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“Just because I didn't speak up didn't mean I wasn't paying attention”: Envisioning Youth and The Food Project
Gratitude

This thesis is dedicated to The Food Project. For feeding me when I was hungry, teaching me when I was angry, giving me space to stand, myself, and speak up. For all of the people with whom I have shared field work, life stories, meals, and years of my growing up. I would not have made it if not for you. A special thank you to the seven people who were interviewed, for your words, time, and enthusiasm.

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Thank you to my mother for reminding me that it is always okay to still be learning. To my father for teaching me how to work with my hands, and teaching me how to drive stick. Thank you to my brother for always playing hard, thereby becoming the first youth at TFP to break their arm during a game of tag. Also for giving me sass.

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Lastly, thank you to Hampshire College, for a truly individualized, hard-to-attain, passion-filled education.
let there be new flowering
in the fields let the fields
turn mellow for the men
let the men keep tender
through the time let the time
be wrested from the war
let the war be won
let love be
at the end

-Lucille Clifton
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Abstract

This ethnographic study of a small non-profit organization in Eastern Massachusetts is aimed at breaking open what makes a youth program work, and how it functions within a sociopolitical context, particularly in relation to other educational settings. The Food Project hires urban and suburban youth to work together on sustainable farm sites in both city and suburbs. Through this work, they aim to “create personal and social change.” The eight participants interviewed for the project talk about their experiences at TFP and in the world. By analyzing their voices, I delineate the importance of interpersonal relationships, place-based education, the internalization of possible futures for youth, and the interplay between dominant power structures and the agency of young people growing up within them. This study offers other youth programs a way to learn about structural components that can support personal and social change. Further, it offers all people who have any concern with young people and education the opportunity to confront personal assumptions about youth. Thus, this study offers a new way of seeing the young people who represent a large portion of the American population: not just as statistics, but as powerful, positive agents of social change.
**Introduction**

I am sixteen. Maria and I are shoveling compost into a wheelbarrow. The compost, dark and heavy, makes shoveling a difficult process, and it is keeping us warm even though it is nearing the end of October. We are workers in The Food Project's Academic Year Program, and are in charge of leading adult volunteers in farm work on the program's acre lot of farm land in Lynn, MA.

An older woman is in charge of taking the wheelbarrow of compost away. She stands as we shovel. She is from a rich suburb next to Lynn, and her clothes look nicer than Maria's and mine. She is telling Maria and me that we are amazing! So responsible! So different from other teenagers! It is a generous compliment. Her blonde highlights reflect in the sun overhead. When we have finished loading the heavy soil into the wheelbarrow, the woman pushes it away. Maria and I burst out laughing once she is gone, because of how wrong she was. We aren't so different from our peers. There are eleven more of them on this farm alone, all responsible, all hard-working, all amazing.

I think back to this moment often because it represents so much of why The Food Project (TFP) matters. TFP is a small non-profit organization in Eastern Massachusetts that runs community-based programs aimed at changing the food system. TFP’s youth programs, which are a central component of the organization, hire urban and suburban teenagers to work together on sustainable farms in both cities and suburbs. Through this work, teenagers find themselves assuming responsibility, being given opportunities to speak up, and enacting real, tangible change within their communities.

The woman's comment on how amazing Maria and I were is important because it demonstrates the dominant view of young people in America: that usually they are lazy, ignorant, and immature. In shoveling compost to be put onto the land in the middle of a city, Maria and I were visibly transforming a landscape in a positive
way. The moment I describe above conveys both the power that Maria and I felt at that
time and the ways that we were both aware of and confronted by common assumptions
about young people in America.

The woman I described was an avid supporter of TFP, and was working with us
for the day as a volunteer. Her volunteer status meant that Maria and I were in charge
of describing the work to her, and making sure the work was done well. The fact that
we did not speak back to her implies the respectful distance that we kept as authority
figures in the situation. TFP provides a space where young people can break down
stereotypes, both internally and externally, while acting as agents of social change.

Having worked intermittently at TFP since 2005, I have undergone significant
personal change, while having the opportunity to contribute to the organization’s
multiple initiatives for social change. My dedication to TFP is reaffirmed, constantly, by
the ways in which I am supported and inspired by the organization and the people
within it. My thesis project addresses the ways teenagers are seen in America, the ways
that these views affect them, and where TFP hopes to break in and change the social
context in which teenagers are seen. My project is an ethnographic portrait of young
people and staff who have worked and are working at TFP, and it centers the voices of
the people who make the place what it is. Their experiences serve as a counter-
narrative to common assumptions about young people. Finally, my project works to
understand how TFP works in the ways it does, and to articulate where gaps in the
program’s effectiveness exist.

As I have worked to complete this thesis, I have found my work constantly
circling back to several crucial questions: How are young people seen in America? Why
do dominant structures play into stereotypes about youth? What are spaces where
young people transgress stereotypes about them? What is TFP’s role in all of this?
Finally, and most importantly, what can I, or any individual, do to change both internal
assumptions and societal inequalities? A seed, while small, holds great possibility for growth. The bursting through the ground and reaching upward of a seed is often taken for granted. A small youth program, TFP contains great possibility for envisioning new ways of positioning young people and new ways of structuring our communities and interpersonal interactions. TFP offers us the possibility that just a small change can instigate great and beautiful shifts in the world.

In the first section of this introduction, I outline the ways that young people have been treated in America over the last century, particularly in the educational system. I delineate the construction of adolescence as a social space of being and the implications of this in terms of the ways young people are able to express themselves publicly. I also articulate the places in which young people are able to be agents of change. In the second section, I describe TFP’s history and current structure, emphasizing the Summer Youth Program (SYP) as a primary structural component of the organization. By contextualizing TFP in relation to some of the dynamics that shape and limit young people’s agency, I make clearer how necessary a broad social change is, in both our systematic and personal treatment of youth.

This study acknowledges the problematic connotations of the term “adolescent,” although I continue to use it to describe young people. I also use the terms “youth,” “young people,” and “teenagers” to describe those people who are participants at TFP in “youth” positions. This study seeks to break open our definitions of these terms and redraw the lines so that to be a ‘youth’ is not seen as so vastly different as being ‘adult.’ TFP uses the term ‘youth’ to refer to the young people who work there, and gives these youth as much, and often more, responsibility than ‘adults.’ Youth are also encouraged to talk about their identities as teenagers, and to question the ways that society is ageist.

1 Age as a determining characteristic of people is both a structural part of American society, demonstrated both by laws and through accepted value systems. Ageism is used to define the ways that people are discriminated against or marginalized because of their age. Typically, ageism applies to people who are considered “youth” and people who are considered “seniors.”
This questioning takes place explicitly within the social curriculum and implicitly in the ways that young people work within their communities at TFP.

**Young People and Education**

In the early 20th century, the American educational system shifted its value system to include the education of all young people. Mass public schooling was born. Prior to this, education was primarily available to those with cultural and/or financial privilege. As mandatory education became the norm, school became a central place where dominant ideologies could be reproduced. Lauren Resnick contends that mass education “did not take as goals for its students the ability to interpret unfamiliar texts... construct convincing arguments, develop original solutions to technical or social problems.”

Instead, Resnick argues that mass education was a systematic way to control young people, particularly those without cultural or financial privilege, and turn them into a reliable work force.

With young people in school, the construction of the 'teenage' years as a particular period of growth became institutionalized. Recapitulation theory, which postulates that human development is paralleled by evolutionary history, was revised by G. Stanley Hall in arguments around child development. This theoretical stance played a large role on the way 'adolescence' was structured into the public educational system. Nancy Lesko describes this stance, pointing out that teenage years were “singled out as a crucial point at which an individual... leap[s] to a developed, superior, Western selfhood or remain[s] arrested in a savage state.”

Thus, if a young person in an American public school is unable to make the leap to a “developed, superior, Western selfhood,” then that person is deemed unable to succeed. Many educators argue that

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this false dichotomy has a large role to play in the achievement gap, in the fact that with more privilege, comes better education, and vice versa.

By using recapitulation theory to argue for adolescence as a determinant of future societal success, the educational system could reproduce dominant value systems more easily. Donaldo Macedo describes the persistence of an achievement gap as representing the educational system’s “ultimate victory to the extent that large groups of people, including the so-called minorities, were never intended to be educated.” The institution of education (including schools and other other programs serving children and youth) became a way to control the “minorities” by placing them within a structure that would keep them busy until they could work. Their education, which had never taken for its goals the “ability to interpret” or “develop original solutions,” had instead been put in place to produce a reliable work force rather than actually enabling all young people’s constructive learning. Those who made the “leap” were disproportionately those who already had cultural and financial capital, and those that did not were destined to fail.

The construction of adolescence as the time during which a young person can either make it or fall flat is important in understanding both the achievement gap and the potential for change within the limiting educational system. In understanding adolescence as a time in which American students are supposed to become successful, it becomes clear that those students who do not enter the classroom with racial, financial, or gendered privilege encounter many more barriers than those students who do. As Lesko argues, recapitulation created adolescence as “a social space in which progress or degeneration was visualized, embodied, measured, and affirmed.” The ability to measure and affirm the success of a student is implicitly linked to their embodied

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5 Lesko, Nancy. *Act Your Age!,* 35.
experience within the educational system. In other words, students take on the external assumptions about themselves and by internalizing these messages, become physical representations of those assumptions. Thus, adolescence itself became a “social space” in which young people internalize the messages they receive. Gary Schwartz describes the unfolding of this social space as the process through which “young people learn that how they are treated is intimately connected to the kind of person authorities see them as being.”

Through public education, young people are given messages about who they should be, as well as how they should act.

To understand the layers of adolescent experience, it is important to understand exactly what about the experience is limiting. Marilyn Frye explains:

> the root of the word 'oppression' is the element 'press'... Something pressed is something caught between or among forces and barriers which are so related to each other that jointly they restrain, restrict, or prevent the thing's motion or mobility.

Teenagers are “caught” in a standardized system of education that often plays into the dynamics of a country that offers better services and more opportunities to those with privilege. Privilege belongs to people who belong to dominant groups: male-identified people, able-bodied people, white people, people who are wealthy, or people who (in America) speak English as a first language.

Teenagers are cornered by the stereotypes of them that are reinforced by media images and adult perceptions. They become restricted; their mobility, both literally and figuratively, is often limited. Even teenagers with privilege are still restricted by characterizations of their identities as immature, ignorant, or reckless. In most situations, young people who are already marginalized based on their identities are pushed further to the side because of their status as young.

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8 These are some examples of people who carry privilege. Many people carry some kind of privilege even as they belong to other groups who are marginalized. For example, as a white person, I carry white privilege, even as I am a female-identified person who is marginalized because of my identity as female.
Particularly in underserved schools, students are often given the message that authorities do not care if they succeed. This is reinforced for youth who are of color, deviate from gender norms, have emigrated to the country, and/or come from financially disadvantaged backgrounds. Michelle Fine and Jessica Ruglis describe the “more naturalized strategy that splinters the soul more slowly, delicately, less aggressively: the strategy of systematic miseducation” that is present and strong in public schools. Fine and Ruglis argue that a “reversal of dispossession” must take place, both “within and beyond schools.” Dispossession in this sense is the way that public policies consistently produce “cumulative disadvantage for youth of color” while providing “academic water wings for most young people who are White, especially if they are wealthy.” Young people of color, particularly without financial privilege, are dispossessed of their rights to pursue and attain the same things as their White, wealthy peers. This “coercive migration of... poor youth of color, out of sites of public education” is extremely important in understanding the marginalization of these youth and the implications of an educational system that functions to dispossess so many young people of their rights based on their racial and class-based identities.

Fine and Ruglis’ discussion of “systematic miseducation” makes clear the ways that falling into a racial, classed, or gendered identity that is not that of the white middle-class heterosexual male pushes young people of marginalized groups to the side. Fine and Ruglis describe the criminalization of youth of color within their schools, through the privatization of testing, increased security standards, and “zero-tolerance policies.” These more concrete ways of mis-educating youth are results of the deeper belief system governing American schools, which follows the agenda of white, male, middle-class people and wealthy elites. For example, a popular conception is that

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schools should teach a “common” American culture,\textsuperscript{12} rather than celebrate diversity. Adolescence as a state of being—as the liminal space in which one seeks to become something else—is important to understanding the way educational institutions and youth programs try to serve young people. Lesko argues that during the 20\textsuperscript{th} century, the adolescent was “newly made as a multilayered object” that was “always ready to indicate and exemplify national crises, and a perfect trope for worry, study, and action-taking that also met the coming-of-age interests of white middle-class professionals.”\textsuperscript{13} The education system runs, for the most part, on a value system that takes as its primary focus the success of the nation, and puts in a secondary position the success of adolescents. Students of color are marginalized both by criminalization and by the “worry” and “action-taking” of the white middle-class that asks for schools to teach towards a common culture (meaning a white, middle-class culture).

Educational programs taking place in after-school or extracurricular settings do not necessarily abide by the same value systems or legal restrictions as public schools. They often follow different structures, both in how time is used and in their institutional policies, which stem both from funding concerns and from the values of the people in charge. After-school programs provide extra-curricular options and can provide positive mentoring relationships for youth. Summer programs provide activities and a connection to a community during months in which young people typically have nothing to do. On the other hand, out of school programs, because they are not always part of the public education system, struggle particularly with funding concerns and high rates of staff turnover. Robert Halpern outlines the difficulties of finding and hiring staff with experience and education, and keeping those staff employed.\textsuperscript{14}

Out of school programs vary widely in their values and structures. Darcy Varney,

\textsuperscript{12} For a well-articulated argument for teaching “common culture,” refer to Diane Ravitch’s “Multiculturalism: E Pluribus Plures,” \textit{The Key Reporter}. (56):1-4. 1990.
\textsuperscript{13} Lesko, Nancy. \textit{Act Your Age}. 47.
in a study of youth programs and the language they use in their work, identifies three
types of organizations that serve young people: programs that see youth as laborers,
programs that ask youth to be leaders, and programs that ask youth and adults to be
learners together.\(^\text{15}\) At many out of school programs, young people are still treated as
passive recipients in their own education. It is important to note that laborer programs
ask youth “to perform manual labor... with the goal of preventing negative behaviors.”
Leader programs allow young people to participate in “creative and democratic
opportunities,” although they are still excluded from decision-making processes.
Learner programs “empower... young people to provide leadership in their
communities,” while providing room for their voices in organizational decision-making.
Laborer and Leader programs, while they can have positive effects on the young people
within them, can still limit the agency of those young people in being active participants
in learning and working.

As she articulates how learner programs work, Varney describes TFP. She argues
that TFP “extends beyond youth-community service to creating youth-adult
partnerships for local and global change,” meaning that youth and adults are learning
and working together. This is outside of the norm for out of school programs, and
requires a more radical approach to ideas about adolescents and their abilities.
Especially because TFP hires a diverse group of young people, it crosses traditional
borders in order to provide a different environment for youth. Diversity in this sense
entails having many people who come from different backgrounds and compose a
heterogeneous group of identities in terms of race, gender, country and place of birth,
socio-economic status, age, religion, and sexuality. In this transgression, TFP offers all of
its participants the opportunity to reverse their own dispossession by claiming a space
in which their identities are valued and they are given space to speak to their own

\(^{15}\) Varney, Darcy. “Splitting the Ranks: Leaders, Laborers and Learners in U.S. Public Space Participation
values, needs, and desires.

Roger Hart's Ladder of Children's Participation\(^{16}\) is particularly useful for understanding how a program that allows for youth-adult partnership gives young people opportunities to have agency. Note that the bottom three rungs of the ladder are

designated as “non-participatory.” When youth or children are represented by adults without being informed, or sharing in the decision-making process, they are not truly participating. At the sixth level of the ladder is “Adult-initiated, shared decisions with children.” This is the level at which TFP operates, for the most part. The structure of the program is maintained by adult staff members, although at times youth are asked to participate on higher levels. Youth voices are valued in hiring processes, are often asked to create new curriculum (most often in the Intern program), and are often the speakers at major events for TFP. Further, the program’s structure emphasizes upward mobility, giving youth repeated chances to apply for and receive both pay-raises and increased job responsibility.

Hart's ladder asks us to reconsider the ways in which children and youth can participate in their own learning and in social action, arguing in his conclusion:

>We must work with educational authorities to change their conception of schooling. Currently they fear too much collapse of control which would result from practising democracy... We must continue to work with non-governmental organizations which... have been providing most of the creative examples for effecting children’s participation.

The fear of “collapse of control” that dominates the public education system in America is clear. It exists in schools with metal detectors and police officers, in policies that punish students for being absent or late, in the rhetoric of teaching a “common culture,” and in multiple interactions between youth and adults in which youth are seen as objects, rather than as subjects of their own growth. TFP, as a program that structurally emphasizes youth voices and agency in decision-making, functions as one of Hart’s “creative examples” of a non-governmental organization that promotes participation. In a program that allows for youth to participate both in decision-making and social action, young people are able to break away from the limitations that surround them.

Even within TFP, however, young people exist within a system governed by adults. The staff structure at TFP is represented in the figure below:
As shown in Figure 2, the staff structure at TFP, shown here for the Summer Youth Program, is clearly hierarchical. It is important to note that all of the roles except for the last two are filled by adult staff. The youth roles, which comprise the majority of actual people, are underneath the adult staff. Although the program seeks to cross age boundaries, it is important to recognize the ways that it still feeds into a system that places youth at the direction of adults. However, in many decision-making processes, youth are both consulted and offered space to give strong opinions. Examples of this are outlined further on in this introduction.

The Food Project: Growing a Thoughtful and Productive Community

“Our mission is to grow a thoughtful and productive community of youth and adults from diverse backgrounds who work together to build a sustainable food system. We produce healthy food for residents of the city and suburbs and provide youth leadership opportunities. Most importantly, we strive to inspire and support others to create change in their own communities.”

The Food Project was founded in 1991 by Ward Cheney, who wanted to connect both youth and adults back to the land. Cheney started the program on a two and a half acre plot of land on Drumlín Farm in Lincoln, MA, his hometown. By 1995, the project had expanded to include a second lot, a half-acre in Roxbury, MA. The program hired youth from suburban and urban areas, from diverse cultural backgrounds, to work

\[17\text{ Last accessed on 1/24/12 at http://www.thefoodproject.org/about.}\]
together on the farms in both Lincoln and Roxbury. The program continued to grow and widen its network of community partners.

By 2003, TFP was ready to start plans for a new site. This new site was set up to function as a separate organization, although it would later become more fully integrated to TPF’s Lincoln-based original site. In 2005, The Food Project-North Shore (TFP-NS) began its first growing season, utilizing a half-acre of land in Lynn, and working on additional acres located at Appleton Farms, a large family farm in Ipswich, MA. The central office was located in Lynn. Twenty youth and three adult staff were hired to work alongside the grower and site director. By 2006, TFP-NS was leasing its own land from The Trustees of Reservations at Long Hill Estate, in Beverly, MA. Currently, TFP-NS farms on approximately an acre and a half of land in Lynn (split between three sites), two and a half acres in Beverly, and continues to partner with Appleton Farms during the summer growing season.

TFP’s curriculum is detailed, carefully constructed, and expansive. The philosophy behind the curriculum seeks to “expand permanently each person’s recognition of himself or herself as an agent for social change.” This philosophical approach is in place not only for the development of young people, but also for the adults who are a part of the program as paid staff, volunteers, or community partners. The youth programs function as a ladder upward for the young people. A young person begins during the Summer Youth Program (SYP), can apply to continue on through the Academic Year Program (AYP), and then can apply to become a part of the Intern Summer and Academic Year Programs. Currently, TFP-NS hires about 30 youth for the SYP. About 12-14 of these youth continue onto the AYP. The Intern program cross-cuts TFP’s branch in Lincoln/Boston with the North Shore site, hiring a wide range of youth in terms of age, experience, and background. The temporality of experience and gaining

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18 Last accessed on 2/25/12 at http://www.thefoodproject.org/our-mission
of new knowledge and responsibility at each step is a crucial part of how TFP's curriculum functions.

In the creation of this program, Ward Cheney hired Stanley Pollack, who was and is the Executive Director of Teen Empowerment. Teen Empowerment is a successful Boston-based youth program working “to empower youth and adults as agents of individual, institutional, and social change.”¹⁹ Pollack worked with Cheney to create a program and curriculum that would address youth development within a social context.²⁰ Teen Empowerment uses the model shown in Figure 3 to explain the way they empower youth to be agents of social change.²¹ Although this model does not directly address the way that TFP functions, its “core beliefs” and steps towards achieving an “ultimate goal” are mirrored within the structure of TFP. Beginning with

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¹⁹ Last accessed from http://www.teenempowerment.org/about.html
acknowledging the ways that youth are structurally limited and the ways that “facilitative leadership” can lead to higher “levels of engagement,” Teen Empowerment’s model works to systematically “give youth and adults the skills they need to implement successful efforts” to achieve social change.

The Summer Youth Program (SYP) was the first program created at TFP, and is the entry-point for youth participants. Understanding the SYP’s structural components is important for understanding the way that TFP operates as an organization, particularly because many of the ideas and activities that take place during the SYP are mirrored in other parts of TFP. I outline here the application and hiring processes, the structural components of the SYP and the importance of these elements.

The application process for the SYP, as for most positions, requires a written application with personal recommendations, followed by an in-person interview. The program is highly selective, and hiring is based on a firm commitment to diversity. Youth who are hired work for six and a half weeks in the summer and are paid a stipend (currently $200/week). Youth must be between the ages of 14-17 by the beginning of the summer for which they are applying. Paid adult staff read all submitted written applications and invite applicants to a group interview session.

Interview sessions are held separately for urban youth and suburban youth, with urban youth interviewed in a centralized urban location, and suburban youth interviewed in a centralized suburban location. During the group interview session, older youth give an overview of the SYP and play icebreaker games with the applicants. Meanwhile, staff pull applicants aside and conduct brief ten minute individual interviews. After the interview, staff sit down with the older youth staff and go through each applicant to discuss their potential.

Final hiring decisions are made by adult staff. In seeking a diverse group, staff work to hire a balance of: urban and suburban youth; males and females; people of
color and white people; youth who are closer to 14 and youth who are closer to 17. While staff do seek to balance a variety of class backgrounds, it is not entirely possible to know each applicant’s socio-economic status. Applicants are also labeled, based on their writing, recommendations, and interview as being a “Leader,” “Middle,” or “at-Risk.” The largest category of youth hired fall into “Middle,” and these are the young people whom TFP describes itself as being most successful with, although the program aims to support all of its youth.

This selection process is reflected on the first day of the program, when youth from completely different homes all find their way, most via public transit, to a farm that they have most likely never seen or set foot on before. They meet enthusiastic staff members, the older youth who have already completed the SYP, and the director of the farm site. One youth, Steven, describes the experience of first meeting so many different people:

They set it up into three different crews, there was like 30 kids and like 10 kids in each crew or somethin’. And, um... like the kids were from a lot of different areas. There was this one girl from uh-h, Kenya, or somewhere in Africa. [...] And then there was like a couple kids from Lynn, from the city, which I had never, I had like seen kids like that but I had never really interacted with them that much you know what I mean?

Steven was confronted with meeting other “kids” that he had “never really interacted with,” and seems, even now, to remember this as a striking moment. Having grown up in a small town, the idea of meeting “kids from Lynn, from the city,” is important because it meant that he was completely out of his comfort zone. This is the position in which most youth find themselves, which is one way that TFP is able to form such a strong community.

22 Transportation passes are provided to all youth based on their transportation plans. For example, as a young woman from Gloucester, I required a commuter rail train pass in order to get to both suburban and urban sites, as well as a bus pass for transport to the urban site. These transportation passes are considered a portion of each youth’s pay for the summer.
The first two days of the SYP serve as an introduction to TFP and the structure of the program. Youth receive three work t-shirts, which are mandatory to wear, train passes, and binders of information. Youth are required to bring their binders to work every day. The youth participate in several workshops: a training on tools and proper usage, an introduction to agriculture, a sexual harassment training, and a review of the standards. As a first job for many youth, these workshops set up both the safe space that TFP seeks to maintain and lay the groundwork for a successful summer. On the day that youth are presented with the standards chart, they are also asked to sign the standards agreement, found in their binder. They are allowed to ask any questions and raise any concerns about the standards themselves. If they choose to sign, they are allowed to continue on in the SYP. If they do not choose to sign, they are asked to leave the farm. Belonging to TFP's community requires all participants to acknowledge,

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Job Requirements</th>
<th>Standards of Behavior</th>
<th>Consequences for Violating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Showing Up</td>
<td>Arrive on time, call if late</td>
<td>W  $16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being Prepared</td>
<td>Wear your t-shirt; bring binder</td>
<td>W  $16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working Hard</td>
<td>Work hard in all aspects of job</td>
<td>W  $16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respecting the Job</td>
<td>Use equipment appropriately</td>
<td>W  $16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respecting Each Other</td>
<td>No swearing</td>
<td>W  $16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respecting Wider Community</td>
<td>Be appropriate on public transit, no littering</td>
<td>W  $16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Safety</td>
<td>Behave safely on public transit, no drugs/alcohol, no verbal or physical abuse</td>
<td>$32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work Safety</td>
<td>No vandalizing, be safe around equipment</td>
<td>$32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Integrity</td>
<td>No lying</td>
<td>$32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Illegal Behavior</td>
<td>No fighting, stealing, or sexual harassment; no possession of drugs/alcohol</td>
<td>Fired</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 4. Standards Chart at The Food Project.

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23 The sexual harassment training is in place because of mandatory regulations in the state of Massachusetts. Simultaneously, because youth can be fired for sexual harassment, it is crucial to introduce it to them early on.

24 These workshops lay the groundwork for the curriculum that is carried out during the rest of the summer. Almost daily, youth participate in workshops, which range from discussions of soil and sustainable farming methods to discussions of cultural backgrounds and privilege. The workshops are meant to scaffold learning, and the introductory workshops serve as the foundation for this.
accept, and abide by the shared standards.

TFP places a high priority on making community standards clear, holding youth accountable for their actions and involving the whole community in maintaining the communal safe space. The standards serve as an outline of the minimum expectations for proper behavior. Figure 4 shows a simplified version of the standards chart that youth keep in their binders. The top six categories are more minor, while the bottom four are much more serious. The consequences for violating each category are explained through a series of steps. For example, in the Being Prepared category, showing up at work without one’s t-shirt would place on on the Warning Step. If the youth did not wear their shirt the next day as well, they would have $16 docked from their pay. More serious consequences move more quickly towards being fired. Illegal Behavior has no steps before firing. Earning back violations, and the money docked, is possible if one doesn’t earn a violation in that category for a full week. Violations of the bottom four categories cannot be earned back.

If a youth is fired, they are usually offered the opportunity to go through a re-hiring process. The re-hiring process requires them to complete two full days of work, unpaid, without earning violations. They then submit a written statement to a randomly assembled board of fellow youth workers and adult staff, who make the decision whether or not to allow the fired youth back into the community. Thus standards are understood and upheld by the community, with an emphasis on following standards in order to maintain a safe space for the community.

Crews come up with names for themselves based on the letter of their crew: A, B, or C. Later in the summer crews also design a crew flag. During my summer as an Assistant Crew Leader (ACL), my crew was B: Beasts of the East. Again in crew B as a Crew Leader (CL), my crew named ourselves the B.O.M.B. Squad (BOMB=Business or More Business). These names carry weight for the participants and are another
important way of creating a deep connection within the community. Crews do farm work together and often sit together for workshops and lunch.

Violations are tracked by all staff: ACL’s, CL’s, growers, and the site director and program associate. During a weekly evening meeting, staff discuss each youth in the program and any possible violations of the standards system. If any person has a concern, question, or clarification they want to bring up about a possible violation, a discussion ensues. Violations are reported to the youth only after staff have reached a consensus. During this evening meeting, staff also discuss the feedback that they will give to each young person during Straight Talk the next day. Staff ask each other for specific examples of ways that specific youth did well or were struggling during the week. In this way, each youth’s growth is made a communal goal.

