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# Constructing the Conspiring Community: Using Practices of Invitational Rhetoric to Create Sustainable Solutions to Community-Identified Needs

Sarah Upton

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Constructing the Conspiring Community:  
Using Practices of Invitational Rhetoric to Create Sustainable  
Solutions to Community-Identified Needs

by

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DISSERTATION

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of

**Doctor of Philosophy  
Communication**

The University of New Mexico  
Albuquerque, New Mexico

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## **Dedication**

This project is dedicated to my co-conspirators at East Central Ministries. It is an honor to conspire for goodness alongside you.

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*This dissertation project would never have been possible  
without my amazing community of co-conspirators.*

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**CONSTRUCTING THE CONSPIRING COMMUNITY:  
USING PRACTICES OF INVITATIONAL RHETORIC TO CREATE  
SUSTAINABLE SOLUTIONS TO COMMUNITY-IDENTIFIED NEEDS**

By

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**ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this study is to identify practices of invitational rhetoric that create sustainable solutions to community-identified needs. Working with East Central Ministries, a Christian community development organization in Albuquerque's international district, I used a co-conspiring method of research; meaning I worked alongside community members to jointly create projects, discuss theory, and create shared understanding of themes which emerged in my analysis. My analysis showed that the community surrounding East Central Ministries is characterized by bordered elements; by choosing to encircle the border space, co-conspirators create opportunities for practicing invitational rhetoric. Initial practices used by co-conspirators at ECM to cultivate the soil of possibilities include the creation of an invitational environment, intention setting, leaving space for what emerges, focusing on feelings, approaching faith in new ways, and being community minded. From the soil cultivated in these initial practices, emergent practices—making space for agency; focusing on what is wanted; sharing, giving, and trusting; and ultimately building a conspiring community—are able

to bloom. In order to further illustrate the significance of these practices, I offer a model for the three Cs of invitational transformation through transcendence: (1) community; (2) consciousness; and (3) conspiratorial acts.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

In this dissertation I seek to understand how development projects can be approached in ways that respect the communities where they take place. Working with East Central Ministries, a community development organization in Albuquerque, New Mexico, I question how communication can be used to create solutions to community-identified needs and how these solutions can be sustainable over time. While my dissertation research takes place in Albuquerque, this project really began with a contrasting development approach I witnessed in rural Ecuador that led to unsustainable development in a local community.

In 1988, a couple from Quito, Ecuador, purchased a large piece of land in the cloud forest outside the city. The land was previously owned by an Ecuadorian bank that planned to sell it to the logging industry, and so the purchase was made primarily to conserve a biodiversity hot spot. The couple went on to form Fundación Maquipucuna, a nature reserve dedicated to conservation, and worked with members of Marianitas, the surrounding community, to create sustainable ways of making a living through farming and *panela*<sup>1</sup> production and, in some cases, working as nature guides.

Six years after Fundación Maquipucuna was founded, a group of Peace Corps volunteers from the United States came to work in Marianitas. Through working with community members to identify their needs, the Peace Corps helped a group of women form Las Colibris,<sup>2</sup> a group dedicated to making *artesanías*<sup>3</sup> like jewelry and home goods

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<sup>1</sup> Unrefined whole cane sugar

<sup>2</sup> The Hummingbirds

<sup>3</sup> Crafts handmade by artisans

out of sustainable resources such as seeds and *tagua*.<sup>4</sup> These volunteers worked alongside Las Colibris to create projects they could continue once the volunteers' tours were over. Fundación Maquipucuna supported these projects by bringing tour groups through Marianitas to buy handicrafts and also sold them in the nature reserve gift shop.

When women began working with Las Colibris, they found that the money gained from making crafts created the opportunity to make money apart from their husbands. Earning their own money offered a new level of independence because they could finally do things like buy ice cream or new shoes from the local store for the first time without needing to be given money or permission. In some cases, the financial freedom gained through their participation also allowed women to leave abusive home situations.

Throughout the years, the group has received several forms of assistance for their projects. Fundación Maquipucuna has offered training that enabled participants to learn how to create different types of *artesanías*, and volunteers have helped to create new projects. For example, one volunteer who knew how to crochet introduced crocheting with thread and beads as a new approach to making jewelry to add to the products the women sell. Once the projects got underway, the group was able to expand, and more volunteering opportunities were created in the community, mostly for international volunteers. With a housing grant from the government, community members were able to build housing for volunteers, charging affordable lodging prices that supplemented the incomes of the families with whom volunteers lived.

In the summer of 2009, I had the opportunity to visit Fundación Maquipucuna during a study abroad program through Georgetown University, studying race, gender, and ethnicity in Latin America. While staying at the reserve, I visited Marianitas and met

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<sup>4</sup> *Tagua* is a hard tree nut that resembles ivory when shelled and polished.

with members of Las Colibris in their workshop, and we discussed the experience in class as an example of women and empowerment. As I continued to reflect on issues of women and empowerment during my first year of PhD coursework at the University of New Mexico, I became interested in returning to Marianitas to understand how the women of Las Colibris defined empowerment according to their own experiences. In the summer of 2011, I traveled to Ecuador with a Tinker Foundation/LAII Field Research Grant from the Latin American and Iberian Institute at UNM with the intention of conducting field research to understand concepts of agency and empowerment through working with members of Las Colibris.

When I arrived, however, I discovered that the group consisted of only two members—Norma, the group’s leader, and another woman who was not actively participating due to the recent birth of a child. As I spent more time in the community, I was told by Norma that a few years after the expansion of Las Colibris, a volunteer named Margaret<sup>5</sup> entered the community and helped develop promotional materials for the group, including business cards, a product catalog, project descriptions mounted on the walls of the workshop I previously visited, and the website that prompted my desire to visit the community and engage in research with Las Colibris. The website discussed the group’s work, opportunities for ecotourism, how to volunteer, and how to obtain a homestay. After leaving the community, Margaret continued to maintain the group’s website and thus facilitated the process of gaining future volunteers. This became problematic, however, once she stopped responding to email requests from prospective volunteers or answering phone calls from the group. As a result, the community no longer

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<sup>5</sup> Name has been changed to protect privacy.



has new volunteers. Many women have had to leave the group to find work elsewhere, including at a local flower plantation where some have become ill from pesticide use.

This experience led me to question how volunteering, which is often perceived to be a philanthropic exercise, can be harmful to local communities and livelihoods. When I asked Norma what she saw as the greatest need for the group's future, without hesitation she said recruiting more volunteers. A follow-up interview with a former group member, who had to leave and find work elsewhere when the group stopped receiving volunteers, echoed the same hopes for the future: "*para ver si tenemos voluntarios, ... que no se cambia.*"<sup>6</sup>

The desire for volunteers in the future was discussed as fulfilling both monetary and social needs. Through homestays (a volunteer lives in the home of a family for a small daily fee that includes three meals), group members were able to supplement their income and thus not need to have a job outside of the group. Volunteer homestays also helped to earn back the start-up fees women paid for Las Colibris membership. One participant explained: "*aquí mi compañera dijo 'tu tienes que poner un entrada,' pero yo voy a tener voluntarios, y entonces como yo recuperar el dinero, el momento que estará voluntario en mi casa.*"<sup>7</sup> Thus, volunteering is positioned as a crucial financial element supporting sustained group involvement; it allows members to make back their initial investment and to create a sustainable livelihood for themselves.

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<sup>6</sup> "To see that we have volunteers, that it doesn't change." Translations will be positioned as footnotes so as not to privilege English.

<sup>7</sup> "My companion here said 'you need to put an entrance [fee],' but I am going to have volunteers, that is how I will regain the money, the moment a volunteer is in my house."

The members of Las Colibris, however, explained that the volunteers who came were important not just for the financial benefits they offered but because of the social impact. “*Para nosotros, cuando los voluntarios vienen, no es solo nosotros poderles ver a, ellos van a dejar dinero, no. Para nosotros es una alegría cuando viene a nuestras familias y nos gusta mucho.*”<sup>8</sup> Because the community is rural and somewhat isolated from major transportation systems those who volunteer here live in the community where they work, and more often than not in the homes of those with whom they work. Thus, volunteers impacted not only the women’s project but home lives as well. One participant explained that having volunteers live in her home “*es un cambio total.*”<sup>9</sup> Sharing living space offers the opportunity to “*compartir los costumbres.*”<sup>10</sup> Additionally, participants described interactions with volunteers as learning opportunities. They explained that through working with volunteers, “*aprendimos nuevas cosas*”<sup>11</sup> and “*aprendimos nueva idioma.*”<sup>12</sup> Relationship building, collaboration, and teaching, then, were all outcomes of having volunteers in homes and in the community; further, the sustainability of the group depended on the funding volunteers provide through the homestay program.

From this experience with Las Colibris, I realized that volunteering and development projects are often ethnocentric. What I mean by this is that volunteers and development agencies (with the best of intentions) often enter communities of which they

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<sup>8</sup> “For us, when the volunteers came, it was not only that we could see they were going to leave money. For us it was happiness when they came to our families, and we liked it very much.”

<sup>9</sup> “It is a total change.”

<sup>10</sup> “Share customs.”

<sup>11</sup> “Learn new things.”

<sup>12</sup> “Learn a new language.”

are not members and create projects based on their own ideas of what is needed and what is “best” for the individuals living in those communities. The education, cultural background, and economic status of development workers often frame what it means to be successful, and they often assume everyone shares that understanding of and desire for success. One prominent example of this ethnocentric approach is volunteering and development in international contexts, where the West is often positioned as the “default frame of reference” (Chowdhury, 2009), and approaches are therefore grounded in trying to “help” international communities become more like the West.

Based on conversations and observations from my time in Ecuador, I developed a tentative framework for what I call *sustainable volunteerism*, an approach that privileges the participation of community members where volunteering takes place. Sustainable volunteerism is a model based on collaboration and sustainability that could potentially be achieved through a three-part process of (1) dialogically identifying community needs/desires/goals; (2) basing a volunteer program on teaching skills/helping with these needs/desires/goals; and (3) ensuring skills are sustainable upon the volunteer’s departure.

In order to avoid ethnocentrism in volunteering and development, I am interested in how community knowledge can become a transformative force so that volunteering and development practices do not become unsustainable. My original intention for this dissertation project was to return to Ecuador and conduct a research project using my model of sustainable volunteerism to create social change in Marianitas. After much reflection, however, I realized that I would be doing the exact same thing that the previous volunteer had done—assuming that because of my research, I possessed special

knowledge and knew best what to do. Who am I, and what do I know about the experiences of women in Marianitas? I decided that the best thing I could do with my dissertation project would be to increase my understanding of community-based social change through engaging with an organization that was already successfully using this approach. This interest has led me to the international district in Albuquerque and specifically to East Central Ministries (ECM).

I first visited East Central Ministries in the fall of 2011 as part of a critical cultural studies course. A classmate was covering ecofeminism in class that night and brought us to ECM to take a tour and complete a small volunteer project. During the tour, one story in particular piqued my interest in the organization and its approach to social change. We were told that the main building where ECM's offices are located used to be abandoned and was used as a drug house before ECM renovated it. Two homeless men were living on the back porch when operations began there, and rather than kicking the men out, John Bulten, the organization's founder, told them about ECM's projects and vision and gave them two options: stay and help or find another place to live. One of the men left, but the other chose to stay and become involved with projects at ECM.

When I heard this story I immediately thought of the communication theory of invitational rhetoric. Invitational rhetoric approaches communication with the purpose of understanding and offers perspectives without demanding that others change (Foss & Griffin, 1995). I therefore decided this was the perfect place to learn about how invitational social change works. To provide a context for my study, then, I will give a brief history of East Central Ministries and an overview of their programs.

## **History of East Central Ministries**

East Central Ministries began in 1999 as an outreach of Fellowship Christian Reform Church. At the time, the organization was called Good Samaritan Ministries, and its main focus was mentoring families making the transition from welfare to work. John began by “running all over the city” and building relationships with welfare-to-work organizations (personal communication, July 5, 2013). At the same time, he was meeting with other church members, including his future mentor, Dan Friesen, and talking about how the church could be doing something different to engage the community. He wanted the church to work with people in respectful ways that did not assume they were coming in with all the answers.

Dan suggested that John connect with the Christian Community Development Association (CCDA), and in the fall of 1999, John attended the CCDA annual conference in Chicago, arriving a week early to take a masters-level intensive course. There he met John Perkins, the man who first envisioned the Christian community development that ultimately led to the CCDA. John explains:

John Perkins, who was third grade educated, the son of a sharecropper in Mississippi, nearly killed in the sixties with race riots, became a Christian and then moved back to Mississippi to work in his community, when he had vowed he never would. He has developed a whole philosophy of development, specifically from a Christian perspective. So his big three principles are (1) reconciliation, with us and God, and us and each other; (2) relocation, either people living in, moving in intentionally and living in community, or, as kids get educated moving back to their neighborhood, so that neighborhoods aren't void of leadership and

education, so relocation is a huge one; and (3) redistribution, of knowledge, of wealth, of making an even playing field. So those are kind of his big three Rs. So I went there in the fall of 99. Went to this class and amazing network of organizations and people who had been doing inner city ministry for 40, 50 years and what they have learned as far as how to do development well and how not to, and those kind of things. I really saw that group as a group that I needed to learn from. (personal communication, July 5, 2013).

Noel Castellanos, the CEO of CCDA, describes the approach to development taken by this association and its members:

Through incarnation we enter into community with neighbors, and we experience their suffering, their pain, their reality. And we don't come in to say we're here to fix your problem. We come in to say, we're here to be present with you as we follow God and watch him bring a new world into existence. (East Central Ministries, 2013a)

John Perkins's focus on relocation and CCDA's emphasis on neighborhood helped John reimagine the approach he was taking to community outreach, causing a crucial shift from focusing on a specific issue—like welfare to work—to focusing on a specific neighborhood—the La Mesa/Trumbull neighborhood in the international district. This neighborhood of about two square miles was chosen for three reasons: (1) its location; (2) its reputation; and (3) its openness. First, Fellowship Christian Reform Church is located about two miles away, so for John it made sense that Good Samaritan Ministries would be located nearby as an outreach program (J. Bulten, personal communication, July 5, 2013). Second, once a thriving neighborhood, La Mesa/Trumbull

is now experiencing economic decline after Interstate 40 redirected traffic away from Route 66, and Kirtland Air Force Base moved base housing from the area. As result, family income decreased, a “temporary arrangement mindset” became prevalent, and crime increased (“Get to know us,” 2013). The international district, commonly referred to as the “War Zone,” is often discussed in local media from a deficiency standpoint, focusing on drugs, prostitution, and violence in the area (“Has new name changed ‘the war zone?’,” 2012). Third, John explains that while some neighborhoods felt closed to the idea of an organization coming in to try to make a difference, the international district felt more welcoming (personal communication, July 5, 2013).

As he was welcomed into the international district, John spent the first few years learning from the community.

But those early years then it was all about what can we learn, and how can we help if it’s needed or wanted, and not impose something on people. And so I started by just doing some prayer walking, the neighborhood mapping... [Prayer walking] . . . is a kind of an evangelical approach to walking streets and praying as you walk—for community, for neighborhoods. I used it in that approach, but it was also my way of getting out of a building, out of the car. It was my way of walking the streets kind of mapping out, you saw my map. (personal communication, July 5, 2013)

The map below was John’s way of gaining an understanding of the neighborhood’s makeup and assets. Yellow lots represent single family dwellings, and blue represent multi-family dwellings like apartment complexes. Green spaces represent vacant lots, and black spaces are boarded up buildings. Finally, pink lots represent businesses.



*Figure 1: Map of neighborhood makeup and assets*

Because John had stopped focusing on an issue-based approach to outreach, he describes feeling lost as he began working in the international district. Prayer walking and mapping helped him work toward finding what direction he should move in next:

So it was kind of a vulnerable time. It was my way of just kind of saying “God, I don’t know what I’m doing. I feel a calling to this, I know you’ve kind of set me up for this, my whole life story has kind of prepared me for stuff, I don’t know what I’m doing.” So it was my way of just kinda talking to God, verbalizing my own fears and insecurities. At the same time walking the streets and trying to meet people. (personal communication, July 5, 2013).



John then took surveys of local assets and needs and sought the advice of community members to determine how to approach holistic development and transformation (2002 annual evaluation).

During the first two years of what would become ECM, John rented an office from a small congregation called Brethren in Christ, and that office became a hub of the ministry, helping John feel like he had a presence in the neighborhood. His presence began to grow in 2001 when a local businessman named Charlie Williams bought a boarded up, abandoned house in the neighborhood. This purchase was made “out of self-defense” because the drug and prostitution activities that were taking place there were negatively affecting his business next door. John worked out an arrangement with Charlie and rehabilitated the building and grounds in exchange for six months of free rent, and today it is still being rented for a low monthly fee. During this time Good Samaritan Ministries made the transition from an outreach program to 501(c)3 non-profit status, changing their name to East Central Ministries in June 2002 to reflect the legal change and to better represent the neighborhood they serve.

After ECM moved in, a warehouse across the street, also being used for drugs and prostitution, closed down a week later. The organization quickly acquired the property to expand the space for existing and future projects. The house and warehouse are still being used today as the main office and hub of ECM activities where multiple community programs are housed (“Get to know us,” 2013).

### **ECM Community Programs**

Over the years many ECM programs have been developed to meet community needs. Some early projects dissolved due to lack of participation and funding, other

projects were completed over the short term, and still many others have been long lasting—evolving and growing into something new over time. After the shift in focus from the welfare-to-work issue to the La Mesa/Trumbull neighborhood, John worked in collaboration with other organizations to start youth and transitional living programs. Wings of Eagles was an outreach to native youth started in partnership with Paul Phillips. In this program, kids learned leadership skills through summer camps, youth groups, and field trips to places like the Rio Grande bike trail and nature center. For the transitional living program John used a house built by another member of the Fellowship Christian Reform Church to house families trying to make life changes.

By year three, however, John explains that “much of what had been established [had] crumbled” (Bulten, 2002). Wings of Eagles was still functioning, but less often because of funding cutbacks. The transitional living program closed because of a “lack of interest/cooperation on the part of residents” (Bulten, 2002). In a 2002 annual report of ECM’s progress, written by John and ECM board members from Fellowship Christian Reform Church, the board membership explains that while this was a difficult time for John and for ECM, it helped him re-examine the approach he was taking to community development:

John recognizes his pattern of looking around for opportunities, finding a small opening, jumping through and then looking around at who might be following, and/or who is there to support this idea. Despite the tough lessons of the year, John remains at peace although still struggling to balance his burning desire to “DO” something with following the interests/skills/needs of local residents of the

community. A growing awareness of the broken idea of “us” helping “them”—the helpers and the helpees. Things must grow together. (Bulten, 2002)

As explained above, when ECM began to work in the La Mesa/Trumbull neighborhood, John also did a survey of local assets and needs. Programs developed by ECM with a focus on these “felt-needs” of community members have been sustained over time through community member collaboration. These programs include the Community Food Co-op, Growing Awareness Urban Farm, One Hope Centro de Vida Health Center, and Casa Shalom Housing Co-op.

**Community Food Co-op.** John’s survey of local assets and needs showed that access to healthy food was a felt-need among residents of the international district. As John explains, New Mexico has some of the highest rates of food insecurity in the U.S., and the La Mesa and Trumbull neighborhoods are particularly facing issues of poverty (Bulten, 2004). To meet this need, the Community Food Co-op began as a food distribution project in the summer of 2001, organized by Rhonda Newby. In 2002, Rhonda completed a participatory research project requesting funding to train co-op members to manage the project on their own. Three days a week, community members come together to pick up, organize, and distribute donated food. The Co-op is committed to cooperative principles such as voluntary and open membership, democratic member control, member economic participation, and equality and caring for others (ABQ Community Foundation grant app). Members are encouraged to volunteer two hours each month and to make a ten-dollar contribution to sustain the cooperative. On average, each family is able to save \$75.00 per visit, as this would be the cost of the donated groceries if they had been purchased at Whole Foods or Sprouts (ABQ Community Foundation

grant app). On average, the co-op provides groceries to 100 families per week (“Community food co-op,” n.d.).

**Growing Awareness Urban Farm.** ECM’s urban farm, Growing Awareness, developed slowly over time as community members began making connections between food waste from the co-op and possibilities of sustainably growing food in community spaces. In 2003, ECM sent out a request in the fall newsletter asking for someone who could compost unusable fruits and vegetables from the food co-op; this request laid the ground for the urban garden that was to come. Composting was the initial start of the urban farm. The following year, the ministry began producing *ollas*,<sup>13</sup> inspired by an ancient irrigation technique used in China and Rome over 2000 years ago. The vase-shaped *ollas* are buried with their necks sticking about one inch out of the ground and filled with water which seeps out over time to irrigate the ground and surrounding plants, serving as a way to conserve water in New Mexico’s desert climate (East Central Ministries, 2004a). In 2005, a volunteer named Kim Williams created the Worm Hole, a worm bed that generated compost and worms to be sold as fish bait. At that time, Kim also took care of the Garden of Abundance, an olla demonstration garden, and later worked to construct ECM’s first greenhouse out of recycled materials (East Central Ministries, 2006b). From this greenhouse Kim began growing tomatoes, peppers, and herbs, which were sold to employ community members and people formerly homeless or addicted (East Central Ministries, 2008a).

