the assumption is to see,

long-term dependency and individual behavior as the problem, effectively dismiss[ing] any notion of legitimate entitlement in favor of individual responsibility, and, with the unquestioned assumption that it was always, inherently better for the able-bodied to work in the low-wage labor market than to rely on welfare for support, had subordinated the goal of fighting poverty to the more politically palatable welfare reform (O'Connor 2001, 290 – emphasis added).

The resulting trends have dramatically altered the governance of poverty in the United States. Impoverished populations are subject to heightened regulations, restrictions, and rules to follow in order to subsist (Schram 2000; Lawson et al 2008, Schram et al. 2010; Burnett 2011).

While discourses of deserving- and undeserving-ness are not new in terms of justifying and explaining persistent poverty, in the current era, there are multiple new spaces and discourses through which this process happens (Katz 1990; O'Connor 2001; Goode and Maskovsky 2001; Kendall 2003). Today, impoverished individuals and communities can be deemed undeserving by a panoply of assisting actors and institutions, not just the state or just civil society. The assignation of deserving- and undeserving-ness based on abilities to follow strict rules is performed by public welfare, church groups, and

many non-profits (Jones and Kodras 1990; Brown et al 2000; Jarosz and Lawson 2002; Lawson et al 2008).

Within this governance of poverty, individuals are encouraged and conditioned to behave in certain ways in order to receive the benefits of government programs or to qualify for non-profit or private sector services. Leitner et al, in their foundational work *Contesting Neoliberalism* explain that,

Individuals are empowered to actively make self-interested choices and are made responsible for acting in this way to advance both their well-being and that of society. Employees are redefined as entrepreneurs with an obligation to work, to better themselves and society, rather than having a right to work. They are responsible for their own education and retraining, to build human capital, and for their own well-being and risk management by behaving prudently, instead of relying on the state. Personal and social responsibility are equated with self-esteem (2007, 4).

This impact on individual subjectivities is a burgeoning field for geographers. As England and Ward remind us, “subjectivities are produced in and through a whole range of discursive and material practices - cultural, economic, social and political - the meanings of which are constantly under revision” (2007, 165). Two key scholars have employed studies of subjectivities amidst non-profit, voluntary or benevolent organizations. Their work helps to illustrate how these organizations can lead to embodied outcomes and impacts on individuals’ actions, identities and subjectivities.

In a medium sized town in Ontario, Kingfisher documents the dynamics and tensions around relocating a homeless shelter, and how this relates to broader processes of neoliberalization. Even a benevolent project of care and homeless services has the potential to render a deepening of neoliberal subjectivities. Through multiple discourses, homeless men can be seen as in and out of place, feminized, and at the most alarming, “non-persons” (2007, 205). The dominant discursive solution to homelessness is often proposed through notions of increased “choice” and “opportunity”. Through interactions

and articulations with multiple actors and stakeholders, the homeless men in Kingfisher's study are wrapped up in a variety of guises, roles, positions and representations. This raises questions about the political and social outcomes that emerge for individuals who simultaneously represent and expose the contradictions of neoliberal subjectivities, i.e. those that are not "rational" or "self-sufficient". In addition, this study raises questions regarding potential spaces for contestation, resistance and adaptation, in addition to potentially challenging the discourses and narratives that often leave marginalized individuals with little political power.

Finally, Mary Beth Pudup's 2008 work on organized garden projects deserves further attention here. She eloquently traces the historical emergence of discourses of individuality and self-actualization that are tied to many non-profit empowerment programs, not only garden based projects. Pudup explains that notions of "personal responsibility" and "individual empowerment" have proliferated over the last 20 years through community garden projects and their placement within various institutional frameworks (2008, 1232). There is great emphasis placed on the potential for individuals to experience personal growth and development through their interactions with plants, in urban natures, and in alternative economic spaces. These values of individuality and "personal improvement" are promoted not only by the organized garden projects, but frequently by non-profits that produce and proliferate these projects. Pudup is interested in the ways that seemingly benevolent garden projects teach individuals how to be self-sufficient and savvy consumers. She points to the similarities between the individual responsabilization seen through neoliberal governmentality, and the individualizing discourses and narratives rife in self-help driven gardening programs (2008, 128). As

explained before, this work has many strengths, but still begs questions of how garden programs function in relation to the non-profit sector and state programs.

Amidst all this, a major question for scholars has been whether there is any remaining space for resistance. One underpinning of contingent neoliberalisms recognizes that there is a dialectical relationship between structural / material conditions of inequality and individual, internalized political subjectivities. In recent years, geographers have explored how politics and resistance and contestation can emerge out of this dialectical relationship (Leitner et al. 2007). In *Contesting Neoliberalism*, Leitner et al. are interested in de-centering neoliberalism and examining the natures and outcomes of the “articulation of neoliberalism with contestation” (2007, 8). They explain that contestation is not necessarily always directed *at* neoliberal interventions per se, but instead might find articulation there inadvertently. Similarly engaged in questions of resistance and contestation, Rebecca Dolhinow’s research with a women’s empowerment group along the US-Mexico border is particularly informative. She demonstrates how organizations’ radical goals are often constrained by responsibilities to donors, particularly in order to produce “fundable projects” (2005, 165). Further, her work presents non-profits and NGOs as definitive sites of neoliberal governmentality, particularly in their ability to produce neoliberal subjectivities. She argues that,

the de-centered advanced liberal state produces political subjects from many sites and although many NGOs... attempt to use their position within civil society to work for social justice, they often become a site of neoliberal governance and end up reinforcing the very production of neoliberal political subjects they seek to deconstruct (2005, 174).

Dolhinow articulates one of the key contradictions and points of interest for geographers studying non-profits and subjectivities: that given the history of non-profits in the US, they are deeply embedded in and dependent on systems that privilege neoliberal values

and ideologies. Thus, these values often find their way into non-profit programming, even when the goals of programming might be more radical and social justice oriented.

While Dolhinow's work seems to imply that non-profits yield no potential for resistance and contestation, there is another vein of scholars specifically looking at how neoliberalism is contested and reworked through different projects. In these studies, non-profits and NGOs have the *potential* to be sites of neoliberal governance, but this is not guaranteed nor scripted (Leitner et al. 2007; Mayer 2007). Instead, this legitimates the study of non-profits as sites of subjectivity production, but also inspires an exploration into how these processes are potentially resisted. These debates form the intellectual backbone of this project, following the work of scholars questioning the efficacy (or even possibility) of contestation through a non-profit when it simultaneously produces neoliberal subjects. As Mayer points out in his contribution to the Leitner collection,

the major dilemma presenting itself within this arena of urban contestation is that the complex work of "empowering" the groups disadvantaged by neoliberalism is embedded in a process of permanent production and reproduction of inequalities through competition (2007, 99).

Non-profits, NGOs and voluntary organizations that seek to empower individuals are embedded in, emergent from, and often reliant on networks of social service providers, donors and government structures. While these networks help produce the inequalities that organizations seek to address, Mayer doesn't see this as inherently limiting, but rather a "dilemma" that is consistently reworked and articulated through contestation.

This review of neoliberalization literatures has shown how current scholars explore processes of neoliberalization as they relate to non-profits' expectations, structures, goals, outcomes, and impacts on participants. However, there is little empirical work on subjectivity formation as it relates to youth, as it occurs in new non-profit

structures, and how youth subjects can leverage political possibility and contestation through their engagement in non-profits. In addition to the work on subjectivities, Herbert's work is an example of the complex articulation between 'community' and neoliberalization. Within the effort to grapple with the gaps left by neoliberal retrenchment, "community" and "community development" have taken center stage in many parts of the world.

Community / Community Development

"What works is when communities are empowered to control their own destiny and shape it; where the opportunity is matched by responsibility" (Blair 2001).

At the beginning of the new millennium, leaders across the US and UK like Tony Blair could be heard echoing this statement in their plans for urban development and growth. Responding to two decades of heightened inequalities and social exclusion, state leaders had a mandate to address these issues. This short quote shows the prominence of three dominant discourses of community development around which responses to this mandate have taken shape: empowerment, responsibility and local control.

Interestingly, this notion of local control is used as both an explanation of, and justification for, devolution of state responsibility to the local level (Herbert 2005; Fraser 2003; Purcell 2006). Given the diminished state involvement that occurred since the 1980s, policy makers tend to employ a hegemonic understanding of 'local control' as common sense, wherein decisions can be made most appropriately and effectively by local constituents without the influence of large government (Purcell 2006). Ironically, then, local control is explained as a desirable solution to the issue of social inequalities, thereby justifying a continued absence of state responsibility and investment. And, the

notion of community is romanticized such that local control is also seen to be desirable *by communities* themselves.

This section will detail how these (hegemonic) discourses have been theorized and critiqued by geographers and urban scholars / planners by first exploring what *community* means, then what *community development* implies and finally how it is deployed and how the structures of community development have been critiqued. Many of these contemporary discussions of community development projects examine how processes of neoliberalization have impacted and continue to shape the structure and outcomes of development projects (MacLeod 2011; Thompson 2011; Leitner 2007; Mayer 2007). Yet each of these conversations carries their own assumptions, pitfalls, and unanswered questions. Geographers often discuss community as tied to a particular place, or at least a geographic imaginary (Elwood 2002; Herbert 2005; Martin 2004), however, “community” itself can be difficult to pinpoint.

Community

Since community is offered as a central vehicle for purportedly meeting social needs in a neoliberal imaginary, ideas of community shape what neoliberalization actually looks like, how it moves and operates in the everyday real world, and what impacts it has on individuals. Scholars have devoted entire books to explain and discern the term (Joseph 2002; Creed 2006), and it has been the subject of philosophical debate for decades (Williams 1976). According to Creed, community can mean three things: a group of people, a quality of relationship, and a place / location (2006). I will expand on these three understandings using “underserved youth” as my example, adapting it to each conception. As a *group of people*, community makes decisions together, has a collective

interest, and sees commonality between the individuals and the group. At a college like the University of Washington, underserved youth may be a group that has joined together to provide support to other low-income or first generation college students. As a *quality of relationship*, community refers more to a feeling or affective association. Underserved youth may not actively organize themselves, but may feel solidarity with other youth with similar backgrounds. Thus, while it is not a distinct group of people, this notion of community is often extended to think about shared experience, and a feeling of comfort across place. Finally, as a *place or location*, community can refer not to a specific group of individuals, but the place or geographic imaginary of a group. One might explain that they are traveling to “an indigenous community” in a remote part of the world. Similarly, urban development efforts aimed at underserved youth might actually refer to urban *neighborhoods* with low-income schools, rather than a distinct group of youth. In this way, place and location can be a stand-in for an actually existing community.

Creed notes that all of these notions of community are quite positive, rarely carrying negative connotations (2006), but reminds us that meanings of community are geographically and historically contingent, shaped by the ideals, politics and events of the time and place. Thus, Creed argues community is not an object, but a discursive entity that is, “constituted by and constitutive of different regimes of knowledge” (2006, 13). Conceptualizing community as a social construct leads Creed to pose a powerful question: “What are the relationships between concepts of community and identity vectors such as race, class, gender, family, and nation?” (2006, 14).

The urban geographical literature on “community” has followed up this question in a variety of ways. Some scholars have focused on how community is deployed

strategically by non-profit organizations in ways that may shift depending on the audience and what is at stake. Deb Martin (2004) and Steve Herbert (2005) both demonstrate how community can be simultaneously used to advance and limit the goals and projects of non-profit or community based organizations. Their previous work, in line with Creed's question, above, frame much of my own work, as I explore how notions of community, deployed at different scales by different stakeholders impact subjectivities, particularly of youth³. For this project, I understand community as a concept and ideal, which can be assigned or claimed. It can be put to use to empower a collective or group, or it can be described on a group's behalf, (perhaps to their detriment). Community can be used as a tool for governance, by implying, preferring and structuring particular behaviors and relationships (Rose 1999). For the purpose of this thesis, community can be a goal, a place, a group, and an ideology.

There is a small literature examining how non-profit organizations deploy community strategically amidst neoliberalization and this literature is tremendously helpful in examining how the articulation between community and neoliberalization presents opportunities for contestation by multiple parties at multiple sites. In particular, this work shows us how 'community', in a neoliberal urban governance context is: a) fractured and dynamic; b) a platform for governance and c) in a dialectical relationship with neoliberalization. These same conceptualizations of 'community' as contradictory under neoliberalism ground my own investigation of 'community' throughout this thesis.

Highlighting these positions, Kate Crehan, in her examination of London-based arts non-profit (Free Form), argues that while notions of community have been

³ Notably absent from his list of identity vectors!

strategically deployed by Free Form throughout its development, actually *existing* community is an elusive, dynamic idea. There is no pre-ordained notion of community, but rather it is experienced differently by individuals and groups based on their positionality, narratives, identities and relationships. She claims that trying to look for community as an object is like trying to find a unicorn (2006, 75). Similarly, Crehan is skeptical of assuming set groups of communities with unified interests, noting that communities are, in reality, made up of a diverse set of individuals. There is great danger, both discursively and politically, in conflating community interests as those of individuals. Adopting a truly relational understanding of community and subjectivity, Crehan's guiding questions are incredibly powerful:

However much we may feel we know what we want, our desires are always grounded in a specific economic, political and social context and in our understanding of that context; unless we know what is possible, how *can* we know what we want? And given the often fractured nature of "communities", in what sense does *the community* as opposed to the different individuals and groups of which it is composed, have desires and needs? (2006, 53).

The geographically and socially contingent nature of community means that it is increasingly difficult, and perhaps impossible to ever create a cohesive and "accurate" portrayal of community needs. As a composite of individual positions and subjectivities, community needs will always be inherently fractured and a representation at best.

This position adopts a relational, feminist and post-structural understanding of community. In the realm of non-profits, this understanding highlights distinctions between when community is used strategically to advance the work of the organization, versus community being claimed by participants for their own identification, in contrast again to the ways that donors and outsiders view and articulate the communities they seek to serve. Each of these deployments of community are vital to understanding the

discursive power of community within a neoliberalizing non-profit and voluntary sector. Interrogating the spaces and contradictions between these divergent notions of community also furthers our understanding of political transformation. When community is claimed versus assigned, this heightens the potential for resistance / contestation to processes of neoliberalization.

Community Development

Just as “community” has been harnessed into a neoliberal world as a vehicle for dealing with social needs and uneven development, so too have the set of institutions and neighborhood-based interventions known as “community” development. The last two decades have seen a hegemonic enforcement of best practices meant to activate local communities to solve their own experiences of social inequalities. These best practices often assume a bottom-up, localized, and efficient way to empower communities to improve their economic situation. Within community development literatures, there are generally two strains of thought and belief. One is that of *development* in a more traditional sense: improved well-being, economic status, investment, self-sufficiency, health, etc. (Fraser 2003; Purcell 2003). These goals are easily quantifiable and measurable, and thus appealing to donors and investors. The other approach, that of *community building*, is more elusive and harder to pinpoint, define or measure. Community building is derivative of community organizing, in which the goals are to make connections, build relationships, and strengthen the networks between individuals (Seattle P-Patch Program, 2011). An underlying belief here is that by strengthening people’s relationships and investment in one another, they will be more inclined to support one another, advocate for community benefit and health, and create positive

outcomes in their geographical location (Seattle Department of Neighborhoods 2011; ACGA 2010).

Community development, then, is seen as a way for small, localized groups of people (purportedly with similar geographic boundaries), to improve their neighborhood, environs, and experiences of the social and economic. As a *policy*, community development is seen as the “best practice” way of empowering neighborhoods or towns that are experiencing economic downturn (DeFillipis 2001; Fraser 2006). Through localized economic development projects, these communities can help bring new investment and encourage economic growth. This approach often privileges public-private partnerships, in which non-profit or private organizations partner with the state and local government in order to invest and develop an economically depressed area (Mayer 2007; Lerner 2005). Ringing true in this model is a trust in the market to correct social ills. In this classic liberal economic mindset, then, through investment and business-friendly policies, economically depressed areas can right themselves and correct for social inequities (Harvey 2005; Brenner and Theodore 2002; McCann 2002). This means that local communities are encouraged to be entrepreneurial, to attract investment, do more with less, incorporate multiple voices and community perspectives, and thus create a series of positive economic outcomes (DeFillipis 2001, Thompson 2011). Unfortunately, as has been well documented by critics of this development model, usually investment and economic growth do not directly benefit local individuals, particularly in urban contexts, where real estate and business development can lead to gentrification, displacement, or dispossession (Purcell 2006; Fraser 2003).

Fraser's 2003 work provides a complex critique of community development projects, noting the spatial impacts for neighborhood residents and their ability to enact social-spatial change. He argues that,

[an] undue emphasis on neighborhood-level networks, as a means of ameliorating poverty, not only serves to put the responsibility of alleviating poverty onto the shoulders of residents residing in a small geographic area but also removes these people and these places from their broader spatial context (2003, 422).

