‘WWOOFING’ BC: AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

by

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Abstract

‘Wwoofing’ BC: An Autoethnography is an exploratory study centering around the experiences of 8 women ‘Wwoofers’ (Willing Workers On Organic Farms) and 11 WWOOF hosts in British Columbia, Canada. The project uses semi-structured in-depth interviews as well as autoethnographic, ethnographic, visual and photo elicitation methods to relate issues of sustainability, health-wellness, gender, feminism-femininity, organic farming, caring, activism, protest, tourism and community. I suggest that Wwoofing provides a respite-sanctuary space for women and WWOOF hosts. Within this space, women Wwoofers and WWOOF hosts are able to witness, analyze and resist social structures as well as create unique friendships and presentations of gender-identity-self.
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“There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside you.”
Maya Angelou

There is much beauty in these lives and their stories. I am incredibly fortunate to have had the opportunity:

I honor all the participants.
Your insights, mentorship and caring touched my heart and continue to guide me.

I honor my grandmother Antonina, my mother Malgorzata and my brother Jacek.
Your presence, wisdom and spirit are my life and nurtured me through the many months it took to imagine, begin, then start to let go.

I honor Si.
You are wonderful/extraordinary. You inspire me.

I honor my committee Jacqueline and Zoe.
Your experience, support and commitment mean the world to me.

I honor friends.
Thank you for laughter, kindness and walking with me: A, A, D, C, H, P, Y.
Introduction: Wwoofing, WWOOF & Visual Auto/Ethnography

[A]utoethnographic writing does not merely tell stories about yourself garnished with details, but actively interprets your stories to make sense of how they are connected with others' stories. In the interpretive process, you gain new knowledge and insight about yourself and others and become transformed. (Chang, 2008, p. 149)

Again and again as I travel around I am stunned by how many citizens in our nation feel lost, feel bereft of a sense of direction, feel as though they cannot see where our journeys lead, that they cannot know where they are going. Many folks feel no sense of place. (bell hooks, 2009, p. 1)

[T]he task of the ethnographer is not to determine “the truth” but to reveal the multiple truths apparent in others’ lives. (Emerson, Fretz & Shaw, 1995, p. 3)

'Wwoofing' is about many things including travel, connection, service and learning. I bought my first WWOOF booklet in 2006. At the time I was interested to find an inexpensive way to see the country and Wwoofing allowed me to learn the practices of organic gardening without having to pay to enroll in a formal education program. For me, Wwoofing was in a sense an effort like hooks describes to create a “homeplace” (2009, p. 16). Wwoofing was my attempt to come back home to tastes I remembered from childhood, colors and smells that I had devoured as a little girl. Even if I grew up in the city, my childhood in Krakow was filled with the smells of local vegetables sold by vendors who grew and picked them, the sounds of eggs packed by Polish ladies in head scarves and daily hours of queued shopping in open air marts and corner kiosks. I remember walking for hours with my mother to find the last few bottles of carrot juice. Its brightness and frothy bubbles were almost immediately devoured. The lack of aroma and the plethora of shiny packaged foods in highlighted supermarkets stunned my immigrant mother when we came to Canada. Like her, I longed to rediscover the
beauty and depth of the food culture that I had experienced in my early life. My
disenchantment grew through university. Although I was studying community, sustainability
and activism I witnessed a profound apathy and depression amongst my professors and peers.
I saw that my women friends especially struggled to reconcile their relationship with food,
society, eating and body/self/image. Thus I started Wwoofing seeking many things. Most
importantly like hooks (2009) writes, I wanted to find a space where I could feel like I was a
part of building or creating something positive in the world. As a citizen/person/woman I was
interested in finding my place and contributing to a movement that would better the earth.

I took the picture below, during the summer of 2009. The image is significant because
the boots represent how empowered and able I felt and feel while farming and Wwoofing.

Figure 1. Work Boots

Figure 1. (2009) I took this picture in April while on a break during my first WWOOF exchange of
the summer. These boots are part of my regular Wwoofer uniform and were with me for many
years before I finally lost them while traveling through Vancouver Island, months later.

Whenever I am out working and put my gum boots on, I walk differently, I stand upright and
walk purposefully knowing that my body is strong and physical-consequential in its ability to
shape the earth and make/construct/germinate/establish life and living. When I tread in these boots, I reclaim a gendered-citizen space on my own terms. I can be dirty/messy and essentially let go of the societal-cultural-femme drag that tells me to be prim/sweet/pretty. In the boots I literally and physically feel free-to-do-whatever-.

The Study: Subjects, Topics & Meaning Making

Gender matters as a source of personal and collective identity. (Woodward, 2011, p. 108)

In Canada, 26 percent of farmers are women. The proportion of farms operated exclusively by women is small (5 percent), but it is growing... British Columbia has the highest percentage of women farmers in Canada (36 percent) (Statistics Canada 2001)... The number of farmers in Canada is declining, but the drop in BC is smaller than in most provinces... (McMahon, 2005a, pp. 135-136)

This research is interdisciplinary and engages with gender studies, anthropology, sociology and geography. I use a bricolage\(^1\) approach that incorporates feminist theory, autoethnography/ethnography, visual methods and concepts of space-place. The primary objective of this study is to explore Wwoofing through the experiences of women Wwoofers and WWOOF hosts in British Columbia, Canada. Some of the secondary aims for scholarship and policy are to account for and analyze the phenomenon of Wwoofing in terms of issues/concepts like 'care giving,' femininity-feminism, sustainability, health/wellness, activism-protest, community. Wwoofing is not in of itself a formal protest movement yet in some ways it does illuminate the notion of resistance. In this way, I explore Wwoofing as a landscape; a meaningful, significant place-space.

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The majority of Canadian Wwoofers are women (WWOOF Coordinator, personal interview, 2009). What does this mean for my analysis of Wwoofing? Within the thesis I suggest that for the majority of the women Wwoofer participants, Wwoofing is about nurturing unique friendships and fostering a radical sort of curiosity; it is an attempt to claim/reclaim a caring-safe space, create a sanctuary-refuge place and explore/witness/analyze/process, gender dynamics. This is done within varying environments and encompasses gaining new understandings as well as allowing for novel presentations of gender-identity-self. Similarly, for the host participants and especially for the women hosts, WWOOF affords a powerful respite-network space. Hosts are cared for/get help but also also teach/examine/support/show, diversely gendered socio-cultural norms. In this way, Wwoofing allows hosts to develop matrices of caring, family like communities but also to center themselves powerfully as mentor-friend-mother-father within these.

A story echoes a life history and the narratives I have gathered in this thesis demonstrate intricate connections to gender/society/identity. I appreciate their wildly mixed and sometimes esoteric/abstracted existence. I am versed in the traditional-academic formalities/procedures/rubrics for arguments. For years my heart has ached watching/waiting/wanting to do something different. I am inspired by the words of one of my former teachers, Jacqueline Levitin. Speaking about women’s film, Dr. Levitin acknowledged the beautiful dialogic significance/intensity of women’s experimental cinema in that it allows viewers to think abound of a language and reality\(^2\). The seemingly awkward images and displaced utterances of experimental film can impel a person to begin to imagine as well as associate to

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\(^2\) These ideas are informed by a course I was enrolled in taught by Professor Levitin in 2007 at Simon Fraser University in Vancouver, BC within the Women’s Studies department. The course was titled: WS 412 - Women and Film, Films and Theories.
worlds of queerness and exceptionalities. I bring these comments in to point out how the lives I showcase in the following chapters are wonderfully convoluted and animated. In this way, this thesis encompasses the experimentalesque life-cinema’s of participants. The chapters are my attempt to present ideas/words/pictures/events that are not necessarily ‘logically’ building to some climax of a point but that instead offer discourse/s that should be supplemented and amended by readers/researchers/audience. The length, personal writing style and digressive analytical content of this thesis are a testimony to my attitude with the scholarly: I wrote it that way and I almost lost myself, consequently as of today when I write “I am Bearing witness. Refusing to bow. to outside pressures. to Revise. or Repress my experience.... I Story to Change” (Graveline, 2004, p. 39). Ergo, like Wwoofer Yvonne - whose words in chapter three excited the above ‘spark’- notes, I recognize that my Wwoofing journey has allowed me to develop my voice, make boundaries, “say no” and therefore invests me with new knowledge of feminism/agency/academia/choice.

Setting the Scene

WWOOFing has provided 1000’s of people with amazingly interesting experiences; WWOOFers have provided 1000’s of WWOOF hosts with help that could be described as “gifts” -such as friendships, cultural exchanges and help on their farms and homesteads. (WWOOF Canada Booklet, 2008, p. 52)

Willing Workers On Organic Farms or WWOOF is an international member-based, web organized hub that brings together willing ‘hosts’ with interested apprentices or learner-workers. WWOOF was founded by a female secretary in England, in 1971. WWOOF was started so that tired urban dwellers could take time away from the city and experience the countryside and farm life (Ward cited in McIntosh & Campbell, 2011, p. 112). Since then
WWOOF has evolved internationally. For the most part, each WWOOF organization functions independently\(^3\) whereby a coordinator oversees membership fees\(^4\) and is in charge of administering their organization. The goals of WWOOF are assorted\(^5\). Each individual organization publishes a statement relating to its own mission and vision but generally these center around promoting opportunities for WWOOF exchanges and supporting the ideals of organic farming. In Canada, a host is responsible for creating a posting regarding what they offer in terms of experience and accommodations and what they need in terms of help. The post must then be submitted to the WWOOF coordinator who charges a fee to include the write up in an annual WWOOF booklet and to allow the host access to the online site. Through the site or book, hosts recruit ‘Wwoofers’ -individuals who have bought an annual membership and have received the booklet and/or site access. Most hosts are farmers and thus are looking for labor help with farm related tasks but some are not and advertise needing assistance with a Bed & Breakfast, small garden or rural business and offer more of a ‘cultural exchange’ including for example English lessons, foreign language tutoring or art studio space (WWOOF, 2006; 2007; 2008).

Wwoofers contact hosts directly and are responsible for figuring out the details of their own stay. WWOOF Canada provides general guidelines and recommendations relating

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\(^3\) For example the online site for WWOOF Canada is: www.wwoof.ca and the general site: www.wwoof.org links all the diverse WWOOF organizations. Although WWOOF programs are connected they are organized by different coordinators, for the most part.

\(^4\) Fees are diverse. WWOOF Canada charges Wwoofers $50 or $62 for a couples/joint membership (http://www.wwoof.ca/FAQ), WWOOF New Zealand charges Wwoofers $50 for online access to the host postings and the printed WWOOF book (https://www.wwoof.co.nz/join.php). WWOOF Serbia requires 5 euros for membership (http://www.wwoofserbia.org/join) and WWOOF Peru asks for $10 USD (http://wwoof-peru.com/Home/About).

\(^5\) Each WWOOF organization offers many different types of postings submitted by hosts from the region. Please see www.wwoof.org for examples.
to exchanges. For example the www.wwooof.ca site identifies Wwoofers as volunteers and the WWOOF booklet states: "The average [Wwoofer] helping time is between 4-6 hours a day, 5-6 days per week. Some WWOOF hosts may request more. Ask the host" (2008, p. 1). Although each WWOOF exchange is unique and host-Wwoofer relationships vary, usually Wwoofers put in a few hours of work for food, lodging and on-site mentorship. Moreover, Wwoofers often seek to learn responsible land stewardship and are supposed to pass on thoughtful leadership in terms of sustainability practices related to food growing.

The Auto/Ethnography

In autoethnography, self and others may be positioned in different ways.... First, you can investigate yourself as a main character and others as supporting actors in your life story. Second, you can include others as co-participants or co-informants in your study. Third, you can study others as the primary focus, yet also as an entry to your world. (Chang, 2008, p. 65)

In 2009, right before I started the fieldwork for the thesis, I had already been on six WWOOF exchanges in the Ottawa valley, BC and Hawaii. Thus I started an ethnography in late April of 2009 as a knowledgeable Wwoofer but new researcher. Over the course of the next few months, including April, May, June, July and August, I traveled around BC and lived as a Wwoofer and auto/ethnographer-researcher. I wrote about my experiences, took pictures of various landscapes and interviewed women Wwoofers as well as WWOOF hosts. I was looking at Wwoofing as a phenomenology; a lived movement, special thing and unique space that would allow me to comprehend diverse peoples, various issues and better understand my place in the world. Like Chang describes, I focused on participants yet also brought my story into the narrative in which we were all a part. I took Chang’s three approaches and used them interchangeably as three different perspectives that I consulted.
throughout the writing process. Within this paradigm my voice emerges like a tide; coming in, out, throughout/through the participants’ stories.

Feminism/Femininity

Gender remains a powerful presence in the 21st century, which is highlighted by the persistence of gender inequalities as well as the universal importance of gender as part of social relations. (Woodward, 2011, p. 104)

Power works in different ways. Power can be coercive and involve force or it can be a whole set of everyday practices. It may be embedded in tradition, explicit and direct; power can be top down and involve institutional backing. Power can also operate diffusely and it may be difficult to identify where it is. In the case of gender discrimination, the idea of indirect discrimination includes a whole set of discriminatory acts, which together make up a culture of unequal treatment. (Woodward, 2011, pp. 104-105)

The difficulties lie primarily in the fact that the term ‘femininity’ is a concept which refers to a set of gendered behaviours and practices, and yet which is fluid and not fixed, and can mean as many different things as there are women (just as there are many ‘masculinities’ as there are men). (Holland, 2004, p. 8)

I first learned of feminism when I was about 10 years old. I saw the word in a popular women’s fashion magazine. I read the accompanying article with increasing curiosity. The feature described a national feminist organization’s efforts to stop domestic violence. I was excited that there were other ‘girls’ working together to shift the world. Since that time, my relationship to feminism, my own feminisms and understandings of femininity have been challenged/adapted. Presently, my research/writing standpoint reflect several commitments with regards to feminism: I acknowledge the struggles and achievements of advocates around the world, who are impacted by gendered violence and pressure/evoke change. In this way, I am interested to present stories that consider gender and its day to day influence/s. As well, I understand that feminism as theory and practice offers a critical reference with which to question social organization. Thus, I aim to recognize the variation of femininities/
masculinities/gender expression/s. This work then, presents a descriptive/exploratory account of a gendered phenomena - Wwoofing, women Wwoofers Wwoofing - with some explanatory interpretation of its effect/consequence.

Throughout the thesis I refer to gender/ed norms and issues of power. I realize that these concepts are diversely imagined and related to. Indeed, within this work, my relationship to them is divergent and even contradictory, as I attempt to illustrate my behaviors/needs with regards to what I experienced in the field and heard from participants. My interpretation of the stories I feature in this thesis - including my own -, is particular. Although patriarchy and 'hegemonic masculinity' (Woodward, 2005, pp. 91; 100) are powerful notions, I did not ask participants to review their definitions. Instead, I asked participants to define power, femininity, masculinity, in their own words and in relation to Wwoofing. Their responses and my observations informed my argument that Wwoofing is a 'respite' space and a place in which women are able to discuss, various, gender/ed conventions. This is done in different ways with varied understandings of gender-resistance-empowerment. For example, although host participants Sharon and Samantha find power in mothering/‘caring’ for their families and as caretakers in their communities, they also relate the understanding that their work/efforts are frustrated by a gendered division of labor in their households. The frustration that Sharon and Samantha related to me - during my conversations with them - with regards to their care work, is something I also encountered throughout the fieldwork and my analysis. At this point, I can't reason these moments any more specifically with regards to gender/femininity because I am not sure what definition of gender/femininity I should/can refer to in light of the parameters I worked within. The
boundaries of these terms are inevitably hazy and I could have gone about the researching of these terms differently. Nonetheless, I am content with the insights I garnered and that the participants communicate.

Chapters

Ethnography is an active enterprise. Its activity incorporates dual impulses. On the one hand, the ethnographer must make her way into new worlds and new relationships. On the other hand, she must learn how to represent in written form what she has come to see and understand as the result of these experiences. (Emerson et al., 1995, p. 15)

‘Wwoofing’ BC: An Autoethnography is presented in five chapters. The first chapter is a literature review that situates the project in relation to several topics including autoethnography, ethnography, geography, visual and feminist methods. I review grounded theory, make connections with ecotourism, volunteer tourism, women and agriculture, ecofeminism, organic farming and ‘care’ farming. I make the point that while this project is introspective and grounded in narrative/s, Wwoofing is also consequential as a socio-political development.

Chapter 2 is a review of methods and ethical issues. I explore how the thesis started, the researcher’s role, objectives, significance and interdisciplinary foundations of the project. I review how I incorporated auto/ethnography, examine the sampling process, limitations, delimitations and ethical considerations. I then examine the interviews, photo-visuals and coding process. I conclude the chapter with some key issues that emerged while I was in the field.

Chapter 3 is a discussion of my time spent working with and speaking to women Wwoofers. I relate four major themes from these experiences: Connection/s, Labor,
Educating Myself, Conflict and Transformation. ‘Connection/s’ analyzes women’s motivations in getting involved with WWOOF. ‘Educating Myself’ considers the type of formal/informal knowledge that is exchanged while Wwoofing. ‘Labor’ reviews the significance of the manual, social and ecological work that women perform while Wwoofing. ‘Conflict and Transformation’ takes a closer look at the women’s personal journeys and how these unfolded with and through Wwoofing.

Chapter 4 is an overview of my time spent working with and speaking to WWOOF hosts. Each section of the chapter is also organized by theme: Settings, Help, Connecting and Sustainabilities. The rural communities I profile exist amongst different competing pressures and interests. ‘Settings’ introduces the hosts and details the physical-social environments I saw and/or worked in as a Wwoofer. Wwoofing entails giving and receiving often within complicated relationships. ‘Help’ is an examination of these dynamics through the hosts’ memorable experiences, ideas of volunteering and understandings of power. Hosts maintain a diverse array of relations. ‘Connecting’ elaborates this spectrum of interactions through the hosts’ definitions of tourism, community, caring, gender and femininity. What does sustainability mean in the 21st century and how is it imagined or practiced? ‘Sustainabilities’ reviews how the hosts apply this term to their farming work. Moreover, I explore the hosts’ hopes and plans for the future and definitions of activism and protest.

Chapter 5 offers conclusions and recommendations. I review the major issues of the thesis in a final commentary that suggests areas for further research and study. The chapter is divided into four parts which relate: Footprints, Land Matters, Regulations and Social Change. ‘Footprints’ looks at the impact of small farms and women’s labor. I suggest that
longitudinal studies and more networking are necessary to help better establish organic farming and women's entry into agricultural work. 'Land Matters' offers some final insights in terms of women's caring, political economy and the state of the world's ecological work. 'Regulations' considers how Wwoofing can maintain itself in the future and sustain its momentum. The last section explores WWOOF's implications in relation to notions of 'Social Change.'
Literature Review

May the [WWOOF] network grow, & be as rich & varied as all its participants. (WWOOF, 2008, p. 1)

Onion,
shining flask,
your beauty assembled
petal by petal,
they affixed crystal scales to you
and your belly of dew grew round
in the secret depth of the dark earth.
The miracle took place
underground,
and when your lazy green stalk
appeared
and your leaves were born
like swords in the garden
the earth gathered its strength
exhibiting your naked transparency... (Neruda, 1994, p. 135)

Wwoofing as a topic engages with several different subjects. Firstly, I situate this project’s methodology and approaches with a literature review of autoethnography, ethnography, ‘place,’ visual and feminist methods. I then provide an overview of grounded theory as it applies to this study. There is a small amount of literature that addresses WWOOF and Wwoofing specifically thus I also make connections with readings that deal with ecotourism and voluntourism, women and agriculture, ecofeminism, organic farming as well as ‘care’ farming.

Autoethnography & Ethnography

Ethnography is about this process of articulating differences and sameness, an act of bounding ‘here’ and ‘there’. (Hyndman cited in Watson & Till, 2010, p. 121)
We bring biases and more than biases. We bring idiosyncratic patterns of recognition. We are not, in fact, ever capable of achieving the analytic “distance” we have long been schooled to seek. (Krieger, 2008, p. 393)

[Anthropologists] have refused to admit that the very possibility of dealing squarely with the Other is tied to the capacity to put the Self at stake. (Dwyer cited in Collins, 2010, p. 241)

Autoethnography is defined and applied in various ways depending on the discipline that frames its use, the researcher’s approach or theoretical commitments. Chang (2008) relates that autoethnography is: “a research method that utilizes the researcher’s autobiographical data to analyze and interpret cultural assumptions” (p. 9). In this way, autoethnography is a way of seeing, organizing and interpreting data by way of the researcher’s experiences, past-history, reflections, conversations and affect-emotions.

Autoethnography and ethnography have their roots in anthropology. Anthropology deals with relationships between the individual-individuals, culture, society and environment. Anthropology employs autoethnography and ethnographic methods to study the subjectivities of people living in different places. As a discipline its interests are defined by mapping diversity through participant observation, comparative analysis and symbolic interactionism; autoethnographers and ethnographers write about how people create, reason with and make sense of their worlds by being there and living with/in the culture they are writing about. Butz (2010) adds that autoethnographers are able to critically engage with important epistemologies including meanings of daily life as well as concepts of local and native-

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authentic through a self-reflective narrative. Krieger (2008) offers an important consideration:

We see others as we know ourselves. If the understanding of self is limited and unyielding to change, the understanding of the other is as well. If the understanding of the self is harsh, uncaring and not generous to all the possibilities for being a person, the understanding of the other will show this. The great danger of doing injustice to the reality of the “other” does not come about through use of the self, but through lack of use of a full enough sense of self which concomitantly, produces a stifled, artificial, limited, and unreal knowledge of others. (p. 404)

Autoethnographic/ethnographic fieldwork is complicated. Conducting an autoethnographic/ethnographic research project is full of constant unfolding negotiations, relentless, troubling ethical questions and difficult practical considerations. Researchers are not immune to bias, making unfair and unwarranted judgments. Moreover, when attempting to know a group or culture, researchers can often feel illiterate as well as ignorant. Facilitating personal and public conflicts as an auto/ethnographer, is an intricate exercise. While conducting an ethnography in a conservative, Catholic community, Fortier (2008) struggled to be seen as a “proper” (p. 345) woman amongst the women participants she befriended. To appease participants, she admits to “coping, erasing, [and] masquerading” (p. 350) her image to attune with the heterosexual norms expected of her (pp. 343-349).

Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) write: “there is no way in which we can escape the social world in order to study it” (p. 17). The authors maintain that no rule can cover the range of fieldwork situations and field site negotiations that auto/ethnographers encounter. They note that ‘honesty’ can dually impede and facilitate trust with participants and also point out that while gender can influence access to some communities, in others it obstructs or even deters forming connections with participants. Hammersley and Atkinson argue that ethnographers
should be weary of adopting ‘expert,’ novice, insider or outsider roles and point out that conducting ethnographic fieldwork can beget severe emotional strain and anxiety for the researcher who tries to navigate “living with the ambiguity and uncertainty of one’s social position on the margin” (p. 113). This anxiety can cause serious physical ailments and suffering including “dysadaptation syndrome”: a conglomerate of symptoms including aches, pains, guilt and anger (Wintrob cited in Hammersley and Atkinson, pp. 113-114). The authors caution ethnographers: “...field researchers do not always leave the field physically and emotionally unscathed, and they rarely leave unaffected by the experience of research” (p. 120).

I struggled with trying to define what I had experienced in the field and how to write it out while not excluding scenarios and conversations that made me uncomfortable, qualmish, happy or pleased. Similarly, Krieger (2008) discusses how difficult it was for her to write about the community in which she was a long time member. She recalls that after finishing her research she could not write about her participants for an entire year. When she finally started analyzing the data that she had previously recorded, she questioned herself: “the account I had written was not social science in a conventional sense, and I wanted very much to be conventional” (p. 395). To still her unease Krieger decided to redefine her methods:

I would have to feel that I could “touch” the experience of gathering my data, and in a way that I had not allowed myself before. I would have to begin by expanding my idea of my “data” to include not only my interview notes, but also my entire year of participation in the community. I would have to be willing not only to feel again what the experience of living in the community had been like for me, but also to feel it as fully and deeply as possible and to analyze my feelings. Why did certain things move me? What had unfolded over the year time? Why had I felt estranged? What did I want? What did I receive? What was I afraid of? How could I bridge the gap between myself and my data? (p. 395)
Echoing Krieger’s remarks, Hoskins (2008) recalls how she became “physically ill” trying to write up a report that would expose a participant who had shared very intimate life stories with her (Hoskins & Stolz, p. 133). Likewise, writing about conducting an ethnography with homeless mothers, Connolly (2000) relates that it was difficult for her to leave the field and reconcile what she witnessed. She notes: “I have attempted to walk the tightrope of describing the pain, ugliness, and cruelty that often enters into these lives as well as the tenacity and heroism that sometimes emerges as they struggle against the odds they face” (p. 192). Collins (2010) offers some insight:

Justice as important are those emotional responses to life in the field; one’s feel for a place will determine the extent to which the anthropologist is accepted and acceptable. These are ‘data’ that are often not recorded on paper or digitally, but become instead part of our selves and may reoccur in memories, whether or not that is our intention. (p. 229)

Additionally, Narayan (2008) discusses how concepts of insider/outsider are constructed and rooted in colonial discourses. She suggests that anthropologists question the authenticity of “native” accounts (p. 271): “By situating ourselves as subjects simultaneously touched by life-experience and swayed by professional concerns, we can acknowledge the hybrid and positioned nature of our identities” (p. 285).

Addressing meaning making, Foley and Valenzuela (2005) write that ethnography is significant when it is ‘critical’ of race/class and engages with local, political stories that can be “applied” to lived realties (p. 231). Likewise, Anderson (2006) suggests that autoethnography is powerful when it goes beyond “emotional resonance” (p. 387) and couples with empirical observation. Similarly focusing on personal narrative accounts in First Nations’ writing traditions, Graveline (2004) points out: “StoryTelling...we understand Power of Language. to Heal. Regenerate. Create. Words give Life” (p. 12). And relating his
“sensuous anthropology” with migrants at a dance hall, Skinner (2010) describes how he engages participants through autoethnography while taking part in salsa dance. He surmises that autoethnographic methodology is critical for the researcher as well as participants:

Because we [participant and researcher] had danced, there was a commonly shared notion -or assumption- between us that we knew each other. ‘When you touch someone, when you experience someone, it makes you comfortable with them’ were the memorable words she [participant Sarah] later emailed to me. This comment substantiated my interview hypothesis that dancing with someone does more than make them feel obliged to agree to be interviewed by you, that dancing with someone relaxes and connects with them, embodied minds, reaching out and entangling. (p. 118)

Nadel-Klein (2010) presents an autoethnographic account of gardening. She mentions that she started gardening to create a sanctuary for herself during a tumultuous childhood. Her research looks at other gardeners’ motivations. She finds that the past is a significant part of the present work that gardeners perform: “Memories do more than embrace the senses. They relay social networks that run like vast root system through gardeners’ lives. If gardens are refuges, they also provide places where social connections may flourish” (p. 175). She further maintains that being a member of the group she studies allows her a unique intimacy with the subject matter:

This [gardening network] is a ‘tribe’ with roots everywhere. Yet, instead of feeling a little lost at sea, I feel very much at home...caring for the subject matter and being able to recognize the craftwork that sustains a moral community have been, for me, distinct assets. (p. 179)

Kohn (2010) also relates the significance of autoethnographic reflection. While conducting research in Nepal, Kohn became deathly ill. She writes about struggling to breathe -she later found out she had double pneumonia- while her participant-friends laughed and chatted amongst themselves waiting for the local shaman who, when he arrived gave her a blessing to protect her from the hospital. At the time, Kohn could not reconcile the behaviors she
witnessed. Many years later, as she was grieving the death of her own mother, she noted that ethnographic perspectives are complicated by “emotional growth” (p. 196). Kohn argues that field memories should be reassessed in light of diverse contexts and personal moments in the researcher’s life:

Our findings are not just added to with time...but they are often dismantled or at least reframed by our own developing sensitivities and interactions with other people and other ‘fields’... Events are not just variously interpreted, but they are multiply remembered against very different personal and deeply emotional associations, which change through time. (pp. 196-197).

Reflexivity is an integral part of auto/ethnographic methodology. It implores the researcher to consider their unique position in the world and deliberate about how this influences the study, their views and participants. Ideally, reflexivity implies a continuing practice of looking at how one is embedded in the research process. After working with a colleague who was unable to publish under his own name, fearing retribution from the government he was working for, Myers (2010) emphasizes the importance of collaboration but also reflects about how partnerships can create political upheaval and reinforce privilege. Myers discusses reflexivity, noting its limits:

[Positionality -or situatedness- apparently involves choosing sides, and sometimes we either don’t want to choose sides, have sides chosen for us, or cannot really claim consciousness of what the sides are or where we [emphasis in original] are in the siding” (p. 381)

Echoing Myers’ thoughts, Rapport (2010) discusses trying to reconcile the racisms of the participants he lived with while conducting an ethnography in England (pp. 82-83; 84-85; 90-91). He writes about his and his participants’ different perspectives:

I might claim superiority (my versions [of truth] were more scientific, more artistic, more liberal, etc;) but in those versions and my faith in them would I not be precisely
equivalent to Doris and Sid? Their prejudices, strategies and insecurities were clear counterparts of my own... (pp. 90-91)

Blauner (2008) discusses reflexivity in terms of the technical aspects of fieldwork: translating conversations and first person, autobiographic narratives into research. He describes some of his process as a reflective-reflexive act: “In each interview I look for the person’s unique story, the special focus or issues which set that person off, add something new to the unfolding “cast of characters” who make up the book as a whole” (p. 227). He notes that his interest in “focus” changes with time and in light of conditions i.e. his own curiosity or current popular, political-social matters (pp. 228-229). Blauner states that he tries to “eliminate” (p. 232) the interviewer within the interview narrative. He discusses the reasons for this: “To be a medium for the voices of other people, you have to suppress your own” (p. 232). In turn, Hoskins and Stolz (2008) reflect critically about the implications of computer-based content coding programs for analysis. They ask: “What is at stake for a researcher who takes an analytic approach and deconstructs the very frameworks that hold participants’ narratives together? ” (p. 131). Correspondingly, Coffey, Holbrook and Atkinson (2008) express weariness while relating digital, data analysis techniques:

...[C]oding data for use with computer programs is not analysis [emphasis in original]... Qualitative research is not enhanced by poor imitations of other research styles and traditions. Analytic procedures which appear rooted in standardized, often mechanistic procedures are no substitute for genuinely ‘grounded’ engagement with the data throughout the whole of the research process... The ‘usefulness’ of such computer programs implies that you have collected and input all of your data and this suggests that data collection and data analysis are discrete and linear. (pp. 11-12)
A 'crisis of representation' coupled with postmodernism have impacted how autoethnography and ethnography are understood and interpreted. Hoskins and Stoltz (2008) consider the "chaotic bombardment" (Arvay cited in Hoskins and Stoltz, p. 131) of narrative, arguing that the privileging of pluralities, voices and stories: "can lead to a proliferation of verbatim accounts of participant experience that leave the reader 'awash in content' and at a loss for how to make meaning of the research" (p. 131). McDowell (2010) maintains: "...doing interviews involves a set of political acts and negotiations of power differentials" (p. 165). She points out that postmodern texts have been criticized as they can actually further obscure and marginalize participants' world views through inaccessible language (pp. 168-169). Acknowledging the complexities of representation, McDowell also cautions researchers to understand that: "As interviewers, we cannot and should not evade the academic and political responsibilities of speaking for/on behalf of others..." (p. 170).

Writing about experimental ethnography and its reification in anthropology and social science, Visweswaran (2008) notes: "For a movement which claims interest in experimenting with how selves are constituted or represented, experimental ethnography has been strangely reluctant to embrace other forms of writing, like the novel, short story, diary or autobiography" (p. 430). Furthermore, Herbert (2010) describes how qualitative geographers are driven by two contradictory demands: to qualify in more depth a particular 'case' and then also withdraw from it in order to generalize, analyze and assess it as a case-study (p. 69). He notes that deep "engagement" (p. 78) in the field can elicit important data and

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7 Due to space constraints I am not able to elaborate this more thoroughly. Please see the following for more information: D. Conquergood's (2003) Rethinking ethnography: Towards a critical cultural politics in Y. S. Lincoln & N. K. Denzin (Eds.), Turning points in qualitative research: Tying Knots in a Handkerchief. Oxford, UK: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers Inc.
reflection on social structures, place, globalization, values and norms (pp. 77-79). In turn, Richardson (2008) comments about society and academic/social responsibilities:

At this historical point, I have chosen to think about my sociological work as telling what I term "the collective story" [emphasis in original]. A collective story tells the experience of a sociologically constructed category of people in the context of larger sociocultural and historical forces... My intent is to help construct a consciousness of kind in the minds of the protagonists, a concrete recognition of sociological bondedness with others, because such consciousness can break down isolation between people, empower them, and lead to collective action on their behalf. (p. 307)

This thesis tries to lay out “the collective story” of Wwoofing. However, like the above authors point out, a story is challenging to understand and/or write. Therefore, I acknowledge that social-ethical issues are never resolved and the research process is inevitably demanding and complex.

**Geography & ‘Place’**

[S]patial context matters to the conduct of social action...location shapes how individuals behave...people’s actions are conditioned by the setting where they occur...social action is always [emphasis in original] significantly embedded in place. (Herbert, 2010, p. 69)

Within geography, place is a term that signifies a mesh of ideas as well as theories relating to landscapes, social boundaries, lived realities as well as personal-emotional sites. Cresswell (2004) defines place as a network grid onto which feelings, sentiments, physical locations and imagined futures, are affixed. Describing a photograph of a Puerto Rican community garden, he notes that immigrant groups create garden places: “to make themselves ‘feel at home’” (p. 6). Within Cresswell’s work, Doreen Massey comments on place and community as “processes” (p. 69) forming in relation to moving concepts of

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8 Due to space constraints I am restricting my elaboration of this term to Cresswell’s exploration (2004). Please refer to: “Chapter #2: The place of geography” in Tim Unwin’s (2002) The place of geography. Essex, UK: Longman Group for more examples of this idea.
boundaries and identity (pp. 69-70). Massey further notes that place-space are sites of conflict, hybridity and uneven development/s (pp. 63-75). The statement suggests that space can accommodate an infinite number of places or a multitude of physical, socio-cultural expressions and interests. Pratt reveals that creating a home-place is a meaningful way to increase power and connectedness to a given space. Using the example of a Filipina domestic, contract worker who actively personalizes her room so that her employers can “see” (cited in Cresswell, p. 83), Pratt writes: “Marking boundaries, insisting on the materiality and persistence of differences, may be as politically productive as blurring them...” (cited in Cresswell, p. 83). Cresswell also writes that humanistic geographers concerned with phenomenology detail places as: “never ‘finished’ but always becoming” (Pred cited in Cresswell, 35). Thus, power lies in making and defining a space and power structures also determine place boundaries: “The creation of place by necessity involves the definition of what lies outside...‘outside’ plays a crucial role in the definition of the ‘inside’” (Cresswell, p. 102). Wwoofing is a space that is defined by its semantic and physical boundaries. Wwoofers and hosts use their bodies and the farms they work on, to understand/mark the WWOOF place. In this way, Wwoofers and hosts make many ‘homes’ in varied ways, within very different spaces, cultures and geographies.