The standards system is in place in order to support the success of the program as a whole as well as personal growth, and this is emphasized during each week’s staff discussion. Violations are not meant to be arbitrary punishments, the results of personal vendettas, or random notes on a person’s behavior. Rather, violations are “earned” by youth as a way of pushing the person to note a specific behavior that is negatively impacting both the community and their own individual growth. ACL’s may earn violations, although it is rare. The consequences for earning a violation as an older youth are higher. Although staff do not earn violations, infractions of the standards system are noted by a supervisor. If a staff person is late, their supervisor gives them an oral warning. If the behavior continues, a written warning would be issued. After this, the staff person could be fired based on their continued disregard for the standards system.

The daily structure of the SYP functions to foster growth and the success of TFP’s endeavors, just as the standards system does. A typical Monday for a youth in the SYP might look like this:
This schedule only varies slightly in content, except for the one day a week when individual crews participate in broader community service, by going to hunger relief organizations (HROs). These range from soup kitchens to homeless shelters to senior care centers. Each HRO receives donated produce from TFP’s farm. Youth often cite the experience of preparing and serving food to those in need as extremely powerful.

Going to HROs provides each crew with a whole day of just being together. It is within this context that Straight Talk takes place. A core part of TFP’s organizational structure, Straight Talk is a way of giving honest feedback to people. In the SYP, Straight Talk takes place weekly in a “One-to-All” format, in which CL’s prepare feedback for each youth in their crew ahead of time. ACL’s are often asked to prepare feedback for half of the crew, starting mid-way through the summer. Straight Talk is also when youth are informed of any violations they may have earned.

Straight Talk is one of the foundational pieces of TFP’s programs that pushes youth to grow personally. An important part of giving good Straight Talk is giving both positives and deltas. Delta, the Greek symbol for change (Δ), represents something that someone could change or do better in the coming week. Delta is used instead of “negative” in order to reinforce the possibility of growth. The person giving Straight Talk is also asked to give detailed examples, in order to ensure that the receiver
understands the exact actions that led to the feedback, both in terms of positives and
deltas. The person receiving Straight Talk is expected to listen, to make eye contact, and
to reflect on their own actions.

Twice a summer, Straight Talk is conducted in an All-to-All format, during which
time youth are given the opportunity to give Straight talk to one another, their ACL,
and their CL. In this way, youth are allowed to speak directly back to the adult staff who
are usually in charge. Even during this format of Straight Talk, the CL and ACL
maintain the silence expected of a listener. An important element of this speaking back
is the way that it pushes youth to publicly show what they have learned about giving
constructive feedback. Having seen their CL and ACL model good Straight Talk, youth
must seek to give honest and well-articulated feedback to their supervisors.

The Summer Youth Program represents the intersection of the three cornerstones
of TFP, which are printed on the back of all worker's t-shirts: Youth, Food, and
Community. Young people are brought together on the land to grow food that is
donated and sold in their communities. The SYP could also be said to represent TFP's
vision: “to create personal and social change through sustainable agriculture.” The three
components of this vision are the same as above: personal growth, for young people
and staff; social change, and impacting the community; and sustainable agriculture, in
terms of growing the food itself. The SYP gives young people an introduction to the
values of TFP while pushing them to grow personally.

After the summer, youth can apply to work during the Academic Year Program
(AYP), also known by the acronym DIRT: Dynamic, Intelligent, Responsible Teenagers.
During DIRT, youth work on Saturday mornings leading volunteers in farm-work,
continue doing social curriculum workshops, and often work after-school on small
projects or do public speaking at events. After the AYP, youth can apply to continue
with TFP through the Intern program. At each step forward, youth are asked to take on
more responsibility, to take on a bigger role in their community, and to work towards changing the food system further.

TFP is not unique in its desire to change the food system, its passion and belief in the power of young people to do so, its commitment to diversity, or in its structure as a youth program. However, I do believe that in its intentional, passionate approach to having all three cornerstones addressed at once, TFP offers a unique example of a program that allows for multiple kinds of growth at once. Youth are not just asked to grow food, they are not just asked to be responsible, they are not just asked to interact with people not like themselves, and they are not treated as passive recipients of education. They are asked to grow food, responsibly, within the context of a diverse community, for the larger community.

Connections

This Division III project focuses on the North Shore site of TFP. At only six years old, the North Shore branch is still small. The web of human relationships that define it contains multiple stories of growth, love, and passion. In interviewing the seven participants for this project, and representing their stories physically on the page, I hope to paint a small picture of what makes TFP-NS the remarkable program that it is.

My connection to the program and participants at TFP-NS was a central motivation for conducting a project that centered on TFP. Choosing to do an ethnographic study meant that I was able to honor the voices and experiences of multiple people, while being conscious of my own position. Ethnography allows, unlike other forms of research, a qualitative form of analysis that comes from what the researcher has heard and seen, rather than from what the researcher wants to have heard and seen. Conducting interviews with participants pushed my own boundaries of knowledge and understanding in relation to both TFP and teenagers in America. From
this place of discomfort, I was able to find new ways of speaking about and looking at TFP as a youth program.

Having worked and been a participant in multiple different educational settings after TFP, I have had the chance to see the ways that programs and schools create settings for youth development. I returned, again and again, both physically and mentally, to TFP as a place that was different from these other contexts. TFP often describes its approach to sustainable agriculture with a phrase: “We give back to the land as much as we take from it.” This was and is an important lesson for me as a young person in America. I must give as much to my community as I take. Having been given so much knowledge, support, and love, I attempt in this project to return all that I have been given. In the following section, I outline the ways that I undertook the ethnographic project, and the guiding theory and data that framed my methods.
Methodology

In that field of possibility we have the opportunity to labor for freedom, to demand of ourselves and our comrades, an openness of mind and heart that allows us to face reality even as we collectively imagine ways to move beyond boundaries, to transgress. - bell hooks

As I set out to conduct an ethnographic study of young people and The Food Project, I had relatively little conception of what product would come out of it. I have worked both as a youth and, later, as an adult staff person at TFP. Thus my position in relation to the organization is that of insider, both as youth and staff, and as outsider, since I am not currently working there. My research comes from having been involved in and being supported by TFP over the last six years of my life. My project is also informed by the time that I have spent outside of TFP, working and learning in other educational settings and other youth programs.

I continue to rely heavily on my insider knowledge in creating, carrying out, and compiling my research. As a person who is 21 years of age and in the process of attaining a four-year Bachelors Degree, I fall in-between the traditional sense of 'youth' and 'adult,' making me both insider and outsider to the people I interviewed. To be both insider and outsider requires constant reflexivity in order to understand where I am entering into this research and what perspectives and assumptions I am bringing with me. Wanda Pillow articulates the importance of conducting research self-reflexively, which acknowledges the researcher’s role in the research process. Through self-reflexivity, a researcher can aim to account “for multiplicity without making it singular” and acknowledge “the unknowable without making it familiar.” While my status as insider in many ways allows me entry into the perspectives of participants, I must constantly remain aware and critical of the multiple ways that I am not able to understand. Meaning is neither fixed, singular, or tangibly captured. It is constantly

Before I begin to explain who the participants were in this project, I present them in their own words. Each participant was asked to write an introduction of themselves. In this way, I allow them to represent themselves. After each person’s self-written introduction is a small paragraph in which I attempt to capture who they are.
Participants

I. “Steven”

“Steven” is a young white man currently living in a small suburban town. His mother, who is legally blind, works as a teacher. His father passed away when Steven was in middle-school. Steven has one brother who is older, who has extreme substance abuse issues. Steven has graduated from high school and is currently enrolled in several community college courses. He works for a construction company. Steven’s tattooed arms do not disguise his extreme optimism—two of them read: “Life is a privilege”; “Death is a promise.” He follows his own philosophy, living his life both fully and joyfully, and brings laughter with him wherever he goes. Steven began working as a Crew Worker at TFP in the summer of 2008.
II. “Frank”

“Frank” is the current Intern Program Supervisor for TFP. He is Asian-American and grew up in Illinois, first with his parents and later living with his sisters when his family suffered a financial crisis. An intensely passionate worker for TFP, Frank has revitalized the Intern Program through his own vision and has helped shape the North Shore program. He is an excellent chef, and his love of food is only rivaled by his love for social change and the potential of youth. Many young people describe him as central to their experience at TFP. Frank began working as a Site Supervisor at TFP in the summer of 2005.
“Nadia” is currently the Assistant Crew Leader for the AYP, and a senior in high school. She is Argentinian, and moved from several different places before settling in Lynn, MA. She lives with her aunt, as her mother lives in Argentina. Recently she accepted a four-year scholarship to a prestigious liberal arts college. Her work ethic is incredible: she works a part-time job at a coffee shop, works part-time at TFP, and attends school full-time, where she excels. She is often smiling or laughing, and maintains deep relationships with the people around her. Her energy and enthusiasm are markers of her power to transform a space from dark to light, and it is this that carries her forward. Nadia began at TFP as a Crew Worker in the summer of 2010.
IV. “Lana”

I’m currently a junior at University of Massachusetts, Amherst, studying Public Health while on the PreMed track. I grew up in a small town near Boston, and lived in US all my life though my parents had moved here from Iran. I have traveled to various countries and enjoyed experiencing different cultures, and I still love trying new things, though I’ve picked up some hobbies along the way- I used to play in a few orchestras and different ensembles in high school and now I still play my flute on my free time between my studying. I’m not on a track or cross-country team anymore, but the gym is one of my favorite places to be, not just for the track but for zumba and kickboxing classes and the weight-lifting machines. I’m not able to squeeze in any more Spanish or other language courses in my schedule but I’m still determined to improve the languages I’ve come so far with- including practicing my Farsi with relatives and family friends. I have a passion for health and taking care of others, and since my older brother, Amar, had passed away during my freshman year of high school due to his depression, I have an increased interest in doing what I can to stay healthy and encouraging others to do the same. I’ve had some ups and downs in life myself: my parents affected me both before and after their divorce, my hearing impairment makes communication difficult in some ways, and I lost my only sibling that I had been closer to than anyone else. I’ve been able to find my strengths through the wonderful experiences and goals I’ve made, such as my desire to make it to medical school, to be a physician, to run another half marathon and eventually a full marathon, to continue the strong relationship I have with my boyfriend, and more. One of the inspiring experiences I’ve had soon after Amar passed away was my time with The Food Project, where I began to find my inner voice. I hope to always be a part of the TFP family and to see people grow together in a community like that.

“Lana” is a young woman from an Iranian family who currently lives and attends college at the University of Massachusetts in Amherst. Her quiet but vibrant personality shows in her positive outlook on life and in her constant smile. Lana's education is connected to her deep sense of working for the community and supporting the people around her. Lana’s enthusiasm for life and for new experiences is one of her finest qualities. Whenever there is a task to be done, Lana is willing to take it on. Her difficulty with hearing loss stands in contrast to her wonderful ability to listen to other people, and although she is often quiet, her laughter is loud.
V. Katelynn

I grew up in the same house, in Beverly, Massachusetts until I left home when I was 18. This house is around the corner from where my grandmother, my mom’s mom, lives, and where my mom grew up. My dad grew up two towns over, in Peabody. I think that one of the most defining aspects of who I am, is my connection to where I grew up. I have an incredibly strong sense of place, for not only the town I grew up in, but for the geographically small region north of Boston that constitutes the North Shore and Cape Ann. I grew up spending every weekday of the summer at beaches in Beverly, Gloucester and Ipswich (my mom is and was a public school teacher and had summers off). On weekends, both my parents and my two siblings and I would spend our time at the beach in Rockport. My dad would free dive for lobsters, my older brother would dive as well and my sister and mom would sunbathe. Me, being the youngest, was equipped with a milk jug that my dad adapted to serve as a tool to gather mussels and periwinkles. Everything that was gathered was taken home, cleaned, cooked and eaten by my family. One of the clearest memories of my childhood is that in the summer, there was always a bowl of cooked lobster in our fridge. In the fall and winter, I explored the woods behind my house, went ice fishing with my dad and brother, and as a teenager, drove with my friends all over the North Shore. We explored all the beaches, coves, rock cliffs, climbing areas, trails, and other nooks and crannies of conservation land, reservoirs, quarries, and special places. We knew the best farm stands, where to find bleached sand dollars and shells to make jewelry with, and where the sunset could best be viewed. We also knew where you could camp and have bonfires without being bothered. In my later teens and early to mid twenties, I became an avid runner, surfer and rock climber. These activities have furthered not only my knowledge of the outdoor environment in this region, but also the way I view and value our natural resources and my access to them.

When I was 18 I moved to Australia, and from there attended school in New Hampshire, Wyoming, California and Montana. Aside from a stint in Seattle, I always came home for the summer. As an adult, I moved back home, now to Cape Ann, in 2009 and have been here since. I work for a non-profit called The Food Project—a place and an organization that has served to connect me in a different way to the area I grew up in. I work with teenagers from all over the North Shore, and farm on land in Lynn, Beverly, Ipswich and Gloucester. The Food Project has allowed me to view my home from yet another perspective, and to feel an intimate closeness to this place and the people that live here. There is a lot to what makes me who I am, but my foundation and much of my happiness comes from my connection to my home.

“Katelynn” is the current Youth Program Supervisor for the North Shore. A young white woman with striking blonde hair, she is gregarious, remarkably insightful, and powerful. Her sense of connection both to the North Shore and to nature allow her to support the young people with whom she works to connect to the land and community. Her ability to provide sound advice and support is amazing, and is representative of the passion with which she approaches her daily work. Katelynn began working at TFP as a Crew Leader during the summer of 2008.
VI. “Lianne”

Lianne is a 41 year old woman, born and raised on the East Coast of the U.S., spending significant amounts of her growing up years in Washington, D.C., New Jersey, and Maine. Immediately upon graduation from college in 1993, she settled in Greater Boston, with the desire to do “edgy” community work. This passion for “edginess” began for Lianne when she herself was 14 years old. Rather than go on an expensive far-away trip like most others from her privileged high school, Lianne chose to spend a week working with a friend in a women's day shelter in the most dangerous part of Washington, D.C. This early experience dramatically changed her outlook about the world, amplified the limits of her own middle-class life, and encouraged her to become an agent of change.

From this time as an early adolescent, Lianne continued on a trajectory of volunteering and working in places where social change was happening. These collected experiences continued through high school and college, and shaped her adult career. Prior to founding The Food Project’s North Shore Regional Site in 2003, Lianne worked for 10 years in Boston non-profit organizations as: a crisis counselor at a domestic violence safe house, a patient advocate at a major teaching hospital, a mentor in a hospital-based domestic violence intervention program, an educator in sexual assault prevention and intervention programs, a research assistant, a nutrition program manager, and a food policy director. Along the way, she earned a Masters of Science in Public Health from the Harvard School of Public Health, with a focus on non-profit management, program evaluation, research methods, and social determinants of health.

From 1999 until the present, Lianne has developed a passion for and expertise about food insecurity, the range of USDA federal nutrition programs (such as WIC, SNAP, School Lunch, and School Breakfast), and food systems. All along the way, she has continued to believe that young people are uniquely apt change agents, and often bring solutions to a problem that adults cannot figure out for themselves. Founding and directing The Food Project North Shore was an ideal way to combine passions while making a difference in the community where she lives.

“Lianne” is a middle-aged white woman who founded TFP-NS, but is no longer working for the program. Her energy and passion for working for social change is evident both in her words and actions. Her knack for pushing those around her towards positive growth is powerful, and she is particularly effective at sharing her own stories in order to help others see their own potential for change. Lianne’s vibrant personality shines through both her wide smile and loud laugh, and her dedication to her community is both steadfast and strong. She began working with TFP prior to the NS site being founded in 2003.
“Dave” is a young African-American man who is not currently employed at TFP. He currently lives with several roommates in a small apartment in Dorchester, MA. He works at a coffee shop, and is working to be enrolled at a community college. He is a passionate musical artist who writes and sings in a beautiful tenor. He graduated from a public high school in a wealthy suburb, while living with an adoptive mother who supported him through his teenage years. Dave has sharp wit and is quick to bring laughter, and loves joking around almost as much as he loves football. Dave began at TFP as a Crew Worker in the summer of 2007.

—Lao Tzu
Dave and I splash dishes noisily in the wash station of My Brother’s Table, a soup kitchen sponsored by The Food Project. I watch the patrons of the soup kitchen eat dinner. They’re greedy but grateful, asking for seconds and thirds but saying thank you each time. A regular, Mary, hands her tray through the service window to me and, ignoring the waist high wall between us, starts talking to me. “Those girls, they took my cigarettes and it ain’t funny ‘cause my husband just passed on the seventh and it’s only been a week and those stogies was all I had left,” and with a few teary blinks of her eyes, she recovers from her sudden confession and asks, “So do you have a cigarette, sweetheart?” I shake my head no and wonder if there’s anything to say.

As she walks away, Dave looks at me from his place at the economy dishwasher, “Wow, dude, that sucks. That lady don’t deserve nothin’ like that.” He’s right; she doesn’t deserve to be left with nothing, with no one, with a life to carry around on her back. No one deserves that.

[...]

I think of Maria now, as I see Mary holding back tears and walking dejectedly towards the exit. Before Maria and Dave, before The Food Project, I had some misconceived notion that being angry was enough, that being rebellious made a difference. Now I know that to hold Maria in silence is different than living alone in silence, that talking about true love with Dave is better than falling in love with anger. I know why Mary reaches out to me—because she misses having someone to hold.

I am eternally grateful to The Food Project for changing me, and for letting me change my community while teaching others what sustainability really means. Now, I find myself greedy to have one more hand to hold, one more crop to grow, one more chance to find a future.

A senior at a liberal arts college, Casey is a young white woman from a small town. She grew up with a father who is a carpenter and a mother who is a teacher. From them, she learned both the value of working with one’s hands and the power of working with words. She has one brother, who taught her to love sports. Casey desires to create spaces for young people that transgress traditional educational settings, and it is this passion that drives her forward on her own path towards being a better person working and learning in the world. She likes poetry as a way of playing with words, running as a way of going through the world, and swimming in the ocean. Casey began at TFP as a Crew Worker during the summer of 2005.

27 My self-description is excerpted from my college essay, which I wrote at age 17. In this way, I represent myself both as the teenager as I was and as the person that I am.
Grounded Theory

In order to study TFP, I chose to do interviews with both youth and adult staff who either have worked or are working at the organization. I interviewed four youth participants, three adult staff members, and included my own voice in all of the interviews. Youth perspectives offer a way of understanding how a program affects the people it is supposed to be affecting. The four youth, and myself, spoke to the ways that working at TFP shaped their teenage years. The perspectives and stories that staff were able to share provided a deeper understanding of the multiple layers of experience that exist at TFP. Staff also spoke to the ways they see the structure working to foster youth development, and the structure of the organization as a whole. These structural elements were addressed more clearly by staff, although they were also present in the youth’s stories.

I have worked alongside all of the people interviewed, interacting with each person during the course of at least two summers. I chose the seven participants based on my personal relationships with them, the fact that they were easy to find and meet with, and because they were all amenable to being a part of this research project.

TFP is deeply committed to diversity, and I sought to represent this within my project, even with a limited sample size. This both allowed for a fairer cross-cultural sampling of participants, since this research project is so small, and served as a more accurate portrayal of the program itself. Diversity across race, ethnicity, age, gender, sexuality, and religion is represented in the group of youth and staff whom I interviewed. However, a major limitation of this project was that I was unable to interview many people, and that I was interviewing solely people who were close to me and easily accessible for interviewing.

The five youth participants (including myself) in this project are over the age of 18. In legal terms, this makes them 'adult.' They are able to vote, be drafted for service in
the army, and act as independent citizens. I do not accept this structural cut-off point. As the youth that I have interviewed (beside myself) have not held staff positions at TFP, they still qualify as youth participants. However, I acknowledge that in being unable to interview anyone under the age of 18, I excluded youth participants who are currently in entry-level roles at TFP. This is a serious gap in this project.

As the people I interviewed are close to my heart, it was difficult to put their words on paper and to analyze those words. A major issue has been following my college's Institutional Review Board policy of keeping the identities of participants anonymous. They are real, breathing people. However, in aiming to share the conclusions of this work publicly, it is important to keep the participants anonymous. My responsibility to these seven people weighs heavily on me. Using Kathy Charmaz's grounded theory, I seek to draw out “an interpretive portrayal of the studied world,” which made it necessary to make a break from my personal relationships in order to learn from the stories. Further, in constructing an interpretive portrayal, I keep participants anonymous in order to focus on the broader conclusions that come out of the research.

Grounded theory, which asks the researcher to remain grounded in the actual research and voices of the participants, was extremely useful in conducting my project. Charmaz describes the way that grounded theory allows the researcher to piece “together a theoretical narrative that has explanatory and predictive power.” While the participants themselves have talked from their own perspectives, it is my duty as researcher to pull from their narratives the threads that will weave one possible integrative description of TFP. This pulling together is subjective to my own working through the interviews. Grounded theory allows my position as researcher to be clear in relation to the analysis that I am presenting. The anonymity of my participants allows

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me to pull together these threads without threatening the personal identities of the people who have shared their stories. All participants agreed to being kept anonymous.

Grounded theory serves as an important research framework in my project because it allows for reflexivity. Wanda Pillow describes the importance of situating “practices of reflexivity as critical to exposing the difficult and often uncomfortable task of leaving what is unfamiliar, unfamiliar.”29 By looking back at what I had asked each person to answer and how I had responded, I pushed myself to expose what knowledge I did not have access to. I asked: How did I respond to them? What were they saying to me? How had I listened? Did I need to ask different questions? This process prompted shifts in my research strategies. Rather than assuming that I could know already what my conclusions would be, I pushed back against my own research strategies, trying to listen for what needed to change. Further, I placed myself in a more uncomfortable position, pushing back against my own assumptions about who the participants in my project were.

An important moment that illustrates this methodology at work in my practice happened after my second interview, which I conducted with Steven, a former youth who is a particularly close friend of mine. As I drove away from the interview, which had been deeply personal, I felt depressed and frustrated. I asked myself, “How can I possibly put Steven’s stories on paper? How can I change his name when these stories and words are so distinctly his?” I thought for a long time and came up with a major change to my research practice. First, I decided to personally answer the questions of the interview during the interview, which created a conversation between myself and the participant, rather than a traditional interviewer-interviewee dynamic. The first two interviews that I had done followed this traditional set-up, based on my misguided understanding of how an interview should be. Just this shift alone marked an important

29 Pillow, Wanda. “Confession, catharsis, or cure?” 177.
step forward for me in being able to conduct my research in a more attentive, relational way.

The second change that I made to my research process dealt with my frustration in seeking to represent someone else, particularly in their expression of their identity and perspectives. I decided to offer participants the chance to represent themselves in two ways. The first was to have them make hand-prints in black paint on a plain piece of paper. Hand-prints are uniquely individual, and represent both the identity of the person to whom they belong and in a metaphorical sense, the work that that person has done. TFP asks all participants in its programs to work with their hands. I also invited participants to write an introduction to themselves, in whatever way they felt most comfortable. In this way, their identities are represented by their own voice and decisions around representation. These methodological decisions meant that I physically went back, found Steven, and asked him to do these two things for the project. Grounded theory asks the researcher to consistently be aware of their actions, ask questions, and return to the process of research in order to be more careful and holistic.

**Research Process**

The research questions that I asked in each interview varied, both based on my

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Where do you live? Where did you grow up?</td>
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<tr>
<td>What were the places like where you lived/are currently living?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talk about your jobs at The Food Project.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What was a challenging moment for you as a teenager?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What was a moment you were proud as a teenager?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tell one (or more) stories that stick with you, from TFP.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using a target/non-target framework, talk about a privilege and limitation of two of your identities (e.g. gender: target=female; non-target=male).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What was/is your high school like?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who was/is a positive adult figure for you?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talk about one stereotype of teenagers and how you would like it changed.</td>
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</table>

response to what the participant was saying, and because I was seeking to have a
conversation with each participant. The questions that I originally drafted and drew from are represented above. I asked the final question to all participants as a way of being able to present a variation of voices on a single topic. In my interviews with staff, I also added in questions about their view of TFP:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Where do you see TFP fitting into the community?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What has kept you at TFP?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What, to you, is the story of TFP?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*For Lianne only: What is the origin story of TFP?</td>
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Adding these questions was prompted by my interviews with participants. A shift that was enormously important in formulating my project occurred when Frank described TFP as a “story-telling” organization. The idea that TFP is a place that contains and transmits an oral culture is extremely important in an ethnographic project. To tell the story of TFP-NS in a voice-centered way has become one of the central focuses of this project. While this instinct may have been with me from the beginning, it was important that the shift came as a result of my interview with Frank.

The oral culture of TFP means that the stories that participants told are layered with meaning. In analyzing these stories, it was important to me to be able to find the multiple ways they were speaking to and about TFP’s structure and work. For example, Steven speaks to this during the Possibility section of Chapter 3, describing the experience of giving a speech at the end of the summer. In the passage, he uses language taught by TFP to describe his experience, like how it “broke down a lotta … stereotypes.” This layering of the words from TFP’s curriculum, like “stereotypes,” into his way of describing a story implies the interwoven oral culture present at the organization.

It was important for me to find a framework with which to approach listening, reading, and representing the stories of participants. The “story-telling” nature of TFP
made it crucial to be able to analyze the stories of participants with great care. Simply laying out pages and pages of interview transcript, while a direct physical representation of the person’s words, is not enough. Transcription itself is an act of translation: in it one loses the physical movements of the speaker, their inflections and accented words, and the flow of their speech. Thus, I focus on an analysis of the spoken word in an attempt to get at the multiple layers expressed within each story. This analysis is key in formulating the “theoretical narrative” through grounded theory.

The scope of my project, because it is small, made it impossible for me to conduct follow-up interviews. Follow-up interviews are an important way that grounded theorists are able to narrow their research scope in order to gain a depth of insight into the narratives they have previously listened to. For example, I could have gone back to each youth participant and asked more specifically about their definitions of ‘success’ and ‘failure,’ which are terms that came up in the interviews often. Re-interviewing with a focus on these ideas could deepen my analysis of these terms in my project. However, in keeping my research project scope limited, I push instead to formulate meaning from the primary interviews that I was able to conduct.

In order to read deeply, I relied on the “Listening Guide,” created by Carol Gilligan et al. in order to “systematically [attend] to the many voices embedded in a person’s expressed experience.”\textsuperscript{30} This systematic attending is important in my project both because it allows for insight and because it forces myself as researcher to conscientiously listen and analyze the interviews. The Listening Guide also emphasizes the concept of “expressed experience” over the more simplistic idea of being able to understand “experience” as directly represented by someone’s telling of a story. This project takes as a foundational assumption that while participants (including myself)

may be directly relating a story of something that happened, they are also expressing their identities and beliefs through the way that they tell the story.

The expression of experience carries multiple layers of meaning, including the reasons for expressing one's identity in a certain way. Donal Carbaugh argues that “by explicating the communication of social selves, we can develop a way of thinking about identity that is not grounded solely in human biology or psychology, but also in particular social scenes of symbolic activity.”31 By looking for the ways that participants are expressing their identities in multi-layered ways, I am able to capture the social context in which participants are expressing their identities. A youth program functions as a complex web of human relationships, and being able to notice and analyze the described “social scenes of symbolic activity” embedded in the youth program allows for new understandings of the way the social context works in relation to participants' identities. Listening for the “expressed experience”32 of participants allows for a way of “explicating the communication” of a social self, giving a more in-depth understanding of what the participant is talking about.

In the Listening Guide, a framework for re-reading interviews is outlined. The authors ask a researcher to go through multiple “re-listenings” in order to get at “the collectivity of different voices that compose the voice of any given person” and “the myriad ways in which human society and history shape the voice and thus leave their imprints on the human soul.”33 The ways that individuals express their identities within a societal context are “myriad” and “shape the voice.” Listening for these different voices creates a dialogue with the interviews that allows for outsider understanding of the way that a certain person is expressing their experience. Secondly, listening for the researcher's voice within the interviews allows for an analysis of the way that

interaction within the interview shapes the ways participants tell stories and what voices they express more clearly or more subtly.