This excerpt highlights the glaring contradiction of many community development projects, wherein those who already experience processes of impoverishment and marginalization bear the burden of "development". Fraser also argues that community development projects seemingly function to mitigate experiences of social difference and diminish inequalities, yet much of that social difference exists in the first place because of the practices and politics of public and private institutions (2003, 422). Even with these contributions, there is an empirical gap emerging from this critique. While Fraser's work is leveled at the neighborhood scale, many non-profits, particularly youth oriented organizations, work with youth who live in different parts of their cities. These participants may not identify or feel solidarity with other participants, either based on their geographies or social contexts. Thus, it is vital to explore these same questions about community development, community building, and actually experienced outcomes, but at scales and contexts beyond that of the neighborhood.

Many community development efforts have had unforeseen disciplinary and governmentalizing impacts following the turn to neo-communitarianism and a political focus on urban revitalization. MacLeod and Johnstone's 2011 work explores the outcomes of post-Thatcherism policies in Britain, and how they have led to a punitive and disciplinary state. In their argument, community is seen as an asset for neighborhood

and economic development. In the process of trying to create positive development, individuals and groups that don't fit this neat, positive and prescriptive idea of community are disciplined and responsabilized by an increasingly punitive state. In the revanchist and neoliberalized urban landscape,

responsibilization' strategies alongside the neurotic obsession with crime and disorder reveal how social control has come to replace welfare as the primary focus of states (Garland, 2001; Herbert, 2005; Squires, 2006) (MacLeod and Johnstone 2011, 20).

The emphasis and shift *to* social control has justified increased and elusive forms of governance that are used to discipline individuals and groups that do not fit an ideal model of community and economic development. This theoretical framework is illustrated in the excerpt below, which highlights how community is deployed as the platform for 'good governance', which allows for disciplining of undeserving poor. In their study, MacLeod and Johnstone argue that,

to discipline deviants unable or unwilling to acclimatize to the 'economic freedoms' of early-twenty-first-century capitalism, the behaviorist– punitive–state is supplanting an erstwhile welfarist concern to extend decent public housing and de-commodified comprehensive health care, education and other municipal services with a growing concern to choreograph — through muscular crime control policies, incarceration or 'enclosure' — *the lifestyles and spatial practices of those expected to blemish the purified landscapes of contemporary urbanization; and all couched in the politically neutering language of 'good governance' and 'enabling community'* (2011, 20, emphasis added).

In this example, community is the vehicle for governance, in order to advance particular neoliberal values and ideologies: self-sufficiency, responsibility, and economic rationality.

Finally, Carolyn Thompson's 2011 work brilliantly links questions of community development with challenges and contestation to processes of neoliberalization through an exploration of one community's challenge to a mega-development project in Brooklyn, NY. She argues that rather than merely being co-opted or constrained by

neoliberal urbanisms, community can also contest neoliberalism, albeit in sometimes obscure ways. Thompson understands that contestation is not necessarily just an “anti-neoliberalism”, but rather emerges during points of articulation between the structural and material place-based experiences of neoliberalization and individual subjectivities and social formations (Hall 1988; Hart 2007). She also rejects divisions between co-optation and resistance, following Elwood (2006). Most intriguing in this study is the question regarding political *potential*: “...examining how communities are dealing with new constraints *as actors in and subjects of neoliberal policies*, while recognizing that analyses of neoliberal urbanism are incomplete without considering how communities engage with those policies” (2011, 1192), emphasis added). Echoing the earlier work of Fraser, Thompson explores the ways that non-profits and community development projects have emerged from and rely on many forms of neoliberal governance. This complicated and dynamic relationship with urban governance structures means that there are constantly shifting, adaptable and contingent forms of contestation. Thompson signals the deep embeddedness of community, neoliberalization, and political transformation, particularly how ideas of the politically *possible* are bounded and limited by the “entrepreneurial logic” of neoliberalism (2011, 1201).

Moving Forward: Neoliberalization, Non-Profits, and Notions of Community

The literatures outlined thus far lay the theoretical foundation for exploring processes of neoliberalization from a contingent and relational perspective. The literatures here have explained the growth of non-profits as an outcome of decades of neoliberal retrenchment of social services and the subsequent governance of poverty in the United States. I have used multiple scholars and case studies to forefront how

attention to subjectivities, non-profits and community development can answer questions about political possibilities and contestation. However, these works do have gaps that will be addressed in this thesis. In order to better understand young people and their actually experienced neoliberalisms, I turn to non-profits as primary sites and transmitters of neoliberal governmentality, and producers of neoliberal subjectivities. Empirically, I turn to new non-profit models and paradigms in order to explore how governance is enacted through non-profit restructuring and fundraising constraints. Theoretically, this project underscores how notions of ‘community’ are bound up in urban neoliberal restructuring.

Up to this point, many of the debates and critiques surrounding community development have been shrouded in binaries, such as a distinction between more grassroots organizations and more corporate models of development. While these discussions have been helpful and productive, they no longer answer all of the questions regarding community development (Purcell 2002; Elwood 2002; Leitner 2007). In an era of diminishing funds, non-profits and volunteers have had to adapt and reinvent the wheel, leading to new models of community development work. These models have not been sufficiently studied theoretically or empirically. While the central questions about community development remain relevant, it is necessary to better understand emergent forms of community development, community building, non-profit work and the voluntary sector. A more comprehensive understanding of the *spaces* of community building and non-profit work can illustrate the political work being done on subjectivities and collectivities, as well as the political potential for contestation and resistance.

Following the work of scholars like Ananya Roy, this project challenges the assumed benevolence of non-profits and NGOs, instead examining their ideologies,

networks, and processes (Roy 2010). In my case, I explore the relationality between notions of ‘community’ and processes of neoliberalization, and their impacts on subjectivities. I recognize that non-profit programs are *always* bound up in contingent geographical, political and historical contexts (Fraser 2003). It is my intention to understand and explore the influences, compromises and unforeseen consequences of urban youth empowerment programs, with the eventual attention to spaces and potential for political resistance and contestation.

CHAPTER 3

The Rise of [New] Non-Profits: The Case for Youth Grow

The recent attention to both the lineage and roles of the non-profit sector illustrates their increasing significance in the landscape of social service provisioning in the United States. Given this significance, heightened work on the practices, politics and ideologies of non-profits is vital to understanding how non-profits are positioned within processes of neoliberalization, and what that means for their participants and clientele. In this chapter, I explore my research design and methodology, particularly how work with one non-profit can shed light on the changing position of non-profits and how youth are positioned within non-profit programs. Specifically, I make the case for why Youth Grow, as a youth *garden* program, is the most appropriate site for exploring the work that notions of “empowerment” do, and how both non-profits and youth are impacted by such language and ideology.

Research Design

My descriptive, exploratory case study illuminates new models of non-profit programming, and develops a better theoretical understanding of how youth subjects are positioned within community development and non-profit work. I approached the field having theorized the outcomes and patterns I expected to encounter, while simultaneously looking for incongruencies and the unexpected (Burawoy 1991). Drawing on the literature, I expected to find that through employing language of “empowerment”, organizations limit their potential for transformative change because this vague language serves the interests of donors more than it does the interests of youth subjects. Youth end up better equipped to *navigate* a neoliberal urban society and economy rather than to

change it. Exploring these propositions necessitated interacting with an organization and its participants/subjects in order to understand processes of neoliberalization, community development and their actual experiences of these phenomena.

Youth Grow's position as a youth empowerment gardening non-profit lends itself well to interrogating and exploring my research questions concerning neoliberalization, non-profits, and the youth subjects served by "empowerment" non-profit programs. First, how are non-profit organizations responding and adapting to neoliberal imperatives and processes of neoliberalization? How are gardens and youth positioned as subjects within neoliberal non-profit restructuring? How is community deployed both by non-profits and by youth subjects, and what are the corresponding impacts on subjectivities? Finally, what, if any, potential exists for non-profits to serve as sites for transformative political and social change?

I answer these questions through a single-site case study, using a variety of inductive qualitative methods. I began by exploring the landscape of urban agriculture in Seattle, looking for organizations that employed language of "empowerment" in their mission statements. Youth Grow fits this "empowerment" criterion, while also designing their urban agriculture programming towards supporting low-income youth. Finally, Youth Grow already had a mentorship and volunteer program established for young adults experienced in both gardening and youth mentoring. Thus, I was able to volunteer without burdening their organizational structure.

Over three months of fieldwork, I volunteered with Youth Grow and conducted participant observation, conducted a series of semi-structured interviews with Youth Grow participants, staff, volunteers and supporters. I interviewed youth that were willing

and able to commit to a one-hour interview, and staff and volunteers positioned to be able to speak to the history and overarching structure and mission of the organization. At the beginning of my time volunteering with Youth Grow, I made my position as participant-observer and volunteer well known. Once I developed rapport with the youth and staff, I began inviting participants to conduct interviews with me. During a work break on one of my volunteer shifts, I invited all twelve of the youth to participate, offering compensation in the form of a \$15 gift card to Safeway grocery. This allowed the youth the option for prepared food, groceries, pharmacy and household or school supplies. I told youth that they could approach me to express interest, or I would follow up with them during the work shift. Initially, a few of the youth expressed interest up front; upon following through, I had a total of nine youth sign up for interviews.

However, due to a number of limiting factors, I only completed three youth interviews. Youth Grow has a strict privacy policy to respect the confidentiality and privacy of the youth. As a mentor, I was not allowed contact information for any of the youth, nor was I allowed to contact them outside of my volunteer shifts. I had to schedule interviews in person during a work-shift, and then hope that youth would follow through and meet me at the required time. I typically scheduled interviews with youth on Saturdays either before or after their market shifts, since they would be showing up to work at a designated time already. Due to the highly transient nature of the youth in this program, many of them did not have cell phones or email addresses, and their schedules were changing frequently.⁴

⁴ Additional personal factors: one youth was arrested for being in the “wrong place at the wrong time”, one youth was fired for stealing at the market, a few youth switched shifts with other youth and neglected to inform me ahead of time

I also invited one staff member and one mentor to interview, both of whom were willing and eager to share their perspective on the organization. All of the interviews I conducted followed the same primary interview script, though they were adapted slightly depending on the age group (youth participant / adult participant). Finally, I also interviewed two city officials in the Department of Neighborhoods and Community Development, one specifically working for the P-Patch program. I sought perspective on community development at the city level and how non-profit programs like Youth Grow related to and interacted with municipal community development programs. All interviews with youth and adult participants were semi-structured and lasted about an hour. For the youth, I did not return interview transcripts since I did not have contact information for them. The adults did receive copies of their transcripts that they were able to edit and comment on.

I conducted participant observation for the full two months of the fall program, volunteering once a week for 4 hours at a time. My shift consisted of greeting the youth, supporting the staff while they made announcements, and then participating in the garden work alongside teams of youth. I attended other shifts as an observer aside from my weekly shift, including the Saturday markets, a Friday session (which I will discuss in the following chapters), and the season's closing ceremony.

Following the interviews and participant observation, my analyses involved coding transcripts and field notes for themes that I expected, and those that emerged in the text, through a grounded theory approach. These themes and codes inform my findings by allowing me to make theoretical insights from the range of data collected.

Methodological Politics and Positions

Feminist theorists have long argued that knowledge is situated and embodied within our individual positionality in historical, social and geographical contexts (Haraway 1991; Rose 1993; Rose 1997). This epistemological outlook requires a methodology that explores subjectivity and individual lived experiences. My research practices draw on these core feminist methodological perspectives, but also towards more scholar-activism (Pulido 2008). I strive to engage equitably with the organizations and communities I work with, in fact seeing little separation between my experiences as researcher, community member, or active citizen interested in youth-centered social justice and urban inequalities. Laura Pulido has said, “how you combine scholarship and activism is linked to how you construct your life” (2008, 1). I take great direction from this position, and seek to contribute my energies to the existing activism and positive work that Youth Grow and Food Connection are already doing, even while engaging in theoretical critique. Advancing an activist and social justice-oriented agenda is inherent to my goals as a researcher, and I hope that it is also an outcome of my research (Pain 2003).

My position within the organization as a mentor and volunteer certainly allowed me greater insight, rapport and trust with the participants. As an outsider to the organization, and certainly an outsider to the homeless and underserved youth, building relationships with program staff, mentors and youth was both ethically important to me, and imperative for me to build trust and diminish my role as intrusive outsider. As a highly educated white woman, I carry much social and cultural capital that the Youth Grow participants may never possess due to structural inequalities along lines of race, gender, class, and at least for their current position, age. Thus, given the relative position

of power I held compared to the youth participants, transparency was vital to my role as researcher. With many years of experience mentoring low-income youth of color through various non-profit programs in the Twin Cities of Minnesota, I did feel comfortable immediately engaging with the youth with a level of respect and had already existing strategies for interacting with them as peers rather than as needy youth. Of course, I do not believe these efforts erase privilege and situate me as a peer with these youth. Rather, following traditions and techniques of anti-racist and anti-oppression trainings, my goal was to enter into my relationship with these youth with the same level of respect and compassion that I would show my peers.

Prior to beginning my engagement with Youth Grow, I met with the director of Food Connection to explain the goals of my project, and to gain her insight and suggestions. She was incredibly enthusiastic about the partnership, and encouraged me to continue in my direction. Over the course of our meeting, she also affirmed my suspicions that Food Connection was experiencing the effects of neoliberalization. When I explained the term to her, she emphatically agreed that Food Connection was, indeed, expected to do more with less, to show higher documentation and accountability of stated outcomes, and constantly innovate and compete for diminishing resources. We concluded that the best output I could produce for the organization would be improvements and recommendations for how to bring their stated goals more in line with their actual outcomes. This will come in the form of a brief memo, and I will provide it to the organization at the conclusion of the thesis project. At the present, I maintain my relationship with the organization, volunteering for events when I can, recruiting new youth, and mentoring again for the summer season.

Situating Youth Grow: National Trends and New Models for Non-Profits

As seen in the literature on non-profits and social services, the dramatic shift in the landscape of social service provisioning over the last three decades has significantly impacted the roles and expectations for non-profits (Wolch 1990; Fyfe and Milligan 2003; Martin 2004; Herbert 2005). What began as a concerted effort to cut national funding and shrink government quickly became an ideological project that demonized entitlement programs while privileging private models for service provision. Across the country, budgetary cuts led to diminished state-funded programs, coupled by a dramatic nationwide rise of non-profit programs. By 1995, the number of classified 501c3 non-profits had grown to just over 1 million. By March 2012, the number of non-profits in the U.S. was over 1.5 million (NCCS 2012). This growth demonstrates a historical shift in the United States, devolving responsibility away from state to individuals and localized groups. As explored in the previous chapter, this transition is a predictable outcome of state-led neoliberalization, and it ushered in a new era of funding, competition and efficiency.

The non-profit landscape is incredibly diverse, running the gamut between small, highly localized volunteer-run neighborhood advocacy programs with miniscule budgets, to national, multi million dollar organizations like Teach for America. Given this variety, non-profits are uniquely positioned between public and private enterprises. While definitively non-public entities, they often rely on public funding streams to help support their efforts (Martin 2004). At the same time, they are technically private operations, but unlike much of the private sector, do not operate in order to achieve a profit; they are accountable to board members, not shareholders; they may produce revenue, but all profit goes back into programming. Interestingly, and often problematically, non-profit

programs are not held to uniform standards or practices like their public counterparts. This lack of uniformity results in a patchwork of services across the United States, wherein every organization operates in its own model, crafts their own mission, has their own revenue structure and fundraising plan, and have varying degrees of accountability. Additionally, this patchwork sector leads to inconsistent service availability; individuals and communities can no longer depend on social services to come from the state, but have to navigate a complex, fragmented landscape in order to find the services they need (Schram 2010). Organizations similarly find themselves caught up in a complicated, and often highly competitive, fundraising landscape wherein each year the guarantee of funding and program availability is tenuous and unpredictable.

The emphasis on mission statement is significant for non-profits. Unlike businesses who are held accountable through their earnings and performance, non-profits are primarily judged and assessed based on how well their outcomes match their mission statements. Additionally, a mission defines the role, scope and politics of an organization, proving incredibly important to potential donors and financial supporters. Amidst the emphasis on mission, one growing source of financial support is through large grants and foundations. For instance, of foundations and granting organizations, about 50% of their funds went to social justice programs, which signals a huge proportion of non-profit funds (Gould 2010). Foundations grants often come with conditions, such as achieving measurable goals and outcomes through programming and outreach. College Possible, an organization I spent two years working for in St. Paul, Minnesota, claims that their college-access mission is “all about the numbers”, because this guarantees funding. Heavily reliant on large grants and pushing a goal of national expansion, this large scale

non-profit exemplifies a corporatizing NGO or non-profit organization (Fyfe and Milligan 2003): every dollar is documented, and the organization is accountable to their large donors at the end of every grant cycle. This process is restrictive for many organizations striving for a more radical mission, or is just too tenuous and unpredictable for a small organization without the capacity for a professional grant writer (Kivel 2007; Smith 2007; Gould 2010). As a response, organizations are experimenting with new models of fundraising, programming and development.