The economic recession of 2008/2009 brought an overwhelming loss of employment to neighbors in the international district. As result, ECM expanded previous greenhouse and plant projects in an effort to “respond in love and practicality” (East

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<sup>13</sup> Clay pots

Central Ministries, 2008a). Larry Sallee, an ECM board member affiliated with Seed and Light International, started bringing chile and tomato seedlings in used Tupperware dishes for transplanting. Sergio, Francisco, and Juan, three unemployed community members, built a 700 square foot greenhouse doubling ECM's capacity for seedlings. Thirty-seven community members were then able to gain employment through growing, caring for, and selling over 20,000 plants in local stores and nurseries, farmers markets, homes shows, flea markets, and by the side of the road (East Central Ministries, 2009).

Finally, in the spring of 2011 the Growing Awareness Urban Farm was officially created with the idea that "awareness precedes change" ("Welcome to growing awareness," n.d.).

We are excited to announce the arrival of Growing Awareness Urban Farm! A micro-business of East Central Ministries that has been in the making for 10 years. We have combined several of our home and garden projects in order to offer our customers an outstanding educational experience as well as high quality, socially conscious products (East Central Ministries, 2011b).

Since the formal development of the Growing Awareness Urban Farm at ECM, the project has continued to grow and thrive. The early farm consisted of the yard from the former drug/prostitution house and the parking lot of the warehouse lot across the street, and in the spring of 2014 ECM added a larger nursery space. The backyard features a chicken coup, six compost heaps, three large greenhouses, and four beehives. Across the street, the warehouse lot has been turned into a playground with edible landscaping. The nursery, located in the international district a few blocks away from the house and warehouse, features two large hoop houses that have allowed Growing Awareness to

expand the variety and volume of seedlings sold. The urban farm currently sells *ollas* all across the country through the website, and various nurseries and stores like Whole Foods sell Growing Awareness seedlings. The money generated from these sales helps to fund temporary jobs for community members who need extra income during hard times and contributes to the sustainability of other ECM activities which will be discussed below.

**One Hope Centro de Vida Health Center.** One Hope Centro de Vida Health Center (OHCV) was created in partnership between ECM and the community in September of 2006. The center began with a community health fair in 2004 which led to discussions about access to healthcare in the community.

Over the next few years, ECM listened while community members talked of little to no medical access for themselves and their children, no access to dental care, and numerous obstacles where access was available such as language barriers, time and transportation constraints, financial barriers, as well as blatant substandard treatment (“One Hope Clinic,” n.d.).

In these conversations, ECM and community members collectively identified community goals and decided to create a “community-run” health center. The health center, then, was created through partnership; volunteers from the community not only receive services, but also fill available positions and decide on future directions of the center (“One Hope Clinic,” n.d.).

The health center is more than just medical services: “OHCV must involve advocacy, prevention education, relationships and empowerment processes” (“One Hope Clinic,” n.d.). The center consists of three exam rooms and two dental stations and offers

programs on subjects ranging from diabetes to women’s health to counseling. It also includes follow-up interviews and case management (“One Hope Clinic,” n.d.). Additionally, One Hope Clinic has added the practice of *salidas*<sup>14</sup> to ensure patients have a safe space to talk about their health needs. After their appointment with the doctor, patients sit down in *salidas* with pathways navigators—all women from the community—to ensure they fully understand their diagnosis and plan for treatment. Additionally, in *salidas*, questions of cost are addressed to make sure patients can afford both their appointments and any medications prescribed. This is also a time where patients are able to talk about personal issues with pathways navigators and engage in prayer if they request to do so.

**Casa Shalom Housing Co-op.** For the first eight years that John worked in the international district he lived in another Albuquerque neighborhood. Inspired by John Perkins’s three Rs, especially relocation, John was quick to say “hey, let’s move into the neighborhood” (personal communication, July 5, 2013). His wife, Lynn, who had just given birth to their second child, asked that John give her at least eight years so they could raise their children and figure out how to make the move. During these years John explains that he watched as families bounced around, in and out of the neighborhood, leaving homes when they could no longer afford the rent. This made it hard to build the long- term relationships that community development depends on (personal communication, July 5, 2013). John began to talk to other community members about home ownership, and how they could make that a reality for families in the international district. Eight years later, when Lynn surprised him by saying she had been looking for

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<sup>14</sup> Exit interviews

houses in La Mesa, John asked “can we do it for more than just our family? What would it mean if we tried to open that up into more participation?” (personal communication, July 5, 2013).

After “a year of praying, dreaming, and meeting together,” thirteen families moved into the Casa Shalom Housing Cooperative in March 2008 (East Central Ministries, 2008a). Casa Shalom is an intentional community in the international district, providing members with “both a sense of home ownership and an exploration in living out the Acts 2 early church model<sup>15</sup> of sharing [their] lives with each other” (East Central Ministries, 2008a). John explains:

The early church that Jesus left was this community of people who were engaged in each other’s lives. And encouraging each other spiritually was right along with every other aspect of life, living and working and raising kids together and you know, all of that. That was the church. (personal communication, July 5, 2013)

At Casa Shalom, residents who may not be able to qualify for housing loans from the bank otherwise have committed to sharing resources and responsibilities and living together on property purchased with money borrowed outside of traditional bank loans. This intentional community is committed to living in community with like-minded families, respect for one’s neighbors, sharing common work responsibilities, and

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<sup>15</sup> This model is called “The Fellowship of the Believers” and reads as follows: **42** And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. **43** And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. **44** And all who believed were together and had all things in common. **45** And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. **46** And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, **47** praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved. (Acts 2:42-47 English Standard Version)



resolving differences in a peaceful, loving way prioritizing reconciliation (“Casa Shalom housing co-op,” n.d.). Residents are “mixed in ages, race, culture and socio-economic status yet have common values and goals” (“Casa Shalom housing co-op,” n.d.).

Projects over the years include various community gardens and Creation Park, a playground that provides community children with a safe space to play and features edible greenery like strawberries and tomatoes. Additionally, the Common Good, a thrift store that used to be housed in ECM’s warehouse, is now in a commercial location and generates steady income for ECM projects. Responding to a felt-need expressed by food co-op members and respondents of the La Mesa Neighborhood Listening Summary, “Just Add Chickens” is ECM’s newest emerging program meant to address food insecurity in the neighborhood. Because “backyard chicken-raising and egg production is a culturally and economically appropriate measure for many residents of La Mesa and Trumbull Village neighborhood,” Just Add Chickens will provide one hundred families with a starter kit including a small chicken coop, water and feed dispenser, feed, and two hens, and workshops to learn proper care of the chickens (“Just add chickens,” n.d.).

ECM currently employs fifteen community members full time and has countless volunteers, interns, and work groups throughout the year. While the projects above were discussed separately, they all work together and support one another. Casa Shalom members volunteer in other projects, and some participate in the food co-op. Growing Awareness Urban Farm proceeds from selling seedlings, ollas, honey, and other products go directly into other community projects, such as One Hope Centro de Vida. ECM projects are also funded by donations. East Central Ministries is always evolving and

changing, and this overview is thus a snapshot of what programs look like in the spring of 2014.

**"What does East Central Ministries have to do with a *Communications* class?"**

East Central Ministries entered the international district in Albuquerque without assuming that the organization knew what community members needed and without telling them what to do. Rather, they invited participation and collaboration to achieve community-identified goals. During my visits to ECM as a student and a teacher, I have witnessed invitational rhetoric in operation throughout all aspects of the organization—in how space is used, in the interactions that happen, and in how decisions are made. For example, East Central Ministries programs are laid out in such a way as to invite community member's presence in all physical spaces. There are not office areas and lobbies—only a house encompassing organizational projects, which community members are welcome to enter. Additionally, practices such as leaving doors unlocked, invitational signage, and use of color and landscaping all contribute to invitational uses of space. For example, one community member explains that the choice of paint colors makes ECM welcoming; “the orange windows invite people to come and be a part of the exciting things that are happening here” (East Central Ministries, 2006b). While this may not seem immediately significant, when you take into account the deficiency and scarcity rhetoric generally used to describe the international district, ECM's invitational use of space becomes more meaningful. Rather than guarding the office and organization's possessions, unlocked doors and open, inviting spaces signify trust and a welcoming stance, with food planted in public spaces to be picked and shared in abundance.

Additionally, East Central Ministries is invitational in its approach to religion. For example, many friends and students that I have brought to visit ECM note that while religion is present in the background, and members of the organization are happy to have religious discussions or describe their faith-based motivation for doing the work that they do, a faith background is not a requirement for working with ECM and/or benefitting from their services. Additionally, East Central Ministries does not attempt to gain religious converts, even though faith-based development is often conceptualized as directed at such conversion. This approach moves past the division between religious and secular thought and creates space for participation and engagement with religion in any way that feels comfortable for the individual.

Since my first encounter with ECM, I have taken students there as a way to actively learn about invitational rhetoric and see the theory in action. We begin our two-day visit with a tour of the organization on the first day, which includes the founding story and information about their multiple projects and approaches to social change. Students then have the opportunity to ask questions. On the second day, we complete various volunteering projects so that we are not just visiting the site and taking knowledge but finding a way to give something in return.

After bringing a group of students to ECM in December 2013 for a tour and overview of their many projects, we sat down in the living room by the fire to talk to John about how this all related to our public speaking course. I asked the students to define invitational rhetoric in their own words, and they collectively talked about communication based in equality, where you appreciate the perspectives of others and share your own without trying to force people to change. Then I asked students to provide

examples of invitational rhetoric they witnessed at ECM. Deanna, one of the students in the class, brought up John's use of invitational rhetoric to talk about politics. While we were outside the health clinic John brought up Obamacare, and said that while he thought this would be helpful for many people in the U.S., it would not solve the problem of access to healthcare for those without documents, a major issue in the international district. He then described the health clinic as a way to address that problem.

Deanna explained that while John was talking about a politically charged issue, he was doing so in a way that simply offered his perspective and did not demand that others adopt it as their own. A quote from this visit is now featured on ECM's website and was printed and sent out in their annual report:

*The ministry is available for all people from the community. It does not matter whether you are rich, poor, or religious. I understand that their services have been created to help the poor, but they invite all walks of life to join them. — observation from a UNM student (italics in original).*

Not only has ECM contributed to my students' and my own understanding of invitational rhetoric, but discussions about this approach to communication have influenced ECM as well, and together we have co-constructed what invitational rhetoric means in this unique context. After my first class visit, Morgan, manager of the Growing Awareness Urban Farm at ECM, asked me for a short paragraph defining invitational rhetoric, which is now featured on their website as an approach to social change. Morgan explains:

This spring we had a couple UNM classes come to tour/volunteer here at ECM. I wasn't sure exactly *which* class was coming, and when they arrived, and I was

able to chat a bit more with the professor, I discovered it was a communications class. John asked the teacher quite bluntly: "What does East Central Ministries have to do with a *Communications* class?" We were both quite amazed at how much her explanation resonated with what we are trying to do. She said:

*I believe there are two basic ways people approach communication. The first, and most traditional, is seeing communication as simply a means to influence or persuade others. The second, more invitational model, is to see understanding as the main purpose of communicating with others. This means offering thoughts and ideas without demanding that others adopt them as their own, or change in any way. It also means creating an environment where people feel safe expressing their thoughts and ideas. I believe that East Central Ministries is approaching social change using a model of invitational rhetoric. Rather than coming into a community and demanding that members change in specific ways, ECM invites community members to collaboratively identify their own needs and desires for change, and then invites them to take part in working towards the goals they have identified. Rather than entering the community from a position of power and "expertise," this model allows for social change that is meaningful, respectful, and honors the community where it is taking place.*

Submitted by Morgan on Fri, 05/11/2012 (italics in original)

### **Introducing the Conspiring Framework**

The word *conspire* typically has negative connotations. For example, there are conspiracies against people, conspiracies to overthrow governments, days when it seems the universe is conspiring against you as an individual. But what happens when people

conspire, scheme, and “plot goodness?” In a short piece for *Conspire*, a magazine linking organizations across the country doing faith-based development work similar to ECM, Morgan described ECM community members working together for change as *co-conspirators*.

Co-conspirators “plot goodness” through imagining creative possibilities and approaches to change that transcend limiting structures, then *conspire* or work together to implement these changes and plant seeds for future projects (“Conspire Magazine,” n.d.). John explains that at ECM co-conspirators are conspiring against systems of power and the systems that hold people down, doing it on the edges or fringes of society, conspiring in goodness, demonstrating what community can look like, and imagining what can be done together (personal communication, May 9, 2014). This dissertation is an extension of ECM’s conspiring efforts as I seek to transcend rigid academic structures that limit the use of theory in communities outside the university, and transcend researcher/participant binaries to work in community with ECM. Because this dissertation project is created in collaboration with ECM, I will use the term *co-conspirator* to refer to individuals co-constructing my dissertation project.

### **Research Question and Significance**

For my dissertation, I am working with East Central Ministries as a case study to ask: What practices of invitational social change create sustainable solutions to community identified needs? Case studies are a useful way to extend the examples and possibilities of existing theories, and with this dissertation, I seek to highlight examples and possibilities for social change. This project serves as one example of how a

community achieved change through the use of invitational rhetoric; it is not a how-to guide meant to be followed exactly for other communities.

Traditional, top-down approaches to community development emphasize persuasion and reinforce binaries between provider/recipient and researcher/participant. Following a traditional development model, many organizations in Albuquerque attempt to address problems in the international district by providing direct services to individuals. East Central Ministries explains, however, that these approaches do not necessarily “bring cultures and races together to work collectively toward a more just community” (“Get to know us,” 2013). Additionally, the “direct service” (“Get to know us,” 2013) approach is often not something communities can sustain on their own once outside funding and/or participation run out or are withdrawn.

This study therefore centers on the possibilities invitational rhetoric brings to social change, and in turn development. Using invitational rhetoric in community development creates a new community-specific understanding of what development means and how projects can be imagined and implemented. With this new understanding comes new potential for collaborative projects among community members, and from this collaboration and involvement comes greater potential for sustainability. This study also contributes understandings of faith-based community development, again making use of invitational rhetoric to uncover new conceptualizations of this approach.

This research ultimately contributes to the literature on invitational rhetoric and invitational social change by providing a case study of East Central Ministries. Previous literature has focused on the potential of invitational social change, and this study will identify real-world practices already being used to meet community-identified needs in

Albuquerque. Based on the practices identified, this study can inform future development and volunteering projects.

### **My Positionality as a Researcher**

Having described my experiences in Marianitas and the history of ECM as starting points for this dissertation, also significant is to understand my relationship to the issues that are important to this dissertation. Informed by previous development experiences coupled with the frames of invitational rhetoric and particular approaches to social change and development, I enter my dissertation, and any other research project for that matter, as a feminist, Latina, woman of color, informed by a border perspective. I acknowledge that I do not live in the La Mesa/Trumbull neighborhood and thus enter the community as an outsider. Although I am an outsider, I bring certain resources with me to address the outsider status. Because of my volunteer efforts, I have made friends in the community, feel comfortable there, and have been accepted as a co-conspirator. I speak and write English, Spanish, and Spanglish, as do most of the co-conspirators at ECM. Furthermore, I share with ECM a border identity.

My border identity leads me to look for ways to transcend strict categorization, as this was a necessary skill to make sense of growing up on the Mexico/U.S. border, an in-between space. My framework challenges traditional binary understandings of borders, development, and social change. Through communication, human beings use binaries to make sense of their social worlds. We begin to distinguish good from bad, right from wrong, male from female, black from white, and us from them. By positioning these different ideas in binaries, there is an implied difference; we begin to see female as being



the opposite of male, black the opposite of white, and understand ideas and actions as either right or wrong, good or bad, with no grey area.

When we transcend binaries we are able to open multiple options for the construction of meaning, relating to one another, and achieving meaningful social change. For example, bordered spaces create options for transcending the strict international categories that created them in the first place. In El Paso, Texas, and Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua, an international border divides what used to exist as one large city. Instead of seeing El Paso and Juárez as binary opposites, they are understood by residents of El Paso and Juárez as “sister cities.” The binary between Mexico and the United States is blurred as individuals and family units move back and forth over the border through the course of their days, and individuals like me create identities drawing from multiple national symbols on both sides of the border.

I believe that my experience of the border has left me with an openness to multiple perspectives and constructions of the world, and as a result, I have been able to see what lies between binary categorizations of human experiences. With this in mind, I seek to conduct research outside of binaries and uncover transcendent possibilities for understanding our social worlds and achieving invitational social change.

Traditional approaches to research have the potential to reinforce existing binaries and create new opposing categories of understanding. For example, in drawing strict boundaries between *participants* and *researchers*, research has the possibility to reify the *nos/otros* dichotomy, further distinguishing *us* from *them* (Saavedra & Nymark, 2008). This tendency can be seen throughout standard data collection techniques and the final presentation of findings. Because research easily reinforces binary categorizations, I

approach my dissertation project with border feminist and decolonizing assumptions as a way of preventing my research from falling into a binary framework and working toward transcendent possibilities.

Because I approach this research study from a borderland mestiza feminist perspective I assume, along with Saavedra and Nymark (2008) that “our research endeavors must at every step attempt to decenter Western modes of thinking, theorizing, and living” (2008, p. 262). The borderland mestiza feminist perspective is a “hybrid mode of consciousness” which challenges researchers to think about new ways of knowing and being, and ultimately works towards “unweaving the legacies of colonialism and rebuilding transformative *nuevas teorías*” (Saavedra & Nymark, 2008).

I draw on knowledge tied to my identity, using a border feminist approach to research and communication as a transcendent strategy. A border feminist approach to communication is inherently invitational as it allows for multiple social constructions in an attempt to transcend dualities and traditional categories. In *Borderlands/La Frontera*, Anzaldúa (2007) makes space for acknowledging and accepting the multiple ways *mestiza* identity manifests in bordered spaces (Ede, Glenn, & Lunsford, 1995). Within bordered spaces, *mestizas* may be positioned as both Mexican and U.S. American, indigenous and Spanish, the colonizer and the colonized (Anzaldúa, 2007). A *mestiza* may find herself straddling a border between U.S. feminists and her own *familia* if she identifies as queer. There are multiple, contradicting ways to exist in the border space, and many of them happen simultaneously. Anzaldúa thus argues that any border, be it international, cultural, sexual, “creates a necessity for tolerating ambiguity” (Anzaldúa, 2007). This ambiguity is an invitation to construct a social world that makes sense for

navigating a bordered space. Ede, Glenn, and Lunsford (1995) explain that in her writing and theorizing about bordered spaces, Anzaldúa presents her perspectives and challenges dominant ideologies, all without colonization or shutting out other perspectives.

A border feminist approach is also invitational in its understanding of what counts as knowledge. Goldzwig (1998) explains that a new challenge of rhetoric is the incorporation of historically located examples. In dealing with the femicide in Ciudad Juárez, border feminists are incorporating popular accounts of *La Malinche*, and *La Llorona* to understand the current political climate that allows for the mass murder of women, and in doing so, attempts to reconstruct a feminist understanding of these mythic women. Bone et al. (2008) use invitational rhetoric to complicate ideas of “eloquence,” or the notion that rhetoric must stand out in some way to be meaningful. In doing so, they are creating space for the everyday rhetoric of marginalized women to enter academic conversations. This border feminist action acknowledges the inherent value of what some feminists of color refer to as “kitchen table knowledge” or knowledge you may have gained sitting around a kitchen table speaking to other women (Trinidad Galvan, 2001).

Tuhiwai-Smith (1999) explains that “the term ‘research’ is inextricably linked to European imperialism and colonialism.” This is because Western knowledge has been positioned as superior, and within this tradition, other forms of knowledge have been treated as if they were there to be discovered, extracted, appropriated, and then distributed (Tuhiwai-Smith, 1999). This traditional colonial model has created problems even for researchers who identify themselves as indigenous and thus find themselves positioned as outsiders when trying to conduct research in their own communities (Tuhiwai-Smith, 1999). Additionally, Cannella and Manuelito (2008) explain that

“research as a construct is so deeply embedded within Enlightenment/modernist thought that arguing for its continued practice is actually a reproduction of the Eurocentric and American error”(p. 49). They stress, however, that because research cannot be completely rejected, a re-conceptualization is necessary.

To avoid perpetuating colonialist practices, I agree that “the purposes, questions, and methods of research must be transformed” (Cannella & Manuelito, 2008). Cannella and Manuelito (2008) propose an “anticolonialist social science that would generate visions of egalitarianism and social justice.” A decolonialist approach questions whether anyone can ever really “know” another; knowledge is replaced by identification with those one is “studying.” (Cannella & Manuelito, 2008). Cannella and Manuelito also use Anzaldúa’s conceptualization of *La mestiza* as a way of embodying challenges to dualistic ways of questioning, being, and interpreting, because *La mestiza* can blur boundaries of identity, space, and time. *Mestiza* warrior activism, they argue, “maintains a proud people while surviving within and confronting colonialist patriarchy;” this kind of consciousness is at the heart of anticolonialist social science (Cannella & Manuelito, 2008). A *mestiza* social science, then, involves research interactions that allow for the collection and analysis of data without imposing rigid structures and influence on others. Researchers do not assume that they have the right or ability to define, know, and judge others. The new focus of research is to:

- (a) reveal and actively challenge social systems, discourses, and institutions that are oppressive and that perpetuate injustice (even if those systems are represented in disciplinary knowledge) and explore ways of making those systems obviously visible in society, (b) support knowledges that have been discredited by dominant

power orientations in ways that are transformative (rather than simply revealing); and (c) construct activist conceptualizations of research that are critical and multiple in ways that are transparent, reflexive, and collaborative. (Cannella & Manuelito, 2008)

Additionally, deconstructing practices without offering solutions is also problematic. Potter argues that “critique has become a means of occluding reality and avoiding responsibility” (2008). To avoid this problem, anticolonialism requires an activist orientation, thus erasing the false separation between academic research and transformative activism in the real world (Cannella & Manuelito, 2008). This means that research must be intertwined with solutions in order to prevent problematic colonizing practices.