Visual Methods

To conceptualise a sensory ethnography process requires an understanding that can account for both human perception and the political and power relations from which ethnographic research is inextricable... One of the tasks of the reflexive sensory ethnographer is thus to develop an awareness of how she or he becomes involved in not only participating in ‘other people’s’ practices, but also in anticipating her or his co-involvement in the constitution of places, and to identify the points of intervention of her or his own intentionality and subjectivity. (Pink, 2009, pp. 42-43)
Photo-elicitation “involves using photographs to invoke comments, memory and discussion in the course of a semi-structured interview” (Banks, 2001, p. 87). Photo-elicitation can “concretize” (Banks, 2001, p. 89) events/sentiments and can also allow participants to revive memories/opinions/views that may be difficult to remember (Banks, 2001, pp. 89-96). Harper (2002) points out that visual images can question taken for granted ideas and deepen researcher-participant observation of self. Visual methods can also illuminate information that may otherwise be missed by the researcher or research participants:

When I photographed from unusual angles, or from very close...it led Willie to see his activities from a new and interesting perspective. As Willie saw his world from a new perspective, he came to realize how little of it I understood. Willie then welcomed a role in which he used the photos to teach me about his normal routines and knowledge. (p. 21)

Beilin (2005) and Harper (2001) detail agricultural landscapes through photo documentary. While Beilin uses photo elicitation with farmer owners to illustrate sustainability and land issues, Harper documents how farms have changed and shift in light of social-economic trends. Following, Croghan, Griffin, Hunter and Phoenix (2008) reveal that photos can ease the introduction or elaboration of complex issues like race (pp. 354-355). Likewise, Gauntlett and Holzwarth (2006) argue that visual/creative methods allow better participant-researcher reflexivity, more breadth in terms of understanding the phenomena under study and are a comprehensive way to analyze social life as well as identity:

Most approaches to audience or social research require participants to produce instant descriptions of their views, opinions or responses, in language. I’d say that’s difficult. Most people can’t really provide accurate descriptions of why they do things, or like things – let alone their identities and motivations – as soon as you ask them. But most language-based studies capture and preserve those instant responses as ‘data’. In the new creative methods, we don’t do that. Instead we have a reflective process, taking time, so the data you end up with is the result of thoughtful reflection. (p. 84)
Collier and Collier (1986) maintain that photography can help to establish intimacy:

"Because photographs are examined by the anthropologist and informants together, the informants are relieved of the stress of being the subject [emphasis in original] of the interrogation" (p. 106). Pink (2009; 2006; 2003; 2001) demonstrates that visual methods can highlight meanings of place, patterns of interaction and use. Following, Collier Jr. (1967) suggests that photography reveals unique points of view: “Through photo-interviewing we can discover the fears, mystic beliefs, and aesthetic values of the native culture” (p. 75).

Crang (2010) maintains that pictures can generate new gazes, aid analysis and serve collaborative projects. While Wwoofing, I often found that I saw as well as heard data. The photos that I took and those that the women participants shared with me, demonstrate that Wwoofing is defined by vivid understandings of one’s presence within a landscape.

**Feminist Methods**

The public-private dichotomy, which is to say, the public-private hierarchy [emphasis in original], is a founding condition of female oppression. I say to hell with it. The reason I feel embarrassed at my own attempts to speak personally in a professional context is that I have been conditioned to feel that way. That’s all there is to it.” (Tompkins cited in Fleischman, 2008, p. 197)

[F]eminist anthropologists stand to learn not only from women’s speech, but from women’s silences as well. (Visweswaran, 2008, p. 429).

How often do research participants have the opportunity to ask questions of us? How much do we ‘give away’? Fieldwork remains a matter of give and take, but hopefully not in the sense that we take while others give... The ‘good conversation’ is a more or less (though never quite) equal exchange; and there is a moral imperative that we accept the complexity of others as we would expect others to accept our complexity. (Collins, 2010, p. 241)

Contemporary feminist debates over the meanings of gender lead time and again to a certain sense of trouble, as if the indeterminacy of gender might eventually culminate in the failure of feminism. Perhaps trouble need not carry such a negative valence. (Butler, 2006, xxxix)
Feminism generally refers to a particular socio-historical movement, theory-method and world view. Feminism encompasses an incredibly diverse set of beliefs, ethos and practices. Third-wave feminism is a branch of feminist thought and a part of the feminist movement, relating a postmodern influenced understanding of gender, power and relationships. As a theory/approach, it focuses on elaborating the subtleties of inequity through deconstructing different notions -including that of woman, gender, femaleness, femininity, masculinity, empowerment- as well as elaborating a multitude of gendered and genderless 'hybrid-flexible' identities. As research tools, third-wave feminism and feminist thought in general focus on questioning academic traditions, research customs, continuing disparities within academia and between various communities (Heywood & Drake, 2007).

Pillow and Mayo (2007) note that feminist ethnography questions the traditions of the academy, looks critically at representation, subjectivity, empowerment and reflexivity, while simultaneously trying to shift power structures and critically examine the ability of any method to represent 'women's experience.' They point out that gender is still a significant issue regardless of its contestation as a category of organization:

Despite the idea that any topic or issue can be a feminist issue of study, most feminist ethnographers are doing what may be thought of as “women's work” -asking and investigating questions about what is typically and normatively assigned as being a women's issue. (p. 161)

Following by asking, “what makes social research feminist?” (p. 146) Ramazanoglu and Holland (2002) state:

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Research projects can be thought of as feminist if they are framed by feminist theory, and aim to produce knowledge that will be useful for effective transformation of gendered injustice and subordination. But this does not mean that feminists have to study women, or only study gender, or treat women as innocent of abuses of power. (p. 147)

Discussing feminism within the academy, Visweswaran (2008) is critical of “classical ethnographies” pointing out that most of these are authored by men while women anthropologists’ works have been categorized and marginalized as “popularized accounts” and/or “confessional field literature” (p. 424). She wonders: “Why it is that what women anthropologists write is so easily dismissed as ‘subjective’” (p. 421). Visweswaran advocates that anthropology as a discipline, must redefine what it considers ethnographic or deserving of analysis (pp. 430-431). Discussing her experience of not being able to apply for a grant that urged her to “avoid use of the first person” (National Science Foundation cited in Fleischman, p. 206), Fleischman (2008) argues: “...perhaps the time has come to draft new rules for judging scholarship, for ranking journals, and for determining what is acceptable scholarly decorum, etiquette, and style” (p. 206).

Feminist research practices take various forms. Hesse-Biber and Piatelli (2007) reflect that acknowledging privilege and differences to participants can serve to strengthen researcher-community relationships (pp. 500-501). The authors present examples of writing in several different perspectives, synonymously and side by side -within an article- to argue that power and representation can be critically addressed via this type of double-triple narration/witnessing (p. 505). Truth is a problematic notion and yet experience based narratives can offer insightful commentary on lived realities, gendered idioms and issues of power-subordination. Ramazanoglu and Holland (2002) note: “Ultimately all truth claims are contingent on their conditions of production, but these conditions are variable and can be
examined” (p. 135). Within feminist standpoint theories, validity is difficult to define and a complicated matter to assess (pp. 63-67). To mediate this, Ramazanoglu and Holland suggest that researchers look at the contexts that frame “truth” and review these while continuing to ask women about their lives. They attempt to ground epistemology:

For many women around the world, caught up in struggles to survive, raise children, cope with poverty, natural disasters, corrupt regimes or varieties of social exclusion, resources for thinking about thinking are irrelevant luxuries. The interrelations of gender with other power relations leave the inequities and injustices of everyday life barely changed for the most disadvantaged. But for those who have the resources to do so, thinking about how and why feminists can justify their claims to knowledge has significant political and ethical implications. The inseparability of epistemology, ethics and politics encourages feminists to imagine how human relationships could be different, and how a better social world could work. (p. 169)

Olesen (2005) notes that the diversity inherent in approaches within feminist inquiry can engender social justice. She writes: “The range of problems is too great and the issues are too urgent to do otherwise” (p. 239).

My position as a woman Wwoofer gave me access to and a certain intimacy with other women Wwoofers. Despite this, as a researcher my position like Powdermaker reveals, distanced me from all the participants including the women who I thought were in many ways my co-collaborators and friends. Powdermaker writes about feeling a part of and apart from the community she was staying in:

...[T]he drums began; I danced. Something happened, I forgot myself and was one with the dancers. Under the full moon and for the brief time of the dance, I ceased to be an anthropologist from a modern society. I danced. When it was over I realized that for this short period, I had been emotionally a part of the rite. Then out came my notebook. (Powdermaker cited in Visweswaran, 2008, p. 426)

DeVault and Gross (2007) examine feminism in relation to qualitative interviewing. They argue that gender does not always engender intimacy or rapport during research
conversations: "feminists must maintain a reflexive awareness that research relations are never simple encounters, innocent of identities and lines of power, but rather, are always embedded in and shaped by cultural constructions of similarity, difference, and significance" (p. 181). They continue by arguing that traditional research paradigms like confidentiality and accountability may need to be re-examined in context of feminist goals (pp. 187-191). After writing the life story of a woman in prison with AIDS, Waterston (2009) discusses the difficulties of helping participants, reaching policy makers and publicizing academic work that can appeal to the general public. Reflecting on the research of Gilligan and Noddings, Preissle (2007) argues that ideas of care have been left out of ethical dilemmas guiding research boards and researcher interests (pp. 518-522):

The relationship between the studied and the studier, between the inquirer and those inquired about, is a defining attribute of research in the human, social and professional sciences, but it has been abstract principle rather than caring that frames most conventional thought about this relationship. (p. 520)

Luxton (1997) points how “anti-feminist” (p. 10) ideology combined with changing economic and socio-political structures impact women, domestic relations and especially the dynamics within families:

Ironically, the social policies implemented by these neo-conservatives undermine and erode the interpersonal and familial relations they claim to support. The net effect of their economic policies is to make it harder for families to take care of themselves. (p. 21)

Side (1997) suggests that researchers look at the strategic-intimate characteristics of women’s relationships. She argues that within patriarchal societies, women’s friendships are significant in that they challenge the ‘family’ as “the basic unit of society” (p. 183). Wwoofers are important to the families and economies they work within. The friendships and bonds that are
created during Wwoofing reveal, as most of the authors above point out, the very
complicated nature of alliances between hosts, Wwoofers and communities.

**Grounded Theory, Transcription & Coding**

Listening can be a radical activity... For any listener, at risk are not only a sense of self, place
and society, but also knowledge of one’s own complicity with oppression. (Olson cited in
DeVault and Gross, 2007, p. 182)

Grounded theory refers to an approach and method for analyzing data. As an
approach, grounded theory relies on specific guidelines meant to allow researchers to
organize and assess information from various sources. The principles of grounded theory
center around coding. Heron and Reason (2001) review skills intrinsic to carrying out
research that is exploratory and thus makes use of grounded theory. They suggest that
researchers be familiar with the dimensions of reflexivity: “being present and open”,
“bracketing...reframing the defining assumptions of any context,” “challenging consensus”
and “research cycling” (pp. 184-185). Likewise, Mishler (2008) encourages researchers to
‘repeatedly’ listen in order to ‘clarify’ and ‘deepen’ understanding/s of social life (p. 83).
Elaborating on the complexities of transcription, Mishler notes: “The search for a standard
system that might be applied to any form of talk for any purpose is a misguided effort.
Transcripts are our constructions and making them is one of our central research
practices” (p. 83).

Clarke (2007) discusses grounded theory and its offshoot: situational analysis. She
maintains that neither are methodologies but ways of analyzing lines of data and text, then
drawing memos and theories while going back and forth through these processes. Within the
grounded theory model, coding starts as soon as there is data and sampling does not
necessarily need to be “representative” (p. 346). Clarke argues that grounded theory is feminist because of its focus on experience, local meanings, material realities as well as its emphasis on polyvocality and diversity. Situational analysis extends grounded theory in that it emphasizes the context of relationships. In reviewing situational analysis, Clarke maintains that it is also feminist because of its stress on “embodiment” and focus on “mapping all [emphasis in original] the actors and discourses in the situation regardless of their power in that situation” (p. 354). Wwoofing as a discourse lends itself readily to grounded theory in that it is the local and micro meanings formed/constructed on each farm and within each distinct WWOOF exchange that necessitate a bottom up/situation specific research lens.

**Research on WWOOF**

McIntosh and Bonneman (2006) find that most Wwoofers are students, female, traveling alone, youth and international visitors wanting to: “‘break away from normal life’...‘explore the world’...‘search for something different’...” (p. 90). Their findings also point out that generally Wwoofers are interested in organics as well as personal growth, social connection, rural culture and physically experiencing farm life. McIntosh and Zahra (2007) reveal that Wwoofing as a type of ‘volunteer tourism’ aims: “…to foster a reciprocal and mutually beneficial relationship between the host and guest” (p. 543). They go on to discuss that Wwoofing is pursued for a multiplicity of social, cultural and personal reasons like “helping people,” to see “real” culture (p. 546) and generates many benefits for WWOOF hosts as well as Wwoofer participants -i.e. positive cultural connections, significant relationships, social contemplation-thoughtfulness. A Maori WWOOF host notes: “The
positive thing was seeing young people, *Pakeha* (non-Maori), coming to do all this community volunteer work. They give up their time, they pay for everything” (p. 552).

Nimmo (2001) overviews what motivates travelers to join WWOOF New Zealand. She notes that Wwoofer participants want to “meet and live with ‘New Zealanders’” (p. 18) as well as experience an alternative to “industrial urbanised societies and their economic systems” (p. 18). Nimmo relates that travelers liked Wwoofing because they were able to save money thus buy “luxury items” (p. 24) like special trips and foods. Travelers stayed with WWOOF because of the “structure and routine,” (Nimmo, p. 24) the program provided, the increased confidence they gained and the abilities/skills they learned. Nimmo also notes that Wwoofing allows participants to “reclaim work” (p. 26). A Wwoofer cited in Nimmo, points out:

I think that when you’re putting...care into (WWOOF work) you...can reach an elated state that I don’t reach when I’m working in a cafe bar. I put care into planting things because I know I’m going to eat them... I can care about making things for other people that I know, for people in my environment. (p. 26)

Nimmo reveals that WWOOF New Zealand’s lack of standardization in terms of selecting WWOOF hosts, can impact potential Wwoofer-tourists negatively when they travel to farms and find that organic farming is not practiced and that they are simply there to provide “cheap labor” (p. 29). She maintains: “...[Wwoofer] workers are exposed to a wide variety of living and working conditions, host values and organic/non-organic farming practises...” (p. 29).

Nimmo suggests that WWOOF, as an “extreme” (p. 29) form of “de commodified tourism” (p. 29) should pay attention to the Wwoofer- “customer’s” (p. 29) concerns. Yet Nimmo also writes that it is the great variation-diversity of farms and farmer hosts that attracts travelers to WWOOF (pp. 28-30).
Ord (2010) suggests that WWOOF presents an outlier type case within tourism studies:

The present literature on WWOOF places it within awkwardly-phrased and poorly defined categories such as "eco-organic farm tourism" and "alternative tourism".... Rather than give this form of tourism an eco-label that serves mostly for its high marketability, it is more useful to understand WWOOF as a possible symbiotic relationship, or synergy, between tourism and sustainable development, as suggested by Moscardo. ("Conclusion and discussion," para. 4)

Ord further relates that WWOOF is often viewed apart from tourism:

Because of the non-commercial, values-based nature of the WWOOF exchange, examining it from a tourism perspective is met with hostility in some cases. In correspondence with WWOOF Spain, for example, the organization was reluctant to be associated with tourism. ("Is WWOOF tourism?," para. 1)

WWOOF allows travelers and hosts to connect to a variety of personal, physical, social and spiritual needs. In this way, Wwoofing is an unconventional form of tourism that seems to attract individuals and especially women, looking for a break from traditional routines.

Ecotourism & Voluntourism

Seismic changes in leisure time, disposable income, mobility and communication technologies have created a context in which tourism has thrived, grown and diversified to encompass a wide array of leisure travel behaviors that were not imagined even as recently as a couple of decades ago. Leading the way in this process of diversification is alternative tourism, which describes a form of tourism that rebukes mass tourism and the consumptive mindset it engenders and instead offers alternative, more discriminating, socially and environmentally sustaining tourist experiences. (Wearing cited in Lyons & Wearing, 2008, p. 3)

[T]ypically what we have assumed is that tourism has been imposed on locals, not sought, and not invited. (Stronza, 2001, p. 262)

Wwoofers are volunteers and tourists but also represent a network and social movement. Wwoofing can be defined as traditional tourism, an alternative experience,
classified as alternative tourism, ecotourism as well as voluntourism. Wearing defines volunteer tourism as a space where tourists:

Volunteer in an organised way to undertake holidays that might involve aiding or alleviating the material poverty of some groups in society, the restoration of certain environments or research into aspects of society or environment. (cited in Gray & Campbell, 2007, p. 463)

Ecotourism can be explained as: “‘responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and sustains the wellbeing of local people’” (TIES cited in Gray & Campbell, p. 465). Gray and Campbell note that as an industry, volunteer-ecotourism is growing and definitions of it include problematic assumptions and associations (pp. 463-467; 471-472).

Lyons and Wearing (2008) write that historically, tourism studies have focused on tourists as escaping; leaving ‘their’ worlds and seeking an idealized, romantic, other-place. Renewed attention to consumption, community, marginalization and globalization has resituated the traditional vision of tourist and ‘touristed’ as citizens; capable of working together and benefitting each other in significant ways. Citing Foucault, Lyons and Wearing point out that although commodification of alternative tourism is increasing and can be detrimental to host communities, people “can choose to resist” (p. 9). Stronza (2001) argues that local communities frequently shift the traditional ‘other’ gaze by, for example, “toying” and “burlesquing” with travelers (Evans-Pritchard cited in Stronza, p. 273). Discussing travel to Cuba, Spencer (2008) argues that NGO-driven volunteer tourism helps to disseminate awareness of social issues and aids with the “establishment of new networks and international links that in turn assist Cuban solidarity” (p. 45). She states: “[a] culture of concern and the notion of ‘moral responsibility’ underpin new emerging trends of tourism and development” (p. 37). Lyons and Wearing (2008) ask: “Does it matter if volunteer
tourism becomes commodified as long as it still provides assistance to various projects and communities? Can a commodified experience of tourism satisfy both the need to consume and the desire to assist others?” (p. 153). They also discuss the “role ambiguity” (p. 150) experienced by travelers who for example, volunteer in order to fulfill a university graduation prerequisite or fundraise monies for treks, but are confused as to what their responsibilities are as volunteer-workers (pp. 148-152). Stronza (2001) writes that ecotourism may in fact be a reification of traditional tourism thus “a guise for business as usual” (p. 275).

Pearce and Coghlan (2008) complicate the idea that altruism is the main factor motivating volunteer tourism. They argue that the global pattern of tourism can be tied to a specific history and particular socio-economic events. Considering that most volunteer tourists come from Western Europe and North America, the authors trace tourism back to “economic surpluses” (p. 131) in European regions. They point out that these surpluses allowed for “specialized non food producing roles” (p. 131): “the population of Europe was sufficiently large to support more inventors and innovators and, in time, the skills to explore and exploit other societies” (Diamond cited in Pearce and Coghlan, p. 131). Discussing why volunteer tourism is significant in specific societies, Pearce and Coghlan point out that increased affluence and the attention to certain socio-cultural ‘norms’ amongst generation X and Y young adults create tourism movements. Norms include contributing to something with “special meaning” (p. 135) for example through the gap year in England, and seeking ‘otherness,’ difference and spiritual-unique moments in the tourism experience (pp. 130-142). Lyons and Wearing (2008) also question the use of altruism to explain volunteer tourism. They write that individuals who participate do so for different reasons including: “the
opportunity to travel, to develop social connections or to develop skills that will help with one’s career” (p. 148). In their study of an ANAI Sea Turtle Conservation Project, Gray and Campbell (2007) write that the majority of the participants “noted there is a difference between volunteers themselves and (other) tourists” (p. 471). A project volunteer states:

People who go to volunteer, anywhere, they go to work with love, for something that is being lost, that is disappearing. And the tourists, no, they come to see something they like, and they only come to see the things they like...so it’s totally different. (A4 in Gray & Campbell, p. 471)

Most volunteer and host participants in Gray and Campbell’s study were resistant to “tourism development” (p. 475) - volunteer participants were concerned about environmental impacts and although ‘cabinero’ hosts were favorable of local growth, they were also weary of loss of local control (pp. 475-476). Volunteers in the project also listed their motivations for being involved. These included: interacting with local residents as well as wildlife and being “useful” (p. 477). Revealing common themes in mass produced travel guidebooks, Young (2008) argues that “authenticity, cultural learning and cultural interaction” (p. 195) motives quoted by volunteer tourism agencies and tour producers, are not new concepts:

At the same time as promoting alternative experiences in opposition to mass tourism, it has to be noted that guidebooks are mass-produced and used en masse [emphasis in original]. Thus, guidebooks can be considered as an exemplar of the commodification of alternative tourism... Thus, the distinction between the alternative travel experience and the mass tourism experience is increasingly blurred. (p. 207)

Matthews (2008) maintains that travel “is about negotiating identities” (p. 115) and “accumulating experiential knowledge of the ‘other’ ” (p. 106). Matthews argues that travelers journey because of the significant opportunities for relationship building, personal development and knowledge exchange (p. 106):
What travellers embark upon in their overseas adventures is not only a search for uniqueness and difference, for an alterity outside of oneself, but also for otherness within oneself... It is about opening up to serendipity, chance and possibility, and in so doing reconciling near and far, ordinary and extraordinary, and self and other. (p. 115)

Describing a Gibbon Rehabilitation Project (GRP) in Thailand, Broad and Jenkins (2008) write that most volunteer participants in the project were earning Bachelors degrees and had taken a break from their studies to help the GRP organization. The motivations of the volunteer-worker travelers were varying and included: getting to travel through particular regions, career development -gaining skills, contacts and “practical experience” (p. 80)-, personal development -friendships and feeling “a sense of belonging” (p. 81)- as well as being able to aid with wildlife ecology. Gray and Campbell (2007) mention that volunteer participants in a sea turtle project were vested in forwarding specific environmental agendas to host communities (p. 475). McGehee and Andereck (2008) write that motivations of volunteer tourists are problematic. The authors note that potential volunteers who call the McDowell County Mission have questionable motives i.e. to: “‘personally hand the clothing to the needy folks’ ” (p. 18) and thus “‘pet the critters’ ” (p. 18). McGehee and Andereck summarize their research in terms of positive and negative impacts of volunteer tourism. Positives include: understanding, “cross cultural interaction,” (p. 22) increased visibility for certain environmental and social justice issues, an increase in “quality of life” (p. 22) in host communities, an increase in resources for host communities from tourism dollars and due to expanded visibility of the host community amongst tourists, increased motivation on the part of tourists to help hosts communities and their own home communities. Negative repercussions consist of: the perpetuation of harmful myths -e.g. that the host community is dependent on Western aid-, environmental impacts of hosting tourists as well the social
impacts - e.g. “volunteer tourist activities may be conducted in a way that undermines the
dignity of of local residents” (p. 22).

Where does this leave the field of alternative tourism? Stronza (2001) suggests that
future research should focus on examining “the full story” (p. 278) of tourism by accounting
benefits for both tourists and local communities. Gray and Campbell (2007) argue that
research on volunteer and ecotourism has tended to ignore the place of volunteer hosts and
“the broader social meaning” of the movement (p. 464). Likewise, Hall and Page (2006)
write that farm tourism studies are dated, contradictory and that farm tourism as an industry
may lack the networks, planning and capital - in some areas- to help farmers improve their
income potentials. They reveal that wine tourism is increasing due to strategic partnerships
between different levels of government and producer networks that brand and develop
geographic regions as such (pp. 243-249). Finally, Belsky’s (2004) work suggests that
tourism literature centers around assessing business strategies and does not look at tourism
from the local level:

Most tourism research continues to emphasize a market-oriented view of
development policies and structural adjustments to the changing global economy. It tends ‘to
focus on notions of prescription, efficiency and economy rather than ideals of equality and
social justice.’ (Hall cited in Belsky, pp. 274-275)

Belsky writes that ethnographic methods including participant observation and in-depth
interviewing can address ecotourism from a socio-cultural vantage point (pp. 280-281;
284-285).
Women & Agriculture

Little (2002) looks at gender in rural, agricultural settings noting that traditional social expectations can ‘other’ women who do not conform. Pini (2005) writes that women ‘manage’ their femininity and power within the sugar farming industry through several strategies including “distancing themselves from men,” (p. 6) highlighting their domestic chores, and titling themselves as farm managers versus farmers/farm wives (pp. 6-8). Sachs (1996) uses a socio-historical framework to elaborate global restructuring, agricultural convergence and women’s involvement in ‘keeping or caring’ for the land. She argues that social-economic systems influence women to move away from rural areas and reasons: “Rural studies and feminist studies therefore should rethink simple dualistic categories such as rural/urban and farm/non farm and recognize that many women and men hold multiple identities in relation to place” (p. 178). Schmitt (1998) writes that women actively fight against gender discrimination but also purposefully reenact gender stereotypes in Germany, in order to get by in agriculture apprentice positions. Noting the frustration of women in the industry, Schmitt suggests a hopeful resistance: “It could be helpful for women farm apprentices to know that the existing social conditions in agriculture are constructed by interaction, and have not always been as they are today” (p. 315). Shortall (1993) discusses how statistics and census data miss women’s farm work. She notes that within a rural Canadian context, community organizing provides important political space for farm women. Moreover she argues that generally: “women play an important unifying role in community life” (p. 176). Brandth (2002) relates that ideas and images of feminists-feminism are often negatively received within farm communities. Theorizing this connection she points out:
...[I]nherent in the question of why farm women have not identified with feminism are the assumptions that farm women are not modern enough, but traditional and oppressed; and that they should (and eventually will) move in the direction of a more equitable and emancipated future, perhaps like urban (academic) women have done. (p. 111)

Cummins (2005) asserts that women generally identify with ‘traditional’ rural roles like wife/mother first, farmer-business partner and manager, second. She attributes this to agrarian ideology: “To survive, they [farm women in Ontario] assert their voice to occupy the home sphere and maintain control and power, to a large extent, in the domestic realm... They are, in total, strong, submissive, and traditional” (pp. 300-301). In this way, Wwoofing exists in a rural farming environment wherein sometimes women and men hold traditional gender roles. However, these roles illustrate a multiplicity of characteristics, behaviors and meanings that can elude as well as confuse gendered paradigms.

**Ecofeminism**

WWOOF is dynamic and influenced by an immense network of Wwoofers and WWOOF hosts. Wwoof hosts and Wwoofers often related to me how meaningful care work, gardening and farming is to them. Women’s relationships to the environment are complex and ecofeminism is a noteworthy term to explore in light of this project. Mies and Shiva (1993) account for women’s private, caring ecological work. They write of the aftermath of Chernobyl: “...women continued to live, to shop, clean, cook, go to their workplace, water the flowers, as they had always done. After Chernobyl, this means more work, more care, more worries...” (p. 92). Conversely, critiquing ecofeminist ideals and questioning the connection between women, nature and nurturing Sandilands (1999) writes: “In ecofeminism, the fact of being a woman is understood to lie at the base of one’s experience...
of ecological degradation; of one’s interests in ecological protection, preservation, and 
reconstruction; and of one’s ‘special’ ecological consciousness” (p. 5). In turn, MacGregor 
(2006) investigates environmentalisms by way of interviews with Toronto based women 
activists. She offers a critical assessment of women’s caring, environmental work:

I argue that, within the context of a white male-dominated society that constructs and 
enforces women’s capacity to care, ecofeminism should not romanticize but, rather politicize 
[emphasis in original] this capacity. Ecomaternalist arguments that celebrate women’s caring 
for people and the planet without condemning its implication in oppressive political 
economic systems risk affirming sexist notions about women’s place in society.” (pp. 6-7)

Jochimsen (2005) grounds the idea of a ‘caring economy’ in a women centered, German 
feminist group that was founded with the idea of exploring economic, socio-environmental 
sustainability in tandem and in terms of women’s needs. Mellor’s (2005) ‘critical immanent 
realism’ is particularly significant for understanding the personal and phenomenological 
aspect of Wwoofing:

While human knowledge is powerful and human activities have tempered natural 
forces, natural systems have their own dynamics that can trigger the unexpected... From this 
perspective, promises of “equal opportunities” are vacuous if they rely on the further 
exploitation of the natural world or subordinate groups within the distorted frameworks of 
unsustainable economic systems. Ecofeminist analysis argues that the marginalization of 
women’s work is not merely an injustice, but enables dominant groups to live as if they were 
not embodied and embedded within a limited nature. (pp. 125-126)

Organic Farming

Mcintosh and Campbell (2001) maintain that women WWooF hosts diverge from 
traditional organic farming roles in that they are usually the principal farmer and are 
primarily responsible for overseeing Wwoofer workers (p. 125). Research that looks at 
women working within organic agriculture includes Degroot (2006) who offers a personal 
autobiographical commentary about her job as a researcher/co-operative organic farmer in
Manitoba, Canada. Furthermore, McMahon (2005) mentions that women organic farmers often present 'hybrid' identities by working on as well as outside farms and constantly networking. Sumner (2003) explores the personal-social meaning of organic farming for women who work within the industry arguing that it is a form of resistance. Additionally, Trauger (2004) reveals that women who work in organic agriculture are able to “transgress” gender-based norms. She notes that: “through public spaces of sustainable agriculture, women can publicly assert their identity as farmers, and gain recognition, remuneration and legitimacy” (p. 304). She also writes that in some organic farming communities, women struggle with traditional patriarchal values and find it hard to gain access to farming tasks and “decision making roles” (2007, p. 16). Hall and Mogyrody (2007) write about the lives of heterosexual organic farmer couples in Ontario. They state: “Alternative farming will not produce transformed gender relations without specific political and ideological attention to promoting gender neutral practices and ideas within organic farm organizations...” (pp. 312-313). McMahon (2005) states that agricultural paradigms invisibilize and marginalize women farmers who tend to farm on smaller plots and thus challenge traditional understandings of what a farm is:

It would be easy to overlook the political and cultural significance of the revitalization of small-scale local agriculture by the women farmers on southern Vancouver Island. The diminutive sizes of many of their farms, often between one and five acres, seem almost trivial compared to the thousand-acre farms of the Prairies so emblematic of “real” Canadian farmers. (p. 137)

Organic agriculture is a space that presents women with diverse opportunities in terms of identity formation, social mobility and professional skill building. Although organic
farming does not always challenge gendered norms, in some ways it does allow women to visualize/acknowledge and even subvert certain taken for granted conventions.

**Care Farming**

Care farming is an initiative, movement and concept that refers to using farms and farm lands for therapeutic purposes:

‘Care farming’ is defined as the use of commercial farms and agricultural landscapes as a base for promoting mental and physical health, through normal farming activity. It is a growing movement to provide health (both mental and physical), social or educational benefits through farming for a wide range of people. These may include those with defined medical or social needs (e.g. psychiatric patients, those suffering from mild to moderate depression, people with learning disabilities, people with a drug history, disaffected youth or elderly people) as well as those suffering from the effects of work-related stress or ill-health arising from obesity. (Hine, Peacock & Pretty, 2008, p. 12)

The use of the term ‘care farming’ is widespread but can be traced back to the UK’s National Care Farming Initiative which was started in 2005 as a research group in partnership with Harper Adams University College (Hine, Peacock & Pretty, 2008, pp. 12-13). The initiative focused on studying the feasibility and benefits of care farming. Although Wwoofing is not defined or delineated as care farming it does present an interesting model of the concept. I relate to it here to demonstrate how Wwoofing can represent a type of care farming in that hosts and Wwoofers often relate to its positive/therapeutic effects.
Methods & Ethics

Authors are not solitary creators of their work; rather, their works are products of caring, nurturing, and supportive communities of constructive critiques. (Chang, 2008, p. 11)

That May afternoon, the garden suddenly appeared before me in a whole new light, the manifold delights it offered to the eye and nose and tongue no longer quite so innocent or passive. All these plants, which I’d always regarded as the objects of my desire, were also, I realized, subjects, acting on me, getting me to do things for them they couldn’t do for themselves. (Pollan, 2002, xv)

Like Chang and Pollan suggest, sense is made on the ground while one is engaged; smelling, tasting and listening to the dynamics of life. ‘Sensory ethnographies’ (Pink, 2009) encompass many different kinds of experiences. Data in a sensory ethnography is felt, touched, smelled, heard and should reflect the variety of mediums and diversity of space-places where meaning can derive from or through. Autoethnography and ethnography encourage their practitioners to totally engross themselves in the diversities and complexities of everyday life. Yet cultures are controversial, difficult to recognize, understand and write about. In this way, fieldwork is often messy and convoluted; encompassing sensitive webs of things that may or may not accommodate the interests of the researcher or the current regulation-standards of research practice. For these reasons fieldwork is as problematic as it is intense and knowledge rich. Tedlock (2000) writes:

Because ethnographers traverse both territorial and semantic boundaries, fashioning cultures and cultural understandings through an intertwining of voices, they appear heroic to some and ludicrous to others. They are cross-dressers, outsiders wearing insiders’ clothes while gradually acquiring the language and behaviors that go along with them. (p. 455)

I came to this project as an insider-outsider hybrid. I started Wwoofing in 2006, began my MA in 2008 and embarked into the field as a Wwoofer-researcher in late April, 2009.
When I commenced fieldwork, I had many roles, prejudices, biases and identities. I was an MA researcher and a semi-experienced Wwoofer; a novice academic but an already established member of the group I was ‘to study’ with field contacts as well as farming skills and gardening abilities. My background in anthropology and sociology directed me towards ethnography and autoethnographic methodology. I was focused on using a very specific lens in administering the thesis including my position, participant observations and questioning. My grounding in gender-women’s studies meant I was looking to elaborate feminisms, femininities and masculinities. As a well educated person, I had clout and considerable leverage regarding my project and its boundaries. As a woman, former immigrant and survivor of violence, I was passionate about social justice and struggling to address power disparities. In this way, I am reflective of my many, compounded responsibilities and I speak to these throughout the chapters with photographs and various narrative-rememberings. Thus, I choose to describe this work as autoethnographic and an autoethnography; although I use ethnographic methods, it is autoethnography that shapes my overall approach, presence and writing. In the following stories, I am a witness to and acknowledge participants, landscapes, other living things and communities. I also lived there, often with them and so I do not hide, hyphenate, abridge or abstract my appearances within those histories. Hence this project is informed by a qualitative-interpretive, feminist, methodological orientation wherein research is a reflexive process engaging multiple parties including but not limited to: researcher-participant/s, environment. As an autoethnographer/researcher my role is to make sense of a space: find a territory, map its culture, locate my place within it and write its boundaries. In
this way, I look at data as affective and in motion, contextual and representative of different meanings and dialectic possibilities.

‘Methods and Ethics’ outlines the methodology and ethical considerations that ground this project. I write about how the thesis began and then examine the researcher’s role as well as the interdisciplinary foundations, objectives and significance of the project. I examine ethnography, autoethnography and how these were applied through the research process. Next, I discuss sampling, limitations, delimitations and ethical considerations. Subsequently, I elaborate on the structure of the interviews, photo elicitation, the grounded theory approach and coding. I conclude the chapter by discussing, key issues ‘in/of the field.’

Beginning/s

Autoethnography benefits greatly from the thought that self is an extension of a community rather than that it is an independent, self-sufficient being, because the possibility of cultural self-analysis rests on an understanding that self is part of a cultural community. (Chang, 2008, p. 26)

Whether they believe culture to be located “out there, in the public world” or “in here, in the private sphere of the self,” none of the scholars refutes the basic premise that culture and individuals are intricately intertwined. (Chang, 2008, pp. 43-44)

Like Pollan (2002), I also found new insights in the garden and among the plants. The auto/ethnographic fieldwork for the thesis started in April 2009 and took me through plenty of gardens and numerous homes in: northern BC, Haida Gwaii, Vancouver Island, the lower mainland and Gulf Islands. The data for this project is primarily informed from in-depth interviews with 11 WWOOF hosts, 8 in-depth interviews with women Wwoofers, as well as photographs and field notes garnered through photo elicitation, auto/ethnographic reflection, participant observation and numerous conversations with others including WWOOF host
families, Wwoofers not formally interviewed for this study, community members, fellow travelers, gardeners and the many men/women who picked me up as I hitchhiked in Haida Gwaii. Moreover, because I started Wwoofing in 2006, I draw insight, experience and photos into this work from these previous WWOOF travels.