While organizations do adopt creative ways to avoid restrictive grant expectations, many small-scale organizations have shirked the demands and requirements of large grants and foundation style fundraising and have moved instead to smaller, membership style models (Smith 2007). However, even programs that opt for individual giving still employ language that is reminiscent of foundation grants and expectations. For instance, across the non-profit sector, mission statements are littered with language of “empowerment”, meant to signal independence, self-sufficiency, self-advocacy; a way to give communities power, confidence and skills necessary to be more self-actualizing. While many feminist development scholars have criticized the “empowerment” project, the topic has not received the same critical attention in the global North (Nagar and Raju, 2003; Roy 2010; Kabeer 1999). A cursory search of scholarly work surrounding non-profits and empowerment is almost exclusively aimed at how to encourage and incorporate “empowerment” into a non-profit or social entrepreneurship program (Dees et al. 2001; Ashcraft and Kedrowicz 2002; Hardina 2005). “Empowerment” language appeals to both large and small-scale donors, the program goals and program directors. In recognition of the viability and power of empowerment discourse to secure funding,

many organizations have adapted accordingly. Specifically, I attribute the rapid rise of urban garden programs to this new empowerment model, due to the multiple benefits that arise through one set of programs.⁵

As Mary Beth Pudup (2008) documents, garden projects are frequently seen as a cure-all to urban inequalities. Within the city of Seattle, this is echoed in a 2009 Department of Neighborhoods report, in which the benefits are broken into four categories: health, social, environmental, and economic (Erickson et al 2009, 5). Across different geographies, these programs take a variety of approaches, but there are many commonalities so far as youth-centered garden programs are concerned. The discourse goes something like this: find and recruit promising low-income youth, teach them to grow their own food and market it. Along the way, they learn about the environment, alternative food systems, and local economies. They gain confidence and job skills. They go on to become educated citizens of their urban environments with new systems-level thinking skills. And they are empowered to lift themselves out of poverty.⁶ This has been seen across the US, in Boston (The Food Project), Minneapolis (Youth Farm and Market Project), St. Paul (Community Design Center of Minnesota), Bellingham (Youth Grown)⁷, Olympia (GRuB), Santa Cruz (Food What!), Berkeley (Berkeley Youth Initiatives H.E.A.T program), Austin (YouthLaunch), Brooklyn (Added Value), Durham (SEEDS), and of course, in Seattle (Youth Grow). This prevalent model has led to national conferences, sharing of curricula, and program collaboration. However, even

⁵ Being able to hit “many birds with one stone” is a huge asset in a competitive and efficient non-profit landscape. Thus, urban garden programs are often hailed as a one-size-fits-all response to urban woes.

⁶ On many levels, I support these beliefs, because many youth do explain the benefits of these programs. However, I am troubled by the lack of critical attention to this discourse, particularly when it comes to assumptions about *poverty alleviation*.

⁷ Not to be confused with Youth Grow in Seattle

with the prevalence and growth of these programs, garden projects are uniquely positioned within the non-profit sector. They do not meet a vital social service, such as housing or hunger services, nor are they fighting an explicit fight for social justice, such as an organization like the Children's Defense Fund. For that reason, their calls for financial support rely on the program's ability to create a "greater good": donors must believe that their programming will lead to an improved citizenry, more adept at navigating the world and advocating for themselves, and eventually independent of non-profit services. I explain the structure and practices of Youth Grow below as one example of such a youth-empowerment garden program, and how it is emblematic of a growing trend across US cities.

Youth Grow: New Models for Empowerment

As described above, Youth Grow does not fit a neat model of efficient service provision, nor is it fighting a clear social justice or grassroots model mission. Instead, it "empowers homeless and underserved youth through garden-based education and employment (Youth Grow, 2012)." It does this through a three season model. Every season twelve low-income youth are hired for the three month-long job-training program. The program seeks to have an equal balance between young men and women, though in the fall crew there were more men. Four of the youth were East African men, one had fled from Central America, one was a Southeast Asian male refugee, and one an African American young man. Of the women, three were white and one African American. One youth presented as transgender, but was fired from the program before I had a chance to allow them to self-identify. While these identity categories are inherently problematic, it helps visualize the work and space of Youth Grow, who they serve, and how these youth

are positioned within the organization. The youth work 3 times a week after school and occasional Saturdays at a local farmers market. In the summer months, the youth work longer hours, maintaining a fully productive quarter-acre urban garden. The staff consists of one full time program manager and one part time program coordinator (one male of color, one white woman) with a crew of young adult mentors that volunteer to support the youth and the garden programming (all of whom were white, and all female except for one male mentor).

Unlike many non-profits, Youth Grow is overseen by a larger non-profit organization, Food Connection. This represents an adaptation and divergence from previous non-profit models, and again emphasizes why Youth Grow operates as a good site for this case study. Food Connection's mission is to "inspire and educate people to garden organically, conserve natural resources, and support local food systems in order to cultivate a healthy urban environment and community" (Food Connection 2012). Food Connection has existed for 34 years in Seattle, serving a growing community of local food activists, urban agriculture enthusiasts and food justice advocates. They adopted Youth Grow in 2010 after the organization experienced financial collapse; after a year-long programming hiatus, Youth Grow re-emerged in the spring of 2011 with new staff, new youth and new structure. They had downsized dramatically, from two garden sites to just one, had lost their Americorps support, and consolidated to only two staff members. They no longer have their own board of directors, but instead have their finances managed by the board of Food Connection. An advisory board for Youth Grow still exists, but they are navigating their new role vis-à-vis the board of directors of Food Connection.

Due to this model, Youth Grow does not do their own fundraising, save for their market sales and an annual auction and dinner, which I will come back to in the following chapters. The youth are highly involved in both the market and auction spaces, thereby directly contributing to revenue and visibility of the organization. Other than these two venues, donations to Youth Grow are routed through Food Connection; Food Connection determines the budget for Youth Grow, and Youth Grow reports back to the financial manager for Food Connection. This umbrella model of non-profit management is relatively new and under-theorized, and it signals a significant historical moment in the non-profit sector. The environment is so competitive, the market so saturated with services, that organizations consolidate their administrative costs and expenditures by adopting and partnering with fledgling organizations. Particularly in the realm of small-scale organizations that don't provide basic human needs, justifying one's cause *and* competing for funding can dwarf an organization before they even get off the ground.

Youth Grow largely exists in an uncharted, under-theorized limbo. As explained before, they are navigating new territory based on their non-profit organizational structure. But their mission and goals also place them between radical organizing and basic needs provisioning. Similarly, they are neither a grassroots model nor a corporatized, business model of service provision. Finally, their position as a garden based program means that in some ways, they are promoting alternative food systems and local economies, which is arguably a challenge to dominant capitalist formations. However, as demonstrated in the previous chapter, it is also well established that non-profit and NGOs are firmly embedded in processes and landscapes of neoliberal urbanism, thereby limiting or at least bounding the potential for transformative political

and/or social change. Finally, given the sparse empirical work on youth-focused non-profits and corresponding gap in the theoretical positioning of youth subjects vis-à-vis empowerment programs, Youth Grow is an ideal site for exploring both the new roles and positions of *non-profits*, and the roles and positions of *youth subjects* within empowerment and garden programs specifically.

CHAPTER 4

Whose Community and For Whom? Deploying Community and Responding to Neoliberalization

Can community provide a counter-hegemonic discourse without serving the interests of a hegemonic one that draws heavily on the same lexical tool? (Creed 2006, 14).

This chapter illustrates how Youth Grow, as demonstrative of other youth garden empowerment programs, responds and adapts to neoliberal imperatives and processes of neoliberalization and how, in these processes, the organization imagines distinct social categories and makes these visible to donors. In order to explore how Youth Grow's conceptions of community building mimic or disrupt those held by the city, I situate the organization amidst its geographic and social context in Seattle. The analysis that follows begins with how the notion of 'community' is deployed at the city level. Next, I explore Youth Grow's engagement with community at an organizational level, particularly how notions of community influence their goals and programming. Finally, I examine how particular social groups are made visible by Youth Grow's shifting organizational structure. I argue that these three engagements with community and social categories are interrelated and must be analyzed together, for they each find articulation with the other, thus contributing to multiple understandings of community, neoliberalization, and the future of the non-profit sector.

Unofficial Partnerships: Youth Grow and Seattle City Government

As an organization nested within a larger gardening non-profit, Youth Grow is quite well connected to many activist and non-profit "scenes". In order to support the organization's goals of education and job training, local organizations run workshops on topics such as college access, small business ownership, resume development, legal

rights, healthy cooking, and urban farming. In addition, Youth Grow is part of a larger landscape of urban agriculture and community gardening, although this integration is less formal than their parent organization, Food Connection. In Seattle, the largest community garden project is actually housed within the municipal government, a fact that sets it apart from many of its peer cities in which community gardening is more wholly non-profit directed (Mai, November, 2011).

Operating within the Department of Neighborhoods for almost thirty years, the P-Patch program oversees about 80 different community gardens throughout Seattle. This municipal program helps gardeners advocate, plan and maintain gardens around the city. Importantly, the P-Patch program operates parallel to three other branches of the Department of Neighborhoods: the Neighborhood Matching Fund, Neighborhood District Coordinators, and Neighborhood Service Centers. These four programs operate under language and goals of civic “empowerment”, “discourse”, and “participation” (Department of Neighborhoods, 2012). The Neighborhood Matching Fund, for instance, exists to provide, “resources for community-driven projects that enhance and strengthen their own neighborhoods” (D.o.N., 2012), while the district coordinators, “encourage and support civic participation”; “act as liaisons between the City and community”; and “coordinate events... that bring government closer to the community” (D.o.N., 2012). The emphasis here on localized, community oriented social and economic development echoes much of the literature on community development. Given the strong rhetoric of community development and community building within this city office, it is inevitable that their beliefs and decisions surrounding programming and priorities will impact the non-profit sector, as well.

While Youth Grow does not have a direct relationship with the P-Patch program or the Department of Neighborhoods, it is still influenced by the discourse of community building that this Department performs through various mechanisms. For instance, the P-Patch municipal program sets the policy and oversees the management of the vast majority of community gardens in Seattle, in which many of Youth Grow's donors and supporters participate. Similarly, the City's stance on community building guides the priorities that organizations like Youth Grow pick up. In a city with such a visible and active urban agriculture and community garden scene, the dominant discourse of "civic engagement" and community building coming from the City has infiltrated and is articulated in other organizations and gardening efforts. While the City is currently the largest organizer of gardening and community building efforts, this capacity is under threat with budget cuts. The relationship between organizations like Youth Grow and the municipal government may take a new shape in the coming years following these cuts. Interestingly, while Youth Grow strives to present itself as serving a 'homeless' and 'underserved youth' social category, it is really only known by the city government for its role as an urban agriculture organization. This speaks great volumes already about the ways that different social groups and categories are imagined and spatialized by both city programs and Youth Grow, and begs further exploration into the relationship between these two sites.

Youth Grow's relationship was not always as separate from city government as it is now. At the organization's conception in 1995, it relied heavily on grant funding from the Seattle Youth Employment Program (SYEP), which helped provide the wages and stipends for the youth employees. In 2009, after a long and robust city partnership, Youth

Grow lost its funding from SYEP, virtually crippling the organization. Operating at that time at two sites in North and South Seattle, Youth Grow was forced to let go all of their youth participants, their AmeriCorps volunteers, and their staff. They were similarly “let go” by the Seattle Church Council, which helped them manage their affairs and provided a space for the organization. In 2010, Youth Grow was adopted by Food Connection, and took a year-long programming hiatus to get their affairs in order, reimagine the organization, and develop new relationships. The spring of 2011 was the first full season of the new and fully functioning Youth Grow, though there are substantial programmatic and organizational differences in their new iteration.

Today, Youth Grow is grappling with this historically complicated relationship with the City of Seattle, has had to reinvent its fundraising structure, and it has re-shaped its programming at a smaller scale and with new staff. Thus, what Youth Grow is able to do on a daily basis is impacted by their material relationship with the City, as well as their own deployments of community and social categories and how these are either taken up or shown to be porous by the youth they seek to serve.

City and Community: How Seattle City Government Deploys “Community”

The Seattle Department of Neighborhoods is a small branch of the Seattle city government, but their mission is extensive,

Seattle Department of Neighborhoods works to bring government closer to the residents of Seattle by engaging them in civic participation; helping them become empowered to make positive contributions to their communities; and by involving more of Seattle's underrepresented residents, including communities of color and immigrants, in civic discourse, processes, and opportunities (Department of Neighborhoods, 2012).

This mission explicitly draws on a few of the same discourses exposed in the review of community development literatures: empowerment, civic engagement, and local control.

Overseeing four primary programs, the department strives to incorporate marginalized populations in various levels and forms of civic engagement, often seeing their department as a “gateway” towards greater involvement with the municipal government (Mai, November, 2011). An employee of the P-Patch program, Mai has multiple years of experience gardening, working with programs like Youth Grow, and balancing community building goals. She sees the Department of Neighborhoods as the “accessible, relevant, friendly government program” (Mai, November 2011). Another staff member, with a background in social justice and activism around poverty alleviation, housing access, and educational reform, frames the mission of the Department of Neighborhoods as,

...each one of those things that I just spoke to has its own relationship to community development. So, for example, neighborhood matching fund is a real, is sort of a community empowerment tool, where community can decide what kind of recruitment it wants to do. And so we have an annual report that... outlines the type of work that the community can do, and it's everything from parks improvement to planning certain events to, (pauses), design projects for a new community garden (Alicia, Nov., 2011).

Alicia's use of ‘empowerment’ here signals that particular communities can collaborate and make their own decisions regarding the most appropriate and beneficial ways to apply for funds and recruit community members to participate in various projects.

Following notions of empowerment, there is a chance for a collective to make decisions that benefit the group, particularly through the activation of individuals in community spaces. Of course, in the above description, the community itself is undefined: we do not know *who* makes use of these programs or how, but we do see an articulation of sites for collective engagement in public space such as gardens, parks, and events.

Imagining community building slightly differently, Mai describes how the P-Patch program in particular fits within the community building mission of the Department of Neighborhoods,

Well, we are the Department of Neighborhoods, but we do community building. So, needs such as... uh, people being isolated, people being segregated. People feeling disenfranchised from city government. You know, like, “I don’t know anything about how government works... they can do whatever, and I don’t know how to break through” (Mai, November, 2011).

Mai draws more on an imagination of community based on the quality of relationship, not with one another, but with government and municipal resources: do individuals feel empowered by or threatened by their local government? Do they feel they can influence their community through that relationship? By directly addressing issues of exclusion and isolation, Mai expresses that city government should actively reach out and accommodate marginalized populations who may feel excluded from governance processes and civic engagement. This imagination of city government as an arbiter of civic engagement harkens back to traditional models of the relationship between state and civil society, even though scholars have challenged that model for many years (Hall 1988; Jessop 2002; Mercer 2002; Lake and Newmann 2003; Fyfe 2005).

Mai and Alicia’s two positions reflect quite different understandings of the relationship between the state and community development. One is more hands-off, providing tools for community engagement, while the other is more involved, by actively engaging populations that are often marginalized from formal forms of governance and decision-making. Both of these conceptualizations contribute to and yield particular material outcomes as far as how community is then *deployed* and operationalized at the city level. At its outset, Mai hopes that community building can address “isolation, segregation and disparity” because of its ability to connect people to one another.

It's connections between individual people, so the P-Patches create a venue for one on one community building. People to resources, and organizations. Organizations to each other. And then all of these things to city government. But it's just a lot of different levels of engagement. Small, large, formal, informal... And I think that there's such a new... between all groups. People of different races, socio-economic classes, young and old, um... rich and poor... (Mai, November, 2011).

In material form, then, the city deploys notions of community to bring people together across markers of difference: race, class, age and income, as Mai identifies. By conceptualizing community as a quality of relation, this leads to promoting engagement with individuals of different backgrounds. Alicia echoes this emphasis on promoting diversity through community building:

Community building from my perspective is the opportunity for diverse and um... folks that, are vested stakeholders in community, whether you live there or you work there or you recreate there, opportunity to be in relationship, based towards a positive outcome.

Alicia went on to say:

Then the district coordinator program, here's the thing, too... and they, to the extent that they respond to initiatives, um, or concerns or, you know, in some cases it's, "I have a complaint about...", in other cases its... we have a slew of, you know, coordinators are expected to put together the right people and not necessarily to fix homelessness, or people's perceptions, but to get community to work together to the same goal (Alicia, November, 2011).

Again, the emphasis here is not necessarily on solving social ills or alleviating poverty, but rather to bring people together, to "be in relationship" with each other and with institutions of government. This understanding of community succinctly echoes that put forward by Creed (2006): imagining community as a quality of relationship brings people together across forms of difference and to a variety of local government based resources, individuals, and organizations. These new relationships can either effect stronger bonds, or perhaps lead to creative local level problem solving of community concerns. Either way, strengthening relationships and connecting people to resources is one of the main goals of the Department of Neighborhoods. And, as has become common place and

foundational within neoliberalized urban governance, city government needs to document its achievements and prove itself accountable to its constituents (Fyfe 2003; Martin 2004; Fyfe 2005; Herbert 2005).