Throughout the process of my dissertation research, my goal is to engage in *mestiza* warrior activism. I am actively reflecting at every moment on ways for my presence to contribute to collaborative projects and reciprocal knowledge creation, rather than just extracting data and distancing myself from “participants.” My data, then, extend beyond those of the traditional research project. I draw on participation, observation, interviews, and organizational texts, but I also incorporate feelings and emotions, relationships with co-conspirators, and conversations leading to collaborative analysis as contributing to, and complicating, these data.

### **Outline of Study**

Chapter 1 has introduced the study beginning with the initial development experience that inspired it, provided an overview of the research site and its projects, described the research question and the significance of the study, and introduced my

positionality as a researcher. Chapter 2 is a review of the literature; I begin with a discussion of the binaries that govern traditional approaches to social change and to development binaries and then discuss transcendent possibilities for each. Chapter 3 describes the research method for this study, including an explanation of why the research site was chosen, philosophical groundings and assumptions guiding the study, data collection, and analysis. Chapter 4 is a description of the analysis and findings. Finally, Chapter 5 offers concluding remarks and implications.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

East Central Ministries is a unique space to understand how social change happens, how it informs development approaches, and what role faith and communication play in the process. In order to ground this study, then, I will examine literature on social change, development, faith-based organizations, and the role of communication in shaping these approaches. As discussed in the introduction, research has the potential to reinforce binaries such as *nos/otros*<sup>16</sup> (Saavedra & Nymark, 2008). When the division between us/them is removed, the word becomes *nosotros*<sup>17</sup> and offers infinite new possibilities for working together and relating to one another.

Research is often conducted and presented using a binary framework to make sense of findings, and this tendency limits transcendent possibilities by placing ideas and experiences into existing categories. In my review of the literature that contextualizes my project, I examine social change, specifically in development contexts, to understand the potential that exists in moving past existing structures and binaries towards transcendent understandings of how change happens. Additionally, I examine the binaries of faith-based development and communication, then highlight transcendent possibilities within each.

### Social Change

Many attempts at creating meaningful social change are grounded in *nos/otros* binaries. The assumption behind this approach to change, while it may be well intentioned, is the idea that answers to change problems lie within *us*, and we will

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<sup>16</sup> Us/others

<sup>17</sup> We

persuade *them* to change in ways we see fit. These approaches to change are also limiting and rely on prescribed methods and paths to achieve change.

Traditional approaches to social change are grounded in efforts to persuade others, exemplifying a patriarchal approach to rhetoric. Foss and Griffin (1995) explain that traditional patriarchal rhetoric is characterized by persuasion and a desire to control others. This desire to persuade and control means a devaluing of the life-worlds of others (Foss & Foss, 2012; Foss & Griffin, 1995). Persuasion is also about conquest and conversion (Foss & Foss, 2012; Ryan & Natalle, 2001), which I argue makes it a colonizing force. This means that when there is an attempt to change or control another person, it is grounded in ideas of entitlement and superiority; the persuader assumes they have the right to change the other person in the interaction. This approach results in colonizing the life-worlds of others, much like the colonization of indigenous territories and ways of life perpetuated by the West.

These persuasion-based traditional approaches to social change are also limiting. Singhal, Rao, and Pant (2006) explain that most studies of social movements have focused on “straight-jacketed, cognitively-structured techniques of persuasion” (p. 268). Often these change efforts focus on what Sowards and Renegar (2006) call a “public protest methodology.” Karlberg (2003) argues that these traditional approaches to social change generally come from the elites in society, and Riley, Torrens, and Krumholz (2005) add that because justice is often defined by those in power, it reflects only their interests. Such approaches to social movements focus on how to construct arguments based in reason that will in turn convince others to change, often manifesting in large scale public protests as the vehicle for change messages. Because these change efforts are



grounded in a *nos/otros* binary, and often defined by those already possessing a high degree of power, they limit the potential for marginalized groups to assert and protect their interests during large scale change efforts.

Karlberg (2003) complicates traditional approaches to social change such as protest by pointing out that they may in fact reinforce the very structures that protestors are attempting to challenge. For example, recent protests against the excessive use of force by the Albuquerque Police Department have in turn created opportunities for APD to use force against protestors (Chappell, 2014). These approaches often reach only what Singhal et al. (2006) call “first-order social changes,” involving only small shifts in knowledge, attitudes, and practices, rather than large scale shifts in value systems. Traditional approaches to social change also devote much time and energy to negativity. There is a focus on violence in research (Gorsevski, 2004) and in media coverage of conflict (Tivona, 2008).

A transcendent approach to social change asks what possibilities arise if we disengage from problematic structures and violent action and instead focus our efforts on new possibilities outside them. If binaries are transcended, multiple options for change present themselves. In addressing attempts at change, several theorists have begun to explore transcendent approaches to change that shift the focus from the negative to the positive and from the material to the symbolic to open up new spaces and opportunities for change. In the section that follows, I highlight transcendent change approaches including: social construction, nonviolent rhetoric, appreciative inquiry, positive deviance, invitational rhetoric, invitational social change, and constricted/constructed potentiality.

People use symbols to make sense of their social worlds and communicate with one another and can therefore choose to use symbols outside of existing binaries. Realities are therefore local, specific, and co-constructed (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). The theory of semiotics lays the foundation for understanding social construction; it serves as an approach for uncovering and understanding the meaning-making process. Social construction maintains that there are multiple, co-constructed realities. Rather than assuming that signs and symbols refer to an abstract *Reality* with a capital R outside of the self, social constructionists maintain that multiple *realities* exist, and these are always local, specific, and co-constructed (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). Thus, every individual constructs his or her own understanding of reality based on symbolic interaction with other individuals, social structures, and the natural world. No construction is more “right” or more “true” than another; it is simply a different life-world.

Understanding orders of signification in semiotics clarifies the process by which social construction works. The first order of signification consists of a signifier and a signified that combine to form a sign (Barthes, 1972). For example, the word *tree* is a signifier referring to an object out in the world that grows in the ground and has leaves. This level of “literal” meaning is referred to as *denotation* (Barthes, 1972). In the second order of signification, or *connotation*, the denotative sign becomes a signifier to which a new signified is attached (Barthes, 1972). If you take, for example, the sign “tree” discussed above and attach the yoga pose “tree,” it achieves a second level of meaning, and the sign becomes a bodily movement that imitates a tree that grows outside.

The third level of meaning, also referred to as myth, takes the second order of signification and adds another signified. For example, the idea of strength and beauty that a tree possesses is something that humans should strive to achieve when using this yoga pose during class (Barthes, 1972). The level of myth is useful for understanding ideology or taken for granted assumptions that pervade discourse (Barthes, 1977). Each of these levels of signification, however, is a social construction, beginning with the label chosen to name the tree. In attempts to create meaningful social change individuals and organizations may choose a social construction that emphasizes a focus on the positive, disengaging from traditional approaches that focus on negative problems in an attempt to end them. Nonviolent rhetoric, appreciative inquiry, positive deviance, invitational rhetoric, invitational social change, and constricted/constructed potentiality are all excellent examples of this shift from negative us-against-them constructions to what lies outside of these restricting binaries.

While scholarship has focused on violence, both physical and rhetorical, Gorsevski (2004) seeks to bring the focus back to peace. She offers nonviolent rhetoric as an alternative to traditional approaches to social change that focus on violence. She explains that violence, in addition to being physical, can be cultural, attacking individuals' ways of life, and/or structural, preventing people from reaching their full human potential. In order to avoid addressing violence through the use of violent rhetoric, Gorsevski (2004) suggests using nonviolent rhetoric, which is creative, focuses on positive strengths of social movement participants, is sustainable, and does not vilify the opposing side of the issue. She explains that this approach to rhetoric and social change is "disarming without the need for arms" (Gorsevski, 2004, p. 69). Nonviolent rhetoric is

characterized by emphasizing with, rather than demonizing opponents; portraying everyone as deserving of human rights, equality, and respect; and avoiding violent metaphors. Nonviolent rhetoric is also characterized by respect for and awareness of culture; a reliance on community and mutual responsibility; a refusal to engage with unjust actions and systems; and an underdog ethos (Gorsevski, 2004).

Moving further away from negativity and opposition towards transcendent change possibilities, appreciative inquiry (AI) is an “invitation to a positive revolution” in change (Cooperrider & Whitney, 1999; Hammond & Royal, 2001) and a “new way of seeing” (Banaga, 2001, p. 262). This approach to community development focuses specifically on positive attributes to achieve social change (Barge, 2001). Cooperrider (2001a) explains that to appreciate means valuing or “recognizing the best in people or the world around us; affirming past and present strengths, successes, and potentials; to perceive those things that give life (health, vitality, excellence) to living systems” and also the process of increasing in value (p. 3). Inquiry means exploration and discovery, asking questions, and remaining open to new potentials and possibilities (Cooperrider, 2001a). Cooperrider and Whitney (1999) thus define appreciative inquiry as a “cooperative search for the best in people, their organizations, and the world around them” (p. 10). This means systematically searching for when systems are at their best, asking questions aimed at heightening positive potential, and assuming that all living systems have untapped, rich, and inspiring positive accounts to contribute (Cooperrider & Whitney, 1999).

Appreciative inquiry also avoids the overwhelming tendency of other social change efforts to identify problems and then to criticize and diagnose them. Cooperrider and Whitney (1999) argue that when this “positive change core” is applied to change

efforts of any kind, changes that never would have been thought possible are realized. In appreciative inquiry, target communities can be understood as “asset-building” communities (Benson, 2006). These relational, intergenerational communities involve a critical mass of people concerned with building developmental strengths; these individuals invest in identifying, activating, deepening, and celebrating the asset-building potential in their community (Benson, 2006).

AI projects are guided by five basic principles: the constructionist principle, the principle of simultaneity, the poetic principle, the anticipatory principle, and the positive principle (Cooperrider & Whitney, 1999). The constructionist principle acknowledges that community destiny and human knowledge are interwoven (Cooperrider & Whitney, 1999). The principle of simultaneity argues that inquiry and change are simultaneous, rather than occurring at separate moments (Cooperrider & Whitney, 1999). The poetic principle compares human communities to open, coauthored books (Cooperrider & Whitney, 1999). The anticipatory principle believes that when we imagine positive images of the future, it leads to positive actions (Cooperrider & Whitney, 1999). Finally, the positive principle points out that building and sustaining momentum for change requires a great deal of social bonding and positive outlook (Cooperrider & Whitney, 1999).

Appreciative inquiry as a process for change has been described as consisting of four basic stages. First, Cooperrider (2001b) outlines three “facts” about human beings: (1) all human beings are exceptions to the rule; (2) as humans we do not have to be central to every human group we belong to, but we need to be appreciated and recognized as essential; and (3) everyone needs to be asked to share what they see as true, good, and

possible. With these assumptions about human beings as a starting point, participants may use a cycle guided by four flexible stages.

The first stage involves identifying the positive change core (Cooperrider & Whitney, 1999) or appreciating and valuing the best of what is already present within the community through a discussion of “moments of excellence, high points, core values, proud moments, and life-giving forces” (Barge, 2001, p. 93). In the second stage, participants share their dreams and visions of what could be, discussing possibilities for positive impact in the world (Barge, 2001; Cooperrider & Whitney, 1999). In the third stage, the positive change core is incorporated into conversations about what should take place in the community, and strategies, processes, systems, decisions and collaborations are drafted through dialogue (Barge, 2001; Cooperrider & Whitney, 1999). The fourth stage invites actions inspired by the discoveries, dreams, and dialogue of the first three stages (Cooperrider & Whitney, 1999) with community members collectively determining what steps should be taken (Barge, 2001).

In order to fully prepare for utilizing the appreciative inquiry approach, Kelm (2001) suggests incorporating mental preparation. Getting into the right frame of mind helps participants to act consistently with the principles of AI and to live AI more fully: “The ‘real’ person is always present and is sensed by the audience, which is why it is important to practice what you preach” (Kelm, 2001, p. 165). Kelm suggests the following affirmations:

- I believe in these people and I'm honored to be with them.
- I believe in what I am doing.
- There is possibility everywhere I look.

- I believe that the principles of AI have real value for these people.
- I am excited about this meeting (p. 165).

Another approach that emphasizes a focus on the positive to achieve social change is positive deviance (PD). This approach is communication centered and positioned at the intersection of theory, research, and praxis (Dura & Singhal, 2009). The three key attributes of PD are similar to AI in that the approach to social change is (1) asset-based; (2) emphasizes gaining knowledge through action; and (3) redefines the idea of experts in social change projects (Dura & Singhal, 2009). Dura and Singhal (2009) advocate a focus on the positive, explaining that participants should identify “what is going right in a community in order to amplify it, as opposed to focusing on what is going wrong in a community and fixing it” (Dura & Singhal, 2009, p. 2). Positive deviance also uses a four-part process of discovery, dialogue, design, and action, focusing on the role of communication in facilitating this approach (Dura & Singhal, 2009).

Both appreciative inquiry and positive deviance are community-centered approaches. To create a significant impact in communities, community members must be committed to investing themselves and their resources (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993). Cooperrider and Whitney (1999) explain that affirmative approaches are an improvement to traditional attempts at change because they involve people in changing their communities through creating a collective sense of purpose, sharing information with the entire group rather than a select few, and valuing what people have to contribute through their invitation to participate in meaningful ways. This community-based approach questions the role of outside “experts,” focusing on wisdom that already exists in communities (Dura & Singhal, 2009).

In the positive-deviance approach, it is important that community members identify their most pressing concerns (Dura & Singhal, 2009) rather than identifying “problems” to be “solved” by outsiders. Additionally, plans for addressing these concerns must be developed within communities rather than simply making use of existing strategies produced in a laboratory modeled after other successful programs (Benson, 2006; Cooperrider & Whitney, 1999). Kretzman et al (1993) explain the importance of focusing on community resources because prospects or outside help are often limited. Finally, Cooperrider and Whitney (1999) explain commitment to affirmative interventions should be community wide if they are to be sustainable.

Cooperrider and Srivastva (1987) explain that the method we choose and the assumptions guiding our research and practices allow us to “create the world we later discover” (p. 129), so choosing a focus on the positive both appreciative inquiry and positive deviance create positive opportunities for change. Barge (2001) argues that affirmative interventions can thus be understood as a social constructionist approach to community development, concerned with how language creates our social worlds (Barge, 2001). Quoting Aristotle, Browne (2001) explains that “a vivid imagination compels the whole body to obey it,” pushing readers to consider what can happen when community members express their imaginations and visions for the future in public (p. 78). This social constructionist view assumes that “if we bring into language those positive moments where we have experienced health, vitality, and excellence, we create a linguistic universe that crowds out the negative stories, enabling community members to carry the best parts about the past into the future” (Barge, 2001, p. 92). Barge (2001) emphasizes the role of communication and linguistic practices in community



development and conflict management. He explains that first there must be a shift from deficit to affirmative linguistic practices (Barge, 2001). This involves communication facilitation skills such as leaving space in meetings and appreciative interviews for conversational formats such as positive storytelling (Barge, 2001). Hall (2001) adds that storytelling can be used as a cultural approach to make affirmative interventions accessible and easily integrated into communities.

Invitational rhetoric is another alternative to persuasion and *nos/otros* binaries, defined as “an invitation to understanding as a means to create a relationship rooted in equality, imminent value, and self-determination” (Foss & Griffin, 1995, p. 5). Foss and Griffin (1995) offer two communicative options for practicing invitational rhetoric: offering perspectives and creating an invitational environment. Offering perspectives simply means articulating one’s own thoughts and perspective about an issue without advocating that others adopt it as their own. Through the practice of offering perspectives, rhetors in an invitational interaction are honoring the life-worlds of others.

Creating an invitational environment means creating conditions of safety (freedom from danger), value (acknowledging the inherent value in the perspective of another), freedom (allowing others the freedom to express their perspectives), and openness (a willingness to be changed by the interaction) (Foss & Foss, 2012; Foss & Griffin, 1995). Through the use of invitational rhetoric, the choices of others can be approached through appreciation, or a genuine curiosity and acknowledgment of their perspective, rather than simply tolerance, which implies allowing the perspective despite disapproving of it (Foss & Foss, 2012). Invitational rhetoric involves “a trust that others

are doing the best they can at the moment and simply need 'to be unconditionally accepted as the experts on their own lives'" (Foss & Griffin, 1995, p. 4).

In order to understand communication from an invitational perspective, I will highlight two important concepts: resourcement and agency. Resourcement is simply the act of disengaging with the frame provided by a rhetor and formulating a response from a different frame (Bone et al., 2008; Foss & Foss, 2012). For example, at pride parades, queer participants have responded to the hateful rhetoric of various church groups with hugs and kind words, thus disengaging from a violent frame and moving instead to a peaceful one. Bone, Griffin, and Scholtz (Bone et al., 2008) address the concept of agency, which has been argued as absent by critics of invitational rhetoric. They explain that agency, or the means to act, exists within the space created by an environment of safety, freedom, value and openness (Bone et al., 2008). Additionally, in this space agency is interactive, grounded in efforts to understand others; this differs from persuasive rhetoric, where agency is present in attempts at changing others (Bone et al., 2008).

Ryan and Natalle (2001) suggest that standpoint theory could be a useful addition to invitational rhetoric, because it adds a component of self-reflection and understanding to interactions with and acceptance of an other. They explain that this hermeneutic interaction would offer greater possibilities of understanding self, understanding other, and ultimately transcending difference (Ryan & Natalle, 2001). This simultaneous understanding of self and other could prove useful in feminist-consciousness raising efforts, which move toward social change first by reflecting on the self and then moving to collective needs (Sowards & Renegar, 2004). Sowards and Renegar (2006) argue that

the third wave of feminism, in which we currently find ourselves, is also more invitational than past waves. For example, one form of third-wave feminism is writing books and essays that focus on one's own personal experience, and offering them to others without advocating their feminism should look exactly as yours does (Sowards & Renegar, 2006). By approaching communication from a place of understanding, rather than persuasion, invitational rhetoric creates new change possibilities such as invitational social change and constricted/constructed potentiality.

Mahatma Gandhi's idea that "we must be the change we wish to see in the world" guides the invitational approach to social change (Greiner & Singhal, 2009). Greiner and Singhal (2009) define invitational social change as "communication interventions which invite, rather than require, participation" (p. 34). Invitational social change maintains that every individual has possibilities for changing their situation and the situation of others (Greiner & Singhal, 2009).

In order to achieve lasting, second-order social change, Singhal, Rao, and Pant (2006) explain that efforts must be collaborative, must use the concept of resourcement in a culturally appropriate way, and must include follow up efforts to ensure that changes are being maintained. Symbol use is also central to invitational social change. For example, Gandhi often used collective symbolic acts to gain public support for just causes (Singhal, 2010), and Antanas Mockus, as mayor of Bogotá, Colombia, successfully used mimes as a playful symbolic approach to reduce traffic accidents (Singhal & Greiner, 2008).

By shifting the focus away from violence and negativity, as Gorsevski (2004) suggests, invitational social change focuses on what assets individuals in various

communities have available to them to change their circumstances. A focus on the symbolic additionally opens the door to a world of opportunities shut out by traditional approaches to social change, where the focus is on changing structures of power and domination. For example, *dayabal* is “a force that persuades through compassion and love” and can be used to create meaningful change (Singhal, 2010, p. 104). Singhal explains that this practice of love and compassion was often used by Gandhi and his followers:

Gandhi, the mediator and conciliator, believed that conflicts were best resolved not by force, nor even the edicts of heartless law; rather, they were to be resolved through entering peoples’ hearts, and bringing to the fore their common humanity. When the caregivers of the beaten *satyagrahis* offer water to the tired policemen who felled their loved ones, a door opens for compassionate resolution. (Singhal, 2010, p. 505)

Finally, building from invitational rhetoric and invitational approaches to social change is an understanding that *nos/otros* attempts at changing others are ineffective because change is self-chosen (Foss & Foss, 2012; Foss & Griffin, 1995). Individuals rarely change through the persuasive efforts of others; they change because they have come to the conclusion that they are ready to make a change (Foss, Foss, & Griffin, 2006). This understanding of self and change opens great symbolic possibilities for change; attention can be directed at what lies outside the binaries and placed on the multiple new possibilities that present themselves.

In his attempt to explain how people change, Wheelis (1973) argues that change comes from within, as “for every situation, for every person, there is a realm of freedom

and a realm of constraint" (p. 30). Using imprisonment as an example, he explains that someone with pride and self-respect is free though they may be a prisoner, and this serves as a constant challenge to their jailers (Wheelis, 1973). While we may understand these conditions and our previous socialization as barriers to being free to change, Wheelis (1973) argues that they are not mutually exclusive, and both can be true; "they coexist, grow together in an upward spiral, and the growth of one furthers the growth of the other" (pp. 87-88).