In the following passage, I present an example of how I analyzed the transcripts using techniques outlined in The Listening Guide, using an extremely small segment of speech from the same section as mentioned above:

STEVEN: I mean, I'd say that first time I ever gave a speech—that was like, pretty great. Like, I was just like—afterwards, seeing people's reactions just made me feel so good.

To begin, I re-listen for I-Statements and highlight these in the text and then write them out as an I-Poem. This method is directly described in the Listening Guide.34

STEVEN: I mean, I'd say that first time I ever gave a speech—that was like, pretty great. Like, I was just like—afterwards, seeing people's reactions just made me feel so good.

Steven's I-Poem:
I mean,
I'd say
I ever gave
I was just

By looking at the I-Statements in this short passage, I think about how Steven is expressing his identity. How is he speaking? Is his voice passive or more active? Is he speaking to thoughts, emotions, or questions? In this passage, I identify that Steven is seeking to express something that is slightly intangible. Each I-Statement is tentative: “I mean,” “I’d,” “I was just.” Thus, I decide to re-read the passage for two voices that Steven is expressing: tentative expression versus absolute expression. I go through the passage once more, highlighting these voices:

STEVEN: I mean, I’d say that first time I ever gave a speech—that was like, pretty great. Like, I was just like—afterwards, seeing people's reactions just made me feel so good.

By reading for these two voices, it becomes clear that while Steven is tentatively expressing the description itself, he knows that he felt “so good” and that giving the speech was “pretty great.” From this, I would continue the analysis, seeking to understand why Steven might be speaking in these two voices. I might track these

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voices in other sections of his speech. What made this section different than other things Steven talked about? By using the Listening Guide's methods, an extremely careful analysis of text is possible, especially in terms of reading closely for different currents of meaning within what the person is saying.

As a project that focuses on adolescents, this research implicitly engages liminality. The young people who speak about their lives are caught within multiple splits that are generally reinforced by society: being young vs. being old, succeeding vs. failing, being perceived as responsible vs. being perceived as reckless. These splits exist because of society, and it is within a societal context that young people make decisions and express their identities. The Listening Guide allows for multiple readings of texts in order to get at the multiple voices that each participant expresses, and captures more easily the layers of experience that make up adolescence. Lastly, because this project focuses on one organization but has many participants, The Listening Guide offers a more nuanced reading of the ways that TFP is talked about.

In representing the identities of the participants in this study, I rely heavily on Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot’s articulation of “portraiture” as a way of “accurately” representing both people and places within a research project. She describes her own portrait writing:

The portraits I have written move from the inside out, search out unspoken (often unrecognized) institutional and interpersonal conflicts, listen for minority voices and deviant views, and seek to capture the essences, rather than the visible symbols, of...life.35

With a similar emphasis on representing the “essences” of the experiences described by participants, Lawrence-Lightfoot is echoing the ways that both grounded theory and the Listening Guide seek to overturn traditional research methods. Rather than look for “visible symbols” or move from the outside in, researchers should “search out unspoken...conflicts” and “listen for minority voices and deviant views.”}

intentionally for multiple meanings allows for a more significant understanding of both
the people and place that one is entering into. Further, in allowing for an acknowledged
subjective representation of both participants and place, Lawrence-Lightfoot’s
methodology allows for the creation of an essential “portrait” that carries more weight
than a more superficial analysis.

As I work to listen, capture, and represent the multi-layered experiences of
participants at TFP, while pulling together an integrative analysis of the program, I seek
to paint a portrait that captures identities, both expressed and subtle. I look for the ways
that participants describe TFP working, and the ways that participants express conflict
with the program and with each other. In pushing back against my own research
methods, I move towards an understanding of this youth program that holds larger
implications for how to study youth programs, how to understand their structures, and
most importantly, how to listen to the people who work within those organizations and
how their experiences can provide fruitful ground for new possibilities. Through
understanding both TFP and its societal context through the voices of these participants,
I present a crucial transgression of dominant views of who young people are and what
educational settings are positive for them.

This project falls into an in-between space. It is neither pure, removed research
nor emotive story-telling. In this liminality is the potential for deep understanding of
both ourselves and other people. bell hooks describes that “the moment we are willing
to give up our own ego and draw in the being and presence of someone else, we’re no
longer ‘Other-ing’ them, because we are saying there’s no space they inhabit that cannot
be a space we can connect with.”36 This project draws in the beings and presences of
multiple people, including myself. I invite the reader to inhabit this space with us, to
live, momentarily, in the midst of the vibrant world of TFP and the people who already

exist within it. By connecting, together, we cross boundaries that are often upheld in more traditional research projects. I have pushed myself to listen, to be uncomfortable, and to work towards new understandings. I ask the same of the reader, so that we can continue finding new spaces in which to connect, to learn, and to grow, together.
Analysis

In the analysis of participant’s interviews, four themes came to light: Relationships, Place, Possibility, and Power. I originally had determined categories based upon my own assumptions of what might be important to the people whom I interviewed. However, through the process of close reading and analysis, I realized that I was forcing categories that were not represented in the research itself. Thus, I began reorganizing based on what shone through from the voices of the participants themselves. These four themes are explored in this chapter through the voices of the participants.

All four of these themes are addressed within the structure of TFP, and so it is no surprise that they are closely linked with programmatic elements of TFP. Relationships are direct results of the careful attention that TFP pays to interpersonal interaction, both during field work and during workshops. These relationships deepen as time goes on, and are represented by TFP’s community work. Thus, the participants who spoke to the power of relationships are speaking both to the effects of TFP’s programs and to their own experiences.

TFP centers its program around farm land. This is a sharp contrast to most educational settings, which take place within four walls. The physical journey that program participants take to reach the farm can be related to the mental activity of entering and being a part of a different kind of space. The section of this chapter that focuses on place emphasizes the different places that participants come from, and the ways they were and are affected by the physical and mental space of TFP's programs.

Rather than use the word 'potential' to describe the ability of a youth to succeed within the American system, the section that focuses on 'possibility' is aimed to point out the difference between 'potential' and 'success.' In other words, participants spoke to
the possibilities given them, and the possibilities that they see for themselves. Potential, on the other hand, is often presented as something inherent within an individual, not something that a person can gain for themselves. TFP’s structure, which emphasizes upward mobility, allows young people to re-imagine their own possible futures.

The last section of this chapter addresses power. Power is often constructed as only held by dominant forces and people with privilege. This section, therefore, seeks to examine, through the participant’s stories, the way that power dynamics are reinforced in individual lives, as well as how people are able to find and hold onto their own sense of power. The use of the word ‘power’ instead of the proverbial ‘empowerment’ is important because it transgresses the idea of ‘empowering’ youth. Rather, youth are allowed to claim the same power as adults. Finally, this section reminds us all of just how constricting dominant structures can be. TFP does not exist outside of a societal context.

**Relationships**

Relationships are a foundational part of The Food Project’s philosophy, and have a large role in both the structure and results of its programs. A relationship is a connection between two or more objects, ideas, or people. At TFP, the importance of interpersonal relationships is given particular emphasis, and it is these relationships that are the focus of this section. People’s relationship to the land is also a major part of TFP’s philosophy, and will be discussed further in the section on Place. Participants in this project spoke powerfully about the meaning of the relationships with other people that they had and have as a result of TFP. This section addresses the meaning of those relationships over time, and in particular the ways that they play into the effectiveness of TFP’s youth programs.

TFP’s deep intentionality around diversity gives an added weight to the power of
relationships within its programs. People who work at TFP are all asked to meet, talk to, and work with many people from varying backgrounds. This contrasts with the diversity that is not often found and is rarely intentional in American society. Diversity in this sense means bringing together people with different ethnicities, ages, genders, sexualities, religions, and abilities. It encompasses all facets of one's identity that are integral to a self-identity within society.

America is a shockingly segregated society, with borders drawn especially around white communities. Schools, where young people spend a majority of their time, are one of the places in which this segregation is most pronounced. Jonathan Kozol points out that American schools “that were already deeply segregated twenty-five or thirty years ago are no less segregated now, while thousands of other schools around the country... have since been rapidly resegregating.” The persistence of segregation, both in schools and in communities, is particularly strong in urban areas, and holds painful implications for the way our country is currently operating to educate its youth. The detrimental effects of this separation contributes to a vicious cycle of dispossession. TFP comes into this picture as a place where people from extremely different places, cultural backgrounds, and experiences are brought together. This intentional crossing of borders takes careful practice and a constant conversation about what it means to be doing the crossing.

When I met Dave in 2007, it was soon clear that we would become friends—we talked and laughed together with great ease. From vastly different families and backgrounds, we were an unlikely pair. Dave, from a single-parent adoptive mother

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39 I use this term to mean “the soft coercive migration of youth of color, especially poor youth of color, out of sites of public education and into militarized and carceral corners of the public sphere,” outlined by Jessica Fine and Michelle Ruglis.
who took him in post-foster care, has deep connections to his Jamaican roots and the
city of Boston. I come from a two-parent home and a working-class town with the white
skin of an assimilated American. As a senior in high school, I would often pick Dave up
in the morning and drop him off at the predominantly white high school he attended in
Arlington, MA as part of the METCO program. I was on my way to the private Jewish
high school I attended in a neighboring town, where though I felt frustrated around
issues of lack of diversity, I was implicitly receiving the privilege that was wrapped up
in someone else’s being denied that privilege. I would never have had to seek out
something like the METCO program in order to go to a “good” high school.

The METCO program “is a grant program” funded by the state “to expand
educational opportunities, increase diversity, and reduce racial isolation, by permitting
students in certain cities to attend public schools in other communities that have agreed
to participate.” This mission statement is a prime example of one way school
segregation functions. Several central beliefs are embedded in the phrases: “to reduce
racial isolation,” “permitting students,” “certain cities” vs. “other communities,” and
must have “agreed to participate.” If the METCO program was truly going to “reduce
racial isolation,” it would send white and privileged students to the inner-city schools.
The idea of “permitting students” implies that it is not their right to attend a well-
funded school. The use of the phrase “cities” to describe the less advantaged areas from
which a student is coming contrasts sharply with the positive connotations of the use of
the word “communities” to describe the places in which they will enter. Lastly, the idea
that these “communities” must agree “to participate” implies that it is not all of our
responsibilities to work towards expanding educational opportunities and increase
diversity.

A wealthy suburb, Arlington’s median household income for 2006-2010 was $82,711, almost $20,000
above the state average. Census information last accessed on 2/13/2012 at

Last accessed on 2/11/2012 at http://www.doe.mass.edu/metco/.
Driving Dave to Arlington High School was a strange experience. He would describe to me mainly spending time with the other METCO students,\(^{42}\) and was often doing poorly in many of his classes. However, he did have a very positive experience playing football. After dropping him off at the sprawling brick building, I would drive to my expensive private high school, with an almost all-white student body. The contrast in our educations is a testament to the inequality prevalent in America, particularly around schools. My cultural privilege both allowed me entry into a private high school and gave me an easier path towards achieving a college degree. Driving Dave to AHS reminded me that even though we were close, our futures would be different. For both Dave and myself, working at TFP gave us new ways to talk about identity and the way we could relate to the people and world around us.

Being able to talk about identity and relationships is a formative part of working at TFP. In the following passage, Dave and I discuss one workshop that facilitates discussion about identity and the social world. The workshop is called Crossing the Line. TFP youth participate in the workshop during the Academic Year Program during a retreat. Retreats are weekends spent as a group sleeping away at locations such as The Heifer Project or The Farm School.\(^{43}\) During this workshop, all participants, including staff, stand shoulder to shoulder with a long rope in front of them on the floor. Statements are read by a neutral staff facilitator. For each statement, participants can choose to cross the line in agreement or stay standing on the original side, in disagreement. Once a participant crosses the line, they turn, face those on the opposite side, and then step back. Participants remain silent for the entirety of the exercise.

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\(^{42}\) Describing the way that METCO students act and are treated at Brookline High School, another wealthy suburban high school very close to Boston, Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot points out that “most people agree that more than any other identifiable group [in the school], the METCO students do not take full advantage of the environment, neither are they treated with the same level of respect by their peers and teachers.” In *The Good High School*. New York: Basic Books, Inc. 1983. 191.

\(^{43}\) Both The Heifer Project and The Farm School are non-profit organizations that deal with sustainable agriculture and changing the food system. The Food Project partners with sites like these as opportunities for youth to see different farms and to learn in new spaces.
statements range from “Cross the line if you are male” to “Cross the line if you enjoy math and science” to “Cross the line if someone close to you has died” and “Cross the line if you have ever tried drugs.” The statements can be extremely personal, and the after-effect is powerful. It is an important exercise in thinking about one’s own identity, and the way that one relates to the other people in the room. Dave and I discuss the ways that Crossing the Line affected us:

CASEY: Because if we all went through something crazy, then we can like, be here together—you know what I mean? Like work to do good things rather than like feel so like caught up in your own mental experiences of things that have happened to you or whatever. You know what I mean?
DAVE: Hmm. Yeah. Just piggy-backing off Crossing the Line, I think um, it also allowed me to feel more comfortable addressing... it helped me feel more comfortable in terms of just being completely up front with just like, who I am. And not just like—
CASEY: Yeah, yeah.
DAVE: In a working environment but just like, I use that as like in society in general, in like—
CASEY: Right, the things that make up what your identity is.

At the beginning of this passage, I am explaining what I think is powerful about Crossing the Line. That “we can like, be here together,” that the workshop gives the group a common ground to stand on, rather than being “so like caught up in your own mental experiences.” Dave’s comment, drawing on mine, describes his sense of feeling more able to be “who I am.” His idea of it being useful in “society in general” is important because it brings together all the layers of identity: the personal, the social, and the institutional and societal. Crossing the Line, in addressing personal experience as a group, allows for the group of diverse participants to feel both related to one another and to be able to hold a heightened awareness of the ways society works around us—and to allow us to be “completely up front” with who we are, in the supportive environment of the workshop.

Later in the interview, Dave and I discuss our identities. A section of this conversation illuminates further the ways that we are able to talk about who we are. I attribute part of this way of talking to TFP, as a part of the oral culture transmitted
through both the relationships at TFP and the curriculum. I include both of our
descriptions of our “target” identities as these are fruitful for the way we both talk
about ways we are perceived in society that are typically framed as being
disadvantaged. In this exercise, we are trying to articulate a privilege and a limitation of
the identity. I have excerpted only a small portion of the conversation. We use very
different language to describe our target identities:

CASEY: So my target identity, I will say, I guess because I haven’t talked about this one
before that um, I grew up working-class, like definitely did not have very much.

DAVE: Alright, so... target group that I’m gonna talk about is the target group of race.
And I fall into the target group because I’m African-American.

The workshop that I drew the question from is a Diversity Workshop\(^{44}\) that asks
participants to figure out what their target and non-target identities are and then speak
to a privilege and limitation of one of each. Dave had been a Diversity Intern, meaning
that alongside other youth in the same position, he has run this workshop for groups of
youth and adults before. Partly as a result of this prior knowledge, Dave speaks with
more confidence in framing his statement than I do: “Target group that I’m gonna talk
about is the target group of race. And I fall into the target group because I’m African-
American.” This way of speaking is directly fostered by TFP’s curriculum. Note that in
Dave’s language he is not framing it as “I am African-American and so I am a target;”
he has reversed the order in a powerful way. TFP creates a structure for people to
discuss identity in a way that does not dive instantly into positives and negatives, but
allows for a re-framing of issues, like that of racial inequality.

This allows people to speak with agency about not only limitations, but the
privileges of identities that are traditionally seen as forcing one into a disadvantaged
position. Dave speaks to this powerfully, as well, when he describes: “I like the
challenge so to speak of being able to be like, just my own person but also to be like,

\(^{44}\) Diversity Workshops are designed to foster conversation about identity, diversity, and the societal
context in which we exist.
that’s not a typical black person.” Relating back to the way Dave described the impact of Crossing the Line, he again emphasizes the personal importance of being able to be his “own person,” although this time, he juxtaposes it with the idea of not being “a typical black person.” For Dave, the idea of belonging to a target identity is intricately linked to the “challenge” of surpassing the societal expectations of people who fall into that group.

A second layer of meaning that these narratives show is that of what we see as being “positive” about our identities. My focus is on the idea of “work.” I use the word “ethic” to describe the way I think about working, which implies a core belief, rather than a passing thought or reflection.

CASEY: A privilege that I think it’s provided me is that I really understand the value of— in terms of I don’t even wanna say that it should be a value to have money but I understand the value of what it means to have the education I have or like that I work very hard like outside of school particularly to like, earn money so that I can pay for myself to do things. And that also— right, so for example I would never have done The Food Project if I didn’t have that ethic of “I need to have a job because my parents already have jobs and work.”

I use the phrase “having” to explain my privileges (particularly materially), and use this word to describe my education, as well. This linking of the “value” of money versus the “value” of education as being things that one has is important to understanding the way I construct an identity around “work.” My language is particularly determinative: “I really”; “I work very hard”; “I need to have a job.” In my narrative of growing up working-class is an ethical belief about what it means to “have,” and how much I have to “work” to get to have things, including education. An important aspect of this narrative is the lack of talk about the ways a financial disadvantage affect me in negative ways currently. In the way I talk about it, it is a problem in the past, even thought it is still a primary concern in my life.

Dave’s identity, again, is different than mine. He discusses the fact that he falls into the target group of race. In his emphasis on the positive, he describes the
“community” that being African-American gives him.

DAVE: I think there's a great culture. I think there's a very big community culture in African-American—I know just living in a African-American community, I know that there's certain areas, certain neighborhoods where I feel like if you didn't have food you could go and there're people that would feed you. I know people that like, I'm really close with that have like, just say to me, like you know, “if there was every anything...” And I feel like just because I'm Black, sometimes I feel like, um, also, I think, um [pause] I like the challenge, so to speak of being able to be like, just my own person but also to be like, that's not a typical Black person. You know what I mean?

His description of certain areas “where I feel like if you didn't have food you could go and there're people that would feed you.” This connection of being fed to belonging to a community is key, and is central to this project. In this case, the way that Dave is talking about the privilege of being African-American is useful to understanding his own value system. While the outer society might have “preconceived notions, stereotypes,” within his community, people support one another. Dave's final statement in this section might seem irrelevant to his discussion of community, but ties the narrative back to his original point—that he likes the idea of disrupting those “stereotypes” that society holds around African-Americans.

The way that Dave and I learned and are able to talk about identity and understand our social selves is one effect of the diversity and relationships at TFP. Our ability to reflect on the ways our identities shape our experience of the world, both in terms of Dave's sense of community and my sense of “ethic,” conveys how strongly the curriculum at TFP teaches ways of speaking about one's experience. Further, I believe Dave and my relationship, which has lasted for five years, is a simpler testament to the strength of the bonds formed between people at TFP.

In trying to think about how culture is created at TFP, Lianne, the founder of the North Shore site, describes the ways that relationships come out of important conversations. Similar to the way that Dave and I became close, in this moment, people were sharing deep personal feelings and experiences, which provided ground on which to stand for forging new, powerful relationships. Lianne reflects:
LIANNE: And that night, so we had had this session that was completely intense where, you know, just didn’t expect it to be at that level and then.. at the same time we stayed up incredibly late and played Taboo.

[...]
To be in that group of people, was intense and deep and people revealing kind of a level of themselves that I, I hadn’t even necessarily expected.

CASEY: Mhm.
LIANNE: So this closeness, but at the same time just laughing so incredibly hard and.. um, which also comes out of trust, right?
CASEY: Yeah.
LIANNE: So both sides of trust, right? Um.. so that I think, to me, would be something cultural about it.

For Lianne, who describes taking great “personal risks” later on, the experience of forming “both sides of trust” within the DIRT Crew is culturally representative of what TFP is able to do. In other words, she appreciates the ways that TFP pushes people to take personal risks in order to form close, trusting relationships, and believes that this is an aspect of the program’s culture. In the beginning of the selection, Lianne is still speaking using “we,” as she is still in the frame of describing what actually happened—the emotional intensity of the workshop, and the ensuing game of Taboo. She brings the narrative out to a reflective place as she describes what it was like “to be in that group of people” and hear “people revealing” intense things that went to a deep level of self. This is where she breaks out of “we” and begins using her own voice—“I, I hadn’t even”—to explain how she looks back on the situation. It is important that she uses the word “we,” because she is describing a group of people who are all different from each other. Even in reflection, Lianne is remembering the importance of the relationships within that group of people.

Lianne’s conclusion to the narrative of this one special experience is extremely important in understanding the way that TFP’s structure feeds into the positive effects it can have on both youth and staff participants. Lianne is relating the “closeness” that came out of the intense workshop with the “laughing so incredibly hard” of playing Taboo until the early morning hours. These, to her, are “both sides of trust.” Literally, this is explaining that the structure set forth by TFP: having a retreat with a small group
of youth and staff; having them participate in a workshop that requires personal sharing; having everyone also participate in playing a game. These aspects of the structure all work to foster a community.

This idea of “both sides of trust” explains what TFP staff have to do to also foster that same community. Staff, like Lianne, must trust themselves to take “personal risks,” and to share personal experiences if they are going to ask youth to do so. Staff must also engage and play the games that they ask youth to play. By having staff be explicitly engaged in all of the same work as youth, the structure works doubly hard to create a positive community that has both “closeness” and laughter. The relationships between all people working at TFP happen through this structure and are aided by the risks that participants take to become closer to one another. Lastly, and related to these ideas, is the fact that this structure works to actively foster a conversation between diverse people in intentional ways. This is a key part of what, as Lianne describes, is “cultural about it.”

Relationships between youth and staff, as demonstrated by Lianne’s story, are an important part of the way that youth grow within the program and the way that staff see their work in the world. In the next passage, Steven paints a picture of what is so special about having people from diverse backgrounds working together. Not only do people at TFP cross borders to come together, they do so in powerful ways. The staff at TFP take personal risks to be a part of the program. Lianne describes leaving “a steady job while I had a newborn baby,” because she was “inspired to do it.” The young people who are hired at TFP make the choice to work during a time when many of their peers are having a vacation. They choose to be in a system that has detailed and strict rules.

The relationships within the program are a key part of what makes people choose to take these risks. When asked to describe one adult who played a role in his life in high school, Steven reflected on his admiration for Frank, and the sacrifices that he saw
STEVEN: He was goin' to school to be a medical doctor, and he coulda been makin' millions of dollars right now and um, is like a brilliant man. He has the biggest heart of anybody I've ever met, like just amazing guy and he ended up givin' up that whole medical career to join like, Americorps and Red Cross type of stuff and just help people out and get poverty level pay for years and now is one of the heads of a non-profit organization and probably doesn't make over 50,000 dollars a year.

CASEY: Way less than that [laughing]

STEVEN: Yeah, whatever it is, I don't even know. And it's just, he's, that's rewarding. That is something that he loves and that he is amazing at doing and has changed so many lives. So he does that. He doesn't care about the money.

CASEY: He changed mine.

In this narrative, Steven gave first his sensationalized impression of how “amazing” and “brilliant” Frank is. This section is powerful in how it shows both Steven's reverence of and relationship with Frank. The details that Steven gives weight are those that show what he is impressed by Frank doing: that Frank “was goin' to school” and “coulda been makin' millions of dollars” and yet “ended up givin' up that whole medical career” to “just help people out.” For Steven, who struggled to receive his high school diploma and is currently in process of getting through college, Frank's trajectory is remarkable in its selflessness. Steven was excited while telling this story; he spoke fast and with enthusiasm. This is reflected in his repetition of his point that Frank “has the biggest heart,” that helping people is “something that he loves” and “is amazing at doing” and that Frank has “changed so many lives.” What is particularly interesting about this first part of the narrative is that Steven knows all of this information about Frank's choices and path towards working at TFP. Steven does not just look up to Frank, he has actually spoken with him and formed an extremely positive relationship with him, enabling Steven to talk so emphatically about who Frank is.

Steven describes more explicitly in the second part of the narrative about the

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Frank describes: “I wanted to become a doctor, like a community health doctor, center and practice. And I was disenchanted by all of my co-students and everything, going for like prestige and money and always talking about pre-med this, pre-med that.” … “So I did two years of Americorps and... I wanted to get more direct service stuff” … “So I learned to serve, so I did City Year because it actually paired me up with community and also, like youth development.” … “Then I did a year of Americorps in San Diego working in a HIV/AIDS clinic.” …. “I went into Brandeis, I came out here just to, uh...my focus was International Health Policy.” … “And that's when The Food Project little job description came across like, my ex-girlfriends like, you know, desk.”

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power of his relationship to Frank.

STEVEN: Never mind he's doin' that for random people. What like... um, just amazing. Um, I didn't get my paycheck one week, and I needed money, so he's like oh, he doesn't even have that much money at all! And he sent me 100 dollars in the mail, of his own money, and he's just like, Steven, I'm just gonna send you my cash—whenever you get your check, send it to me, which I got months later. Finally sent it back to him just like uh, I needed the money so I couldn't say no. I was tryin' to borrow it from everybody I couldn't get it—I felt bad doin' it but then, he was just like makin' me—just like come on Steven just take it. He's like, I know you need it, it's fine, I'll be fine. I'll get through the week. Sent me like, his whole paycheck of the week, just so I could get by.

Steven, who didn't get his paycheck and “needed money,” talked to Frank about his problem, who sends Steven “100 dollars in the mail, of his own money.” The juxtaposition of Steven's need with Frank's insistence that he would support him is important in the way Steven talks about this situation. A key moment is Steven saying, “I felt bad doin' it but then, he was just like makin' me—just like, 'come on Steven just take it.'” As a young man struggling to make ends meet, Steven is reluctant to take assistance. He “was tryin' to borrow it from everybody” but “couldn't get it.” Crucial to this is that Steven does not rely on any person, but Frank chooses to assist Steven in this moment of need. Frank's role as a staff person is not to allow Steven to be dependent, but instead to offer him a moment of support, almost in friendship.

The importance of Frank's role as “makin'” Steven take the money shows, on a subtler level, the depth of the relationship between Steven and Frank. Steven doesn't ask Frank for the money, or even describe wanting Frank's money. It is Frank who instigates the giving. It is Frank who, in Steven's words, is also able to create an atmosphere of stability, saying: “I know you need it, it's fine, I'll be fine.” This carries enormous weight for Steven, who is impressed that Frank sent “his whole paycheck of the week, just so I could get by.” This exaggeration of the “whole paycheck” is important because it implies the importance of the giving, rather than the actual amount of money that Frank gave Steven.

This selflessness, linked to Steven's almost hyperbolic description of Frank in the
first part of the narrative, is important because it shows how deeply Frank and Steven relate to one another. This story delineates clearly the power of relationships within TFP, and the way that their formation within the structure can lead to important moments that go above and beyond the program itself. Steven and Frank, who come from very different backgrounds, are brought together not just by the work that they do together, but by the emotional force of positive relationships. Steven's memory of this moment in which Frank was so supportive is important because it implies how much Steven holds onto his relationship with Frank.

Meaningful relationships are present within the structure of TFP as well, and are an important part of the personal growth that happens for many people within the program. During the first summer, youth are particularly challenged to push themselves out of their comfort zones, which can only happen (in a positive way) within the context of positive interpersonal relationships. One event that contributes to this takes place mid-way through the summer, the overnight, which is a shorter version of the retreats that take place during the Academic Year. The overnight takes place on a farm, and young people and staff of the SYP sleep in tents on the farm. During the overnight is an open mic. Lana, who is self-described as painfully shy, was challenged to speak up at TFP. She talks about having decided to hula hoop at the open mic, although she had never done it “alone in front of everyone” and “wasn’t really sure” about doing it. Her crew leader, Michael, had supported her to bring a hula hoop to the overnight in hopes that she would perform:

LANA: I thought it would be awkward if I just hula hooped and nothing else, and just did that. But I thought what the hell—it’s just one time! So I took my hula hoop, went up and then I remember like, Jania was there, and she asked me if I wanted music, someone brought their stereo. Maybe it was Jania, I don’t know, so she played music then. So I was so relieved, that at least there was that playing in the background so I was hula hooping. Then people started clapping, everyone started clapping. I never felt like that much support.