In order to maintain a positive relationship with the city of Seattle, the P-Patch program must continually demonstrate how they are meeting their community building goals. Mai believes that the reason the program has such a positive image throughout the city can be attributed to the fact their impacts *are* easily documented in these terms. She explains,

So, community building is a goal of ours, and we have community gardens. And this many thousands of plots in every corner of the city. This many being built each year, by community members, this many thousands of volunteer hours per year that we log. Food security is a goal of ours...Every year we donate 25,000 pounds of food, for instance, to food banks, and that's a very measurable goal (Mai, November, 2011).

An ethic of measurement and accountability is rife in this statement. Clearly, the P-Patch program knows that city government expects tax dollars to go towards clear outcomes and expectations. As documented in the literature, social programs have persisted amidst state retrenchment must continually demonstrate their utility, efficacy and criteria for awarding services. The P-Patch program is firmly grounded in this ethic, and continues to plan their goals and document their successes accordingly. However, the need for growth, expansion, and cultivation of new gardens carries a unique set of drawbacks, particularly when it comes to establishing a strong quality of community relationship:

If it were up to *me*, I might slow down and become less ambitious about growth, you know, adding acreage and number of gardens a year? And check in again just with our goals of diversity, and inclusion, and are we leaving people behind in this rush to build more gardens, bigger, and produce more tons of food... the whole point is community building, so, are we addressing the needs of those people? (Mai, November, 2011).

There are two very clear phenomenon reflected in this excerpt. First, Mai addresses the attention to *growth*, expressing in her own words how a neoliberal ethic has infused

community building projects and city government. Secondly, Mai returns to the notion of community as a quality of relationship, wherein government reaches out to include its diverse constituency through outreach and encouraging civic engagement. However, in her eyes, the need to constantly achieve growth and measure success obstructs the program's ability to prioritize the relationship-building component of community building.

Commitments to community *building* are under threat as cities expect a more accountable, measurable model of community *development*. The Department of Neighborhoods (D.o.N.), for instance faces severe threats due to budget cuts that are focusing government attention only upon the most vital social services, such as housing, hunger and health care. The employees at the D.o.N. are acutely aware of their department's precarious situation, which stems decades of neoliberalization of poverty and social services and the contemporary recession. Reflecting this position, Alicia says,

well, it's a tough time for the City of Seattle ... [there's] less staff... you know, more work to be done in community that is also being stressed. So, I think, you know, a lot of departments are kind of in survival mode (Alicia, November, 2011).

She alludes to the fact that social inequalities have deepened in light of the recession, which leads to increasingly "stressed" communities. However, government programs that would ordinarily address stressed communities are facing cuts and having to fire staff. Unfortunately, but particularly telling for this project, Alicia's position was actually being cut shortly after our conversation, reflecting the dramatic ways city programs are adapting to budget cuts.

The P-Patch program has experienced similar cuts, as there is "less money to pay staff...it's just trying to do the same amount on less" (Mai, November, 2011). However, Mai makes an interesting comparison between the P-Patch office, and non-profits:

So... so far I don't see that we've cut the workload. We continue to do, I guess we function sort of with that non-profit spirit of 'we can do it, we can do it!', but that's part of the strategic planning process, specifically asking the question, 'what do we need to give up', because we can't keep spending the money (Mai, November, 2011).

Mai's invocation of the "non-profit spirit" acknowledges an imaginary of non-profits as spaces of creative problem solving, adaptive fundraising, and deep determination. City government is now looking to non-profits as a new model of "partnership" it can rely upon in a context of severe and ongoing retrenchment of its own resources and capacities.

While the traditional 'public private partnerships' of 1990s urban governance endures, the Department of Neighborhoods staff has identified a new model of partnership that seemingly would rely more on non-profits to manage and share the responsibility of social services. The following excerpt demonstrates the move towards a new partnership model:

Elyse: I was actually wondering about how... how you see non-profits fitting in? Um, to the... you know, increased demand and decreased funding, and meeting these needs.

Mai: Well... are you a mind reader?? We're having that conversation *right now*.

Elyse: Really?? (Laughs)

Mai: Right now the mayor's office has directed us to undergo a P-Patch strategic planning process... how do you meet demand in a time of cuts, and specifically, what are some opportunities for public-private partnerships? So the question is unanswered... But people are very interested in how there can be more formalized relationships between non-profits and city government (Mai, November, 2011).

This partnership is intended to split responsibility and disperse the burden of service provision given that neither city government nor non-profits seemingly have the resources to do the job on their own. Now, though, this is seen as a necessary adaptation to the precarious and deteriorating funding landscape. Alicia acknowledges this new relationship to non-profits, below,

So, um, we're not sort of in the business for funding non-profits, but certainly we're in the business of *empowering* non-profits to utilize our dollars... Honestly, I think the, the

struggle is, can a non-profit position itself differently to get the kind of funding that the city can't get. And certainly partnerships are a big deal, a big deal... (Alicia, Nov., 2011).

Alicia describes how non-profits are eligible to apply for foundation and small grants to which city government cannot apply. In an ironic development, city government, which originally inspired the non-profit sector to fill gaps in state social service provision, now calls *on* non-profits, hailing them to also garner fiscal support on behalf of municipal programs. Mai, while excited about the prospect of new partnerships, expresses concern:

I'm very much for the idea of public-private partnerships, as long as leadership and envisioning stays within city government. I think there's something so powerful about the fact that we have that housed in city government. If we just say, 'turn it over to the non-profits' like everybody else, it's like, um, we would lose a lot (Mai, November, 2011).

This changing relationship between non-profits and city government has, apparently, been reflected in other cities, based on Mai's comments of "everybody else". Across U.S. cities, this new partnership model is restructuring the spaces and terms of the relationships between state and civil society: on the one hand, government seeks to serve community needs, but lacks the resources and staff to implement their projects. On the other hand, non-profits remain threatened by precarious funding, and formalized partnerships with city government can provide stability amidst otherwise unpredictable financial support and planning (Larner 2005; Fyfe 2005; Larner et al. 2005).

In light of dramatic budget cuts, the Department of Neighborhoods is now faced with difficult choices. They hope to maintain their commitment to community building and inclusion, but struggle to meet these goals as they focus their attention on measurable goals and outcomes. Additionally, after experiencing stark budgetary cuts in the last three years, the City is now reimagining its relationship to the "private" non-profit sector, in order to share the burden of service provisioning without sacrificing either sector's position and benefits. This new context heightens the relevance and need to explore the

relationship between city and non-profits, particularly how deployments and conceptualizations of community at the city level subsequently take material and discursive form in non-profits. The following section will explore how Youth Grow has adapted their structure, mission, and programs in lieu of the same cuts that are impacting and restructuring city efforts at community development.

Making Youth Visible: Social Categories and Appealing to Donors

A key way of examining how local government notions of “community building” may be taken up in or transformed by non-profits is by examining how non-profits articulate the “community” they serve and explain how their work benefits the community at large. Organizational statements of *who* they serve and *how* they lay the groundwork that connects city notions of community building with non-profit framings and architectures. When asked who the organization seeks to serve, Julian the program director explains that in sticking with the “core values” of Youth Grow’s founders, “they wanted to continue to serve homeless youth, or at-risk” (Julian, November, 2011). In addition to serving ‘homeless youth’ Lily, one of the long standing mentors, explains how notions of community building are central to Youth Grow’s goals and mission:

I hope that they’re learning to engage with the world around them a little bit... Based on like, their interactions at the farmers market, like I hope that they’re engaging some with that community, and I hope that they’re engaging some with the community when we take them on field trips or work parties or whatever, like, just engaging with people that they wouldn’t necessarily talk to (Lily, November, 2011).

The program premises part of its youth development mission on the goal of having this marginalized group of subjects engage with “the community”. In so doing, they supposedly become more able to move from being a marginalized youth subject (‘homeless’, ‘underserved’), into being members of “the community”.

Thus, quite blatant and powerful notions of community circulate through Youth Grow's programming and promotional materials, particularly through their fundraising and revenue streams. Given Youth Grow's tumultuous funding history, they decided to revamp their approach to fundraising when Food Connection adopted them. Rather than rely on large foundation or city grants, Youth Grow transitioned towards an individual donor based program. Reflecting the same pressures felt by the P-Patch program, Youth Grow must document and demonstrate the need for their programming in order to justify funding and support. For the purpose of generating donor support, Youth Grow takes active steps to foreground the youth it benefits, articulated as 'underserved', 'low-income', 'at-risk' or 'homeless youth' even when participants do not self identify in these ways. The entire justification and existence of their non-profit venture relies on making visible the low-income, homeless, and underserved youth in their program. This visibility is produced in material and discursive ways.

Sage, the youth with the longest stretch of involvement with Youth Grow, is keenly aware of her position as a visible representative of Youth Grow and as an 'underserved youth':

Sage: I mean, when I talk about Youth Grow, it's basically like, with passion I guess... I should really be their poster child.

Elyse: Why do you say that?

Sage: I don't know, isn't the poster child, like, the perfect representation?

Elyse: Mmhmm

Sage: Well, I'm like their perfect representation. Like, I'm not in the program, go home to the family, goof off at school and spend all my money. I'm the perfect example of how this is like, changing somebody's life. I'm a full time student, I have a part time job. My career path directly relates to that, whether that's selling my stuff at a market or having my own farm (Sage, October, 2011).

Her invocation of the "poster child" signals that Sage knows her story fits with the imaginary of who Youth Grow seeks to serve, who donors wish to help, and the type of

individual that can actually benefit from Youth Grow’s programming. She alludes to the fact that she takes her school and job seriously, that she is invested in preparing for her future, and developing relevant skills. She does not have the privilege of a supportive family, a disposable income, or the skills to coast through school. So, while she does not perform the poster child amidst her peers necessarily, she performs a representation that supports the non-profit narrative.

The notion of a “perfect representation” is of particular importance when it comes to fundraising, because of how the organization appeals to donors. As described above, Youth Grow has had to revamp their funding structure in order to remain viable, flexible and self-sufficient following their tumultuous funding history. Julian explains this transition, noting how most non-profits handle their fundraising, and how Youth Grow has had to reimagine their fundraising approach in a new way.

The philosophy... a lot of non-profits run on grants. But grants... are great, as long as they’re there, but they can dry up. But we run on a small, individual donation system based. And then you don’t have to worry about ‘when this grant finishes, where are we going to get our money?’. So, I think that’s been the philosophy, and like, I’m not sure... because we inherited that, they like built a solid base that was there already. So I’m not sure how they populated that... We’re working on kind of helping make that . We’re working on ways of doing that. There’s a board of advisors, that used to be the Youth Grow board, and some of them came on to the Food Connection board, and some of them just formed this like, board of advisors. They’re looking for a role, because they used to be much more hands on, so what’s their role in all this? So they’re trying to find a role, and one of the ideas that Caroline⁸ and I had was for them to kind of cultivate that donor base. To touch base with each of those donors, and to give guided tours on the farm, and like, make the donors basically like, first thing. To interact with them... (Julian, November, 2011).

Julian touches on a number of unique developments here, primarily pointing out that there is a new approach to fundraising. No longer relying on grants, Youth Grow appeals to individual donors. Secondly, Youth Grow’s leadership is now in a complex

⁸ Caroline is the executive director of Food Connection

relationship with Food Connection, Food Connection's board, and the pre-existing Youth Grow board that has now shifted to an "advisory board". Third, Julian describes the concerted effort at making donors feel supported and significant. All of these are tangible examples of the ways that non-profits are adapting amidst new demands and constraints.

Appealing to individual donors has immense impacts on the ways that the youth are portrayed as a discrete, though imaginary, social group. In this new fundraising model, Youth Grow must appeal to donor beliefs about "doing good". Scholars of philanthropy have documented that in appealing to donors, organizations must tap into a belief that dollars donated will contribute to a public good.⁹ Harkening back to the P-Patch's need to document their successes, Youth Grow must demonstrate their value and impact through presenting the 'underserved youth' as a distinct social group to these individual donors. In this process of making youth visible to donors, there is a dialectical relationship of making visible the *donors* themselves as good citizens. Unlike the underserved youth group that is made visible despite its imaginary position, Youth Grow's donors are both unified by place and with similar interests.

Structurally, the main source of Youth Grow donations is funneled through Food Connection, which oversees much of Youth Grow's operations. Julian explains that,

Food Connection does all the fundraising. We... actually don't do much of that side. But we touch base with the donors and kind of like, go to the advisory, like there's this auction that we threw, so we brought youth for that, and they spoke. But really, we don't deal much with the fundraising aspect of the program, which I'm very happy about (Julian, November, 2011).

The fact that Food Connection does most of the outreach for support means that they draw on a discrete group of supporters: their donors and volunteers. Food Connection

⁹ Admittedly, in this example, they are referring to large scale philanthropists, not small-scale, individual donors.

alone has over 900 volunteers who donate their time at various points throughout the year, and ostensibly support the organization's mission statement around organic urban agriculture. Based on this large network of supporters, Julian notes that Food Connection also has a fairly strong reputation within Seattle, vis-à-vis their position as an urban agriculture non-profit. Alluding to this reputation, Julian states,

Some people see Food Connection as working with, like, white women, (laughs). I mean, it's in [North Seattle]. And that's, that's something they're challenging and trying to get away from (Julian, November 2011).¹⁰

It is true that Food Connection is broadening their image as an organization for white women. They are expanding their field sites to Issaquah, Rainier Beach, Rainier Valley, and other locations throughout Seattle. However, the firmly established donor base affiliated with Food Connection is mostly located in North Seattle, given their prominence there over the last thirty years. Thus, while the group of donors might grow and diversify over the years, the majority of current support for programs like Youth Grow comes primarily from upper middle class, white donors. Given that demographic, there are two primary sites at which the youth are made visible, and these are directly related to the consumption patterns, practices and beliefs of Food Connections donors.

The first site where the youth are made highly visible is through their participation at the Farmer's Market. Once a week, 3-6 youth work a market shift, interacting with customers and selling produce. The mere presence of youth at the market gives a face to and labels the otherwise imagined social group of underserved youth that Youth Grow targets. At the market, there is a large banner displayed with the Youth

¹⁰ Neighborhood name was changed here to protect the anonymity of the neighborhood. It is a neighborhood that is predominantly white, upper/middle class. Food Connection is well known in the neighborhood, and is seen as an asset to the area, hosting events, a community garden and a children's garden.

Grow logo and mission statement. The youth each wear an apron with the Food Connection logo on it; two youth stand behind the counter with Julian, and one stands at the edge of the stand to greet customers walking by. The Youth Grow stand is the only stand that serves coffee at the market, which is certainly a draw to many customers. Sage reflects on her responsibilities at the market, saying,

We're encouraged to talk to customers. And, people think it's fun at the market, I think. It's more busy. Like, it's more in demand of our attention, so we do have to pay attention. We can't just like, be in the middle of the people walking by, and just be like, all in space (Sage, October, 2011).

The market is seen as a break from the hard physical work at the farm, and the educational workshops and sessions, thus seeming “more busy”. In order to appeal to customers, the youth need to be attentive and cheery. They are also seen as the primary arbiters of the program mission and goals. Rodrigo explains,

You have to talk to the clients when they ask, ‘what is the program?’ or, ‘where is it located?’ And, ‘what’s the difference between different products?’ (Rodrigo, Oct., 2011).

Interactions with youth are the primary way that many donors, supporters and customers connect with Youth Grow, thus reifying the notion of the low-income, underserved and homeless youth as a set entity, a discrete social group that exists and works at the farmers market.

Through the market, primarily, Youth Grow strives to move marginalized others, in this case homeless or underserved youth, into a “community”. In order for this process to work, the youth are made to perform as ideal subjects. It is their behavior, presence, choices, etc., that do the work of transforming “homeless youth” into “good future community members”. Presenting and performing the ideal youth subject and future community member shows the worthiness of Youth Grow within the discourse of community building, and creates a “worthy” subject to appeal to donors for their support.

Another key site at which youth visibility is produced for donors is the annual silent auction. Each year, Youth Grow presents a silent auction to raise money for their program. This year, the organization raised over \$60,000 at the auction alone, representing one quarter of their operating budget. And, as Julian mentioned, they featured a few of the youth to speak at the auction. The event is a site of dialectical positioning between the imagined underserved youth group and the donors, wherein the youth are positioned as worthy recipients of donations, as well as good future community members. After a formal catered dinner and a silent auction, Julian showed a short video of the youth at the garden and market, and finally the youth shared their stories in front of the crowd.

The experience of the youth at this auction raised many tensions, discomforts, heightened awareness of class difference, and curiosity about the fundraising process.

Rodrigo's experience at the auction, for instance, caused a lot of nervousness:

It was my first time, to be in front of three hundred people, and it was like, I was really... I don't know. I was confused. Or, not confused, but nervous. Because it wasn't in my first language... [I talked about] the difference between my country and here. How I come here. How the program helped me (Rodrigo Oct., 2011).