Building on ideas of changing from within, Foss and Foss (2011) argue that dominant theories of change, or *constricted potentiality*, limit the available options for change by focusing on tangible material conditions. They then propose an alternative paradigm, *constructed potentiality*, which explores creating change through the use of unlimited symbolic resources. Foss and Foss (2011) argue that actors go through a series of steps when seeking to create change, first making an initial symbolic choice that then affects the possibilities for change they have access to. In traditional approaches to change, or *constricted potentiality*, actors focus on the material means available for making changes. This leads to persuasion as the strategy for change, with a prescribed route to change. The focus of change efforts is external, and the result is a change in material conditions (Foss & Foss, 2011)

In the paradigm of *constructed potentiality*, the actor's initial choice is to focus on the symbolic resources available to create change. This leads to interpretation as the strategy for change and an unspecified route to change. The focus of change efforts is internal, and the result is self-change. Constructed potentiality offers greater possibilities for social change outside of dominant structures. For example, a prisoner may focus

efforts to change their circumstance on structures such as courts and appeals. Or they may, as Foss and Foss explain, choose to refuse to see themselves as a prisoner and construct a daily routine representative of that social reality, thus symbolically resisting imprisonment (Foss & Foss, 2011).

Traditional approaches to social change have focused on persuasion, thus reinforcing *nos/otros* binaries with the assumption that it is *our* duty to convince *them* to change in some way. Transcendent approaches to change move past these binaries, questioning how people can change themselves, work together to create something new, and make use of playful and symbolic resources. I now will examine development as a type of social change, beginning with traditional development binaries, and moving towards transcendent development possibilities.

## **Development**

Traditionally, development literature and approaches have relied on variations of the *nos/otros* binary, including drawing distinctions between developed/underdeveloped, traditional/modern, Northern/Southern, First world/Third world, and wealthy/poor. These projects position local communities and members as being in need of aid, and individuals and organizations from outside of the community are seen as able to provide that aid. For example, in the case of Las Colibris discussed in the introduction, Margaret was working within this binary. She saw the Marianitas community as being in need of assistance and herself in a position to provide that assistance. This meant creating projects on her own that required technology outside the community, such as the Internet, and delivering volunteers to the community. It also meant that community members could only

participate as recipients of this work, and therefore had no say in how the projects would be carried out.

Development projects that seek to eradicate poverty in countries deemed “underdeveloped” have been around since the 1940s (Hefferan, Adkins, & Occhipinti, 2009). Hefferan, Adkins, and Occhipinti (2009) explain that having this attitude towards communities they seek to help can often do more harm than good:

Often reflecting a messy entanglement of political over humanitarian concerns, U.S. foreign development aid, in particular, often has been preoccupied with moving those in the “global south” from a state of presumed “backwardness” toward a Western-defined notion of “progress.” (Hefferan et al., 2009, p. 1)

Many development projects are based in the traditional/modern binary and rely on “modernization” approaches. Huesca (2003) explains that this means a development agenda that replaces traditional social and cultural practices and values with those of “modern” societies. Modernization approaches to development have caused researchers to question whether development increases social justice and the standard of living for communities or relies on a ‘trickle down’ method of economic development (Dicklitch & Rice, 2004). This method of economic development also removes politics from the process of social change and development, which diminishes the need for examining power relations and ethics (Huesca, 2003). As Huesca explains, development guided by assumptions of modernization can be reduced to “a fateful procedure whereby poor nations should imitate the social, political, and economic steps of their wealthier counterparts” (Huesca, 2003, p. 52).

Development projects additionally construct a *nos/otros* binary through the ways in which they categorize communities where aid is targeted. For example, Southern/Northern and Third world/First world distinctions are made between communities who receive aid and those who provide it. The North/South distinction creates development strategies based on theories of social evolution, or the belief that Northern nations are more “evolved” (developed) than Southern nations (Huesca, 2003). While this may seem like nothing more than a word choice, the attitudes it creates can be harmful to targeted communities. Eade (2007) explains that a large body of development literature positions Southern countries as in “need” and argues that international NGOs are in the best position to meet those needs (Eade, 2007).

This approach becomes problematic, however, because “not even the best-intentioned NGOs are exempt from the tendency of the development industry to ignore, misinterpret, displace, supplant, or undermine the capacities that people already have (Eade, 2007, p. 633). When projects are developed to protect the autonomy of NGOs and community-based efforts, there is increased risk that Southern partners will be abandoned without anyone to hold accountable (Eade, 2007).

In order for this tendency to be avoided, Eade (2007) stresses the need for NGOs to learn about the values, perceptions, concerns, and aspirations of the communities with whom they work, rather than simply gathering surface-level observations. He recommends a “commitment to partnership, reciprocity, shared risk-taking, and interdependence” if NGOs are making serious attempts towards capacity building (Eade, 2007, p. 636). In addition to the South/North distinction, Third world/First world understandings of development reinforce colonial histories. In other words, many



development practitioners focus on what they believed to be problems of “underdevelopment” or “backwardness,” and seek to address them by applying Western economic and political systems to “Third World” countries (Servaes, 2006). This conceptualization of development is greatly influenced by historical events like the Industrial Revolution in the U.S. and Europe and the colonization of Latin American, African, and Asian countries (Rogers, 2006).

In addition to the development binaries discussed above, the effectiveness of development projects is judged using a quantitative/qualitative binary, with greater importance placed on outcomes that can be measured quantitatively. Development theory has been greatly influenced by Western academic standards such as “the quantitative empiricism of North American social science, and capitalistic economic/political philosophy” (Rogers, 2006, pp. 213–214). Rogers (2006) and Dissanayake (1984) cite capital-intensive technology, economic growth, and quantification as three key features of modernization-minded development. First, Rogers explains that because many “developed” nations possess capital-intensive technology and “less developed” nations do not, development practitioners proceed with the assumption that introducing technology would translate into greater development (Rogers, 2006). Second is the assumption that humans are essentially economic, and so would respond “rationally” to economic initiatives so that profit would inspire large-scale behavioral change (Rogers, 2006). Finally, and arguably the most prevalent assumption of traditional development is the idea that simple measurement of numeric data, such as per capita income, is sufficient information to both design development projects and assess their success (Rogers, 2006).

Because of the reliance on quantifiable advances such as the number of projects completed and trainings attended, development is often measured in terms of economic and political liberalization rather than qualitative social and economic advances (Dicklitch & Rice, 2004). Due to these approaches, Dicklitch and Rice (2004) explain that development NGOs are positioned as disempowering to the communities they enter, criticized for “lack of accountability, transparency, grassroots participation, and overall effectiveness,” and perceived as entering international communities “simply to hand out foreign funds” (Dicklitch & Rice, 2004, p. 661). Eade (2007) explains that even development efforts aimed at building the capacity of individuals and communities, which stem from Freirian intellectual traditions, have moved toward a “ ‘pull yourself-up-by-your-bootstraps’ kind of economic and political agenda,” which he cautions “will be at best insignificant, at worst damaging” if not accompanied by critical examination (Eade, 2007, p. 632). While this focus on quantitative measures often is linked to the 1940s-1960s development era (Dissanayake, 1984; Rogers, 2006; Servaes, 2006), it still is prevalent today.

For example, in a 2013 episode of NPR’s *This American Life* podcast called “I was Just Trying to Help,” two approaches to international aid were discussed. The first, developed by graduate students from the U.S., is called “GiveDirectly” and does just that—gives money directly to poor families in Kenya. The second approach is called “Heifer International,” which gives cows to Kenyan families, along with training on proper care and nutrition to increase the cow’s milk production. When trying to figure out which approach would best help local communities, the segment’s reporter David Krestenbaum suggested an experiment: “Take one village, give the people cows and

training, and the next village over, take the money you would have spent on cows and training and just give it to the people” (Glass, 2013). Paul Niehaus, a co-founder of GiveDirectly from the U.S. agreed: “It'd be great, wouldn't it? It would be fantastic. That's exactly what the sector needs” (Glass, 2013). Elizabeth Bintliff, a self-identified African woman, and vice president of Heifer's Africa programs, felt differently:

Well, let me say this—I mean, as an African woman that sounds to me like a terrible idea... I mean, it sounds like an experiment, and we're not about experiments. These are lives of real people and we have to do what we believe is correct. We can't make experiments with people's lives. They're just—they're people. It's too important ... data has its value but it cannot capture everything. There is a limit to it. (Glass, 2013)

This story highlights an important distinction between foreign aid efforts created in the U.S. with the desire to help those in need and local efforts in Kenya. While quantitative experiments to verify the effectiveness of programs makes perfect sense to GiveDirectly, and the U.S. graduate students who started it, African development organizations like Heifer's Africa program maintain that the lives local community members are directly impacted, and so their experiences cannot be reduced to experiments.

The story discussed above also highlights the binaries between community centered/ethnocentric approaches and client/provider relationships. Development projects can often create a binary between the interests of those conducting them and the communities they aim to help. Eade (2007) argues that aid agency workers begin to see the world through the agency's eyes, which potentially leads to the assumption that “their

priorities (which are necessarily shaped by their upward accountability, and fed by their own public-relations priorities) will naturally coincide with those of the people on the receiving end, or can be bolted on without too much problem” (p. 630). Concepts such as *gender* and *empowerment* are often reduced to buzzwords, minimizing their importance and potentially hindering the work being done in local communities, rather than helping (Eade, 2007).

This was the case with the website created for Las Colibris. Margaret framed the group as an organization dedicated to the empowerment of women. However, when asked, group members could not offer their own definitions of empowerment. Additionally, when attempting to create egalitarian partnerships, traditional approaches to development often construct the relationship through a client/provider binary. Hoksbergen (2005) explains that in these “partnerships,” many NGOs begin to dominate relationships, resulting in what looks more like a provider-client relationship.

Following the constricted-potentiality approach to change, some development projects also focus on a prescribed process or formula to be successful. Eade (2007) points out that it is important for development practitioners to realize that these projects cannot be “reduced to a set of ingredients” with a universal recipe prescribing “how to do it.” Rather, the diverse actors involved in any development project must be taken into account, and local priorities and values must be privileged (Eade, 2007, p. 632). Another issue in development partnerships is the tendency for a one-way transfer of resources toward the “weaker partner,” resulting in the potential loss of dignity (Eade, 2007). Traditional development practices are ultimately harmful to partnerships as they

“undercut the authentic nature of partnership, and, in the process, hinder the growth of civil society and sustainable development” (Hoksbergen, 2005, p. 22).

Development approaches positioned in and evaluated by the multiple binaries discussed above have, not surprisingly, been heavily criticized in development literature. Positivist assumptions, ethnocentrism, and blame of the individual are just three of the major issues with this approach. First, Servaes (2006) explains that planning a linear, “rational” sequence of events determined outside of the target community is an approach grounded in positive assumptions and is potentially manipulative. He adds that empirical data used in this approach often fails in its “search for specific, measurable, short-term, individual ‘effects’” (Servaes, 2006, p. 286). Second, this initial approach to development is grounded in ethnocentric assumptions (Dissanayake, 1984; Rogers, 2006; Servaes, 2006), in which practitioners take for granted their own cultural forms, scientific methods, and modernity, and assume that these will not only work in the communities they enter, but are the correct ways to become “developed” (Servaes, 2006). These ethnocentric assumptions are ultimately grounded in the Western experience as a model (Dissanayake, 1984; Rogers, 2006) and cultivate a “kind of consumer demand and a Western way of life” (Servaes, 2006, p. 286). Finally, this approach to development is characterized by the tendency to place blame on the individual for being “underdeveloped” (Dissanayake, 1984; Rogers, 2006).

The late 1960s and 1970s saw a shift in development approaches following the criticisms launched at traditional approaches. This second wave of development disrupted traditional binary categories through an emphasis on income and information distribution, popular participation, and a mix of traditional and modern technological systems.

Theorists and practitioners argued for the equal distribution information, income, and a new emphasis on the quality of life (Dissanayake, 1984; Rogers, 2006). Additionally, rather than going into communities under the ethnocentric assumption that their pre-prescribed formula would work for development, projects began to emphasize popular participation in planning and execution along with self-reliance and independence drawing on local resources (Dissanayake, 1984; Rogers, 2006). The 1960s-1970s shift in development also questioned the traditional emphasis on “materialistic, economic growth” and instead focused on “social advancement, equality, and freedom,” qualities which “should be determined by the people themselves, through a widely participatory process” (Rogers, 2006, p. 225).

While this second wave of development disrupts binaries such as developed/undeveloped, provider/client, and quantitative/qualitative, it may simply shift the focus to existing North/South binaries and create new ones such as center/periphery, elite/masses, and dependent/independent. Servaes (2006) points out that this approach to development has therefore also been criticized. First, he explains that the “center” and international capital are often blamed for poverty and “backwardness,” and that this in turn “encourages a Third World-oriented ideology that undermines the potential for international class solidarity by lumping together as “enemies” the elite and masses in the Center nations” (Servaes, 2006, p. 288). According to Servaes (2006), this development model is static and will not be able to account for changes over time, which is why he calls it the “dependency approach” (p. 287).

Since the shift in focus from *nos/otros* understandings of development to popular participation and a blend of the modern and traditional, multiple transcendent

development approaches have begun to emerge. Rather than relying on traditional binaries to create, target, and monitor development projects, these approaches open a space for community members to identify their own needs, desires, and/or goals, and to work with organizations and individuals within and outside of the community to meet those needs. A focus on community members and grassroots efforts moves development projects away from the center/periphery, elite/masses, and dependent/independent binaries introduced in the second wave of development. Multiple options for transcendent development are then able to emerge, including partnership, human rights, holistic development, and anotherness in one world.

Hoksbergen (2005) explains that emphasizing partnerships, the first option for transcendent development I will discuss, is a recent trend in development. Early NGOs traveled internationally to complete development projects on their own, then began hiring local community members to do the work (Hoksbergen, 2005). Next came the era of creating and training NGOs abroad, from which stems the new trend towards partnering with these NGOs (Hoksbergen, 2005). Hoksbergen (2005) argues that this move comes from the desire for Western NGOs to be able to “phase out and return home” while insuring the infrastructure of development projects remains:

Throughout all these stages, the ultimate goal for people and organizations from the North has been to “work themselves out of a job.” This goal could be realized if local organizations populated by motivated and well-trained people were to arise from, and be sustained by, the grassroots. (Hoksbergen, 2005, p. 17)

Pleyán (2001) also advocates for partnerships in development projects, citing the housing crisis in Cuba as an example where the traditional *us* helping *others* model was

unsustainable. For example, using the standardized production of housing in other countries, with cool climates, proved ineffective when implemented in the Cuban context (Pleyán, 2001). Organizations such as Habitat-Cuba thus based development projects on three pillars: “supporting the conscious participation by the residents of low-income neighborhoods in changing their surroundings; encouraging them to think of economic, cultural, and environmental solutions that are sustainable; and stimulating greater interaction and cooperation among all the relevant social actors” (Pleyán, 2001, p. 333). For partnerships such as this to work, community members are encouraged to participate in every aspect of the development process, from diagnosing problems to planning solutions, in order to create community ownership over projects (Pleyán, 2001). Second, Pleyán stresses the need for achieving dialogue and facilitating local participation to easily replicate building methods in future projects. Finally, he stresses that this development project is not just aimed at building housing but in turn is also building community. Thus, social relations must be considered (Pleyán, 2001). He ultimately argues that without partnerships guided by these three pillars there is no way for projects to be sustainable (Pleyán, 2001).

Dissanayake (1984) cautions, however, that the “partnership” approach potentially still perpetuates inequality on the development process. He argues that the partnership approach focuses on the “interdependence” of Western countries and development target countries and complicates understandings of “interdependence: “one has to bear in mind that when the spokesman for this approach employ the term “interdependence,” they are talking of a viciously asymmetrical relationship in which the developed countries thrive at the expense of the developing countries” (Dissanayake,



1984, p. 45). In order to avoid the unequal relationships that partnership can promote, “authentic partnerships” (Hoksbergen, 2005) are necessary. Hoksbergen (2005) explains that while authentic partnerships between development organizations and target communities are desirable, they are not always easy to achieve in practice.

Characteristics to strive for in authentic development partnerships are: a clearly articulated common vision, complementary strengths, relationship equality, self-standing organizations, shared responsibility and clear roles, accountability on both ends, making decisions jointly, transparent communication, constructive conflict resolution, openness to compromise, listening and learning from one another, and finally a shared understanding of the partnership’s future (Hoksbergen, 2005, pp. 19–20). Additionally, Hoksbergen outlines processes by which target community partners may feel more “equal” to their development partners: minimal direct funding and dependency on funding, more self-raised funds from local sources, sensitivity on the part of the funding partner to managing the funding relationship, and listening more to the voices of community members (Hoksbergen, 2005, p. 23).

Additionally, to more fully forge partnerships, Hoksbergen (2005) emphasizes making covenants and avoiding “phase-out:”

A covenant, or long-term relationship agreement, is formed after an initial courting period in which the two organizations spend time together to discuss their identity, their values, and their vision and mission, and also do some preliminary community work together. The resulting covenant, developed through mutual discussion and negotiation, establishes the two organizations as partners and assumes a high level of mutual commitment.” (Hoksbergen, 2005, p. 23)

This differs from a simple contract outlining desired project impacts and stipulations and moves toward deeper partnerships rooted in participatory development work.

Additionally, in recognizing the importance of partnerships, Hoksbergen (2005) stresses the importance of phasing out the phase-out process of development. Rather than slowly taking steps to withdraw from a community and a development project, he argues that partners should plan on continuously maintaining partnerships as “it makes little sense to phase out of relationships that take so much time and effort to build” (Hoksbergen, 2005, p. 25). Eade (2007) moves towards understanding equal partnerships as a “co-development” approach, which he argues is more beneficial than attempting to be a “catalyst” (p.637). In a catalyst relationship, one partner channels money and resources to the other partner, attempting to change the receiver without experiencing any change themselves (Eade, 2007).

The rights-based approach is another development model that transcends the binaries of earlier approaches. Uvin (2007) explains that this approach encourages a redefinition of development and its aims and pushes development projects to both respect and fulfill human rights. Ultimately this means that development projects should:

Respect the dignity and individual autonomy of all those whom it claims to help, including the poorest and the most excluded, including minorities and other vulnerable groups, often discriminated against; it ought to create opportunities for their participation—opportunities that are not dependent on the whim of a benevolent outsider, but rooted in institutions and procedures.” (Uvin, 2007, pp. 602–603)

Transcendent development can also be achieved through a holistic approach based on community and human development. Mahadevia (2001) suggests thinking about development as the creation of a “sustainable city” (p. 245). In order to create sustainable cities, he suggests an inclusive approach based on four pillars: environmental sustainability, social equity, an economic growth with redistribution, and a political empowerment of the disempowered (Mahadevia, 2001, p. 245). According to Mahadevia (2001), “these four dimensions have to be approached simultaneously in the process of development and not, as at present, with one dimension taking precedence over the others within a fragmented and sectorial approach to sustainable development” (p. 245).

Dissanayake (1984) outlines a holistic approach to human development grounded in Buddhism. “The Sarvodaya Movement of Sri Lanka is fundamentally concerned with the total development of the human being. It envisions development not merely in terms of GNP and per capita income, but also in relation to the flowering of the total human personality” (Dissanayake, 1984, p. 41). The objectives outlined in this approach are in line with development as a participatory project: creating an awareness of problems confronting community members and generating ways to address them, developing community leadership skills, foster economically profitable skills, and encouraging the planning of development projects search for resources to complete them (Dissanayake, 1984, p. 41).

Finally, “Anotherness in one world” appears to be the most transcendent recent theorization of development; this perspective acknowledges that every community must find its own unique path to development. Servaes (2006) explains that this development perspective is rooted in both theory and practice and rejects dominant Western

approaches to development, including modernization and dependency theories. He argues that despite the clear paths to development outlined by economic and politically oriented approaches, “there is no universal path to development. Development must be conceived as an integral, multidimensional and dialectic process that can be different from country to country. Each society must find its own strategy” (Servaes, 2006, p. 290). This means that we acknowledge multiple others and their perspectives and make space for these perspectives to coexist. I focus on this approach to development because I believe it leaves the most space for invitational and transcendent understandings of the development process by giving people space to construct a development approach that works best for their given situation, without relying on strict definitions and categorizations of what a development project should be.

Traditional development binaries create a *nos/otros* division that simply reifies the categories rather than solving the binary divisions. Transcendent approaches to development invite participation, promote equal partnerships and human rights, focus on holistic development of the whole individual, and leave space for each community to create their own unique path to development. I will now focus on a more specific subset of development—faith-based organizations—again outlining the traditional binaries of this approach then moving to transcendent possibilities.

### **Faith-Based Approaches**

Faith-based approaches to development are also positioned in binary opposition to the secular development approaches discussed above. I begin my discussion of faith-based development by describing the faith/secular binary, exploring its positioning within

a good/bad tension, and concluding with possibilities for transcending both faith/secular and good/bad understandings of the role spirituality can play in development projects.

Beaumont (2008) argues that while faith generally refers to “beliefs and ideas that are unsupported by rational and/or empirical evidence and are reserved for concepts of religion, spirituality and belief in a transcendent reality,” faith-based organizations (FBOs) can be a little more difficult to define (p. 2019). This definition used in this study draws from Leurs (2012) and Dicklitch and Rice (2004): FBOs are formal organizations that rely on faith teachings for inspiration and guidance, draw on religious discourse to create aims, values, and goals for the organization, and operate as nonprofit, independent, and voluntary to achieve public good locally and internationally (Leurs, 2012). Important to note is that FBOs are not affiliated with the state, and while their philosophy, membership and/or programs may have a religious core, they are doing something different than strictly missionary work (Dicklitch & Rice, 2004).