The tables below list the women Wwoofers and WWOOF hosts that I formally interviewed, their pseudonyms, ages and how many WWOOF exchanges they had been on or Wwoofers they had hosted at the time of the interview\(^\text{10}\). I include relevant background information, if this was provided to me i.e. occupation, nationality, age\(^\text{11}\).

Table 1. Women Wwoofers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Wwoofer Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Occupation &amp; Background</th>
<th>Date of interview</th>
<th>Number of WWOOF exchanges</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sam</td>
<td>20's</td>
<td>Student/Traveler, Canadian</td>
<td>Summer, 2009</td>
<td>More than 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leila</td>
<td>30's</td>
<td>Non Profit industry/ Social Work, Canadian</td>
<td>Fall, 2009</td>
<td>More than 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marie</td>
<td>20's</td>
<td>Professional, Canadian</td>
<td>Winter, 2010</td>
<td>More than 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tess</td>
<td>40's</td>
<td>Non Profit industry/ Social Work, Canadian</td>
<td>Winter, 2010</td>
<td>More than 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yvonne</td>
<td>20's</td>
<td>Student/Traveler, German</td>
<td>Winter, 2010</td>
<td>More than 7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{10}\) To protect confidentiality I have chosen to approximate -i.e. spring, summer, fall- when I met women Wwoofers.

\(^{11}\) I have changed or altered some details relating to these characteristics in order to protect confidentiality. For example, I have chosen to approximate age.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Host Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Occupation &amp; Background</th>
<th>Date of interview and/or dates of stay</th>
<th>Approximate number of Wwoofers hosted at time of interview</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mariko</td>
<td>30's</td>
<td>Teacher, Japanese</td>
<td>Winter, 2010</td>
<td>More than 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deena</td>
<td>20's</td>
<td>Non Profit industry/ Social Work, American</td>
<td>Spring, 2010</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chloe</td>
<td>40's</td>
<td>Professional, Canadian</td>
<td>Spring, 2010</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. WWOOF Hosts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Host Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Occupation &amp; Background</th>
<th>Date of interview and/or dates of stay</th>
<th>Approximate number of Wwoofers hosted at time of interview</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Daniel &amp; Angie</td>
<td>Both in their 40's</td>
<td>Farmers, Small business owners, Canadian</td>
<td>April-May 2009: Stayed approximately 1 week</td>
<td>Approximately 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dorra</td>
<td>60's</td>
<td>Community development worker, Canadian-European</td>
<td>Interview only: May 2009</td>
<td>Approximately 20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rob</td>
<td>30's</td>
<td>Farmer, Non Profit industry, Canadian</td>
<td>May 2009: Stayed approximately 1 week</td>
<td>Approximately 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharon</td>
<td>40's</td>
<td>Farmer, Small business owner, Canadian</td>
<td>May-June 2009: Stayed over a month</td>
<td>Approximately 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maureen</td>
<td>60's</td>
<td>Farmer, Retired administrator, Canadian</td>
<td>Interview only: June 2009</td>
<td>Approximately 300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samantha</td>
<td>50's</td>
<td>Farmer, Non Profit industry, Canadian</td>
<td>June 2009: Stayed approximately 1 week</td>
<td>Approximately 300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Occupation</td>
<td>Visit Dates</td>
<td>Length of Stay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christine</td>
<td>60’s</td>
<td>Retired professional, Canadian</td>
<td>June 2009:</td>
<td>Approximately 100 days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natalie</td>
<td>70’s</td>
<td>Retired farmer and professional, Canadian</td>
<td>July 2009:</td>
<td>Approximately 20 days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adam</td>
<td>60’s</td>
<td>Farmer, Professional, Canadian</td>
<td>August 2009:</td>
<td>3 days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jane</td>
<td>50’s</td>
<td>Farmer, Small business owner, Canadian</td>
<td>Interview only: February 2010</td>
<td>Approximately 50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Researcher Role: Interdisciplinary Foundations, Objectives & Significance**

The ideas of ‘space’ and ‘place’ require each other for definition. From the security and stability of place we are aware of the openness, freedom, and threat of space, and vice versa. Furthermore, if we think of space as that which allows movement, then place is pause; each pause in movement makes it possible for location to be transformed into place. (Tuan cited in Cresswell, 2004, p. 8)

Reflexivity means that researchers reflect about how their biases, values, and personal background, such as gender, history, culture, and socioeconomic status, shape their interpretations formed during a study. (Creswell, 2009, p. 233)

I use a bricolage approach that connects gender studies, anthropology and geography.

I categorize my research strategy as descriptive and exploratory in that my aim is to provide thick and “rich description” (Marlow, 2005, p. 32) and I structure the data/analysis/writing reflexively; using codes, themes and narratives. During the course of the project, I held many roles. My primary role was as an autoethnographer-researcher but I was also a member

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12 For further explanation with regards to the distinction between descriptive, explanatory and exploratory research, please refer to Marlow’s (2005) definitions on pages 32-35.
of WWOOF Canada and thus traveling/working/volunteering/laboring as a Wwoofer. This meant that I took notes, asked questions, observed behaviors and environments but I also took part in all chores and tasks, assigned to me by the WWOOF hosts I stayed with. If there happened to be a conflict between the two i.e. I can’t take notes while herding animals, I would forgo my researcher ‘hat’ to get involved in whatever was going on.

My research question is: What is the experience of women Wwoofers and WWOOF hosts in BC? This thesis explores Wwoofing through autoethnography and ethnography via the experiences of women Wwoofers and WWOOF hosts in BC. The questions that I prepared for Wwoofers and WWOOF hosts also reflect my secondary research interests which include reviewing terms like: ‘care giving,’ femininity-feminism, sustainability, health/wellness, power, organic agriculture, activism-protest, community. I looked at the unique architecture of WWOOF by examining its broad structure and elaborating its specific parts with Wwoofers and WWOOF hosts. I hope that the work influences initiatives aimed at introducing and soliciting women into farming and organic agriculture. It is also my wish that this work will encourage other researchers to examine gender expression/s and socialization, by means of local issues while engaging in fieldwork that is near home. Furthermore, I want to encourage critical discussion regarding agricultural politics, sustainability practices, preserving farm lands and establishing educational trusts that bring awareness to food issues.

I took the picture in Figure 2, while at my third WWOOF exchange in 2009 with Sharon and her family. The small frogs are common to the area and my host wanted me to see one. We had a conversation about how sensitive they are to habitat pollution. The moment is noteworthy to me because it demonstrates the caring-educational component of all
my WWOOF experiences. As a mentor-friend, my WWOOF host Sharon consistently ‘showed’ me important issues on the island, in this way. In turn, I would always point out/point to different objects or terrain and ask her to speak about their relevance and socio-political significance, in terms of her life or island living in general.

Figure 2. Frog in Haida Gwaii

Figure 2. (2009) I was finishing my chores when my WWOOF host called me over to point out this small frog near a pile of grass I had just raked.

Auto/Ethnography

For me anthropology did not mean ‘field-work’: it meant my whole life. My method was to settle down among the people, live with them, share their life as far as an outsider could... This meant that I did not depend merely on asking questions, but knowledge of the people gradually sank in until it was part of me. (Elwin cited in Tedlock, 2000, p. 458)

Ethnography entails an unfolding process of learning and becoming -as researcher, writer, translator, creative communicator, intellectual curator, project manager, adopted local, and more simply and significantly, a responsible person in the world- and trying to come to terms with what these roles mean. Ethnography represents the intensity and passion that motivates my attempts to understand the many worlds through which I and others move between and learn from, as well as the peoples, things and places that have guided me on these journeys. (Till cited in Watson & Till, 2010, p. 133)
Feminist ethnography begins from a different place than traditional ethnography; a place that questions the power, authority, and subjectivity of the researcher as it questions the purposes of the research. (Oakley cited in Pillow & Mayo, 2007, p.158)

I used ethnography and autoethnography as partners for this study. The field I was looking at was wide and diverse. It included my own experience-memories as a Wwoofer as well as interviews with hosts, Wwoofers and others. Thus my gaze was focused on understanding how Wwoofing was elaborated and sustained but also how gender and other issues including sustainability, community and power intersected with Wwoofing and in what kinds of ways this happened. The relationships I found and formed through this study and Wwoofing were the gateway for the project’s findings. I studied the space-place of Wwoofing in terms of the participants’ relationships to these and in turn this was heavily influenced by relationships that hosts and Wwoofers had with each other. Specifically, I looked at how people related to each other, how they moved their bodies in space, how they reacted to and shaped various places and then how they described or related this work and their lives. For example, I noticed that Samantha’s multiple roles posited her in a seemingly traditional caretaker role. She was always working for everyone; farming, baking, cooking, hustling Wwoofers, taking care of her family and partner. She related her tiredness and annoyance at times with all the jobs that needed to be done. On the other hand, Samantha’s connection to her work and aspirations for her daughters, Wwoofers and the land, complicated the/a traditional caretaker role significantly. The way she moved and spoke reflect a meaningful delight and pride in her achievements and the island life she is creating. Moreover, her actions and speech express an awareness and active contemplation of the various dynamics which she is a part of and struggles with. Autoethnography and
ethnography allowed me to see and link to Samantha in a variety of ways including being able to express my own hesitation, joy, ambivalence, gratification and disappointment in terms of my own role as a woman Wwoofer. Consequently, not only was I able to meaningfully converse with Samantha about our positions and futures, but I was also able to work alongside her and look at how both our bodies contributed to and diverged from various socio-cultural norms/concepts we were discussing.

I experienced similar insights with Sharon. On my first day at her home, I went clamming with the family. We heard about a dead fin whale a kilometer or two from our camp fire. Mark drove there and all of us stared and circled around the whale, talking about how it possibly died, as I peppered my WWOOF hosts with questions about “why” the death could have happened. Sharon tried to answer all my queries and explain the history of these events on the island. The moment was a spectacle and a ritual; the whale and our looking gave me an awareness of not only the environmental issues but the affective-cultural meanings that grounded these -i.e. viewing, gazing, touching, chatting- and how necessary these are to make sense of landscapes. It felt wrong to take a picture of the whole whale and so I took photos of parts of it, it seemed less voyeuristic and more respectful that way. I insert the picture in Figure 3, to demonstrate how autoethnography, participant observation and the use of visual methods allowed me to gain a very intimate sense of life on the island. Living with WWOOF hosts enabled me to be a part of their day to day norms as well as gain perspective of their life styles and consequently the sea-lives that occupied the physical and semantic fields in which these two existed. Through the image of the whale and the subsequent photograph and photo-memory of it, I experienced the animation of the ocean and
the family while at the same time hearing, smelling and relating death. As a result, my perception into Wwoofing, farming and community were vividly appended and visually challenged. Furthermore, my appreciation of women's roles in Wwoofing was qualified through the teacher-mentor-friend relationship that Sharon and I cultivated during the beach trip.

Figure 3. Whale Carcass

![Whale Carcass](image)

Figure 3. (2009) My first day on Haida Gwaii, my WWOOF hosts showed me a dead fin whale that had washed ashore.

**Sampling**

Purposive sampling allows the researcher to intentionally select those elements that are information rich, which makes it the sampling method of choice in qualitative studies. (Marlow, 2005, p. 144)

I used snowball and purposive sampling\(^{13}\) to recruit participants for the study. I used purposive sampling because I was conducting an auto/ethnography and wanted to select the

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\(^{13}\) Due to space limitations I cannot elaborate these sampling strategies further. Please consult Creswell (2009) for more information.
sites that I thought would be most interesting for me to experience. I used snowball sampling as I thought that WWOOF hosts would be able to identify interesting Wwoofers that I could meet but that might be hard to reach, or vice versa. These strategies allowed me to select participants and field sites that I knew would provide me with compelling data and I was able to do this cost effectively, within the time constraints that shaped my study (Marlow, 2005, pp. 144-149). I was a WWOOF member\textsuperscript{14} with a WWOOF membership number and access to the WWOOF website. I recruited WWOOF hosts primarily through the site. I had limited funds for the research and I do not drive. Thus I knew I had to plan to stay with hosts who were accessible via train, ferry and/or bus. I mapped an ideal route in order to maximize my finances and to be able to experience as much of the various regions of BC that I could. My route started around the Prince George area, went through the northern part of BC into Haida Gwaii through Vancouver Island and the Gulf Islands then into the lower mainland. I purposely looked for WWOOF hosts online that I would be able to reach and who were somewhere along the route I had planned. I wanted to experience different sorts of farms or exchanges and so I also looked to online host posts that interested me, seemed unique or would give me access to an area of farming-agriculture that I hadn’t yet experienced, like ranching. This study was significant because it would allow me to complete an MA but also because I was interested in starting a farm of my own at some point and wished to learn as much as I could about farming and organic agriculture. I chose hosts because of what they could offer in terms of mentorship and guidance or because they could showcase something about an area of farming that I wanted to understand.

\textsuperscript{14} When you buy a membership on line through the site, you are issued a Wwoofer membership number. Membership is valid for one year.
After selecting possible WWOOF stays online I sent general emails to the hosts I picked, telling them a little about myself. I described some of my previous Wwoofing experiences as well as my intention to start a farm of my own at some point in the future. I also let hosts know about my MA study and research plans. In the same initial email, I inquired if they might have room for a Wwoofer sometime between late April to late August 2009 and asked hosts to provide me with more detail regarding their expectations i.e. hours, sorts of chores, wake up times, accommodations and lodging. When a host contacted me via email with their interest I explained the study more thoroughly offering them my contact information -if they wished to speak on the telephone- and sent them an ethics pack\textsuperscript{15} via email\textsuperscript{16} which included: #1) a participant information sheet describing the study and my intentions, #2) a consent form for the in-depth interview, #3) a consent form for the ethnography and #4) the interview guide. Once a host contacted me stating they had read through the ethics pack and were interested in participating in the study and hosting me as a Wwoofer, I booked my arrival date and approximate length of stay. An exception to the rule was one host whom I contacted via telephone -at the time, I had very limited Internet access and was Wwoofing in a rural area. I explained my study to the host over the telephone and and arranged my arrival and stay with them via telephone. In this situation, the host was given the ethics pack upon my arrival. When I arrived at a host’s home, we would go through the ethics pack verbally and then sign as well as date the forms. Usually at the same time, we would set the date for the interview. I gained access to the majority of the WWOOF host

\textsuperscript{15} The ethics pack for WWOOF hosts is attached at the end of the thesis. It is titled: Appendix A.

\textsuperscript{16} Participants were also offered the option to have the ethics pack sent to them via post if they wished.
participants interviewed in this study through purposive sampling using WWOOF online postings. I accessed Dorra through snowball sampling via Angie and Daniel.

For the women Wwoofers I used a combination of purposive and snowball sampling. I met Sam and Leila on site while Wwoofing at a farm in 2009. Part of the ethical guidelines in the ethics proposal approved by the REB at UNBC included making a commitment to introduce myself and the study, as soon as possible, to other Wwoofers, family members or guests while I was traveling from late April-August 2009. This was to ensure that my position and intentions were known and to prevent becoming a ‘covert’ anthropologist-researcher. Therefore, when Sam arrived at the farm I was staying at, I let her know about my study. I gave Sam an ethics pack for Wwoofers which included: #1) an information sheet detailing the study and my intentions, #2) a consent form for the in depth interview, #3) a photo release and #4) the interview guide for women Wwoofers. While on the farm, we arranged an interview. I went through the same process with Leila except she decided to complete an email interview. The email interview was concluded several months later, in the fall of 2009. I accessed Marie, Yvonne and Mariko through an announcement I posted online on the WWOOF site asking for participants. Marie, Yvonne and Mariko contacted me via email to ask for more information and arrange interviews. I sent each of them the ethics pack via email and scheduled the interviews. I was introduced to Deena and Chloe via two WWOOF hosts I had interviewed. I sent most of the WWOOF hosts I had met during the summer of 2009 and some of the hosts I knew from my previous WWOOF travels an email asking for contact information of women Wwoofers who might be interested in participating in the study. I received a few names and from those names, Deena and Chloe emailed me stating

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17 The ethics pack for Wwoofers is attached at the end of the thesis. It is titled: Appendix B.
they wanted more information about the study. I sent each of them an ethics pack and we arranged for the interviews. I also put up posters\(^{18}\) advertising for women Wwoofers. I knew that many Wwoofers were students, thus I put up posters at UNBC in Prince George, SFU in Burnaby and UBC in Vancouver. Moreover I put up posters in Vancouver at the Mountain Equipment Co-op store on the community board knowing that MEC is an ‘outdoor enthusiast’ hub and hoping a Wwoofer or a friend of a Wwoofer might find my poster and respond. I received a few responses from the posters but I was only able to arrange an interview with Tess through this type of solicitation. Additionally I received names of Wwoofers from some of the Wwoofers I met during the summer of 2009 but I was not able to arrange any interviews from these contacts. Finally, I solicited my own Wwoofer friends whom I had met during my previous WWOOF exchanges. I let them know about my study and sent them an ethics pack. Although two women agreed to be interviewed, I was not able to finalize a date for either of the interviews due to scheduling conflicts on the part of the women.

**Limitations & Delimitations**

The purposive/snowball sampling procedure does not allow me to generalize the findings in this study. The conclusions may not be applied to other groups and may be subject to other explanations (Marlow, 2005, p. 149). Reliability and validity can be difficult to evaluate in a qualitative project (Creswell, 2009, p. 190; Marlow, 2005, p. 188). I addressed these through respondent validation (by building ‘rapport’ with participants in the field, checking in with participants about meanings of statements during fieldwork, summarizing

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\(^{18}\) A copy of the poster is attached at the end of this paper. It is titled: Appendix C.
discussion points during interviewing and checking in with participants after transcripts were sent out), maintaining thorough records, reflexivity (explaining my background and theoretical orientation/s to participants before\(^{19}\) and during the study as well as assessing biases within the study). Either in person, via email or verbally, I let each participant know that they did not have to answer any questions they did not want to answer, that they could comment on things that I did not ask, that they were able to stop the interview at any time, and that they could withdraw from the study, interview or ethnography at any time. I also let each participant know that if they withdrew, they did not have to offer an explanation for withdrawing. Furthermore, I gave participants my contact information several times throughout the research process and let each participant know that they could ask me questions before, during or after the interview. My contact information included my telephone and email.

After I transcribed an interview I sent two copies of it back to each participant via mail\(^{20}\), or one copy via email, for review. I let each participant know that they could, comment, amend as well as add to whatever they wished. After the transcriptions were sent out and sent back to me, I then sent a few separate follow up questions to each women Wwoofer via email -I incorporated the answers into the thesis- but due to lack of space and the structural constraints of the thesis I was not able to ask follow up questions of WWOOF hosts. Almost all of the women email’d me back with answers to my follow up questions

\(^{19}\) Each ethics pack that I gave to a participant explained my intentions, theoretical orientation and background. As well, before the ethnography and interview process, I explained to each participant that I needed to verbally review my intentions, theoretical orientation and background to them as was outlined in my REB proposal. A couple of hosts and a few women Wwoofers declined to go through the verbal validation process but wished to be interviewed nonetheless.

\(^{20}\) For each interview that I mailed through the post, I included a self addressed stamped envelope so that participants could mail back any amendments at no cost to themselves.
except for Mariko. When I sent Mariko follow up questions via email\textsuperscript{21} my message bounced back because the email address no longer existed.

During the field work, I kept several notebooks to record notes, jot down quotes and observations. When I could, while I was in the field, I asked clarification questions to establish that I was in tune with the meaning or intention of what was said. During the interviews, I also asked clarification questions to establish that I had fairly recorded the meaning and/or intention of what was said to me. In terms of the autoethnographic narratives of my past traveling as a Wwoofer, because I kept some diary style journals of my WWOOF exchanges since starting Wwoofing in 2006, I validated my autoethnographic narratives through these.

This study is restricted to: a) autoethnography of my Wwoofing travels starting in 2006 and ending in 2010, b) photographic data including my own and that which was submitted to me by women Wwoofers spanning a period from 2006 to 2010, c) participant observation data from living in several different households during the summer of 2009 and d) in-depth interview data with specifically delineated WWOOF hosts -hosts either were at the time of the interview affiliated with WWOOF Canada with a membership number or had previously been affiliated with WWOOF Canada- in British Columbia, Canada as well as specifically delineated self identified women Wwoofers -who were at the time of the interview affiliated with WWOOF Canada with a membership number or had previously been affiliated with WWOOF Canada- whom I met in British Columbia, Canada.

\textsuperscript{21} Mariko did not provide me with a telephone or other means to contact her.
Ethical Considerations

I have changed the names of the participants, approximated their ages and purposefully abstracted/changed other identifying information like towns/cities, location of farms, dates of my stay, properties as well as job titles. It was difficult to protect the confidentiality of the hosts I was staying with while on Haida Gwaii because it is a small community and everyone knows everyone else's business. This meant that when I stayed with a host, word usually got around that I was there. Moreover, as I was hitchhiking through the island, drivers who picked me up would often ask me where and with whom I was staying or where I needed to be dropped off. I was lucky that my hosts did not mind that I let other people know I was living with them. I found it tricky to navigate conversations where hosts or other community members asked what researching "was like" or what I did while staying in different households. People that picked me up, knew many of my participants and would often tell me stories and gossip about neighbors and island residents. Thus, it was challenging to engage with hosts or others while also trying to protect the confidentiality of hosts, even during my mainland travels and especially when hosts would ask me where I was "coming from" or "going next" or if a host asked me what "kinds of farms" I had previously worked at. I had to be careful not to reveal too much detail but the nature of my work as a Wwoofer meant that I needed to give my hosts some information regarding my experiences and previous familiarity with animals or chores.

During my travels I kept a recording device and signed consent forms locked up. The key to the locked compartment that I traveled with, was kept on me at all times. When I left to work for the day, I would usually hide the the locked compartment for added security.
Before starting my travels, I was anxious about the prospect of traveling alone, even though by that point I had Wwoof’ed alone many times. As I sat on the train in late April of 2009, heading towards my first WWOOF destination, I was hesitant. I felt empowered in my role as a researcher. I knew I was capable of handling the physical and social demands the project entailed and looked forward to gaining new skills, meeting people and establishing myself as an auto/ethnographer. Still, I was nervous; I was a young woman and had agreed to live with strangers, oftentimes in rural settings. If something happened, who would I contact? If I got into an emergency situation, how would I get help? These questions and the realization that my cell phone might not work at all the destinations I was heading to, made me fearful but did not dispel my excitement. I had emailed my thesis supervisor a rough itinerary of my travel plans with some approximate dates of stays. As well, because I had Wwoof’ed before I knew how to mediate tricky and difficult situations.

After my fieldwork I came home to Prince George and thought back to all that I had been a part of. As a Wwoofer-researcher there were many times I felt I could not speak my mind, express my opinions or reveal my wishes while in other situations I felt very much ‘at home’ as I conversed with people about my role, history and their lives. I was not entirely comfortable talking about my personal life but I knew that if I wavered in revealing parts of myself, so would the WWOOF hosts and women Wwoofers that I spoke with and asked to relate their lives to me. I remember that even as careful as I was to look professional and be friendly, there were numerous times I felt dirty (I was farming and often caked in mud, animal waste or both), judgmental and not particularly happy about what I was seeing or hearing. After all, I was speaking and working with people from different backgrounds with
diverse views. Additionally, it was difficult to be a confidant to Wwoofers while trying to be a confidant to WWOOF hosts, who at times told me different things about each other.

I had many other awkward and uncomfortable moments. For example while on Haida Gwaii, I agreed to be in a play that my WWOOF host’s friend was organizing. I agreed initially because I thought this might be fun and a way to get to know the community. A day later I felt overwhelmed and realized I had taken on too much. I decided to drop out but I could not find the script I had been given. I had left it in my host’s home and it had disappeared. I looked for it for over an hour, with no luck. I asked my WWOOF host to call her friend, to let her know that I could not continue with the play and that I could not find the script. A day or two later while I was taking a walk I ran into the organizer of the play. I smiled intending to say how sorry I was and to explain how tired I had become in the last few days. She was obviously upset, cut me off in mid sentence and sharply requested that I return the script because “photocopies on the island cost a lot of money.” I apologized and offered to pay for the script and she rescinded saying that it was “okay” but walked away with a grimace on her face. I was shocked and embarrassed wondering how badly I had damaged my reputation.

Similarly, while on Vancouver Island I found it hard to relate to the wealth and prosperity I was seeing while commuting in a rickety, too small bicycle in my mangy farm clothes to work amongst multi million dollar homes and properties. I felt out of place and ashamed a lot of the time as I came to and from work or walked around the neighborhood that I was living in. I was often too tired to wash my hair and too poor to buy extra clothes. My worn out jeans, bandana and raggedy black t-shirt seemed to stand out amongst the clean
and well dressed crowds I encountered every day and even my WWOOF host, who dressed immaculately. I tried not to look at my frizzy, dirty hair and overgrown eyebrows but it was difficult not to stare at myself in the mirror and feel horrible. I broke down crying several times, usually in private while I was staying with Natalie. It was too expensive to use my cell phone so I would go to a pay phone near a convenience store, where I found myself regularly sobbing to my brother or mother trying to ignore the stairs of onlookers in crisp shirts and brightly colored clothing, presumably looking at me in my shabby state.

While in the lower mainland I became so emotionally and physically exhausted I could barely get up after crouching down to cut blackberry bushes on Carrie and Adam’s farm. I got very dizzy many times and found it hard to continue working and conversing with the family. I try not to think about what they must have thought or if they saw me repeatedly falling over. I got very sick with a migraine, one night while I was there and spent it trying to cover up my vomiting by running the bath. I wonder if they heard and what they assumed. I had to leave two other WWOOF farms abruptly, largely because of the conditions. I came back to my brother’s apartment from the second farm and found I had picked up bed bugs. In August of 2009, I canceled my remaining WWOOF travels after I started crying and couldn’t stop while contemplating another dirty trailer, verbally abusive host or seven hour bus ride.

Several other ethical issues came up during the summer. I didn’t drink except for a taste of beer and a taste of wine and I refused the offer of drugs a couple of times. Although the people around me said they ‘understood’ after I explained my decision to refrain from using any intoxicating substances, I realize that my refusal also distanced me from the Wwoofers, WWOOF hosts and community members I was trying to get to know, in that my
abstinence made me stand out as an ‘observer-researcher’ versus guest and friend. In this way, I often felt guilty, nervous and conscientious that my presence was disturbing the host families I was staying with and I usually wondered if the people I interviewed were nervous speaking to me as I fretted about trying to find the right balance between observing, questioning, talking, note taking, not judging and ‘being ethical.’

I have used many outhouses while Wwoofing. The outhouse at Rob’s farm was one of the most memorable because of its pink, styrofoam seat -best for chilly winters- and wax paper ‘skylight.’ As an urbaner, It was hard for me to quiet my discomfort with the general living arrangements -including the outhouse- while Wwoofing at Rob’s farm. When I arrived, Rob let me know that he would be tenting and offered me the main cabin to stay in. I felt anxious with the proposal as the main cabin was one room and housed the kitchen as well as the computer. I wanted some privacy and didn’t want to disturb my host’s routine, so I asked if I could stay in the nearby trailer. Unfortunately, the trailer was full of mouse droppings and had not been cleaned for some time. Rob warned me against staying there yet I was stubborn and determined to preserve/maintain some sense of ‘comfort,’ distance and private space. At the time, I didn’t feel like there were any other options -the bus that I would eventually live in, would arrive days later. Rob let me know that he wouldn’t sleep in the trailer but that it could use “a woman’s touch” and that he would consider me cleaning it, my first Wwoofer chore. That night, as I lay in the sleeping compartment of the trailer I had tried to make hospitable, with moth’s flying overhead, spider and bug parts all around me and the smell of rotting things filling my living space, I stared at the spotted ceiling with exasperation and wondered if I could make it through the next few hours. I wanted to be empathetic, open and
fair but I was uncertain about the situation. A few hours later I resolved to stay and try my
best to adapt as I thought a ‘professional’ ethnographer would.

Figure 4. Farm Eggs

![Farm Eggs]

Figure 4. I have gathered many eggs while traveling.

How applicable is an ‘organic’ standard? At almost every farm I have worked on,
eggs were a staple food. The photo in Figure 4, is symbolic of several interesting ethical
moments. While Wwoofing at Samantha’s farm, I interviewed her in the garden. During the
interview we both weeded, while other Wwoofers also weeded nearby. It was the only
feasible time that was available for the interview. During our conversation, I was trying to
balance my recorder and weed at the same time, carefully aware that any water or dirt could
damage my equipment and I could possibly loose every single interview, I had electronically
stored. During the interview, because I was conscious of my host speaking about other
Wwoofers, I had to be careful with my follow up questions, considering the other Wwoofers
were very close and could overhear our conversation. On the one hand, I did not want to
seem, as if by speaking to the host about Wwoofers, I was sacrificing my neutrality or ‘bad
mouthing’ other workers on the farm and on the other hand, I did not want Samantha to think
that by not asking follow up questions, I did not care about her experiences with other Wwoofers. It was a challenging hour to navigate. The element that the picture kindles for me is of the chickens that I saw while coming in and out of the garden. The chickens were kept in a coop all the time and had lost most of their feathers. Throughout my stay at Samantha’s home, I always felt uneasy that the chickens were confined, seemed to be suffering and seemingly there was nothing I could do about it. Samantha, other Wwoofers and I talked about how ‘bad’ we felt, looking at these animals every day, while coming in and out of the garden. Samantha explained that the chickens needed to be caged because the hawks would eat them, should they be let out. I noticed that many farmers on Haida Gwaii had to make similarly difficult but necessary provisions.

The Interviews & Photo Elicitation

Each time, before I go to talk to the people I have identified as important to the aims of my work, my heart thumps, my palms sweat and I wonder whether I have the energy, confidence and the sheer check required to persuade them to share with me the sometimes intimate and occasionally painful details of their lives for what might seem to them to be very little return. (McDowell, 2010, p. 157)

Any landscape is composed not only of what lies before our eyes but what lies within our heads. (Meinig cited in Duncan & Duncan, 2010, p. 225)

The interviews were structured around ideas, concepts and experiences I wanted to elaborate. I had a dual purpose. I wanted participants to focus on a term, for example ‘community’ and discuss the meaning of this in their lives and/or in relation to WWOOF or Wwoofing. Thus my questionnaire was semi-structured in that it was directed to specifics but also allowed participants plenty of space to consider a lot of different issues and speak to anything they wanted to, if they wished. In this way, the responses centered around the
participants’ lives and were phenomenologically grounded. Yet the questions related to divergent topics and linked back to Wwoofing.

I conducted the interviews using the interview guide. Typically, I asked the questions in order as they were written although sometimes I would go back and forth depending on what the participant had touched upon during the conversation. Similarly, I asked many follow up questions throughout the interview. For example, if someone talked about their early life on a farm while answering the community question I would ask them: “Can you talk about your life on the family farm more, what was it like? Did it influence your decision to become a Wwoofer or WWOOF host?” This strategy worked in the same way over email except it was extended over a few days, several weeks or months.

Photo elicitation offers significant data and opportunities for reflection: “Photographic images can simultaneously represent a singular version of time and space while challenging that very representation of time and space” (Benjamin and Edwards cited in Canal, 2004, p. 34). I decided to include photos of women Wwoofers and photos that women Wwoofers submitted to me in order to get a better sense of the phenomenological experience of Wwoofing. Images can add complexities, subtleties and accents to understandings of people or situations. The act of creating a photograph and using a subsequent conversation to elaborate it allows participants to creatively express a sense of place, self or space and thus contribute to a broader ethnographic understanding of women Wwoofing. Thus during the interviews I asked women specific questions in relation to the photographs they submitted to me and typically the explanations of the photographs were related with a story. For example, Yvonne wrote about the day that she and her boyfriend
decided to go boating and Deena spoke about the journey of traveling abroad, while Cat discussed the context and significance of a goat herd photograph taken by a neighbor.

**Grounded Theory & Coding**

As I elaborated in chapter one, grounded theory is an open-ended and iterative method of looking at and analyzing data. The approach generally requires the research process to be inductive and the researcher to be reflexive: to engage in a back and forth process between the gathering, writing up and interpretation of data (Charmaz, 2000, pp. 511-520). In this section I discuss my fieldnotes, how I transcribed the interviews and the amount-type of data I garnered. I write about the coding process, as well as the auto/ethnographic writing style. Within my fieldnotes, I often use language/grammar that may appear nonsensical but signifies various things about the moment I was in. My notes are intensely personal and often relate divergent emotions, actions, experiences, conversations and include objects like shells from Haida Gwaii’s beaches, ticket stubs from ferries, business cards from different people I met and even food wrappers from various eating establishments I went to. The notes fill three notebooks but have been torn from their original bindings and reorganized into folders, highlighted in different colors and written over to indicate various themes or issues elaborated on in the thesis.

I started the thesis having already been on several WWOOF exchanges. Thus, I employed a ‘semi-structured’ interview guide with specific themes and codes in mind that I knew were meaningful for Wwoofers and WWOOF hosts. While in the field, I asked the questions generally in order that I wrote them but I also emphasized to participants that they could speak to whatever they wanted to, whenever they wished. Thus, the codes did emerge
from the data and yet not all of the discussion centered around the coding scheme I put in place. For example, although I saw protest and activism as important, many of the participants hesitated to define themselves as activists/protesters. I did not anticipate this response but I include the participants’ answers because they present interesting commentaries e.g. within the ‘Sustainabilities’ section for the WWOOF hosts and in the ‘Labor’ discussion for Wwoofers. I transcribed each interview myself. Each conversation lasted approximately an hour or longer and took about 8-10 hours to write out. During transcription, I jotted memos and notes to myself regarding various issues and concepts that were emerging and that I wanted to further elaborate. After finishing transcribing, I read over each of the interviews several times and again took notes and memos regarding issues to explore further. I then selected themes that I felt represented the women and themes that I felt represented the hosts. On my computer, I color coded each interview to reflect these themes and then set about creating themed narratives as sections of the thesis. I acknowledge that my coding system is flexible and forms a loose organizational structure in line with my interview guide but in some ways this is intentional, as I want the thesis to reflect a dialogue of many, rather than facts leading to a point. The photos contribute or append the discussions further, as do my travels from 2006 and participant observations from the summer of 2009.

The conversations I had with participants are not made up of simple sentences. There are rambles, asides, emotionally laden thoughts, non verbal cues and sounds/grunts/“mhmm’s” that signify unique views and positions in a context that I was often intimately a part of, had experienced or was experiencing. If studied thoroughly the views of participants present ambiguities and complexities that should not be overlooked. Additionally, if reviewed
in light of the fieldwork, the meanings of interviews are further value added and present new ideas/concerns to consider. Thus, I coded the interviews flexibly and intuitively based on what I had seen in the field, my experiences as a Wwoofer and positioning as a researcher-ethnographer. I then wrote and recorded memos not at one stage but throughout the thesis process. My purpose though is not to delegate conversations as subject-objects ‘values’ into the thesis but to recreate stories and narratives as they relate to each other and as these were related to me. Therefore, each section of the thesis is a conversation representing a spider web of meanings and discussion allowing the audience to continue questioning some of what I witnessed and heard; stories, pictures, cinemas, lives and scenes in motion.

Reflections In/Of the Field

Figure 5. Lock

Figure 5. (2009) I created this lock to secure the bus I was staying in, while at a farm in northern BC.
We may often find we are unprepared for what we experience in the research setting. (Pillow & Mayo, 2007, p. 163)

“So what are the goals [of autoethnography]? I don’t quite follow,” the same man continues. “Could you be more precise?”

“The goal is to encourage compassion and promote dialogue.” (Bochner in Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 748).