Rodrigo's articulation of his own discomfort and nervousness captures the tensions that emerge when youth are made to perform the "poster child" role in front of a room of strangers. While they ostensibly consent and agree to this process, there are very strong power dynamics in play when low-income, homeless and/or brown-bodied youth are asked to perform tales of their troubled pasts in order to represent youth who have benefited from the Youth Grow program. Sage also confronted these tensions, and was unsure of how to present herself to the crowd:

I was a nervous wreck... We were supposed to make a speech, and I like, thought everything was good. Thought everything was good... The night of, [my

girlfriend] said I wasn't dressed properly, so I just freaked out. I was a mess. I started crying....I changed, we left, I brang clothes so I could change, cuz I didn't think I looked good. So, I went there. And... it was really cool. I wanted to gamble because there was this auction...And I spoke, but I didn't think I was going to" (Sage, October, 2011).

Sage's experience at the auction raised many confusing and complex emotions, including discomfort over her presentation and dress amidst a wealthier crowd. She also referred to the auction as "gambling", signaling her inexperience with the type of event. Finally, she also describes the emotional journey between being excited about the event, and then being overcome with nerves and later on, enjoying the event because it was "cool".

The auction is a site for making 'underserved youth' visible, to justify and produce a recognizable category of needy youth as donation recipients for this particular group of donors. At the auction, the youth are showcased as worthy subjects in order to try and garner funds from donors. Giving voice to this phenomenon, Sage gave a lengthy account of her own experience, quite keenly exploring why her presence at that event appealed to donors.

Elyse: What did you talk about?

Sage: Ummm. I said, basically, when... I said when I started this program, I was homeless. My dad was homeless. I... I basically said they provided me with my only consistency, basically. Yeah, my only consistency. And even throughout all my, um, like living situations, it was consistent when I came there. And I said, "I forgot all my problems when I walk down that driveway." And I didn't have to deal with nobody being high or nothing. And... it was just perfect. I was just like.... I think people understood that.

Elyse: Seems like it. They made a ton of money that night. And it felt pretty normal?

Sage: Yeah. Pretty good. Well, I was scared. But like, I *wanted* to make money for them. I knew that my story would make money for them.

Elyse: Why is that?

Sage: Why is that? Because... **it's like puppies!**

Elyse: (Laughs). How so?

Sage: I don't know... I don't think uh, they might, but, I don't think those people would be funding a program that was giving part time jobs to kids in prep school in... wealthy neighborhoods who needed a little extra a month. I don't think they would fund that (Sage, October, 2011 – emphasis added).

Sage's observations about the auction clearly demonstrate the power of representation in appealing to middle class donors. Her use of "puppies" invokes an image of a wide-eyed, pleading and irresistible animal. This powerful image speaks to the ways that "successful" youth stories affirm and perpetuate the perceived benefits of the program to donors. Similarly, we are reminded of how the auction and resulting money only emerges if the donors feel their money is going to increase the public good. Sage's comment about helping kids in "wealthy neighborhoods" draws on a different imagined social category altogether, a group of youth that not only doesn't need additional help, but would not be able to attract this help from donors at an auction like Youth Grow's.

Resulting from these deployments and sites of articulation of "community" and target social groups, the youth at Youth Grow have their own understanding of the organization's goals and target audience. While the organization seeks to present a unified, worthy youth subject as part of a larger social category of 'homeless' or 'underserved youth', this unification is rarely, if ever, expressed by the youth or the mentors. Lily, a long-term mentor, referring to the moniker of "homelessness", says,

I can think of at least 3 or 4 youth from the fall crew that would probably self-identify that way, if you asked them, um, but they probably would prefer you didn't ask them. Um, and the rest... I know that there are at least a few that would certainly NOT identify that way. That would absolutely not want to be thought of as underserved... but like I said, I don't think it's necessary for them to self-identify that way" (Lily, Nov., 2011).

While the organization seeks to serve 'homeless youth', this volunteer explains that many of the youth do not self-identify that way. This is echoed by the youth themselves, who, while *wanting* solidarity and community, often don't find it at Youth Grow. Much of this may be attributed to the current nature of youth recruitment, wherein youth are recommended through drop in centers, by social workers, or at their schools. There is little structure or organization to how youth are recruited, and this is reflected in

how each youth comes to the program, how they identify, and if they feel or find community amidst their peers. The three youth each express their lack of social cohesion or identity as a social group or ‘underserved youth’ category.

When I met Rodrigo, he was in his second season with Youth Grow, and was foster brothers with another one of the youth crew. When asked what makes Youth Grow different from other programs, Rodrigo says, “they help people who are refugees, or homeless, or have problems with their families...” (Rodrigo, October, 2011). Rodrigo goes on to identify as a refugee, and when asked about how he found out about the program, he says it was,

my social worker. She found the job, and gave me information where I could interview... I felt like it was interesting for me, because when I was youth, I lived on a farm... (Rodrigo October, 2011).

Rodrigo, like many of the youth, found out about Youth Grow through a social worker, but he does not identify as homeless. Interestingly, he sees Youth Grow’s target population as more broad than the organization articulates in its own mission and programming.

Another youth, Sarah, was new to the program in the fall season after being encouraged to apply by a social worker at her school. The interaction below addresses how Sarah got involved in Youth Grow, yet how her initial understandings of the program were quite disparate.

Sarah: She said it was a program working with plants, in the garden. I don’t know exactly how she described it...

Elyse: I mean, did you know it was a work program?

Sarah: Yeah. She said I’d be getting paid.

Elyse: Then did she say anything about who the program was targeted for, or who they were reaching out to?

Sarah: Um... she didn’t really say the name, just what it was, so she gave me the application... she knew my sister, and kinda knew my family a little bit, and our struggles and stuff. And thought I was deserving for the program, because of some of the stuff I’ve been through, I guess (Sarah, October, 2011).

Sarah's initial interpretations of Youth Grow show that she did not seek out the program for its gardening components, but more because it was a potential job. Additionally, while she did not elaborate on her family's "struggles" specifically, she alludes indirectly to her position as an underserved youth, thus making her "deserving" of the program.

Finally, Sage, the longest participant with Youth Grow, initially discovered Youth Grow through her drop-in center, explaining that at the time, Youth Grow, "said that they hire at-risk youth, so they kind of voiced this option at the drop-in center" (Sage, October, 2011). Of all of the youth I interviewed, Sage is the only one who self-identified as homeless. At the time when she applied, both she and her father were homeless, and Youth Grow, "provided me with my only consistency" (Sage, October, 2011). Today, Sage does not identify herself as homeless, but is open about her precarious living situation, which involves living in a van with her girlfriend.¹¹ Thus, the youth understand the target communities and social categories that Youth Grow has identified and seeks to serve. It doesn't necessarily follow that the youth self-identify within these categories. Not all of the youth do identify as homeless, nor did they all come to Youth Grow having identified as an underserved, at-risk youth. Many stumbled upon the program at the recommendation of a mentor or social worker, and they often stay for differing reasons.

The City of Seattle sees gardening as a key avenue for "community building", meaning connecting 'citizens' to one another. However, the youth at Youth Grow are not experiencing that reality or experience of community building at all. Instead, at Youth Grow, "community building" is not a pre-determined outcome of the programming.

¹¹ While Sage is the only interviewee who identifies as homeless, there was another youth who spoke openly about her status living in a tent. This participant did not complete the program, though she had expressed interest initially in doing an interview.

Sarah, naming this phenomenon, says, “I wouldn’t say I actually, like, made any friends...” (Sarah, October, 2011). When asked how she talks about the program to people she hangs out with, Sage responds, “People I hang out with? I don’t hang out with nobody” (Sage, October, 2011). This form of social isolation and exclusion is incredibly common among homeless and street youth, as documented by Kristina Gibson in her compelling ethnography *Street Kids* (2011). Ironically, perhaps one of the only unifying features between the youth in Youth Grow is their experience of social isolation. However unifying that feature may be, it does not necessarily lead to youth sticking with the program. Instead, there is a rather high turnover of youth from season to season, to which Sage expresses her frustration

I’m actually kinda mad, like, when people don’t take this opportunity. Because it really sucks when you’re at the end of the program and there’s only eight people” (Sage, October, 2011).

While the youth may appreciate each others’ company, learn from one another, and strive for greater commitment, Youth Grow lacks any signifiers of community. The youth do not self-identify as one set “group of people”, inhabit or reside in one place, or have the strong bonds of a ‘community’ quality of relationship. Additionally, the ways that youth understand a sense of community, or lack thereof, is vastly different than the city’s conceptualization of community building as connecting citizens to local government and resources.

Different Communities, Different Visibility: Conclusions

Youth Grow makes visible the youth they seek to serve, in order to justify their program and appeal to donors. However, as shown by the youth quotes, insights and actions, there is very little community actually experienced at Youth Grow. The

organization strategically presents a unified ‘underserved’ or ‘homeless youth’ social category to sustain their financial support base, appeal to middle class donors, and justify the existence of their programming. The moments of heightened visibility occur at two predominant spaces, though the processes of making visible are in constant relationship to the simultaneous visibility of the donors. Through the farmers market and the annual auction, members of Youth Grow are made to represent the “poster child” of the organization, signifying a future transition from homeless, low-income and underserved youth to “community members”. When it comes to community, Youth Grow is simultaneously making visible an imagined category of underserved youth and accentuating the presence of the middle class donor as well.

Between the budget constraints threatening both city programming and the non-profit sector, we have seen new empirical relationships and processes emerge both at the municipal level and at the organizational level. Many of the frameworks for these current adaptations are preceded by years of neoliberal restructuring of social services. Now, bound to document and measure their progress, both the city and non-profits are held accountable by documenting and reporting on the multiple benefits and public good that emerge through their programs.

Deployments of “community” are one of the primary tools that both city government like the P-Patch, and non-profits like Youth Grow use to secure funding, structure their missions and programs, and appeal to donors. However, while the Department of Neighborhoods imagines “community building” as uniting diverse citizens together and with local government, this looks very different for an organization like Youth Grow. This organization strives to serve an underserved and/or homeless youth

community that may or may not self-identify as such. By making them visible, they simultaneously justify the existence of the program and appeal to donors. The City still creates mechanisms that translate their discourses and notions of community building into the goals and vision of Youth Grow and similar gardening programs. However, in the actual deployment of their programming, Youth Grow positions itself as a very different arbiter of community building, concerned more with strategically positioning different social groups and categories in order to justify their work, appeal to donors, and presenting a worthy recipient of community building efforts.

CHAPTER 5

The Good Worker, The Future Thinker: Producing Deserving and Undeserving Youth

Introductions and Framing

As seen in the previous chapter, Youth Grow must present their goals, target communities, and programming in ways that appeal to donors. They are reliant on tapping into the donor subject's belief about what types of programs will help youth and lead to a greater public good. In other words, mission statements and program goals are constructed such that donors believe they are making an investment into the future of the program, the youth, and their own communities. One of the techniques for doing this has been to employ language of "empowerment", a discourse also evident in community development and community building. The dominant discourses of community and international development seek to "empower" local communities to self-actualize and lead to positive social and economic change (Dees et al. 2001; Ashcraft and Kedrowicz 2002; Hardina 2005; Nagar and Raju 2003; Kabeer 1999). However, in the world of youth-empowerment non-profit programs, the *language* of empowerment is quite vague, and does not lead to a particular set of outcomes, as do other more measurable goals like those seen in vital social services like housing and health care.

Any goals, whether measurable or not, will impact subjectivities of youth participants through their practices and processes. Given the variable nature of empowerment programs, specifically, every program varies in their impact on youth subjectivities. As England and Ward remind us,

subjectivities are produced in and through a whole range of discursive and material practices - cultural, economic, social and political - the meanings of which are constantly under revision (2007, 165).

By exploring the discursive and material practices resulting from Youth Grow's mission, practices and outcomes, this chapter seeks to answer my second research question: how are gardens and youth positioned as subjects within neoliberal non-profit restructuring? Given that 'empowerment' is a cornerstone of this non-profit restructuring, it serves as a powerful entry point for exploring youth subjectivities amidst a restructuring non-profit sector.

Building on the previous chapter's findings on organizational outcomes and impacts, this chapter shows how the same ethos to which Youth Grow is subjected also informs the experiences of the youth participants. Through attention to the lived experiences of youth, I show how particular program goals, rules, structures and practices impact the ways youth identify, aspire and are positioned as deserving subjects. Subjectivities are impacted at two distinct stages and scales. First, the practices and programming at Youth Grow encourage particular behaviors, teach specific lessons about proper ways to operate in neoliberalized urban spaces, and educate the youth through daily feedback and workshops. Secondly, by encouraging a middle class work ethic, an appreciation of multiculturalism, and entrepreneurialism, Youth Grow encourages future thinking, aspiring and self-sufficient youth that will one day be positioned as successful adults. Through the relationship between these two processes, the youth are positioned as either deserving or undeserving: of the program, of the investment of donors, of social services. While language of deservingness has persisted for a century to explain impoverishment and difference, this difference now is mapped onto youth bodies during their transition to adulthood, based on their likelihood to become successful, deserving adults. In the chapter that follows, I highlight moments where ways of being, social

norms and expectations are reified through the programming, language and practices of Youth Grow.

Supplanting Gardening with Good Work

For an organization that seeks to “empower homeless and underserved youth through garden based education and employment”, the organization does very little actual gardening (Youth Grow mission, October 2011). In the fall session with three days of work at the farm, one is spent gardening, one is spent on education, and one is divided between market prep, a visit from a guest chef, and an hour-long collective feedback session called Straight Talk. The disparity between the gardening goals and outcomes are so vast that both Lily and Julian, the longest volunteer mentor and the program director respectively, point out the irony of the situation. Julian explains the difficulties of trying to balance so many different practices within one program,

That’s been a problem, because it’s a short session. If you only have ten weeks, and you want to add all these things, and you only do... we’re doing about fifty to forty percent education. So the other fifty to sixty percent is gardening. So that it’s not a lot to educate ... which I mean, the work has its own educational value. But we decided that we wanted to have specific education, and uh, *it becomes really difficult to incorporate everything we’d like to incorporate and to do it well.* Like, we incorporated resume building into this one, we were only giving it one education session, and it really should have had, like, 3... (Julian November, 2011 – emphasis added).

Julian acknowledges how hard it is to balance all of the different aspects of Youth Grow’s programming. As a program whose primary goal is “empowerment” through gardening, it’s unclear how they are achieving these goals through such divided programming. When asked what the youth are learning in the program, for instance, Lily jokingly exclaims, “They’re not learning a lot about organic gardening!” (Lily November, 2011), bringing humor to a rather stark reality, in which the program does not do what it sets out to do.

If not gardening, then the most powerful and consistent feature of the program is an emphasis on producing “good workers” and good work behaviors. At Julian’s best estimate, gardening makes up about sixty percent of the programming, which would include the market prep and market sales. In reality, between the 3-4 work days, only one day is devoted to garden skills such as watering, planting, bed prep, harvesting, tilling, and weeding, thus setting a more conservative gardening estimate at about 30% of total programming. In the rest of the time, the youth are learning and working towards educational goals through the workshops, field trips, guest chef visits, and Straight Talk. For a program ostensibly *about* gardening, but that only spends 30% of its time *practicing* gardening, what are the actual experiences of the program, and what are they learning? Running throughout all aspects of the program is an underlying, though less visible, emphasis on building and developing good workers.

The notion of the good worker first became visible through my volunteer time at Youth Grow, but was repeatedly brought up in the interviews with youth and adults. Consistently, the following ethics were encouraged and expected of the youth: showing up on time, having a positive attitude, working well with others, taking responsibility, exceeding expectations, taking on leadership roles, communicating with others, and providing good customer service. Whether in the garden, on a field trip, or with a guest chef, the youth are always held to the same basic standards of what it meant to be a good employee. As to how this plays out through the program goals and rules, Sage explains,

“Well, there’s certain goals that are set up for us, and it’s because of this is to make us ... the best employees we can be, or whatever... ‘keep a positive attitude’, ‘be motivated’, um, ‘consistently work’, ‘don’t be late’” (Sage October, 2011).

Through the programming, Sage and others internalize these values and idealization of the perfect employee.

While Sage has obviously adopted these goals as part of her position as a budding “good worker”, we can trace the origins of this position to the goals of the program and its leadership. Julian believes that Youth Grow’s strengths are in the tools they provide to the youth, “Working with different populations. Showing up on time, being a *real employee*” (Julian, November, 2011 -- emphasis added). Lily, a long term mentor and volunteer adds that in addition to

showing up to work on time, being motivated to do the work... the most important expectations for youth are the ones that involve basically being a team player, having a good attitude about the work, um, not complaining when it’s not something that you don’t want to do” (Lily November, 2011).

Even in this program about gardening, the most important expectations are not about the garden skills or even the education. They are about adopting appropriate work behavior and striving to be a perfect employee.

In addition to internalizing and adopting the behaviors and attitudes that construct a “good worker”, the youth also have their own beliefs and expectations about what it means to work hard in Youth Grow specifically. Interestingly, these perceptions are in tension with the program goals and Julian’s own perceptions about what the youth value. Over and over again, the youth voiced that their beliefs of hard work revolved around physical labor: the digging, weeding, harvesting, hauling and shoveling that makes up much of the gardening activity. They often felt bored or frustrated with the educational sessions and the feedback sessions, saying that it was “a lot of kids talking about their feelings”, or too much time spent doing “paperwork” (Sage and Rodrigo, October, 2011). Sage reflects back on other times during her involvement with Youth Grow, remembering that,

... we used to work more. [Now] there’s a lot more education sessions and a lot more talking time I guess” (Sage, October, 2011).