46 She describes: “One of the times I was public speaking in eighth grade and like, presenting a project, I got an anxiety attack and I almost passed out [laughs] after everyone left I started crying and I couldn’t stop. I hate that.”
And then I felt like it was no big deal after that. As long as you have support you can do almost anything.

Lana is speaking with strong language about an important moment for her. Her “what the hell” is important because it breaks away from her manner of speaking (she is a quieter, reserved person). The narrative structure of this story is relatively simple: Lana “thought it would be awkward,” but “thought what the hell,” and took her “hula hoop, went up,” and because there was music, she “was hula hooping” and “then people started clapping.” Although a simple story, it holds weight, and this is clear from the amount of time that Lana takes to tell it. Rather than tell the story as simply as I was able to organize it, she adds in multiple details, both setting the stage in images and also informing the listener that the details are important for her.

Her conclusion of the story is the lesson that she learned from the experience: “As long as you have support you can do almost anything.” This shift from speaking in I-statements (“I remember,” “if I just,” “I was”) to “you” demonstrates the reflection that has brought Lana to this point. She is able to understand and talk about this story not just as an example of her personal growth, but holds it as an example of a more universal truth—that with “support,” “you can do almost anything.” The support of her co-workers speaks to the communal desire to create a positive space, and the ways that Lana's relationships with those coworkers influenced her ability to push herself out of her comfort zone.

In this next passage, Nadia describes the transition from acting as a youth to acting as a leader, and the difference in the two experiences, particularly in terms of the ways relationships matter and mattered to her. She, like Lana, emphasizes “support” in her narrative. The prompt to which she was answering was the same as for Lana (to talk about an important or memorable story at TFP):

NADIA: Um, the most recent I can think of um are, Family Feast. Um, it was completely different from my Family Feast as a crew worker—to the Family Feast as an Assistant
Crew Leader where before it was more like you tryin’ to branch out to everybody you know, to make sure you kept in contact with everybody...

CASEY: Yeah.
NADIA: Now, as an Assistant Crew Leader there’s people comin’ up to me tellin’ me like, “you, you know, you did a awesome job or whatever.” So, you know, that’s a completely different experience and at the same time you feel like the same support in a different way, so it’s really cool to see like, people lookin’ up to you. Aside from just being your friend.
CASEY: Yeah, and watching people speak is like—
NADIA: And see how much they, you know, they grew.

Nadia uses the directive voice often, and it is striking in her telling of this story because it renders her self less visible to some extent. This manner of speaking is both a style of speaking (e.g. using the phrase “you know” often in a conversational tone) but also says something about Nadia’s experience at TFP. Nadia was 17 when she began the SYP, meaning that she was one of the oldest participants. In her manner and ability, she often takes on roles and responsibilities that surpass what one might expect of a 17 year old. Thus, her use of the “you” seems to imply that what matters to her about TFP is the experience that “you,” or “they” are having—that her own personal growth is of less concern than seeing “how much they, you know, they grew.”

Her description of “tryin’ to branch out to everybody” as a youth speaks to the importance of relationships. Nadia recognizes that her interpersonal connections at TFP were important to her from early on. The fact that she was looking to “branch out to everybody” implies that the relationships surpass friendship or even casual workplace relationships. To Nadia, there is, and was, an importance attached to forming strong relationships between all people at TFP. This could also be seen as a sense of the community at TFP and the ways that community is fostered through interpersonal relationships.

This leads into Nadia’s transition point—that as a youth just forming relationships was key, but “now, as an Assistant Crew Leader...you feel like the same support in a different way.” Part of Nadia’s shift into becoming a youth in a supervisory role is, for her, the ability to feel sustained by the way her interpersonal relationships...
allow her to observe other people’s growth. This new support comes as praise for doing a good job, and in getting to see how people “grew.” Her positive emphasis on getting to see the growth of others connects with concern with the interpersonal. She wants to form positive relationships in order to support others to grow. This trajectory in her thinking about relationships shows how TFP’s structure can foster learning about how to form community. In Lana’s story, Nadia would be one of the people clapping. Both stories emphasize the ways that people working at TFP support one another within the context of deep personal relationships.

Place

TFP does not exist within a vacuum. The people who work and have worked for TFP leave to go live and learn in other places, and form new relationships. This section of stories emphasizes the importance of the physical space of TFP and of the ways people who have worked at TFP enter into other spaces, and the ways they describe that entering. As an organization that asks people to cross borders, TFP, both literally and figuratively, provides a ground for participants to stand on that allows them to talk about and perform their identities in new and important ways. First and foremost, the idea of relating ‘to the land’ is a central part of TFP’s philosophy, and speaks to the weight that is placed on having a relationship with the physical space of the farm. Second in importance is the emphasis on creating and maintaining a ‘safe space,’ that is, a psychic safe space in which people can feel comfortable. The standards and guidelines that are introduced to youth during the SYP are part of the way this safe space is created and upheld.

In the following story, Dave and I talk about lunch on the farm during the summer. This section speaks to both the physical aspects of being on the land and to the feel of a more figurative space of support. Our conversation began by Dave trying to
think of memorable moments.

DAVE: I used to love how you could never not have lunch and then go and still not have —you would be full after lunch.
CASEY: Yeah, yeah, yeah.
DAVE: Just eating off people...
CASEY: Yeah I like that—you know that we started—after that summer, Katelynn introduced—like we made a, during the summer, a salad every lunch and you always had peanut butter and jelly so that no matter what if someone didn’t have lunch there’d be...
DAVE: Yeah, yeah.
CASEY: But I feel like that something that has always been powerful with The Food Project is that you always are able to eat, you know what I mean?
DAVE: Yeah. That’s true.
CASEY: Like, that’s like a—’cause you don’t even think about it but it’s like... you’re in the food right there. Like it’s right there and you can’t be hungry.
DAVE: What if you’re the one person... but it takes a few weeks before you’re like, “I’m gonna go get a tomato and eat it right now.” At first you’re like, “damn.”

Dave's first statement in this passage illustrates the way that he sees TFP's space as different from other places that he inhabits. At TFP, “you could never not have lunch and then go and still not have.” What Dave seems to mean here is that when someone does not bring lunch to work at TFP, they will be fed by their coworkers. “You” can't “go” back to work and “still not have” eaten. This idea implies the existence of other places in which you could “go and still not have.” Dave speaks to this implication earlier in his interview briefly, when he describes that “of course there was times when I was hungry and stuff.” For Dave, TFP is a place where you will “be full after lunch” because other people would share their food. I relate to this shortly after by describing the way that the physical space shapes this fullness: “you're in the food right there,” so “you can't be hungry.” In many other places, if an individual doesn't have food for themselves, it might not be noticed, or it would be impossible to provide for them. At TFP, in Dave's words, you can't “go and still not have” eaten.

Although most participants did not go into detail about farm work, the physical act of being on the land is important to the way TFP functions. Steven describes the knowledge that he gained by working on the farm:

STEVEN: Um, that was pretty cool and I got to learn all this gardenin' type of stuff, you know, weeding, and hulahoein', and all different types of tools and different jobs. And
the dibblin’ and whatever.
CASEY: Dibbling! Oh, the dibbler! [laughs]
STEVEN: Yeah the dibbler [laughs]. Dibble dibble dibble! Yeah that was mad fun. And then I’d go home and my mom would be like, “Oh, yeah, now that you’re a professional can you do my all—
CASEY: [laughs]
STEVEN: My weeds?” And I’d be like, [sarcastic tone] “Yeah right,” I never touched weeds since.

Steven, who has had a challenging time succeeding within the public educational system, attaches importance to the knowledge that he gains from working on the farm. He lists the things he has learned, like “weeding, and hulahoein’” and “all different types of tools and different jobs.” Although not extremely specific, his listing the multiple ways he has gained knowledge through farm work is part of his desire to present himself as both smart and able to succeed. His recollection of the “dibbler” is of a tool operated by two people that makes even holes in the bed for planting. The act of pushing the dibbler is one that instantly implies connection, both to the person working with one and to the land itself.

Steven’s description of his mother’s request to do her weeds ties into his connection to farm work. He describes her saying, “now that you’re a professional.” Later, Steven describes not being seen as a professional because of his appearance. The idea that he is labeled a “professional” because of his proficiency in farm work is important. He relates working as an intern during the SYP and getting to work with the new youth in the program:

STEVEN: And we just kinda... we ran farmers markets and, for the Summer You—the Summer Youth Program that ah I was in the year before, we’d go and give workshops to them and play games with them and just kinda be the older kids that would teach them. Well, not really older, some of us weren’t really older but you know just teach them stuff or just do fun stuff—
CASEY: Well, you had been there longer...
STEVEN: Yeah, yeah... and sometimes we’d do farm work too on random days when they’d need extra help. And then um.. after that I went on.. I signed up to be a crew leader—Assistant Crew Leader like kinda, the young kid whose kinda in charge, or like, but like, still the age of the crew workers or whatever.

Gaining place-based knowledge allowed Steven to take on more responsibility within the program. In the second part of this narrative, Steven shifts from talking with a “we”
voice in order to describe his decision to become an “Assistant Crew Leader.” Interestingly, he first calls himself a “crew leader” and also uses the phrase “I signed up,” rather than saying that he applied. In fact, it’s impossible to just “sign up” for a position at TFP. His feeling of responsibility and agency is clear in this section, then, as feeling able to get the job he wanted, and to feel “kinda in charge.” This passage makes clear the way that getting to “do farm work” when the other youth “need extra help” allows Steven to be “the young kid whose kinda in charge,” and the way that this sense of agency allows him to feel confident and “professional.”

In the first part of the passage, Steven speaks mostly in a “we” voice, in order to include the other interns who were working with him. This is important in understanding the way that TFP functions to create a community. As youth continue on through the programs, they become very close, so that they are no longer simply individuals, but they act as a group to enact change. The fact that he says, “some of us weren’t really older” illustrates this poignantly. He could have said, “other people weren’t older,” or, “I was older than others,” and it would have been straightforward. However, his sense of the group's importance leads him to speak completely from the perspective of “we,” implying a deep sense of belonging and the power of belonging to what many young people refer to as their “second family.” The work itself, and the physical space, foster this belonging because they allow youth to be working together in a specific context. Further, in gaining a sense of ownership over both the knowledge and land, youth are able to have a sense that they can pass on (“teach”) the culture of the place.

The physical knowledge resulting from farm work is not the only way that space is important at TFP. The way that 'safe space' functions to figurally foster community and personal change is also key to the program's mission. In response to my asking her about how she sees TFP affecting the world, Katelynn reflects:
KATELYNN: How do I see The Food Project affecting the world around it? I mean I think kinda touching on what you said, at The Food Project we have... safe space, which is something that’s like, I don’t know I would almost say like, the most important thing to me at The Food Project, like, the ability to feel like the norm and the accepted situation and behavior is one where you can be yourself, voice your opinions and as long as your using the tools to do so in a respectful way that you feel safe and you feel comfortable. And I think that that’s something that we carry wherever we go at The Food Project and so like, being able to like, to walk into a meeting or a room, you—you know under the cloak of The Food Project and be able to bring that there—

Rather than beginning with the physical way that TFP affects the world, Katelynn immediately jumps to the conceptual “safe space,” where “the norm...is one where you can be yourself.” While safe space is not a tangible object, it is intimately connected to TFP. Katelynn describes being able “to walk into a meeting or a room...under the cloak of The Food Project.” This way of describing the effect of safe space is extremely important for understanding the way TFP uses the intangible “safe space” to transform physical space. Katelynn’s use of the metaphor of a “cloak” implies this connection in her mind of safe space to a physical object that suggests protectiveness or safety. Her use of the word “tools” is also interesting, as it both refers to the knowledge-based tools of facilitating safe space and to the tools that are used on the farm itself.

Katelynn continues describing the affect of TFP on the world “in the physical sense”:

KATE: And then like, in the physical sense, like affecting, affecting like you know, collaborators, community partners, I think about like, just how I talk to teachers, or how I talk to a principal—
CASEY: Right.
KATE: Or how I formulate, um, my thoughts. Like that's always, that's always there in everything.

I had anticipated Katelynn to begin talking, at this moment, about the collaboration that TFP has with community partners in terms of “physical space”: the gardens that have been built at local elementary schools and other community spaces or the mobile and weekly farmers markets that have sprouted up across the North Shore. However, she instead continues using the metaphor of “safe space” to imply a physical sense of “how I talk to teachers” or “how I formulate, um, my thoughts.” The idea that safe
space can be tangibly understood and wrapped up in “everything” is an important value carried within the system of TFP.

In entering places that are different from TFP, as Katelynn describes, the “cloak” of TFP is often over one’s shoulders. In the following passage, I describe a difficult situation that I faced at college, and the ways that TFP’s figurative space remained with me. I am talking to Nadia with the prompt to explain a difficult situation:

CASEY: Oh, I can say, so I, I almost dropped out of school a year ago, because I was like going through some really serious shit with a person at school who I ended up standing up to within the school policies. But I felt like, coming back this year was very intense for me because I had like made it through the semester but really like narrowly escaped not making it to my senior year of college, which I knew I didn't wanna... I was like, I knew I wanted to either be a teacher or work at a youth program and either one I can't have dropped out of college, that's not... that's important for me.

My narrative begins with a tentative voice: “I felt like,” “I had like,” “I was like.” In the first section of the narrative, I use strong language to describe most action/emotion: “some really serious shit,” “standing up to,” “very intense,” “narrowly escaped.” These words form the tone of the story, framing it as both serious and high intensity. The use of “narrowly escaped,” I think holds several layers. It implies both having “escaped” the “person” and having “escaped...not making it to my senior year.” What is interesting about the story is how little of a story it is; I tell the entire real narrative in one sentence: “I was like going through some really serious shit with a person at school who I ended up standing up to within the school policies.” That I say hardly any more than that has to do with several psychological stances: that I feel still tied to my adult mentor role when speaking with Nadia, that I am unable to talk very much more about it, and that I am choosing, as Nadia “chose” to ignore the difficult circumstances in order to focus on survival. It is this third stance on survival that I will explore further through the structure of the narrative.

After framing an “intense” story with harsh language, I begin to speak with more of a reflective and determined tone:
CASEY: So, this whole semester I’ve been like, working really really hard, and I guess the moment I’ve been the proudest of myself is one of my advisors just keeps saying to me, “Casey, your work ethic is so amazing but how do you do this?!” And just hearing her say that, well, I think everyone should work really hard because you’re in college and that’s a lot of money and resources that are being put into you so you should respect that. But its also made me feel, like, proud of myself for overcoming a very, like, a very ridiculous person and like, making it to this place where now I have one semester left and I’m gonna graduate and I’m gonna have a job. And I feel like, proud of myself for... not just overcoming, but like, choosing that, and choosing to take it positively.

I am speaking with a determined voice compared to the more tentative voice prior: “I’m gonna graduate,” “I’m gonna have a job.” This shift is important in understanding the way I have constructed the story to be able to tell it, that although “I almost dropped out,” “I can’t have,” so “I’m gonna graduate.” In looking at the way I talk shortly after in terms of having the “skill” to work hard, this section sets a clear precedent for my internal beliefs about how working hard has enabled me to make it through a more tenuous time in my life to a more secure one.

I close the story itself with “I can’t have dropped out of college.” This affirms the fact that the story has left me choosing to work even hard to not drop out. As I return to the present, I describe my current situation: “I’ve been like, working really really hard.” My repetition of the word “really” is important only because it places emphasis on how important “working hard” is for me. I use the voice of an outside person, “one of my advisors” to show an external reflection of how hard I am working (this is very similar to the way Nadia uses her GPA to talk about her success in school). What is crucial to understanding the narrative is what I say after describing my work ethic, which is a complete rationalization of my whole construction of working hard as a means for survival:

CASEY: “And just hearing her say that, well, I think everyone should work really hard because you’re in college and that’s a lot of money and resources that are being put into you so you should respect that. But it’s also made me feel, like, proud of myself for overcoming a very, like, a very ridiculous person and like, making it to this place [...]”

My judgment that “everyone should work really hard because you’re in college” comes both from the way I identify in terms of class (being a student on financial
aid/scholarship) within college and provides a reason to be working hard. The frame I use for this belief—“you should respect that”—is important because it implies that I have constructed my work ethic around respecting what I have been given (and “overcoming” difficult obstacles because of that respect). My description of the “very, like,” “very ridiculous person” relates back to my refusal to actually describe the story that I am referring to, and almost sounds silly in this context.

My idea of “making it to this place” sums up my construction of a work ethic: that no matter what, it is I who has to “choose” to make it—rather than allowing anything to interfere. Finally, my construction of an identity as choosing to make it in order to be a teacher or work at a youth program speaks to the depth of the impact TFP has had on me (although this isn’t explicitly spoken). If I can’t make it, how can I support others to make it? This project itself, in many ways, represents my way of both giving back to and pushing forward the legacy of TFP—I will make it, to tell this story, to help others to replicate what is so powerfully transmitted within TFP.

**Possibility**

The way that youth are taught to understand what TFP seeks to achieve is by memorizing and learning the meaning of “the vision.” A vision is something that is not achieved. It is visible, perhaps, but it exists also in the imagination. In order to create personal change and social change through sustainable agriculture, people at TFP must be able to envision possibilities: for themselves, society, and our food system. TFP’s vision allows the organization to engage in praxis: re-evaluating the progress and effectiveness of the program based on their vision for a future. This section focuses on all of these possibilities, and reminds us both how close and far our visions are.

The following segment was related by Frank, a current staff person at TFP. He began speaking as soon as the tape recorder was on (I hadn’t prompted him with a
question). He expresses his view of the way that TFP works in a different way from other organizations, and why it is important:

FRANK: Okay. Um. [short pause] I think it’s very evident like where The Food Project falls, like The Food Project and I think what.. I love as a person is like really identified in this quote, in terms of.. you know there was a bunch of exercises like you know separating people of color and white people and just like, seeing the, interpersonal and you know.. internalized oppression and all this other kinda stuff like coming out. Just seeing like the work that Growing Power focuses on or like you know, what People’s Groceries focuses on is... not so much a partnership, lets say, and its just like focusing on one group of people.. and what I love I think that’s come, become evident is that I don’t think any organization in the country that I’ve gone to, like nationally or anything does the work of like, what The Food Project does and bringing like, really diverse people from really extreme different backgrounds together. And I think like—

CASEY: In this sense—

[Referring to quote by Lilla Watson: “If you have come here to help me, you are wasting your time. But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together.”]

FRANK: In this sense, and not in like, “oh, let me just serve you” like a partnership to understand like, those people with privilege.. uh, that privilege is connected to why some people are not as privileged.

Frank is describing here the quote he had used to introduce himself. He explains that what he loves “as a person is like really identified in this quote,” because of his value of having people from really “extreme different backgrounds together.” He is speaking through the lens of TFP, which is more of a partnership, rather than the two organizations he contrasts TFP with, saying that they are “just like focusing on one group of people.” Frank’s trajectory at TFP, which began in 2005 when he decided to apply for the position of Site Supervisor on the new North Shore site, gives him a strong sense of where TFP falls in the larger scheme of things.

There are several interesting aspects of what Frank is talking about. The first is the way in which Frank’s personal value system is entwined with the value system he ascribes to TFP. In his first statement, he is leading off the conversation (the recording starts with him talking), explaining where he feels TFP “falls.” Immediately following

47 “Growing Power is a national nonprofit organization and land trust supporting people from diverse backgrounds, and the environments in which they live, by helping to provide equal access to healthy, high-quality, safe and affordable food for people in all communities. Growing Power implements this mission by providing hands-on training, on-the-ground demonstration, outreach and technical assistance through the development of Community Food Systems that help people grow, process, market and distribute food in a sustainable manner.” -www.growingpower.org

48 “People’s Grocery is a health and wealth organization -our mission is to improve the health and economy of West Oakland through the local food system.” -www.peoplesgrocery.org
this opening, he says: “and I think what... I love as a person is,” demonstrating his internal connection between his own beliefs and the way that TFP operates. This, for Frank, is opposed to Growing Power or People’s Groceries, organizations he refers to because of a recent conference he had attended at the time of the interview. He is emphasizing the fact that TFP’s model is not a “service model” but instead contains the understanding that someone’s “privilege is connected to why some people are not as privileged.”

Frank’s way of speaking during this passage is focused on the internal thought process that guides his actions. He begins many statements with “I think,” implying both that these are not simply intuitive emotions and further, that he has spent time contemplating the ideas he is laying out. His use of the phrase “become evident” illustrates further the way he has come to a conclusion around TFP’s value system: that he has spent time considering and testing his theories, and that he doesn’t “think any organization in the country that I’ve gone to” does “the work” that TFP is able to do by being so explicit around diversity. I choose not to analyze too closely his use of Watson’s quotation, as it is his introduction to himself. However, the final sentence demonstrates fully, I believe, what Frank is trying to get across: that in many places a service model is employed that focuses on one group of people, and than in contrast, Frank has realized that TFP is able to create a place where the participants liberation is bound up together, and so everyone works together.

While the importance of working together towards the shared vision is central to TFP’s philosophy, it is necessary to emphasize the way that personal growth creates the possibility for individuals to realize their own visions. In the following segment, Nadia describes her path towards college:

NADIA: And now, I go to bed at like 10 every day and I’m just like ah. I don’t know, so, I think the proudest moment was just like, a lotta times, there was like a lot of times when I felt like, I had too many things on my shoulders, and I was like you know, I chose this so I’m just gonna stick through it. So, like I said, I get outta work at 11:30, after bein’ on
my feet for like 10 hours and you know, I stick with it, I go home, I did homework, and I maintained my solid GPA my junior year.

CASEY: Crazy GPA.

NADIA: And yeah, and you know, and it paid off, it really did, so, I think when I got my scholarship I got more congratulations than I ever got like happy birthdays, and it was because people knew how hard I had worked for that.

CASEY: Yeah.

NADIA: And you know, the first comment that people said was like, “you know, hard work does pay off.” And people see it. I'm really proud of that.

This passage concludes a longer narrative in which Nadia describes her process of getting through high school (and how hard she worked). It is the section of the interview in which I felt Nadia spoke the most about herself, which is reflected in the repeated use of I-statements to describe the experience. The language she uses is strong: “the proudest moment,” “I chose this,” “I stick with it,” and “I'm really proud.” These statements reflect both the concrete difficulty of how much she had to do in order to accomplish her goals and the amount of pride she feels, having done so. Her inclusion of the responses of other people: “people said... 'you know, hard work does pay off,’” is important because it shows her ability to see her role in a social context. Her hard work is individual, and she receives public acknowledgement for being a particularly strong individual.

Earlier in the narrative, Nadia describes working “45 hours a week, plus school.” Her simple statement of this is partially a way of coping with the stress—with the “too many things” on her shoulders. After stating the more concrete aspects of this process, she is reflecting back on the experience. Her use of the phrases “I think” and “I feel” marks the narrative shift to reflection—she is thinking about what it was like, and what it has been worth. The statement “I chose this” is the core of this narrative of hard work and success. All of the other pieces fall into the category of choosing to succeed: she chose 45 hours a week, a 4.3 GPA, and as a result, gets to feel that she chose to get a scholarship. This is important because it shows Nadia’s sense of agency and ability in determining her own future.
In a very different narrative, Dave describes a moment in which he was able to envision a different kind of possibility for himself as a result of TFP. He describes getting to go to an organization in Boston and give a presentation, and the after-effect. It is in response to my asking for a memorable or important moment for him at TFP:

DAVE: Ok, so, um, I remember one time, I went, this is when I was a diversity intern. I went to this place in Dudley Square called the um, Urban League. So pretty much what it is, it’s a ah, professional network of African-Americans of like, professional statuses, so like, there’ll probably be like couple doctor—you know doctors, lawyers, teachers, things like that.
CASEY: Yeah.
DAVE: And um, I gave a workshop on um, hunger and homelessness. Um, and, I just felt like it was a great opportunity to... be in a place—kinda see where I wanna be in the future. Um, and I thought it was a great opportunity to interact with people who are pretty established in their lives.

Dave's experience as a Diversity Intern was clearly an important part of his time at TFP; this is the second time he spoke about it during the interview. His experience of going to the Urban League and giving “a workshop on um, hunger and homelessness” is nicely described here. The first important thing to note about this narrative is the actual facts of what happened: as a young person in an internship program at a youth program, Dave was asked to go facilitate a (probably two hour) workshop for “doctors, lawyers, teachers” on “hunger and homelessness,” a topic that many adults might have trouble facilitating a workshop about. Dave's casual tone in speaking about this experience implies how easily he has accepted that he, of course, was able to carry out a task such as this, because of the training and practice he was given at TFP.

I present this passage for that reason, and further because of the opportunity that it seems this experience gave Dave, to “kinda see where I wanna be in the future.” Earlier in the interview, he describes the one positive adult role model he sees as Kaya, his sister (who was a role model for me, as well). Coming from what he describes as a messed up family49, Dave, I think, places importance on his experience at The Urban League because of this point—that he could “interact with people who are pretty

49 “My family’s all types of fed up.”
established in their lives.” As a young African-American man, to get to see and present to a group of “African-Americans of like, professional status,” was clearly a very important moment in Dave’s life, because it gave him that opportunity to envision a positive present and future for himself. This relates back, of course, to Dave’s narrative of liking the “challenge” of proving himself different than a “typical black person.”

Katelynn, who is scheduled to leave TFP at the end of this coming SYP, reflected during her interview on her time at TFP and the possibilities it gave her as a person:

KATELYNN: So I guess what that makes me think of, is.. now I’m getting ready to leave The Food Project at—the end of this summer and I had like very seriously thought and planned and like, you know, gave my notice, um.. about a year ago that I was—that I was gonna be leaving. And I didn’t end up leaving, and.. but like, thinking about leaving The Food Project makes me think about a lotta things. And kinda like along those lines I guess it makes me think.. [sigh] that like, I don’t think that I would be able to understand where, I’m from and where I grew up and feel as connected to it, in the way that I do, if it wasn’t for The Food Project. Like I think that, I always grew up—I grew up in this area—CASEY: Mhm.
KATELYNN: Feeling very much like people, I didn’t understand people—they didn’t understand me and I didn’t wanna dress the way that everyone dressed. I didn’t like know how to be myself here and I definitely think that you know, part of that came from learning about myself having left and experiencing other things.
CASEY: Right.

Katelynn speaks in a fairly tentative, though thoughtful, way about her time at TFP and the prior decision she had made to not “end up leaving.” She repeats variations of the word “leaving” in the beginning of the section, implying the importance of this departure for her. Her transition to describing the connection she now feels to where she “grew up” has to do with the weight of her departure from TFP. Her feeling that she “didn’t understand people” and “they didn’t understand” her contrasts with her deep sense of connection at TFP.

In describing this connection, Katelynn talks about the new understanding she has for the place she lives:

KATELYNN: And making the decision to come back, whatever. But I think a big part of it is that I feel like, I go someplace every day, whether it’s the Lynn office or the land or even just working from home the people that I interact with, because of The Food Project, like understand me and I understand them and I feel like I connect to these people and we think—not alike, I think we think really differently but we have.. I don’t
know a set of tools not everyone has to talk about things and to like go to this place where I feel more myself than anywhere else.

This description contains Katelynn’s depth of understanding around how TFP creates a place for people to come together with “tools not everyone has to talk about things.” In contrast with her feeling of not being understood, Katelynn’s sense of the space at TFP is one of being connected and feeling “more myself than anywhere else.” This feeling allows her departure from TFP to be not only bitter but sweet. She leaves with the “set of tools” and newfound connection to her home that she only has “because of The Food Project.”