Figure 5, displays the handmade lock device that I fastened out of several different materials including a cutting board, log, and electrical cord while Wwoofing in the summer of 2009. I was sleeping in an old bus with a door that I could not secure at night. I was hesitant to ‘make a mountain out of a molehill’ or sound too ‘girly’ so I decided not to mention my fears to the WWOOF host. I didn’t want the host thinking I was afraid of him or the neighbors but I also knew that I needed to trust my intuition and do something about the situation. I was scared. In the late afternoon of my first night inside the bus, I gathered items I thought would work for my plan and set about fastening these into an alarm of sorts. The premise being that if someone or something -there were bears about and I was afraid of them too- should try to open the door at night, the wood would prevent them from doing so because I had lodged it between the device that connected the steering wheel to the door of the bus. Moreover, I had tied the shirt and cord around the bus door opener restricting the mobility of the door even further. Finally, I had leveled the cutting board on top of the door opener so that if the door was forced the board would fall on the metal floor and the noise would signal me. The benefit of the makeshift alarm was that I could sleep somewhat soundly at night. Nonetheless, it was awkward as well as time consuming to take it down and I couldn’t go to the outhouse after I set it up. As well, I became somewhat paranoid wondering how I would explain what I had created and why I had created it if my host should
drop by unexpectedly. The situation was tedious as every night the ritual of putting up the alarm tired me both physically and mentally. I wondered if a male Wwoofer would go through all this trouble? I couldn’t imagine any of the men Wwoofers whom I had met putting up all this effort to close a door. I remember trying to sleep in the dark, angry at myself and the thoughts I was feeling. I felt like a little girl; unable to vocalize or verbalize my concerns nor identify what exactly it was that made me so afraid to sleep. I also remember speaking to many women Wwoofers who had similar experiences of being concerned while staying on rural farms and feeling ‘off’ while being alone in fields or gardens. These experiences extend to many of my women colleagues and friends who describe always being acutely aware of being alone after dark. It is interesting to me that as a little girl I was afraid at night of a monster in the closet and yet as an adult I am party to a collectivity of women who continue to be fearful of their safety after dusk. What does this fear mean from a socio-cultural perspective and who is this fear entity that we are imagining is out there somewhere? Thus I wonder if women are pushing socio-cultural boundaries or risking their lives by Wwoofing alone, all over the world?

Barbara Tedlock (2000) discusses how after Bronislaw Malinowski’s diaries were published in 1967, social scientists became more aware of ethics during fieldwork. She notes that during this time anthropologists started a dialogue regarding methods, suggesting that if anthropology were to be “reinvented” it would be “critical and emancipatory” (Scholte cited in Tedlock, p. 464). I was initially attracted to anthropology because of these ideals. During my undergraduate studies these words were used consistently to outline anthropology’s focus but as I worked through my BA, I always struggled to reconcile or understand how the
anthropologist professors I knew were upholding these somewhat abstract notions. I wondered how these terms could be applied to my life? Many of my scholarly readings were rich in terms of description and elucidation of oppression, poverty and despair but for the most part lacked what I will term ‘hopeful-will-full’ stories, in which people meaningfully changed social structures or their lives for the better. As a woman who had experienced poverty, violence, prejudice and discrimination over many years, I was searching for knowledgeable, kind, empathetic, warrior-advocates who I could look up to and collaborate with inside what I imagined to be the safe and inspiring world of the university. I am grateful for the rich historical foundation anthropology provided me with. Nonetheless, I was heartbroken to learn that the type of mentoring-kinship-advocacy-support that I was seeking was unavailable and indeed in many instances my seeking this out would mean violating academic/university taboos as well as writing norms that discouraged me from expressing my background and experiences except in rare instances where “autoethnography” was being taught or when I needed to explain a late paper-assignment. I remember asking one of my teachers if she talked to policy makers regarding the issues we covered in class. She responded by stating that policy officers “don’t want to hear from me.” In this way, I learned that social science would probably, most likely never really be able to ‘help’ the world like I had imagined it would or could.

I pursued Wwoofing and farming because it gave me something tangible to hold on to in terms of social change and restored my sense that in fact I was/am able to create and resist. Despite having internalized years of postmodern-isms that caused me to obsessively and incessantly question my self worth, actions, feminisms and agency, Wwoofing gave me an
immediate sense of relief and peace. I saw what I was doing and that I was helping. Even as a familiar compulsive dialogue entered my head trying to convince me to a) analyze what I meant by “helping,” b) deconstruct/unpack/critically review what “I was doing” and in the process c) diminish my actions-validation-recognition and pride, Wwoofing still manages to animate a type of glee, deep within my soul that I have yet to discover words for. The picture in Figure 6, shows my first Wwoofing experience. I remember how my mother questioned me when I told her I was going away to live with a woman farmer, for a few days out in the valley. “Your’e crazy, where am I going to find your body?” my mother said after lecturing me about the cruelties of the world and the inherent danger of solo traveling. After hearing my mother’s advice I had to really push myself to get into the car, when my host showed up to pick me up and drive me away to her farm. I remember hesitating as the car door clicked shut and hesitating as the car sped up and my own home became a distant speck. At the time I felt courageous but also kind of wildly insane. Like a ‘crazy woman’ stepping off some indefinite but dense socio-cultural borderlines. Those anxious moments awakened me to the invisible-subtle, gendered parameters that shape my world and social-physical standpoint. My smile in the picture reflects the pleasure I felt at arriving and starting my first Wwoofing adventure. As a woman amongst many women at that farm, I experienced a new understanding of safety and trust. I am not saying that every farm I have stayed at has been fulfilling or peaceful but hearing about the brazen exploits of other women like me strengthened my resolve to keep exploring the gendered edges and limits that define a life.
Figure 6. My First WWOOF

Figure 6. (2006) Another Wwoofer took this picture of me at my first WWOOF exchange. The WWOOF host at this farm fostered animals. These kittens were soon adopted.
Talking to and Working with Women Wwoofers

Nature was the intimate companion of my girlhood. When life inside the concrete house was painful, unbearable, there was always the outside. There was always a place for me in nature. (hooks, 2009, p. 215)

I came to Wwoofing seeking many things including friendship, health, healing, well being and solace. I dreamt that the rural destinations advertised in the WWOOF book would provide for my mind, body and spirit. After sending away for the WWOOF catalogue in 2006, I remember tearing up looking through all the hosts’ postings. I thought I am not alone in wanting to do ‘good,’ to help; to do something for the earth and for other people. My first exchange in the Ottawa valley was in a word, blissful. Wwoofers were required to put in three hours of labor at the farm and the jobs were ‘light’ compared to what I have done since then. The chore list given to me by the host in the morning usually consisted of weeding, house work and property maintenance like painting fences. I loved doing anything my host asked and would have gladly put in more hours if there were more chores. At that first exchange the rest of my time was spent bike riding, kayaking, eating and relaxing.

My Wwoofing travels since then have been full of adventure and I cherish the fellowship I have experienced, beautiful vistas I have seen and memories I have made. The outdoors, like hooks (2009) notes, provided me with a refuge and the WWOOF farms at which I stayed became my sanctuary. Despite the difficult experiences I encountered during Wwoofing, I feel like what I am doing makes sense and in turn I feel like I make sense when I am farming. When I engage in the physical acts of Wwoofing, like taking care of animals and gardening, I feel like I am literally rewriting gendered, socio-cultural scripts with my
body. For example, as I weed I find that I cannot stay typically feminine. The work requires me to get dirty, wear awkward, oversized, ill fitting clothing and present my self in ways that defy notions of womanly-attractive-pretty. As I WWOOF I consciously work to create a gender-bending sanctum-space in which I can refigure my place as a girl in the world, decenter popular notions of woman and think about the social norms that surround me. I believe that for most of the women I interviewed, Wwoofing is about some of the same. I suggest that for the women I profile below, Wwoofing is making a choice to go away to a refuge-type space in which one can take respite from society and create a place where the environment almost always necessitates a spiritual and corporeal reconfiguration of self-gender-body.

I started my own Wwoofing journey during my undergraduate studies. University left me feeling lethargic and frustrated. As a woman I was often stressed trying to figure my way into a patriarchal culture of mixed messages that confused me. I felt pressure to be ‘strong’ but stay small, to think ‘big’ but remain polite/good looking/respectful and to ‘empower’ myself through an education that seemed ‘white-man words’ heavy but solution-answer free. I was energized to help and ready to ‘fix things’ yet I felt the world did not have a place for me. I wasn’t sure where/how I fit and who my role models could be. When I started Wwoofing I was purposefully seeking what hooks describes as a “homeplace” (2009, p. 2): a haven-retreat where I could comfort/heal my stressed self and evaluate my future, life and purpose. I wanted to understand my influence and be significant but I also needed to be away from a background in which images-products-messages told me that I was meaningful only as a subject/model/wife/girlfriend/mother/‘other’ to a him. The agricultural landscape as I
saw it at the time through Wwoofing, presented an idyllic setting to start this process, get away from all that societal noise and rework my understandings of place, worth and value as a person-woman.

Figure 7. A Day’s Work

Figure 7. (2007) My Wwoofer roommate took this picture of me after a day of weeding and harvesting.

Figure 7, was taken in 2007 at a farm where I stayed for close to four months. When my brother saw the photo he remarked that my forearms looked “huge.” I often smile when looking at myself in the shot. I am proud of how powerful I look and the strength that exudes from my arms, calves and even the thickness of my neck signified with my favorite scarf that I always wear in the same way while laboring. The photo and my stance evoke resistance. I look happy, proud and defiant in the space and within my body. I have noticed this same positioning in many of the Wwoofer photos that I have included throughout this chapter.
believe it is a similar feeling of honor-integrity and opposition that fuels many women to begin and continue Wwoofing.

Most of the women Wwoofers that I have spoken to since 2006, echo sentiments that I have shared above in different ways with various testimonies. This chapter is a collection of stories and a bricolage of findings which centers around eight, in-depth interviews with women Wwoofers conducted from 2009-2010. I also weave in my experiences Wwoofing since 2006. The following discussion includes the women's accounts, pictures, as well as my own photographs and autoethnographic narratives.

The women that I spoke to exist like Bishop (1994) notes; in a world that is powerful and in transition to ‘liberation’ (pp. 100-103). Ideas and forces like empowerment, femininity, class and community weave in and out of their lives, throughout the conversations I have re-written and the pictures I re-present here. The chapter is organized into four theme based sections: Connection/s, Educating Myself, Labor, Conflict & Transformation. ‘Connection/s’ explores the bonds that the women participants sought and found through Wwoofing. I elaborate the women’s motivations to WWOOF, ideas of community and relationships with hosts as well as land-environment. I finish the section by discussing how women view tourism in relation to their Wwoofing travels. ‘Educating Myself’ relates to the kinds of skills, knowledge, and information that women solicited and acquired while Wwoofing. ‘Labor’ showcases the work that women Wwoofers do. I discuss women’s ideas of volunteering, power, activism and protest. The last section is titled ‘Conflict & Transformation’ and examines women’s commentaries on gender, femininity and society.
Connection/s

What was amazing about being in Lara’s farm was it wasn’t like it was just an exchange of I work for you and then you cook for me, but it was like she cared for me and vice versa...we definitely took care of each other and I thought that was a really beautiful thing. (Deena, personal interview, 2010)

[WWoofing] interested me because it was an “alternative” way to spend vacation time and I liked the idea of getting know people and their communities in a different way. (Leila, personal email interview, 2009)

All of the women I interviewed were searching for some type of connection when they decided to WWOOF and most were seeking community and mentorship. Some of the women found connection and community within the towns and families they had the chance to be a part of while Wwoofing. Other women established links to the country, land and environment they labored on. The women explained their motivations for Wwoofing and I asked them to expand on ideas of community in relation to their WWOOF traveling. Marie was motivated to WWOOF by a strong interest in sustainability, learning how to grow her own food, a desire for positive environmental change and her concern about food security: “My original intention was a little escapism mixed with survivalism... I’m not a survivalist, I don’t believe in the doomsday things but I like to be prepared” (personal interview, 2010).

During her WWOOF travels, Marie became a “community Wwoofer” and experienced living in many different households within one town. Consequently, she formed deep friendships with the community members she met and found a mentor in her WWOOF host. She talks about how Wwoofing changed her idea of community:

I wasn’t prepared for for the way that the community in Brayburn22 embraced me...within two weeks I knew I was going to spend my whole summer there I had no desire

22 For confidentiality purposes I have changed the names of all towns.
to go anywhere else...for the first time I saw community working together to take care of
those who couldn’t take care of themselves. (personal interview, 2010)

After Wwoofing in Brayburn, Marie started making plans to quit her job, become a
farmer, move out of the city and devote her life to sustainable agriculture. Marie talked about
how immersed she became in a community that was devoted to reciprocity and caring for its
members, other Wwoofers and the earth: “You’re trading your time now to care for someone
knowing that in the future someone else will trade their time to help you when you
need” (personal interview, 2010). Marie pointed out that the caring ethic she observed while
in Brayburn seemed to eclipse day to day conflict: “there were people who had a true open
door policy where any neighbor could come in asking for help...there are people in that
community who do actually hate each other but it doesn’t seem to be a problem” (personal
interview, 2010).

Likewise, Leila’s WWOOF hosts became mentors sharing their “knowledge and
experience” (personal email interview, 2009) with her as well as connecting her to the
community:

There weren't any other people around [at the farm], that was both good and bad
because on the one hand it was nice to have our own space but it also didn’t give us a chance
to meet other people, apart from the host. However the host was very good at directing us to
things to do around the island on our time off. She even hooked us up to a community kayak
and crab dinner down on the beach. (personal email interview, 2009)

Leila talked about how she started Wwoofing in order to find community and meet other
‘green-caring’ individuals:

One of the main reasons why I WWOOF is to meet new and interesting people...
When I say “like-minded” people I mean folks who have a passion for the environment and
protecting it, for sustainable agriculture and general social justice. They are involved,
community-minded people. (personal email interview, 2009)
Figure 8, is a photograph that Leila submitted. It illustrates the ideas she expresses. Leila notes that the picture is significant because it reminds her of everything she experienced and learned while Wwoofing:

Agata: “When you look at yourself in this pose/with this background what do you think about?”
Leila: “Happy times! We worked very hard but played hard too in the afternoons.” (personal email interview, 2009)

The photo shows Leila smiling while displaying the chore she is working on. She looks proud of her accomplishments and seems to find a lot of joy in the work. It is important that Leila talks about finding happiness in the manual labor she performs as a Wwoofer.

Wwoofing can be described as working for free. Moreover women Wwoofers work in unpredictable situations and live in strangers’ homes helping with a variety of tasks. Why would women choose to do this? The community notion is an important one for the majority of the women Wwoofers I talked to as reflected by Leila. Leila shows how subversive Wwoofing can be. Leila was strategic in her decision to go Wwoofing. Her choice reflects a need to find cheap accommodation, take a break from her work life and learn something. In this way, she barters her caring work for personal advantage. The benefits being the ability to travel to beautiful areas, meet interesting people and find connection to a community of similar-others including like minded women and mentor-hosts. I think the idea of community that women like Leila speak of, often refers to being able to witness, participate in and talk about a place in which bodies are not solely tourist-objects but meaningful subjects; engaged in very physical tasks that profoundly shape the earth and other lives. Within the Wwoofing space these body rituals are socially/spiritually important and the community rituals of
speaking-dialoguing about the work are common place, applauded and highly valued.

Figure 8. Leila Working

Figure 8. (2009) Leila explained that she loved Wwoofing at this farm because she was able to connect to “like minded” people and learn different skills like sorting wool.

Yvonne heard about Wwoofing through friends and was “inspired” to start after hearing their stories. Her motivations were diverse: “I hope to learn about farming, mostly about caretaking [sic] about the animals, but also about self-sufficiency and gaining some new and inspiring views of the world of the people I greatly appreciate – farmers!” (personal email interview, 2010). Her experiences of Wwoofing were positive because of the relationships she formed. She talks about her most engaging exchanges noting that:

We always really enjoyed meeting people from the area and just feeling the sense of community, whatever community it was... Some farms had Wwoofers for the fun of it -because they enjoyed our company and liked to pass some teachings on and give people a good time. Some farms had Wwoofers because they needed them to run their business. That’s sad to realize. Some farms had never hosted anyone before and kept us busy 10 hrs a day, but rewarded us with delicious meals, nice conversations and very warm involvement in every aspect of the family life, plus friendship! (personal email interview, 2010)
Mariko who was referred to Wwoofing by a friend, wanted to experience nature and take some time away from a demanding job as a tutor-teacher in Japan (personal email interview, 2009). Similarly, after spending time tree planting, Sam was looking for work that was physically challenging but did not involve helping to grow “cash crops”: “I loved just having my hands in dirt but... I didn’t want to be putting my head down and grinding away at life that way anymore” (personal interview, 2009). Sam spoke of being completely immersed during a WWOOF exchange, feeling part of the family but not the community and experiencing the isolation of living in a rural countryside setting. After a conflict with a host she trusted and felt very close to, Sam discussed the realities of living in a stranger’s home:

I really love trading labor for room and board...but it’s also interesting to be constantly aware of being in someone else’s space...to be very much welcomed into the family and still distinct from it... Sometimes being in a house and living familialy [sic] with people doesn’t necessarily mean that you are family. (personal interview, 2009).

Tess grew up in the countryside and was looking for a way to travel, learn about farming organically and see rural Canada with her young child:

I loved living rurally and all the things that go with that... it [Wwoofing] was organic focus and I chose to take my son so I actually zoned in on the family component, so families that actually were open to me traveling with my son. (personal interview, 2010)

She decided to WWOOF with her toddler to learn about organic agriculture and in order to make connections with other farm families. Although she gained a lot of knowledge and insight she was not able to find the community she was seeking. After finishing Wwoofing, she reflected on her experiences noting that organic farming was just an option amongst many. She questioned whether organic farming could be a cohesive community or an alternative to traditional agriculture:
I think we have a very independent oriented society...organic farming...it's still something you could do with your life it's not engrossed in tradition...community is not embedded, I mean even on the co-op farm south of Larrow [where she stayed as a Wwoofer] the two families that we met that were on the farm were independent from each other... They got their own Wwoofers and they got their own Wwoofers. (personal interview, 2010)

Like Sam, Tess and Leila, Deena was looking for something “interesting” to do. After her boyfriend suggested to go and WWOOF, she decided to become a WWOOF member. Deena related how Wwoofing induced a caring-community like environment because of the intense physical labor required every day on the farm: “[When] I didn’t feel good and I was down that day, I wouldn’t have to work...” (personal interview, 2010).

The women’s actions and comments regarding motivations and community reflect a need to be outside of the social world in which they are living and the desire to redefine for themselves a place which is sustainable, meaningful, empowering and unique or ‘interesting.’ Additionally, notions of independence and self sufficiency are important. I believe these needs are sought out through Wwoofing and are fueled by wanting an experience that will provide rest/rejuvenation for the spirit, mind and body. Ironically, rest means work and is attained with ‘meaningful’ WWOOF duties. Nature is related to as an actor in the women’s stories, as it facilitates the women’s connections to this meaningful work place and is also a source of the meaningfulness. In this way, the women use their bodies to assert their presence in space and their intentions to build something new/different within that space. The body extends itself and reflects reach-influence and power. I believe that the women continue Wwoofing because the feedback from this extension of the body into space is usually so immediate and telling. As a Wwoofer you see things grow, watch things move and change. Thus you are constantly and consistently witnessing your affect. An
affect that is perhaps missing or stunted in areas outside of Wwoofing. I believe that it is a
desire for this type of concrete-shaping of the world that women are seeking and finding
through Wwoofing, as Wwoofers.

The women I spoke to were motivated to WWOOF in order to develop more caring
and sustainable approaches towards the earth and connections with the land. Tess expressed
that sustainable agriculture requires the support of caring individuals:

I think one would have to care for the land to want to grow organically... I think for
me it’s definitely a care for the earth to want to learn those tools and what individuals across
Canada are doing and as families. (personal interview, 2010)

Chloe went Wwoofing to figure out if she would be able to make the transition out of her
professional business life into agriculture, full time. She spoke of caring for others and the
land as a future organic farmer: “I hope to be a good care giver, you know once I’ve learned a
few tricks of the [farm] trade... I want to grow good, healthy food for my
customers” (personal interview, 2010). Deena felt the picture of her in Figure 9, demonstrates
her love of the outdoors and attachment to Wwoofing. She describes the moment in the photo
as being closely related to Wwoofing because: “I loved being outside...working the earth... I
went...to India and I went to Nepal and went trekking and you’re just so close to the
outside....almost like you guys are like nature becoming one” (personal interview, 2010).

The picture of Deena shows her in what could be described as a bleak environment
yet also demonstrates Deena’s formidable relationship to it. Her immense backpack and fixed
stance present a woman who is awesome in her ability to assert a presence in space. Deena
constructs her relationship to the environment as a feeling of unity and solidarity. In a way,
Deena is implying that the environment is her ally and supporter to her on her journey of self
discovery. It's a paradoxical association because it reflects a disassociation to the 'not outside' or the other-place in which it is not possible to care meaningfully or touch/work the earth. The actions of the women Wwoofers show an intention to redraw society on their own terms, which means doing something valuable and forming significant relationship-friendships and/or 'caring' Wwoofing based families. It is interesting to see that many of these 'caring' groups seem to be led by women. Like Deena, I was drawn to farming precisely because it allowed me to be a part of something else, outside of where I was living and because Wwoofing let me detach/walk away from the inequity that I experienced as a woman in urban society. The constant worry of trying to relate my body into harmful bodily discourses and disparaging/negating remarks that positioned me in opposition to a body-thing that needed to be restrained, controlled and constantly managed led me to find a place where I could rest and resist. Rural Wwoofing became a respite space for me but since then it has led me to thoroughly question/wonder whether I need to come back to the 'not outside.'
believe that the 'connections' I have found in Wwoofing -like many of the women suggest-have given me the power to imagine and create a caring world-place, that I can work to build albeit with the understanding that certain social structures, like class/access to funding may make these attempts challenging. Still, it is the idea that I/we can, the very thought that one is able, that is so radical in that before Wwoofing I didn’t know a place like this existed or was available to me. And what is most meaningful, is that it is the simplest/smallest of acts that have given me and other women Wwoofers these ideas. Pulling beets, hammering, milking, cultivating; these actions are personal milestones for the women but reflected within a gender lens, they have immense social consequences. These represent a movement of women and a synergy of gender bending action that can transform rural and urban space alike.

The majority of the women felt a ‘deep connection’ to Wwoofing, the communities they traveled to and the households they lived in. Consequently most indicated that Wwoofing was very different from tourism or a ‘different kind’ of tourism. When I asked Yvonne if she was a tourist, she responded by stating:

Definitely not! I hardly go to see the sights that all the neat guide books suggest, I only travel off-city and I usually stay on the farms rather than drive about and see the area. No, I am not a tourist. (personal email interview, 2010)

Leila voiced similar feelings:

I consider myself a different kind of tourist...as a Wwoofer I am still traveling to another destination and visiting new places. But it's a different kind of tourism...one that visits a place for a longer period of time and gets to know a community and contributes to it. Tourists who travel just to see don't necessarily contribute to a community... (personal email interview, 2009)

Marie did not consider herself a tourist and made strong distinctions between what a Wwoofer does and what a tourist is:
The tourist maintains his I'm from the outside perspective so they're always looking in, they're always unattached to what's involved whereas what I found when you're a Wwoofer or if you’re a true traveler in my opinion you’re immersed, you no longer can make the separate distinction between me as an outsider and what's going on here because you’ve become part of the inner mechanics of whatever it is you're doing... I took zillions of pictures with my camera last summer but it wasn’t from a like, oh this is going to be great to show my friends at home kind of thing. (personal interview, 2010)

Likewise, Tess noted that there are significant differences between tourism and Wwoofing:

A tourist I think, is someone that says I'm going to this destination, I'm going to go see that... I feel that the depth of my choices is to be involved in particular people's families and farming, and all of that was quite deep, way more than a tourist from my definition. (personal interview, 2010)

Sam did not identify as a tourist but did mention that Wwoofing could be considered tourism:

I think it’s definitely a way to quite cheaply see a lot and I think that’s great. But I also know from being on these different farms and talking to different Wwoofers and also from just talking to the hosts that I was living with for a long time that sometimes the relationship is abused and some people think that Wwoofing is a vacation and so that seems maybe not even touristic but like almost voyeuristic. (personal interview, 2009)

Chloe does not consider herself a tourist but does note that if she had gone somewhere outside of Canada then she would call herself a tourist (personal interview, 2010). Mariko made the point that if she were a tourist it wouldn't be possible for her to make genuine connections with Canada and Canadians:

WWOOF is a unique experience. Wwoofers work in cooperation, spend a lot of time together... So we can establish good relationship[s] while Wwoofing. If I came to Canada as a general tourist, I can't make friends as much as I made [sic]. (personal email interview, 2009)

She also comments that Wwoofing “stimulates my curiosity” because through Wwoofing she is able to experience, see and “understand” Canada’s environment, including plants, animals, climate and culture (personal email interview, 2009). Mariko took the picture in Figure 10, while Wwoofing in northern BC. The picture presents a visual metaphor of Mariko's search for health and wellbeing as it shows the place where she regained her sense of self and
connection with her body (personal email interview, 2009). The environment mediated this engagement, like for many of the women Wwoofers featured in this chapter. The landscape is an actor-subject in the women’s stories and within Mariko’s life.

Figure 10. Mariko’s Landscape Shot

Figure 10. (2009) Mariko learned many things about Canada through traveling to rural areas and working in various conditions, climates and households.

Environment is engaged by the women participants and actively sought out/collaborated with for its healing/therapeutic properties. The significance being that it is women that are deliberately and consciously/purposefully choosing to step out of urban society and create an environment/world/place outside the mainstream, to heal/resist or like Mariko, find a sanctuary-refuge in order to reconnect back to society - in Mariko’s case to go back to Japan ‘stronger/healthier.’ In general, the women’s ideas of tourism relay a resistance towards the traditional travel-tourism experience. Perhaps this hesitation to define oneself as a tourist suggests another attempt to displace the object-subject positioning within tourism
but also more generally within social structures. Maybe the women are responding to
knowing what it feels like to be 'looked at' and this may make them aware and weary of
replicating gendered and disempowering 'gazes.' Wwoofing may be an attempt to look,
differently, a conscientious shifting of a/the gaze by women and/or a resistance to looking, in
that although 'beauty' is highly valued within the women's experiences of nature and
Wwoofing, it is secondary to the search for meaningful re/establishment of connections to the
world.

**Educating Myself**

Agata: Has your definition or sense of organic or organics changed...or shifted in any way
shape or form since you started Wwoofing?
Sam: I had an intellectual, theoretical definition of it before I left and now I have an
experiential...now I know what it feels like in my hands. (personal interview, 2009)

Over the years as I spoke to women Wwoofers -including the women I interviewed
for the thesis- I noticed that many emphasized gaining organic agricultural and animal
husbandry skills as well as increasing their sustainability and health knowledge in order to
better their own well being or that of their families and friends. Additionally, the majority of
the women Wwoofers I met since 2006 including those that participated in the interviews
mentioned that they were Wwoofing so that they could prepare themselves to start their own
farm at a future date.

Sam started Wwoofing while taking a break from her studies and in order to learn
about farming:

I felt like I didn’t have any credibility...like I was living in my head and didn’t really
know how to do anything except discuss theory and I had become increasingly more
interested in what I was eating... I got to a point where I just realized well I’m 22 years old
and I don’t know how to grow my own food and this is a big, like this is a systemic problem and it’s not just me and something pretty major needs to change. (personal interview, 2009)

I took the picture in Figure 11 of Sam, on harvest day. The Wwoofers on the farm that we were staying at, were harvesting greens for the island market. Sam is sitting on a bucket in this photo but most of the time buckets could not be used in the garden in this way, due to the lack of space between rows and beds. The advantage of the tight quarters was that Wwoofers at this farm were able to have long conversations during the many hours we spent hunched over -weeding, spacing plants or harvesting- learning and sharing information as well as skills, like how to weed with two hands. These gardening skills were learned from Wwoofer to host as well as Wwoofer to Wwoofer and our chat sessions usually included trading diverse ‘know how,’ including body positioning while doing various things, how to apply for land-home loans, where there was viable or affordable land for sale in the province and how to manage our lives and personal health-wellbeing.

What is significant about the garden chat sessions is that they allowed Wwoofers, especially the women Wwoofers that I spoke with on the farms I worked at, to mentor each other. We brainstormed together about starting our own farms, buying land and finding meaningful lives, within or outside of urban contexts that for the most part we felt drained by. Throughout the years as I have WWOOF’d through different farms, I have found that my time in various gardens has allowed me to see women analyze their class/gender in intense ways, for example through talking about our inability to get capital and buy farms. Additionally, while in the garden, women Wwoofers are able to witness other women using their bodies in ways that defy traditional gender stereotypes. These two aspects of Wwoofing -seeing gender work and done differently and speaking about our gendered lives and positioning- enable women Wwoofers to connect, rebuild and reflect abstract concepts and
complex issues. For example, I remember talking about how 'fat' is construed by society and debating the consequences of whole fat, raw milk with a woman Wwoofer. The conversation was illuminating in that it allowed me to understand in a practical sense -as I was drinking raw milk at the time and was able to physically attest to its benefits for my body- what fat was and how I had come to view it through standard governmental health promotions, diet campaigns, mainstream television programs etc. Comparably, seeing women of various shapes and sizes capable of the most arduous of farming tasks allows me and women Wwoofers to questions our assumptions of what health and healthy look/s like and are reasoned to be. I have heard many women Wwoofers remark that they have found 'peace with food' while Wwoofing and I have also have experienced this as my perspective of my body and its needs have changed dramatically since I started Wwoofing.

Figure 11. Sam Harvesting Lettuce

Figure 11. (2009) Sam is harvesting. The spaces between beds at this farm were small but allowed Wwoofers to talk while finishing chores.
Sam explained to me that while Wwoofing, her learning was dynamic. Sam usually worked with her WWOOF hosts side by side and became knowledgeable about different issues like native plant species. Sam also acquired diverse skills through planting garlic, using a chainsaw, weeding and clearing land. Leila appreciated the practical skills she gained with Wwoofing, noting that her understanding of what organic farming meant had significantly “deepened” while on WWOOF exchanges (personal email interview, 2009).

Marie revealed that Wwoofing provides her with expertise she feels she needs but lacks as an accounting professional: “I started to think along the lines of well, what would be my skill in a survival situation and I thought I need to learn how to grow things” (personal interview, 2010). Tess started Wwoofing with an interest to develop her hemp milk hobby into a bigger business. During her WWOOF trek across Canada, she was able to network with other farmers about the viability of organic production, market considerations and licensing. After working on a mustard seed farm, Tess indicated that: “[It] was really neat to learn that these people were able to grow these unique grains and actually be really productive and viable” (personal interview, 2010).

Gaining sustainability/health-wellness information was also important for many of the Wwoofers I met and spoke to. Wwoofing solidified Tess's understandings of health, wellness and sustainability:

I think the only way that you are going to maximize your own health and wellbeing and therefore your family’s health and well being is if you care for the earth and the caring for the earth will care for you... We’ve created this disposable economic infrastructure that doesn’t allow for us to see too far into the future. (personal interview, 2010)
When she started Wwoofing, Mariko wanted to improve her health, lose weight and learn English. Before she traveled to Canada to WWOOF, Mariko was a "stressed" out teacher for an intensive "cram" school in Japan:

When I was in Japan, I usually got up around noon, worked at cram school from 4 to 11pm, ate dinner at mid-night... I gained weight... I had to change my life style... I thought [W]woofing would be good for me. (personal email interview, 2010)

Mariko let me know that she wished she had started Wwoofing much earlier because she regained her health, gained "muscles" and made many friends. Echoing Mariko, Chloe came to WWOOF in order unwind and rest whilst "being outside...surrounded by natural beauty" (personal interview, 2010). After Wwoofing and deciding to start a farm of her own, Chloe also anticipates living a healthier life:

You hear farmers talking about...you just have to be careful not to get worn out by the drudgery, but I look forward to leading a very kind of naturally physical life instead of having to go for a run or having to row on my rowing machine, I'll just be getting all that exercise through working, which is nice. (personal interview, 2010)

Deena talks about how her understandings of health shifted drastically while Wwoofing. She explained that her WWOOF host provided hearty meals and because of this Deena learned to appreciate the simple ingredients of home cooking: "I'm at a point in my life where I'm very into making my own food and so that means if I make a cake, like I'm going to put butter in it" (personal interview, 2010). Sam observed that while Wwoofing health and wellness were almost omnipresent:

It's [health and wellness] being directly addressed every day...people are well fed and people are apart of...have such an important and such a strong relationship with their environment...and yet of course because we are human there is still disharmony, there is still personal stuff that goes on that keeps people from being whole. (personal interview, 2009)

Sam went on to state that:
I feel quite humbled by the ease with which I watch people go about their daily business out here and the strength that I see in that and how much there still is for me to learn. (personal interview, 2009)

Conversely, Yvonne explains that her ideas of health/wellness did not change while Wwoofing. She discusses that “health comes from within, from our attitude and our motivation to live a good life” (personal email interview, 2009). Marie reflects on health and wellness in terms of the farm work she was doing as well as the community within which she was staying:

Before I went Wwoofing health and wellness was about eating right and exercising and you know it is, but going to Brayburn [and] seeing a bunch of men and women who are over fifty, who are far more physically able than people my own age in the city made me realize that there’s something, [else] it’s not just about getting on the treadmill and eating organic foods, it’s more of a lifestyle thing. (personal interview, 2010)

Leila notes that after Wwoofing: “I would say that my appreciation for health and well-being has increased and I feel that humans need to have more of a connection with the earth in order to have a good state of well-being” (personal email interview, 2009).

Like many women that I spoke to, Leila decided to pursue her interest in organic agriculture further after Wwoofing:

I would like to take a leave of absence from work or reduce my work hours in the coming spring, to return to Wwoofing and some other experiences (possibly an apprenticeship program in agriculture) related to agriculture and farming... I would like to explore this area more. I see it as a way to further my education in a more non-traditional way. (personal email interview, 2009)

Chloe had initially decided to WWOOF in order to learn more about organic agriculture and test whether she could actually be a farmer full time. Her first exchange offered some important perspective. She learned that she would need to work a few more years in her profession in order to get her finances settled: “I realized...it’s not smart to go into farming
being in debt... I had to go and make some more money and save up to buy the land so that’s what I did” (personal interview, 2010). Figure 12, shows the farm land that Chloe bought and intends to develop into an organic farm. It was through Wwoofing that she was able to set in motion and arrange the venture of becoming a full time farmer. Her story is inspiring for other women, in that she is single and pursuing the business on her own. In terms of gender significance, the mentoring that many of the women Wwoofers I interviewed spoke about comes full circle with Chloe as she will now become a mentor to other women. Like Deena remarks further in this chapter, it is motivating and inspiring for women to be able to witness another woman running a farm as the sole proprietor.

Figure 12. Chloe’s Farm Land

Figure 12. (2010) Chloe has broken ground at this site and anticipates building her house and farm soon.

I suggest that Wwoofing and pursuing the goal of becoming a farmer, signify an attempt by the women Wwoofers to garner knowledge and power to change the world. It is
about shaping a future for yourself and being able to create change in the physical-social landscape. Becoming a farmer is about wanting and aspiring to be consequential/powerful/able with one’s body-spirit. The decision/aim to become a farmer is a way for the women Wwoofers to verbalize their intention for consequence within space and to actualize it.