Even in their language to describe the program, it is evident that the youth see a division between real work and the educational components:

Tuesdays are work days. So we just do whatever needs to be done, like, make a bed, we could like, do a couple of beds in a workday. And... Thursdays are usually days we go on field trips... we don't always go on field trips. And on Fridays, is when the cooks come. And then we have Straight Talk (Sage October, 2011).

Even while being positioned repeatedly as good workers in their attitudes and practices, the youth still refer to only one day a week as a “work day”, with the other days carrying their own roles and positions.

Physical work is certainly the way that the youth identify *hard* work, but that does not fully explain the emphasis on *good* work. Pulling on this thread, the youth explain that good work is different depending on the location. At the market, for instance, good work means being attentive to customer needs. At the farm, in addition to physical work, it also means working together and being communicative. However, almost all of the youth articulated a hierarchy of “real” work, privileging the physical farm work above the market work. Interestingly, in the discussion of “work”, none of the youth ever mentioned the times spent doing education or field trips, even though these are activities for which they are still paid hourly. Thinking about how her notions of good work changed during her first job, Sarah admits,

I'm a harder worker than I thought I was... This was my first job, so, I didn't know that I would work this hard. So, it makes me happy to get a different job and know I can work the same way (Sarah, October, 2011).

While Sarah's favorite work experience was a highly physical one (hauling 30 pounds of winter squash by herself!), she also explains the value and workmanship required at the farmers market:

I helped make coffee. And, greeted people that were walking by. And it was a good experience. It helped me open up more (Sarah, October, 2011).

Rodrigo, on the other hand, clearly values the physical work more than the interactions at the market. Customer service is valued, but it is not considered “real work”,

At the farm, you have to work, how to make a bed, or how we harvest the produce. And at the market, you pay attention to the client and what they want, and if they need help... they are really different. At the market, you don't work, like, really work. Like make a bed. You basically just have to pay attention to the client (Rodrigo, October, 2011).

This distinction between physical work as real work and customer service as non-work speaks highly to how the youth internalize notions of good work in a highly gendered manner. While Youth Grow's emphasis is on good attitudes, showing up on time, and otherwise being a “real employee”, the youth still see divisions between the types of work expected of them. This implies a distinction between when the youth think of themselves as real workers: even though they try to maintain the positive behaviors and attitudes, they struggle to articulate the skills they have gained as good employees. The youth struggle to articulate a holistic understanding of their jobs, roles and positions. This came through quite clearly in many of the youth interviews, as they muddled through descriptions of the skills they had gained, and how they would convey this to future employers. A significant reason for this lies in the “school” like nature of the educational programming, which seems quite disparate from the “work” aspects of the program. Seemingly, Youth Grow hasn't drawn a clear enough connection between how the educational programs could lead to improved employment prospects.

Between both the “school” and “work” spaces of the program, youth are encouraged to take on leadership in all of their work. Leadership is seen as a highly desirable trait of a good worker: someone who identifies tasks, can lead by example, and

can delegate responsibility. In the fall season, there were four youth that had returned from the summer crew, and these youth were identified as the “youth leaders”: expected to take leadership roles to guide the new youth crew. Lily explores leadership as one of the “employable” skills that the youth should gain through the fall program,

...learning about working with other people, and about taking instructions well, learning about leadership. That’s a big one with our youth leaders. Learning about leadership and how to instruct other people” (Lily, November, 2011).

The emphasis here is on training the youth leaders to take initiative and identify tasks and problems before the program staff need to. Rodrigo, one of the youth leaders, explains his leadership role below,

Now they give me ‘leader’, like when Julian is absent, so I have to pay attention to all the groups, most specifically, work for myself, or for my group. I have to look around, and if they need anything or if they have a question, then I need to help... [they] said, ‘if you want to be leader, you have to pay attention around the groups, and not just work like yourself. And to do the work and also teach the other people how they can do it’... (Rodrigo, October, 2011).

Rodrigo is expected to branch out beyond his own physical work and be attentive to the needs and work habits of his peers. Interestingly, Rodrigo here signals leadership as valuable work, against his prior rejection of the ‘social’ as “not work”, based on his comments about working at the market. Now, as a leader, he must educate his peers and step up to fill in the organizational leadership when Julian is away. There is a clear emphasis on the good worker as one who will exceed expectations by observing what his peers need, what the work dynamics are of the whole group, and to fill in the gaps as needed. This type of entrepreneurial spirit is repeatedly encouraged by Youth Grow, and signifies a strong emphasis on the self-sufficient and entrepreneurial subject that is privileged and encouraged repeatedly through neoliberal ideologies and processes of neoliberalization.

For Youth Grow's youth, these "good worker" behaviors and attitudes are encouraged and taught through formal and informal disciplinary actions. Drawing on Foucauldian scholars of governmentality and discipline, we know that discipline occurs both formally and through more pernicious practices that encourage particular behaviors by conditioning the norms, expectations and values of subjects (Foucault 1986; Rose 1999; Dolhinow 2005; Kingfisher 2007). Youth Grow's pathways and processes allow for formal disciplining through their Straight Talk program. The mentorship role also establishes informal disciplining that happens by modeling appropriate work behaviors and expecting the youth to follow suit.

Straight Talk is a collective feedback program that Youth Grow adopted from a larger youth gardening empowerment program based out of Boston. The youth participants gather at the end of the work-week to reflect on their work, each receiving a positive, a "challenge", and having the chance to give feedback to their peers and employers. Input for the youth is compiled in two ways: the other youth are able to craft suggestions and feedback for their peers during Straight Talk. Otherwise, at the end of each work day, the mentors stay for an extra half hour to debrief about the youth and compile positives/challenges for each youth which can be conveyed at the end of the week. Straight Talk is a closed program absent of any mentors¹², so my awareness of it comes from one observational session, but otherwise reflects my time debriefing with mentors and staff at the close of our volunteer shifts. Finally, I did ask the youth directly about Straight Talk during the interviews, in order to garner their impressions and feelings about the program.

¹² I was able to attend and observe one Straight Talk session with permission of the youth. Normally there are no mentors, only the staff and the youth.

Straight Talk is meant to simultaneously encourage “good” behaviors through positive feedback, while also serving as a space for discipline and recording violations of Youth Grow’s many rules. On the topic of rules, Julian says,

I mean, getting a job is one thing. Keeping a job is another. So, like, we’re pretty strict, but there’s a reason for that (Julian, November, 2011).

If the youth do break one of Youth Grow’s rules, they are at risk for violations.

Violations can lead to the loss of a \$50 bonus, docked pay, or even termination from the program. In addition to providing formal discipline through administering violations, Straight Talk also encourages positive behaviors and attitudes. Julian explains that they rely heavily on peer feedback and holding the youth accountable:

It starts with us giving them feedback, and giving them more... like, we give more input as we go through the program. But the idea is just that everyone is aware of where everybody else is, and how they’re doing. It creates a way stronger dynamic. Because then everything is out in the open... and I think the peer pressure, and partly wanting to fit in and be part of the group. It really does make a difference (Julian, November, 2011).

According to Julian, the feedback is most powerful when it comes from peers, due to “peer pressure”. However, this is not necessarily reflected by the youth themselves.

Through the interviews, it seems that youth value the feedback far more from their supervisors than they do from the fellow youth. Having referred to Straight Talk as, “12 youth talking about their feelings”, Sage goes on to express her frustration with the program as being irrelevant in the moment:

Straight talk is supposed to be like, learning the skill of giving critical feedback to your employees, and being able to receive critical feedback from your employees. I don’t really see the point in it right now. And like it could be important later, and I’m sure maybe in my, if I get a job I’ll notice it. But I don’t see it yet. (Sage, October, 2011).

Through the formal disciplining of rules and violations as well as positive feedback from supervisors, Straight Talk encourages the development of the good worker through positive attitudes, behaviors, and entrepreneurialism.

The attention to rules and discipline is in contrast to the open and transparent mentorship space Straight Talk is meant to foster. For instance, the rules described above seem reasonable expectations for a work environment; youth cannot show up under the influence of drugs or alcohol, they need to show up on time, they must call if they will be late or absent for a day, etc. However, in the social context of homeless and underserved youth, this list is rather unforgiving. Prior to starting the mentorship program, all volunteers must attend a training on working with homeless youth, which emphasizes the complicated contexts and situations that lead to homelessness, and how youth should not be judged or punished, necessarily, for using drugs. To have undergone this required training for mentors, only to be met with such a contradictory policy at Youth Grow, raised tensions over the realities and expectations for the homeless and underserved youth population. This policy saw heightened relevance when one of the youth was fired for showing up to work high. Being fired on the spot for a first infraction is in stark contrast to other “real jobs” where there would be a review process for violations like this. Admittedly, this is inappropriate work behavior, but it raises the question, again, of what work Youth Grow is in the project of doing.

As a garden organization that works with homeless youth, Youth Grow does not have the structure to help youth work through substance abuse or other potentially harmful coping strategies. Instead, this behavior is deemed unacceptable and is grounds for immediate termination. The program relies on a web of City and other nonprofit services to help youth with more substantive issues; many times in the interviews and through my volunteer work, staff and mentors referred to the complex and rich web of social workers to whom they often refer youth. Through aspects of the programming like

Straight Talk, Youth Grow is creating contradictory spaces, supposedly for peer, mentor and staff feedback, but also to discipline and censure the youth. Straight Talk, and the values and practices that follow from it, lead to greater social stratification between the good worker and the bad, rule-breaking youth.

In a less direct way, the youth are encouraged to be good workers through their relationships with the mentors. The mentor role is premised on the notion of consistency: understanding that the underserved youth subject group lacks consistent adults in their lives, Youth Grow hopes that the mentors can be consistent, caring adults in the lives of youth. However, this goal is not necessarily apparent to the youth themselves or to the mentors¹³. Lily, the longest standing mentor, thinks that the mentorship role is more about teaching good work than it is about consistency:

the mentor role at Youth Grow, honestly, the way I feel about it is mostly, um, modeling appropriate work behavior... basically, showing up is 90% of the job (Lily, 2011).

The requirements for mentorship are experience with gardening as well as experience with homeless or underserved youth. This predominantly yields a demographic of white, middle class, mid-twenties to mid-thirties adults with years of diverse work experiences and motivations. Through the interactions with the youth on work days, the positive attitude, work ethic and interpersonal skills assumed to be present in and practiced by the mentors, are supposed to transfer as desirable, good working skills.

Akin to the ways Straight Talk is perceived by the youth compared to the staff, many of the youth are unclear on the roles of the mentors. The most common comment about the mentors was that they were too chatty, and often didn't work as hard as the

¹³ Interestingly, this notion of consistency is full of contradiction -- the mentors are not allowed to maintain relationships with the youth after the program ends. For the sake of confidentiality and privacy, this is appropriate, but as far as promoting consistency and true mentorship, this policy makes it nearly impossible. Unfortunately, this is rather endemic to all social services.

youth. This is particularly interesting given that the mentors are supposed to be modeling good work behaviors, but are often perceived as quite the opposite! However, even if the mentors are not seen to work as hard alongside the youth, it is the mentors who generate the bulk of the feedback for the Straight Talk program. Thus, it is the mentors' perceptions of good work, work ethic, and attitudes and behaviors which make their ways into the feedback and conditioning of the youth subjects. In the day-to-day interactions with the mentors, however, many of the youth found the role less clear. Sarah says,

Some of the mentors were chatting with each other. Like, I don't mind that, but sometimes they were chatting and not working. I'm not saying with talking to the youth, because [they] want to know about us and that's ok. But sometimes to the other mentors... (Sarah, October, 2011).

Referring to the mentors and additional volunteers (some of whom are UW-Farm volunteers, others just like to drop by), Sage complains that,

Well, they don't work as hard. Some do. Specifically the ones that are actually working with us weekly, work harder than the UW ones. The UW ones are chatty. And they don't work hard. They work... slow. And you can't tell a volunteer to hurry up (Sage, 2011).

Interestingly, the youth are highly aware of how little work some of the mentors actually do. Again, then, much like the gardening goals, there is a stark disconnect between the goals of the mentor component and the perceived outcomes by the different stakeholders. The organization believes the role of the mentors is to provide consistency, but neither the youth nor mentors echo this concept. The mentors believe that they are there to model appropriate work behavior and be positive role models for the youth, both through their interactions and in their feedback for Straight Talk. Finally, the youth see the mentors as fun, chatty, and rarely as the hardest workers nor as consistent adults.

Youth Grow promotes itself as an organization that teaches and promotes the ethos of a "real job", but it is readily apparent what types of contradictions and tensions

arise when this goal is put into practice. The organization serves more as a pseudo-workspace, where the organization attempts to perform the role of a real job, while actually allowing and requiring many roles and subjectivities that would not be present at a 'real job'. For example, the positions of 'volunteer' and 'mentor' are inherently neither 'boss' nor 'employee', nor 'co-worker'. The youth are aware of these roles, and thus challenge the usual ways of relating to others in a job environment. Thus, we hear the youth call attention to this through statements like, "you can't tell a volunteer to hurry up". The youth are confronted with multiple contradictions between both their own expectations as workers and their relationships with the mentors and volunteers. Promoting the space of a 'real job' is attractive to Youth Grow, but it creates many difficult or impossible contradictions for the youth to navigate, many of which would never be present in a 'real job'.

In a trend that is increasingly apparent within Youth Grow, the multiple goals of the program do not necessarily translate or map neatly onto the stakeholders and participants of the program. Rather than promoting gardening skills and education wholeheartedly, the organization tries to do too much, and doing none of it particularly well: teaching job skills, market skills, cooking, urban agriculture, and educational components. They implement Straight talk to encourage positive attitudes, work behaviors and uphold the organization's rules, but this platform rarely accommodates or leaves space for the youths' socio-cultural contexts. Finally, the mentorship program does not promote the consistency that the program perceives, and instead positions mentors as both models of appropriate work behavior and simultaneously as chatty, amorphous adults. The youth are positioned as good workers, primarily, through the daily practices,

relationships and interactions in the spaces of Youth Grow. These skills and priorities are further advanced through Youth Grow's promotion of middle class subjectivities.

Becoming Middle Class: Self-Sufficiency and Future Aspirations

Throughout the physical job and education components of Youth Grow, the youth are purportedly taught the habits and values of good workmanship. When this gets internalized, some youth see "good work" as physical, while others value the customer service aspect of their work. In both scenarios, good work entails leadership, a positive attitude, and following the rules of the organization. These are translated through the day-to-day practices of the organization. However, there is another scale and level at which subjectivities are being acted upon and influenced.

Youth Grow encourages the development of future thinking, self-sufficient and middle class youth that will be able to navigate the neoliberal urban job market through their entrepreneurialism, multiculturalism, and capacity to aspire¹⁴. These transformations and actions upon youth subjectivities are clear through the organization's skills workshops, their interactions with the mentors, and their presence at the farmers market. While I have explored each of these spaces and interactions in other sections of this thesis, I discuss them here with particular attention to how notions of future "self-hood" are mapped onto the youth in dichotomous ways. The youth are given two paths for their future selves: the path in which they are empowered to make their own, "good" or "different" choices, a type of middle class-ness; or the path in which they lack self-advocacy and struggle to make choices and set goals. Invariably, this division separates youth based on their ability or willingness to adopt middle class behaviors.

¹⁴ I borrow this term from Arjun Appadurai's anthropological work, "The Capacity to Aspire: Culture and the Terms of Recognition", 2004.

Much literature has explored notions of middle class-ness, and it is a vast imaginary to draw on. Within Youth Grow, the middle class imaginary involves attention to future earnings, consumption patterns and life paths (Bourdieu 1984; Fernandes 2005; Roy and Ong, 2011; Lawson 2012). To be middle class means pursuing a college degree, having a vocation rather than a minimum wage job, having disposable income, supporting local food and local economies, and using extra income to support philanthropic projects. These notions of middle class-ness are supported by the presence of mentors and also the donor groups who embody these lifestyles. Thus, beyond merely encouraging the youth to be “good worker” drones, Youth Grow positions youth relationally with the donors. Donors mirror and reflect their own middle class positions onto the youth by investing in a program that purportedly empowers youth to advance onto college and meaningful employment. As will be demonstrated below, the donor lifestyles involve disposable income, an emphasis on local food and economies, and philanthropy, as is demonstrated by their presence at the farmers market and auction. The emphasis on future aspirations, college degrees and future work are all acted on through Youth Grow’s educational programs.

A key site for the promotion of self-sufficient and middle class youth is Youth Grow’s numerous workshops. As explored already, Youth Grow programming includes job skills and educational programs to supplement what the youth learn while gardening. While many of the youth are frustrated with these components and would often rather be gardening, there are distinct values and skills that *are* being taught through the workshops. Three primary workshops emphasize the potential future self: resume building, starting a small business, and college applications. These discrete skills are

meant to lead to future preparedness, but they also stand in for particular values about a self-sufficient, goal setting and ambitious future self. While the values of future preparedness and self-sufficiency come through in other workshops and field trips, they figure most prominently in these sessions. And given that the fall season only included five workshops, these three make up a strong majority of Youth Grow's focus.