The last story in this section was told by Steven, who explains powerfully the ways that TFP has affected him. The narrative is quite long (Steven spoke without stopping) and in order to pull out the layers of meaning, I’ve identified four smaller narratives embedded in the larger. The first narrative is the simple one. Steven describes giving a speech for the first time having “never spoke before in front of people.”

STEVEN: [pause] I mean, I’d say that first time I ever gave a speech—that was like, pretty great. Like, I was just like—from afterwards, seeing people’s reactions just made me feel so good. And like, just how nervous I was and how I was so afraid I wasn’t gonna do a good job—how I’d never spoke before in front of people like, I was just expecting me to like—this kid up here like uh uh duh uh uhhh like fall over or somethin’ like that. I had no idea what I was doin’ and I did a really good job. I was so proud of myself right there.

In this section, Steven is describing the powerful experience of giving a speech at the Family Feast after the SYP, and getting positive feedback from other people after speaking. He describes the rational nervousness of “how I was so afraid I wasn’t gonna do a good job,” and how after he did it, he “was so proud.” He moves on from this section rather quickly into talking about being able to take on responsibilities.

The second section of his talk has to do with Steven’s sense of personal growth and how it led him to be able to take on “the responsibilities of being in charge.”

STEVEN: Um, but also just even bein’ able to take on the responsibilities of bein’ in charge and like, in my first year there in the SYP like, I was swearin’ all the time and I was just like—I wasn’t bad but I was just quittin’ cigarettes and not like—I feel like that first year nobody woulda thought, like yeah, this kids gonna be a crew leader one day, you
know what I mean?

He talks about his former identity: “I was swearin’ all the time”; “I wasn’t bad but I was just quittin’ cigarettes,” and how he can see that “nobody woulda thought... ‘this kids gonna be a crew leader.” His reference to “this kid” rather than himself is important because it demarcates the line he sees between his past identity and his more responsible current self. He relates this to the personal growth he saw in his peers:

STEVEN: Like, I feel like a lotta the kids who made it through the longest were those kids—like, you know like Jamar, Alex, like all the kids that like, really were kinda troublemaker type of kids.

His identification of these other “kids” being “troublemaker kids” and that the outside perspective of those “kids” was the same as the way people viewed Steven is important.

Steven describes ending up “stickin’ along” with the program, and having his life changed “around completely.”

STEVEN: And then after that year like ended up stickin’ along with it. Like, it just changed my life around completely. I was—my whole life when I was younger, when I was like, lookin’ up to these kids that were sellin’ drugs—I thought that was like, the coolest thing ever. “I just wanna be a drug dealer, and make money, and not give a crap about anything. And just have fun and party all the time.” And I never wanted to graduate even high school, never really cared.

This narrative is key to understanding the ways that youth are able to experience and talk about personal change at TFP—to reflect on past identity and relate it to the way they are now. Steven goes further into reflection after describing his change from a former self at TFP. He begins talking about when he “was younger” and “lookin’ up to these kids that were sellin’ drugs.” Again, Steven uses the word “kid” to talk about people who are not as responsible. He articulates his past perspective on the world—that he just wanted to “be a drug dealer and make money, and not give a crap about anything.” His construction of this narrative of past self versus current self is extremely useful in understanding how Steven sees himself currently. Not only can he reflect back to the more negative aspects of a former identity and perspective, he uses this reflection to propel him forward.
Steven describes the feeling, at TFP, of “just bein' around people that actually wanted to do somethin' with their lives,” while “gettin' away from those kids that sold drugs.”

STEVEN: But, like, once I went through this, like, in the Academic Year Program, they make you bring in your report cards. And if you weren't doin' good enough you couldn't even come to the—to work, and they'd let you bring your homework and they'd help you with it. And there was a lotta smart people, a lot of good connections in there. And um, and just bein' around people that actually wanted to do somethin' with their lives, instead of all these kids that just wanted to party, like, made me—it did influence me—it kinda changed my life around—gettin' away from all those kids that sold drugs and sellin' drugs myself. Just gettin' away from all that kinda stuff. And you know, really just, I had never really seen anythin’ that could like, change me like that before. Even like, friends or anything, like, that was just—it was friends, and it was family, like we all like, legit, like I love everybody that I worked with, that I became close with. I don't know, I never woulda met any of those people if it wasn't for that; never met any of the positive influences. And uh, yeah, it just really changed my life around for the better, like, completely. Just this whole... yeah.

The need to physically get “away from” bad influences puts emphasis on the idea of having positive physical spaces for young people to feel supported within, while being surrounded by a network of “people that actually” want to do something “with their lives.” In other words, Steven is not simply explaining his own personal growth; he is articulating the ways in which TFP’s structure allowed him to change his own life around. He even says, “I had never really seen anythin’ that could like, change me like that before.” This is a key sentence and reflection for understanding the power of TFP.

For Steven, it was a space in which a new kind of change was possible, and could actually counteract the negative influences in his other places of living.

This final part of the narrative, in which Steven pulls together his positive feelings about TFP, uses the structure of his description of past selves in order to have a powerful emotive conclusion. He describes that TFP “was friends, and it was family.”

This weight on what TFP was for Steven is important because it represents the way a youth program can create a positive physical and mental space for a young person struggling with more difficult aspects of their lives. Steven’s use of the phrase “I love everybody” is important because it notes the deep emotional quality of his experience at
TFP. He follows this phrase with a further repetition of the idea that TFP “just really changed my life around for the better, like, completely.” The refrain of having his life “changed” is echoed throughout Steven’s long narrative, and seems to be the point of his stories. In his reflection on his past selves, Steven is cluing the listener to understand that not only can he see how he used to be, he understood where he needed to make a change. The simple description of “quittin’ cigarettes” is a reminder of the concrete ways that Steven felt himself changing through TFP, and the stronger sense of loving everybody he worked with is a more emotional, but just as real, representation of the deep and abiding sense of connection that TFP provides for its youth.

**Power**

Inequality is reproduced by both the American educational system and by the other systems at work around it (e.g. the media, schools, institutions). This reproduction is governed by the interests of those who are in power. Young people, already defined legally as having less power than adults, exist in the margins of American society, both physically and metaphorically. Paulo Freire argues:

> Any attempt at mass education... must possess a basic aim: to make possible for human beings... to penetrate more deeply the prise de conscience of the reality in which they exist... discovering their own presence within a totality, within a structure, and not as 'imprisoned' or 'stuck to' the structure or its parts.\(^5\)

Through what Freire terms “conscientization,” people who have previously existed as marginalized ‘objects’ can become active ‘subjects,’ agents in the process of social change. In learning about the inequality active “within a structure,” young people can understand more fully their place within society. Further, through this education and action, young people become active agents in social change.

The young people in this project come from different backgrounds and experiences. All of them, however, share the common experience of feeling powerful or

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powerless, depending on circumstance. In this section, youth talk both directly to and subtly about the way that having or lacking power plays into their lives. Power exists in multiple invisible ways. The analysis of these stories seeks to pull out the ways that power dynamics are working on and for these young people, as part of their larger narratives. As they articulate “their own presence within a totality,” these youth speak against the dominant conceptions of young people.

Relationships at The Food Project are often navigated between people who are coming from varying backgrounds and perspectives. Youth positions are specifically age based. For example, for the Summer Youth Program, a young person must be between the ages of 14 and 17 by July 1st. As they continue applying and being hired for other positions, they take on more responsibility. Meanwhile, older staff are generally hired for supervisory roles, and are almost always considered to be at a more authoritative level than young people, at least intra-organizationally. Within this structure is room for variance, especially in terms of what responsibilities youth are asked to take on. For example, when leading volunteers, youth act as the staff, while the program coordinator acts only as a quiet observing participant. Thus, there are power dynamics between youth and adult staff that are important to deconstruct, both in order to understand how TFP works as a whole and how it functions within the world around it.

Nadia, who served as an Assistant Crew Leader for the Summer Youth Program after only one year with TFP (this is rare), struggled with her Crew Leader, who was new to TFP. As she describes working with him, she speaks from two perspectives: that of being a youth who wants to connect with other youth and that of being a youth who knows they have to take on more responsibility. Nadia describes her first thoughts on being an ACL:

NADIA: I think um, when I applied to be an Assistant Crew Leader... I came in with a completely different mindset and when I was faced with what my job was, I had to
kinda play with that and just kinda like be a little flexible.
CASEY: What was the difference?
NADIA: So I went in thinking “okay, I'm just gonna follow his order and you know, kinda be the model, you know, to follow.”
CASEY: Right.
NADIA: And um, when I went in, I realized that because he didn't have very much experience I was stuck in a situation where I had to give him sometimes directions—

Nadia emphasizes that she thought she was “just gonna follow his order,” and by following, be followed by the other youth. She describes the realization that she “was stuck in a situation” where she “had to give him sometimes directions.” The language Nadia uses to describe her newfound role is that of necessity: “when I was faced”; “I was stuck”; “I had to.” She was placed in a position of giving the directions rather than be able to follow, although this wasn't her choice.

This taking on of responsibility beyond her youth-staff position is important in the way it shaped Nadia's experience of being an ACL. Her capability as a leader was already strong. She describes her response to the necessity of being more of a leader than she had expected with ease, although it seems that it still had an impact. She

continues:

NADIA: And at the same time it's not that... it's not that easy anymore to just sit there and talk to the youth, which was kinda what I wanted—I wanted to be that connection, um, but, you know, it kinda, it was—I think it was annoying at some point—you know, you felt like—so who's the crew leader right now? Can you just tell me what to do so I'm not confused? You know. I mean it helped obviously because aside from being Assistant Crew Leader you grow as a leader. Like, you have to on the spot think of what's next when youth are comin' up to you and being like “Scott doesn't know what to do, what should we do next?” You're like, “Well.....Let me think...”

In this passage, Nadia articulates what she had wanted to gain from her role as ACL, that she “wanted to be that connection.” Her brief acknowledgement that “it was annoying at some point” is a way of navigating the difference between her desire and the necessity she was “faced with.”

An interesting shift in Nadia's voice in this second passage occurs when she begins using the directive voice rather than speaking with I-statements. As she explains her desires, she uses I: “I wanted”; “I think.” As she shifts to the necessary steps she
took, she uses you: “you grow”; “you have to”; “youth are comin’ up to you.” This is key in understanding how Nadia dealt with the situation in which she was “stuck.” Rather than focusing on her own wants or needs, Nadia responded by placing herself outside of the picture, focusing on a more responsible identity as the person who could “grow as a leader.”

It is possible to draw from Nadia’s description of this relationship with her adult supervisor that when youth are placed in adult roles, they can push themselves to forego their personal desires in order to achieve the greater goal. This example of foregoing is similar to Lianne’s description of the personal sacrifices she made to start TFP’s North Shore site. Nadia’s voicing of her annoyance with Scott, asking, “Can you just tell me what to do so I’m not confused?” connects to this way of seeing youth-adult relationships at TFP. When youth are not able to “follow,” they may push themselves to function as more adult figures within the program’s structure, giving themselves the chance to “grow” as leaders. However, when this shift happens too fast, or because of the incompetence of an adult staff person, the young person may feel annoyed or frustrated that they are being pushed out of their role as youth too fast.

In the following section, Nadia describes a time where she actively chose a more adult role in order to mentor one participant in the SYP. In contrast to the previous passage, Nadia speaks with more I-statements and with less derision towards the person she is speaking about. Perhaps this is because Nadia naturally held the power in this relationship, rather than being pushed to have it. Nadia is describing the difficulty surrounding one young woman’s firing:

NADIA: Um, it was hard. It was hard I think ’cause I tried, I really tried to walk her, you know, along the right paths for so long—
CASEY: Yeah.
NADIA: And I even told her, at the end I think. I think I was actually the person that reported her last violation, that got her fired because it was just like, she, you know, she was aware that she was doing wrong things and I feel like she still had so much more to work on and maybe she wasn’t ready for that, you know?
CASEY: Yeah, totally.
NADIA: So, I mean, it was a bummer that she had to leave and like if she were to do it again, she’d be a lot better at it ’cause she knows what she’s facing.

It seems in this passage that Nadia ascribes a strong positive character to the young woman she is describing. She emphasizes that the young woman would “be a lot better at” the program if she did it again. This way of speaking implies the deep sense of care Nadia feels towards this young woman.

Nadia begins by acknowledging that the firing “was hard.” She repeats this phrase again, making it clear that for her, this was an extremely difficult situation. In her interview, Nadia rarely expressed that moments were difficult for her. Note that in the passage about Scott, she still refrains from describing the situation as difficult, only as “not that easy anymore.” In her role as a mentor for this young woman, Nadia feels it a personal loss to have “tried to walk her...along the right paths” and still see the young woman “doing wrong things.” This feeling of personal loss comes when one takes on the responsibility to foster one person’s personal development and finds that that person still ends up not succeeding. Nadia, who is the person carrying more power in the relationship, is left feeling as though that power did not enable her to do enough.

An important line in this passage comes when Nadia says, “I feel like she still had so much more to work on and maybe she wasn’t ready for that, you know?” The ending of this statement with a question seems to reflect Nadia’s own difficulty accepting that this young woman “wasn’t ready for that.” Nadia’s use of the phrase, “I feel,” emphasizes the personal quality of this moment for her, and how tied to her own personal sense of success this young woman’s success was. As Nadia describes, she was “the person that reported [the young woman's] last violation.” This is tied up in the emotional difficulty of the firing.

As the more adult figure in the relationship, it was Nadia’s responsibility to report the young woman's violations, even if these led to the firing. Further, it was Nadia’s responsibility to feel the weight of the firing because she acted as a mentor,
although as she describes later, “And I think it was, even after, you know, you feel bad that day and then the next day when you see the change not only in your crew but in the whole program.” Nadia’s switch to the directive voice is associated with her taking on of a more adult role. Thus, she seems to be conveying that adult figures must make the shift away from their personal feelings in order to run the “whole program” effectively. The importance of letting go of the young woman’s firing because of the “change...in the whole program” is key to Nadia’s telling of this story. As a youth placed in a position of power within the program, Nadia takes on the role of the person who can make sacrifices and who can “feel bad that day” but know that the overall change is worth it.

Dynamics of power within TFP, particularly in terms of age, are extremely important to unpacking the program’s effectiveness. At the same time, a whole world exists outside of the program, and it is this world that governs the way people see themselves, especially as agents of change. As Katelynn describes it eloquently to youth during the Summer Youth Program, it’s the “water we swim in.” The power dynamics governing American education, media, and landscapes affect each of us. Participants in this project spoke about, both subtly and directly, the water they swim in and how it affects them. The following narratives take up this thread, looking at moments where participants spoke about family and school as places where life is different than at TFP.

Being able to feel like one has a voice is key to having agency. Young people often struggle with this, particularly in the face of difficult circumstances in which the only role available for them is that of passive recipients. In this passage, Lana describes the challenge of living between parents who are getting divorced. She begins with the way that her experience of school was different than that of her brother:

LANA: School was his relief and school was my, like, another stress. I couldn't even speak up for myself. But, I feel like that made us not really confident in ourselves seeing that our parents were, you know, fighting. Um, and then when they got divorced, we were still in contact, me and my brother were still seeing my dad, every other weekend
and we were with my mom every other weekend, and then that was hard too, 'cause they had us like, take sides and we were always in the middle. But at least we had each other, you know?

In this description, Lana speaks both to moments in which she was passive, “I couldn’t even speak up for myself,” and to moments in which she was active, “we were still in contact.” Her description of being “always in the middle” illustrates how difficult it was to be between two fighting parents. This linking of metaphorically having voice to the actual communication that Lana had with different family members makes clear how much this experience shaped her identity as a person who could “speak up,” described in another section in the interview.

As Lana continued telling this narrative, she begins describing her brother as he was leaving her life:

LANA: And then, my brother went to jail after um, I think it was his freshmen year of college um and then, so [pause] at that time, his thing was almost over. He was in the, house arrest, I think is what it was—I forget what it's called.
CASEY: Yeah—that you can't leave the house without—
LANA: Yeah, and he decided to stay at my dad’s house so, then we were apart, so I had to deal with my mom, he had to deal with my dad. But we got to visit each other, like every weekend, he would come like, yeah, or every other weekend I would go to my dad’s house, um, then he passed away and then I didn't have any contact with my dad after that. So it's just me and my mom now.

Lana's feeling of passivity increases in this description. None of the decisions she talks about are hers to make. This is particularly striking in the moment in which she says, “then he passed away.” By having this be almost a side-comment in the longer narrative, Lana has pointed both to the emotional weight of her brother's death, and to the lack of agency she felt over the entire situation.

It is difficult to unpack family dynamics in a way that honors the depth of them. Lana's story, here, is important more because of the way it shows how one person can remain affected by their family circumstances, particularly in terms of personality and self-expression. Lana is shy, quiet, and reserved. This is reflected even in the way that she puts so many events in this single brief narrative. She concluded telling the story in
a similar way:

LANA: And it's been working fine, I mean since I got through this pain. And it's not like I got over anything it still comes back, I still get upset once in a while but it's a lot easier now that I have my friends supporting me and my mom.

In this passage, Lana speaks with the most active voice. She speaks with I-statements and is in control of what she feels. She describes getting “through this pain,” and still acknowledges that “it still comes back, I still get upset,” but is able to see that “it’s a lot easier.” This clear framing of a story of a very difficult time in her life allows Lana to have power in her own story, rather than being passive in what is happening. As the youngest member of a family fraught with tension, it is clear that Lana became quieter in response, and is only now figuring out how to “speak up” for herself.

The choice to take on responsibility is a marker of being an 'adult' to many young people. Indeed, this choice combats the traditional view of youth as 'lazy' or 'reckless.' Thus, by choosing responsibility, young people take control of their own lives (agency) and move towards a more 'adult' self. For Steven, this move towards being responsible involves the choice to push himself away from his older brother, a drug-addict who is often in trouble. Steven describes his dilemma after being asked to talk about a challenging situation in his life:

STEVEN: Um. I guess like a current challenging situation I'm having is my brother like completely, completely addicted to drugs. Not really knowin' what he's doin'. And uh, not knowin' how to help him. Like, at first I was like—I'd get mad at him when he'd do stuff. But now I'm realizin' it's really not him, he used to be a good kid it's just the drugs side of him takin' over. And now he's like a scumbag or whatever. But like, I kinda wanna still, I always try to like, lie to myself and see him as a good kid, like, whatever. But, like, just tryin' to figure out—should I just completely push myself away from him?

Steven cares deeply for his brother, as emphasized by his description of his brother's trouble. Steven is caught between “not knowin' how to help him,” and getting “mad at him,” even while trying to still hold onto the belief that it’s “just the drugs side of him takin' over.” What Steven is expressing underneath this description is love for his brother: “I kinda wanna still [...] lie to myself and see him as a good kid.” This desire to
see his brother as a “good kid” would make it easier for Steven to feel so helpless.

The powerlessness Steven feels in the face of his brother’s drug addiction is understandable. Similarly, Steven’s search for justification shows how connected he feels to his brother. Steven described at a different moment in the interview:

And then um, we lost our father when we were younger, um, I was like 9, he was like 12 or 11 or somethin’ like that. And, uh, it hit me, it hit both of us obviously hard, it hit him kinda more—I went more with the grieving side […] and it hit him more on the anger side.

Throughout Steven’s life, moments of difficulty have been marked by his brother’s reaction being different to his. This seems particularly strong in relation to their father’s death, when Steven reacts with “the grieving side” and his brother responds with “the anger side.” Looking back to Steven describing his brother’s drug addiction, it seems that Steven takes responsibility for his brother’s bad actions and reactions. As Steven works to becoming his own adult self, he asks, “should I just completely push myself away from him?” This question is powerful because it shows how difficult it is for Steven to leave his brother behind, even though Steven has found a different way to adapt to the struggles he faces.

Steven continues describing the effect his brother has had on him:

STEVEN: ‘Cause he’s gotten me arrested, he’s gotten me in a lot of trouble. I can’t even hold a job right now, for the last three years because of like stuff that like did come from what he was doin’. Um…I can’t even work at The Food Project any more because of all that.

[…]
At first I was tryin’ to help him and tryin’ to do whatever I could, like, gettin’ mad at people who would sell him drugs. Like just do whatever I could to stop him from using. Which is really kind of impossible. And even bein’ around that all the time got me in more trouble. And, so now, I’m kinda at the point where I’m moved out; I’ve tried to push myself away from him as much as I can but then I’m realizing: he doesn’t have any friends, he doesn’t—all he really has is my mother and me. And if he doesn’t have anybody than there’s really no way he could make it through it. But if I put myself in the position where I could get hurt or in trouble, then why should I do that. So I really don’t know who, what’s the right thing to do.

In this passage, Steven oscillates between emphasizing his love for his brother and speaking to the need to push away from his brother in order to succeed. He acknowledges, importantly, that his brother has had an extremely negative impact on
Steven’s life: “he’s gotten me arrested”; “I can’t even hold a job right now...because of like stuff that like did come from what he was doin’.” Steven’s voice in this moment is strong. While he does not deride his brother, Steven is making a clear distinction between his brother’s actions and his own.

Steven is able to reflect on his past self and the way that he thought “gettin’ mad” at the people who would sell his brother drugs could possibly stop his brother “from using.” In this reflection, Steven is able to say that it “is really kind of impossible” to stop his brother from using, and that it got Steven “in more trouble” just to be by his brother’s side. This reflection is a key part of Steven’s move to become a more mature self. He pushes away and against his brother in order to stay away from situations “where I could get hurt or in trouble.” However, even having “moved out” and having pushed away his brother, Steven feels the difficulty of not knowing “what’s the right thing to do.” This is similar to Nadia’s dilemma of trying to support a young woman being fired. Steven feels that even as he takes on more responsibility, he can’t always be sure that he is making the right decision. However, the power that he expresses of knowing that it is “impossible” to stop his brother from using is a clearly important stance for Steven to be able to take.

In order to feel powerful within the world and claim agency, young people often have to combat stereotypes about them, about where they are from, and about who they are able to become. This struggle begins with moments within one’s family, either if it is the struggle, like Lana, to feel that one can “speak up” or like Steven, to “push away.” At TFP, as Nadia describes, youth often enter into complex relationships of power with both adult staff and with other youth. These relationships are usually, and hopefully, places of growth, for both people. In the face of wider societal issues, however, youth must be able to claim more space, speak louder, and make a bigger impact, in order to have adults even listen.
In this final passage, Dave and I discuss facing people who are ignorant, particularly in terms of privilege. In thinking about the ways that power dynamics shape each and every person's life, it is especially important to be able to being to recognize the ways that each of us reinforces dominant power structures and ideologies. In the first section, Dave describes very simply, “Like obviously, of course there was times when I was hungry and stuff like that but I think like, overall, everything that I been through has helped me. But I don’t know, so.” Dave's brief statement of there being “times when I was hungry and stuff like that” skates over what could have been a long description of difficult times. The fact that he leaves these out of the conversation is tied to the second half of his statement, in which he justifies his struggle with the idea that “everything that I been through has helped me.” This is an easier way to accept difficulty. To believe that every struggle helps one get stronger (and perhaps this is the case) is a way of making it through each difficult thing one faces, and using that strength to move forward in life.

Dave's use of the word “obviously” is crucial to understanding his world-view. To Dave, to have “times when I was hungry” is a fairly reasonable occurrence. This isn't to say that it is okay, nor that to Dave it is okay, but it does imply an important perspective on what it means to have been hungry. When I responded to Dave's statement, I began with, “I think that's a really good perspective. I think ‘cause, I mean like, the other perspective is to either be really angry all the time or to be like... I don’t know.” My inability to name any other perspective beside anger implies how difficult it is to actually psychologically reconcile being disadvantaged with a positive outlook on life. Either one believes that struggle is helpful, or one is angry at the system that produces the struggle. The repetition of “I don't know” in both of our beliefs speaks to the complex system that we are speaking against.

Shortly after, Dave described why he doesn't respond with anger:
DAVE: But I don't get mad at people like that because I think like, it's just, it's just like—not the fear of the unknown but overall, but they just act like that 'cause they don't know.

CASEY: Yeah.

DAVE: I think like, if someone was to sit down and educate them, even if it was like a video! Of like something really dramatic happening in the hood or something.

CASEY: But do you think that's all it? Like I don't know if that's all it would take.

DAVE: I don't know. Maybe. But I think a lot of times people who are like that—it's not—sometimes it's people who really don't wanna know and don't care but I think sometimes people just don't know and wanna know.

In this passage, Dave and I speak purely to what we “think.” This is important because it marks the absence of our emotional sense of the way ignorance affects our own lives, or the lives of others around us. The “us” and “them” expressed in this conversation also shows the way that a complex system that perpetuates cycles of injustice forces people into splits. Dave uses the phrase “people who are like that” to explain “them” as a category. Although we are clearly referencing those with privilege, we are using extremely simple terms.

I, for example, carry privilege that Dave does not, as a white college student. Similarly, Dave, as a male person, carries privilege that I do not. Sitting together during the interview, in some sense, we educated one another. The idea that there are “people who really don’t wanna know and don’t care” is a pessimistic view of the world. I believe Dave justifies this statement with the idea that “sometimes people just don’t know and wanna know.” The idea that for the most part, “people who are like that” could be educated about their privilege is key. Systems of injustice only work as long as the people within them refuse to learn from one another, or break from the cycles of ignorance perpetuated by those dominant systems.

Is it the “fear of the unknown” or is it simply the “unknown” that keeps us from speaking with one another? Youth at TFP come from extremely different backgrounds. Some battle with structural injustice for years, both within and without their families. They find their way to a small youth program, where they are pushed to talk to one another, and educate one another. It is this speaking up that pushes youth at TFP to find
their own voices, and to use them for positive change. Maybe, at heart, most of us are people who don’t know. Maybe it is on all of us to speak up, but more importantly, it is on all of us to be listening. It is by working together that we can transform the world.

In understanding the ways that participants expressed meaning about their experiences in relation to both TFP and its societal context, it is important to recognize the implications of their words. It is important to see the meaning of a mentor in a young person’s life; the meaning of a physical space and the metaphorical presence it holds in someone’s mind; the ways that reflection can lead to personal growth and new possible futures; the way that power affects all of us, and all of us can have it. TFP pushes its participants to be self-aware agents of social change, through positive relationships, strong connection to place, emphasis on possibility, and power.
Conclusion

I chose to do an ethnographic portrait of TFP not only because it has impacted me in powerful ways, or even my community, but because I believe that TFP has important lessons and implications for all of us. As a program that takes as a central goal that everyone should have access to healthy food, TFP provides a model of equality in a system that often ignores those without privilege. As a program that gives youth space to be agents of this equality, TFP provides a model of an educational setting that transgresses schools and allows youth to be the people speaking up for a change. TFP is a program that creates community, that pushes all participants to talk about their identities in meaningful ways, and that purposefully reflects, as a program, on what it can continue to do better.

In my concluding chapter, I address layers of the interview experience that are not visible through the analysis in the previous chapter. I continue on to discuss this research project in the context of other work done around TFP. I end by summarizing the implications of this study, particularly in terms of how lessons taken from TFP’s structure and participant experience can be used to think about informing other educational settings. Learning from the TFP model can have great implications for all people within American society, from parents to children to teachers to lawyers and judges. We are all stakeholders in changing the system. The conclusion closes with the transcribed versions of participants' responses to my final interview question, which asked them to speak back to stereotypes about young people.

Lessons Learned: (Mis)Understandings

These interviews, all conducted with people with whom I am close, represent only a small section of people's experiences at TFP. To conduct interviews on the
a threshold of insider/outsider perspective means that each conversation was shaped by
the identity of the participant, by my identity, and by the history and relationship
between myself and each participant. Sofia Villenas describes how “to resist ‘othering’
and marginalization is to use our multiplicity of identities in order to tolerate and
welcome the contradictions and ambiguities.” 51 To use my own multiple identities in
order to “dismantle the categories” 52 is extremely important in an ethnographic project.
In this way, I resist “othering” the participants in this project, by bringing into
conversation the “contradictions and ambiguities” present in the interviews themselves.
This welcoming is crucial to giving this project real depth, and allows me to question
my own stances in relation to privilege, power, and marginalization.