Perhaps women are attracted to Wwoofing because it is an industry that they can access through a casual type apprenticeship like Wwoofing. Wwoofing fits into the women’s lives and can be managed with a family/job/student status. Although there is financial/emotional risk involved, maybe this also appeals to the women in that this risk is another way for the women Wwoofers to assert their independence/abilities/potential. Moreover, seeing the natural world and natural beauty may be an attempt to reconcile notions of beauty and imagine new concepts of value-worth. In turn, the focus on health and wellness could signal a need by the women to take time away from the social world for recovery and reflection. The women relate making connections and focusing on adding breadth to their health-knowledge education in order to better associate to the social world and their bodies. Wwoofing acts as a space where some women go for respite but in order to build up resilience/awareness/perspective for possible/inevitable re-entry into social life. As well, the seeking of something outside of one’s immediate social arena i.e. the pursuit of Wwoofing, could be an attempt to reclaim pleasure and joy. The sensual pleasures that Wwoofing affords like eating, interacting, touching and feeling, may allow women to participate in an ‘other’ place where gendered discourses like those related to food including shame, can be evaded, at least temporarily. Women Wwoofers negotiate their relationship to the environment but they also
define/have remarkable physical control of it, every day through the actions they perform while farming-gardening.

**Labor: Working For Something That ‘Matters’**

The women Wwoofers I interviewed relate that they are attracted to Wwoofing because it is meaningful labor and practical, in that they can exchange work for lodging. In this section, I discuss the women’s Wwoofing work, I look at how volunteering connects to the women’s ideas of Wwoofing, explore power dynamics and look at women’s conceptions of activism and protest.

![Figure 13. Fertilizing the Garden](image)

I took the picture featured in Figure 13, while Wwoofing in BC, prior to this research. While at this farm, I was responsible for moving manure into the garden. In the evening it was expected that I would fix supper and then clean. I asked the host if he could do his dishes, we had an argument and he asked me to leave. A few days later, I walked out into the bush. I was found by a kind neighbor whose family drove me back into the neighboring city. They also explained that over many years, they found Wwoofers like me with different
stories along the road as they were leaving this particular host’s property. When I got home, I questioned my openness and Wwoofing. I had lived with a man, I didn’t know, alone in the woods.

I have spoken to many women Wwoofers who have experienced similar situations and conflicts with male WWOOF hosts. A Wwoofer I met, who did not want to be formally interviewed but wanted to share Wwoofing stories with me for the thesis, told me about the various WWOOF’s she has been on and how often she was propositioned by much older men while on exchange. She laughed while describing the situations and we both found a lot of similar ‘humorous’ circumstances to share with each other. Generally, what is interesting about the women who have told me stories regarding conflict and male hosts, is that the majority of these accounts are used by the women as narratives of agency. What I mean by this is that the women, including myself, usually reflect on conflict with male hosts as ‘learning opportunities’ and instances wherein we are able to successfully facilitate and mediate difficult situations.

After I came home from the above mentioned farm, I congratulated myself on being ‘strong,’ to withstand being there for so long and even felt proud of myself for not ‘taking the easy road’ and leaving earlier. That particular WWOOF exchange left me tired and weary but also still feeling like I was shaping my femininity through showing toughness/resistance/patience/persistence. When I reflect that I hold these qualities as positive I also have to admit that they are part of a gendered social code in which women are often taught and pressured into job/work ‘ghettos’ (Ryle, 2012, p. 391). Thus, Wwoofing in general can be viewed critically in terms of the type of gender codes it can reify and that women Wwoofers can
reenact. Nonetheless, resistance is evident as each women I spoke to encountered conflict, yet the majority classify their Wwoofing experiences as positive because of the learning and mentoring they gained. Women seem to resist disempowering situations through managing their perspective of these. For example, through humor, like Marie via an introspective analysis, or like Tess through intense planning and organization to start her own farm.

Farming-agriculture are gendered industries within which women been marginalized (Ryle, 2012, pp. 101-102; 372, Sachs, 1996). It can be argued that the marginalization of women Wwoofers does occur, with regards to cases like I have described but what is important to take into consideration is that the women themselves re-tell their stories within a framework of empowerment. I am still uncomfortable thinking about what happened on that farm and how dangerous it was for me to be walking on a bush road alone yet I can’t and won’t write myself as being taken advantage of, although I admit Wwoofing can be identified as a precarious place in that it is not always pleasant and can be unsafe.

WWOOF Canada affirms that Wwoofing is volunteering. Yet many of the women and hosts that I spoke to have different ideas of what volunteering is and what Wwoofing isn’t. Marie talked about how central volunteering is in her life:

All the work that I felt the most proud of...was always volunteer...when you get paid to do something unfortunately even when it’s your passion, I feel like it somehow degrades it...when I do Wwoofing your payment for helping others, for devoting your time is shelter and food, it’s fundamentals and I think that’s what I like about...the Wwoofing thing...making that extremely evident tangible direct connection...it’s immediate and it’s more real than a paycheck. (personal interview, 2010)

Marie describes her WWOOF exchanges as “la vie en rose.” Discussing the picture in Figure 14, she notes: “When I WWOOF... I see a romanticized vision of what that life [is]... I’m sure that life is hard but when I am there [Wwoofing] I feel so happy” (personal interview, 2010).
Figure 14. Marie with Flowers

Figure 14. (2009) Marie explained that this photo summed up how positive her Wwoofing experiences were.

Marie’s picture features the flowers prominently but what I noticed while viewing it with her, were her shoulders which look very built and muscular. The muscles, beaming smile and the huge bright flowers that illuminate her face illustrate a picture of a woman who is tough, joyful and possessed with confidence as well as surety of her place in the world. In this way, I believe what Marie relates to is what I felt intimately during my Wwoofing journey. While Wwoofing I was able to find myself within nature and recreate my identity-face through nature. I used the physical chores I mastered while Wwoofing to rebuild my body as well as my awareness of a new ‘femaleness’ that I could -like Marie- embrace. For me, this new femininity included attaining a mastery of farming-agriculture and thus a feeling of power in my own body and strength within nature/the world. Marie stated that Wwoofing gave her an opportunity to emplace herself. I think the picture captures these
sentiments as she is literally embedding the flowers on herself, to herself and on top of her self. I remember that during Wwoofing, I would often like Marie take parts of the nature around me like dirt and mud and just enjoy sinking my hands and feet into these. At the end of the day, after my chores were done although I felt filthy, I also felt proud of the bits of things and soil that usually covered my body. On the farms where I stayed these were markers of my prowess and experience. Like Marie’s flowers, the mud on me represented a life that I had discovered, chosen and made through my efforts.

Yvonne writes about volunteering and Wwoofing:

Volunteering is the belief in an idea and the motivation to help achieve it without looking for a personal gain out of it. If someone’s idea is, that experiencing farm life makes people better people and the world a better world, then volunteering on a farm is the right thing to do. (personal email interview, 2010)

Sam did not equate Wwoofing with volunteering but described it as “reciprocity” and a “bartering situation” (personal interview, 2009). Leila echoed Sam: “there is an exchange involved, being that you work for the farm and you get room and board in exchange. In other types of volunteer work you don't always get something in exchange for your involvement” (personal email interview, 2009). Tess discussed how volunteering should be a “mutual exchange” and a “life long journey” (personal interview, 2010). Deena considers volunteering in a broad way and in terms of global politics: “you should be helping people help themselves, it should be about empowerment...it should be about ultimately trying to like not just help this one person but like really change the systematic problems” (personal interview, 2010).

Perhaps the reason the women are so attracted to Wwoofing is because in some ways volunteering presents an opportunity to leave corporate-patriarchal economic systems and try
something different. It is about evaluating alternative economic arrangements and thus exploring/affirming agency as well as socio-personal place and boundaries. I think that by emphasizing the importance of volunteering, women are stating that they feel disconnected and possibly like disconnected consumer-commodities. The stress on altruism and doing something for the/a collective ‘good,’ reflects to me an attention to trying to subvert traditional social-economic constructs in the world. WWOOF is in this way then, a social innovation and a niche for women who want to physically impact social issues individually but also collectively, within a network-society of women, Wwoofers, Wwoofing.

I asked the women to define and explore ideas of power and empowerment in relation to Wwoofing. Yvonne’s comments struck me. She wrote about working with a WWOOF host and an important realization that she had about her abilities:

In the beginning I thought, the host has all the power. He can tell me to do things I don’t want to do, he can dictate my meals, my sleeping comfort, my entertainment. But he actually can’t do all those things, many of them depend on my own choices. So really, I have quite some power. One of them being to say “No.” (personal email interview, 2010)

Sam spoke about power in relation to learning about self sufficiency while Wwoofing: “I think there is so much power in being able to understand the fundamental way of going about your life and being able to care for yourself...up here power is survival” (personal interview, 2009). Sam went on to to discuss that while Wwoofing she felt powerful because she acquired the skills to become self reliant: “I feel like I’m learning the tools that I need to keep myself and the people I care for alive and so I think that’s empowering” (personal interview, 2009). Tess also spoke about being empowered through Wwoofing:

It’s empowering in that I feel that I’m contributing to our lives and caring for the land and the land cares for us including the animals...but I don’t consider it a powerful act that seems almost too god like for me. (personal interview, 2010)
After having decided to become an organic farmer, Chloe considered the power of her choice: “It’s powerful in the sense that I have control over my lifestyle apart from mother nature, but you know I’ll be my own boss and I can decide what to do and what not to do so that’s very liberating” (personal interview, 2010). Leila related power with control but didn’t link it back to Wwoofing: “Power is something that only some people have... They might have power because they are rich or because they are informed /educated...” (personal email interview, 2009). She let me know that her ideas of power did not change while Wwoofing. Marie communicated about seeing the power struggles that had emerged within the community she was staying in. She stated: “these people [WWOOF hosts] are fighting to maintain that kind of life and not making ends meet and so then they fall into having to find a job, a normal job or moving away or selling their land to make a profit” (personal interview, 2010).

Alternatively, Mariko outlined power in terms of personal strength. She related that because she was not strong enough to do certain WWOOF tasks, like heavy lifting, other Wwoofers had to help her (personal email interview, 2009). Deena did not talk about power with regards to Wwoofing specifically but related to it, in a more general sense. She discusses power in terms of the distribution of wealth, the inaccessibility of health care and the lack of access to quality produce, including organic products for the poor. Her experience Wwoofing in southern BC made her reflect on these inequalities:

It was super white... British Columbia is beautiful, I loved Charlotte [WWOOF host] you know what I mean but [it] reinforced this thing that this [organic] is like a thing for [the] white trendy west coast and doesn’t apply to people in urban environments. (personal interview, 2010)
Deena's reservations regarding organics are embedded within a new sense of self and a newly empowered view of her role in sustainable agriculture. After Wwoofing, Deena became more attentive of the negative effects of traditional agri-business and through Wwoofing she realized that organic produce was available to her: “I could grow basil... I think that Wwoofing made me see it was a reality, made me see that I could do it” (personal interview, 2010). Reflecting on issues of power, Marie also talked about experiencing conflict with a male host while Wwoofing. She related an incident where while speaking to a man whose family she had become close to while Wwoofing, he slapped her on the buttocks. Marie was shocked and confronted him. He apologized. Marie was not able to totally forgive or absolve his behavior: “He was referring to women as goddesses [while trying to apologize and after she confronted him] and I said, well you know, would you really just smack a goddess on her ass?” (personal interview, 2010) Tess also related encountering power struggles while Wwoofing and talked about how disappointed she felt as a WWOOF host stood around playing with her son, watching her labor to clean out a chicken coop that obviously hadn’t been touched in years (personal interview, 2010). Chloe discussed a similar situation and called her first WWOOF exchange “slave labor” (personal interview, 2010).

The comments on power make evident the fact that women are analyzing their macro-micro positioning through Wwoofing and in very unique ways. Wwoofing allows women to make tangible products with their bodies and thus it positions a woman’s body differently within social space. The struggles within Wwoofing reflect women negotiating risks/boundaries and mediating gendered norms, mores and structures. The women’s ideas of self sufficiency may parallel neo-colonial discourses of independence and self reliance but in
terms of the tenets of feminism, these terms are highly valued (Hannam, 2007). Thus, I believe the women Wwoofers are resisting traditionally gendered, caring discourses and in this way are establishing their independence/power/presence within the world through their WWOOF work.

The women Wwoofers I met felt their work was important but hesitated to categorize what they were doing as “activism” or “protest.” I asked Sam “do you consider yourself an activist?” She replied: “No, I don’t... I tend to identify concerns that I have and then work on changing myself...” (personal interview, 2009). Tess considers herself an activist but dislikes protest:

I’m not a protester I’m not the type of person that would ever go out into the streets with pickets... Activism seems like a more of a subtle opportunity to be able to create change and I certainly would consider myself if I was to look at the definition of activism, I’m sure I would be in there somewhere... I mean the fact that I took hemp and flew with that and decided to grow and get a license...that stuff was a very activist kind of way to go about creating change and educating people... I don’t consider...Wwoofing to be any kind of activism...for me it was for my education. (personal interview, 2010)

Marie talks about how her ideas of activism and protest changed fundamentally after Wwoofing:

I have a few cousins who are anarchists in the activism sense...after Wwoofing I started reading a lot... Somebody said that that the most radical thing a young person can do is growing local food for local people... I’ve attended protests and things like that but I never feel that that’s as meaningful. (personal interview, 2010)

Chloe is involved in human rights work but does not consider her WWOOF work activism:

[Wwoofing] was not an act of activism, I mean it is a lifestyle choice...it’s the same as choosing for organics...you’re choosing to eat healthy and not to buy into big agri business... Activism in the farming world for me, would be to stand up for the preservation for ALR [Agricultural Land Reserve]. (personal interview, 2010)
Yvonne notes: “Activism is a sign of protest for or against a thing and it usually involve[s] some illegal actions and aims at shocking people. It is a rather negative term for me, it just isn’t very peaceful...” (personal email interview, 2010). Deena who works with a social justice organization in the US, identified with activism personally but also expressed reservations about Wwoofing, activism and food politics:

I would like to sometimes consider myself an activist... I believe in actively trying to create a more just world... I feel a lot of people that are into organic, into all this new trendy food stuff aren’t even into people that are living in poverty you know... (personal interview, 2010)

Even though the women note that Wwoofing is part of their larger resistance against non sustainable structures, I wonder whether Wwoofing can address larger global issues related to food security and access? The women’s focus on the personal and self relate somewhat to an ignorance or reification of food issues into organic lifestyle/consumer choices. Yet the decision to WWOOF is often a major event in the women’s social-professional lives. Therefore, it is interesting that the women affirm personal relationships and caring connections when speaking about activism/protest. They point out that it is these personal moments that are so powerfully important in terms of forging more meaningful-sustainable lives. It seems like the separation from activism and protest could represent the need to disconnect not only from physical-material society but also from the terms/notions/ideas/actions of that ‘other’ world, outside of Wwoofing. Moreover, the priority to personal relationships reflects to me a disruption of the public-private divide. In Wwoofing, the private space of the home and farm are meaningful resource-places. Women seek out these domestic areas for protection, kinship and wisdom-learning opportunities. In this way, the
women are making resistance political and critical through a traditionally marginalized home space.

**Conflict & Transformation**

Describing the picture she took below (Figure 15), Marie states:

[M]y old life in here [within the house shown in the foreground], it's kind of disordered and lifeless and...has that abandoned shell kind of a feeling and when I go Wwoofing I feel like I'm gazing into this beautiful world that's you know full of life and color and so it's kind of a contrast between city life. (personal interview, 2010)

Figure 15. Marie Touring an Old House

Since starting Wwoofing in 2006 like Marie, the women I spoke to often discussed at length the personal growth, perspective and meaning they sought and formed through Wwoofing. These moments of insight offer commentaries on gender, femininity and society. Marie’s picture and statements resonate these themes vividly. Her reflection of being lost and then finding her place while Wwoofing connect her WWOOF travels directly to discovering
a new sense of self, purpose and identity. In terms of gender, Marie’s considerations of this picture do not specify or relate to femininity but what is significant is that she consistently relates to trying to find a space-peace outside of city life, in which she could redefine her self, throughout her interview with me. Searching/looking for the ‘space outside’ and outside of city life is I believe, a metaphor for women’s struggles with gendered, socio-cultural norms/conventions.

The women offer diverse thoughts on gender and femininity. Marie dreamed of being a “CFO of an all female oil company” as she was growing up but her understandings of femininity changed after Wwoofing:

When I was younger [I was] very aware of my femininity and [how] to use it to my own advantage... When I was Wwoofing and I stopped being so self aware particularly physically, it didn’t matter if I was very feminine or not at all, I was still useful. (personal interview, 2010)

Marie linked the transformation in her views, directly to the WWOOF work she was engaged in as well as the mentoring of the older women in the community of Brayburn. The “gusto” Marie felt these women embodied, gave her the perspective to see how possible and attractive a life like theirs, could be:

There’s quite a few women in the valley who also embody very different ideals of femininity one of them...she must have been almost seven feet tall and she’s sort of an Amazon woman, [she has] long dreadlocks doesn’t shave anything and [is] just very very strong, but so feminine in a different kind of way... These women who were in their sixties once you get past the fact that a woman needs to be young to be beautiful, I would see these women as stunning, they were so full of energy and know how, they were the one’s chopping wood in the middle of winter or...they would go off and herd the llamas and the sheep and the goats so it was a female strength of beauty you know, a beauty and strength as opposed to a beauty and youth and physical attributes so I got to see that women can be beautiful in all different kinds of ways. (personal interview, 2010)
Seeing these women also transformed Marie’s relationship with her body. She expresses this while describing the photograph in Figure 16, that she took of herself:

I went hiking by myself...and I’d never done that before and also I got soaked, I was covered in the morning dew cause I was bushwhacking and once I cleared the tree line I took off all my clothes and at first I was all like oh someone’s going to see...once I got over that, than it was a very empowering feeling... I embraced my physical self... (personal interview, 2010)

Figure 16. Marie at the Top

The photo Marie took shows a body that is seemingly almost floating in space. It is missing the typical physical characteristics of ‘woman’ like breasts and hips yet Marie describes the moment as tied to a new found sense of her femininity. Perhaps this sense comes from the strength that emanates from Marie’s torso as demonstrated through her muscles and rugged posture. This view showcases a body that almost overtakes the physical environment. Yet her outstretched arms contrast this, illustrating an abandonment to nature and profound joy within an environment that she describes as community yet also notes
caused her some deep stress and conflict. In this way, her travel to the top of the mountain parallels her Wwoofing journey. Through both, Marie experienced moments of gender confusion, frustration but also reconnection and peace.

Similarly addressing femininity, Deena talks about how her WWOOF host reshaped her awareness of gender and class:

Charlotte [WWOOF farm host] made this farm herself...[she] knows how to do everything with it, there’s no men involved... That was really cool to see... I identify as a feminist, my mother’s a physician...it was just cool to see it in a different way like rather than in women becoming these like doctors and lawyers which is how I grew up...seeing them do it in this way was really awesome. (personal interview, 2010)

Sam’s experiences as a Wwoofer led her to reflect about gender roles: “I keep on encountering these women who are...holding up the entire situation and they’re these very strong, very loving, very kind...very accepting women...and these men who seem to be not acting as equal companions.” (personal interview, 2009). Yvonne notes that her views of gender and femininity were founded throughout her life but were also influenced while Wwoofing:

I am a woman and I like men the old fashioned way. They’re supposed to be strong and provide [a] foundation to a family, mentally, physically or fiscally. I am a feminist in my way, because I like to do manlike things and I’d hate to see someone not letting me do them because I am feminine.... During my [WWOOF] travels, I found many traditional role models... Women cook, men drive the tractor. If they’re both fine with it, I don’t see any need for artificial feminism. (personal email interview, 2010)

In turn, Tess’s understanding of femininity centers around women’s roles:

I feel that the female is the caregiver in the family and the one that creates the children for generations to carry on, I think they’re the ones that should be sort of central to a lot of this caring and farming and community work and I don’t think we’re at that place to be able to recognize that as wholesome, as she should be recognized. (personal interview, 2010)
Mariko remarked that one of the farms she Wwoof'd at separated jobs in terms of gender but this didn’t bother her too much because she enjoyed “domestic duty” (personal email interview, 2009).

The women’s comments on gender and femininity reflect an awareness of gender norms and an attempt to engage with these. I believe that Wwoofing allows women access into private spheres where witnessing varying family types, marriages and domestic arrangements can aid with evaluating/appraising, traditional/non traditional roles, rules, masculinities and femininities. Furthermore, Wwoofing allows women to share their experiences and relate to complicated gender/domestic situations. Thus, WWOOF provides women Wwoofers further insight into social structures and a venue in which to discuss these. Seeing the reality of other women’s lives and experiencing conflict means that the women who come to Wwoofing looking for a ‘safe’ space, may realize that sanctuary is necessarily complex; not always available, ideal, or as beautiful/peaceful as one imagined. This sanctuary-space holds risk as I wonder whether the constant self-reflection and inward looking, social contemplation can become less personal and thus address the myriad of public social forces that need attention. Tied to this, I note that the ‘journey’ towards improvement/betterment seems to be perpetual for women and thus infinitely timeless presenting a dangerous self dialogue. If self improvement is always available and its possibilities are never able to be concretely finalized this leaves women who buy in, in a state of being obsessively aware of being faulty/undone/not finished but ‘journeying’ and thus never capable enough to achieve the progress they seek. On the other hand, the women relate that Wwoofing affords them time, skills and perspective therefore exceptional agency-clarity with
which to develop different possibilities/conversations/values and environments. In this way, the “accepting women” that Sam talks about appear within a context wherein other options like Marie’s women of the valley, are also present, assessed, considered, thus related to.

The women Wwoofers present diverse insights about their role in society. What Marie describes as her “blossoming” within Brayburn also involves a new way of seeing herself: “I felt I had the permission to be quiet, I didn’t always have to speak or be witty or make conversation, I could just sit and observe” (personal interview, 2010). Her Wwoofing experiences set in motion a plan to eventually move to Brayburn, after her WWOOF host offered to allow her, to build a house on his property. Marie admitted that she has reservations and feels conflicted regarding the plan and her place within the town: “I love that community and yet I still feel like an outsider as much as they welcomed me... I feel like I almost haven’t earned my stripes” (personal interview, 2010).

Figure 17. Tess’s Therapy Animals

![Tess’s Therapy Animals](image)

Figure 17. (2011) Tess’s farm land and goat herd. Tess uses animals in her therapy work.
Echoing Marie’s hesitations, Tess notes that she was not able to find the community she was searching for while Wwoofing. This motivated her to create such a community, at a farm of her own. Today she owns a farm and has started a dairy. She uses goats and horses as therapy animals in her work with youth and adults. Tess understands her farm and the community she is making as a “developing” space that is: “safe, fulfilling, responsive vs reactive, loving, unity centered” (personal email interview, 2010). She sent me a picture (Figure 17) that a neighbor took of her goat herd. Tess was “surprised” when she received the photo because:

Most of our neighbors...tend to wonder why we have our goats and often complain about them wandering free range and they wonder (out loud) why it is that we do not eat them or sell them for meat as they (our neighbors) do with their 100's of cattle...we love our herd, especially admiring their social family units and how they interact, they are a model community in our eyes... (personal email interview, 2010)

Tess created her own ideal-model of refuge/sanctuary inspired through her Wwoofing journey. Tess’s photograph does not show her but it is her vision that is reflected. Through her actions, physical labor and caring work, Tess produces a respite space not only for her and her family but also many other living things. Tess’s photograph demonstrates how gender can figure into an environment. Tess links the new community that she has created with love, peace and caring. These terms have been connected with women in harmful ways yet Tess’s statements indicate a powerful claiming and reworking of these words within a unique place that Tess has real ownership of and control over. As Tess mentions, the traditional agricultural landscape does not always support or recognize her work yet she continues to expand her dream and evolve others’ understandings of community, agriculture and farming, as a woman and independent farmer.
In terms of society, Leila discusses how Wwoofing allows her to see, be a part of and learn about so many diverse households: “It's a wonderful experience to take a peak into some very different lives” (personal email interview, 2009). In turn, Marie again considers how the demographics of the town she was staying in created an ideal learning environment: “Everyone there is fifty or older and so there I was wide eyed and bushy tailed, like show me anything you know I want to soak it up, so they were more than happy to oblige” (personal interview, 2010). I asked Deena to talk about what organic agriculture meant to her after WWOOF. She spoke about the social divide she witnessed while Wwoofing in BC:

I feel kind of conflicting things about organic by working at a farm... I understand why it costs so much money [to buy organic] however...what I would love to do is [make] that type of food accessible so doing like urban gardening and stuff like that rather than just have these farms... in the middle of nowhere... that are not accessible to people from low income backgrounds. (personal interview, 2010)

Chloe talks about being a farmer and her determination to succeed against the odds:

What I dislike about organic farming is it seems to be that it's very hard to make an income but I sort of disagree with that to some degree. I think organic farmers can make a decent living, they should be able to make a decent living and maybe I’m very naïve but I think it is possible. (personal interview, 2010)

Similarly Yvonne discovered important facts about farming and society while Wwoofing:

Organic is something that few people LIVE, [emphasis in original] but lots of people do. Some [farmers] only adhere to the certification standards while others don’t even bother to get certified but still are more organic than the official organic farmers/families. Organic means to me that you farm, grow, breed, butcher, live as harmless to soil and all of god's creations as possible [sic]. (personal email interview, 2010)

Yvonne sent me the picture in Figure 18. The shot was taken by her boyfriend in 2009. The photo is important to her because she feels good seeing herself looking so peaceful. She wrote that the picture held a significant message for others as well as other
Wwoofers: "If you open your eyes and heart, you will end up on the one island out there for you" (personal email interview, 2010).

Figure 18. Yvonne Rowing

Figure 18. (2009) Yvonne takes a break from Wwoofing to go boating with her boyfriend.

The picture contains several elements that assert the idea of Wwoofing as a sanctuary for women. Yvonne herself brings up notions of place i.e. the "island out there for you" that evoke spiritual connotations and add dimension to the idea of Wwoofing as refuge/journey. Moreover, Yvonne's look in the photograph presents an aside to popular media images of women. She looks almost genderless in the picture but at the same time is powerfully engendered within the boat and ocean space. Her short hair, baggy clothing, large dirty work gloves and rowing posture figure her as a very active woman-subject, moving towards her dream-destination in charge of the boat, her body and future. In this way, like Yvonne, the other women also demonstrate that Woofing allows a place in which they can experiment with roles, ideas and society itself. They are able to witness complicated gender structures,
theorize their place within these as well as figure their competencies, abilities and complicity in oppressive networks. Consequently, perhaps the 'quiet' of Wwoofing makes available a place for women in which, for a short time, one can get 'off the grid,' examine/shape the duties/responsibilities that define society and thus even become physically/socially re-gendered/unsexed.
Working & Speaking with WWOOF hosts

Our first home is the earth, and it will be where we come again to rest forever, our final homeplace. (hooks, 2009, p. 203)

[People inhabit multisensory environments, places which themselves are constantly being remade. (Pink, 2009, p. 131)

This chapter also follows a bricolage style of presentation. My discussion throughout the following sections centers around in-depth interviews with 11 WWOOF hosts and participant observation through living in seven households from April to August of 2009. I also embed narratives of my WWOOF travels from 2006-2009. From 2006 I have used my camera while Wwoofing to capture significant landscapes; I attach some of these images within this chapter to highlight concepts, noteworthy space-places and findings. The chapter is divided into four themed sections: Settings, Help, Connecting and Sustainabilities.

‘Settings’ establishes the contexts in which I worked and the hosts speak: Daniel and Angie are changing their lifestyle to compensate for economic pressures, while Dorra is helping to rebuild the rural landscape and hoping to mentor new women into agriculture. Rob is looking for new connections to expand his farm and Sharon is struggling to build a feasible health-based business. Maureen and Samantha are WWOOF ‘veterans’ with a lot of opinions and experience and Christine is coming to terms with getting older and not being able to maintain her farm. Natalie is happy with continuing to provide a welcoming, family like environment for Wwoofers, while Adam and Carrie, just beginning with WWOOF, look forward to meeting new people. Finally, Jane is looking ahead intent on sustaining her land for the future.
‘Help’ chronicles the WWOOF exchange. What does Wwoofing provide for WWOOF hosts? Why is Wwoofing so appealing? How do WWOOF hosts understand their role or WWOOF labor? I relate the hosts’ memorable experiences, notions of volunteering and power. ‘Connecting’ surveys relationships between hosts, Wwoofers and the world. Wwoofing relies on a system of links and bonds. Speaking and working with hosts I observed a wide array of ties and friendships. Not only were hosts invested in their associations with Wwoofers but they also talked at length about hopes for their land, businesses, farms as well as their own personal-spiritual development. Within ‘Connecting’ I look at the kinds of networks that WWOOF hosts maintain, how hosts understand their role in relation to tourism and their place within the community. I then relate hosts’ understandings of caring, gender and femininity. ‘Sustainabilities’ brings together several topics to review meanings of the term and analyze the viability of Wwoofing as well as organic farming in general. The section is a personal/cultural look at Wwoofing in that it presents the hosts’ definitions of sustainability and organic agriculture, explores the hosts’ plans for the future, ideas of health-wellness, activism as well as protest. In this way, the hosts offer narratives that extend semantics to illustrate how sustainability is conceived, applied and the ways in which the term interacts with identity-self.

**Settings: Spaces & Places**

In the last 30 years, rural communities, be they based upon industrial production, agriculture or other forms of natural-resource extraction, have experienced a series of devastating blows, leaving them uncertain about their economic future. (George, Mair & Reid, 2009, p. 27)
During the summer of 2009 I visited many homes, farms and WWOOF hosts across BC as a Wwoofer and researcher-auto/ethnographer. I worked at and stayed in seven households for periods ranging from two days to over a month. Throughout these summer travels I formally interviewed 10 WWOOF hosts using the interview guide. In February of 2010, I flew down from Prince George and interviewed another WWOOF host in the Gulf Islands. In this section I introduce the people -in order of my meeting them- and environments that informed the ethnographic portion of this study.

I set out traveling from Prince George in late April. I met my first WWOOF hosts at their business in northern BC. Angie and Daniel are a married couple in their forties with children. They own a ranch and organic oriented cafe. During the week Daniel stays on the farm out of town while Angie resides in town with the children, managing the eatery. I stayed with them and another Wwoofer for about a week, in a cabin that adjoined the family’s ranch home. Daniel and Angie explained to me that they grew up with Wwoofers and Wwoofer type workers on their family farms. WWOOF was a tradition that they maintained when they took over the ranch. While Wwoofing with them, I worked a few hours a day and helped with the animals, spread hay, painted a greenhouse, chopped wood and built a chicken house. Before staying at the ranch I didn’t have much experience being around animals bigger than goats. Moreover, I had never really built anything other than lego structures. The experience gave me confidence and expanded my carpentry/ranching skill set. I was also impressed being able to witness the confidence and abilities of Angie and Daniel’s young daughters,

23 Many WWOOF hosts and Wwoofers that I spoke to often used the term ‘Wwoofer’ to describe a work-trade and/or the act of exchanging labor for food and lodging. Although in this study I specifically refer to WWOOF hosts and Wwoofers as individuals that are affiliated with WWOOF Canada -i.e. with a current or past membership number-, it is useful to note that ‘Wwoofing’ is a term that is increasingly being used to mean a variety of situations.
who took up farm chores with incredible ease, poise and self assuredness. Seeing the girls climb ladders, chase animals and comparing their assertiveness with my shyness around the farm, gave me a unique perspective of how gender socialization figures itself and especially within so called ‘traditional’ families. It was encouraging and fascinating seeing the girls handle tools and tend to the animals with so much trust i.e. laughing, smiling and chatting while teetering several meters in the air.

Figure 19, shows one of my lunches on the farm. Although my knees were wobbly and I barely managed to keep my composure -and breakfast down-, I was proud of being able to herd so many cows the day this meal took place. I felt like a real cowboy. I was surrounded by men including my host, the other Wwoofer and the farmer helper, who performed the castration of the young bulls. I remember thinking how interesting it was that I had accessed a ‘boy’s club,’ and I also remember I had to remind myself to be careful not to show too much feeling and to especially take care not to flinch or look nervous/agitated during the cuttings. I kind of succeeded in that I managed to act somewhat composed, although secretly I was horrified seeing the blood and aching animals. The ritual of eating-consuming the testicles closed the day and that too was hard for me to endure but I put on my best ‘cowboy’ face and ate. I was uncomfortable with what had happened but I sensed that overcoming girly-emotionality was significant to do because being included in the/their ceremony was important to me. Thus when I bit into the meat, I laughed and smiled as did my host and the other Wwoofer. My actions were genuine though because in that moment I was happy and proud. I felt included and like I belonged.
After finishing my WWOOF work at the ranch, most of my days were spent talking about the local agricultural industry and the decline of farming in the area. I was sad to hear that Daniel and Angie plan to sell the ranch. They talk about the economic factors that influence them to give up the farm. Daniel notes:

It's too cold to grow tree fruits, it's too cold to grow grapes [in northern BC]...you're pretty much limited to livestock and then organic beef is... I mean we do okay but...we have to sell some of our beef just into the regular market just to you know, pay our bills. (personal interview, 2009)

I left the ranch and was introduced to Dorra by Daniel. Dorra is a former WWOOF host and works in community development in northern BC. Dorra came to Canada and left eastern Europe to pursue farming and “self sufficiency.” She explains that it would have been difficult for her to do this in her native country: “Since I was a girl, I did not inherit our family farm but my brother did or was supposed to” (personal interview, 2009). In being
involved with WWOOF for over nine years, Dorra hosted twenty Wwoofers. Many of the Wwoofers that stayed with Dorra came back to her farm several times. Through WWOOF Dorra was able to engage with young people from her homeland and they helped teach her own children the language, thus the family could maintain some cultural connections. Dorra spoke to me about being a mentor to other aspiring women farmers. During the interview we established a teacher-student type of relationship as I listened to the guidance she offered.

After speaking to Dorra, I took the train from Crandon to Placid. I disembarked at a mile marker along the tracks and met my next host, Rob. Rob is in his thirties, owns a CSA farm and works for a non profit organization. CSA stands for Community Supported Agriculture. Rob explained to me that customers on his farm buy a ‘share’ or several shares in the crop for the upcoming season. They do this several months in advance depending on their needs, family size and income. In return, they receive a portion of the harvest when it is ready, typically in the early summer. Rob holds regular ‘work bees’ for share holders and customers so that they can learn about farming. He also offers customers the opportunity so that they can exchange work for CSA shares. I stayed with Rob for over a week and lived in a camper trailer, then a bus and we ate all meals together in the small cabin space that Rob uses as his bedroom/office. I worked an average of about three to four hours a day. While at Rob’s my tasks included helping to ‘square’ off -measure and then straighten beds- the garden, moving an outhouse, making compost, cleaning the barn and planting onions. Rob has hosted eight Wwoofers and has had a positive experience with the WWOOF program. He is interested to continue with WWOOF because he is able to teach farming skills and can learn

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24 For an example please see: “What is Community Supported Agriculture?” at: http://www.landfood.ubc.ca/ubcfarm/csa.php
about organic farming through the Wwoofers that visit him. His plans for the farm include, incorporating ‘agro tourism’ and developing different projects, like an equipment share, but he considers food production to be his most vital goal.

1. WASH ALL STUFF OUTSIDE [pots]
2. Fill up with soil, mix for basil up to 200 pots in priority
   A) all round black [pots]
   B) all square [pots]
   C) 10 peat round pots
   D) rectangle brick [pots]
   E) hanging planter
   F) small round [pots]
3. onions, finish 2nd bed

The above list showcases one of the chore lists that Rob prepared for me. I have mixed emotions thinking about all the chore lists I have seen over the years as a Wwoofer. Through Wwoofing I have done every type of mundane task including washing dishes, cleaning pots, cleaning homes, changing diapers and organizing mucky barns. Many of the women Wwoofers I spoke to report the same. Although I have found immense joy through the ‘routine’ jobs I have performed on farms, I often wonder how these chores have actually helped me and conversely how my labor benefits my host. I know that the small tasks I describe keep small farms and communities going. They are essential jobs. Yet I question whether my WWOOF work is ‘women appeasing’ and ‘hosts taking.’ I also understand that although the farms will be there after I leave, all I have to take with me are abstract body-knowledges that I may or may not use again. Multiplied by many women, the effect is somewhat troubling. My time at Rob’s leads me to reconsider whether Wwoofing is empowering for women. It also gives me the perspective to see that exploitation is a complicated matter. Was I in fact resisting by staying on the farm and trying to push myself
to reason the circumstances and my mixed, oftentimes frustrated emotions? I wanted to figure out a relationship with Rob and the land I was working on even though I felt tired being there, taking on all those monotonous responsibilities. The uncomfortableness I experienced is significant. Perhaps by being /working with those uneasy feelings and within the ‘caring-woman’ stereotype I was actually reclaiming it. After all, I had power in the relationship. I was a researcher as well as a competent adult and I could leave. Nonetheless, I stayed and I think it was because I was curious; curious to see what would happen, how I would react and how the dynamics could/would inform my analysis around empowerment. I think that for other women Wwoofers, what is critical, is the fostering of this curiosity to go and explore ourselves, our boundaries and the social/gender structures around us. Rob was similarly reflective about his role and confided to me that he worries about ‘crossing the line’ with regards to using Wwoofer labor (personal interview, 2009).