Hefferan, Adkins, and Occhipinti (2009) have developed a typology to explain differing degrees of faith present in organizations, moving from heavily faith-based to secular; these include: faith-permeated, faith-centered, faith-affiliated, faith-background, faith-secular partnership, and secular. In faith-permeated FBOs, religion plays a significant role in the organization, and employees are expected to participate (Hefferan et al., 2009). Additionally, religious content is mandatory, and “beneficiaries are expected to participate in religious activities and discussions of faith” (Hefferan et al., 2009, pp. 12–15). Religion also plays a role in faith-centered FBOs, and staff may be expected to participate in religious activities. However, they differ in that “beneficiaries have the option not to participate in religious program components” (Hefferan et al., 2009, pp. 12–

15). Faith-affiliated FBOs are characterized by optional religious practices for staff, and they may “invite beneficiaries to religious activities outside program parameters or hold informal religious conversations with beneficiaries” (Hefferan et al., 2009, pp. 12–15).

In faith-background FBOs, religious activities are rare and take place peripherally. Programs do not feature religious content; however, resources may be available to beneficiaries who seek them out, and religion is seen as a motivated factor for individual staff and volunteers (Hefferan et al., 2009, pp. 12–15). Faith-secular FBOs feature voluntary religious practices on behalf of faith-partners, but not secular partners (Hefferan et al., 2009). There is no religious content designed by secular partners, but faith partners may supplement by providing optional religious activities (Hefferan et al., 2009). Finally, secular FBOs feature no organized religious practices or religious content (Hefferan et al., 2009).

To further distinguish faith-based organizations from secular organizations, Clark and Jennings (2008) have categorized them by approach to action in the organization as: representative, charitable/developmental, socio-political, missionary, and radical/illegal/terrorist; and the role faith plays as passive, active, persuasive, and exclusive. These categories group FBOs by how faith is used to perform actions and how faith messages are communicated, further distinguishing them from secular organizations where faith does not play a role. Scholars have also classified the features of faith in organizational identities and practices (Leurs, 2012) and the role organizations then play for communities (Rogers, Bamat, & Ideh, 2008).

These classifications, while helpful for understanding how faith backgrounds intersect with the features of organizations, reinforce a binary between those that are

faith-based and those that are secular. This binary limits the transcendent possibilities that exist outside these limiting structures. Additionally, this binary leads to ideas of being for or against FBOs, positioning these organizations in a good/bad tension.

Faith-based organizations often find themselves positioned within a good/bad tension. Kirmani (2012) explains that on one hand, FBOs are characterized by proselytizing (which disproportionately impacts the poor and desperate), presenting rigid and inflexible religious views aiming at control of social and cultural interactions, creating division in areas experiencing religious conflict, and taking conservative stances on issues of gender. On the other hand, however, he explains that FBOs are seen as advantageous in terms of being able to draw upon spiritual and moral resources for motivation towards creating social change, having access to large local and international networks which provide social capital, featuring longer term commitments to the communities where they work, and greater independence generated through individual donations rather than large donor funds.

This good/bad tension also manifests in a rational/spiritual binary. Resulting from the qualitative/quantitative binary in development that privileges outcomes that can be measured numerically, faith-based approaches to development are largely absent from development literature. Lunn (2009) argues that this is yet another legacy of modernization's "rational" values and focus on positivist social science. Hefferan (2009) stresses the importance of faith-based approaches to international development and assumes that the "relative silence" in development literature stems from the ways in which spirituality and faith are stigmatized and the tendency to cast aside "religious or

spiritual ways of knowing or experiencing the world in favor of scientifically grounded understandings (Hefferan et al., 2009, pp. 5–6).

I will expand on both sides of this good/bad tension to further explore how FBOs and secular organizations are pitted against one another. Critiques of FBOs in the literature include: organizations feel responsible to evangelize, they privilege the spiritual advancement of volunteers over the needs of community members, they do nothing to combat deprivation and discrimination, they potentially dismantle advances in gender equality, they deny the usefulness of secular approaches, and they ultimately have negligible impact.

First, according to Leurs (2012), some FBOs believe they have a “responsibility to evangelize and often see their humanitarian activities as a means to that end, either directly or indirectly (p. 713). This means that FBOs potentially use their position as humanitarians to evangelize over those that benefit from their services. Hefferan (2009) explains this is one reason FBOs often are perceived negatively within development; because they are assumed to evangelize desperate individuals in exchange for needed services, “motivated by smug self-importance” (p. 6). Faith-based messages are also argued to privilege the spiritual advancement of volunteers, positioning volunteers as agents of change and target community members as immobile and needy (McKinnon, 2009). This approach reinforces the *nos/otros* binary, creating a line of division between those in need, and those who can provide assistance. Additionally, it places greater emphasis on how volunteers can feel good about themselves as participants in their faith, potentially missing the point of development projects all together.



Some critics argue that development projects created by faith-based organizations gloss over issues of inequality in favor of dogma. Balchin (2007) claims that FBOs are not effective in addressing deprivation and discrimination, due to their “implicit claim that hungry stomachs can be filled by morality and ideology, rather than by global trade equality, an end to militarization, and the realization by all people of their human rights” (p. 536-537). De Kadt (2009) expands on issues of inequality in FBO approaches, arguing that when the beliefs guiding FBOs are “rigid, inflexible and self-assured,” they are likely to have negative side-effects around issues of gender and patriarchy (p. 784). Women are disproportionately impacted by these belief systems. Pearson and Tomalin (2008) caution that when development projects adopt a “let’s see what religious leaders have to say model,” there is potential for silencing women’s voices within those religions, and fundamental religious forms may challenge universal rights of women (p. 47).

Finally, critics argue that religion is often privileged and positioned at the center of development projects. Some FBOs frame religion as the only development obstacle, issue, and solution, at the expense of other secular approaches, which stems from Orientalist assumptions about the “underdeveloped Other” (Balchin, 2007, p. 532). Balchin argues that positioning faith as central to development potentially discredits all secular approaches:

If you want to get ahead in international development policy today, you've got to use the F-word: faith-based. On the other hand, if you want to be dismissed, de-legitimized, silenced in development policy and practice, then you've only got to use the S-word: secularism (Balchin, 2007, p. 532).

Winkler (2008) ultimately argues that competing faith identities, exclusionary ideologies, and territory disputes contribute to a lack of community development capacities, and “faith-initiated projects remain fragmented with limited neighborhood-wide impacts” (p. 2100).

Countering the criticism launched at FBOs, proponents have argued that FBOs have the potential to surpass development efforts made by secular organizations. Praise of faith-based organizations includes: they are able to fill gaps left by the state and use their large networks to form important partnerships, they are better equipped to address multiculturalism, they desire to empower community members rather than create relationships built on dependency, and they ultimately contribute to development foundations, even those of secular organizations.

First, FBOs are assumed to fill gaps in development using spiritual discourse and relying on faith-based networks. Beaumont (2008) and Hefferan et. al (2009) explain that FBOs fill gaps created by state neglect by delivering social services and development programs. Clark (2006) argues that they are able to fill these gaps because of their ability to mobilize those estranged by secular discourse. Proponents of FBOs ultimately describe them as highly networked locally and internationally, thus allowing for the creation of networks and partnerships (Clarke, 2006; Leurs, 2012; Pearson & Tomalin, 2008).

Leurs (2012) argues that FBOs are also able to connect with underrepresented communities as they have an “enduring organizational structure that reaches into remote and rural areas” (p. 707-708). Clark (2006) and Lunn (2009) explain that as immigrants and migrants relocate to Western nations and balance new nationalities while holding onto faith identities and familial links in their countries of origin, those nations are

becoming become more multicultural and thus more multifaith. Thus, they argue, development organizations must incorporate these cultural faith values if they wish to be sustainable (Clarke, 2006; Lunn, 2009).

Supporters also claim that FBOs tend to move across social, ethnic, and cultural boundaries, working more closely with “marginalized others” and aligning their values more closely with poor recipients of development aid (Beaumont, 2008; Linden, 2008). Clark (2006) also notes that FBOs are moving away from their strictly “mainstream Christian” affiliation with projects emerging in new faith contexts, including evangelical Christian, Islamic, and Hindu. Dicklitch and Rice (2004) further distinguish FBOs, explaining that successful organizations use hands-on approaches, as opposed to handouts; view community partners as equals, not subordinates, during decision-making processes; and encourage “self-help initiatives and empowerment rather than a culture of dependency” (p 661).

Finally, supporters of FBOs argue that religious, specifically Christian, concepts are essential to development processes, and religion plays an important role in social welfare (Beaumont, 2008; Lunn, 2009). Lunn (2009) explains that Christian missions were deeply intertwined with imperialism, providing services in health, education, and humanitarian aid, and thus before *development* existed as a concept, these missions were laying the foundations for development work.

Faith-based organizations find themselves positioned not only within the good/bad tension, but also within a tension of faith vs. secular. Once these seemingly common-sense distinctions are understood as socially constructed binaries, there are possibilities for transcending them. Linden (2008) explains that the distinction between

religious and secular stems from classic Marxist ideology, where it became “common-sense” to “view aspects of the world as divided into religious and secular antinomies, and this entailed a systemic distortion of history in the interests of a dominant discourse” (p. 72). As discussed above, organizations that incorporate faith into their mission vary in terms of the role faith plays and to what degree. Additionally, Kirmani (2012) explains that not all organizations that incorporate faith into their mission explicitly identify as faith based, and those who do are “highly varied and cannot be grouped into a single category” (p. 745). As a solution, Lunn (2009) suggests turning toward holistic views of development that offer possibilities for transcending binaries that stem from the Western mindset that sees “the sacred separated from the secular, and the material from the spiritual (p. 946).

Lunn (2009) asserts that while religion historically has had “negative and destructive aspects,” it is possible to embrace the positive potential of religion in development projects with a “change of perspective” (pp. 947–948). Along with the possibility of transcending the distinction between religious and secular approaches to development lies the opportunity to transcend the good/bad tensions of some faith-based organizations. Pearson and Tomalin (2008) explain that all development organizations, whether classified as religious or secular, offer a wide range of philosophical, political, and ideological views and practices and thus are not easily classified as good or bad. Hefferan et al. (2009) expand upon the idea that faith-based organizations defy classification as good or bad, positioning them in a space “right at the intersection of globalization, neoliberalism, and international development, where multiple meanings and competing agendas play out” (p. 6).

Important to note is that FBOs are concerned with more than traditional conceptualizations of religion as formal and organized; if definitions of religion, faith, and spirituality are teased out, multiple possibilities for transcendent FBO approaches and practices present themselves. Lunn (2009) suggests that intersections between religion and development are so contested because religion has been erroneously conceptualized as a single entity or group of entities, and is thus seen as an obstacle to social development. Lunn (2009) then offers definitions for religion, spirituality, and faith that open up possibilities for multiple identifications and practices within each; defining religion as “an institutional system of beliefs and practices concerning the supernatural realm,” spirituality as “the personal beliefs by which an individual relates to and experiences the supernatural realm,” and faith as “the human trust or belief in a transcendent reality” (pp. 937-938). If religion is understood as multifaceted and includes not only large-scale organized religions such as Christian and Muslim, but makes space for personal beliefs and practices, spirituality, and faith, this “creates the potential for religion to be one of the mechanisms for social development—or, in critical theory terms, emancipation and human flourishing” (Lunn, 2009, p. 948).

Additionally, religiously guided approaches to development may draw on virtues across human experience, rather than relying on a particular religious dogma. This emphasis on virtues allows these approaches to transcend strict categories of particular religions. For example, Dissanayake (1984) highlights a Buddhist approach to development, which rather than alienating the non-religious and those from other faith traditions, emphasizes unifying values such as compassion, kindness, and charity. While

these values stem from Buddhism, they are also shared by a wider range of people from multiple backgrounds.

Delgadillo (2011) offers spiritual *mestizaje* as another transcendent approach to spirituality that opens up greater possibilities for individual identities and practices within it. Further distinguishing the construct of “religion” from other forms of spirituality, Delgadillo argues that religion is a Christian and Western way of thinking, often applied to societies and time periods in which it is irrelevant. While spirituality shares origins with religion, Delgadillo (2011) argues that the term signifies “non-Western belief and life systems and non-institutional or organic forms of engagement with nonmaterial realities” (p. 3).

Delgadillo uses *spirituality*, rather than *religion*, as an encompassing term, drawing on Gloria Anzaldúa’s notion that spirituality recognizes multiple ways of knowing and an acceptance of a nonmaterial sacred realm (Delgadillo, 2011). Anzaldúa calls this approach to transcendent spirituality “spiritual *mestizaje*” a theory and method aimed at achieving a heightened, embodied, consciousness of justice, which Delgadillo defines as “the transformative renewal of one's relationship to the sacred through a radical and sustained multimodal and self-reflexive critique of oppression in all its manifestations and a creative and engaged participation in shaping life that honors the sacred” (Delgadillo, 2011, p. 1). This approach to spirituality focuses on a journey to reaching critical awareness and employing that awareness and does not follow a prescribed path (Delgadillo, 2011). Additionally, while this journey happens on an individual level there is the possibility that individual journeys will merge, reaching collective perspectives which are perhaps at a greater level of intensity (Delgadillo,

2011). Finally, rather than stemming from any particular epistemic privilege, spiritual *mestizaje* relies on “unceasing epistemic inquiry” (Delgadillo, 2011, p. 4).

Spirituality offers possibilities of transcendent understandings of both faith and faith-based development:

Spirituality denotes, on one hand, a connection to the sacred, a recognition of worlds or realities beyond those immediately visible and respect for the sacred knowledge that these bring, and on the other hand, a way of being in the world, a language of communication and interrelation embodying this understanding and one's response to it. A transculturative process, Anzaldúa's spiritual *mestizaje* demands the recognition, assessment, and critique of the paradigms that, woven together, have colonized the borderlands and the Americas (Delgadillo, 2011, p. 4).

The intersection of faith-based organizations and development projects has been positioned within faith/secular and good/bad binaries. As my discussion of transcendent approaches shows, however, there are multiple possibilities for individuals of all or no faith backgrounds to come together and work towards community development outside of these limiting structures. In my discussion of communication and development below, I will explore how communication ultimately helps move development projects into binaries and also how it opens up space for transcendence.

### **Communication**

Just as traditional approaches to social change, development, and faith-based organizations rely on the use of binary categorizations, the role of communication in development projects traditionally has focused on a sender/receiver binary. Traditional

development approaches rely on a linear model of communication, with one sender and one receiver of information, and a focus on attempts at persuasion (Huesca, 2003). Huesca (2003) explains that this persuasion-focused approach “reflected the culture and philosophy of the Western tradition” and resulted in individual-blame for the perceived “underdevelopment” in communities (p. 54). This meant, for example, that if an individual let go of their traditional practices or worked harder, they would achieve the development standards that researchers and practitioners believe they *should* want. So the communication focus became a process of persuading community members to adopt development practices based in Western understandings.

The traditional sender/receiver binary in communication also functioned within assumptions privileging modernization. This approach therefore “diagnosed” underdevelopment by making use of quantitative, social scientific research that sought to “isolate variables, identify causal relationships, and construct middle range theories that would explain the complex process of national development and social change” (Huesca, 2003, p. 51). Communication questions were also concentrated in the binary schema of traditional cultures vs. modern societies (Huesca, 2003). Finally, these projects were guided by Aristotelian definitions of communication grounded in persuasion and influence (Huesca, 2003), thus seeking to exert power over and change others.

Moving away from traditional sender/receiver binaries and attempts at persuasion, communication can be a transactional exchange in development projects using participatory communication. Childers (2006) refers to communication as the “most powerful, and yet elusive force in the world” and believes it to be the “lifeblood” of news, knowledge, entertainment, culture, value systems, and ultimately evolutionary



change (p. 389). Dissanayake (1984) argues that communication is the driving force of human society, without which no society could function. Therefore, the role communication plays in any development project is important (Childers, 2006; Dissanayake, 1984). Below, I highlight two transcendent options for communication in development projects: a Buddhist model, and Latin American participatory communication.

Dissanayake (1984) proposes an approach for understanding the role of communication in development, grounded in the Buddhist concept of communication. He explains that the Buddhist model is in sharp contrast to the Aristotelian or traditional Western model of communication relied upon by many development scholars (Dissanayake, 1984). Where the Aristotelian model is manipulative, focusing on influence and control, and emphasizes the speaker in an asymmetrical relationship, the Buddhist model relies on notions of sharing and mutuality, focusing on understanding and choice, emphasizing the receiver in a symmetrical relationship (Dissanayake, 1984).

Huesca (2003) explains that rather than focusing on linear sender-receiver models of communication, “Latin American scholars introduced more fluid and elastic concepts that centered on how-meaning-comes-to-be in its definition” (Huesca, 2003, p. 57). The work of Paolo Freire argued for popular participation in naming the world, which informs Servaes’s (2006) “Anotherness in one World” making space for multiple paths to development. Huesca explains “the elimination of the dichotomy between subject and object, combined with an action-reflection orientation toward inquiry resulted in a heightened moral awareness or conscientizacao” (p. 56). Huesca (2003) asserts that through Servaes’s grounding in conscientization theory, the role of communication in

development is elevated to the exploration, cataloging, and mediation of multiple meanings surrounding development projects in a given culture. Additionally, ideas of “co-presence, intersubjectivity, phenomenological "being in the world," and openness of interlocuters” are emphasized in this approach (Huesca, 2003, p. 57). These ideas are meant to move away from the subject/object and researcher/development recipient binaries of traditional modernization approaches. In order to break away from transmission-focused models of communication, dialogic communication is emphasized, which allows researchers, practitioners, and participants to collaboratively construct reality and plan action, offering a more ethical use of communication in development projects (Huesca, 2003).

In response to Latin American critiques of traditional development approaches, with their new emphasis on dialogic communication and the co-creation of meaning, the notion of “participatory communication,” in which practitioners and community members collaboratively identify development goals, determine program structure, and evaluate results, was introduced (Huesca, 2003). Huesca (1996) explains that the main idea behind participatory communication is that “ordinary citizens are not only capable of naming their world, but that they routinely theorize complex relationships in everyday life” (p. 26). Of central importance to a participatory communication approach is Freire’s notion of praxis, or “self-reflexive, theoretically guided practice” (Huesca, 2003, p. 55). Using an approach guided by praxis, people use dialogic communication to uncover the hidden roots of their own oppression, and use the critical consciousness which emerges to form movements for social justice (Huesca, 1996, 2003).

Based on the transcendent moves made in the literature above, in this study I approach social change, development, faith approaches, and communication using definitions that highlight their transcendent potential. I understand social change as a self-chosen, individual act with possibilities for collective awareness and action through a focus on symbolic resources and no prescribed path to change. I approach development as a participatory process of social change based in invitational approaches to communication and informed by culture, where measures are taken to ensure sustainability. I conceptualize faith approaches as based in spirituality, creating space for individuals from any or no faith background to come together in a journey towards heightened awareness to create new ways of being in the world that honor others, the earth, and potentially the sacred. Finally, I see communication as the use of symbols to co-construct reality from an invitational, affirmative perspective. These definitions guide my current project with East Central Ministries.

### **Chapter 3: Method**

East Central Ministries is located within the La Mesa and Trumbull neighborhoods in Albuquerque's international district. I chose this setting because, based on my time working with the organization, I have become interested in their approach to social change within local communities. East Central Ministries was the ideal setting for this project for several reasons. First, ECM has been in the community doing asset-based development work successfully since 1999. My initial interactions with ECM were invitational on an interpersonal level, and I observed that communication about their history appeared to be invitational as well. Additionally, co-conspirators at ECM have identified with invitational rhetoric in discussions with my students and me during class visits. Several projects have been successful over sustained periods of time, and the approach is representative of invitational concepts. The neighborhood and organization themselves are also representative of a bordered space within Albuquerque. Finally, working with ECM offers possibilities for a reciprocal research process, in which I am able to use skills and assets that I bring to the table to contribute to the organization while at the same time learning from them and having access to rich and interesting data.

#### **Philosophical Groundings in the Participatory Inquiry Paradigm**

This research project is situated within the participatory paradigm. This approach allows for the rejection of traditional participant/researcher binaries and offers possibilities for transcendent methods of gathering and presenting information through the co-construction of reality among co-conspirators. The participatory paradigm's focus on knowledge as a co-construction between the self and the given cosmos differentiates it from the critical and constructivist paradigms, which while having similar goals of

emancipation and social change, differ in their conceptualization of the nature of reality. Thus Heron and Reason (1997) proposed the need for a separate participatory inquiry paradigm. Ontologically, the participatory paradigm is subjective-objective, meaning that our experiential knowledge of the world affects the way we see and construct the world (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). Heron and Reason (1997) argue that our subjectivity is a window into a world that in turn transcends that world. Rather than one Reality, this paradigm understands that realities are always co-constructed through interactions with others, and with the given cosmos (Guba & Lincoln, 2005; Heron & Reason, 1997).

Epistemologically, this paradigm recognizes multiple forms of knowledge and the ways in which they interact. For example, experiential knowledge is formed through each individual's experience of the world, and thus every individual possesses unique experiential knowledge equal to the experiential knowledge of others. Presentational knowledge, then, is the way in which individuals symbolically or aesthetically present their experiential knowledge to others. Heron and Reason (1997) explain that the symbols we use to refer to an object, such as a tree, should not be confused with the essence or being of that tree. Finally, practical knowledge is an understanding of how to perform actions in the world (Heron & Reason, 1997).