There were many moments where, transcribing the audio recording, I could
sense the loss of the nuance of the original interaction. Further, and more difficult to
describe, each interview was recorded separately from all of the other time I spent with
each person, even the moments I spent with them on the day of the interview: learning
post-interview how to chop wood with a heavy axe, with Steven; cooking soup for
Lianne, who talked to my mother for a good half hour; going to McDonald’s with Dave
and driving back from Boston together, singing R&B. These experiences exist outside of
the research, yet they represent just as fully many of the emotions and thoughts that are
talked about in the interviews regarding connecting to other people, to food, and the
way that the structure of TFP pushes people together in new ways.

In this section of the chapter, I address moments during the interviews in which
the participant and myself expressed a level of shared understanding that is hidden to a
reader, or a moment in which we had a misunderstanding. In this way, the research
process is allowed to be fluid, revealing places of meaning that might be hidden

beneath the most obvious thematic layers. It pushes myself, as research, to read for meanings that I might have missed both in the original interaction and even again, when I transcribed and analyzed.

In looking at places of understanding and misunderstanding in my interview with Dave, I was able to work towards a conceptualization of my role in creating meaning during the interview. This was also fruitful for looking at the ways Dave and I construct meanings of self and of TFP. The first misunderstanding between Dave and myself happens when I don’t understand what he is talking about:

DAVE: Because I think like, sometimes [The Food Project] people go too far to find someone that’ll be inspirational.
CASEY: You think that’s what it is? Wait, what do you mean?
DAVE: I think sometimes it’s like, you can find somebody that’ll touch everybody’s lives that isn’t like overly bougie, like you know Food Project, you know Food Project...

By using the terms “somebody that’ll touch everybody’s lives” and “overly bougie,” Dave is able to express to me more clearly what he meant. I understood the tone of his statement to mean that he didn’t want someone who went over the top in seeking to be “inspirational,” where before I had taken his statement to be an affront to my belief that TFP often has “inspirational” staff. His explanation resolved the misunderstanding and we continued talking. I include this moment to demonstrate the ways that conflict within the interviews can be talked through. An interview between two people who are close to each other can hold many of these moments, and it is important to notice which imply deeper meaning and which are a result of the closeness.

The second misunderstanding in my interview with Dave carried much more weight. It is especially important in understanding my position as a researcher. I am relating a story about a fellow Crew Leader whom I was angry at (the reason is not included in this portion):

CASEY: So, she starts tryin’ to tell Alex and Jamal how they should call dreadlocks just—
DAVE: Locs?
CASEY: Locs, ’cause of all this stuff. And then she says...
DAVE: That’s true though!
CASEY: But no, no—
DAVE: I argue that sometimes.
CASEY: No, no, I know, I'll explain the whole story [...] 

The central reason that Dave and I are not understanding each other in this moment seems to be because I am introducing the story in such a way that it sounds as if I am disagreeing with what this woman is talking about. This seems to bother Dave because he considers her statement to be valid and it relates to his racial identity, not to mine. In this moment, I felt flustered trying to explain what I meant by telling the story:

[...] CASEY: So then she starts telling Alex about how he's perpetuating black male stereotypes blah blah blah and Alex's just like giving her shit the whole time on purpose because like—
DAVE: Is she white?
CASEY: No, she's black. [...] 

I give here an explanation of how I was frustrated because this woman was trying to explain something to my Assistant Crew Leader, Alex, that was actually deterring him from listening to her. This helped Dave to understand my point, and we end up agreeing. By structuring my telling of the story around race, however, rather than Alex's immaturity, I spoke in a way that Dave did not agree with. My repetition of “no, no,” in the first section makes the interaction elevate in tone towards frustration, rather than if I had acknowledged what Dave was saying. Instead, if I had stopped to listen, perhaps saying, “yes, that is true, and...,” it might have been easier to tell the story in a way that Dave could understand. In telling the story in a way that emphasized race, rather than levels of maturity, which had been my core problem with working with Alex that summer, I created a platform for misunderstanding between Dave and myself. Although later in the conversation I was able to articulate my meaning, it is important to recognize my limited perspective in the beginning.

As soon as I was able to give a fuller, more nuanced explanation, Dave and I are able to reach shared understanding:

CASEY: The point was more like, she was someone who was like—you could tell when she spoke that she was actually really powerful but she went so over the top with telling
Alex that, that then he wasn't going to listen to her say *anything* at all about perpetuating black male stereotypes because he was pissed that she was saying it in the first place. DAVE: Yeah, yeah. The way you do it right...

Both the moments of disagreement and the moments of shared understanding between Dave and myself seem to express a primary concern on both of our parts to identify with one another. In this situation, I assumed more comfort than I should have in talking about “locs” and black male stereotypes, since I am white, and female. An important realization for me in analyzing this portion of transcript was that my closeness with Dave plays a huge role in the way we interact. We want to identify with each other, we want to understand each other, and we already have a large base of shared knowledge that informs the way we speak with one another and enables us to repair misunderstandings.

The above moments of misunderstanding represent an extremely important overlaying of TFP's culture with the interpersonal relationships that exist outside of it, as well. Dave and I are not currently working at TFP. However, in the way we speak with one another, we still abide by many of the cultural standards that we learned at TFP. We are respectful of one another, and seek to understand what the other is saying. We are able to think about our identities, both racial and otherwise, and talk about those identities, even if it is difficult. In the follow section, Nadia and I have a misunderstanding in a different way, although it relates back to this idea of being able to talk about identity.

Nadia and I, who related during the interview as hard-working young women, had an important moment of misunderstanding. Nadia, who is a senior in high school, was expressing to me her pleasure in getting to have lots of free time. I however, was at the time of the interview exactly half-way through with my senior year of college, and carried the weight of that amount of work on my shoulders. In the following two moments are embedded several important layers of meaning about hard-work and
moments of experience:

    CASEY: Are you still working at Dunks?
    NADIA: Yeah. But now I, I cut down a lot, I work like three days as opposed to like five
    when I worked…
    CASEY: Don’t do that in college.
    NADIA: No, definitely not. [laughs]

In this short segment, I offer Nadia an opinion from my college student perspective: not
to work too many days a week while in college. Her agreement (and laughter) implies
that she both understands what I am saying and has already thought about it, she says,
“definitely not.” Having been Nadia's Crew Leader, this interaction seems to fall within
the bounds of that relationship. I am older and have had three and a half years in
college, and to give mentoring advice is natural. In the section that follows, however, we
disagree with each other, quietly, again because of our difference in experience:

    CASEY: […] I do my work during the daytime.
    NADIA: [laughs]
    CASEY: I just do it. ‘Cause that’s a good skill to learn in high school because people get
insane.
    NADIA: It does, but, I feel like, you get outta the habit just as quick though, because…
    CASEY: Yeah, but, you have the skill, the skill is what matters I think.
    NADIA: I guess. Like, now I just like, I’ll go home and I’ll be tired […]

Although this isn't a blatant disagreement, Nadia and I clearly have differing opinions
on whether once one has the “skill” of just doing one's work, one can keep it or “get
outta the habit.” There are two important points embedded in this. The first has to do
with Nadia's sentiment that one can “get outta the habit,” which is based on her
experience of, as a high school senior, not having to work as hard because she has set
herself up for success. This is a perspective distinct to her current place in the
educational system (a colloquialism for this is “senioritis”). As a senior in college, even
though I might be able to relate to Nadia’s sentiment, I emphasize here the ability to
hold on to a work ethic.

    This sense of wanting a work ethic to be engrained in the self relates to the idea
of working hard as a method for survival. In Nadia's current situation, having worked
hard and receiving a full-ride scholarship to a four-year liberal arts college, she is able to work less hard because she has worked through a difficult time, survived, and succeeded. In this section, I am expressing, underneath my statements, my own struggle to continue working through that process. In my emphasis on “the skill, the skill is what matters,” I am referring to my own psychological need to justify working hard in order to continue on succeeding. The most important ramification of this is that it rendered me less able to listen or respond to what Nadia was actually saying, instead focusing on my own needs. Nadia’s, “I guess,” is a way of acknowledging my stubborn view and moving us forward in the conversation.

Misunderstandings within interviews do not negate meaning or relationship, rather, they inform the way that each person relates to the other. In this case, Nadia and my perspectives were vastly different because of our positions in society. In particular, this limited my own ability to listen to her. In some ways, though, it may have been better for Nadia and myself to continue on with our own opinions about work ethic, as both of us are able to succeed using our own strategies. Similarly to my misunderstandings with Dave, this conversation between Nadia and myself demonstrates the interweaving of TFP's values into our daily lives and perspectives. Our expression of wanting to work hard is related to the way we have learned to work from TFP. At the end of my interview with Dave, we had an extremely interesting moment of shared understanding that demonstrates this interplay:

DAVE: No questions.  
CASEY: Aright, you're the best. Um, close this out Beasts of the East.  
DAVE: We the best.  
CASEY: Did we have a chant? We didn't have a chant.  
DAVE: Nah.  
CASEY: My crew when I was a crew leader had chants.  
[end of tape]

The summer that Dave and I worked together, our crew named itself “Beasts of the East.” The tagline was “we the best.” In this ending to the interview, Dave and I return
to our first common ground, which was Crew B in the summer of 2007. When I say that we are ending, and use our crew’s name, Dave immediately responds with “we the best.” I hadn’t expected him to respond so quickly with the catchphrase, and hadn’t even heard it said that way in years.

In this passage, Dave and I express a shared understanding of several things. The first is the meaning of TFP in our lives. The fact that we have not forgotten the name and catchphrase of our crew implies how connected we still feel to that group of people and that moment in the program. The second is that we are remembering how we, two people, met and got to know one another. The fact that this meeting is located within the context of TFP relates back to the idea of the culture of TFP being interwoven into people’s sense of identity and their relationships. The “cloak” that Katelynn describes in the section on Place is a similar idea. TFP stays over, or within, participant’s minds, even when they are no longer physically working at TFP.

The final important place of shared understanding in this passage is that of all things on which Dave and I relate, it is our origins in The Food Project that remain key to our conceptions of self. I clarify that several years later, as a crew leader, my crew had chants, which was and is important to me. What reading for shared meaning in my conversation with Dave lends me to believe is that above all, The Food Project creates for those youth who stay on, a culture that is transmittable, loving, and supportive.

Reading for misunderstandings and shared understandings allows a different perspective on the research project. It brings to light the way that my position as researcher affected the data. It brings this position into conversation with the text, highlighting both the depth of interpersonal relationships and the power dynamic of interviewer and interviewed. As researcher, I made the decision of whether or not to move on with the conversation, or as even in the last example, to end the interview. Thus, reading for moments in which my power was pushed against by the person being
interviewed gives more insight into how research interviews are shaped by the power dynamic of researcher and researched.

**Implications: Intentionality, Commitment, Love**

This ethnographic portrait of participants in The Food Project's youth program is important not only because it provides insight into the structural components of the program but also because of the ways the voices of the participants can speak back to the dominant value systems present in the current educational system. The youth interviewed in this project push back against assumptions and stereotypes of youth in powerful, necessary ways. Part of this pushing back comes from time spent within TFP's programs. There are two very simple programmatic elements of TFP's youth program that by definition transgress traditional American educational values.

The first is the fact that the program takes place on a farm. The space that the land provides is a new cultural context for almost all participants, making the diversity of the program even more significant. Lianne Fisman, in her dissertation on participants' perceptions of space at TFP, describes the “equalization of power” that takes place by putting all participants in settings in which they are not entirely comfortable. She suggests that this equalization “should create conditions whereby negative stereotypes about people and places may shift.” If this is a truth of TFP, then the seemingly simple fact that the program takes place on suburban and urban farm sites is actually the foundation for the work that the program is able to do around diversity and breaking down stereotypes. This is a breaking away from traditional education settings, which involve four walls, tables, chairs, and specific hierarchies of power.

A second important element of TFP's structure that makes it extraordinarily

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different from schools and from many other youth programs is that it pays its participants. For youth, being paid is often the reason that they cite for having participated in the program in the first place. It is also a key part of the enforcement of the standards system. As long as youth are invested in earning their full pay, they try not to violate the standards system, even if they are not completely interested in the idea of the standards themselves. This allows for a longer temporal trajectory towards success within the program than at youth programs or schools, which cannot ensure the engagement of their participants as fully. Also important is the pay of the adult full-time staff, which, although it is common in other programs, is important because TFP does not run its youth program using volunteer staff, meaning that attrition rates are less high. Paying youth for their time immediately places them as agents of their own success, rather than positioning them as objects. A common traditional view is of the young student as a 'blank slate' to be filled with knowledge. TFP's structure asks its young people to fill themselves.

Full time adult staff are put in positions of authority over the youth staff. However, all staff exist on a more equal plane than in many other educational settings, since youth are being paid for their time and their effort to work and learn hard. It is important to recognize that youth are still aware of their status as younger-than and lower-paid-than adult staff. Although both parties (adult staff and youth workers) seem to accept this hierarchy, for the most part, it is more in line with dominant views about young people. Within a limited system, growth must take place slowly, and subversively. TFP, functioning as a small non-profit organization, requires government funding and private donations in order to run. I am not sure that TFP was founded on the premise of radically shifting perceptions of youth, and the fact that it does so now is crucial to its success, even if it is not fully radical.

Brigham and Nahas Research Associates, in a follow-up study of youth
participants from The Food Project, highlight three ways that TFP is set apart from other youth programs. While these are different than my own findings, they speak to the way that different research approaches lead to different results. I discuss these as a way to give my own conclusions more depth. Brigham and Nahas cited the following:

• The Food Project is a phenomenal first job
• Experiencing diversity—purposeful, sustained, and meaningful
• The land as a resource

These conclusions are based on surveys conducted with a diverse group of 30 youth who had participated in TFP’s Boston/Lincoln site in years prior to 2006. These conclusions are useful to understanding the ways that TFP’s structure works, especially in terms of going beyond other youth programs. However, because of the lack of personal relationships inherent in the Brigham and Nahas interview process, their research project fails to gather the subtler details at work at TFP. By conducting an ethnographic study that allowed participants to talk about their own lives in relation to TFP, my project gets at what is at work on a deeper level within TFP’s structure and for participants.

Brigham and Nahas’ conclusion that “The Food Project is a phenomenal first job” is important. Job skills are a crucial aspect of the way that TFP is both seen as successful by the external community and the way that TFP works to keep youth both engaged and moving upward in their own trajectories. Brigham and Nahas describe, “the work is ‘real’ and the responsibilities are significant.” I push this idea further to include that TFP is a phenomenal first job not just because it teaches young people how to work, and do “‘real’ work,” but that it also offers youth more agency than most other organizations. Youth at TFP are asked to meet community partners over lunch, give presentations to potential donors, and draft new curriculum (among many other things). In situations like these, youth are placed as ‘in charge,’ and speak with power.

about the social change they hope to effect, while simultaneously being able to reflect on their own growth.

As outlined by Darcy Varney, TFP is a “learner” organization\(^{55}\), where youth are placed in decision-making positions and allowed power in facilitating aspects of the program. In this way, not only does TFP teach young people job skills that are relevant in the external community, TFP also helps young people achieve internal power that translates to them feeling more in control over their own success. As a young person in the Academic Year Program, I assisted in transforming our half-acre plot of land in Lynn to a full acre with soil that was brought in. After two Saturdays leading volunteers from a local college digging trenches through the soil in order to make beds and paths, I felt amazed. I could see as a result of my peers and my own hard work, we had doubled our farm space by two! The feeling of power gained from that work had a lasting effect on my sense of agency, particularly in educational settings where I felt less powerful.

The study by Brigham and Nahas correctly identifies TFP’s attention to diversity (especially in terms of the curriculum) as a key element of the program’s success. They suggest that TFP’s efforts around diversity “should be leveraged to the fullest.” Their study, which emphasizes program elements rather than personal experience, again leaves out what this study presents strongly: the way that the structure of the program influences personal experience. TFP’s diversity is not only special because of the way it functions within the curriculum, although this is an important structural element of the program. The diversity of the program goes further to impact the depth of relationships between people from different backgrounds, transforming the sense of community at TFP to one that transgresses norms of what a community should look like.

The land as providing a “metaphor for youth” is another key element of TFP’s programs that Brigham and Nahas are able to articulate as a structural component of

TFP’s philosophy and work. They describe that “the land provides a metaphor for youth, reflecting the many truths of their lives about the importance and value of hard work and effort.” In other words, by seeing a seed grow into a vegetable plant that can feed someone in the community, a youth can metaphorically see their own growth into an agent of social change. What is important to note about their conclusion is that the land also functions as a grounding element for the community surrounding TFP. While this is not addressed in my study, it is an important component of TFP’s vision and mission that is left by the wayside in most studies of TFP. In focusing on the experience of youth, or, as in my study, in focusing on the experience of youth and staff, the research around TFP has left out the external community, within which TFP is embedded, and which is a central focus of the program itself.

One anecdote often told about TFP-NS is that the Lynn farm site, which is located behind an elementary school, transformed the space. Prior to the farm’s existence, graffiti covered the large brick wall of the school that faces the (once vacant) lot. With the farm now in place for six years, there has not been a single incident of graffiti since. This implies that more than just having a strong effect on the participants of the program, TFP’s commitment to the land impacts the community in important ways. By taking as its goal positive social change for the community, TFP is supported by that community. Unfortunately, this is a relatively unaddressed aspect of both studies.

In the following section, I address the ways that I believe TFP functions on deeper levels to facilitate positive personal and social change, and the structural elements that foster this growth. TFP works to provide a space for positive youth development, shared communal values, and actual social change. While the program is neither a panacea nor is it working in isolation, TFP has several important implications for the way that youth development programs can and should function. These positive aspects function on both invisible and more stated levels, but all work towards TFP’s
vision, “to create personal and social change through sustainable agriculture.”

The first crucial aspect of TFP’s programs is the intentionality inherent in decision-making processes and community formation. The meticulous hiring process, careful attention to diversity, and complex rule system all speak to institutionalized ways of intentionally creating a specific community. The people in this project spoke to the ways intentionality worked for them. Think back to Nadia’s careful approach to mentoring a young woman who was going to be fired, or Dave’s use of specific language to speak to his race when asked to identify a target identity. The moments in which participants acted and speak with intention conveys on a larger level the way that TFP fosters a community in which people actively examine their own actions and words. This work, particularly around diversity in relation to education, is extremely powerful, and I believe useful for other educational settings to consider.

Further, TFP intentionally educates its participants, specifically in terms of agricultural knowledge, political awareness, and societal understanding. The careful construction of the curriculum that is implemented for both youth and staff is an important component of TFP’s working. Lianne Fisman describes that “narratives are reframed as people come to understand the history, politics and connections between places.”56 As both youth and staff learn about the physical space they are inhabiting, through curriculum and conversation with one another, the communal narrative of place is “reframed” in a more meaningful way. This is a key component of TFP’s programs that I believe should be implemented in other settings.

Having the program be maintained through intentionality and attention to detail has resulted in the strict set of guidelines, both personal and communal. Thus, the second aspect of TFP’s programs is commitment. Youth participants are asked to commit to the position they are hired for, to commit to the standards system, and then

56 Fisman, Lianne. “Sowing a Sense of Place.” 34.
to commit to the values of the program. Staff participants are asked to commit to remaining with the program, to supporting the youth and each other, and to be committed to changing the food system.

Intentionality and commitment, however, are not enough to make a place as special as TFP. The stories told by participants in this study reflect a much deeper level of power that is found in the relationships between people and the relationships that participants have to the vision of TFP. The final crucial piece of TFP’s working is the one that functions in the most subtle of ways. It is the function of the value placed on relationships, and is fostered by youth and staff participants alike. It is love. Relatively unaddressed in literature on the success of youth programs or educational settings, love between people is crucial for support, motivation, success, and happiness.

In a discussion of the presence of eros in the classroom, bell hooks gives an articulate description of what she sees as a major conflict of educational settings:

Trained in the philosophical context of Western metaphysical dualism, many of us have accepted the notion that there is a split between the body and the mind. Believing this, individuals enter the classroom to teach as though only the mind is present, and not the body. 57

Most schools are constructed as spaces for the advancement of a mind. Indeed, the majority of schools that allow students to act through their bodies are vocational schools, primarily serving working-class and minority communities. TFP intentionally puts young people on farms, which immediately asks them to be aware of their bodies. Through curriculum, TFP asks young people to think about their selves in relation to the world. Rather than assuming that “only the mind is present,” TFP transforms the meaning of education to include the importance of supporting mental, cognitive growth, emotional growth, and supporting physical knowledge. I argue that it is because of the refusal to split mind and body that TFP is able to have participants form such strong relationships.

Love is something that is traditionally considered as existing outside of educational institutions. The common belief is love should be suppressed so as not to interfere with the knowledge-getting of students or professionalism of teachers. What is the space where minds and bodies are accepted as one? In the family, in the home. TFP, which is often referred to as a “second family,” is a location in which both mind and body are accepted as one. Further, it is a place where the whole person is listened to, respected, and supported. It is through the formation of relationships within a place like this that love can emerge as a foundation of the program itself, rather than a suppressed emotion.

In considering American society and the segregation, along racial, class-based, and even gendered lines\(^{58}\), that it reproduces, particularly through educational systems, a place like TFP holds deep meaning. TFP intentionally places together “youth and adults from diverse backgrounds,” “to work together.” By asking these participants to remain committed to the program, and giving them incentive to do so, TFP creates a tight community of people. It is within this community, through the standards and curriculum, that intense, powerful relationships form. The community becomes a context in which people feel comfortable expressing their identities, as agents of social action. It is within these relationships that one can feel the deep and abiding love fostered by the program, and it is within these relationships that the meaning of all of the programmatic elements becomes clear.

The Final Question

I asked each participant one question at the end of the interview. It went something like this: “If you were walking down the street and you saw a stranger walking towards you, and you could tell that they were stereotyping you in some way because of your status as a teenager, what would you want to say to them? Or, what is one stereotype about

\(^{58}\) An argument could be made for a proliferation of ways that the American educational institution reproduces segregation along multiple lines of marginalized communities. I stray away from this argument in order to re-focus to the positive space of TFP.
FRANK: I think what was interesting is that, I think for me as a young person, I believed in the stereotype. And I don't think I was a person that would have stepped up without like a Food Project organization for me to become, to help me realize. So, I thought the stereotype wasn't a stereotype, I thought it was true. I didn't even think about it as a stereotype. I was just like, oh, “I am not mature, I cannot handle responsibility.” I did not have a job. I played video games all the time, um.. yeah, it's very interesting. So [clears throat] otherwise, I'm trying to think of some other instances.

CASEY: Well I guess you could even look at it, like, I feel like, I mean, I think when I was a teenager with the people I was friends with, I.. chose to play into stereotypes of teenagers, so I chose to be reckless in my decisions or something.

FRANK: Yup.

CASEY: Um, but that I would still, so I guess, now, looking back on that I would still tell someone who's a stranger like, “you—you perceiving me as a reckless teenager is not actually what would've helped me.” Like I needed someone to say, “I see that you’re doing something because of this.”

[...]

FRANK: Kind of, I don't know whether it was because of my age or because of my race [clears throat] and.. this is something that comes out in you know, diversity discussions all the time, and its, I kind of forgot about it until someone mentioned about something I wasn't aware of back then but felt really bad about. Which was like, you know, going into stores.. and just having adults like, you know, you get the sense of when people are looking at you, following you around.

CASEY: Mhm.

FRANK: So.. I guess like reflecting back, I guess that was one of the things I took from interacting with like you know, these diversity workshops or something like that. That was the thing that jogged my memory the most. It wasn’t like, super impactful like you said before about me as a young person, but that one like really stood out.

CASEY: Yeah, I think that's exactly what it is.

FRANK: Yeah, I didn't know how to process it at that time, it's just, what [exhales] what is crazy is.. like not having, it's kind of interesting like reflecting back on it right now.. just like not having the language, um, and trying to process it without that is really difficult.

CASEY: I would say next to impossible.

FRANK: Yeah, yeah. Um..

CASEY: You can feel things attached to it but not necessarily be able to name what's going on.

FRANK: Yeah. And I think.. you know just thinking about that, was it agism, was it racism, um, was something. And maybe that was like a, one of those stereotypes that a young person was not to be trusted in that kinda situation.

LIANNE: Well the way that I tend to handle that kind of stuff now, is, um.. I mean I am very sensitive to people’s stereotypes about youth, particularly the sort of yuck-gross stereotype that people don’t care about the world, they don’t have much to offer—

CASEY: Right.

LIANNE: They’re self-centered, like that stuff.

59 In many research studies, the voice of the researcher is removed during transcription. I keep my voice in because I was there during the interview, because I spoke, and because this is crucial to understanding what the person said (they were speaking to me).

60 I include staff responses first in order to have the youth speak last.
CASEY: Yeah.
LIANNE: Which is not true. And um... so the way that it comes out mostly right now in my daily experience because I'm doin' a lot of work related to school food and related to food justice work in Chelsea—
CASEY: Mhm.
LIANNE: And.. um.. so there are, there are lots of times when I'm in places where people are talking about what young people wanna eat, and what they like to eat and what they will eat and why they won't eat things that are better for their bodies.
CASEY: Right.
LIANNE: And I—I more, I more, um.. my approach is to.. just present an overwhelming amount of evidence that I'm right [laughs].
LIANNE: So it's just, I'll say, “I hear you, I have worked with hundreds of young people.. that is not my experience. My experience is that when young people are part of the solution and are presented with the opportunity, the real opportunity to do something differently, they surprise adults by a) doing something that maybe is not what we would expect but in fact doing it better than we would've done ourselves.”--[...]
CASEY: Right, right.
LIANNE: Just rise to the occasion. Um, so that's, that's more kind of pragmatic... And then I think what I would say is.. um... this is another Food Project memory but um.. just sort of like where do I land in all of that... and I think some of that I learned from Frank. There was one sum—[laughs]—one summer where Juan was working at Walgreens and Juan had this you know, horrendous track record of quitting places, right, so, something he's now improved. Um, there was this one summer where he was working at Walgreens and he came into the Food Project office one day and he was like, “I'm just gonna quit, I'm not even give my two weeks notice.” And I said to Juan, “No you are not!” And Frank said, “Juan, if you do that, what will the people at Walgreens think about teenagers?” And it was just this juxtaposition of these two approaches—[laughs]
CASEY: [laughs]
LIANNE: Like, “NO YOU WILL NOT” [laughs] and Frank was like, “Juan, think about how you’re contributing to the stereotype.” And um.. I think I’ve learned to do the latter.

KATELYNN: I think the thing that like.. I don't know, I mean, this is something that I think about a lot because I can very clearly see like, how.. I have viewed teenagers since I started working at The Food Project has changed. Not that I ever thought they were useless, not an opinion of them like that, more like, as I've gotten further away from that age group.. they seem so much younger and like—
CASEY: Right.
KATELYNN: Just all of those things and I think what I would say, and so I imagine, say the person walking down the street is like 40 years old, they’re gonna feel like this person's so young or whatever but I remember, I still remember being a senior in high school—
CASEY: Right.
KATELYNN: Not feeling really any different than I do now. I mean yes, I have more experience, I hope, and am more mature, I hope. But at the same time like, you know, I had the same level of intelligence, I had the same level of motivation, the same drive that I have now.
CASEY: Yeah.
KATELYNN: I wish that somebody had given me something productive to do. Like I was always seeking stuff out, I was always like, “I’m gonna go volunteer at the hospital” and I wanna do this and they would have you do stupid meaningless stuff and so I think I would just tell that person who saw me.. when I was 15, give me something productive—like.. don’t think I’m useless, like I have so much unspent energy that I wanna put to good use.