I left Rob’s farm and took the train to the coast. I then got on the ferry to Haida Gwaii, where I stayed with Sharon, Mark and their family. Sharon and Mark have lived on the island for most of their lives. They own a small restaurant which Sharon operates. Mark has a full time job in the resource industry. During my time with them, I helped at the restaurant washing dishes and preparing foods, planted raspberry bushes, weeded around the property, cut grass, upturned soil for a potato bed, painted picnic tables, door frames and assisted Sharon with chores around the newly constructed Bed & Breakfast, including caulking the bathroom. I stayed with the family over a month and worked on average three to four hours a day. I had the weekends off and lived in a small cabin next door to the restaurant. I ate all of my meals with the family. It was very important to both Sharon and
Mark that I have a “good experience” (personal interview, 2009) while staying at their house and on the island in general. For that reason, they often encouraged me to explore the area. Furthermore, they would usually invite me to go with them for neighborhood barbecues, celebrations and potlucks. I also spent a lot of time with their children.

What was meaningful for me while at Sharon’s, was being able to connect with Sharon and through her to other women like her, on the island. I found through Sharon a women’s network within which I was able to hear other women relate the struggles and joys of living and making a living on Haida Gwaii. During a work bee at a neighboring women’s farm, I was able to see how island residents and other guests contribute to making Haida Gwaii a community space. I remember spending time talking to all the women who surrounded me in the garden and then the kitchen-dining room. The women included Sharon, her farmer friend, women friends, girl children and other Wwoofers. After laboring outside, all the women helped to make a meal for guests and families. Although I recognize how gendered our work was at the time, as we were outside gardening then inside cooking while most of the men were smoking and/or chatting near the house, I also felt genuinely connected to a meaningful women’s place. Our gardening and cooking were joyous events. We laughed and chatted about our lives while working, preparing food and getting the table ready for the meal. Through our cooking and collective work in the garden, we carved out a positive, gendered space. I propose that this time was an important respite place wherein the women were able to receive support from each other and thus sustain the caring work that we all performed for family-land-community. Although this space was mapped by some drudgery and physical toil, it was also a happy place in which women were able to ‘unwind’ together,
talk and thus analyze their work and positioning through informal/formal gossip-chatting.

**Figure 20. Clamming with Sharon and Family**

![Image of people clamming](image-url)

Figure 20. (2009) My first day on the island Sharon and Mark took me to go and dig for clams. It was my first time doing this. Afterwards we made clam chowder, a family favorite.

I took the picture above while at the beach with Sharon and her family. The picture is meaningful because it reminds me of the intimacy I shared with Sharon. Sharon talked to me about difficulties in her life, her triumphs and personal health. She also constantly invited me to special local gatherings and always motivated me to take time off and travel around the area. The relationship that was created allowed me to also express my fears, hopes and pains. Through this dialogue we made a space in which our caring work as women was less invisibilized. I believe that the act of caring and its gendered significance was at least slightly disrupted/shifted through this relationship/friendship. Sharon is aware as I also acknowledged to/with her on many occasions, that our caring work is taken for granted, yet we also realize how complicated the networks in which this caring work exists, are. We both noted that we love doing the work that we do, like gardening, farming, taking care of others and yet we are
also aware of the physical-emotion-spiritual effects of all this caring on our health-well being (personal interview, 2009).

On a sunny Saturday morning, I decided to visit the Farmers’ Market on Haida Gwaii. I hitchhiked into town and interviewed Maureen, a regular vendor at the market. Maureen is retired and has a small vegetable farm with a goat dairy. She has hosted three hundred Wwoofers and has been a WWOOF host for over ten years. Maureen expressed to me how important it is for her to have the help and companionship that Wwoofers bring. The majority of the Wwoofers she hosts keep in touch with her and many have come back to visit with their own children. Maureen is selective with who she asks to come and stay with her. She let me know that she rarely invites Canadian Wwoofers to her place: “I’ve found that most Canadians are very unreliable, they’ll say they’ll come…and then they don’t show up” (personal interview, 2009).

I left Sharon and Mark’s to take a job house sitting at a farm for a neighboring couple. Many days later, I hitchhiked into town and took a private boat to get to Samantha’s farm. Samantha is in her forties and owns a certified organic farm, specializing in mixed vegetables. She sells most of her produce through a CSA type box program during market day on the island. Samantha and her husband have also recently started a dairy. The milk business is run by Olivia, a former Wwoofer who decided to become a full time dairy farmer. Olivia owns the cows that produce the milk but exchanges milk and work with Samantha; whose land she grazes her cows on. While at Samantha’s, I stayed with the family in a room in the main house with four other Wwoofers and a farm apprentice. The house had no electricity (propane was used as fuel and sometimes a creek provided hydro power for a little
while) or phone access and the closest neighbor was a boat ride away. The work day at Samantha's started around nine in the morning. Most of my time was spent out in the garden with the other Wwoofers, trying to keep up with the immense amount of weeding that the garden required. I also planted crops like basil, hung seaweed to dry and harvested lettuce as well as other salad greens. I worked an average of three to four hours a day after which Samantha prepared lunch. Wwoofers usually helped with dinner. The rest of my time was spent hiking, talking with Samantha and the other Wwoofers or Samantha's kids. Because of our conversations I felt like Samantha and I became colleagues and confidants. I explained to her my intention of becoming a farmer one day and she provided me with insight and feedback regarding my work, plans and the agricultural industry on the island and in BC. She also expressed the stress of trying to maintain the farm as a sustainable business. When I asked Samantha about femininity, she stated that she wasn't 'that educated' and didn't really know how to answer the question, yet she spoke insightfully and eloquently regarding her role as a caregiver and nurturer for her family, farm, community and the hundreds of Wwoofers that came to stay with her (personal interview, 2009). Her understanding of herself reflects an awareness of her role as the powerful center of an immense network of students, Wwoofers, apprentices, friends, colleagues and island residents. It is her caregiving that empowers/situates her in this place and continues to provide her with esteem and respect on the island and within the agricultural community.

I took the picture featured in Figure 21, because it represents the positive emotions and rituals that happened around eating times at Samantha's farm. There are so many food taboos related to health/weight/fat/women, but I find that after farming, the women
Wwoofers and WWOOF hosts I have met often relish meals, eat heartily and don’t ‘guilt’ food or their bodies. In this way, I would argue that the WWOOF space itself endears a reflection of several social discourses. There is a focus on pure/purity/organic food but there is also an attention to pleasure and eating with radical joy/attention and gratification.

Figure 21. Fresh Cheese Pizza at Samantha’s Farm

Figure 21. Pizza was a popular staple at Samantha’s farm. The bread was made fresh, almost daily and the cheese came from the dairy.

After leaving Samantha’s farm, I hitchhiked through Haida Gwaii to Christine and Tom’s home, where I spent a couple of days working and speaking with them as well as their daughter Sally. Christine and Tom are both retired professionals. After buying an old logging slash with another couple in the seventies, they set up their house, garden, goats and chicken coop on the land. Christine estimates that she has hosted approximately one hundred Wwoofers since 2002. Wwoofers who stay with Christine and Tom are an intrinsic part of the farm and take part in a diversity of chores including garden work, helping upkeep the house with painting, mowing the lawn, taking care of the animals, constructing fences and helping her contracter son with his building projects on the island. Christine gets so many
Wwoofing inquiries that she regularly turns people away because of lack of space and time: “I’m getting better at saying no...but people beg and plead and I give in” (personal interview, 2009). Christine let me know that Wwoofers who stay with her become part of the community and family especially as she and Tom get older and are no longer able to keep up with all the work required to sustain their land. I found that Christine and Tom provided a space where Wwoofers could rest but also feel like they were making a difference in someone’s life. Their farm was a nice-friendly place to be where you could count on being taken care of and included in island life in exchange for simple chores like raking leaves. Although I feel obliged to Christine and Tom for the beautiful home they allowed me to access, I also interpret my work there in context. In considering the gendered significance of my ‘fieldwork fatigue’ I question how the ‘odd’ jobs I did at Christine and Tom’s - combined with all the other ‘small/odd’ jobs I have done as a volunteer and Wwoofer all over the world- contributed to my burnout in August of 2009. When I quit my fieldwork that summer, weeks after leaving Christine and Tom’s, I wasn’t just tired but overwhelmed by how much work I had put in to countless organizations/for numerous people, over many years since my teens.

I left Haida Gwaii and spent a few days in Prince Rupert. I took another ferry to Vancouver Island and then, I took a bus to my next destination. My WWOOF host Natalie, picked me at a Greyhound bus depot. Natalie is an artist and retired professional, recently widowed. I stayed with her while Wwoofing at a nearby farm, owned by her family. At the time of the interview, Natalie had recently sold her own small farm - at which she hosted Wwoofers for a few years- and had moved into a new home in an urban environment. Natalie
grew up on a farm but got into farming herself out of necessity. She was living on land that is part of the Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR) and learned that if she started an agricultural business, the tax incentives would allow her to maintain the house and property. Natalie decided to get involved with WWOOF because she wanted help with the physical demands of growing and tending to the vegetables she produced and she also liked having company around the house. Speaking about Wwoofers Natalie explains: “It’s like having kids only better” (personal interview, 2009). During my stay, Natalie and I shared many intimate details of our lives. Still, my time at Natalie’s was stressful in that I was increasingly starting to feel the pressures of fieldwork burnout and thus was trying to reconcile the endless hours of labor on her family’s farm with the relationship I was forming with Natalie. Although our conversations were vivid and thoughtful, I found myself increasingly questioning my role as a Wwoofer. What kept me at Natalie’s was being able to spend time with her and the other women Wwoofer, Greta. Whereas in university I read about forming union-collectivity, within Natalie’s house I was able to actually participate in doing this in real time, with real women who had real lives and flaws. The process of staying and trying to figure out what I was doing as a Wwoofer and woman-person in the world and what/where my place was, kept me at Natalie’s. I was curious once again.

I spent about two weeks with Natalie during which I explored the neighboring city and got to know her and Greta. Natalie was a very open host. I admire her strength of character as she managed to operate a profitable farm-business by herself, whilst
experiencing some difficult challenges in her life.

Figure 22. Farewell Meal at Natalie’s Home

Figure 22. (2009) I celebrated my last meal at Natalie’s with her and Greta. Each of us made foods showcasing our different cultural backgrounds. Natalie also gave me a homemade card and roses.

Figure 22 shows the good bye dinner Natalie arranged for me. What is important about the meal is the fact that we created a small community. During my time at Natalie’s, we lived together, worked together, got to know each other and shared a space in which we consistently made meaning; chatting about various issues, personal histories and situations. My relationship with Natalie was formidable in this sense. She was a mentor, but we were also confidants in that our living situation and the interview, provided a venue for us to disclose our life histories and through sharing these stories we participated in a collaborative analysis of our worlds.

I left Natalie’s on the ferry, headed towards the Gulf Islands. My next WWOOF exchange did not work out and I decided to take a break from Wwoofing in the lower mainland. I contacted my next host Adam, online through the posting he put up on the
WWOOF website. Adam is a professional and owns a medium sized livestock farm with his wife, Carrie. I stayed with them for close to a week, in their house. My day usually started before nine and I had lunch alone as everyone was out of the house working or in school. I worked a few hours a day and helped with clearing blackberry bushes, shifting manure and cutting grass. After my chores, I went for walks around the area and read. I would usually come back in time to help with and have dinner in the late afternoon, with the family.

Adam started advertising for Wwoofers as his farm expanded because he needs the help. He was told about the program by a colleague and 2009 was his first year with WWOOF. I was the family’s third Wwoofer. Adam, Carrie and their children regularly host international exchange students and co-op students in their home. Adam let me know that as a family they often form close relationships with their guests. He notes that: “Having people in our home enriches us as much as you know it’s a benefit to them” (personal interview, 2009). Adam informed me that he is willing to teach Wwoofers to use the farm machinery and all other aspects of his livestock operation. In this way, Adam’s farm provided me with the ability to understand that Wwoofing offers women the opportunity to gain hands on experience with agricultural tasks, within a caring-supportive environment. Adam and Carrie are the reason I was initially drawn to Wwoofing: to make connections and friendships with farmers who are willing to share their knowledge and include me in their lives.

I intended to WWOOF a few more weeks but conflicting schedules with hosts and my own exhaustion prevented me from traveling after the first week of August. I queried a WWOOF host, Jane over email about staying with her during the summer of 2009 but this did not work out. I kept in touch and in February of 2010 I flew down to Vancouver and took
the ferry to the Gulf Island of Varn to meet her. Jane picked me up at the Varn Island dock and I stayed with her for the day. Jane owns a small farm and specialty wool business. She showed me around her farm, the island, and took me to a community lunch, organized to honor the volunteer workers on Varn. Jane started farming because of a "love for the land" and because she wants to be out in nature and as "sustainable as possible" (personal interview, 2009). She got involved with WWOOF Canada in 2000, after her own daughters became Wwoofers. Chores vary on her farm and include tending to the animals, weeding, preparing materials for the business or clearing blackberry overgrowth. In terms of her future plans, Jane relates that she hopes to sign a covenant for her land to protect the area against future development and to ensure it remains devoted to sustainable agriculture. She notes:

I'm not going to be able to do this forever...although part of [the farm] is in the agricultural land reserve, I don't trust that the agricultural land reserve will always be there" (personal interview, 2010).

In this way, Jane is actively working to create a sanctuary-place for Wwoofers and other members of the Varn community. She is a bold mentor and role model in that she is an independent business owner, advocate for Wwoofing and an advocate for Varn, island communities, sustainability as well as mentoring more generally.

Help

So far I haven't looked at it and said whoa, are [Wwoofers] being highly productive for their four hours, I mean I don't think of it in that way... At the end of the day I say, if I get things done you know for the cost of a few meals then you know...it works for me and it works for them. (Adam, personal interview, 2009)

I couldn't do this without Wwoofers. (Christine, personal interview, 2009)
I see [Wwoofing] as a tool to help farmers do things well... I’m sure I’m healthier with Wwoofers. (Rob, personal interview, 2009)

Before starting Wwoofing in the summer of 2009, I had already been on several WWOOF exchanges in Canada and the US, lasting from a few days to several months. I experienced living on farms where I was considered a companion-friend, with a few chores and a lot of time socializing with the host and farms where I literally felt like I was running the barn and business, barely able to breathe between getting up for 5:00 am milking, providing caregiving for small children and spending long shifts packaging products, assembly line style. From these experiences and during the auto/ethnography, I found that WWOOF hosts gained a lot through WWOOF but also gave of themselves in meaningful ways. Getting Wwoofer help was important for everyone I stayed with but each host interpreted and defined help differently. I explore these ideas through examining hosts’ memorable experiences and relating their thoughts on volunteering and power.

Discussing memorable experiences, Samantha pointed out that she has been “super fortunate” with the Wwoofers she has hosted (personal interview, 2009). She attributes her positive record to the culture of WWOOF:

[Wwoofers] bought into the program, they understand the rules so to speak and they come with a certain consciousness...they don’t come here thinking oh well I’m going to this cool farm and we’ll party or you know sit around drumming or whatever they think we’re going to do. (personal interview, 2009)

Likewise, Sharon remembers hosting a young carpenter who helped build her restaurant and became a sort of role model for her sons: “He got some soapstone and he showed the boys how to carve the soapstone and they’d be down to the river fishing and then they’d be out to the ocean and they’d be doing stuff together” (personal interview, 2009). Sharon also
remarked that she had some negative experiences with Wwoofers. She laughed talking about hosting a Wwoofer who was concerned about radiation and got upset that the family used a microwave, but then mentioned that a few Wwoofers who stayed with her would regularly “take off” during the day. The latter situation left Sharon feeling weary of inviting more Wwoofers to her home:

We’re ambassadors for the island and we try to show people as much as we can about where we live...[WWOOF’s] a good thing for our family, it’s a good thing for our kids, I like people, I like hearing where they come from and their experiences... I really enjoy the whole process but there’s been a few [Wwoofers] that have just not respected that process and I should have just said bye right away...you keep thinking oh well maybe its going to be okay...and then you just sorta end up with this feeling inside you... I felt like we were being used. (personal interview, 2009).

Similarly, Jane commented that some Wwoofers were “militant” about working only “four hours”25 (personal interview, 2010) per day, but recollected a positive experience about the first Wwoofer who stayed with her. The young woman was from Korea and in her twenties. She had never been on a farm, was enthusiastic and not bothered by the bugs or dirt. Jane was happy that she was able to provide such an enriching experience for the woman.

Considering memorable experiences, Adam talked about the first couple of Wwoofers he hosted who were “keen” (personal interview, 2009). He was happy to pay them for doing extra jobs around the farm. Natalie related feeling very supported by a young Wwoofer who helped her pack as well as move her house and farm, when she sold both. Natalie also remembers hosting a woman from South America, who she found hard to motivate. Natalie was surprised that the woman decided to sign up for a farm exchange. She explained her

25 The WWOOF book gives general hosting-labor guidelines as an overview for WWOOF hosts and Wwoofers. One of the guidelines outlines that Wwoofers should work approximately a few hours a day in exchange for food and lodging. However these guidelines are suggestions as many WWOOF exchanges and situations exist and are encouraged. For example within the WWOOF book and the online postings submitted by WWOOF hosts, work day expectations vary widely. (WWOOF Book, 2006; 2007; 2008)
disbelief: “Usually [being] a Wwoofer suggests that you a, like to travel b, like to be with people c, like to work, you’re adventurous...she didn’t seem to fit that role” (personal interview, 2009). Christine describes the day of her wedding to Tom. The house was full with people and the septic tank backed up. The Wwoofers were assigned to clean the mess. Christine notes: “They weren’t happy” (personal interview, 2009).

As an older widow, Maureen needs the help that Wwoofers bring and she talks about being a tutor-mentor for the Japanese Wwoofers who stay with her: “I enjoy teaching them not only to improve their English...[but] a lot of things we do here are totally foreign to them like baking...and I enjoy teaching them how to bake” (personal interview, 2009). A woman Wwoofer who stayed with Maureen left her a thank you card. Maureen remembers the card vividly: “It said...if it weren’t for you I never would have had the opportunity to touch soil” (personal interview, 2009). The assistance that Rob was able to get from Wwoofers came at a very important time. He talks about hosting a couple who aided him when he was exhausted and unable to finish the day to day farm chores. He describes the situation: “It was stuff that I wouldn’t have gotten done, I wouldn’t have done it because I was just too tired...” (personal interview, 2009). Dorra relates how she and the Wwoofers she hosted developed “life long friendships” (personal interview, 2009). For instance, when Dorra’s marriage broke up and she came to terms with being a lesbian, she noted that the Wwoofers “buffered” what was a tumultuous time in her life (personal interview, 2009). Two Wwoofers experienced health issues including a pregnancy and a diagnosis of cancer while at Dorra’s farm. Their English was limited, so Dorra had to take them to the hospital and translate. Dorra feels that because of all these experiences she “became kind of a
grandmother" (personal interview, 2009) to all the Wwoofers that stayed with her over the years. Daniel recalls the first ‘Wwoofer’ on his dad’s farm: “We had one guy, this old hippy guy that would come up every summer and stay here in his little camper and he liked to help with the square bales...” (personal interview, 2009). Angie talked about how the man became good friends with Daniel. The man wasn’t an actual Wwoofer but the type of work exchange and future relationships like it, resonate deeply with Daniel and Angie. Their daughter Daisy mentioned that a recent Wwoofer was like a “big brother” to her, while Daniel and Angie noted: “Everyone who has come [to WWOOF] has been very open to our girls, which has been a really wonderful experience for us” (personal interview, 2009).

Memorable experiences demonstrate that WWOOF is a space in which social consciousness is built. The relationships that are formed while Wwoofing offer insight into gender, resistance, inequality, society and class. What I find most interesting is the resistance space that Wwoofing offered for the Japanese Wwoofers. Maureen became a source of knowledge and independence for the women Wwoofers that stayed with her while the Wwoofers who came to Dorra’s witnessed family reconfiguration and gender transformation. In this way, the friendships, companionship and different sorts of bonds emphasize how Wwoofing allows a space for observing, seeing and therefore surveying/evaluating varied dynamics and socio-cultural ties.

During my WWOOF travels I found that Wwoofing is not always defined as volunteering, despite its classification as such by WWOOF Canada. I was interested to know if hosts considered Wwoofing volunteering and/or if this is a meaningful term in their own
lives. Christine discusses how much she appreciates Wwoofers, considering that she and Tom are no longer able to physically keep apace with farm chores:

I'm tired a lot of the time and you know we’re old so...I can support Wwoofers by doing cooking and that kind of thing and certainly execute the plan but as far as actually looking after all of this work here, no way, the garden would go and I would probably plant it all in berries and have a u pick sign out at the road or something, but even that you know takes work. (personal interview, 2009)

Dorra associates Wwoofing with volunteering because Wwoofers are not paid. In many ways, she relates personally to the situation: “Since I’m working for next to nothing [at her current position as a community developer in northern BC] I consider myself [a] volunteer” (personal interview, 2009). We both commented that a lot of unpaid work sustains small communities like Crandon, while Dorra showed me around her office and pointed out that the entire building was constructed, designed and supported by volunteers (personal interview, 2009). When I brought up volunteering with Maureen, she replied with stories of negligence she had heard from some of the Wwoofers who stayed with her. A young woman told Maureen that while staying on a farm on the mainland, her host had only provided her with “salad from the garden” (personal interview, 2009) to eat. Natalie resonated with using the term bartering to define Wwoofing but isn’t comfortable describing Wwoofing as volunteering:

[Wwoofers are] working, the host is working... I would work alongside them, they never did anything that I wouldn’t do alongside them and then I would leave early and go and stir up some lunch or whatever but... I didn’t see any of that as volunteerism, not their work nor mine, it was hard work for benefit for both of us. (personal interview, 2009)

Jane relates that when another WWOOF host on the island of Varn brought up the suggestion of having stipends for Wwoofers, she opposed it: “that’s not part of Wwoofing...we all need money but money brings in a very different set of expectations”
(personal interview, 2010). Jane further states that volunteering holds an important place in her life. She revealed to me that: “The most interesting work I’ve done in my life has been as a volunteer” (personal interview, 2010). Finally, Jane let me know that even though she enjoys having Wwoofers she has a one week stay policy on her farm. After hosting Wwoofers back to back Jane felt drained and realized: “You just need a break...and while I love sharing, I also then have to sort of refuel and have my space back” (personal interview, 2010).

Sharon is an active volunteer in her community and is proud that she can offer her help and mentorship to younger women on the island. When I asked Sharon about volunteering, I explained to her how I had recently come across the term voluntourism. Sharon felt a connection to the word right away:

I really like the concept of voluntourism... I went on a little tour to Mexico but I was kind of bored sometimes.... I needed just to have alone time and just not [be] doing anything but I mean there’s times when I felt like, I just want to sweep a floor. (personal interview, 2009)

For Samantha, volunteering means: “contributing without asking for financial compensation and the contribution is generally a social contribution” (personal interview, 2009). She relates her experiences working on a farm in Nicaragua noting, like Jane that: “The most important things I’ve ever done in my life were as a volunteer” (personal interview, 2009). Samantha went on to say that Wwoofing was a chance to gain critical skills and life experience. Adam told me that although he “didn’t have time” (personal interview, 2009) to volunteer, he is involved in his church and regularly donates product from his farm to the community through the church, when needed. Tom let me know that he often pays Wwoofers for completing their WWOOF chores because he ‘feels bad’ asking someone to do something for free. Daniel and
Angie associate volunteering and Wwoofing with “sharing yourself” and discussed how: “The benefits go both ways” (personal interview, 2009). Additionally, Daniel points out that it is difficult to find farm labor. For Daniel, Wwoofing fills an important economic need in the community of Crandon:

Farm wages aren’t very much and so people come every morning with this attitude that oh I’m only making ten bucks an hour, I’m not going to do anything and Wwoofers are like oh I’m here and I’m going to learn. (personal interview, 2009)

Daniel and Angie find it difficult to volunteer in their community because of the time it takes to run their business and raise their children. Daniel also discussed how: “Every time you farm you’re volunteering your time because you’re sure not getting paid for it” (personal interview, 2009).

From the hosts’ responses volunteering is a powerful ideology that draws women especially, to contribute of themselves to ‘community.’ Women express feeling proud, happy and obliged to help out. I wonder how volunteering can shame those who are not able/not willing. Albeit, it is interesting that women’s labor is so powerful and significant for numerous communities and that women are able to express this significance in terms of elaborating the importance of volunteering in general and specifically related to their farms-land-neighborhoods.

I wanted the hosts like the women Wwoofers I spoke with, to explore issues and meanings of power to see if they connect this word to the work they are doing as farmer-mentors or the help that Wwoofing provides them with. Natalie feels that Wwoofing is empowering for her:
[Wwoofing] allowed me to keep some health and wellness for me and to stay on the farm and to see it through and to reap the satisfactions from marketing the product and sharing that satisfaction with them [Wwoofers]. (personal interview, 2009)

She also mentions that Wwoofing is particularly empowering for women:

The women [Wwoofers] who came probably felt the same empowerment that I did and I think that it was more important for women then it was for guys because generally farm work you think it’s the guy in the overalls and the old farmer stereotype. (personal interview, 2009)

Comparably, Sharon notes that Wwoofers “empower” her because they help her to “cope” with and juggle the demands of maintaining her land and business (personal interview, 2009).

I asked Samantha if as a woman farmer, she considers herself powerful. She hesitated with a few seconds pause and a small frown, but then answered:

It’s so important that people are doing this...growing food organically, locally all the things that I stand for or that I’m doing are things that I really really believe in and I do think...[organic farming] is a place to start changing the world... I think it’s powerful, a powerful statement about what’s important. (personal interview, 2009)

Similarly, Rob discusses that organic farming is part of a powerful shift in society: “When little farms like this can be a part of a movement that basically disempower[s] corporate America, that’s power” (personal interview, 2009). Rob also talks about feeling powerful as a farmer because of the difficult physical labor that taking care of the farm requires. He mentions that as a WWOOF host, he is trying to be more “aware” of power relations on his farm between himself and Wwoofers: “I’ve always been in a position of power I guess and [I] just try to be aware of what that is...” (personal interview, 2009). He comments that creating a ‘feel good’ space for visitors who came to the farm is important to him: “It’s powerful when you feel good if someone feels good and I know I feel good and I know the people that come here feel good” (personal interview, 2009).
Daniel and Angie linked power to abuses in global economic and food systems. Angie elaborates on this idea in terms of her search for “alternatives.” She is often frustrated with the societal, government and corporate disregard for the environment but finds comfort in meeting and hosting Wwoofers:

I don’t want to support what’s going on...there’s so much waste... How can we be allowed to have [these] toxins?...there’s this huge power system that’s being created, that’s allowing this... Wwoofing is kind of neat because you see people who are like minded and I think that that’s kind of interesting. (personal interview, 2009)

Christine chose not to define what she is doing as a farmer, as powerful. Instead, she discusses farming as: “making a small difference in the lives of some people who’ve had a happy experience [while staying at the farm]” (personal interview, 2009). She goes on to say: “People have to allow others to make the difference and so it’s kind of a choice and I’m there if you want to get something positive out of this but it’s not my purpose in life” (personal interview, 2009). Comparably, Jane does not connect to the idea that what she is doing is powerful but focuses on the power of collective-community actions when living on a rural island like Varn. She reveals: “I feel it’s important for communities and especially a small community to work together and pull together and this isn’t...your perfect community in doing that, but it’s worth striving for” (personal interview, 2010). Adam also reasons that farming provides an alternative, but does not believe that what he is doing as a farmer is a powerful act: “I know you’ll talk to some farmers and they’re extremely altruistic like you know they’re going to save world... I’m not that way” (personal interview, 2009). He relates this statement to the fact that as a small-medium sized farm, he will never be able to supply chains like KFC with free range products. Adam understands his farm as part of a ‘spectrum’ of goods in which he is a choice among a variety:
To feed everybody you have to have those people [large scale, traditional meat facilities] to produce that kind of food...healthy, basically safe food at a reasonable cost for the masses and the people that really want a discerning taste and they want a different product that’s where I fit in. (personal interview, 2009)

Wwoofing offers hosts the opportunity to explore power within diverse relationships and provides a powerful respite space for hosts, who benefit from the help and camaraderie that women Wwoofers offer. In some cases hosts reassert traditional power structures and in other ways they complicate these, yet it is important to note that generally Wwoofing allows a space to view and negotiate power relations.

Connecting

I’m a mother and a housewife and I have been one for 25 years... Having Wwoofers come is like...well having you [Agata] here for example is like wow, another woman around, this is so nice, wow she did all the dishes, oh my god all the dishes are done, it’s just a relief of burden... (Sharon, personal interview, 2009)

It makes me feel good when people say ‘I learned something out of this’ like ‘wow I learned where a carrot came from’ or...‘wow I really appreciate paying $2.99 for two pounds of organic carrots, now I think that’s even too cheap because [I] realized the work that went into it,’ if people leave with those kinds of insights then that’s good. (Samantha, personal interview, 2009)

While Wwoofing I have met many diverse characters and have been amazed with the relationships that I have witnessed. I have seen WWOOF bring together backpackers, health conscious travelers, foreign students and older adults with farmers, professional-entrepreneurs and individuals interested in a little companionship. Landscapes are also integral in these scenarios often eliciting powerful attachments. Animals, woody acres, lush countrysides and emerald waters often trigger deep sensations and intense physical responses. My WWOOF travels have changed my own body space in that the skills I have learned shape what I can do, my perspectives and the way I carry my self. I have spoken to
many hosts that feel likewise stating in different ways that they choose to live rurally because of the special connection they feel to the country. The following section elaborates relationships that hosts form with other farmers, Wwoofers and the land. I discuss the types of networks that WWOOF hosts belong to and maintain. I relate how WWOOF hosts understand their role in terms of tourism and within the broader community. I then analyze how hosts interpret ideas of caring and how they understand gender and femininity.

I asked hosts to talk about connections in terms of networking. Adam let me know that he is involved in an organic-non organic farmers’ market association. Natalie informed me that the farmers in the area regularly connect to each other via telephone and email and discussed her wish for someone to organize a formal WWOOF group during the summer where Wwoofers and hosts could meet, socialize and chat. Christine commented that she is a member of the farmers’ institute on the island and as such regularly “exchange[s] ideas and bitch[es]” (personal interview, 2009) with members of the group. Sharon talked about how she trades services with other farmers including sharing Wwoofers, using salad greens from a neighbor in her restaurant and raising pigs for a friend who then helps her with accounting work. This type of work bartering is effective for Sharon and further inspires her to continue her “barter board” (personal interview, 2009). The board is a large chalk board that she puts up near her business. It advertises items and services that anyone on the island can connect with or possibly trade - it was through the barter board that I found a farm sitting position with June and Andrew. Daniel talked about receiving emails from WWOOF hosts warning him to avoid certain Wwoofers and discussed warning Wwoofers about some WWOOF hosts in the area: “I say [to Wwoofers] you really shouldn’t go there because they
treat people pretty bad” (personal interview, 2009). Daniel and Angie also note that the “organic movement” in Crandon is limited but they regularly communicate with the few farmers in the area, share equipment, exchange services and are part of a few community groups centering around environmental protection (personal interview, 2009).

Rob exchanges information about his farm through a regular newsletter he emails out to CSA members. Moreover he is involved with the local farmers’ market association where he and other vendors actively solicit new producers and encourage sustainable agriculture practices in the community. Members also help each other in terms of sharing information about appropriate pricing and assist one another with produce shortages: “I didn’t have enough zucchini [for the box program] one week, so I call Reeka down the road and got some zucchini” (personal interview, 2009). Rob mentioned that he is also interested in developing a paid organic farmers coordinator position to organize new initiatives and aid with implementing sustainability measures (personal interview, 2009). Samantha notes that she likes to talk to other farmers about the “difficulties” (personal interview, 2009) of being an agricultural producer on Haida Gwaii. She mentioned feeling isolated on the island because of not having enough opportunities or time to speak to other growers. Samantha also let me know that she does manage to visit farmer friends on the mainland, where she is able to “ask a million questions” (personal interview, 2009) and share information regarding organic and general farming issues. Dorra reflects on how important it is for Crandon and northern BC as a whole to network with other regions, townships, organizations and interested individuals: “We’re trying to prevent this community from dying... I’m working here [as a development coordinator] because the trees are gone, either the trees are dead or
they’re sold...it’s very tough to find something to keep the community alive” (personal interview, 2009).

I asked hosts to talk about tourism in relation to their farms and the Wwoofers they took in. Daniel and Angie describe Wwoofing as an alternative to traditional tourism in that it is an affordable and notable way for many people to see and experience Canada:

A lot of comments that we get is that Wwoofing’s a way to meet the real people, not to just sit there and look at the tamed elk in Jasper...they can get off the beaten track...it kind of cements that connection between people. (personal interview, 2009).

Angie further relates: “It’s not so [Wwoofers are] just passing through, it’s kind of making those connections and seeing the importance of that in the world, I think [Wwoofing’s] really kind of a special tourism” (personal interview, 2009). Dorra does not believe Wwoofing is tourism and does not think her farm was a tourist attraction: “I’m always trying to keep away from tourism even though I’m a tourist officer...tourism is just for entertainment and Wwoofing is learning, communicating, interacting” (personal interview, 2009). Maureen describes Wwoofing as a “working holiday” (personal interview, 2009) especially because on her farm Wwoofers work for three days and have the rest of the week off. Jane does not think her farm is a tourist attraction and likes the fact that Wwoofers choose to do something like Wwoofing as opposed to a more traditional vacation: “if that’s [Wwoofing] what they choose to do instead of going under a tree and reading a book for a week or going to a beach or climbing a mountain, yeah I think that’s great” (personal interview, 2009). Similarly, Natalie related that she did not consider her farm a tourist attraction but noted that Wwoofing is part of a “broader tourism” (personal interview, 2009). Samantha commented that Wwoofing is tourism but she does not consider her farm a tourist attraction. While working in the garden
at Samantha’s farm we talked about how Haida Gwaii has made plans to allow cruise ships to port in town. Samantha is not happy about the premise. She noted that the scheme will burden local resources and it will be difficult for a small community like the city of Queen Charlotte to support the thousands of expected visitors.

Sharon’s restaurant displays art by local artisans and is part of a marketed art tour. Sharon believes that Wwoofing is a type of tourism in that it allows people and even families to see places that may otherwise be financially inaccessible. She commented that she would like to take her children and husband to WWOOF outside of the country (personal interview, 2009). In the past, Adam tried opening on Saturdays to accommodate customers who may have wanted more of a ‘tourist market weekend’ farm experience, but the plan did not work out. Adam let me know that most of his customers prefer to purchase meat in bulk and pick it up during a few specific dates throughout the year (personal interview, 2009). Conversely, Rob is interested in incorporating agro tourism on his farm with the caveat that the experiences be longer term and educational. He states: “I’m just not a big fan of like one time, shop, take a picture and go home, I don’t think that’s education” (personal interview, 2009).