Methodologically, according to the participatory paradigm, research should be a collective experience in which researcher and subject are equal participants (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). Research subjects have a human right to be equal participants in research design (Heron & Reason, 1997). Because the knowledge and experiences of the researcher and subject are intertwined, research cannot be "objective." Axiologically, the goals of research are emancipatory, aiming to provide human beings the opportunity to

reach their greatest potential, however this is achieved through equal participation within the research process. Research is conducted through a hermeneutic process (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). Ultimately, the validity of the participatory paradigm is determined through action, with questions such as: Has the research caused action aimed at helping humans reach their full potential, and do participants feel good about this action and outcomes? Within the participatory paradigm, the researcher does not enter from the position of expert, as one can only be an expert on their own experience, not the experience of participants. Thus, the position of the researcher is as an equal participant in the research process and a co-constructor of knowledge and reality.

### **Co-Conspiring for Data Collection**

As a graduate student required to use traditional methods and obtain permission from the Internal Review Board, I have experienced the discomfort that traditional approaches to research can cause in communities outside the academy, specifically in Latin American contexts. During a research trip to the nature reserve in rural Ecuador that was the initial impetus for my dissertation work, I had little trouble building relationships with community members due to my use of Spanish and my identity as a Latina from the Mexico/U.S. border. However, once I began wrapping up data collection and thus following my IRB protocol steeped in traditional academic approaches to interviewing and obtaining consent, I found that my relationships became problematic. Suddenly people I had begun to build friendships with seemed uncomfortable talking to me after being read the “risks of the study” and being asked technical questions meant to advance my own research goals. I believe that entering my research project with goals and assumptions of the participatory paradigm continues to help me facilitate authentic

relationships characterized by the co-construction of meaning, and this helps to offset the rigid formality imposed by the IRB.

Data collection at ECM was based in what I am calling a co-conspiring approach to ethnographic participant observation; at every moment during the research process I attempted to enter into community in ways that resembled ECM's entrance into the international district. My first visit to ECM was based in learning about the organization from co-conspirators, much like John Bulten entered the international district with the intention of learning from community members. Just as John highlighted the assets of the neighborhood during that initial learning period, during my first visit a real-world example of invitational rhetoric emerged as an asset. With the permission of co-conspirators at ECM, I began bringing students to learn about the asset of invitational rhetoric present at ECM, and giving students the opportunity to share assets they possessed to do work in the community. During these visits I was building relationships of trust, working alongside co-conspirators through volunteer projects.

This initial process of learning from ECM and building relationships with co-conspirators lasted about a year, and only through this participation did it become apparent that the work being done by co-conspirators expanded understandings of invitational rhetoric, and invitational rhetoric offered a framework for co-conspirators to put words to their actions to explain them to others. For example, as discussed in the introduction, by sharing my understanding of invitational rhetoric with co-conspirators, they were able to gain insight into how their approach to community development is communicated, and I was able to broaden my understanding of how invitational rhetoric takes place outside of academia and share this with students.

Using a co-conspiring methodology, I was interested in entering a site and seeing what got made there by the participants. As Pearce (2009) suggests research can also illuminate what the researcher and people in the space are making together, and I argue that this helps co-conspirators transcend *nos/otros* binaries in the research process. As I added field research to my volunteering activities, in conversations with co-conspirators I established trust by explaining what I was learning at ECM and created a space to include their interpretations and suggestions for my project at every stage. I would often bring ideas, initial findings, and theoretical groundings to share and in conversation co-conspirators and I would discuss their usefulness. In order to use a co-conspiring methodology, it was important for me to spend time working in the community and establishing relationships before proposing a research project with ECM. It is also important to continue to nourish the relationships I have built, and so while my dissertation project at ECM is over, my co-conspiring with ECM's people and projects is ongoing.

Pearce (2009) argues that the communication guiding the research process informs what can be produced; I enter the site with a fluid research design (Pearce, 2009) in order to see what data emerges and what the space calls for. Pearce explains: "every time we collect and analyze data, we call into being a particular pattern of communication that could have been otherwise, and if it were different, would have different effects" (Pearce, 2009, p. 7). Following a social constructivist perspective, I examine what reality we co-construct together as the beginning and ending of a research project that "depends on how other people involved respond" (Pearce, 2009, p. 11). In order to create a holistic understanding of the strategies of invitational social change



functioning at ECM, I explore four different types of data: (1) participant observation; (2) semi-structured interviews; (3) ethnographic interviews; and (4) written materials.

**Participant observation.** This project began with participant observation through volunteering at ECM. As a volunteer for the year before I began formal data collection, I have been able to form relationships and observe casual interactions and day-to-day occurrences. While collecting data, I spent three-to-five days a week at ECM for anywhere between two and six hours a day. I would water, plant seedlings, or mix soil at the Urban Farm; work with student volunteers from Albuquerque High; pick up donated food to bring back to the co-op; and help organize and clean in the main office. Basically, I helped with whatever needed to be done on any given day. I have also organized four volunteer days with 60 students each and continue to bring small groups of students for small volunteer projects. Finally, I have attended community meetings and gatherings at the invitation of ECM, facilitated conversations at the community-garden planning meeting, and participated in Zumba fitness classes sponsored by One Hope Clinic. Overall, my participant observation included approximately 950 hours of co-conspiring at ECM, and at the end of each volunteer day or community experience, I took field notes about interactions I witnessed, conversations I had, and actions that occurred.

Gorsevski suggests the use of the *rhetorical climate* in rhetorical data in order to acknowledge thoughts and feelings that are just as important as texts and words to understanding what is happening in a particular situation. The climate is a sensory experience that includes what individuals perceive individually and collectively; it motivates a reaction based on feelings and sensations (Gorsevski, 2004). The rhetorical climate arises from participants' lived experiences, and Gorsevski argues that using this

construct allows the researcher to take into account “the rhetoric and actions of people traditionally ignored in rhetorical criticism” (p. 161). Embracing feelings and intuitions offers greater potential for uncovering material and ideological injustice (Gorsevski, 2004). For example, “intangible states of mind, attitudes, and feelings (mental/physical) are crucial to offsetting a victim's mental and physical duress that is the result of a hate crime” (Gorsevski, 2004, p. 135). My field notes also incorporate the notion of the rhetorical climate, noting feelings and sensations described by others and felt by me.

**Semi-structured interviews.** Semi-structured interviews were another kind of data I collected at ECM. I conducted seven semi-structured interviews in English, Spanish, and Spanglish aimed at understanding co-conspirators’ experiences. I left space for these interviews to lead where they may, but was also prepared with the following guiding questions: (1) What was the community like before East Central Ministries moved here? *Como era la comunidad antes de que se estableciera East Central Ministries?*; (2) How has the community changed? *Como ha cambiado la comunidad?*; (3) How has working for/with East Central Ministries impacted your life? *Qué impacto ha tenido en su vida el trabajar en East Central Ministries?*; (4) What are needs/desires/goals for the future of the community? Your future? *Que necesidades/deseos/metast puede identificar para el futuro de la comunidad? Su futuro?*; (5) How did your participation with ECM begin? *Como empiezo su participación con ECM?*; (6) How do you think your participation has impacted ECM? The community? *Como piense que su participación ha impactado a ECM? La comunidad?* These interviews were recorded, and all interviewees gave verbal consent for the recordings.

Co-conspirators whom I interviewed included adults (age 18 or older) working at East Central Ministries, as well as community members involved with various projects created by the non-profit. I began by interviewing staff members with whom I already have established relationships, then used a snowball-sampling method of recruitment (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011) to meet potential co-conspirators employed at ECM and/or living within the community. In addition, through my participation as a volunteer and engagement in community gatherings and Zumba classes, I met other co-conspirators to interview. These experiences also created space and opportunities to see what interactions emerged. Five interviewees were staff members, and two were full-time volunteers. All were adults living in the community.

**Ethnographic interviews.** Ethnographic interviews, defined as informal, spontaneous conversations (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011) were also part of the data I collected at ECM. During my regular volunteer hours, I developed relationships with several members of ECM who are there on a daily basis and had frequent conversations with them about their backgrounds and work at ECM. Additionally, through community gatherings and Zumba classes, I have met individuals who interact with ECM in varying capacities to form a more well-rounded understanding of the organizations presence in the international district. For example, some co-conspirators attended community planning meetings for a new garden park to ensure their children would have a safe space to play; other co-conspirators attended Zumba because they were mothers and daughters hoping to spend time together exercising; still others attended parties at Casa Shalom because they live there and hope to spend time with their neighbors. While completing

my dissertation, I have also used these ethnographic interviews to check my understanding of themes and concepts with co-conspirators.

**Written materials.** In addition to my experiences as a participant observer, I also relied on documents from the organization to add to my understanding of ECM. These documents include flyers, brochures, annual reports, quarterly newsletters, grant applications, a previous CBPR study which led to the creation of the food coop, and meeting minutes, I have also gathered data from various sections of the website, including overviews of ECM as an organization (“Get to Know Us,” “Contact Us,” “Get Involved”), descriptions of various projects housed at ECM (“One Hope Clinic,” “The Urban Farm,” “The Common Good Thrift,” “Youth Programs”), and histories of ECM and the neighborhood (“History, Mission, and Values,” “Latest News and Stories,” “Key Partnerships”).

### **Data Analysis**

To prepare for analysis, I listened to each recorded interview for ideas relevant to my research question, identifying the beginning and end of those sections and transcribing them word-for-word as outlined by Foss and Waters (2007). I then went through transcripts, field notes, newsletters, annual reports, website printouts, surveys, and grant proposals and coded for themes that emerged within and across them; I then cut out themes and sorted them into piles and compared the piles to the major concepts of invitational rhetoric outlined in my literature review to see if they exemplified them, extended them, and/or contradicted them. Finally, I organized the piles into the explanatory schema discussed in my analysis chapter. Textual analysis involves

“systematic investigation and explanation of symbolic acts and artifacts for the purpose of understanding rhetorical processes” (Foss, 2009, p. 6).

Once my analysis was complete, I attended a community dinner at ECM and presented my themes to co-conspirators; we discussed what they agreed/disagreed with, what they would change, and/or what they would add. I also handed out questionnaires on which co-conspirators could write answers to these questions if they did not want to express them verbally, they could also specify if they would like me to use their real names or pseudonyms in my final dissertation document. One co-conspirator observed that this discussion, in addition to the informal conversations I had with co-conspirators about theories and emergent themes through the data collection process would “make my research project three dimensional instead of two dimensional” (B. Rowland, personal communication, December 13, 2013).

### **Style**

Cannella and Manuelito (2008) describe the traditional expectation that findings be written in a categorical, linear fashion, which uses academic forms of presentation that are traditional and colonialist. They explain, however, that for it to be useful in contemporary academia, they had to employ “the master’s tools” (Lorde, 1984, cited in Cannella & Manuelito, 2008). During the process of writing up my analysis, I have worked to present the knowledge co-created with my co-conspirators in ways that challenge traditional borders of academic writing. Pearce (2009) explains that “our decisions about voice, narrative and vocabulary both conceal and reveal what happened in the study, and either honor or colonize various conversations that were involved” (p.

7). I seek with every step to honor the conversations and experiences of everyone involved in this dissertation project.

Many feminists have offered interesting possibilities for transcending rigid academic borders of what counts as rhetoric and how studies should be written up. Foss and Foss (1991) have argued that including texts produced by women, such as quilts, creates opportunities to include rhetoric that would usually be left out of academic discussions. Ede, Glenn, and Lunsford (1995) explain that bell hooks rejected academic structures of writing such as footnotes because these stylistic choices are exclusionary and marked the discourse as being for highly educated, academic audiences only. Thus, hooks chooses to write in language that is accessible to as many people as possible, even if this leads others to view her work as “anti-intellectual” and “unprofessional” (Ede, Glenn, & Lunsford, 1995). Palczewski (1996) explains that Gloria Anzaldúa’s style of writing treats publications as “letters to friends—intimate, tied to life, embodied, and inviting of response” (p. 7). Additionally, through her use of Spanglish, Anzaldúa challenges traditional rhetorical style and portrays the border she inhabits through the texts she produces, allowing for readers to experience the ambiguity of the border.

Because East Central Ministries is a bordered space within Albuquerque, I have used Spanglish and transcendent forms of communication in the writing process in order to more accurately represent the space and the actions that take place in it. I have left quotes in original language with English translations as footnotes and have represented co-conspirators’ use of Spanglish as well. In order to break down researcher/participant binaries, I have also included many co-conspirator narratives to make space for their voices and experiences to stand on their own in this dissertation.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, I have entered East Central Ministries using a co-conspiring approach to ethnographic participant observation and grounded participatory inquiry to uncover practices of invitational social change. Through participant observation, semi-structured and ethnographic interviews, and organizational texts, I have produced a holistic understanding of ECM and its contributions to the surrounding neighborhood. I hope my findings in this study will inform future development projects, both local and international, to create just, sustainable approaches that give project ownership to community co-conspirators.

## Chapter 4: Findings

Since my first visit in 2011, East Central Ministries has stood out as a site of invitational rhetoric. From the founding story inviting two men living on the back porch to participate in programs to an approach to faith that allows people from any or no faith background to participate, invitational rhetoric is used to communicate in interpersonal interactions and on documents representing the organization. In this dissertation project, I am working with co-conspirators at ECM to understand how practices of invitational rhetoric can be used to create sustainable solutions to community-identified needs.

I began my analysis by reading through my transcripts, organizational documents, and field notes and coding for themes that emerged within and across them. I then cut out each code and made piles of similar words and themes, such as *community* and *food*, for example. I then examined my piles for examples of invitational rhetoric and sorted them into existing concepts of invitational rhetoric and new concepts that seemed to be part of ECM's invitational approach but which were not part of the original theory of invitational rhetoric. I found that the co-conspirators—all of those working/volunteering/participating at East Central Ministries—first enter the bordered international district space and make a decision about how they will engage with the line of division that is the border. This decision creates a space in which individuals can experience new forms of communicating and relating to one another, cultivating the soil for change through the use of particular practices. From these initial practices, new emergent practices are able to bloom.



## Entering the Bordered Space

The international district is a community with clearly marked geographical borders, the lived-in space that emerges around borders, and the options for transcendent consciousness that exist in border spaces. This is evident by its borders within Albuquerque; its ties to the Mexico/U.S. border; its borders of race, class, and language; and its borders of what is safe and unsafe. With its clearly marked parameters of the major Albuquerque streets of Louisiana, Wyoming, Lomas, and Gibson, the international district is a bordered space within Albuquerque. Much like the response I get when I tell people I am from the Mexico/U.S. border, many who learn that my dissertation project crosses the boundaries of the international district express concern for my safety; when I have taken students to visit ECM, their verbal and nonverbal responses clearly mark our border crossing, and they ask “why are you taking us to the hood?” The residents of the international district also represent the space that emerges around borders, as this neighborhood is home to “the highest concentration of cultural and ethnic diversity in the state” (“Get to know us,” 2013). This diversity differs greatly from other homogenous neighborhoods in Albuquerque, and at a recent community meeting organized by the Story of Place Institute,<sup>18</sup> many residents explained that they sometimes feel Albuquerque has pushed people, such as recent immigrants, who were not wanted in other neighborhoods into the international district to avoid dealing with them.

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<sup>18</sup> The Story of Place Institute was founded using a “living systems” perspective, which views marginalized communities through a lens of interconnectedness rather than a focus on fragmented “problems.” They are currently working in the international district with a “story-building process—rooted in individual lives, cultures, histories, and ecology—all which inform the creation of community art, performance, and place making projects” (“International district,” n.d.).



*Figure 2: Photographs taken by Sarah Upton in ECM's warehouse*

As the above pictures, taken in ECM's warehouse, demonstrate, the international district is also a manifestation of the Mexico/U.S. border in Albuquerque. Many of the families in the neighborhood have emigrated from Mexico, and some even come from my El Paso/Juárez community. For example, while attending community Zumba classes, we were asked to introduce ourselves and say where we were from, and I met a woman from Juárez. Later, walking to the shed at Casa Shalom, I passed a car with an *Amor por Juárez* sticker. This same sticker appears on many cars in El Paso, and the Wells Fargo building there showed the message in lights when the drug war in Juárez was at an extreme high.

Finally, the border is present through the use of Spanish, Spanglish, and English. John, Executive Director of East Central Ministries, explains that when he began working in the international district, he realized that the La Mesa Neighborhood Association was

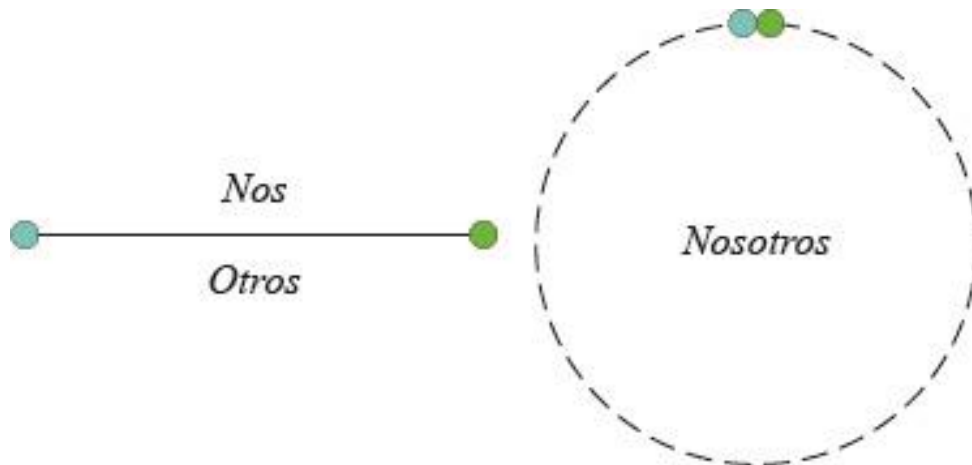
mainly composed of older White homeowners, and it was not until he met *Hablas*, a group of Spanish-speaking apartment dwellers who met at La Mesa Elementary, that he was able to hear some goals of the Spanish-speaking population. John is the first to admit that his life-long attempts at becoming fluent in Spanish have not worked out so well, and so it led him to seek and find “passionate Spanish speaking people equipped to disciple and counsel” (Bulten, 2002).

With the help of Spanish-speaking co-conspirators, all ECM gatherings are completely bilingual. At community events ranging from planning a new garden project, to celebrating a community member’s life at Casa Shalom, steps are always taken to ensure that speakers are bilingual, or a translator from the community is available. During the La Mesa Community Garden and Park Conversation, walkman-like machines were available for translation of the conversation, and anyone who needed translation could pick up a headset and machine and listen. Translation was done by Lidia, Director of One Hope Centro de Vida Health Center, who had to ask several people to slow down for translation during their speeches. She mentioned that John was the only person who spoke at an accessible pace, and during his speech to the community, he stopped and thanked Lidia for translating. At a Casa Shalom party to celebrate a community member who had passed away, John took a moment to welcome everyone and draw our attention to the fact that we were celebrating this person’s life. He then said a short prayer. Everything was translated by Blanca, the Administrative Manager.

Finally, borders are identified and erased or bridged in ECM programs. When discussing programs, some staff members even draw on border metaphors to describe what takes place at ECM. For example, as Rhonda, a former employee who now serves

on the board, was working to revise the Community Food Co-op through participatory research in 2002, she stressed that the “line between ‘provider’ and ‘client’ is being erased to ensure the greatest amount of ownership and empowerment.” Lidia often describes her position at One Hope Clinic as creating a bridge between health professionals and community members to advocate for the health of her community.