The skills of being able to put together a winning resume, fill out a college application, and eventually leverage capital and investors to secure one's own small business are all skills that would allow youth to put their visions into action. That is, of course, assuming that they have visions to act upon. This is one of the values and transitions that Julian hopes Youth Grow will encourage: the ability to set goals, and then act upon them. Drawing upon his own background studying psychology, Julian describes his primary hopes for the youth through the term "self-regulation":

I want to incorporate kind of a, teaching self-regulation, delayed gratification, things that have been strongly correlated with life satisfaction. You know what I mean, I want to incorporate those things. Then, no matter what we end up doing with the youth, they'll be successful (Julian November, 2011).

Here, we see notions of success bound together with the ability to self regulate. While the language of self-regulation comes from a psychology perspective, it is eerily similar to much of the language in literatures of governmentality, where individuals are responsabilized to manage their own health, well being and position in society. If youth are able to do this through the setting of goals and delaying gratification, Julian believes that they will be successful.

The program staff and volunteers seek to open doors and teach youth about the wide array of options available for them outside of Youth Grow, in order to expand their potentially narrow views of life possibilities. Reflecting on the experiences of many low-

income youth from poor neighborhoods (from which Julian also came), he says that one of the goals of the college workshops is,

just the idea that school is a possibility, and there's resources available to them... I just want to make sure that they're aware of them (Julian November, 2011).

Echoing this sentiment, Lily the mentor notes that many youth don't see college as a possibility, and hopefully the workshop will allow them to see more future opportunities:

[they're] thinking that college just isn't an option... Well, if you want it to be, it is. It doesn't have to be your, your goal, but it's not everybody's goal, and it's not necessarily a good goal for everyone, but if you want it, it's there, and you can do it... so yeah, I absolutely think that they can do whatever they want (Lily November, 2011).

Thus, alongside the tangible skills of navigating a college application or applying for financial aid, Youth Grow's leadership believe that is it of vital importance (worth spending 1/3 of their week's time on!), to show youth their potential, future options. This practice assumes that the homeless or underserved youth have a dearth of aspirations, that they lack future plans and goals. Notably, Lily's admission that "they [the youth] can do whatever they want" reflects an apolitical, decontextualized position that is all too familiar in neoliberalized discourses of self-sufficiency and responsabilization. In this framework, everyone is equal and has the potential for success. By extension, a lack of success reflects a personal failure, rather than the presence of socio-cultural and political-economic structural causes of inequality. Lily, who prides herself on her personal relationships with the youth, still reflects a dominant discourse that sees individuals and youth as capable of "whatever they put their minds to", even though she knows many of the obstacles the youth face on a daily basis. Youth Grow produces youth subjects who embody the goal setting and future aspiration of an imagined middle class-ness (Haylett 2001; Jarosz and Lawson 2002; Lawson et al 2008; Dowling 2009).

As Youth Grow produces future middle class and “good” workers, they strive to inculcate their participants with an appreciation of diversity and difference. Youth Grow’s program does not state multiculturalism as an outright goal of the mission, but through their personal values and statements, it is clear that this is seen as a positive outcome of the programming. In the interaction below, Julian explains that in their next season of youth recruitment, he hopes to increase the diversity of the applicant pool.

Julian: So, we get [a] bigger, more diverse applicants... ethnically, environmentally, different cultures and traditions. It just makes for a very interesting dynamic.

Elyse: That was true even just this season.

Julian: Well, it expands their world a little bit. Cuz, if you grow up in a poor neighborhood, you might only know that neighborhood. (Julian, November, 2011).

Julian hopes that the youth will benefit through the skills and experiences that a more diverse pool of co-workers and participants can provide. Increasingly, articulating one’s capacity to work with people from different backgrounds is a vital job skill, particularly as a middle class worker to both *hold* a diverse range of experiences and *appreciate* a multi-cultural workspace. Thus, Julian’s position highlights the value of the “interesting” dynamic, which broadens the youths’ world views, and will also prepare them to be more competitive in contemporary urban job markets.

Similarly, Lily explains that one of her own goals and hopes for the youth lies in their exposure to different communities and different ways of life:

I hope that they’re engaging some with that community [farmers market community], and I hope that they’re engaging with the community when we take them on field trips or work parties... or whatever, like, just engaging with people that they wouldn’t necessarily talk to (Lily, November, 2011).

This emphasis on exposing youth to new communities and diverse perspectives supports and furthers the unspoken goals of multiculturalism as well as middle class-ness. Youth are put in positions that may initially take them out of their comfort zones, but with the

eventual goal that they will be able to interact and work with people *from* these diverse communities. While this goal is not inherently problematic, it does position the youth as recipients of a particular outlook and way of interacting with their outside community, and assumes that they are not experiencing this already! Rather than communication skills and multiculturalism being seen as a personal decision or philosophy, it is seen primarily as an asset with which they can help secure their future goals and aspirations. To “engage with people that they wouldn’t necessarily talk to” is seen as an opportunity, one that Youth Grow provides, and which the youth would not necessarily seek out or achieve on their own.

Drawing on work on relational poverty studies (Goode and Maskovsky 2001; Mosse 2010; Lawson 2012) it is clear that by promoting the values and ethics of self-sufficiency, multiculturalism and diversity, it is simultaneously highlighting the assumed preexisting *lack* of these values by the underserved and homeless youth. Then, as these middle class values are encouraged, it also heightens and reifies the positions of many of the (middle class) donor and supporter subjects. In particular, in their relationships and interactions with middle class subjects and donors, the youth are exposed to people that make “different” choices. Lily’s description of the interactions with the farmer’s market community is quite striking.

I hope that, not that they will *become* the farmers market community, but just that they are interacting with people who are different from them.... That they see that there are a lot of choices in life, um, they get to have goals... I think it’s good for them to be exposed to more people who make different choices, just so they can see what that, what that looks like (Lily, November, 2011).

Lily is careful to point out that she doesn’t expect the Youth Grow youth to *become* middle class, local food advocate-subjects. Instead, her use of words like “exposure” are indicative of a powerful discourse which assumes that proximity between middle class

and poor individuals will somehow lead to an adoption of a middle class work ethic, thereby lifting poor people out of poverty. This troubling discourse is echoed almost exactly in the justification of mixed income housing, where “exposure” and “proximity” to middle class residents will rub off on ‘the poor’ and they will gain middle class values (Joseph and Chaskin 2010). This simple and superficial discourse fails to acknowledge power, structure and persistent poverty, as explored extensively in Chapter 2. Instead, Lily’s statement casually assumes that if the underserved youth see people who have made “different choices”, by “seeing what that looks like”, perhaps the youth will also be able to plan for the future and articulate their own goals and aspirations. Through the interaction and relation to middle class subjects, the underserved youth can adopt their own middle class identities and subject positions.

Through the workshop component and their field trips to sites such as Goodwill and urban farms, Youth Grow puts a great deal of emphasis on producing future thinking, multicultural subjects. Successful youth are supposed to come out of the Youth Grow program with the capacity to aspire for future goals, a heightened awareness of possible futures, and an appreciation for a diverse and multicultural community within which they will live these goals. It is through the spaces and deeper interactions with these “diverse communities” that the youth are encouraged to adopt middle class identities. Further, there is a relational production of middle classness that is mapped against the underserved, dependent and aspiration-less youth population. It is through the interactions between these longer-term positions and the day-to-day practices of Youth Grow where we see longer lasting narratives and discourses of successful youth and their future potential. The persistent emphasis on “choices”, (that assumes apolitically that all

choices are open to the youth), and “values” (which holds a quasi-moral tone), lay a powerful discursive terrain for positioning youth as deserving or undeserving of care, support, investment, and future success.

Deserving and Undeserving Youth

Youth subjectivities are being acted upon at two different temporal scales: the day-to-day behaviors and actions of producing good workers, and in their imagination of future selves as aspiring members of an imagined middle class. Both of these practices produce troubling and powerful outcomes that reify a division between deserving and undeserving youth. This first occurs through the actual selection of participants in the program. However, youth are further stratified through the formal disciplining that occurs through Straight Talk and the Youth Grow rules. Finally, there is a more ideological distinction between youth that successfully distinguish themselves as self-sufficient future adults, and those that stay behind as low-income, underserved, and now, always-undeserving. By inscribing a limited set of acceptable actions, outlooks and aspirations, Youth Grow limits the possibilities and potential spaces of inclusion for the youth they deem undeserving. This further deepens the experiences of social difference for this already marginalized population.

Deservingness gets scripted at many sites at Youth Grow, but it first occurs at the moment of participant selection. As explained previously, Youth Grow is an organization that attempts to teach gardening and education skills to homeless youth, rather than an organization that provides homeless youth services. This means that they lack the capacity to provide the vital social services and case management that homeless youth often need (Gibson 2011). Youth are recruited through social workers, case managers and

school counselors. Julian describes their current selection process in language that echoes that of a neoliberal discourse of deservingness. Here, deservingness corresponds to an ability and willingness to improve one's lot, to demonstrate self-sufficiency and entrepreneurialism. In effect, to make visible the discourse of "pulling oneself up by their bootstraps":

I think in the past they took anyone... like, they took *the most desperate*. And we're realizing that we're not really staffed for the most desperate... So we're kind of aiming *a little bit higher than that*, for those that have barriers to employment. You know, like, we still take homeless, we still take criminal offenders, we still take, you know, the ones that are kind of... you're not, completely knocked off their feet, but kinda *getting their feet back up*. You know, they're just starting to get their feet back, and *they need a hand up*... there are other organizations for people that are really destitute, and they're better off to go there (Julian, November, 2011 – emphases added).

Shying away from the "really destitute" and the "most desperate", Youth Grow is seeking youth that have demonstrated a readiness to get back on their feet. These are youth who have at least some modicum of stability in their lives, and unfortunately, this is the only demographic Youth Grow can realistically serve. With only two staff, Youth Grow is quite unable to provide the necessary social services and mental health care that street youth often need (Gibson 2011). However, Youth Grow doesn't make this distinction in their mission statement. Instead, by claiming that they serve homeless and low-income youth, they perpetuate an imagined underserved youth group. In reality, they are serving a particular *type* of low-income or homeless youth. Lily explains this further

It's not... it's not necessarily for youth who are straight up living on the street or don't know where their next meal is coming from. It's really for youth who are ready to make a change in their lives (Lily, November, 2011).

In this way, Youth Grow defines "deserving" for their program by recruiting youth that have made efforts to envision their future, at least enough to provide some stability for themselves. Goode and Maskovsky articulate this position with more detail in their description of the deserving poor,

The deserving poor are now those who embrace the spirit of entrepreneurship, voluntarism, consumerism, and self-help, while the undeserving are those who remain 'dependent' on the state (2001, 7-8).

Youth Grow exists for the particular subset of underserved youth who have demonstrated a "spirit of entrepreneurialism", a trait that escapes youth that are "desperate" or "destitute". Those youth, who are invariably dependent on a variety of services for their basic needs, are relegated as undeserving, and denied the opportunity to participate in Youth Grow's programs.

Youth Grow perpetuates a distinction between deserving and undeserving youth before they even get a foot in the door. Once *in* the program, levels of deservingness are established by the ability of youth to follow the rules of the program and assume the behaviors of the good worker as described previously. The Straight Talk program provides the primary platform to distinguish between successful youth who can self-regulate and follow the rules, and those youth that lack the self-control and discipline to stay in the program. The youth that are fired or unable to follow the rules are looked down upon, judged, and criticized for their lack of responsibility.

Deservingness is directly linked to notions and expressions of responsibility. The youths' lack of responsibility is manifested through a series of (in)actions that often lead to termination from the program, which is in stark contrast to youth who leave the program on their own accord for better opportunities. In the course of my fieldwork, five of the twelve youth left the program. Three were fired: one for stealing from the market, one for showing up to work high, and one for not showing up two shifts in a row. One young woman was encouraged not to come back for her own personal health reasons (but she had also missed a full week of work and couldn't provide a doctor's note), and the

final youth was not officially fired, but chose to stop coming so he could focus his attentions on his school work.

Unsuccessful youth embody a lack of responsibility and an inability to follow the rules, which is in stark contrast to the “successful” youth that persist in the program. These successful youth see a distinction in their levels of responsibility, and see this is an affirmation of their deservingness for trust and further support. They also express frustration and disappointment with the other youth. Sage, for instance, has very little patience or sympathy for those youth that break the rules of the program. The exchange below is illustrative of the ways that Sage, as a responsible youth, positions herself in relation to the irresponsible youth:

Elyse: Why do you think it is that a lot of people drop out?

Sage: Because... they have no interest in what they're doing.... A couple people had to drop out cuz, one I know, was stealing from us. They got let go. One... three were high or smelled like weed when they came here. So they got fired. And then a lot of people just didn't call. Just...

Elyse: You were saying that you think a lot of people maybe, end up dropping out or maybe getting fired because they weren't interested, maybe because there's no passion?

Sage: Because they weren't ready. For the responsibility. I'm really self-motivated. I have no sympathy, and I'm actually kinda mad, like, when people don't take this opportunity... Like, it's a very easy job to go to. It's very easy rules.¹⁵ You can like, make several mistakes and still be there. If you can't get to Youth Grow, you can't, you won't have a job, basically. So, I have no sympathy for you. You need to grow up!”

Sage articulates her own responsibility in relation to the youth who “weren't ready”. She is interested, passionate, responsible, and self-motivated, in comparison to youth that lack the self responsibility to follow the “easy rules”. Given that Youth Grow is a job training program in many senses, and not even a “real job”, the inability to follow these rules is a particularly strong offense, signaling that, as Sage says, if you can't handle the

¹⁵ Interestingly, Sage's belief that it's a very forgiving job is in contrast to the harsh rules and immediate termination that some of the youth experienced. On the other hand, when it comes to minor infractions such as lateness or bad attitude, Straight Talk is meant to help discipline the youth in a way that allows them to improve and stay in the program.

responsibility of Youth Grow, this signifies your undeserving-ness for both sympathy and support.

Sage's position becomes even more telling when compared to the praise that youth receive upon leaving the program for "better" opportunities. These youth are often finding other jobs and programs, or pursuing athletic or extracurricular activities. Aligning neatly with the imaginary of the future thinking, middle class youth, these youth achieve success by setting goals, taking responsibility, and pursuing their ambitions. Lily expresses her joy and pleasure with the youth that have found success this way,

The other youth that have not continued have gone onto job training programs, which is fabulous... a lot of them are leaving because of good opportunities. The ones that are not getting fired are leaving for good things (Lily, November, 2011).

Lily alludes to a dichotomy between "good opportunities" as fabulous, and the irresponsibility and poor decisions that lead to youth being fired. Julian describes this dichotomy further:

Most often, it is something else. They either get a job, or another program or, um... an education opportunity or something like, it's usually something of that nature. Sometimes it's just not a good fit. Sometimes we have to fire people, and you know, a couple people have stolen at the market. And we just don't have any tolerance for that (Julian 2011).

In this way, youth that make the "fabulous" decision to leave are further embedded as deserving youth: entrepreneurial, self-sufficient, motivated, able to self-advocate, ability to set goals, and an ability to navigate a competitive urban job market. Thus, there is not only a distinction between the youth that stay and youth that go; those that go for seemingly good reasons serve as an indicator that Youth Grow is working: producing good workers who are capable of advocating for themselves, seeking out better opportunities, and setting themselves on a path for middle class adulthood.

Many of the youth understand that completion of Youth Grow demonstrates their responsibility and success. To a future employer, their participation in the program marks them as a positive investment; they are responsible, able to follow rules, persistent, and entrepreneurial. When asked how she would present herself to a future employer, Sage explains,

It will say something if I came from a job training program and stuck with it for this long, and got promoted. Even if it doesn't relate to it? It's like, 'you should hire me, because I'm a responsible youth and came through this... program' (Sage, October, 2011).

The completion of a job training program like Youth Grow becomes less about the gardening skills or garden education, and more about encapsulating the values and workmanship, responsibility and self-motivation, attitudes and behaviors of successful youth, presenting them as deserving of future investment, future employment and reliably self-sufficient.

When youth complete a season at Youth Grow, they both internalize values and notions of self, but they also embody particular narratives that are visible to onlookers and outsiders. Particularly, perceptions of deservingness are personally internalized as they correlate to responsibility. To the public, though, completing Youth Grow's program signifies deservingness through investment in self, an ability to plan for the future, and a willingness to work hard and interact with multiple communities. While all of the youth expressed awareness of responsibility as it relates to hard work, Sage's words are most telling about how Youth Grow operates as a site for processes of responsabilization, and how these become internalized by the youth:

Responsibility means, taking care of yourself? Because that's what you're responsible for, I guess. I'm responsible for that. I'm responsible for things like getting myself to school and finding out what works for me.... I don't miss work unless I'm sick, and I really am sick. I don't miss school. I don't skip class. I do my homework (Sage, 2011).