Wwoofing maintains communities in that it constantly allows Wwoofer networks to form, grow and assist many areas. As women make up the majority of Wwoofers, women are contributing significant amounts to community sustenance. I wonder where some farms like Samantha’s would be without this help? It is important to note that generally hosts seem to be concerned with social change and forwarding a rethinking of social structures/values, including encouraging Wwoofing, which challenges traditional economic-labor relations. In
this way, Wwoofing may be a place to evaluate and redesign social norms. Moreover, the way in which hosts relate to tourism, reflects how Wwoofing is embedded within a paradigm of social change. It is a diverse place that can engender a critical reflection of various constructions/categories including that of traditional tourism, traveling motivations, issues of community, access, inequality as well as inclusivity. Connection and connecting to ‘real people’ evoke the sense that Wwoofing can endear/kindle relationships that challenge social mores as well as ways of relating to people/communities. Thus, WWOOF hosts and Wwoofers can become allies in re-evaluating and changing social structures related to environment and culture.

I asked hosts to reflect on what community means to them and in relation to their experiences with WWOOF. Maureen observed that Wwoofers usually stay with her for months at a time and that they then become part of the community. For example one of the Wwoofers at Maureen’s is now a “permanent” assistant. He is in charge of the barn, supervises and teaches the other Wwoofers what to do (personal interview, 2009). Rob believes that Wwoofers contribute to many communities because they experience different areas and farms: “[Wwoofers] see community and can go back to their own community and incorporate those things” (personal interview, 2009). Christine points out that Wwoofers who stay with her always get involved with helping whoever on the island needs assistance. As well, Christine organizes volleyball games, barbecues and get togethers for Wwoofers so they can feel more ‘at home’ and part of island life (personal interview, 2009). Sharon remarks that community is a place where she feels “safe,” “comfortable” and where people “care.” Her understanding of community means it is important to her to treat Wwoofers like
“family” (personal interview, 2009). Accordingly, Dorra relates: “[Wwoofing’s] extended family and this is how I always understood Wwoofing, that all the Wwoofers were my children and they still are” (personal interview, 2009). Dorra talks about Wwoofers being treated poorly and how this negatively effects community building. She discusses one situation:

[The] poor Wwoofers had to eat in a separate room, they were provided with cans and they could eat [by themselves]...they were not really one of [the family]...if you treat a Wwoofer like that of course [they] will never be part of your community. (personal interview, 2009).

Samantha talks about community as a group of people “co existing in a meaningful way” and the “synergy” that happens on her farm when Wwoofers stay for longer periods. She explains:

The farm and Wwoofers evolved together... Wwoofers are a part of my definition of a community... I just assume that they will come and I assume assumptions about the type of people that will be attracted to this place, so it’s a factor all the time in my mind. (personal interview, 2009).

Daniel and Angie value Wwoofing because it recreates the community space that used to exist in Crandon. Daniel points out: “Wwoofing kind of replaces some of the neighbors helping neighbors that used to happen” (personal interview, 2009). Angie relates to this: “Wwoofing allows your garden to be grown, it allows your trees to be harvested... Wwoofing people are willing to do that, they see that it is a viable experience” (personal interview, 2009). Daniel and Angie lament the loss of the type of community they grew up with. Daniel notes:

[My mom] belonged to the women’s institute and our father’s belonged to the farmers’ institutes, the farmers would all get together and buy our grain and our bailer twine and our fencing as a buying group and those meetings were kind of part of the social...you
used to look forward to going to the monthly meeting and now everyone’s gotten so busy it’s kind of fallen apart. (personal interview, 2009)

Likewise, Jane reflects that the community on Varn is struggling: “I would like to see this community functioning more together for the betterment of this beautiful island and its protection, but it’s not there at the moment” (personal interview, 2009).

WWOOF hosts for the most part are looking to redefine community arrangements and community norms. Most hosts express the idea that they want to change things in the world and their local worlds, including confronting various disparities. However, the specifics of this are not necessarily addressed or mapped out, leaving Wwoofing as a somewhat muted expression of these intentions. Wwoofing allows hosts to amend an economic system that perhaps does not allow them to sustain their work. In this way, Wwoofing presents a conundrum in that it allows women to meaningfully reshape spaces but it also supports the ghettoizing of women’s work in that hosts are often relying on Wwoofers to work for free and to provide the help-labor they need, indefinitely.

I asked hosts to reflect about caring as I wondered if this word applies to their connections to the land they care take, Wwoofers they take care of as well as the customers they try and provide for. Christine did not specifically connect the idea of caring to Wwoofing but she did talk about caring in relation to organic farming: “[Caring is] looking out for the welfare of your fellow human beings.... I do that here [through the farm]... I give away a lot of food if I have it and... I’m as organic as I possibly can be” (personal interview, 2009). Samantha notices that: “most of the people who choose to WWOOF are people who care about the earth and they want to explore another way of living” (personal interview, 2009). She spoke about “caring” for her land and the Wwoofers who stay with her:
[I] just want to make sure that we can help them [Wwoofers] in some way and keep people healthy and comfortable and happy, I hate it when people don’t like their experience here and it really affects me, so on some level I just want everybody to be happy. (personal interview, 2009)

Natalie discusses caring for Wwoofers by: “helping them have an enjoyable time and looking after them, they are contributing and they need to be treated with care, I’m not just going to throw a cold box of honey nut cheerios at them” (personal interview, 2009). Adam and Carrie related the topic to their role as hosts. Carrie explains how they connect to the guests that stay with them:

There is a relationship that develops, especially if it’s over a longer period of time but even short term because you get interested in what they’re doing and so I think in some ways that relationship is a part of that care economy. (personal interview, 2009).

Rob confided that hosts can loose money through the mistakes that Wwoofers make. He reflected about his role as a teacher in such circumstances: “When I hear care I think well, care and compassion and then I think well there’s so many times that I’m not compassionate towards Wwoofers” (personal interview, 2009). I also asked Rob if the idea of a “care economy” meant anything to him. He reveals:

I would have to say half the stuff I’ve done in my life has been entrepreneurship and the other half is the caring economy... The two don’t go together so what I’ve tried to do is bring caring economy into the business world and so what that means to me is relating to health and well being...and personal growth and meeting people’s goals and lifestyles and just personal development and education and all that sort of stuff, so that’s to me the caring economy and so I try to bring that into the business world but they don’t fit hand in hand so you often are going to loose some money so I get stressed out and then I’m not so caring anymore. (personal interview, 2009).

Following, Jane feels that being involved with WWOOF means being a caring and conscientious hostess by introducing Wwoofers to island life:

Help is always good but...the thing that I think about the most and I hope [Wwoofers] will get out of it is that [Yarn’s] a beautiful piece of land and it’s a wonderful community. It’s
a unique community and sharing that with young people and mentoring a little bit, that's why I really like to have people. (personal interview, 2009)

Jane also talks about caring for her farm:

I really feel that we're only here for a moment in time and I know there are a lot of people on this island that you know they buy a piece of land and it's my land and yes I happen to own this piece of land right now but I do think about what I'm doing and the impact it will have for somebody whose going to be here, after I'm gone. (personal interview, 2009)

Hosts occupy insecure spaces as they juggle the demands of running businesses in a difficult economy. They reflect on wanting to break from this system yet still admit to needing Wwoofer labor and in some cases relate being dependent on the work of Wwoofer women. The situation is stressful. Hosts and Wwoofers are performing caring work in sometimes inconsistent environments and within inequitable relationships. Yet the 'caring' paradigm sustains/strengthens these linkages and is a meaningful point of connection for hosts and Wwoofers. Caring for the earth/land seems to offer hosts and Wwoofers an opportunity to recreate an alternative type economic structure based on ideals of friendship/reciprocity. These notions appeal within the WWOOF network and perhaps caring is performed as a radical response to demanding economic pressures. Additionally, the consistency of caring efforts maybe demonstrates defiant -even if ironic and somewhat counterintuitive- attempts to question/undermine such forces.

I wanted to understand how hosts interpret, connect to and apply ideas of gender, femininity or masculinity to the work they do on their land or in terms of hosting. Dorra explained to me that she went through a major life change in the late 1990's when she fell in love with a woman. Subsequently, her marriage unfolded. The transition in her personal life
gave Dorra a different perspective of farming and gender relations. She feels it is important to pass this on to other women who plan to be farmers:

I was always interested in farm life and wanted to have my farm but my parents told me, no you can’t because you are a girl and that was the main reason I came to Canada and I had my own farm and did all the work that I wanted to do but even then I was still hiding behind a marriage to do all this. Now I would tell every girl you can do it alone or with a male or with a female partner, you can do it. (personal interview, 2009).

Adam talks about how the gender landscape of the agricultural industry has changed:

Women are playing an increasing role in agriculture [over the last few years]...are moving both into roles in government and administrative jobs... It’s totally acceptable now that a woman is going to be running the farm and be the lead person on the farm. (personal interview, 2009)

Rob made the point that he didn’t believe in segregating tasks on his farm: “Whether it’s a guy or girl, I just list the job and let’s do it” (personal interview, 2009). Furthermore, he relates how he connects to femininity and feminism through the ‘caring work’ he performs as an organic farmer. He is disappointed though, that a parallel men’s movement, that he can identify with does not exist:

There’s feminism but there’s been no real masculine, masculinism [sic] movement and I really feel that’s been challenging for me and a lot of guys that I know because there’s no way to explore what it means to be a guy in a larger context in a context which still nurtures the feminine side. (personal interview, 2009)

Relating femininity, Natalie talks about meeting “princesses”; women Wwoofers who are unprepared for farm work:

One gal that was a princess type...broke out of that mold in such a lovely way... She enjoyed so much trimming trees and digging and finding bugs and getting dirty... She discovered a whole new part of herself I think, and that was exciting. (personal interview, 2009)

Sharon let me know that she does segregate chores on her farm:
We wouldn’t say to you, [Agata] can you go pound in six fence posts, that would not be appropriate because it would hurt your body to be lifting those heavy things whereas on the other hand Rick or Michael who are big guys... Their bodies can handle that kind of work. (personal interview, 2009)

When I questioned her about the practice, Sharon offered some insight that she gleaned from her mother:

Once you do that [volunteer for a specific task like pounding in fence posts], it’s yours for the rest of your life... Once you spin the hammer guess what girl, you’re the carpenter too and you still clean the bathroom, do the laundry, cook the meals and the shopping. (personal interview, 2009)

Sharon also connects femininity to her sense of self as a farmer and business owner. She confesses: “I feel like an old work horse, I do not feel feminine...” (personal interview, 2009).

Christine notes that she worries about Wwoofers who take on too much:

Guys or women will do things beyond [physical] capability just to prove a point, for men it’s, ‘I have to be macho,’ for women, ‘I have to be equal to men’ and so they’ll do things that that they really shouldn’t be doing physically and they hurt themselves. (personal interview, 2009)

Jane considers the type of emotional and physical strength needed for farm work:

I don’t want to sound sexist or anything... I think there’s a lot of that feminine, the feminist and the feminine that comes out in this [organic farming] and [it] also really feels good to be out doing some buff work. You can’t be a pansy both in the work and in the emotions, animals get sick, animals die... (personal interview, 2009)

In turn, Samantha discusses femininity in relation to the “nurturing” work she performs on the farm and that many women assume in the community of Haida Gwaii. She talks about caring and gender dynamics within her family:

Frank [Samantha’s husband] won’t do dishes and then it’s a constant struggle and my eldest daughter hates it because she’s like ‘mom you shouldn’t work all day [on the farm] and then you have to cook the meals and do the dishes too’... (personal interview, 2009).
Wwoofing offers women an opportunity to witness very different lives and experience a range of gender identities. Hosts reflect a breadth of understandings relating to gender and femininity, suggesting that as discourses these notions have important value and are actively/dynamically negotiated/addressed/analyzed through farming as well as Wwoofing. Farm work provokes hosts to consider and observe how traditional/non traditional roles and rules fit/subvert the daily needs of the garden/farm land. Moreover, the hosts’ comments reveal the struggles and nuanced mediations of self/body/knowledge that they regularly deal with. In this way, although some hosts rely on certain stereotypes to value their positions or opinions of the environment and WWOOF space, other hosts reflect mixed feelings and/or reservations about their place as well as their support of gendered conventions.

Sustainabilities

If people had just the skills to feed themselves and their family it’s going to make a huge difference... Even in this community now because so many people are out of work you see a lot more people putting in gardens in town, people that have a little bit of acreage are getting pigs and chickens so they have something to eat and that’s one of the best things that I think you can share with people is the ability to feed themselves and their families. (Daniel, personal interview, 2009)

Agata: What do you think about when I say the word organic or organics?
Samantha: [laughter]...weeds! (personal interview, 2009)
I needed to find a market that provided something that wasn’t being provided here so I did that and since I’ve started my price of grain has tripled, my freight prices have tripled so it’s no longer feasible for me to have an organic product... It’s a real downer for me...[but] I have private customers and they [say] we don’t care... (Sharon, personal interview, 2009)

Figure 23, represents the intense complexities involved in understanding and practicing sustainability. I took the picture while on a WWOOF exchange in 2006. While Wwoofing, I was able to attend a local council meeting in the BC town where I was staying. The residents of the town were heatedly divided as to what to do about the dump, the picture
shows and whether they could afford to install a more ecologically sound site. Although most of the community members were aware of the environmental concerns stemming from the sludge and mess, they were not able to come to a consensus as to what to do or whether they could afford to do anything. I remember leaving the meeting in awe that a handful of people living in such a beautiful environment, obviously conscientious of the effects of pollution could condone something like this and were not able to figure out a solution.

Figure 23. Community Dumping Ground

Figure 23. (2006) While Wwoofing in a small town in BC, I went on a garbage run with a WWOOF host. I took this photograph of the local dumping ground.

After seeing this place I started questioning my understanding of Wwoofing as a radical/critical sanctuary space. I saw men and women who were deadlocked, could not find peace and I struggled to understand where my power was in the situation. I felt frustrated, angry and restless. As a Wwoofer all I could do was observe. Thus with sadness and trepidation I wondered what my role was. As a Wwoofer, could I really change or transform things? Was my questioning and witnessing of the circumstance worth anything? What about
the other women Wwoofers before, after me? At times, I am deeply ambivalent about Wwoofing and unsure if in fact WWOOF work is too trivial to change present disparities or social structures meaningfully. I also wonder if a lack of solidarity is the problem. As Wwoofers, is our positioning -laboring independently on private farms all over the country-, actually a reification of the caring labor women have performed through time? As Wwoofers, are we just participating in a reprivitization of work? After all, after Wwoofing, we go back home usually alone, without any definite-material record of our efforts.

During my WWOOF travels, sustainability was always an issue that was discussed but put into practice in different ways. I remember burning piles of garbage with a WWOOF host and wondering, considering the rurality of the farm where I was staying and the other options -digging holes and burying the load or paying to have it shipped somewhere else- if what we were doing was in fact environmentally sound. I remember living with a host where the family and Wwoofers ate the cheapest most processed supermarket foods to reduce costs and ‘save’ the organic products from the farm, for paying customers. I have also met hosts whose political views reflect disparate understandings of environment and ecology. Moreover, having spoken with numerous hosts that dealt with major back and body pain, various health issues like migraines, seasonal affective disorder and depression, I recognize that sustainability refers not only to ecological earth-care but also personal bodily issues. In this section I detail hosts’ definitions of sustainability and organic agriculture, discuss the hosts’ plans and hopes for the future, ideas of health and wellness as well as activism and protest.
I wanted hosts to define sustainability as this term is used to connote diverse ideas.

Natalie connects sustainability and Wwoofing:

Sustainability has a lot of levels of meaning but if you narrow it down to sustainable food resources, then can we keep on growing whatever it is we’re growing without wrecking everything in the process... Wwoofers allowed me to do that for a short time... They allowed me to have a sustainable crop... I could keep it growing, I had a product to market, with their help I could make it work. (personal interview, 2009)

Angie discusses sustainability as a rancher and WWOOF host:

Farming allows people to see that you have to get up and you have to do this and you have to do that... It’s so interdependent, if you don’t feed the cows the cows starve, it’s pretty immediate...that is so important for Wwoofing... We’re able to show people a little bit about, although we’re not like a largely successful farm because of the challenges we have here but for people to realize what it takes to get something on the table. (personal interview, 2009)

Samantha refers to sustainability as safekeeping the land for future generations: “not just my kids but my kids kids kids kids” (personal interview, 2009). Maureen comments that sustainability is a matter of “life and death”: “It’s significant because if we don’t do everything sustainably from logging to gardening it just won’t be there for us” (personal interview, 2009). Jane discusses her personal mission to be as sustainable as possible:

I used to bring over [to the island] a number of things from the city but I now try to eat what I grow and what I can’t get here, I buy at the local stores as much as possible... You know all those lovely exotic fruits and vegetables that you’re tempted with in the stores, [I] just think well gosh you know an apple it’s just as good sometimes. (personal interview, 2010)

Although Jane is not certified organic, she is strict in terms of how she runs her farm: “I will not have any chemicals put into the soil of any sort, I’m very careful...” (personal interview, 2010). Adam comments on the criticism that larger farms and traditional farming practices receive:

There’s things that people will brand as industrial agriculture that actually are probably sustainable but there’s other things in industrial agriculture that are not sustainable,
so it’s not industrial agriculture versus organics it’s just you’ve got to look at each individual operation and say, are you depleting the resources? (personal interview, 2009)

Christine speaks about sustainability and farming on Haida Gwaii:

You cannot make a living [farming on the island] you just can’t. The hundred mile diet means that what you would eat here would be fish, seaweed, what you could plant, but you can’t grow wheat so you won’t get flour... Bees don’t really produce honey here and on and on and on. If you don’t trade off island your diet would change drastically. (personal interview, 2009)

The discussion of sustainability demonstrates the analytical role that hosts take on in terms of these issues as well as the hosts’ expectations of changing social norms with regards to the environment. The hosts relate a personal and social relationship with sustainability, discussing their efforts to mentor Wwoofers, help the earth and protect their families through their actions and educating others. It is interesting that women Wwoofers are a fulcrum in this space mediating sustainability issues on the frontline, alongside WWOOF hosts. I believe that within Wwoofing, sustainability presents a feminized dialogue. Its meanings and definitions, specifics and particularities are made by women with small deeds, most of which are not formally recognized or accounted for. And yet WWOOF is also a place within which women and hosts have power/authority to design sustainability, physically as well as symbolically. Wwoofers and hosts are able to foster new dialogue/actions/consciousness related to sustainability/earth care. I have talked to countless Wwoofers and hosts who related to me how “safe” and at “peace” they feel while out in the country. I think this sense of ease/security arises because of the rurality/isolation and distance that Wwoofing accords from the social-city. When women and hosts talk about how comfortable/comforthed they feel while in the garden or on their farms, I believe they are also signifying a feeling of freedom being outside a/the norm/on the edge-margin-fringe of convention and the freeing sense of being
able to work the earth and contribute to sustainability-community, specifically/individually but in collaborative friendship/relationships.

I asked hosts to talk about and define agriculture and organic agriculture. Christine is weary about the repercussions of traditional agribusiness:

More people are alive as a result of chemical agriculture, more people have food but what about the quality of the food, more people having more people on the planet is not necessarily a good thing, you can’t even support them [and] eventually you won’t be able to. (personal interview, 2009)

Natalie discusses how difficult it is for her to buy organics because she is on a fixed income. She tries to purchase local food when she is able and it is available but she also admits being skeptical about quality control in terms of organic products:

It would be nice if everybody meant what they said, when they said they were organic. It’s pretty hard to really trust that and so then it becomes an ideal that hopefully most people will strive for. Maybe they don’t make it 100% but at least they would strive for it. (personal interview, 2009)

Adam questions whether organic agriculture can meet the demands of a growing population:

“Everybody wants more organic but at the same time guys working their two acres in their backyard are not going to supply the world with food” (personal interview, 2009). He also comments on the commodification and idealization of organic products:

I think it’s been confusing for the consumer because they’ve been buying organic, they think it’s from some little guy out in Langley growing his lettuce in his backyard and then they find out that it was grown outside of Los Angeles and it was shipped up here in a truck. (personal interview, 2009)

The hosts’ comments regarding organic agriculture suggest that there is pressure on farmers to adapt to more efficient production methods but also reform and tune into organic-sustainability initiatives. These forces posit Wwoofing at a center with competing social standards. The focus on organics and health carries heavy ideological significance with
regards to bodies, gender and women. Thus it is interesting that so many women are embedded within Wwoofing networks. In this sense, I also wonder how long the Wwoofing space can accommodate the respite and social analysis that women and hosts seek given an agricultural-economic system that is changing so dramatically.

I asked hosts to reflect about the future and relate their hopes and dreams for their land or the Wwoofers that stay with them. Daniel and Angie recounted that the isolation and economic uncertainty of keeping the ranch makes it difficult for them to secure a future for their daughters. After selling the farm they hope to travel, connect with organic initiatives around the world and Daniel wants to start a green construction-development business. Dorra told me that she sold her previous farm because her children were not interested to take it over. At the time of the interview she had purchased new farm land and was planning to move there with her youngest son. Dorra’s main hope for the future is “to live a healthy peaceful life” (personal interview, 2009). After writing a ten year business projection for his farm, Rob revealed that he intends to rely on the land as his main source of income in the near future. He also wants to expand the farm with other organizations to accommodate different projects: “I want the farm to develop into a place that people feel comfortable about coming and experimenting and trying things” (personal interview, 2009). Sharon talks about sustainability in terms of finding stability in her life:

My business will consume me if I let it, so I'm not going to let it. I'm trying to find a balance between my business that I run and my family and my responsibilities to my family and my responsibilities to myself... I'm not as healthy as I could be. I need to lose some weight. I need to take time for myself and I also want to get my gardens back [from fallow]. (personal interview, 2009)
Maureen hopes to develop another property that she owns on the island into a garden while Samantha expects to decrease the size of her garden space but increase a greenhouse on her property and further expand the dairy. She also mentions wanting to see more support of organic agriculture within society and on the islands of Haida Gwaii:

We've sorta proven over sixteen years that growing vegetables just doesn't make money. I won't give it up because I think we need local food and I hope that our day will come, when local food becomes so important that they won't let us stop because they'll need the food... I'm hoping that...local farming efforts will be supported in a way that actually helps us keep producing food, so that we can do it and actually earn a fair wage at the same time. (personal interview, 2009)

In terms of Wwoofers, Christine hopes that they continue to “learn something” (personal interview, 2009). Natalie let me know that she wants all her visitors to continue to “enjoy” the farm work and the community she lives in (personal interview, 2009). Adam talked about finding a permanent apprentice to work on the farm full time and hopes to continue with WWOOF as a host (personal interview, 2009). Jane reflected about trying to encourage younger people to start farming and hopes to further develop the “covenant” for her farm land. When I asked Jane if her children wanted to take over the farm, she replied: “It’s not something that they would ever aspire to take over, nor is it something that we [her and her husband] would ever in our wildest dreams think of in our will leaving to them, because that’s a big burden on families” (personal interview, 2010).

After Jane’s comments I am left wondering who will be able/is able to do the world’s agricultural work? The idea of Wwoofing seems ideal in some ways. Volunteers, helping to feed the world. Wwoofing is popular but can it address the details of social struggles like food security and poverty? These issues are analyzed and addressed in the Wwoofing space in a myriad of ways. Nonetheless, I am critical as to whether Wwoofing can accommodate
the sustained attention/planning/organization that social structures need in order to be changed. What is hopeful is the focus on food and social issues by WWOOF hosts. This emphasis within Wwoofing is part of a broader education, that I think does at the very least nurture the beginnings of a critical discourse with regards to social change/food access.

WWOOF hosts together with Wwoofers, take part in a collective dreaming/meaning making and thus create a temporary space in which socio-cultural questioning/inquisitiveness is encouraged and thus can continue to unfold; hopefully into definite plans and concrete proposals.

I asked hosts about their ideas of health-wellness in order to broaden my own knowledge and better understand how these apply to farmers. Daniel talked about how often his back “gave out” while doing farm work. He notes: “If you don’t have your health you don’t have anything” (personal interview, 2009). He went on to say that his farm provides a restful space for Wwoofers and friends, who seek out the ranch to get away from city life:

It generally seems to really improve people’s health, being in a lower stress, healthier food environment... All the Wwoofers mention to us how lucky we are to have a place like this and to be in a community like this. (personal interview, 2009)

For Samantha, health and wellness are very intimate concepts: “[health and wellness are] physical because I know if I'm not feeling well physically I have a really hard time coping and we have a real physical lifestyle here” (personal interview, 2009). Samantha’s ideas of health and wellness are influenced by her former work as a nurse. She points out that: “the whole [global health] system really needs a serious overhaul and I think that’s just going to start from the grassroots” (personal interview, 2009). She also notes that Wwoofers sometimes influence her notions of health and wellness. For example, it was a former
Wwoofer who educated Samantha about the health benefits of raw milk. Moreover, Samantha sees how physically fit she is compared to some of the Wwoofers who stay at her farm. During the interview she laughed while stating that she could “work circles around” Wwoofers that were half her age (personal interview, 2009). Angie also has a background in nursing and commented how working in the medical system inspired her to seek health and wellness in non traditional ways. Both Daniel and Angie noted that the Wwoofers who come to the ranch, do not have very strict health ‘agendas’: “The Wwoofing people we’ve had are just really more the average person, they just want an experience, they’re traveling and they’re not actually like granola green [or] vegans” (personal interview, 2009). Daniel laughed and explained further: “We had this one guy that lived on meat, cigarettes and coffee...” (personal interview, 2009).

Sharon relates trying to provide for Wwoofers so that everyone who stays with her is “healthy” but she also mentions that some of the Wwoofers who have lived with the family did not have healthy habits: “The couple that we had from Germany and France...they basically lived on sugar and coffee” (personal interview, 2009). Jane reveals that she was initially drawn to the Gulf Islands as an escape from urban life: “I’ve always felt if I’m in the city for too long there’s something very claustrophobic about it, I know there’s something in me that just needs to be out in a more rural environment” (personal interview, 2009). Rob states: “Without health and wellbeing, it’s disrespect for the gift of life and that’s why I think food is such a big part of that” (personal interview, 2009). Christine defines health and wellness as making sure everyone, including the animals on the farm are taken care of. She also discusses the terms as personally important, defining these as: “what you eat and the
exercise you get breathing and fresh air and not breathing polluted air and a state of mind and
being content and happy” (personal interview, 2009). With a humorous tone, Maureen notes
that health and wellness are a “number one priority” for her even though she may not look
like “the picture of health” (personal interview, 2009).

I was curious if WWOOF hosts consider themselves activists or if they measure what
they do as protest. Angie and Daniel let me know that they are involved in trying to protect
their farm land and the surrounding areas from upcoming development projects. The
experience has tired both of them. Daniel states: “Activism is heartbreaking...there’s so many
pressures, there’s so many political things you find out last minute...” (personal interview,
2009). Thus for Angie, Wwoofing is an opportunity to go about activism differently:

You can definitely plant seeds in people’s minds in the Wwoofers’ minds as they’re
traveling and say look we’re doing this this way because and this is why we don’t agree with
the conventional way it’s done... We [also] talk about nutritional value of food and people
come and say oh yeah I didn’t really think of it in that way. (personal interview, 2009)

Rob also related trying to engage with formal activism and protest movements while in
university. He stopped and let me know why: “I’m not going to get anywhere by telling
someone else how to live their life. I want to live my life. I want to support the people that
want to live similar lives, I want to educate them” (personal interview, 2009). For Rob,
Wwoofing is a practical way to express his opinions:

[Wwoofing is] living by doing...it’s people being who they want to be, not asking
someone else to let them be who they want to be and it’s not telling someone else to be like I
want you to be. (personal interview, 2009)

Sharon does not see herself as an activist or protester but as a “pacifist” and “caregiver”
(personal interview, 2009). She describes her role:
I guess I did at one point [protest, become an activist] and I found the process futile and kind of gave up on it and so now I do what makes me feel happy and what I want to do and if that means helping my neighbor figure out how to install windows because she’s never done that then that’s what I’ll do or go help my friend get her house ready because she’s got a baby coming or shop for her at the thrift store because she has no clothes or you know help a neighbor set up their business, because they’re opening in two weeks... (personal interview, 2009)

Maureen does not consider herself an activist or protester either. I asked her if she is an advocate and she replied by stating that she is “just starting” (personal interview, 2009). After our interview at the farmers’ market Maureen showed me around the vendor booths and told me how new by law regulations -like the fact that every product would soon have to be individually packaged and cooled- would restrict many producers from being able to sell their goods because of the expense. Samantha agrees that farming is activism:

[The] local food movement is full of people like me, that used to be kind of lefty activists in different realms, more political realms and then [we] looked at food and decided that food is really a place to be political. I definitely think that growing local food is a political act. (personal interview, 2009)

She also relates “mixed feelings” about protest, stating that farming is simply “choosing a better way” (personal interview, 2009). Similarly, Christine does not view what she is doing as protest: “It’s a choice. It’s how I prefer to live and you know if the neighbor wants to put fertilizer in her garden, that you know is fine. I put fertilizer in my flowers but I don’t eat them” (personal interview, 2009). She expands on her ideas of activism and protest:

I think it’s very much think globally act locally and marching in the street to protest what’s going on in Iran might make you feel good but I don’t think it makes any difference and so you’d be better off to write a letter to somebody in Iran, than to march in the street with a placard. Activism is actually changing people and changing lives and doing something but if your activism is just making signs and protesting and writing letters to the government and holding rallies, I think it’s kind of a waste of time. (personal interview, 2009)
Natalie does not view the farm work she did as activism or protest but as “global literacy.” She let me know: “I don’t see anything to protest. I see [being a WWOOF host and Wwoofing] as being a positive thing for everybody” (personal interview, 2009). Adam related that he does not see himself as an activist. Instead, he views farming as producing food that “meet[s] a very small segment of the market” (personal interview, 2009). Jane discussed that she is a “passive activist.” When I pointed out the “Save the Arts in BC” button on her sweater as we were talking, Jane expanded on the role of activism in her life saying she supports a variety of causes but only “in the most positive of ways” (personal interview, 2009).

Caring for their own health, the health of the land, Wwoofers and guests is an important goal for WWOOF hosts. In this way, the hosts indicate an awareness of the WWOOF space as a sanctuary-respite place, away from urban centers where one can regain a relationship with self and others. Hosts also talk about trying to mentor alternatives to mainstream social values yet shy away from describing themselves as activists or protestors. Instead they focus on micro actions including forming deep bonds with others and Wwoofers, as well as changing personal lifestyles and behaviors. Although hosts express their commitments in terms of social change throughout their commentaries on different subjects, they don’t necessarily define these engagements or discuss their activities in traditional ways e.g. as activism or protest. Perhaps this is reflective of the fact that Wwoofing itself is a network-movement that is not applicable to being defined in traditional ways. I believe that the hosts’ discussions reveal that WWOOF is an ambiguous margin-fringe, a hubbub that
complements and at times circumvents social-cultural models as it redefines domestic/private structures and interactions.

Wwoofers work in private homes and WWOOF is a movement that functions within these private-privileged exchanges. I recognize that for some WWOOF hosts, especially women hosts, WWOOF may be a complicated necessity and may not necessarily be defined as a choice. The women rely on the help that Wwoofing provides for them and their families. So although I feel a need to acknowledge the social scripts, gender codes and socio-cultural patterns including patriarchal roles/rules that inform many of the experiences I bring into this thesis, I also hesitate to further outline/analyze these as I fear delineating the participants into abstracted representations of ‘kind-hearted’ or ‘disparate/desperate.’ I can’t say that Sharon or Samantha are ‘caring women farming in a man’s world’ although I accept the heartbreaking/confusing dynamism that sometimes winds through their lives. My memories of Wwoofing and commitments to phenomenology will not allow me to anatomize the participants’ lives further. During the auto/ethnography I saw many things. I remember looking at Samantha’s husband watching her laboring in the kitchen day after day and I think of the numerous times I washed/cleaned after families and children. I recollect all the emotional work that I, other women Wwoofers and WWOOF hosts invest into maintaining farms and rural livelihoods. Yet even if I am tempted to infer causality and say: I saw/did this and it led me to think of x, y or z, I hesitate as I wonder if any of the women would agree. I am reflective that my conclusions are not just standard analytical practice but reflect the coding of a life/story. I am skeptical about writing the participants’ lives as gendered case studies.
The processes of discovering/coding/speaking/doing are unbelievably conflicting. If I went into the field with gender inequality as my foundation, after hearing: ‘What is gender studies? Why are you studying that? Are you serious? I don’t know what that is? I don’t get it?’ countless times, I don’t feel able to impose my feminisms unto the stories I have profiled and yet I can’t help but be drawn to the feminized narratives that WWOOF has showcased to me. The help that I provided to the hosts and the long conversations I had with all of the women have brought me and the thesis to an interesting culmination. I see a disjunct between my scholarly commitments which demand further elucidation/interpretation/explanation, stories that resist that type of typical resolution and my own often contradictory/antithetical/vacillating, analysis-emotions. It is possible I asked too many questions. On the other hand, I think it is precisely all the miscellaneous ruminations and convoluted scenarios profiled, that illustrate several beautifully convoluted truths that I offer to the chapter and this work in conclusion: loving-caring labor maintains the WWOOF network, this labor supports/builds diverse types of families and is empowered by women who occupy places simultaneously at the core and periphery of various communities.
Conclusions

The weary one, orphan
of the masses, the self,
the crushed one, the one made of concrete,
the one without a country in crowded restaurants,
he who wanted to go far away, always farther away,
didn't know what to do there, whether he wanted
or didn't want to leave or remain on the island,
the hesitant one, the hybrid, entangled in himself,
had no place here: the straight-angled stone,
the infinite look of the granite prism,
the circular solitude all banished him:
he went somewhere else with his sorrows,
he returned to the agony of his native
land,
to his indecisions, of winter and summer.
(Neruda, 1973, p. 49)

While Wwoofing I found myself grappling with unexpected emotions and situations. As a Wwoofer, I observed a wide array of gender expressions and WWOOF also precipitated me to develop my femininity, interpret my feminism/s and constitute my masculine 'cowboy' self into being. In this sense, WWOOF gave me the space to define myself as a woman-citizen. Still, as a Wwoofer and researcher/auto/ethnographer, I struggled. Some days I felt like a hobo and drifter; dirt stained, coarse, my work/life/skills valueless in a world full of land owning WWOOF hosts and 'properly' employed workers. My somewhat dubious status/non-title and rural existence gave me the experience of subsisting on the edge of economic and social life. Although I was affiliated with a university and privileged, I was also a volunteer-student therefore poor and indebted; reliant on the gracious propriety of my participant 'WWOOF parents.' In this way, I had little worth with which to ground myself within the capitalist system. On the other hand as a Wwoofer-researcher I was building social
capital for the information-knowledge economy and thus framing my self/adapting my body
to generate goods and services for/in the future. In this way, Wwoofing did give me the place
to mediate, means and access. I cherish my Wwoofing experiences. As a Wwoofer, I realized
that I want to be a farmer. Thus, despite my ambivalence regarding Wwoofing, I recognize
-like many of the women participants narrate- that my WWOOF’s are the beginning to
achieving a dream I had into a plan that I now cast. Hence, this conclusion is also a
commencement-initiation.

Many of the women Wwoofers I met experienced a similarly diverse array of feelings
and adventures while Wwoofing. Through Wwoofing the women participants are able to
critically assess their socio-cultural position and emplace themselves in the world. Marie
points out how Wwoofing transforms her notions of work and friendship: “I wasn’t prepared
for the way that the community in Brayburn embraced me...” (personal interview, 2010).
Conversely, Sam’s words in chapter three, capture the uncertainty that also defines
Wwoofing: “...sometimes being in a house and living familyly [sic] with people doesn’t
necessarily mean you are family” (personal interview, 2009). Sam’s insights relate
interpersonal, household and family dynamics while Marie’s account speaks to perspectives
of self, community and relationships. In turn, Yvonne offers a profound understanding of her
own power, Deena conveys a new awareness of food, privilege as well as her own self-image, while Mariko came away from Wwoofing feeling very connected to her body, ‘health-
wellness,’ Canada and Canadians. Leila’s travels influenced her move from Ontario to BC,
and her decision to pursue organic farming as a full time occupation. Furthermore, Chloe
literally broke ground on her farm soon after finishing Wwoofing. Furthermore, following
Wwoofing, Tess became an advocate for new agriculture models by introducing animal therapy programs on her farm and to her community.