When a border, or a strict line of division and separation, is encountered, people have a choice in how to react to it. They can choose to uphold it, reinforce it, militarize it, and the like, or they can cross it, transcend it, and/or open it. Co-conspirators at ECM have approached a strict line of division separating *nos*<sup>19</sup> from *otros*<sup>20</sup> and made it into a circle of community for *nosotros*.<sup>21</sup>



*Figure 3: Nos/otros vs. nosotros model*

This circle enfolds a community for *nosotros*, whoever that *nosotros* may be, and it is characterized by fluid, permeable margins that allow people and ideas to cross. Within this community, communication takes place and is enacted in unique and specific ways that may not be possible outside it. Co-conspirators thus make use of particular practices

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<sup>19</sup> Us

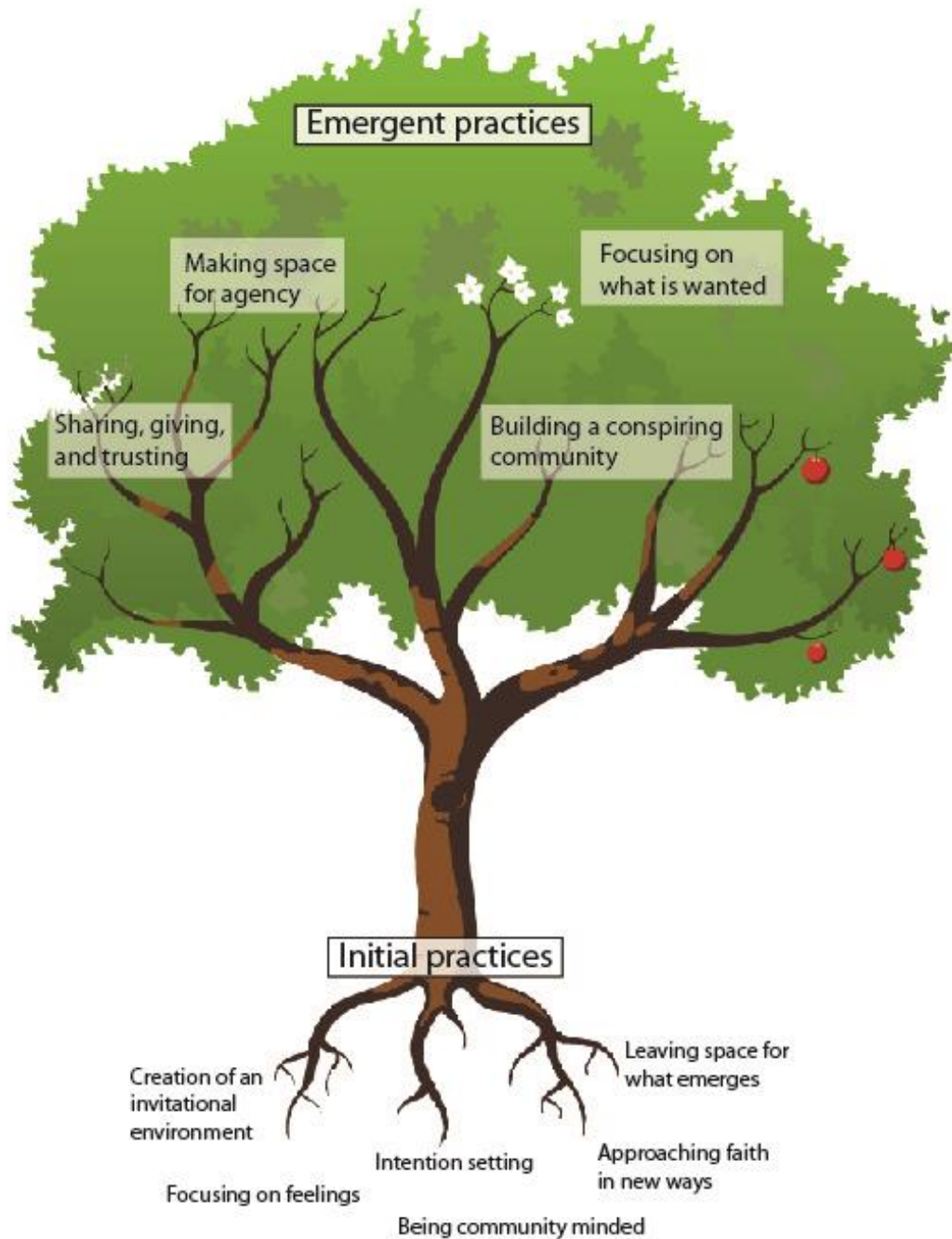
<sup>20</sup> Them

<sup>21</sup> We

as they enter this encircled border space; building on these, they make use of practices that emerge once the initial soil has been cultivated.

### **Practices for Entering the Encircled Border Space**

Practices are ways of being, relating to others, and performing actions, and are both communicated and enacted by co-conspirators. In order to enter the encircled border space, co-conspirator practices include creation of an invitational environment, intention setting, leaving space for what emerges, focusing on feelings, approaching faith in new ways, and being community minded. After the border space is entered and constructed in a particular way, co-conspirators are able to make use of emergent practices including making space for agency; focusing on what is wanted; sharing, giving, and trusting; and ultimately building a conspiring community.



*Figure 4: Practices for entering the encircled border space*

**Creation of an invitational environment.** In order to cultivate soil for particular kinds of communication practices, co-conspirators at East Central Ministries work together to create an invitational environment of safety, freedom, value, and openness, which in turn respects the larger natural environment. The condition of safety is

especially important for ECM's invitational environment, given the issues of crime and violence in the history of the international district. Safety in an invitational environment means feeling free from danger, and physically, emotionally, and intellectually secure; these elements of safety are all present at ECM.

First, John describes the shift towards feeling free from danger:

I think generally people would say yeah, this is a different neighborhood, it feels different. It's safer. We're allowing our children to go to the park when before we did not. We feel better about going to Fair and Square to shop. All those kind of things. I think by and large the general consensus is yeah, this is a better neighborhood. (personal communication, July 5, 2013)

Further contributing to an overall feeling of being free from danger, ECM continues to receive grants for "urban gathering gardens" throughout the international district, creating a safe, physical location for neighbors to come together and share.

Apart from feeling free from danger, ECM creates an environment of physical, emotional, and intellectual security for co-conspirators in a number of ways. Physical security at ECM is shown financially, as employment allows co-conspirators to secure physical needs like food and housing. Multiple co-conspirators explained that before ECM, they "needed work badly" (East Central Ministries, 2010b); Vicky, a staff member at the One Hope Clinic, explains:

*Cuando vino la recesión yo me quede sin trabajo, y paso casi cuatro meses y termine con mi fondo que yo tenía para cubrir mis gastos en este caso, luz y la renta. Yo tenía una tráiler y este ya no pude seguir entonces lo que termine antes*

*de perder completamente todo tuve que vender la tráiler vendí mis muebles vendí todo.*”<sup>22</sup> (personal communication, February 4, 2014)

When she was referred to ECM and could not pay her entrance into the food co-op, Vicky assumed she would need to leave and find work before coming back and becoming a member: “*y cuando vine este una señora me dijo, ‘no te preocupes, yo te voy a pagar la canasta y puedes recoger’ [comida]*.”<sup>23</sup> Vicky has since become an integral staff member at the One Hope Clinic, and along with many other co-conspirators, now feels financially secure.

Emotional security at ECM is created by caregiving among co-conspirators, whether it is caring for children during their parents’ doctor’s appointments, volunteering at the coop, or children vowing to care for adults in the community when they get older. For example, in a letter to her neighbor featured in the Winter 2004 Newsletter, then 11-year-old Amanda promised to return the care they had provided for her and her friend Chehalis: “when you and Erika get old and sick I will be there to take care of the both of you” (East Central Ministries, 2004b).

Finally, care is taken to ensure that co-conspirators feel intellectually secure in sharing their feelings and ideas. For example, the One Hope Clinic strives to create a “friendly and welcoming environment” and keeps costs low to ensure greater access to health care. Through *salidas*, the exit interviews discussed in the introduction, a safe space is created to discuss patient’s health, giving the staff:

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<sup>22</sup> When the recession came I was left without work, and almost four months passed and I ran out of my fund that I had to cover my expenses in this case, light and rent. I had a trailer that I could no longer keep, and so before I lost everything I had to sell my trailer, sell my furniture, sell everything.

<sup>23</sup> And when I came this women told me “don’t worry, I will pay the basket and you can collect’ [food].



An opportunity to make sure that each patient understands fully what health care providers diagnosed and the treatment offered. It is during these interviews that questions of cost, tests, or medication is discussed. It also gives patients the opportunity to open up with some of their personal issues. (East Central Ministries, 2011a)

In the invitational environment, freedom means having the power to choose or decide, and East Central Ministries creates the condition of freedom through facilitated meetings where co-conspirators present and consider multiple options and appreciate diverse perspectives as resources. Community meetings at ECM are planned with deliberate intention setting. Rhonda, who helped facilitate early projects like ROOTS (redeeming our opportunities to succeed) and the community food co-op, used a dialogue-based approach when she facilitated community meetings, a process that involved evaluating, reflecting upon, and analyzing group experiences.

As an employee, Rhonda also facilitated small community meetings guided by contemplation of co-conspirator experiences and biblical stories, ending with plans for actions to be taken. In the case of the co-op, Rhonda explained that this approach to facilitated meetings

will allow current members of the co-op to express ideas and suggestions on how the co-op should operate. Members will be allowed full creativity in idea presentation. This technique will allow the facilitator to identify the wishes of the members and will generate new and innovative ideas for the cooperative. (Newby, 2002)

More recent meetings, like those leading to the community health fairs and clinic and planning sessions for the garden park, also make use of dialogue to capture the needs and wants of community members. Sometimes this involves meeting in small groups at tables, then coming back together to share with the larger group; at other times, small focus groups are held independently. These small groups are especially useful for individuals who feel uncomfortable in large group settings; they create the freedom to share in ways that feel safe—with a small group—and ensure these thoughts and ideas freely expressed in small groups are used in project planning. Meetings are also held in both English and Spanish or make use of translation devices to ensure that participants are free to share in the language in which they feel most comfortable.

Co-conspirators also experience freedom with respect to organizing participation at ECM around their own personal schedules. For example, during the planning of the community co-op, co-conspirators filled out daily activity schedules and available options surveys to identify the most convenient hours of operation for the co-op, allowing “members to have a sense of responsibility and ownership of the cooperative.” This worked to give co-op members freedom over their own schedules and the power to choose and decide what formation of the co-op would make the most sense for them and their families.

Finally, freedom is expressed through the types of conversations co-conspirators feel safe having and the topics they feel welcome to talk about. Morgan explains that this environment of freedom gives her space to ask questions: “I have found here a freedom and appreciation for asking tough questions and wrestling with the paradoxes life presents” (“The beauty of seasons,” n.d.). This freedom grants co-conspirators the

opportunity to explore their understandings of the world, themselves, and each other, and to discuss these topics openly.

Leticia, who makes *ollas* for the urban farm, describes ECM as a place where “it doesn’t matter where you come from or who you are. Everyone has the same value here.” Value, another external condition of the invitational environment, is an acknowledgement that co-conspirators have intrinsic worth, and each person is “a unique and necessary part of the pattern of the universe and thus as valuable” (Foss, 2009a). While many direct service organizations have treated the international district as a problem to be fixed, ECM focuses on its value displayed through the assets of the neighborhood and people who live there. Co-conspirators in turn display the value in their interpersonal relationships through time spent in community with others. Neighborhood assets include “the highest concentration of cultural and ethnic diversity in the state;” a range of restaurants and stores, ranging from “Oaxacan craft shops to Native American Jewelry stores to Ta Lin Vietnamese and World Markets;” and “the State Fair grounds and Historic Rt. 66 . . . located in the heart of our neighborhood” (“Get to know us,” 2013). Profiles of co-conspirators in newsletters also focus on the unique assets brought by community members, like Gabby’s energy; Leticia’s versatility and reliability; and Jeremy and Jennifer’s friendship, advice, and security (brought by their two dogs), just to name a few.

At the clinic and elsewhere in the community, value is displayed through creating a “friendly and welcoming environment” and the importance of being “the first friendly face that someone sees” when they walk into the clinic (East Central Ministries, 2013e). Lidia explains that she feels frustrated in health settings where the person behind the front

desk—who patients encounter first—is rude and unwelcoming (personal communication, February 4, 2014). This can make patients—especially those already uncomfortable due to class, language, and other barriers—feel unwelcome in these spaces. The co-conspirators who work in the clinic therefore take great pride in ensuring patients feel welcome in the space and valued as individuals by greeting them with a smile, clearly communicating they are there to meet patients’ healthcare needs and giving them undivided attention in *salidas*.

Finally, people recognize the imminent value of one another through intentional time shared together. For example, while giving me a tour of Casa Shalom, John showed me a common laundry room shared by people living in the coop. He said that some of the units had their own laundry machines in the beginning, but they did away with that to encourage people to come together and share time while doing laundry. And these acts of being present with one another are significant gifts meant to show value. John explains:

Presence is a theme at ECM. We believe that it is in the relationship with Christ and our neighbors that we make a difference. Just being present when someone is hurting, or sitting on the front step as they tell you of how their husband lost his job. There are so many ways to just be present. That is how I envision the Kingdom of God celebrating Christmas; giving gifts of being there for our neighbors, fighting for justice issues, listening, praying for one another, providing opportunities for development instead of just quick charity. (East Central Ministries, 2008b)

At ECM, community members describe both how they are made to feel valuable by others, and also how their self-value lies in their opportunities to help people. The

website for Growing Awareness Urban Farm displays the following quote by Wendell Berry:

One of the most important resources that a garden makes available for use, is the gardener's own body. A garden gives the body the dignity of working in its own support. It is a way of rejoining the human race.

The idea of the dignity of work is a common theme throughout various ECM programs. Many co-conspirators explained to me that they feel respected, that their work is being valued, and that they feel useful. Luis explains that working at ECM helped him feel useful again:

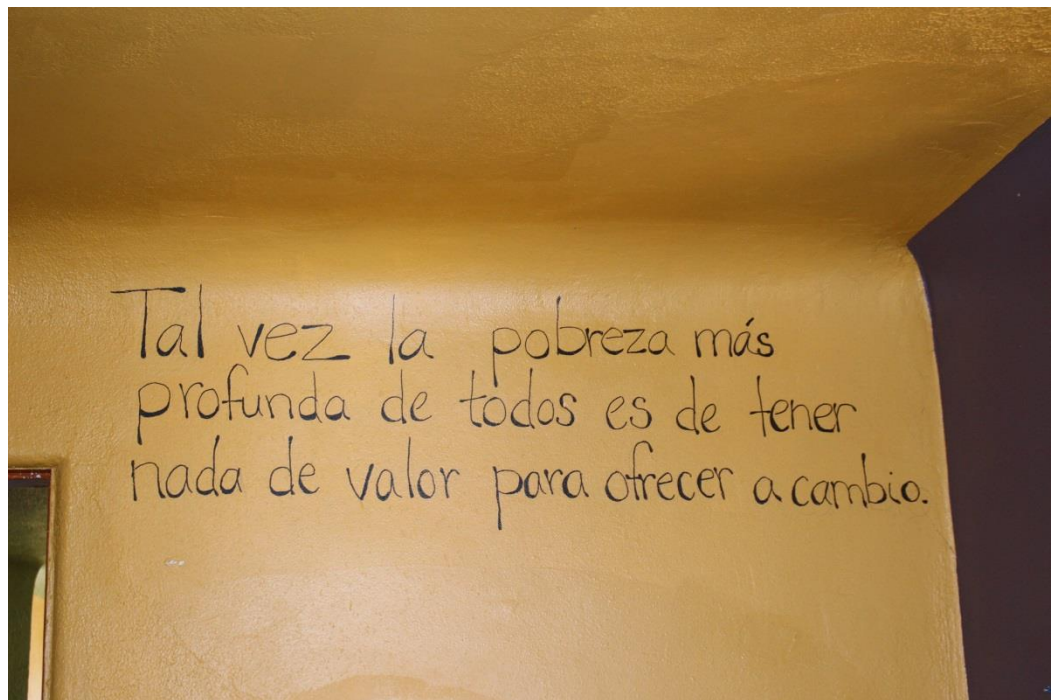
*No puede conseguir trabajo. Estoy enfermo, tengo diabetes y es muy difícil me quedan contrata porque tú sabes no tenía contrata y diabetes no tenía doctor ni nada tengo que ir cada rato a baño y tomar agua [sic]. Y cuando llega aquí con John yo me sentir útil ultra vez para ayudar con buen impacto. Porque yo sabía que yo podría dar de mí también todavía no estaba ni muy enfermo, ni muy cansado ni muy viejo no más quede a un oportunidad y el me la dio.*<sup>24</sup> (personal communication, December 20, 2013)

Shirley, an 88-year-old volunteer who frequently makes lunch for the staff and other volunteers, also explains how the work she does at ECM is both useful and a blessing to her:

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<sup>24</sup> I couldn't find a job. I am sick, I have diabetes, and it's hard for me to get hired. I didn't have a doctor or anything and I have to go to the bathroom constantly and drink water constantly. And when I got here with John I felt very useful again, like I was making a good impact. Because I still knew I had more of myself to give; I wasn't that sick, or that tired, or that old. All I wanted was an opportunity and he gave it to me.

I have a little car that everybody feels free to use and that helps a lot. And I run errands. I run a tremendous amount of errands like depositing money and going to the main post office to buy nonprofit stamps; all sorts of errands that take time for anybody else to do, whereas I have the time. So that's really a blessing, probably to ECM but also to me, to be able to do that. (personal communication, February 4, 2014)



*Figure 5:* Photograph taken by Sarah Upton in ECM's main office.<sup>25</sup>

As the above quote, painted on the wall of ECM's main office, demonstrates, co-conspirators feel most valuable when they are able to help and make a difference in people's lives and feel that they are giving back. On a creative survey given out to learn

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<sup>25</sup> Perhaps the most profound poverty of all is having nothing of value to offer in exchange.

more about ECM staff and volunteers,<sup>26</sup> co-conspirators were asked about their favorite part of working at ECM. They explain: “I am able to help, just a little bit, people that need to be helped” (Luis); “with the tools I have been given, I can find a way to give back” (Karla). When asked how their work at ECM was important to their community, family, and themselves, co-conspirators again responded: “to help makes me feel good, and if I’m good, my family is happy” (Andrea), and “it is a blessing for me to serve people whose lives have been changed in some way, and to be a part of a growing family of community, volunteers, and staff” (Blanca).

Finally, invitational environments are characterized by openness, or the practice of considering “as many perspectives as possible with a genuine curiosity for differences” (Foss & Foss, 2012). East Central Ministries creates the environmental condition of openness through an invitation into the community, an emphasis on transparency, and an appreciation for learning from the perspectives of others. John explains that as he began searching for communities to partner with, La Mesa/Trumbull appeared to be the most open:

As I started meeting people and talking to people there was an openness for somebody or a group or others to come help and do things, whereas other neighborhoods had felt a little bit closed. And I didn’t want to go somewhere where I wasn’t welcome. So this neighborhood felt more welcoming. (personal communication, July 5, 2013)

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<sup>26</sup> Questions included: What would you want people to know about you? What is your favorite part of your job at East Central Ministries? How is your job important to our community, your family and yourself? What makes you happy when you wake up each morning? If you had a million dollars, what would you change about our community and about yourself? If you were a bird, where would you fly? What kind of office supply (stapler, pen, etc) are you most like and why? A penguin walks in the door at ECM wearing a cowboy hat, what does she say and why is she here?

ECM also practices openness through its transparency with partners outside of the community in newsletters and year-end reports. For example, they explain that “as a partner of East Central Ministries you have also trusted us with your financial support. We are honored by your trust and want to be transparent and accountable to you” (Bulten, 2012). They share year-end highlights including the more “difficult times we were experiencing in finances and losing some good friends” (East Central Ministries, 2010a). Many things that happen within the community are written about in detail to share what is learned from experiences.

Co-conspirators explain that at ECM they are always learning from each other and describe feeling grateful for the experience. For example, Bob Bulten, John’s father who lives and works at Casa Shalom half-time and in Michigan the other half, explains “I am going to spend as much time with people as I can so I can learn from their stories” (East Central Ministries, 2013e). When asked “what would you want people to know about you?,” many also describe open-mindedness as an aspect of their personality they hope to share with others: “I am very open minded and I love to help others even if I do not know anything about them” (Karla) (East Central Ministries, 2013e). Morgan expands on understandings of openness and community, by showing their link to one another: “this vulnerability, this listening, this openness and reality, is community itself” (“Some thoughts on community...,” n.d.). Finally, celebrating diverse perspectives as resources is built into the mission and values of ECM: “we celebrate cultural differences while working towards reconciliation and justice” (“Who are we?,” n.d.).

From this invitational environment comes a consideration of the larger natural environment, and ECM projects are dedicated to environmental sustainability. In



Morgan's words, "good stewardship of what we have been entrusted with is an extension of our faith, not only because we believe that Creation in and of itself is worth preserving, but because the choices we make every day affect others all over the globe" ("Welcome to growing awareness," n.d.). The spoiled food from the co-op is put directly into compost bins, and the compost is then used for seedlings at the urban farm. Used laundry water is also funneled into the worm bins in the compost area. *Ollas*, one of the main sources of income for the urban farm, are a method of irrigation designed to prevent evaporation and wasted water, serving as "a great environmentally friendly way to conserve water" ("Welcome to growing awareness," n.d.). Finally, ECM's community parks and gardens make use of "locally sourced seating, shade structures, and perennial edible plants and trees" ("Welcome to growing awareness," n.d.). These parks and gardens serve as community spaces for co-conspirators to enjoy nature, learn about growing food, and even pick fruits and vegetables to eat as the walk by.

While I have discussed safety, freedom, value, and openness separately and given examples for each, important to note is that they are not unique, separate categories. Each influences the other, and ultimately the concepts work together to create a space where unique forms of communication and practices of invitational rhetoric are possible. Next I will cover the invitational practice of intention setting made possible in this unique environment.

**Intention setting.** Another practice for entering the border space that is ECM is intention setting. Just as the environment discussed above was created with great intention, co-conspirators set clear intentions for communication, shared time and space, outreach, and sustainability. As ECM was taking shape, and John was figuring out what

his approach to Christian community development would be, he met with other members of the church to talk about and set a clear intention for how to approach community members respectfully:

We kind of did some training and just kind of talked, especially about how we could do this without coming in as total jerks saying we have answers and we're here to help you figure out how to change your life. Real sensitive to not doing it in a demeaning, derogatory approach. (personal communication, July 5, 2013)

Community members at ECM are also encouraged to have intentional and meaningful communication with neighbors, where time is spent really listening to one another. For example, in a blog post on community, Morgan explains that communicating on this level of openness involves reflecting on our own feelings and actions to get to know ourselves at the core of our beings, as this is the only way to be “truly vulnerable, honest, and open with another person.” She adds that this process takes “time, intentionality, effort, discomfort, and often pain” (“Some thoughts on community...,” n.d.). Morgan has used this self-reflection and intentional communication to have successful working relationships in the community. For example, Morgan told about how, when she first started at ECM, she intentionally talked to John to figure out how to work so closely together. They would say things like, “when I do this, it means this,” or “please call me out when you see me doing this” (personal communication, February 10, 2014). She explained that when you work so closely with someone, you will either hate that person after a few months or find a way to make it work. So she felt it was important to lay everything out in order to have a successful working relationship.