STEVEN: I can think of like one that’s probably not as important of an impact but like when—lets say—a couple of my friends—this one girl in particularly lives in a wicked rich neighborhood and I remember one time I went—my car was like a 1000 dollar car—piece of crap—and I rolled up to her house and she’s just like “oh my god, like, what are my neighbors gonna think of this car parked in my driveway?” And I’m like, “What are you—what is that even supposed to mean? Like are you serious—what did you just say to me? Like you’re just makin’ fun of my car right now, like, what is this?” She’s just like, “Yeah, I mean, it’s nothin’ against your car like, I just don’t want my neighbors to think that there’s some, like, hoodlum here at my house.” Just ’cause of my car, and right then I was just like, wow this girl's completely like, a complete fake—like, I’m not even—whatever. But like, even just that, I’m just—are you serious? Like, just ’cause I drive this car? I don’t wanna waste all my money on a nice car so I’m immediately a hoodlum? [laughs] I don’t know. Also, back to where I work, I hate when people just assume because I’m young that I don’t know how to do something or I’ve never done it or I’m not gonna do it as good. Even like, when we were puttin’ up cabinets for a long time, like, just, they’d be like oh, just expecting that they were gonna have to come check everything that I do right after. Which is good, yeah, go ahead and make sure it’s good but like, just even having—just havin' to expect that I’m going to mess something up, and like... I don’t know. That’s not really a good way to...

CASEY: But I feel like those expectations weigh on you, like, someone’s expecting you to mess up, expecting you to mess up, expecting you to mess up, and then you’re gonna mess up and they’re gonna be like “of course you messed up, you’re...”

STEVEN: But it’s aright, I expected it. Hold on, I’m tryin’ to think of a better one. Um...

STEVEN: Well, I guess, ’cause I have tattoos, um, I have tattoos when I’m on jobs. And a lot of times I’ll get left alone on jobs and uh, I remember this one, kinda... older woman, a classy type of woman, you know like they lived in a really nice house, you know. Clearly had money. Um, she says to my boss: “Well, he’s not gonna steal anything while you’re gone, is he? Like, I don’t have to watch him, do I?” And I’m like, seriously? I guess I can understand, I’m younger and I have tattoos so instantly, like, I’m a hoodlum whatever. But like, that was just—that made me feel, like seriously, you’re gonna think that right now? I talked to her, too, and was like, really outgoing, like “oh how are you doin’ today? It’s nice...” Just havin’ a conversation, shootin’ the shit—and she, still, ended up sayin that. And I was just like, wow, that really hit me—damn, just because I like tattoos I’m instantly gonna rob your house. Okay...I don’t know.

DAVE: I think everyone has to go through the process of life, so, if you’re interacting with someone who’s older than you who has kind of a negative outlook on young people... you gotta remind them that they were young once. So I think it’s important not to really judge by the age, or where they come from, just like, as the person themselves. Um, I know that sounds cheesy, but it’s really true. But also, I don’t know, I think, I understand a lot of negative um, what is that word, whatever...

CASEY: Stereotypes, you mean?

DAVE: I understand why there are a lot of—reasonably why there are a lot of negative
stereotypes for young people but I also challenge young people to help... break them down.
CASEY: Mhm.
DAVE: I think that, for every, I think like, there are good black people, bad black people— you know what I mean? Good white people, bad white people, there are good young people, bad young people, and I think its just important to take initiative for yourself and to try to change it from like—self-respected, rather than like worrying about being— don't get mad when someone says that all young people are gonna steal things and you're stealing things. You know what I mean? Take it internally and just try to change your ways and then hope— help your friend to change their ways and then hopefully, over time, things will change for the better.

NADIA: I think... the best part, I mean the best way to deal with a situation like that, where somebody's so like, stuck in one idea, is more or less agreeing to it and, acknowledging the fact that there are other teenagers who are working hard. Like, grown-ups, where you have some grown-ups who are you know, that work really hard, and there are other ones... I think its more the opportunities that teenagers are given, not so much what they're doing. Because if they don't have things to do, they don't...

LANA: Um, well, I wish that people would know that just because I didn't speak up didn't mean I wasn't paying attention, or I wasn't listening, or I didn't appreciate whatever they did. So, one smile, or one hello, from anyone, would make such a big difference when I was a teenager. It changed my whole day. [laughs].
Artist's Statement

“Because a successful narrative or lyric poem can echo or resonate so powerfully with the emotional experience and sense of identity of cultural insiders, it allows us to see the nuances and complexities of culture.”

– Kent Maynard and Melisa Cahnmann-Taylor

My choice to conduct an ethnographic study of The Food Project’s youth program engaged me as both a participant and as a researcher. My deep ties to the organization made it important for me to remain reflexive about my research project. As I began to conduct interviews, I felt faced with the complexity of my position in relation to both the people I was interviewing and the program itself. How could I engage in critique of the very people who had supported me by being part of this project? How could I critically analyze the youth program that I have described as the main reason I made it to college? As I had done in other difficult moments of my life, I turned to creative forms of writing. Both in writing fictional narratives based on lived experience and in crafting poems around the same experience, I began feeling that I could tell a different, sharper narrative. My fiction and poetry tell the stories that I could not include in my ethnographic study.

The three characters who are central to the pieces are Tyrell, Camille, and Eva. Tyrell and Camille are loosely based on real people. These real people have worked and been closely involved with TFP. I was unable to interview them for the ethnography, partly because of the closeness that I felt towards them. In many ways, it was an easier project because I did not interview the real people behind Camille and Tyrell’s stories. Throughout the research process, I was required to transcribe raw audio into text, and from that text, surgically remove the sections that I felt were most pertinent or useful for my project. This process was extremely difficult for me. However, it allows the ethnography to cross-cut multiple lived experiences in order to tell broader narratives.

In the same way, this creative work crosses through the lives of the three protagonists in order to tell real, relevant stories about young people in America.

A major question in my ethnographic project had to do with trajectories of success. Many young people, in the world, but for the sake of this project, in America, face adversity and marginalization, not least because of their status as young. In this climate of injustice, young people learn different ways to make it through. The Food Project is one organization that does give hope, in many ways, that there is possibility for changing the system. However, it cannot combat the overarching systematic injustice. My four years in a liberal arts college have been darkly contrasted by the perceived 'failure' of my peers who are not in college, struggling to make it. My privilege in attaining this education was, and is, not lost on me. Poetry, and short fiction, were two spaces in which I found myself able to write about the disparity I felt hanging over me.

The following pieces of short fiction, interspersed with five poems, focus on only brief moments in Camille, Eva, and Tyrell’s lives. Based on lived experience, they aim to make real for the reader the world of young people who are succeeding, with difficulty. The societal injustice that surrounds these three characters plays a major role in their lives. Camille and Eva struggle with being young women whose bodies are subject to violence. Tyrell struggles with being a young Black man in a society who sees him as a threat. All three characters balance their family lives with the collective social space that they create together. These stories are in no way meant to represent general experience. They are specific, both because I am writing, as authors often say to do, what I know, and because I believe it is only from specific experience that people can learn from one another. Similarly to the presentation of distinct stories in the ethnography, these stories are told from specific moments in times, about specific happenings, in order to illustrate each protagonist’s reality.
All of the fiction pieces are written from the third person point of view. This was an important approach to writing these pieces because it allowed myself, as the author, to provide both omniscient narration and to force the reader to feel distanced from the situation. These stories should read as both far away and, suddenly, too close. The third person perspective forces the reader to stay out of the heads of the three characters. This was a complex part of my decision-making as a writer. I chose to keep the reader from the characters' inner thoughts because young people are almost always positioned as unknowable. In the majority of educational settings, young people are not directly allowed to speak to the processes around them. On a even larger level, young people are not allowed full rights as citizens. They cannot vote. On turning 18, they are still denied the legal ability to drink alcohol. Even at 21, a young person has difficulty renting a car or a hotel room. As a reader feeling these lives unfolding on the page, I ask you to be restricted from these three young people's lives. They are happening, but they are not yours.

The distance in these stories is meant to be in conversation with the connections between the three characters. Eva’s status as White (and thereby privileged) is out-of-place in the places that the characters travel. She is self-conscious of her skin. Camille, who is specifically not-White and not-Black, contrasts with both Eva and Tyrell in her racial identity. The almost complete absence of family context means that each of the three characters is seen only as they are presented by the third person narration: their race is seen, their cultures are not. These stories seek to subvert typical assumptions around racial identity by forcing the reader to only see the characters as they are seen within a societal context. Thus, Eva's pale white skin, illuminated with a police officer's flashlight, is discomforting, not desirable. Camille, with pale but not white skin, protects Eva, the white girl in distress. “Hot Box Summer,” at the center of the collection, more directly addresses the racial identities of the three characters.
The poetry interspersed between the stories is absolutely connected to them, but is separate. Importantly, the poems are all written in first person. The first person poetry is the bridge between Eva’s perspective and the distancing third person. By hearing the perspective of just one person, the reader is allowed some relief from the distant third person that keeps the fiction so disconnected from the reader’s own life. This layering of new point of view onto the fiction also makes more real the pain and difficulty present in the protagonists’ lives. Note that “Tastes Like Salt” involves a third person narrator, partially in acknowledgement of the difficulty of speaking.

Each poem is structured with specific purpose. Both rhythmic and stanzaic choices are intentional in creating the poem that stands on the page. The structure of the poems “Hot Box Summer,” “Tastes Like Salt,” and “Of Failure” carry both an emotional quality and more standard purpose: the black and white appearance of text on paper versus the black and white of a societal view; the connection between two young women and the confusion between their two voices as they share lived experience; the way that in speaking, as in writing, we begin to place our fear outside of us.

The presence of substance use in the fiction, and poetry, is intentional. I am not seeking to represent three young people who are using substances because they are young. Rather, Tyrell, Camille, and Eva use in order to have temporary escape from the complex issues they face. In a world that rarely listens to youth, this project asks you to take them more seriously. There are no glorified adult figures in these stories. This is not because there are no positive adult models, mentors, and teachers. Rather, this project forces you, the reader, into a world in which these adults have no say. Further, these young people are without a place to be in safety. They can go to the store, home, car...but no matter what, their space is always potentially public. Their substance use, again, allows them a world beyond the physical. They share something secret, all their own, that is only vaguely accessed by the reader.
My ethnographic research speaks to the powerful ways that youth and adults can relate to one another and have extremely positive effects on one another. This fiction and poetry exists both in relation and in contrast to that ethnography. It argues that even with positive spaces, young people are still, often, lost in the huge White spaces of American society. Trapped in a web between McDonald's and the next police officer driving down the street, young people have no time to do much but keep escaping, keep finding new ways to reconcile their struggle as a new way forward.
In the front window of the house are thin tan curtains, like veils, drawn. A sedan pulls up to the sharp curb; it has no hubcaps. Tyrell steps out, adjusting a black backpack across his broad shoulders. His white t-shirt almost glows in the nearest streetlight. Farther down the one way street, a police car lies in wait—hunched in the dark. The officer behind the wheel has doughy skin. He is hungry. It is nearing his son's bedtime. With a trained eye, he notes the sedan, then Tyrell, skin a dark brown, crossing the lawn.

The officer starts his car engine. The growl startles a rat, who scurries through a sewer hole in the side of the street. Tyrell opens the screen door and turns his key in the lock.

Two more police cars, their smooth black and white paint gleaming under flashing lights, pull up behind the sedan. Their sirens whine. Tyrell steps inside his house, closing the door behind him.

The officer who had been parked in the dark drives down the one way street the wrong way. He parks with his headlights facing the front door of the small brown house. Tyrell has disappeared through the depths of the kitchen, and is going to get clothes from his room to bring to Eva's parent's house. His sneakers make no sound on the blue and white linoleum floor. Eva is in the sedan, with Camille in the passenger seat. Eva has shoved a plastic bag of marijuana down her bra, where it fits snugly against her pale skin.

Tyrell is zipping up his backpack. He reaches for a black hat hanging from a nail on the wall and pulls it on his head, the brim shading his eyes.

Two officers approach the car. Four more approach the house. Their uniforms are all blue, skin white; hair shaved close to the scalp.
One officer taps at the driver side window of the sedan with his flashlight. The beam illuminates, through the glass, Eva’s pale bare legs. She leans forward and rolls down the window. Camille looks straight ahead, ignoring the other officer, who stands at her side of the car. His midsection seems to fill the window, a dark bulge of navy. The flashing lights of the three police cars pulse colors across the street. In one upstairs window across the street a baby begins to cry.

The officer who breaks the lock on the door is also first in the kitchen. Tyrell freezes in the sudden light, and noise, and holds his backpack in front of him. His eyelids are open wide and his nostrils flare as he begins to breathe heavier. “Where the fuck's your brother?”

“I don't know, he hasn't been home in three days.”

“Bullshit. Where is he?”

Once her window is down, Eva gets goosebumps from the cool air rushing in. The officer's voice is sharp, the crackling of water poured over ice. “What are you doing here?”

“We're just bringing... our friend by to get some clothes.”

“Do you know Jay?”

“Who?”

“Your friend's brother. Jay Gardner?”

“No.”

“Then what are you doing here?”

“I already told you. We're just bringing our friend by to get some clothes. Then we're leaving.”

“So you don't know Jay Gardner?”

“No.”
In the kitchen, three officers pin Tyrell to the wall. Blood begins to spill from a cut on his lip. The wall is cold against his right cheek and forehead. His legs are spread wide by a kick from one of the officers.

Once they exit, Tyrell leans with his back on the wall, his hands shaking. He crosses the kitchen and pulls a red towel from where it hangs on the handle of the stove. He turns on the sink and wets the towel with cold water, pressing it to his face afterwards. He clenches his other hand into a fist, and pushes the front door open with his shoulder. It slams shut in his wake.

The three police cars drive away. The baby in the upstairs window is still crying. Her mother picks her up and rocks her back and forth, whispering.

Eva and Camille look at each other. Eva wipes her sweaty palms on her shorts. Camille smiles at her. “Lucky they didn’t search us, huh?”

“I know, right?”

“Do you know Jay?”

“I met him once. Weren’t you there?”

“Probably.”

Tyrell pulls the side door of the house shut and turns the key in the lock. The deadbolt slides into place. He has his backpack slung over one shoulder, and pulls up his pants as he walks down the driveway. He wipes his mouth with the red kitchen towel. Eva starts the car engine. She and Camille fall quiet as Tyrell climbs in the backseat, adjusting his long legs to fit comfortably. He rubs his head. “They fucked me up.”

“For what?”

“They want Jay.”
“Then why are they messing with you? Didn’t you say you don’t even know
where he is?”

“Yeah, but I kinda know. I’m not telling them either way.”

“Yeah, but they still can’t do that.”

“Of course they can. They’re the police.”

“You should still file a complaint or some shit.”

Tyrell’s hands are still shaking. He sits in the dark of the backseat and feels his
empty right pocket. It is missing his knife. Camille rolls down her window and puts one
foot up on the dashboard. Wind brushes her hair back from her face and she studies
herself in the side mirror. Eva makes a right turn at the end of the one way street and
accelerates.

One of the first cars they pass is another police car. On the side it reads, in
looping black cursive: “We take pride in serving our community.”

Camille spits out the window when they stop at a red light. Her throat is sore,
but she hasn’t been able to bring herself to stop smoking. A young man on the corner
looks up, sees her, and whistles.
Tyrell yells it, spits it through the air as if it could hit the Foodmaster's sign, echo down, reverberate from the sign for McDonald's. Tyrell, wearing a soft white tee, raises his fist, his skin dark brown. I laugh, Camille, laughing, says up to him, *Stop, you're bein' mad hotbox.* I grab his arm, but he yells, deep voiced, *White Power!* The echo of the words is writhing on down to McDonald's. It's real summer today, and a cop with a white fist wrapped around his steering wheel is driving on up the street. Black tires run over black asphalt, his radio buzzing. I try not to laugh. Hot air surrounds us crossing the asphalt to McDonald's. I think that the city itself is a clenched fist. Tyrell says, *you got a big Black dude walking up with a white girl*—I watch the expression on his face light up—*and a little Spanish mami*—air settles in waves, hot. *That looks like Trouble!* Echo moving across the city, the words like a fist holding our future. A line of cars is stacked up at the drive-thru. Tyrell pulls open the door, his shorts mid-calf, he swaggers in. The A/C air is chilly, Camille and I, in our short-shorts, echo an image of teen-age-hood. This is McDonald's, dark red tables, waxy green potted plant rising up over to the side. Tyrell asks me to pay for his, since I got a credit card and job. I don't err on the side of caution, order fries, the echo, Tyrell asks for more fries. We get four McDonald's Junior Bacon Cheeseburgers. In my fist the silver wrappers are greasy. Tyrell takes his three, asks for a bag. I can smell, in the air, the sizzling oil. I listen for the echo of sirens outside. Camille orders a McDonald's Number Four: Chicken Sandwich. Leaving, fists full, we walk back to Camille's house, all the way up the hill. I hear echoes, *White Power,* the fist raised. Another cop drives past, he's got a McDonald's. Summer air slow, hot, I could’ve thrown up: with the fullness, my whiteness, the heat.
Fielding Street, 8 AM

Bumper to bumper morning traffic. Eva edges her maroon sedan into the fray between a gray SUV and a blue Volvo. She has makeup on from the night before. She taps the brake with her foot and then slams down as the traffic halts again. Tyrell has his seat tilted back so he is reclining, like a hospital bed. Eva looks over to him, “Didn't you say you're supposed to be at work by eight? I gotta get the car back to my mom.”

“It's not like it really matters, the supervisor never shows up on time.”

“Yeah but—”

“But this job really sucks? Yeah, it does, Evie.”

“At least you have one.”

“I guess. You're lucky you don't gotta work.”

“I do work. I just don't gotta go in 'til 1.”

“I thought you were on vacation from your big fancy college.”

“Yeah, well. Gotta make money.”

“For real.”

A light flashes on the dashboard to indicate that Tyrell’s seatbelt isn't on. Eva points at it with her finger, tapping her nail against the black plastic. Tyrell sighs, pulling the seatbelt across his chest and waist and then tucking the top strap behind him. He adjusts his black baseball cap so that it shades his eyes.

The Volvo in front of them has one brake light out. The man driving is singing along to a tape of Willie Nelson in a soft baritone. In his passenger seat is a datebook and a ham and cheese sub that he bought at the Stop and Shop.

Eva rests her hand over the steering wheel and glances at the odometer, which is hardly moving at all. “You wanna at least listen to some music?”

“Yeah, I brought a CD today. So I don't have to listen to your mom's CD again.”

“I never made you listen to that! It's her car. Put yours in.”
“I will, I just gotta sort through this—oh—shit—I dropped it.”

“Where is it?”

“It fell under my seat.”

“You want help finding it?”

“Just drive.”

Tyrell fumbles under the passenger seat, his fingernails collecting dirt from the rug of the car. His hat falls off and lands upside down on the floor. Eva hits the brakes as the Volvo’s one brake light goes on again in front of her and the traffic slows back to a halt. They are just passing a convenience store, still twenty car lengths away from the next light. Holding her foot on the brake, Eva leans over to the passenger side, reaching around with her hand for the CD. Her arm brushes against Tyrell’s heavy blue jeans. Her hand feels at a receipt and empty soda bottle; she begins to ease her foot off the brake.

The crash echoes down the street. Eva pulls over quickly, up onto the curb and into the convenience store parking lot. Her hands shake. The Volvo turns in front of her. The man gets out. Eva grinds her back teeth.

“What the hell were you thinking?!”

“I’m so sorry, I just—”

“You just can’t drive, huh?”

“Look, I have insurance. It’ll cover this.”

“Damn right, it’s gonna cover this. You got a cell phone? Call the police.”

The convenience store clerk watches the two cars in his parking lot through an open space in his window between two cigarette advertisements. He mutters a swear in Hindi under his breath. The owner of the Volvo, who has a trim brown mustache and sandals on, is standing at the back of his car, looking down at a dent in his bumper. The young girl pulls down her shorts to cover a few more centimeters of the smooth white
skin of her thighs. A tall boy gets out of her passenger's seat, holding his stomach, his
arms dark against his white t-shirt. The girl inspects the front bumper of her car, which
has no dents. A small scratch of blue paint is the only evidence of any collision. She
pulls out her cellphone.

Tyrell sits on the hood of the sedan. He leans one hand on the maroon metal. It is
still warm from the engine. A pair of young girls walk by and greet him, giggling. He
nods to them, pulling his hat back on. One of the girls is smoking a cigarette, and the
smell of it stays in the air, a bitter, almost tasteless cloud.

Eva holds her phone to her ear, clenching and unclenching her other hand. She
stares at the bumper of the Volvo until a voice on the line startles her.

“Lynn Police, how can I help you?”

“Well, I, I just rear-ended someone. It's not bad, we just need an officer for the
insurance claim.”

“Where are you?”

“Fielding St. just after Western Ave. Pulled over in the gas station parking lot.”

“An officer will be there shortly.”

“Thank you.”

When the officer pulls up, he parks on the one way street adjacent to the parking
lot. Adjusting his belt under his gut, he walks towards the three people and two cars.
He speaks into his radio.

In the convenience store, the clerk rearranges packs of cigarettes in the shelves
above the counter. He pauses to take off his right sneaker and massage his heel with one
hand. He puts his sneaker back on and looks back through the window. Eva is speaking
to the officer, who nods and hands one piece of piece of paper to her, and hands another
to the mustached man, who writes down his personal information. He is uninsured.
The officer listens to someone speaking through his radio.
The sun has just climbed over the city's roof line and beads of sweat begin to form, crystalline, on the officer's pale upper lip. He begins to walk away from the Volvo and sedan, towards his police car. The hemline of his pants is too short, and his mismatched socks are visible—one thin and tan, one low and white.

Tyrell has already taken the keys to the sedan from Eva and is listening to his CD with the volume on low, sitting in the passenger's seat. On the first track, Tyrell's brother is rapping in a slow, deep voice, over a sample from Ray Charles' *Hit the Road, Jack.* Tyrell adjusts his weight, allowing his legs more room to stretch. He pulls down the sun visor, gray fabric with a small tear at the top. A dull, yellow light over the mirror turns on. He examines himself and runs a finger over the split in his upper lip, making a face.

Up ahead, a driver in traffic leans on their horn as a mac truck runs a red light. The sound barrels down the street like thunder. The convenience store clerk looks up at the customer who has just walked in. It's the man with the mustache, who asks for a phone. The clerk shakes his head. The man walks out. He rubs his short hair.

Eva gets in the sedan and turns the key past accelerate to start the engine. It chokes to life.

“You're fucking lucky you got insurance.”

“I know. That guy was—”

“An asshole. You see the way he was looking at me?”

“Yeah. But Evie, you gotta understand—if some little white girl rear-ended my car I'd be fuckin' pissed too.”

“Yeah, but it was all 'cause of your CD though, just saying.”

“Hah! I told you to drive!”

“Yeah, well, at least you're getting a ride.”

“True. This hurts though. Fuck man.”

Δ
Hoping

She leans forward in the rocking chair
inhales, begins speaking. Her hair
dark curls, her small hand poised around
a cigarette, her feet pushed up against
the bars of the porch railing, unpainted wood.
Words blossoming from between her
sunset mouth (rosebud?) and I am not listening,
just looking at her legs bridged up,
parallel to the splintering floor, the way she is
smaller than myself. Her words are
wrapping around me, summer heat, my legs pushed up

like Camille’s—we could be the same.
Tyrell speaks, then, as he adjusts his weight,
I think I’d fall if this wasn’t here, he taps the wood with a
thick-skinned hand. I look up, the sun going down

just behind his head; instead of talking, I am
hoping the railing doesn’t break.
Restraint

The first day is cold. Jay traces patterns in the concrete wall while lying on his back in bed. He does thirty-two push-ups. His arms shake. He does twenty-eight more. He bites the inside of his lip.

The second day is still cold. Jay brushes his teeth and rinses his mouth out with water from the faucet, wiping his lips with the collar of his white t-shirt. He opens the Bible and reads some lines from Job: “When I lie down, I say, When shall I arise, and the night be gone?” At lunch he sits hunched over his tray. He doesn’t speak when a young man with a smooth fade and honey-colored eyes sits next to him. “What’chew here for, big man?”

Jay looks up and stares at the young man. He notes a wide scar cutting down the right side of the boy’s face, still a dark red. Jay shakes his head and mutters, “Some bullshit.”

The young man laughs, pushing green beans into the rice on his tray. “Ain’t we all.” Jay looks down at his food and shovels a forkful into his mouth. Chewing, he pretends it’s his mother’s cooking. That it was her fingers clasping the knife, slicing the leaves from the stem of collard greens, and thinning the fat from the chicken breast. He can see her hands dripping with egg yolk as she dropped the slippery chicken in an explosion of flour in the second bowl. He is startled back to reality when the young man eating next to him says, “I’m Miro.”

“Jay.”

“You’re a quiet dude, huh?”

“Got nothin’ to say.”

Miro laughs at this, shaking his head. “Man, you gotta have some kinda story. Me, I was at work, right? You know, I stay workin’ construction—and the lady of the house, she starts comin’ on to me as I’m nailing up the cabinets in the kitchen. All
expensive wood and shit. But I’m like, ‘nah, I got a fiancée’, you know what I’m sayin’? I been with this girl for mad long—six years in August... damn. Anyways, the bitch gets all mad and starts talkin’ shit about how I’m not respectin’ her wishes, blah blah blah and she goes and talks to my boss. And this dude comes in the kitchen—and I’m still workin’, you know? And he starts sayin’ how he’s gonna have to ’let me go’ and well, I got a little anger problem—so yeah, I knocked him out... and now I’m here... just a few more months and they let me out. Just ’cause I had this little charge from my high school days the judge was all ready to put me in here."

A bell rings before Jay can respond and they both stand up, balancing the trays in their hands. Jay stands about half a foot higher than Miro. He says, “See you around, man.”

Miro laughs again, with a wide smile, “I’ll see you.”

After lunch, Jay does more push-ups and tries reading Psalms instead of Job. He remembers that his mother used to read Psalms when they lived in the apartment on Sparing Ave. Now she lives on Fielding and recites Revelations. Jay hasn’t been to the house in a while. He misses Sunday dinners. He makes a list of things he wanted to do before now:

1. Buy Raza that ring with the two diamonds and her favorite, a amythist
2. Talk to D about the job at the sears auto department
3. Have a baby with Raza... raise it rite
4. Help mom with the mortgage so she can’t lose the home

He can’t think of any of the others. He knew he had a goal. He thinks of Tyrell. He writes a fifth:

5. Help Tyrell get into the GED program that i did

He folds the list carefully into a small square. He puts it in the front of his Bible and puts the book back on the metal chair in the corner.
The sixth night, Jay wakes up with sweat beading along his hairline. He rubs his eyes in the dim, gray light of five am. “The destruction of my soul is imminent, my Lord,” he says. “My God, where are you in this hour of my need?” The walls are hard, the ceiling high. He feels trapped and speaks louder. “The wicked flourish and the Lord does not punish them; this world will come to an end if their sin is allowed to continue.” He stands, rocking back and forth on the gray concrete.

He walks to the front of the cell and wraps his hands around two of the bars. The metal is smooth and pleasantly cold. He tightens his grip. He says louder, “The sinners surround the righteous and choke them with temptation.” His jaw clenches as he speaks. He begins to pull on the bars. They don’t move.

Jay cracks his knuckles and flexes his shoulders and grabs the bars again. Pulling and then pushing. In frustration, he cries out, “The Lord will cast down the wicked and He will have vengeance. Sinners crumble before the might of God.” The echoes of his pronouncements draw a guard. Three more, their steps echoing down the hallway like the sound of cracking ice.