Comparably, the WWOOF hosts describe a spectrum of contexts via their roles as farmer-caretakers, mentors and sometime ‘surrogate’ parents to the Wwoofers that come and stay with them. In general though, all the hosts talk positively about Wwoofing’s influence in their lives. Adam and Carrie look forward to hosting more Wwoofers, relating in chapter four that: “Having people in our home enriches us as much as you know it’s a benefit to them” (personal interview, 2009). Rob feels “healthier” with Wwoofers and Maureen values Wwoofing for the help and companionship that Wwoofers bring to her home. Natalie reflects that she is fortunate to have had so much help in running her business while Samantha also considers how her farm has grown “with” the hundreds of Wwoofers that have come and helped her. Christine and Tom admit that Wwoofers sustain the land that they themselves are increasingly too “old” to maintain while Jane, Daniel and Angie are proud that they are able to teach people organic farming and convey the tranquility of rural living. Finally, Sharon repeatedly voices how important it is for her that she is able to show Wwoofers the beauty of Haida Gwaii.

It takes a lot of courage for a host to allow a stranger into their home and onto their land. Vice versa, it takes a lot of boldness/assertiveness for a woman Wwoofer to go and live -sometimes thousands of miles from ‘home’- in a stranger’s house with no legal contract and no real pay. Angie and Daniel’s comments as related in chapter four, fit well here. They note: “Wwoofing’s a way to meet the real people, not to just sit there and look at the tamed elk in Jasper” (personal interview, 2009). Yet ‘realness’ encompasses qualities and characteristics
that can be difficult to control-negotiate and live with, so I admit like many of the stories I feature in the thesis relate; not all my WWOOF exchanges have gone well. Nevertheless, like Samantha describes in chapter four, I too instinctively 'assume' and 'trust' that Wwoofing will be there to continue to help me learn/witness how community/self/sustainability are practiced in real time with all their inconsistencies, deviations, ‘troubling’ femininities, zany characters and disappointing frustrations.

Footprints

While the researcher may feel deeply embedded in and a part of the research setting, the fact is this place and people were operating without the researcher before she or he arrived and will continue to function without the researcher. (Pillow & Mayo, 2007, p. 167)

Why is it important to appreciate narratives and survey women’s stories? What is the point of asking farmers to describe community or femininity? Wwoofers and WWOOF hosts relate many ideas that impact agricultural and gender landscapes. While out in the garden weeding, WWOOF host Samantha let me know how concerned she was that the WWOOF book was featuring less organic farms and more hosts advertising their hobby gardens and small businesses. On the other hand, host Sharon told me on several occasions that she hoped her new B&B would sustain her restaurant and family. For Sharon, the new business is supposed to help allow her to continue providing organic products and a healthy option for island residents, at her restaurant. Samantha also related to struggling while trying to maintain her farm on the island. The issues that Samantha and Sharon talk about present significant dilemmas not only for the future of Wwoofing but also for the future of rural areas and small farms as they try to stay commercially viable and relevant. It would be useful for researchers to follow up with farmers and business owners like Samantha and Sharon with
longitudinal studies that could assess the pressures/strains/successes in terms of administering small, organic-health oriented business ventures within island/rural communities.

Stories can provide intimate pictures of systemic issues. Rob’s insights in chapter four regarding caring, farming and gender with regards to not being able to find a “masculine movement,” Sharon’s revealing words about finding respite with women Wwoofers and Natalie’s discussion of feeling empowered and empowering women, are all glimpses into topics that need further elaboration and study. How do women and men figure gender on the farm? How do these negotiations inform the many different kinds of relationships that occur in rural settings including women’s friendships and women to women mentorship? How does this then shape the rural and urban landscape? I remember that when I came to Angie and Daniel’s ranch I was embarrassed to admit that I didn’t know how to hold, use a drill or even hammer a nail. I was frustrated, constantly nervous and refused to do certain things like using the power saw, stating half-jokingly to my hosts and their children, “I don’t want to hurt anyone” several times through any given day. Daniel remained patient, always willing to teach and give me the opportunity to try different things. Still, I felt like an old stereotype: another girl who can’t/won’t do what the boys do. The other Wwoofer who stayed at the farm with me stated that he was comfortable with all the tasks assigned to both of us. Indeed, the way that he held the tools, spoke and held himself was in stark contrast to my approach and bearing. I know of the social structures that positioned us so differently and my being there is an affirmation that these do not affix anyone to any space but at the same time in the same place, I could not summon my brain or my body to say yes to things I said no to. Although
the women Wwoofers I spoke to and met did not relate similar anxieties, I wonder if my fearfulness is someone else’s decision not to email a farm or host? I question if my nervous joking is some other person’s affirmation that a WWOOF posting or WWOOF host’s write up doesn’t look very ‘interesting’ or like it would be a ‘good fit’? I am curious how many parallel, subtle, socio-emotional cues we can dialogue about or uncover as researchers or from participants? It would be useful to design an interview guide that would be able to factor in how identity makeup/conceptions of self connect with gender and task assignment within labor intensive environments.

If the majority of Canadian Wwoofers are women (WWOOF Coordinator, personal interview, 2009), what kind of an economic impact do their labor hours have for BC’s and Canada’s rural industries? It would be worthwhile for researchers to map the value and meaning of this with a quantitative survey and qualitative assessment. This study commented briefly on women WWOOF hosts’ various roles/jobs/responsibilities on their land and within their communities. Comparably then, it would be interesting to follow up with women hosts like Samantha, Sharon, Jane and Maureen with a mixed methods approach that could quantify and elaborate their diverse work loads thoroughly.

Samantha spoke to me about the value of establishing “local currencies” (personal interview, 2009) and other hosts as well as Wwoofers talked about finding more opportunities for farm-agricultural producers and interested laborers as well as novice farmers to network and establish different ideas like freight subsidies, environmental advocacy, regional Wwoofer-WWOOF host groups, local sustainability coordinator positions, care farm partnerships with interested agencies, land-buy collectives etc. I recommend that future
research be done within a participatory-action framework\textsuperscript{26} - working one on one with individuals or a small number of participants - to aid with setting up practical collaborations of this nature. It would also be significant to initiate longitudinal studies that follow for example, laborer-apprentices like Wwoofers interested in building farms or organic-sustainability based rural businesses, over longer periods, to investigate issues of sustainability and food security from micro-local vantage points.

\textbf{Land Matters}

Women produce the majority of the world’s food, but they share limited control over, ownership of, and access to land. Although obviously necessary for production, land also provides collateral for access to credit and other forms of capital. Thus, women’s exclusion from landownership limits their access to credit, capital, and other resources. (Whatmore cited in Sachs, 1996, p. 45)

From roaming hills and feeling free I learned in the world of the city that to be safe as a girl, and especially as a black girl, it was best to be still, enclosed, confined…. Gone was my confidence that I belonged in the world. Gone was the spirit of wildness rising in my soul each day like the wind, like breath, like being. (hooks, 2009, p. 218)

Growing up in an immigrant family, I learned quickly that it was important to ‘give back.’ Yet I was hesitant when I started Wwoofing. I am not a hippy, into ‘communal living,’ and having been born and partly raised in a formerly communist country, environmental, Marxist-anarchist, eco maternal utopias don’t appeal to me. Volunteering has always been very important to me. I have been a ‘Big Sister,’ I have served the homeless in downtown, east side Vancouver shelters and I am a proud Girl Guide leader. Thus, with Wwoofing, I am able to demonstrate volunteerism, model ‘good’ citizenship, see some of the world and learn to farm for no money. Yet like most of the women Wwoofers I have met, I wonder where my

\textsuperscript{26} Please see \textit{Handbook of action research: Participative inquiry and practice} (2001) for examples and exemplars.
WWOOF work is going. Over the years I have heard many women Wwoofers question how the WWOOF work they are doing could help them secure farms or land of their own. As Wwoofers, we all express relief that we can learn agriculture informally but we are also always aware that life outside of Wwoofing does not readily or easily support a clear transition into farming. Still, most days Wwoofing in Hawaii and like my Wwoofer roommate, I was grateful to put in my WWOOF hours and felt obliged to my host family. I never articulated that thankfulness. Degroot (2006) does. She points out: “I am a feminist and a farmer... I am choosing to earn low wages and spend my summers doing physical labor. For most women, this isn’t a choice” (pp. 191-192).

Wwoofers work in private but offer an important public service. In some ways the incessant care giving that we do, reaffirms our place as women. Yet as conscientious, ‘eco-caring’ citizens our volunteering is labelled as ‘fun,’ ‘hip’ and in an increasingly competitive employment market, very necessary. Green rhetoric often relies on advocating consumer choice as well as affirming the individual and family as the primary site of ‘green duty/ies.’ Corresponding, sustainability ideologies also usually continue to re-privatize earth caring. Within these dialogues Wwoofing can be branded as a wonderful-opportunity. Frank discussions regarding the specifics of who will manage future food security are left to a/the community. This community is double speak evoking all-nobody and laissez fair, neo-liberal political economy (MacGregor, 2006, pp. 97-112; Sandilands, 1999, pp. 46-47; Luxton, 2007, pp. 19-23). In this context, Wwoofing’s popularity amongst women and care ethic need to be looked at closely.
I recommend that policy makers and researchers work together, to understand youth who are interested in farming as a career, in order to then provide support as well as resource-initiatives that could be implemented to connect youth and women with land/farm grants or to women farmer-mentors that could ‘grandfather-mother’ the new generation into the industry. I would also recommend that interested women move to organize in tandem resources/networks like for example, a web portal similar to WWOOF Canada’s, that can offer links to farmer mentors, appropriate programming initiatives and opportunities for creating resources i.e. workshops, working groups etc.

Regulations

Sumner (2003) offers a consideration: “If the only way to change [emphasis added] is to set an example, including an economic example, then we are an alternative. If the organic farm survives, then [emphasis added] it’s a model for the future” (p. 148). I wonder who will take up the work to sustain organic farming into the 21st century? Wwoofing provides for our communities and relies on hours of non monetarily defined/unrecognized activities. Should it continue to be understood as ecotourism? Will it become a part of the official green agenda as outlined by city planners and politicians? Is it just a new form of traveling or exotic backpacking? I have started these conversations within the thesis. I suggest further research that elaborates volunteerism and the organic industry’s viability in terms of labor power/apprenticeship development would be useful. Moreover, although I hesitate to recommend that Wwoofing be officially regulated by a government body, I will argue that more formal rules be put in place to ensure minimum accommodation standards. I have met many women Wwoofers since 2006, that were often disappointed that the host
write up that initially attracted them to a particular WWOOF did not measure up to the reality of the living situation they encountered when they arrived.

Regulation might require that Wwoofers become more formally involved in the WWOOF organization. For example, a panel or committee could be started through and with WWOOF Canada whereby Wwoofers and WWOOF hosts would set up an overseeing/quality control board or checking procedure where hosts would need to “check in” with a specially designated Wwoofer checker to verify that their accommodations meet a/the requirement. I recognize that hosts have different financial abilities and setting standards can be problematic. Punishing or deterring these hosts from WWOOF, is in my mind detrimental to WWOOF’s aims. Thus, I recommend that more awareness and support be provided for hosts and Wwoofers so that the vetting process can be fair and remain accessible. At the very least I encourage Wwoofers to express their experiences with hosts on the WWOOF Canada site. Although web boards designed for this very purpose do exist I have found that more information is passed via word of mouth versus online postings. The word of mouth method functions, as I have been “warned” and have related certain challenging experiences to other Wwoofers and hosts, but this is not enough to address accommodation/working issues meaningfully.

Social Change

“...[F]eminists too often believe that no one has ever experienced the kind of society that empowered women...” (Allen, 2004, p. 571)

Progress constantly figures into our indicators of everything as researchers. It frequently gauges originality and acts as a measure of uniqueness. Conversely, farms are
usually decrepit places and organic farming is not a new practice. At times, Wwoofing seems to typify traditional, gendered-caring relationships. Women are putting in the work, do not hold many titles and relate financial and emotional duress. Nonetheless, as a discourse-place WWOOF accords perspective in terms of how gender and sustainability alter and operate. My discussions with hosts Natalie, Christine, Samantha, Rob, Daniel, Adam, Maureen, Angie, Sharon, Dorra and Jane specify how women are empowering themselves, other women and how gender, agriculture and community interact. My conversations with Sam, Leila, Marie, Tess, Yvonne, Mariko, Deena and Chloe establish how diversely empowerment is imagined, defined and experienced. In light of the varied moments the participants recount, I am left questioning whether ‘change’ can ever embody the work that is happening? Similarly, is ‘empowerment’ an adequate descriptor for the myriad of situation-relationships that Wwoofing enables? It would be useful for researchers to further elaborate these two terms with women. As well, it would be interesting to explore empowerment as well as masculinities with male farmers and male WWOOF hosts.

I took the picture shown in Figure 24, in 2007 during a WWOOF exchange in Hawaii. I was living with a host that was demanding and the farm work was grueling. Yet as I mentioned earlier, my time Wwoofing on the island was inspiring. I gained muscles I didn’t know I had, esteem like I had never felt and aptitudes that continue to be intrinsic to my professional and personal development. When I harvested the carrots in the photo, I thought they were annoying and funny; small, unruly, hard to eat, insignificant in many ways but appealing and irresistible nonetheless. I decided to include them here because they present a final visual metaphor of the argument I am trying to forward but still lack the language to
phrase. Questioning the need to represent nature or gender Sandilands (1999) writes that instead it is ‘wild’ moments, “lack of conclusiveness” (p. 208) and uncertainty that sustain democracy and civic society (pp.182-186, 208-209). In this way, WWOOF exists as a democratic exercise. Within all the inconsistent, eclectic and conflicted relationships many WWOOF hosts and Wwoofers report as well as illustrate insightful, loving, transformative moments. WWOOF showcases diverse bonds, kinship, connections, ways of helping, being and doing things. It allows people to share and generate unique stories. It is a space in which story telling is valued intrinsically. As a place then, Wwoofing allows rest and inquiry but also fosters resistance while simultaneously providing for unforeseen, surprising and hence potentially radically egalitarian implications.  

Figure 24. Biodynamic Carrots

Figure 24. (2007) I picked these while Wwoofing in Hawaii.

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27 Sections of the conclusion were written as part of a paper presentation for the 2009 PCA/ACA conference in New Orleans, LA. Please refer to the reference list for the full title of the paper.


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WWOOF.


Appendix A:
WWOOF Host Information Sheet, Consent Forms & Interview Guide

WWOOF farm owner/WWOOF host Participant Information Sheet

Stud title: Feminism, Femininity and the 'Care Economy': An Ethnographic Study of Women 'Wwoofers' in BC

This information letter is meant to provide participants an explanation about the study methodology and intentions.

I am a student in the MA Gender Studies program at UNBC. As part of my thesis research I am conducting a study of women 'Wwoofers' (Willing Workers On Organic Farms) and Wwoofing in British Columbia. I am interested in understanding the significance of Wwoofing for women, in general and in relation to the following themes: 'care economy', 'care giving', femininity-feminism, sustainability, power, health/wellness, activism-protest and community. Since very little academic work has been done on this topic your ideas and commentary are beneficial for addressing this subject within a Canadian context.

I started Wwoofing several years ago and have participated in over six exchanges thus far. Growing up in an immigrant family I learned it was important for me to 'give something back' and I became involved with Wwoofing in order to find strength and 'balance' within my own life.

Participation in this study may include one or both of the following: being part of an ethnography of Wwoofing, answering questions and describing your experiences during an in depth interview regarding Wwoofing.

Although I hope you will participate your participation is completely voluntary and you can withdraw at any time, without explanation. When you withdraw from the study your information will be withdrawn from the study.

The study process is planned as follows:

1. For 1-4 months ideally starting in late April or early May 2009 and ending in late August 2009, I will travel around BC and stay at various WWOOF farms as a Wwoofer. During my stay at these farms I will be a participant observer. This will mean I will engage in all the daily WWOOF tasks assigned to me by WWOOF hosts. This will also mean that I will be writing about my own experiences - i.e. for example tending to animals, weeding or making dinner. As well I will be noting the role of other Wwoofers on the farm if there are any, how the farms practice organic agriculture and how the farm hosts interact with the land, animals, quests or other Wwoofers. Moreover I will be taking part in informal conversations and formal interviews with WWOOF hosts, Wwoofers or others.

Names and other personal identifiers will be changed in consultation with participants unless they wish to be credited and where possible.

2. During the ethnography I will be asking WWOOF hosts and women Wwoofers that I meet 'on site' if they would like to participate in in depth interviews and/or photo elicitation. Participants will receive the interview guide in advance of the in depth interview. The recorded interview will be approximately 1.5 hours in length and will take place in whatever space is comfortable for the participant.

3. All participants will remain anonymous. No identifying information will be included on interview tapes and transcripts or in the thesis. Only aliases will be
Transcripts of interviews will be made available to participants via email. Ideally this process will start in September 2009.

Participants may withdraw at any time. **Should a participant choose to withdraw from the ethnography I will stop participant observation and leave the farm. Withdrawing from the ethnography means that your information will be withdrawn from the study.**

**Should a participant choose to withdraw from the in depth interview I will destroy all the information gathered during the in depth interview.**

After the thesis is published the interview tapes will be secured in a private location to be determined—i.e. most likely a safety deposit box—for two years. **Two years after the date of publication the tapes will be dubbed over and destroyed manually unless otherwise directed by participants and/or unless via prior agreement I am allowed to keep these indefinitely.**

There are no known risks associated with your participation in this project. **I hope that the study findings will guide the development of sustainability initiatives and opportunities for women to enter farming and other 'non traditional' occupations.** You will incur no cost nor will you be paid for your participation.

The results of the research will/may also be published in the thesis, presented at scholarly conferences and thus published within conference papers, published in academic journals and/or published in academic anthologies.

A copy of this information letter and the consent form will be provided to each participant.

Participants are able to access the finished thesis through the UNBC library archives in Prince George. The date of publication is expected to be August 2010.

Please feel free to forward any further questions to my supervisor Dr. Si Transken. Dr. Transken is an Associate Professor & Acting Chair with the Social Work department at UNBC. She can be reached at: 250 960-6643 or si@unbc.ca

Any concerns or complaints you may have about this research should be directed to the Office of Research at: 250 960-5650 or reb@unbc.ca

Signing your name below indicates that you understand the above conditions of participation in this study and that you have had the opportunity to have your questions answered by the researcher.

Signing this means that I agree to take part in this study.

Signature of Participant

Date: ______________

Printed Name of Participant

WWOOF farm owner/WWOOF host Participant Informed Consent Form re: In Depth Interviews
**Study Title: Feminism, Femininity and the 'Care Economy': An Ethnographic Study of Women 'Wwoofers' in BC**

This consent is voluntary and is aimed at gathering information about the experiences of women 'Wwoofers' and Wwoofing in general in BC. After reviewing the attached information sheet, please read and answer the questions below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do you understand that you have been asked to be in a research study?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Are you 18 years of age or older?</td>
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<td>Do you understand the benefits and risks involved in participating in this study?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Have you had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss this study?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Do you understand that, you are free to refuse to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Do you understand that if you withdraw from the study all the information gathered during the interview will be destroyed?</td>
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<td>Do you understand that, if you decide to participate in a one-on-one in depth interview, this interview will be tape recorded?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Do you understand how confidentiality and anonymity will be addressed?</td>
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Do you understand who will have access to the information you provide? 

☐ Yes  ☐ No

Do you understand that while I am traveling all recorded interviews will be kept in a secure lock box? 

☐ Yes  ☐ No

Do you understand that when I get back to UNBC your recorded interview will be kept in a secure filing cabinet at UNBC? 

☐ Yes  ☐ No

Do you understand that your recorded interview will be kept for two years after the date of publication in a secure site? 

☐ Yes  ☐ No

Do you understand that after two years the interview tape will be destroyed? 

☐ Yes  ☐ No

This study was explained to me by: ____________________________

Print Name: ____________________________

Date: ____________________________

I agree to take part in this study: ____________________________

Signature of Evaluation Participant: ____________________________

Date: ____________________________

Printed Name of Evaluation Participant: ____________________________

Date: ____________________________

Signature of Witness: ____________________________

Printed Name of Witness: ____________________________

Date: ____________________________

I believe that the person signing this form understands what is involved in the study and voluntarily agrees to participate.

Signature of Investigator: ____________________________

Date: ____________________________

WWOOF farm owner/WWOOF host Participant Informed Consent Form re: Ethnography

Study Title: Feminism, Femininity and the ‘Care Economy’: An Ethnographic Study of Women ‘Wwoofers’ in BC

This consent is voluntary and is aimed at gathering information about the experiences of women ‘Wwoofers’ and Wwoofing in general in BC. After reviewing the attached information sheet, please read and answer the questions below.

Do you understand that you have been asked to be in a research study? 

☐ Yes  ☐ No

Are you 18 years of age or older? 

☐ Yes  ☐ No

Have you read and received a copy of the attached information sheet about this study? 

☐ Yes  ☐ No
Do you understand the benefits and risks involved in participating in this study? □ Yes □ No  

Have you had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss this study? □ Yes □ No  

Do you understand that, you are free to refuse to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time? □ Yes □ No  

Do you understand that, if you withdraw from the study, your information will be withdrawn? □ Yes □ No  

Do you understand that, if you withdraw from the study, I will stop participant observation and will leave the farm? □ Yes □ No  

Do you understand that, if you decide to participate in the ethnography I will be writing about my own experiences on the farm as well noting the role of other Wwoofers, how the farms I visit practice organic agriculture and how WWOOF hosts interact with the land, animals, guests and/or Wwoofers? □ Yes □ No  

Do you understand that the results of the research will/may also be published in the thesis, presented at scholarly conferences and thus published within conference papers, published in academic journals and/or published in academic anthologies? □ Yes □ No  

Do you understand how confidentiality and anonymity will be addressed? □ Yes □ No  

Do you understand who will have access to the information you provide? □ Yes □ No  

Do you understand that while I am traveling all recorded interviews, photos will be kept in a secure lock box? □ Yes  

This study was explained to me by: 

Print Name 

I agree to take part in this study: 

Signature of Evaluation Participant Date: 

Printed Name of Evaluation Participant 

Signature of Witness Date: 

Printed Name of Witness
I believe that the person signing this form understands what is involved in the study and voluntarily agrees to participate.

Signature of Investigator

Date:__

Interview Guide for WWOOF hosts

Study Title: Feminism, Femininity and the 'Care Economy': An Ethnographic Study of Women 'Wwoofers' in BC

These prompts and questions may not be used in the order shown as well some or most may not necessarily be used depending on prior interviewer/participant discussion or negotiation.

#1. Name:

#2. Date of Birth:

#3. Place of Birth:

#4. Present address:

#5. Where did you grow up? Family/family background?:

#6. Gender, Sexuality:

#7. Occupation/etc;

#8. How did you come to own this farm or start caretaking for this farm/land/plot?

#9. How did you become involved with Wwoofing/Wwoofers?

#10. How many Wwoofers have you employed?

#11. What is Wwoofing like at your farm?

#12. What have some of your Wwoofing experiences been like?

#13. Have you also hosted/do you host apprentices? Does your arrangement with apprentices differ from your arrangements with Wwoofers?

#14. What are your hopes/plans for your farm?

#15. What are your hopes/plans for the Wwoofers that come and stay on your farm?

#16. Do you meet/network with/communicate with other farms/other organic farms/ former Wwoofers?

#17. What have these experiences been like for you? How long have you been involved in doing this?

#18. Do you consider Wwoofing tourism? Do you see your farm as a ‘tourist attraction’?

#19. How did you come to participate in this interview?

#20. Do you have any thoughts/comments/hopes/concerns/questions about this study or project?
#21. Do you have any thoughts/comments/questions about me or my background?

#22. Is there anything you would like to add/any other stories, thoughts you would like to share?

#23. What does care economy/care giving/caring mean to you? How has this been defined/changed...and in relation to being involved with WWOOF?

#24. What does community mean to you? How has this been defined/changed...and in relation to being involved with WWOOF?

#25. What do health/wellness mean to you? How has this been defined/changed...and in relation to being involved with WWOOF?

#26. When you see/hear/read about agriculture or “new agriculture,” what do you think about? How has this been defined/changed...and in relation to being involved with WWOOF?

#27. What do activism/protest mean to you? How has this been defined/changed...and in relation to being involved with WWOOF?

#28. What does sustainability mean to you? How has this been defined/changed...and in relation to being involved with WWOOF?

#29. What do masculine/feminine/femininity/feminism mean to you? How has this been defined/changed...and in relation to being involved with WWOOF?

#30. What does power mean to you? How has this been defined/changed...and in relation to being involved with WWOOF?

#31. What does volunteerism mean to you? How has this been defined/changed...and in relation to being involved with WWOOF?
Appendix B:  
Wwoofer Information Sheet, Consent Forms & Interview Guide

Wwoofer Participant Information Sheet

Study Title: Feminism, Femininity and the 'Care Economy': An Ethnographic Study of Women 'Wwoofers' in BC

This information letter is meant to provide participants an explanation about the study methodology and intentions.

I am a student in the MA Gender Studies program at UNBC. As part of my thesis research I am conducting a study of women 'Wwoofers' (Willing Workers On Organic Farms) and Wwoofing in British Columbia. I am interested in understanding the significance of Wwoofing for women, in general and in relation to the following themes: 'care economy', 'care giving', femininity-feminism, sustainability, power, health/wellness, activism-protest and community. Since very little academic work has been done on this topic your ideas and commentary are beneficial for addressing this subject within a Canadian context.

I started Wwoofing several years ago and have participated in over 10 exchanges thus far. Growing up in an immigrant family I learned it was important for me to 'give something back' and I became involved with Wwoofing in order to find strength and balance within my own life.

Participation in this study may include one or both of the following: answering questions and describing your experiences during an in depth interview regarding Wwoofing and/or sitting for or submitting a photo self portrait in terms of Wwoofing and discussing its meaning with me.

Although I hope you will participate your participation is completely voluntary and you can withdraw at any time, without explanation.

The study process is planned as follows:

I will be asking women Wwoofers that I meet if they would like to participate in in depth interviews and/or photo elicitation. Participants will receive the interview guide in advance of the in depth interview. The recorded interview will be approximately 1.5 hours in length and will take place in whatever space is comfortable for the participant.

Interested women Wwoofer participants will be asked to sign a photo release. Participants will sit for or submit a photo self portrait they feel represents their Wwoofing experiences. Participants will be given the opportunity to discuss the significance of the photo they submit and the opportunity to edit any photograph before it is published -i.e. should they wish to conceal certain distinguishing features, geographical markers in the photo. The photo elicitation interview should take approximately 30 minutes.

All participants will remain anonymous. No identifying information will be included on interview tapes and transcripts or in the thesis. Only aliases will be used to identify individual tapes or within the thesis. During my travels consent forms, information sheets, tapes and notes will be kept in a secure locked bag.

I will keep the key to the locked bag on my person at all times. When possible I will mail transcripts and tapes back to Prince George care of my supervisor Dr. Si Transken. Dr. Transken will remit any consent forms, tapes or photos that she receives into a secure locked filing cabinet at UNBC.
Transcripts of interviews will be made available to participants via email. Ideally this process will start in April 2010.

Participants may withdraw at any time. Should a participant choose to withdraw from the in depth interview I will destroy all the information gathered during the in depth interview. Should a participant choose to withdraw from the photo elicitation I will destroy the photo the participant has submitted to me.

After the thesis is published the tapes and/or photographs will be secured in a private location to be determined -i.e. most likely a safety deposit box- for two years. Two years after the date of publication the tapes will be dubbed over and destroyed manually -unless otherwise directed by participants and/or unless via prior agreement I am allowed to keep these indefinitely. The photos will be shredded/permanently deleted, unless via prior agreement I am allowed to keep these indefinitely. Access to the tapes or photos will be limited to me.

There are no known risks associated with your participation in this project. I hope that the study findings will guide the development of sustainability initiatives and opportunities for women to enter farming and other 'non traditional' occupations. You will incur no cost nor will you be paid for your participation.

The results of the research will/may also be published in the thesis, presented at scholarly conferences and thus published within conference papers, published in academic journals and/or published in academic anthologies.

The photo as part of the results of the research will/may also be published in the thesis, presented at scholarly conferences and thus published within conference papers, published in academic journals and/or published in academic anthologies.

A copy of this information letter and the consent form will be provided to each participant.

Participants are able to access the finished thesis through the UNBC library archives in Prince George. The date of publication is expected to be October 2010.

Please feel free to forward any further questions to my supervisor Dr. Si Transken. Dr. Transken is an Associate Professor & Acting Chair with the Social Work department at UNBC. She can be reached at: 250 960-6643 or si@unbc.ca

Any concerns or complaints you may have about this research should be directed to the Office of Research at: 250 960-5650 or reb@unbc.ca

Signing your name below indicates that you understand the above conditions of participation in this study and that you have had the opportunity to have your questions answered by the researcher.

Signing this means that I agree to take part in this study.

Signature of Participant

Printed Name of Participant
This consent is voluntary and is aimed at gathering information about the experiences of women 'Wwoofers' and Wwoofing in general in BC. After reviewing the attached information sheet, please read and answer the questions below.

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<td>Do you understand that, if you sign the photo release that the photo that you submit as part of the results of the research will/may be published in the thesis and may also be presented at scholarly conferences and thus published within conference papers, published in academic journals and/or published in academic anthologies?</td>
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Do you understand who will have access to the information you provide?  □ Yes  □ No

Do you understand that while I am traveling all recorded interviews, photos will be kept in a secure locked bag?  □ Yes  □ No

Do you understand that when I get back to UNBC your recorded interview, photos will be kept in a secure filing cabinet at UNBC?  □ Yes  □ No

Do you understand that your recorded interview and/or original photo will be kept for two years after the date of publication in a secure site?  □ Yes  □ No

Do you understand that after two years the interview tape will be destroyed and the photo will be shredded?

This study was explained to me by: ___________________________  Print Name

I agree to take part in this study: ___________________________  Date: ______________

Signature of Evaluation Participant

Printed Name of Evaluation Participant

I believe that the person signing this form understands what is involved in the study and voluntarily agrees to participate.  Date: ______________

Signature of Investigator

Photo Release

Study Title: Feminism, Femininity and the 'Care Economy': An Ethnographic Study of Woman 'Wwoofers' in BC

As part of my interest in visual methods I hope to collect and analyze photo self portraits of women Wwoofers, Wwoofing. Should you wish to become involved with this component of the study your participation would mean submitting or sitting for a digital photo and discussing its meaning. Your participation in this component of the study is completely voluntary and you can withdraw at any time without explanation.

If you decide to withdraw from the photo elicitation interview I will destroy all the information gathered during the photo elicitation interview and destroy any photos submitted to me.
The photo as part of the results of the research will/may also be published in the thesis, presented at scholarly conferences and thus published within conference papers, published in academic journals and/or published in academic anthologies.

Signing this means that you agree to release a photo for this study: 

Signature of Participant  
Date: ____________

Printed Name of Participant

Interview Guide for Wwoofers

Study Title: Feminism, Femininity and the 'Care Economy': An Ethnographic Study of Women 'Wwoofers' in BC

These prompts and questions may not be used in the order shown as well some or most may not necessarily be used depending on prior interviewer/participant discussion or negotiation.

#1. Name/Alias:
#2. Date of Birth:
#3. Place of Birth:
#4. Present address:
#5. Where are you coming from?:
#6. Where did you grow up? Family/Family background?:
#7. Gender, sexuality:
#8. Occupation/etc;
#9. What do you do here? What has this experience been like?
#10. How did you find yourself Wwoofing?
#11. What has the experience been like so far?
#12. What do you expect/hope/desire etc; from your time here?
#13. How did you first start Wwoofing?
#14. What was that experience like?
#15. How many farms have you worked at?
#16. What were those experiences like?
#17. Who did you meet there? What was that like?
#18. What about the farms themselves what were these like? Differences? Similarities?
#19. And working with/meeting farm hosts...what have these experiences been like?
#20. When you hear/see the words...what do care economy/caring/care giving mean to you? How has this been informed? Where has this been informed? How has this been defined/changed in relation to your work here or anywhere as a Wwoofer? (i.e. Has it?)
1. When you hear/see the words...what do organic/organics mean to you? How has this been informed? Where has this been informed? How has this been defined/changed in relation to your work here or anywhere as a Wwoofer? (i.e. Has it?)

2. When you hear/see the words...what do masculine/feminine/femininity/feminism mean to you? How has this been informed? Where has this been informed? How has this been defined/changed in relation to your work here or anywhere as a Wwoofer? (i.e. Has it?)

3. When you hear/see the words...what do health/wellness mean to you? How has this been informed? Where has this been informed? How has this been defined/changed in relation to your work here or anywhere as a Wwoofer? (i.e. Has it?)

4. When you hear/see the word...what does power mean to you? How has this been informed? Where has this been informed? How has this been defined/changed in relation to your work here or anywhere as a Wwoofer? (i.e. Has it?)

5. When you hear/see the word...what does community mean to you? How has this been informed? Where has this been informed? How has this been defined/changed in relation to your work here or anywhere as a Wwoofer? (i.e. Has it?)

6. When you hear/think about agriculture or "new agriculture", what do you think about? What do these mean to you? How has this been informed? Where has this been informed? How has this been defined/changed in relation to your work here or anywhere as a Wwoofer? (i.e. Has it?)

7. When you hear/see the words...What do activism/protest mean to you? How has this been informed? Where has this been informed? How has this been defined/changed in relation to your work here or anywhere as a Wwoofer? (i.e. Has it?)

8. When you hear/see the word...what does sustainability mean to you? How has this been informed? Where has this been informed? How has this been defined/changed in relation to your work here or anywhere as a Wwoofer? (i.e. Has it?)

9. What do volunteering/volunteerism mean to you? How has this been informed? Where has this been informed? How has this been defined/changed in relation to your work here or anywhere as a Wwoofer? (i.e. Has it?)

10. Where do you see yourself after you finish Wwoofing here? Where are you going next?

11. Do you consider yourself a tourist? How so? How not?

12. How did you come to participate in this interview?

13. Do you have any thoughts/comments/hopes/concerns/questions about this study or project?

14. Do you have any thoughts/comments/questions about me or my background?

15. Is there anything you would like to add/any other stories, thoughts you would like to share?

16. When I asked you about using a picture for the study what did you think about?

17. What are your thoughts now?

18. How did you take this picture?

19. Where did you take this picture?
What does the picture mean to you, when you think about what it shows/doesn’t show?

When you look at yourself in this pose/with this background what do you think about?

Are any of the colors/props/wardrobe/expression/s/background visuals-objects significant? How?
Appendix C: Poster

WOMEN PARTICIPANTS NEEDED
FOR RESEARCH ON "WWOOF"
(Willing Workers On Organic Farms)

Are you a woman 'Wwoofer'? Have you ever been on a "WWOOF" exchange in BC? Are you a woman over the age of 18? Are you interested in participating in a research study?

I am looking for women to volunteer to take part in a study of 'Wwoofing' experiences.

As a participant in this study, you would be asked to:

1.) take part in an in depth interview about your WWOOF experiences
2.) take part in photo elicitation and share photos of your WWOOF experiences

For more information about this study, or to volunteer for this study, please contact:
Agata Skorecka
Email: skorecka@unbc.ca

This study has been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance through, the Office of Research Ethics, University of Northern British Columbia.