Sage has internalized experiences of responsabilization and articulates that quite clearly in the exchange above. She describes the daily responsibilities she upholds: school, homework, and her job. Additionally, though, her allusion to responsibility as “taking care of yourself” reflects a powerful discourse of personal responsibility that pervades much of the neoliberal ideology and notions of governmentality. Here, though, deservingness is aligned with responsibility, and this is signified by a completion or persistence with Youth Grow. To the public or a future employer, then, successful participation in Youth Grow is a stamp of approval that declares one’s deservingness of investment and future job opportunities, and a direct sign of one’s ability to navigate and operate within a neoliberalized urban political economy.

Youth Grow produces a division between deserving and undeserving youth through three stages of their program: participant selection, program participation, and post-program destinations or choices. As youth are differentiated along lines of deservingness through these three stages, some are lauded and celebrated while others are left behind, seemingly at their own fault. Echoing centuries long rhetoric and discourse that blames the poor for their impoverishment, Youth Grow positions youth as either deserving of their success, or at fault for their failures. To those youth that don’t finish the program, there is “no sympathy”, and it signals that youth lacked the skills, responsibility and self-regulation to successfully complete the program. Through the perpetuation of this binary of deservingness, Youth Grow fails to produce substantial and structural poverty alleviation. Instead, they believe that participation in their program leads to success through the promotion of self-sufficient, responsabilized, forward thinking youth. In a new way, then, Youth Grow has added to and complicated a

persistent discourse of deservingness, adding “age” on to the axes and experiences of social difference. Historically, deservingness has been tied to race, class, gender and able-bodiedness. While age itself is not a marker of difference, youth are now suspect to the same criteria and judgments based on their ability to navigate a path to their future selves.

The crux of “deserving youth” circulates around notions of temporality and the future. Will the youth of Youth Grow be successful and distinguish themselves as self-sufficient, future adults? Or will they persist forever as dependent and irresponsible? In a way, Youth Grow’s practices and values support an imaginary of helping *potentially* bad kids into *deserving*, successful adults. Thus, it is in the transition to adulthood where youth define themselves as either forever-dependent and always-undeserving, or where they demonstrate that they are deserving; responsible, self-sufficient, entrepreneurial, multicultural, goal-setting and confident. So, far from a program that solely teaches gardening skills and education, we see that Youth Grow opens up the door for multiple actions and influences on subjectivities. Notions of empowerment are not directly tied to specific outcomes and programming choices. Thus, as Youth Grow attempts to practice gardening, job skills, education and employment sessions, there are ample openings for influences on subjectivities. The interactions with mentors and the Straight Talk program encourage the attitudes and behaviors of good workers. The workshops and positions vis-à-vis middle class customers and supporters promote future thinking, goal setting youth. Thus, between the day-to-day as well as attention to aspirations and the future, youth are positioned as deserving depending on their capacities as good workers and as potential members of a middle class imaginary.

CHAPTER 6

Synthesizing Community and Subjectivities

Reflecting on the Project: Conclusions

This thesis has explored the ways that non-profits are positioned within processes of neoliberalization. I have shown how organizations rework their organizational capacities to accommodate and respond to neoliberal imperatives. These imperatives take form through demands for increased efficiency, heightened accountability, conditions attached to service provision, decreased funding opportunities with increased expectations, etc.,. These impacts have yielded distinct outcomes for how organizations conceive of community and community building. Organizations deploy community as both a means and a goal for their programming, often relying on romanticized notions of community-level empowerment. Further, the ways organizations navigate neoliberalization while conceptualizing ‘community’ impacts both the positioning of their participants and how they appeal to donors. Finally, I have shown how all of these processes and adaptations lead to new forms of non-profit structure and organization, namely in the development of member-driven revenue, umbrella organizations, and a move away from foundation grants. These changes invariably lead to new positioning of their programs, donors, and participants in order to appeal to the changing funding structures.

This thesis has also explored the impacts on participant subjectivities through one case study with Youth Grow, a Seattle based youth empowerment gardening non-profit. I explored how notions of “empowerment” lead to multiple, vague outcomes that most consistently encourage youth to be “good workers”. Through job training and skills workshops, Youth Grow also encourages young people to aspire and set goals for the

future, thereby promoting middle class aspirations and identities. Finally, the articulation between these two processes, the day-to-day and the future aspirations, produces a distinction between deserving and undeserving youth. They are scripted as deserving/undeserving at three stages at Youth Grow: participant selection, program participation, and program completion.

While *claiming* to meet youth where they are (potential addicts, varying work experience, unreliable transportation, varying levels of interest in gardening), the reality is quite different. Youth Grow holds all youth to the same standards of “good work”: positive attitudes, good communication skills, strong customer service, hard physical work, and demonstrating leadership and entrepreneurialism on a day-to-day basis. Even though the organization makes all volunteers go to a training about homeless youth and the precarious social, economic and health environments they find themselves in, Youth Grow seems to expect the same behavior from all of their youth, regardless of their experiences of marginalization and social difference. As an ‘empowerment’ program, Youth Grow strives to alleviate the experiences of impoverishment and/or homelessness that the youth experience. By pairing youth with both the strong job skills and ability to advocate and set future goals, the youth at Youth Grow are positioned to be self-sufficient, responsible and ‘successful’.

It is necessary to understand the goals of empowerment and how these goals are uniquely tied to processes of neoliberalization. Seemingly, “empowerment” is meant to give communities and individuals the skills, power and confidence to change their social and economic situation. For the case of youth, the goal, need and commitment to youth empowerment stems from the fact that many youth are deeply marginalized. Their

multiple experiences of social difference along axes of race, class, gender, sexuality, age and ability position young people as worthy and needy recipients of social services. If ‘empowerment’ programs are meant to mitigate these marginalizing experiences, it stands to reason if organizations like Youth Grow are providing any structural change that would actually change the *conditions* of impoverishment and social difference. As the previous two chapters have demonstrated, the answer, at least for Youth Grow, is clearly no. Instead, Youth Grow positions itself as an organization that ‘empower’ youth to make the best out of an already existing neoliberal urban environment and economy. The organization does not exist as a vehicle for poverty alleviation, nor does it challenge the ways that youth are positioned as marginalized, often depoliticized actors. Rather, Youth Grow further reifies and writes youth within a discourse of un/deservingness. For youth that are deemed undeserving, their political agency is stifled, as these youth are positioned as needy, irresponsible, incapable of future thinking, and always-dependent.

Youth Grow’s deserving youth are positioned as future good workers, able to apply their entrepreneurial spirit as a best-practice way of navigating the neoliberal urban economy. Successful youth have the promise of future self-sufficiency, rather than dependency on the state. They are able and eager to craft middle class aspirations. In this way, youth are “empowered” to *navigate* processes of neoliberalization to their own best advantage, and, notably, to the “advantage” of society, given their self-sufficiency and lack of reliance on social services. Thus, deserving youth hold promise to break their reliance on the state and non-profits. In an unpredictable turn, then, Youth Grow’s vision to the future is one where Youth Grow need not exist. Not because they have successfully helped alleviate poverty and mitigated experiences of social difference, but because they

have successfully equipped youth to navigate neoliberal urbanisms without help from the state or civil society.

The ideological underpinnings of Youth Grow are firmly embedded in neoliberal rationalities. As Julian and Lily articulate, Youth Grow believes that regardless of social position, power dynamics and/or structural inequalities, youth can “make a change in their lives”. This is an idealistic goal, but rather unrealistic. It does not account for the complex webs of power in which low-income and homeless youth are entwined as marginalized, racialized, homeless and disenfranchised by their age, class or gender. However, even as the program is deeply embedded in neoliberal rationalities and governance mechanisms, there are also counter-currents within its work that push back against these dominant discourses and hegemonic positions. Julian situates Youth Grow as representative of these counter-currents:

We kind of touch upon a few issues, I guess. There’s the food justice, then there’s the politics of food, a small urban farm, and its already just kind of political in its own way. We do some education around that... I’d like to do more. So we’re a small urban farm, and that already creates some politics around it. We work with an underprivileged population that fulfills another need. And... we kind of model organic farming and organic growing and other themes. But we’re a small organization, so our footprint isn’t that significant in the greater Seattle movement. We do good work, and we help people out, and it has an effect (Julian November, 2011).

Here, Julian positions Youth Grow’s work as inherently political, given its context as an organization dealing with food justice, urban agriculture, and ‘underprivileged populations’. In relation to dominant food systems and prevailing social service paradigms, Youth Grow does challenge many of these hegemonic positions. It promotes alternative food systems, particularly in its participation in the local farmer’s market. The organization’s position within Seattle’s local food, urban agriculture and alternative food system scene does lend the organization a political position. However, these politics do

not necessarily lead to poverty alleviation, nor do they change the socio-spatial conditions that position young people as impoverished and marginalized. The organization claims a political stance that is not reflected in their actual work, given that the educational component is limited to resume development and job training, rather than directly addressing and discussing youth-centered issues of social justice, agency or citizenship. The disjuncture between their claimed identity of a social justice and food justice organization is not demonstrated by their actions, particularly in their educational programs. Their educational programs do not create the “political” landscape to which Julian refers. By ignoring questions of agency, citizenship and political subjectivity, Youth Grow self-identifies within a type of nonprofit politics, but their programs and projects do not support this position.

As for working with ‘underprivileged populations’, Youth Grow *does* provide a positive space and source of income for a small group of ‘underserved’ and homeless youth in Seattle. The youth gain an opportunity to feel productive, earn a wage, and learn skills that are transferrable to other jobs and projects. The youth work outside, learn to cook nutritious meals, build resumes, and interact with peers from different backgrounds. They receive mentorship from caring adults, learn customer service skills, and in some cases get to interact with media and the “public”. More importantly, youth are given a space where they are expected to be, where they can be “in the right place”. Their work is appreciated, even if it is highly monitored and disciplined. Julian reflects on the positive parts of the work:

I guess my favorite part is when we’re all working together, and we get all the stuff done, and it goes so smoothly. It’s just like, amazing. And it’s just incredible the kind of, it’s like, kind of being a conductor for an orchestra. Have all the different parts working together, smoothly, and it all works out. So, that’s my favorite part, when it goes well (Julian, November, 2011).

Julian's care and appreciation for the work shows that most youth who come through the program will be met with respect and have the chance to work as part of a team. There is an ethic of care that emerges from this organization and their work, even if it is not leading to structural change.

Youth Grow's most significant positive impact, and greatest opportunity for transformative change, comes from their ability to give youth a 'space to be'. Rather than villainizing homeless youth and overtly policing their use of space, Youth Grow provides a positive and caring space that youth are not only *allowed* to be; they are *expected* to be there. Julian draws on the contributions of a larger youth empowerment organization, Outward Bound, which provides opportunities for youth to adventure and explore on wilderness trips:

[He] said that youth today suffer from a misery of unimportance. There's nothing for them to do. Nothing productive. And most youth that I know are coming to realize that if they didn't have something productive to do that they were going to get into trouble (Julian, November, 2011).

Of the ways Youth Grow addresses this 'misery of unimportance', Julian goes on to say:

The gardening might have some attraction. I think that most... mostly, the most common thing we heard when we asked people why they wanted the job, we heard the whole thing about gardening, but most of them just wanted something productive to do... So they were just looking for something to do. And the fact that we pay helps (laughs). Um, so the money is a kind of a lure, and the work itself... some of them are interested and some of them aren't. And I don't know, like everyone says they're interested in gardening, but it's something they say to get the job. I think it's more just something productive to do (Julian November, 2011).

Julian acknowledges that expressing interest in gardening is a way for youth to get a foot in the door, even if it is not actually their primary reason for pursuing a job at Youth Grow. However, regardless of their actual commitment to gardening and agriculture, Youth Grow will still provide them with 'something productive to do'.

Of course, as has been demonstrated in their promotion of un/deservingness discourses, Youth Grow can only be a ‘productive’ or positive space to be for youth that qualify for the program, and demonstrate their responsibility and deservingness to be there. Perhaps in its future aspirations as an organization, Youth Grow can reflect on their ethic of care and possibility as a positive ‘space to be’ for more youth, regardless of their ability to demonstrate deservingness and future self-sufficiency.

Limitations and Future Directions

This initial project, while small in scope, still presents strong evidence as to the ways that organizations and young people are positioned as subjects within processes of neoliberalization. While I would have appreciated more youth interviews, my access to youth was limited outside of the framework of the organization. The interviews I did conduct are also impacted by my positionality. As a well-educated, middle class white woman, I was an outsider to the organization and the youth they serve. This may have impacted the ways that youth engaged with me and spoke with me about Youth Grow. For instance, as a volunteer, I was too close to the organization for the youth to share outright criticisms, for fear of them being heard by the organization and its leadership. On the other hand, if I had been a true outsider and not served as a volunteer, I would not have developed such strong rapport with the youth, and they would have been less reticent to speak with me at all.

As I conclude this project, I see multiple opportunities for future work. As a single site case study, this project lays the groundwork for future work in different geographical and historical contexts. Given the breadth of similar youth empowerment garden programs across cities of the United States, the methodology and framework of

this project could easily be applied in other contexts. It would be incredibly fruitful to look for patterns or incongruencies between non-profit programs. Particularly, are most organizations positioned similarly vis-à-vis neoliberal restructuring? If not, what are the differences? How are the processes of neoliberalization demonstrating their contingent and place-specific nature through the positioning of non-profits and the populations they seek to serve? It would also be worthwhile to compare and expand the understanding of youth positioning and youth subjectivities amidst empowerment programs. Additionally, I am intrigued by the possibility of identifying youth solidarity across space and time: are the experiences of youth in different cities and different organizations similar enough to unite them across spatial distance? Or, are the social categories presented and performed by Youth Grow fractured and imagined enough wherein there is no common experience in other socio-spatial contexts?

Additionally, more direct questions of funding structure, scope and fiscal detail are vital to continuing on with this line of research. Unfortunately, the organization was not able to provide me with the necessary statistics and data. Future work would more accurately account for how fundraising operates, how money moves through organizations like Youth Grow, and how organizations compete with one another for the same funds. Finally, I am intrigued by the notion of giving youth a space to be. Particularly in the work of Kristina Gibson (2011), one of the leading preventative steps for homeless youth suicide and death can be through providing a positive space to be. Future work on the transformative potential of organizations like Youth Grow would frame or highlight questions of allowing and encouraging youth to be “in space”.

I conclude this project inspired and even more curious about the incongruencies and mismatches between what Youth Grow says they do, how this is conveyed to donors, and how it is actually experienced by youth. Given my own commitment as a public scholar, I think that there are multiple publics and audiences to whom the findings and further questions of this project appeal. Namely, this project and future work are well positioned to engage more directly and intentionally in participatory and feminist research methodologies *with* the youth participants. For instance, I am interested in how the youth voices at Youth Grow, and/or similar organizations, can be better incorporated into the organization and programming. A strong example here is the mismatch over the educational components: Youth Grow's leadership is convinced that this is one the strongest aspects of their work, while it is universally one of the youth's least favorite pieces. Similarly, how can the organization better incorporate gardening into the programming, so that the outcomes are more aligned with the mission, but *in a way that appeals to the youth*.

As alluded to earlier, this project also has the potential to engage a youth community across space. Using digital media and interactive web technologies, I see a great potential for collaboration between myself as a public scholar, the youth in youth empowerment gardening programs, and the organizational leadership. Creating web spaces that allow youth to collaborate, share curriculum, and plan conferences would greatly strengthen feelings and experiences of solidarity across multiple programs. Of course, this is contingent on whether or not youth would desire this type of program at all. As an outsider, I would strive to develop a project like this in collaboration with youth, rather than impose a framework of my own vision. However, given the existing

relationships and conversations between organizations, and an annual youth-led urban gardening conference, I believe these frameworks are there, but do not yet adequately allow for youth to communicate across space and time. This is another entry point for collaboration and conversation as a public scholar.

Finally, this work speaks to the youth empowerment nonprofit community. If nothing else, this work has exposed many of the unforeseen and unplanned outcomes on youth subjectivities that emerge from empowerment programming. To youth empowerment practitioners and program managers, then, I have one call: be self-reflexive in your work. What is your organization really teaching? What values are being transmitted? Even when programs do “good work”, give youth a productive and positive space to be, and provide a wage, there are always politics and ideologies at play. How these are being enacted both materially and discursively are the questions youth empowerment programs must always ask themselves.

Drawing on the phenomenal work of scholars like Ananya Roy (2010), this project stands as the beginning of a possible institutional ethnography of youth empowerment programs. Questions of politics, networks, subjectivities and ideologies are excellent entry points into exploring the frameworks and outcomes of youth empowerment programs. In addition to laying the groundwork for that future institutional ethnography, this project also contributes to scholarship on the neoliberalization of poverty and the governance of poverty in the United States. It elucidates changes to the non-profit sector and how these are taken up and presented by individual organizations. The work contributes to work on neoliberal subjectivity formation, particularly through the perspective of relationality. Finally, this work speaks indirectly to the critical youth

geography literature, by framing youth subjectivities within processes of neoliberalization and non-profit restructuring.

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