The first guard hits Jay’s fingers with his baton. Jay lets go. When the second guard arrives he unlocks the door. Jay tensed up, ready to fight. He strikes the guard, hitting his doughy cheek. The three other guards enter the cell and one uses a taser, pushing it against Jay’s chest. His ribcage vibrates. Then comes pain. Jay’s muscles contract and the electricity explodes through his nerves. He falls to his knees, spasmimg, his eyes wide, pupils dilated. The four uniformed men stand over him. The one Jay hit spits and tasers him again, holding the black gun straight against his ribcage. Jay’s eyes roll back. The guards back off as he falls to the floor. They cuff his limp wrists behind his back and prop him against the wall.

When his eyes open, the officer with the taser flinches. He leans forward and
pulls Jay to his feet. Jay is sweating, heart stuttering inside his chest. With his eyes locked on the officer's face, Jay says: “The Lord will reward the righteous in heaven, the wicked he shall cast down. My God, where are you in this hour of my need?” The officers leave him to write up their report. As punishment for assaulting a guard, Jay is placed in solitary. Miro, awake and drawing in pencil on the wall next to his bed, watches the officer leading Jay down the hallway. He whistles and Jay turns his head. Miro winks at him and mouths, “Bullshit.” The corner of Jay’s mouth turns up in a slight smile.

Alone, Jay reads the entire Bible. The walls are white. It is dead quiet. Lying in bed, he traces the same crack over and over again from beginning to end. He asks for a pencil and receives it with lunch the same day. He traces lines that radiate from the real crack.

He reads the Bible a second time, rubbing his fingers lovingly over the crisp, thin pages. He does ten push-ups after each book. He can’t find his list of things he wanted to do. He remembers a long time ago, believing that it was his destiny to join the Army. He prepares for war. He asks for a notebook and receives several sheets of paper. He begins to write down his feelings, but gets sick of re-reading them: “I want...,” “I wanted...,” begin to sound useless. The bruises on his ribs from the night he was put away have begun to disappear. He does more push-ups. The floor is rough underneath his fingertips.

In sleep, he lets the nightmares come. He feels good in this landscape of terror, his eyes closed, breath slow. In his head: lights flashing and his feet, pounding against asphalt. The ground swirls as he pushes down into it and moves faster forward. Turning, cornered, houses on all sides, roofs like upturned knives. Blue uniforms, light skin, taser, and suddenly his body, stuck, eyelids forced open—staring at the officers. Bar to his neck, metal cold. All faces so white they glow, all eyes accusing. He wakes up
It has been sixty days. Jay memorizes a Psalm each day. He murmurs the lines under his breath, over and over: “I have done no wrong, yet they are ready to attack me.”

He is kept in solitary. His shoulders are broader. He runs in place for hours each day.

The prescription pills he is forced to take each morning are pink. He swallows them with cold water, wondering what they will do. His cell is pale blue and filled with shadows. He scratches his arms while he sleeps. The sheets are often on the floor. The walls are cold. He presses his face against them to wake up. He only moves by swimming because the air settles around him thickly, now.

“But as for me,” he says, looking at his palms, “I am poor and needy; come quickly to me, my God; You are my help and deliverer; Lord, do not delay.” He traces the wrinkles, the valleys between knuckle and knuckle. He imagines Miro, released and home to his fiancée, with that big smile on his face again.

Jay begins to gain weight from the medication. He has difficulty breathing. It has been eighty-eight days. He tries to memorize a Psalm but his lips are heavy. The words shift on the page. They are tricking him. He kneads the skin of his arms. He does one hundred push-ups in a row. He waits.

Finally, Tyrell comes to visit. Jay is led out of his cell and down the hallway. He counts his steps. It takes sixty-four to reach the metal door that leads into the visiting area. The guard seats Jay in a dark blue plastic chair with metal legs. Jay grips the plastic seat with both hands. He is nauseous.

Tyrell sits across the glass, holding a phone, and looks at Jay. He has been waiting
twelve minutes for his brother. He has been watching the thin black metal clock arms moving in circles. The clock hangs at the top of the wall, with a crack that leads from the place where it meets the floor until about halfway up. A guard, uniform collar buttoned to press into his neck, stands with his arms by his sides underneath the clock.

Jay slowly unwraps his right hand from around the chair and picks up the phone on his side. It is cold against his ear. Jay looks at his brother's face. Tyrell was always the pretty boy of the family. But his voice is deep now that he has gotten older.

“Man, I thought you had just, well, for a while we thought you was at Raza's. Then she called askin' for you and that same day someone at school was askin' me about whether the article their moms showed them in—”

“Wow. You coulda come sooner. Right?”

“I'm—Jay, bro, I'm sorry. Mom's been worried out of her mind—it got so bad she's about to quit her job. She puts a place at the table for you every Sunday like you're about to walk through that door again. I shoulda come, I know. Just had to get a ride...”

His voice trails off. The glass between the brothers glints with the fluorescent white light overhead. Jay's morning pills have begun to dissolve in his stomach and he feels his muscles losing strength as the air swirls around him. Tyrell taps against the glass.

“Look, I hired you a good lawyer—that same one that got Lamar offa those charges last year, you remember that?”

“Hm. You tell Mom that you were comin' out here today?

“Nah. I got Camille to drive me out her 'cause it's her day off.”

“Aright. You gonna tell Mom?”

“You want me too?”

Jay shakes his head, looking at the place where the glass divider meets the smooth gray desk surface. He runs his hand along the side of his chair.
“When's this lawyer comin' to see me, then?”

“Tomorrow, Friday.”

“Aright.”

“Yeah, so... are you doin' aright?”

“Could be worse.”

“Aright.”

“You just go home, worry about your own shit, aright? I'll meet with this lawyer lady and work it out.”

Tyrell stares at his brother's soft brown eyes and nods. He gets up and begins to leave down the hallway. He puts his hands in his pockets. In the car, Camille is lighting her fourth cigarette, and watching the guard in the entrance booth, who has been picking his teeth with the same toothpick for close to ten minutes.

Jay stays seated in the plastic chair until an officer pulls him from under his arm. He wavers a little on standing and watches his feet pressing against the concrete floor as they move down the hallway. It seems like he is turning the concrete wet, into puddles, each time a foot lands on the ground. He feels his breath moving across his lips. His chest aches, like someone is hammering against the bones from the inside. The channels to his heart begin to constrict. He can't find his breath, though he feels the air around him, and his vision begins to waver. As the officer leads him towards his cell, Jay watches the bars bending, swirling together like unlinked chains.

His chest aches. He clutches his stomach. His eyes stay wide open, locked on the bars stretching ahead of him down the hallway.

The officer holding his arm almost falls too when Jay crumples to the ground. The concrete glints around his body underneath the overhead fluorescent lights. The officer puts his radio to his mouth.
That Kinda Trouble

Eva’s steps on the sidewalk are measured. Biting at the inside of her bottom lip, she wonders if she is still able to speak. Her stomach aches. Another person is walking towards her down the sidewalk and her hands tense. She clenches her teeth.

As it comes closer, a streetlight casts cold rays down on the figure. Eva can see the outline of a strong forehead and big eyebrows—a man. She looks down before he can see her face.

Nothing happens as the two bodies pass each other. The man has a long beard and a hole in the right side of his right sneaker, exposing a bare toe. Eva sees none of this, just quickens her walk, her hands in fists, her breath heavy on her lips. After ten more steps, she turns and watches the man’s figure shuffling into the darkness. Putting both hands on her stomach, she keeps walking.

With a block left before getting to her house, she takes out her phone and calls Camille. “Hello?”

“Ay, what’s up?”

“Camille, I—well, what’s up?”

“Nothin’, I’m just at the apartment, why, you want to chill?”

“Yeah, yeah, I’m just, um, walking near the Stop and Shop.”

“You took the bus?

“Yeah, I’m sick of walking. Can you just come pick me up?”

“Yeah, no problem, I got some shit to tell you anyways.”

Camille sighs as she hangs up the phone. She looks at the two pale yellow pills she’s cradling in her palm. She takes a big gulp of Sprite and throws the pills into the back of her mouth. Pulling on a black jacket, she checks her face in the mirror, brushing an eyelash from her left cheekbone. She smooths her bangs, which fall straight over her forehead, and, grabbing the keys from the counter, opens the door and walks out,
locking it as she leaves.

It’s a cool night and it makes the little hairs on her neck rise. The percocet changes the way her skin feels—her body is quieter. She climbs into her Explorer and revs the engine as she backs onto the road. Lighting a cigarette with a small red lighter, she tilts her head back as she drives. Streetlights splash light across the windshield.

Outside the gentlemen’s club on Boston St. are two parked cars: a small black sedan that looks like a refurbished police interceptor and next to it, a maroon SUV. In the sedan sits a young man with a red hat. He holds his phone closer to his lips than his ear, spitting words into the mouthpiece. Hanging up, he opens his door. He turns, and Camille swears that he is watching her as she drives past.

She drags on her cigarette and looks away. Hitting her blinker, she swerves left across the road into the liquor store parking lot. Turning the engine off, she climbs out of the car. As her foot reaches to the pavement, it gives her a sudden flow of energy. A bell dings as she pulls open the store’s heavy glass door. She runs her tongue over her front teeth and then smiles at the clerk behind the counter without opening her lips. She chooses a cheap fifth of vodka. As she puts the bottle on the counter, she feels the weight of the glass in her hand, like an anchor.

The clerk is a young woman with long black hair that flows over her shimmering pink shirt. Camille stares at the clerk. “I like your shirt.”

“Thank you. ID?”

“Uh, yeah, here.”

“Will that be all?” The clerk slides the plastic card back to Camille, who slowly pushes it back into her wallet. She jumps at the clerk’s soft voice.

“A pack of reds?”

“Marlboro’s?”

“Yeah.”
“Total is 15.98.”

Camille hands her a twenty dollar bill, “Here. Good night.”

“Thank you.”

Camille walks out with a smile. Every time was always the same at that store. She imagined, briefly, the girl behind the counter remembering her name, and saying it in that quiet voice: “Camille, will that be all?” She shakes her head and pulls the door of the Explorer open, climbing in.

Eva is sitting on a curb and stands when she sees Camille’s car coming down the street. Camille pulls over and Eva climbs into the passenger seat, pushing her hood off her hair. She feels something pressing into her back and pulls from behind her the vodka. She puts it in her lap. Camille looks over, “Shit, I forgot mixer.”

“Fuck it—let’s drink it straight.”

“Aright. Straight.”

Eva watches Camille driving, her right hand draped over the steering wheel, the smooth curve from jawline to high cheekbone. “You know, Cam, sometimes I wish I didn’t go to college.”

“You only got one year left.”

“I know, but it’s fuckin’ hard.”

“Yeah. We miss you out here, but you got this.”

“Yeah, I miss you too.”

Camille parks the Explorer under a tree by a cemetery. They climb out, Eva has the vodka in her purse and puts her hood back on. Camille lights a cigarette, her hands tingling in the breeze. Her tongue is dry. Eva reaches a hand out—Camille gives her the cigarette. They walk through the stone pillars. The grass in the cemetery is a dark green, like algae. It glows under the lampposts that line the walkways. Eva thinks the grass is so bright because the dead are giving up new life through the earth. She doesn’t say this
to Camille. Instead, she hands back the cigarette. “My godmother was buried here.”

“I remember goin’ to the funeral with you.”

“Yeah, it was halfway through my senior year at high school.”

“Hold on. Where’s the vodka? You gotta tell me about what’s been goin’ on with you.”

“Here.”

Eva unscrews the cap and hands it to Camille, who puts the bottle to her lips and lets the liquid slide down her throat. She smiles as she swallows and hands the bottle back. Eva takes a sip, licks her lips, and takes a second, longer one.

Eva exhales and takes a seat on the grass below a young oak tree. Camille sits next to her, pulling the hem of her jacket down. Eva unzips her hoodie. Camille watches her, pupils dilated, and lights another cigarette. Eva’s hands shake as she pushes the sleeves of her shirt up over her biceps. Her arms, soft white inherited from her mother, have hand-shaped bruises wrapping around them.

“Eva.”

“I know. I know. It’s fucked up.”

“Who did this shit to you?”

“We met last year in a class and it was just... I’m in love with him, you know? He just gets so fuckin’ pissed off and then shit like this happens and sometimes I feel like I’m not even there. So I came home.”

“Damn, well, I’m just glad you’re safe.”

Camille reaches one hand over and touches the largest bruise, deep blue and yellow, on Eva’s right arm. Eva shivers and looks at Camille, whose eyes are locked on the bruises.

Eva picks up the vodka, which was leaning on her thigh. She opens her lips and pours it in. It burns on the back of her tongue. Camille is still staring at the bruises. She
says gently, “I took some perc's today. I thought I was gonna feel better when I moved out from livin’ with Ron, but just living like this, I'm just so—”

“Tired of this shit?”

“Yeah, since my mom moved, I guess.”

“Where'd she go, again?”

“To fuckin' Tennessee. Like life's gonna be a lot better for you in Tennessee.”

“You wanna go see her? I only got a month left and then I'm done, remember?”

“Yeah, yeah... maybe.”

The fifth of vodka is half empty. Camille lights another cigarette and slides down so that she is lying with her head on Eva's legs. Eva strokes Camille's forehead, brushing her bangs back.

Camille's body is lit up. She feels like there are grains of sand spilling over her skin. She giggles suddenly. “You know, this is where I lost it—my virginity, I mean.”

“You lost it in the graveyard?”

“Yeah, I mean, we were kids—where else were we supposed to do it? Wasn't like my mom was gonna be down with that one.”

“But the graveyard, I mean. Was it good?”

“I don't know. It just hurt and I had my eyes open, looking at all the graves.”

“Fuck.”

“Yeah. I don’t know.

“You ready to get out of here?”

“Yeah, I guess. Let's go finish the bottle at my house. What do you gotta do tomorrow?”

“Nothin'. Told my mom I’d help her around the house or something.”

“Alright, then.”

Eva stands up first, and pulls Camille up, who falls onto her with the effort. They
laugh. Eva pulls her shirt on, grabs her purse and puts the bottle in it. Camille is rummaging in her bag for the car keys. They hold hands as they walk towards the exit.

Outside of the graveyard, the city has fallen quiet. Camille pauses to light a cigarette. A car approaches from down the street, exhaust system roaring. A young man in the passenger seat rolls down his window and shouts, “Damn! Looking for a ride?”

Eva backs away from the curb, her fingers curling into fists. Camille drags on the cigarette. “Fuck off.” She reaches her other hand into her purse, feeling around until she grasps her butterfly knife. She doesn’t glance back at Eva, just keeps her eyes on the car, and the young man.

“You look too little to be out here all on your own.” His friend, the driver, laughs, and nods. “Just hop on in.”

“We can handle ourselves. Now get the fuck out of here.” Her tongue is heavy. Eva, behind her, is frozen.

“See, I don’t think you can. You need someone to take care of you.”

The other boy laughs, “Yeah, and we got the, you know, ways of taking care.”

The boy in the passenger seat finds this funny, and gets out of the car, still laughing. He leans against the sedan, putting his hands in his pockets. His teeth gleam. He has broad shoulders and stands with his feet spread wide.

Camille pulls out her knife slowly, keeping it hidden in her palm, its weight comforting. “Look, just get the fuck out of here. We’re not looking for any taking care of.” Eva runs her tongue over the roof of her mouth.

The blade clicks open in Camille’s hand, glinting. The boy raises his eyebrows in surprise.

“Oh shit. Aright. I’m not looking for that kinda trouble, little lady.”

He begins to back away, shaking his head. He reaches the car. He pulls open the door. “Tony, let’s get the fuck out of here. Crazy bitches.”
Eva begins to smile. Camille keeps the knife pointed at the car, her cigarette in her right hand, still cherried.

△

Camille rolls up the window when she's finished the cigarette, flexing her fingers around the steering wheel. Eva turns to her, “Thanks for dealing with that.”

“Don't even—”

“Aright. Well, what did you wanna tell me about earlier?”

Camille eases her foot down on the brake as they reach a red light. “Oh, well, I took Tyrell out to see his brother today. So I'm waiting in the parking lot, all annoyed that's it's takin' so long for him to have this conversation, you know?”

“Yeah. Wait—weren't we supposed to go back there?”

“Oh, shit, I wasn't even paying attention.” Camille turns the steering wheel until it locks and accelerates as they take a u-turn. “Anyways, so Tyrell comes walking out of the gate and he's got a real serious look on his face. His brother had a heart attack.”

“But he's young, right?”

“Only, like, two years older than Tyrell or somethin', and he just had a heart attack right after Tyrell talked to him. And there was nothing Tyrell could do—they just put his brother in the jail hospital.”

“That's...”

“Yeah. Crazy.”

“Where's Tyrell? Should we pick him up or something?”

“Well, he told me he was gonna stay with his moms tonight, but we could call, at least.”

Eva pulls out her cellphone. She dials Tyrell's number.

“Shit, he doesn't even have his voicemail set up.”

“Dumbass.”
“It always seems like it's right at the end of summer when everything goes down fucking hill.”

“Yeah, I swear my boss was about to fire me today.”

“For what? You didn’t answer the stupid hotel phone fast enough?”

“Nah, he said I was late again but I wasn’t, I was just changing into the fuckin’ hotel jacket. You wanna smoke tonight?”

“Yeah, I even got some bud left over. At least you get to sit down at your job. I’m sick of walking around to people's houses asking for money. Too fucking hot.”

“Yeah, that job seems like it sucks. Lets just go up to my place and chill.”

“Yeah, fuck Tyrell and his stupid phone. And fuck working.”

Camille giggles suddenly. She holds up her middle finger to the car passing them and accelerates. “Fuck all these people.”

Eva smiles. “Look, we're almost home.”

Δ
Tastes Like Salt

I.
Camille's sitting
legs crossed on her dark red
bed spread. She's telling Eva about
how her brother touched her
wrong how her mother yelled at him
how it's really okay. How it's been years.

And then he touched me
And he was so young
But I was younger

II.
The words spill into Eva's eyes
first, she watches them form
inside Camille's pink lips and then, like smoke,
billow out. Eva smells them, bitter,
inhaled through her nostrils, breathes out the same stuff, same words,

And then he touched me
and you know
it just didn't feel right.

It could be the end of the
world to speak some things
out loud – the distance between
speaker and audience spreading like a tense hand motioning
STOP like a wide hand grasping at skin.

and I said [ ]
and he [ ]

Eva flexes her feet as if to run
but there is no where else to go
but here
but away. Camille rubs her stomach, says,
we should go down for breakfast, my moms cookin' today.

And I haven't
been the same
since and I keep
crying and I keep thinking
and I know it's not the right
way but I keep thinking
how come I had to be the
girl this happened to.

It could be the end of the world
to swallow all those words as early as 11am
on a Sunday as young as 19
(as old as 19)
or it could be another step
in the right direction.
The community college at night looks like a lit-up monument. Streetlights, sparse, cast shadows over thirteen young saplings that were planted mid-March when the school wanted to better itself. There were twenty-four. A vandal left eleven small stumps on the east side of the brick building. They look like knives stuck in the ground — only the wooden handles protruding from the earth. On a night with a fuller moon, the lines between the red bricks look like a blueprint for how to scale the walls. Tonight the moon is waning to nothing.

A window on the second floor is open half an inch. A chemistry class burned through an aluminum tray in an experiment gone wrong. Below the class, Tyrell sat in geometry. He watched the teacher drawing a theorem out on the whiteboard. He liked the three little dots that mean therefore. Therefore, it is solved. He drew the three little dots with pen on the marked up brown desk.

Now, Tyrell sits on the school steps. His house, a few blocks away, is empty except for his mother, who has returned home after her double-shift and is snoring lightly, a gray sheet tucked under her chin — hair wrapped in a long blue silk cloth. Tyrell was unlocking the front door to go inside when Camille pulled away. He knows he needs to tell his mother about Jay’s heart attack. He looks up at the moon, like the tip of a fingernail pressing on a soft black blanket. He wonders if he will ever have a girl who presses her fingernail to his skin like that, putting him to sleep.

A cop car drives by. Tyrell ducks his head, looking at his smooth suede sneakers. His dark jeans and black sweatshirt turn him into the invisible man. He tilts his face back up. He watches a sapling, swaying in a small gust of wind following the absence of the police car. He wishes that no one had ever cut down any of the trees.
The Milk and Bread

In the corner store by Fielding Street, a veteran with a cane and a black hat with embroidered platoon numbers is buying a single cigarillo. He pays in quarters. The clerk, ignoring the ache in his right heel from standing so long, glances at the security camera screen above his head. Black and white, it shows the only other customer—a young woman pushing a stroller, navigating her way through the narrow doorway. Her daughter has two high pigtails with sparkly purple elastics, which aren't visible in the camera's grainy view. The mother, with slender fingers wrapped around the white plastic handles of the stroller, pushes it towards the refrigerators at the back of the store.

She balances a carton of milk in the hook of her left arm and takes a bag of bread off the shelf. She inspects the sell-by date. Her daughter unbucksles the seatbelt of the stroller and then pushes the two plastic pieces back together. When they click, she frowns, and presses the release catch again. The mother moves toward the front of the store.

“I can... put these here?”

“Fine.”

“Thank you.”

She deposits the bread and milk on the high gray counter and returns to the back of the store for a carton of orange juice. Her daughter squeals and reaches a hand out towards a bright yellow package of chocolate. The mother turns and presses a finger to her lips. Through the window, the clerk watches a sedan pulling up to pump four. He keeps an eye on the young man stepping out of the driver side, who approaches the store, a hat pulled low over his forehead. The mother puts the orange juice on the counter. The clerk frowns.

“You can't get this kind of juice with the WIC coupon. You gotta get the Juicy Juice—see that can?”
“Um. Okay, no juice. The rest?”
“Yeah, the milk and bread, fine.”
“Stop it, no candy!”
“Mama, mama, this, this!”
“No.”
“The coupon?”
“Here, sorry. Thank you.”
“You have a nice day.”
“Thank you.”

The bell at the top of the door makes a dinging sound as the young woman pushes the stroller out, her right arm weighed down by a plastic bag that reads, THANK YOU THANK YOU THANK YOU in light blue cursive. The young man waits as the woman walks out. The clerk checks the window, but the sedan is the only car parked. The young man enters, pushing glasses up towards the bridge of his nose. He wears a dark blue mechanics suit, the name Miro embroidered above his heart in swooping white letters. The pants are cuffed neatly into smooth black suede sneakers. He nods at the clerk and moves toward the fridge, taking out two cans of soda and walking up to the counter.

“One dollar.”
“Here.”
“Have a good day.”

Miro pushes the door open with his shoulder, stepping out onto the concrete stoop and then to the asphalt. The clerk returns the can of juice to the back shelf and leans against the wall behind the counter, watching Miro as he pumps gas. The woman in his passenger seat is looking at her left hand, a smooth silver ring weighing down her finger. A young girl, curly hair in pigtails, sits in the woman’s lip. She grabs at the ring,
turning it around her mother’s finger.

Miro looks up the street, where several cars are stopped. An SUV does a quick u-turn, the other cars soon follow. The truck ahead of them has burst into flames. Miro stares. The handle on the gas hose clicks. He shakes his head and puts the hose back. He leans into the open driver's window.

“Look up the street, baby, that truck is on fire.”

“Chruck chruck!”

“Oh my god. Do you think we gotta call 911 or somethin?’”

“Chruck!”

“I'll ask the clerk to call.”

Miro walks over to the store again, opening the door and leaning in. He points down the street. The clerk sighs and picks up a black phone hanging on the wall, dialing the three numbers slowly. In the car, the little girl has made a song. She stands with her small feet pressing into her mother’s thighs, bouncing back and forth, her voice lifting through the window and rising to meet the thick gray smoke that billows over the street.

Δ
Of Failure

I.
Pressing my lips together
I cut
the dutch open with my fingernail
and empty the cigar's guts
onto the gravel:
strips of wilted tobacco
settling like dirt.
Sinking into myself as we light up
I can feel my breath come and go.

Tyrell raps under his breath.
The windows are cold but it is August.

II.
Tyrell asks me:
What are you most
afraid of?
I think slowly, but say surely:
Of myself.

He nods, eyelids low,
and I ask him: What are you
most afraid of?
He says:
Of failure.

III.
Aching, we
sit in silence
under a dark sky, no stars,
in an unregistered car
in a parking lot
behind the homes of so many struggling people.

We sit, high up, with chests tight
and fear settling around us in smoke.
Overhead

By the time they reach the parking lot at the beach, Tyrell has rolled up a blunt. Eva is first out of the car, her hair down; the sudden wind coming off the ocean leaves her neck bare for a moment. Tyrell and Camille follow her towards a bench at the edge of a long concrete sidewalk that stretches down for miles. The sand is gray. Camille, who wishes it would rain, looks over her shoulder, checking for police cars. Tyrell sparks a black lighter and inhales as the blunt ignites. His eyelids flutter and then he closes them, blowing out a slow stream of smoke.

Eva is watching the tall waves crash on the sand. She wants to touch them when they are at the crest—stretched out and about to break. She takes the blunt from Tyrell. They are silent for a long time.

Behind them is an empty parking lot, except for Camille's Explorer. Tyrell sits between the two women, his back broad in a black sweatshirt, hood draped over his favorite black hat, brim shading his eyes from a lowering sun. Eva, her legs crossed, reaches a hand over to Camille, who takes it in hers and closes her eyes. Behind them, a police car drives by. The officer inside, his collar buttoned to the top, doesn't even see the three figures on the bench. He accelerates into the curve of the highway, answers his radio, and turns on the sirens.

Tyrell, startled, turns and watches with relief as the flashing lights disappear. Camille presses her leg against his, “It’s all good.”

“I know.”

Suddenly, Eva stands up, kicks off her flats, and begins to run across the sand. Her muscles adjust to the added difficulty and she begins moving faster. She is almost out of breath when she reaches the first line marked by waves, and the water shocks her nerves so that she stops moving. She takes one more step, ocean at her ankles, and turns to look back. The sun, setting more quickly than she remembers, lights up the sky a
sharp red, and below it, she sees Tyrell and Camille walking towards her. A wave hits her jeans and she begins to smile. Tyrell, moving more quickly than Camille, sees Eva's smile and smiles himself, turning to see Camille. “Hurry up!”

“Shut up, you know I'm a smoker!” But Camille begins to smile too.

The sky, darkening overhead, begins to show the moon still waning. Tyrell points to it, “That moon is fuckin' beautiful.” The other two look up at the sky, a swirl of black, disappearing red glow and the sliver of moon.

Eva, her feet cold, stays in the water even though it is reaching her calves, and says softly, “It really is.”


“No!”

“Then what?” Camille unbuckles her sandals and walks into the water next to Eva, shivering as the cold hits her nerves. “What really is?”

“It—it really is okay.”

Δ
Blessed by Association

I watched everyone get arrested when I went to college
or they got pregnant
or lost in drugs, lost their job(s).

I watched my body disappear for the first time when I was 9
no wonder I had a preoccupation with stories
no wonder I had a love of imagination.

Camille calls me and says she was pregnant
second time
second miscarriage.

I take birth control and think about my growing up,
becoming until he stopped it with his hands
becoming until I understood my body had a knowledge of its own.

An ex called me and says he wants to see me
now that he's out of jail
now that his record's clear.

I write this poem for Camille's children (to be, one day)
for my body to be safe (one day)
for everyone (to be okay, one day)
Sources

On Youth and Education:


On Theory:


Links to Non-Profit Organizations Mentioned:

The Heifer Project, http://www.heifer.org/

The Farm School, http://www.farmschool.org/


Teen Empowerment, http://www.teenempowerment.org/

Government Statistics:

The METCO Program, http://www.doe.mass.edu/metco/

Epigraph:


The Food Project:


To get involved or learn more about TFP's programs, visit:

http://thefoodproject.org/
http://thefoodproject.org/what-we-do
http://thefoodproject.org/youth-programs
http://thefoodproject.org/give
http://thefoodproject.org/volunteer
http://thefoodproject.org/work-here

To read more of TFP's resources, visit:

http://thefoodproject.org/food-project-toolbox
http://thefoodproject.org/books-manuals
http://thefoodproject.org/activities