At ECM, co-conspirators also practice intentionality in sharing time and space.

For example, several co-conspirators have intentionally moved into the neighborhood to be closer to other community members. Other co-conspirators intentionally set time aside daily or weekly to share meals with other community members. Intentionally sharing time and space are examples of activities that intentionally create community: “we believe that this kind of intentionality is needed for us to make steps towards transformation within our community” (East Central Ministries, 2004b). During the initial planning of Casa Shalom, some conversations were entirely dedicated to setting intentional values for the community, including sharing resources and time together, not speaking ill of a neighbor, and building significant relationships (J. Bulten, personal communication, July 5, 2013).

Approaches to outreach on the part of this Christian community development ministry have been well thought out and set with intention, even changing the name from Good Samaritan Ministries to East Central Ministries, which they believe “better reflects the neighborhood where we are committed” (East Central Ministries, 2002). ECM’s mission was created through “a more intentional approach of engaging the poor” and centers around building healthy supportive relationships, walking with neighbors, creating opportunities for sustainable life changes, and participation in holistic transformation of the “neighborhood into communities where God’s peace is present and all of God’s children can flourish” (“Who are we?,” n.d.). Co-conspirators seek to form lasting relationships through projects community members complete together, and this approach is able to engage the poor differently than just giving direct services without a relational aspect would.

Finally, co-conspirators at East Central Ministries take great care to ensure the changes they are making are sustainable through intentionality. First, ECM is conceptualized as a long-term project. Bob, a key volunteer with whom who I spend most days, explains that there is “not a drastic push for immediate changes;” instead, there is a desire to “become part of the community, to walk along with them.” According to Bob, projects are “more beneficial if they know there’s a stability to what’s being given to them, and it’s not just going to one day just disappear.” Community development is thus conceptualized as long term, and projects are expected to “continue indefinitely” (Newby, 2002).

Projects are created with great intentionality and sustainability is always part of the planning process. For example, the community food co-op planning proposal included plans for a self-sustaining program based on members’ contribution of 10 dollars per month, volunteering for 30 minutes a week, and management and operation of the co-op. Casa Shalom echoed this intention, committing to making the housing co-op financially sustainable without outside grants and funding and with low mortgage costs for residents to “keep people from being transient or falling behind on their payments” (J. Bulten, personal communication, July 5, 2013). More recently, the “Just Add Chickens” project is “working to create a sustainable backyard chicken program” through giving families the opportunity to produce their own eggs to sell or consume and training them on proper care for their chickens and maintenance for their coop (“Just add chickens,” n.d.).

Intention setting guides all practices at East Central Ministries, whether co-conspirators are figuring out how to have meaningful productive communication or

setting aside time and space to engage with one another. Intentionality also guides the method of outreach in meeting new co-conspirators, and all projects are created guided by the intention of sustainability. This intention setting, however, focuses on process; it is a commitment to be mindful in interactions and planning. Intention does not mean following a prescribed path towards goals with a particular end result in mind.

**Leaving space for what emerges.** Coupled with the practice of intention setting, co-conspirators at ECM also leave space for what emerges. East Central Ministries calls its approach to community development “intentionally disorganized,” meaning that it exists somewhere between the practice of setting clear intentions for communication, shared time and space, outreach, and sustainability, but also leaving space for what emerges in messy, silly, creative ways. As I began coding interview transcripts and newsletters, and this intentionality became apparent, I brought it up to Morgan during a conversation while transplanting seedlings in the greenhouse. She agreed that a high degree of intentionality exists at ECM, but was quick to point out that this intention did not mean going in with a plan or idea of what would happen; there is a balance between intention and leaving space for what emerges. ECM’s website calls this approach an “intentionally unorganized” environment that stems from the chaos that can emerge in family-like community relationships. For people to flourish in this environment, John explains, we must learn to “expand our imaginations, take ourselves a little less seriously, and listen to others carefully,” and we must also be willing to “stretch, imagine, and step out of our comfort zones” (East Central Ministries, 2004a).

This environment tends to attract personality types comfortable with an unorganized approach. For example, when asked on an organizational survey what office

supply he would be John says “a paperclip that can hold things when needed, but most of the time just being lost on my desk” (East Central Ministries, 2013e). Matt, the former Urban Farm manager, called himself a “general goofer offer” (*Rebuilding Broken Walls*, 2010). John also explains that before reading *The Shaping of Things*, he used to feel like ECM was a “little ministry on Vermont Street doing a bunch of crazy stuff.” But when asked on an organizational survey, “A penguin walks in the door at ECM wearing a cowboy hat, what does she say and why is she here?” he responds, “I am home. These people are obviously crazier than I am!” The personalities not only flourish in an environment of unorganized chaos, they contribute to it.

Co-conspirators characterize this intentionally disorganized community as “an adventure,” “messy,” “creative,” “dynamic,” and “flexible” (compiled field notes). Laughter is another major community theme and is described as bringing people together with love, overcoming difference, and in Luis’s case, a morning greeting. As his profile in the Winter 2013 Newsletter explains, Luis will often greet you with a joke; he frequently walks around with his hat overturned, “taking a donation to buy new (un-holey) jeans for Morgan” (East Central Ministries, 2013d). New projects are often conceptualized and presented as new adventures, and the Spring 2012 Newsletter featured a cutout person you take on a virtual tour of ECM, which promises a “fun and adventurous tour of God’s work here at ECM” (East Central Ministries, 2012).

Many projects center around creativity, like Creation Park, which “transformed our asphalt parking lot into a peaceful green space of play and laughter where the fabric of community is being woven together” (East Central Ministries, 2010a). It is also dynamic, with “many programs, partnerships, and relationships that are happening day-

to-day.” This requires “flexibility and a laidback personality” on the part of co-conspirators, because “in this fluid and intertwined community, often a broom or tool isn’t where it was when you last saw it, and the person you are looking for has just walked out the door” (East Central Ministries, 2013b). Morgan reflects that while “there is no formula to follow, and community is often messy, it is beautiful to see such a diversity of people drawn to this shalom” (East Central Ministries, 2013b). Finally, Bob wishes more people had the chance to experience this approach to intentionally unorganized community:

I would love to have everyone have a chance to embrace what it is to be part of a community like this. Sometimes it seems like it’s totally unstructured, but it’s spontaneous: we never know exactly what’s going to happen on any given time. Which is exciting ‘cause it’s not the same thing every single day, it doesn’t become a drudgery. You never know who’s gonna walk in the door or what kind of phone call you’re gonna get or who you’re gonna meet. And that’s exciting to me. (personal communication, February 4, 2014)

**Focusing on feelings.** At ECM, co-conspirators enter the encircled border space with a focus on feelings, using these feelings as a guide for how to imagine and create projects and also how to measure change. Since its beginning, ECM has focused on the concept of “felt-needs.” Avoiding the common “presumed needs” approach taken by direct-service organizations, co-conspirators instead listened to the “physical, emotional, mental, spiritual, and social aspects of the community as expressed by community members themselves” (Bulten, 2004). These felt-needs were collected through surveys, community meetings, informal conversations, and even experiences. For example, the

“La Mesa Neighborhood Listening Survey” found that community members felt a lack of access to healthy produce, needing to drive long distances to grocery stores, restaurants, and farmers markets; from this felt-need, the community food co-op was born. Zumba classes have also risen out of the desire to meet the community’s felt-needs for health in a holistic way through the incorporation of exercise. (East Central Ministries, 2013c).

Sometimes personal experiences bring felt-needs to the surface that co-conspirators previously did not know they had. The Fall 2010 Newsletter tells the story of a scare a volunteer named Cecilia experienced one day in the warehouse: “I was inside cleaning, and my son was outside playing in the parking lot. When I went out to check on him he was gone!” Her three-year-old son was later found walking a block away, but this experience “identified another community ‘felt-need’—safe green space for families” (East Central Ministries, 2010a). Cecilia worked with other co-conspirators to build ECM’s creation park, and now says her children are safer and happier.

Sometimes felt-needs are articulated without words, and John describes how he carefully “listens between the lines” without assuming needs: “that for me is a little bit of a dance... I often kind of try to listen between the lines.” John explains that after seeing many families “bouncing around in and out of the neighborhood,” he began to piece together ideas of stabilizing the neighborhoods and creating space where people could put down roots. He identified affordable housing as a possible felt-need, so began conversations with neighbors to check this interpretation against their own experiences. Many agreed and began meeting together to plan what that might look like.

Just as was the case with Casa Shalom, the community food co-op, and creation park, community-driven projects are collectively created by co-conspirators based on felt



needs. One Hope Centro de Vida Health Center is possibly the best example of how projects emerge from community member's needs, start to finish. It all began when Azucena Molinar, a long time ECM volunteer, "saw access to good health care as a dire necessity for many hard working immigrant families that did not qualify for health care benefits." She began meeting with other community members who had similar concerns about the lack of access to health care. Azucena ultimately worked with other co-conspirators to put together a health fair for over 250 people in the community, then brought the findings from the fair, such as the high instance of diabetes in the neighborhood, to John. Lidia explains what happened next:

Then John says "so what would you like us to do with all this? Would you like us to advocate for you, or maybe be an intermediary between you and the other agencies, clinics? Do you want us to help you create some collaboration policies or something?" And they were like, "no, we just want to have our own clinic." "Oh... hahaha. Oh, okay, well then let's have a clinic." And so it was like that, okay, if that's what we need then I guess we need to have a clinic. And so to me that just says it all, "let's have a clinic." (personal communication, February 4, 2014)

John has since explained on several occasions that he did not set out to start a health clinic, nor was he too fond of the idea at first; however, he wanted to pursue projects that community members themselves saw as most important. One Hope Centro de Vida is now "a community-run health center that offers a medical clinic, a dental clinic, and a diabetes clinic and treatment program" (East Central Ministries, 2012).

Decisions about what path to pursue next are always discussed among multiple co-conspirators. Just working in the main office, I would often overhear John asking others what they thought ECM's next project should be. Lidia explains that this topic often comes up during her conversations with John: "You know, I was just talking with John the other day, and he was like, what should be the next focus of our ministry?" Lidia explained that kids in the neighborhood need college mentoring programs, because many of their parents have a hard time showing them that possible next step without having had college experiences of their own. To this John simply asked, "what else could we be doing to promote education and the college experience?" and the next conversation started, continuing the emphasis on felt-needs. Decisions are always collaborative, and people are always asked for their input.

A focus on feelings is also used as a tool to measure how far the neighborhood has come. The Spring 2012 Newsletter encouraged readers to "come and see" what was taking place at ECM because "it is something you need to feel, smell and experience for yourself" (East Central Ministries, 2012). This approach to feeling, combined with the invitational environment, creates what Gorsevski (2004) calls a rhetorical climate, which acknowledges thoughts and feelings as texts. Using the rhetorical climate I was able to understand how change is something to be felt and sensed, individually and collectively. Co-conspirators described their feelings of change in the community in a way that statistics and crime reports cannot capture.

Co-conspirators overwhelmingly described ECM as having a "feel-good environment" characterized by peace. Lidia explains that as she walked into the health center for the first time she "felt this peace" and continues to feel it every time she returns

(personal communication, February 4, 2014). Becky describes her work at ECM as “good for my soul” (East Central Ministries, 2013e). I can also attest to the feeling of peace. During the months of December and January, my father underwent surgery and recovery as part of his cancer treatment, and I felt emotionally drained and heavy as I helped hold things together for my family. Volunteering at ECM during this time was one of the only places I felt better and really felt supported. Everyone always asked how my dad was doing and offered words of encouragement, and Bob frequently gave me suggestions for activities to help my dad focus on something other than the struggle of recovery.

Even people in the neighborhood who are not yet co-conspirators describe the feeling of change that is ever-present at ECM, as described in the story below published in the Spring 2013 Newsletter:

As I walked out the front door, I saw woman standing in our woodchip covered driveway. She spoke in a soft voice with deep emotion, “It is beautiful, these pine wood chips, the smell—it’s good for our souls. Thank you for what you are doing here, we need this all over the neighborhood. We need this change. We need to work together to change this neighborhood, but we can’t do it alone. We need community; we need each other.” She had tears in her eyes, and they started spilling over as I thanked her for her encouragement, and agreed with her that together as a community we can change and beautify this neighborhood. “I need change too,” she said beating her own heart, “but we can’t do it alone.” “No,” I agreed, “we can’t do it alone.” I thanked her again, hugged her, and told her she was welcome to come and commune with us anytime.

Her words cut straight to my heart, and tears came to my eyes as I thanked God for this woman, for her words of perspective, encouragement, and truth (East Central Ministries, 2013b).

In the Winter 2013 Newsletter, John wrote that after 14 years, ECM's community, filled with people "living in the vulnerable shadows of our city" had "never looked or felt so clean and renewed" (East Central Ministries, 2013d).

**Approaching faith in new ways.** East Central Ministries self-identifies as a "Christ-based, community development ministry;" however, their approach transcends traditional faith/secular boundaries. Mirroring the direct-services approach many development agencies apply to the international district, some faith-based organizations provide direct services to individuals along with sermons, which differs from ECM's approach to faith. I witnessed one such approach when we went to drop off extra food at another ministry in the area, which Bob explained is targeted more at the transient population of the international district and less grounded in community and relationship building. I overheard the pastor preaching and asking about whether people wanted/needed baptism. I also watched as people lined up to get food and were directed like children about what to take and how to behave: "quit handling them, leave them alone; stay back until we tell you; one set of ribs each; that's enough milk, we have a lot of people; *Andale!*"<sup>27</sup>

The general approach to faith that characterizes ECM is so different from traditional, proselytizing approaches that it is startling when someone at ECM engages in that kind of talk. While I was working in the kitchen one day, I had the chance to meet a former volunteer who came by to say hi while he was in town for the holidays. While I

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<sup>27</sup> Hurry Up!

was juicing apples, he asked me outright, “How did you come to follow Jesus? I assume by being here you are a believer.” I immediately felt uncomfortable; I was put on the spot, and did not know how to respond. As I reflected on this experience, I felt like I had been unsettled in some way, but I could not quite figure out why. I think it is because no one at ECM had ever asked me outright about my spiritual beliefs before. Everyone had always given me space to figure out how I fit at ECM for myself. And asking me outright about religion disrupted that.

John especially has been critical of traditional approaches of religious groups to development:

Church in North America is in crisis when it comes to our calling of mission for the hurting and lost. We are simply not keeping up with the need for transforming lives and communities. The approaches we have been trying are not working well.

(East Central Ministries, 2004a)

He describes feeling frustrated with church bureaucracy that “drives more on money and getting people into their building or fitting them into a box of their dogma than about is this good news for the world and changes things in our neighborhood?” Finally, he argues that church should not just be a building where people gather once a week and say nice things to each other, then don’t communicate for the rest of the week (personal communication, July 5, 2013). And he acknowledges that he is not pointing fingers, because he has “shortcomings in this area as well” (East Central Ministries, 2004a).

Resulting from this reflection, East Central Ministries intentionally reimagines faith in a transformational and, I argue, transcendent way. One source of inspiration is a book that many people working at ECM have read, Shane Claiborne’s *Irresistible*

*Revolution.* Claiborne is a member of the Christian Community Development Association and does development work in a Philadelphia community called The Simple Way. When Bob told me about the book and Claiborne’s approach to social change, religion, and community development, he described them as “out of the box Christianity” (personal communication, December 23, 2013). For Bob, this approach was characterized by the idea that Christians need to learn they are not here to serve communities, but here to learn how to work together with communities to create change.

In the Winter 2004 Newsletter, John reflects on another book in which he found a name for what ECM had unknowingly been doing all along—*The Shaping of Things to Come: Innovation and Mission for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Church*. This “post-modern” approach includes proximity of space, shared projects, commercial enterprises, and emerging indigenous faith communities, and John explained that it helped him “see out of the box that has been built around the church and it’s [*sic*] mission,” and may nudge people to change the way they “do” church (East Central Ministries, 2004a).

At ECM, the church is an action performed by co-conspirators, and John explains this is based on examples of early approaches of the Christian church:

The early church that Jesus left was this community of people who were engaged in each other’s lives. And encouraging each other spiritually was right along with every other aspect of life, living and working and raising kids together and you know, all of that. That was the church. (personal communication, July 5, 2013)

Becky, the Youth Programs Manager, adds that church is something lived out at ECM whenever the community is together, and so when she is playing tag with a neighbor’s child, sharing dinner, or attending a birthday party—that is church.

This “out of the box” understanding of church is also reflected in approaches to discipleship and prayer. John explains that at ECM, they disciple using an “organic and relational model” whether it is one-on-one conversations while gardening, small-group discussions during car rides, or answering questions from a 9-year-old neighbor. Prayer is approached in an invitational manner, which differs from the traditional approach of preaching at people. For example, in the newsletter, John sometimes outlines requests for prayers based on community needs like negotiations on the purchase of the warehouse or a safe summer in the neighborhood. When discussing end of the year tax-deductible receipts for donations made to ECM, John invites requests for prayers to be written and sent back to be met by ECM.

**Being community minded.** Finally, ECM enters the border space with the practice of being community minded. A quick browse of the website, a day of volunteering on a project, or reading the newsletter mailed to your house will quickly reveal that community is a foundational concept at East Central Ministries. People describe feeling a “sense of community” (East Central Ministries, 2013d) and “learning how to be community” (website). Community is what unites “Hispanic, Caucasian, Native, Black, immigrants, rich, poor, male, female, old and young” (website). Vicky explains that “*la comunidad, East Central Ministries, quede una comunidad de respeto, con fe, que tengan equilibrio entre sus familias.*”<sup>28</sup> ECM has created a particular social world through careful conceptualization of what it means to be a community. In this community, co-conspirators think of the group instead of the individual and live and work together.

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<sup>28</sup> The community, East Central Ministries, is a community of respect, faith, and harmony among its families.

As East Central Ministries Community Co-op was being reimagined to encourage even greater community ownership, Rhonda submitted a grant proposal with a summary of the project explaining that this co-op encouraged a “gradual transformation of the participants from a mind-set of individualism to one of community awareness, involvement, and commitment to each other” (Newby, 2002). This practice of moving from individualism to community has emerged within the co-op and spread throughout other areas of ECM. For example, when Luis, who works in *olla* production and as a general handyman, first came to ECM, he learned very quickly that even picking up food is a community action:

*John enseñando que no lo mas es sala de comida [sic], es como una cooperativa que tienen que aportar a ellos también ante. No lo más arreglar la comida, y ya hice. Porque no es banco de comida, es como una comunidad que todos ayudamos.*<sup>29</sup>

In the Winter 2013 survey outlined above, people were asked what they would do if given one million dollars, and many responded with ideas that would benefit the entire community as well as themselves. Programs, workshops, job creation, and lights to enhance safety in the community were all suggested by co-conspirators, and Luis said if he was given the money he would pray for ideas on how to spend it in a way that would benefit everyone. In a conversation with Vicky, she emphasized that people should always be thinking about the community instead of just themselves, and this idea was reflected across interviews with co-conspirators: “it’s not always perfect, but they’re

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<sup>29</sup> John taught that it is not just a dining room, it’s a cooperative where you have to provide something in return. Not just fix the food and now I’m done. Because it’s not a food bank, it’s like a community where we all help.



learning to work as a community instead of always thinking me me me or individually” (B. Pedigo, personal communication, December 20, 2013).

Co-conspirators at ECM move towards becoming community minded through working and in some cases living together. The ECM website explains that many organizations in the area work to provide individuals with direct services. ECM intentionally “encourages community members to work together to self-accomplish community issues” (community co-op), and ECM is commonly described as a “project neighbors do together” (J. Bulten, personal communication, July 5, 2013). Community members, ranging in age from 12 to 82, identify the act of working together as important to the health and growth of the community, and ECM projects such as the community food co-op, urban farm, and housing co-op are developed and sustained through co-conspirators’ “commitment to sharing the common work responsibilities of the community” (Casa Shalom membership guidelines). For example, participation in the co-op is based on whether an applicant is interested in working with others to build relationships and economic opportunities, and the Growing Awareness website says the urban farm is only possible because it stems from multiple people collaborating to do different jobs and offer different expertise. Every project at ECM, no matter how big or small, centers around a diverse people “all working together for the common good” (“Welcome to growing awareness,” n.d.).

Another component of being community minded is the literal act of living together in community, and this is an integral component of ECM’s approach to community development. After attending a Christian Community Development Association conference John learned about John Perkins and the three Rs of community

development: (1) relocation, (2) reconciliation, and (3) redistribution. The idea of relocation and living in the international district became increasingly important to John: “I was quick to say, hey, let’s move into the neighborhood” (J. Bulten, personal communication, July 5, 2013).

He felt that to work toward community development, one should be a community member, and when his family was ready to look for a home in the neighborhood, he asked “well, can we do it for more than just our family? What would it mean if we tried to open that up into more participation? So the idea of a cooperative housing community started resurging out of that” (John interview). He began meeting with families every week to talk together about what it meant to “live in community” and how that could mean living differently, and out of these conversations emerged Casa Shalom. Outside of just the housing cooperative, the practice of living in the community is shared by most co-conspirators, with 14 out of 15 staff members living within a mile radius; most volunteers live in similar proximity as well. The women who manage and run One Health Clinic all live in the international district, and Lidia, the director, explains she is better able to meet the needs of patients by always being “a community member first” (field notes).

### **Emergent Practices in the Encircled Border Space**

When co-conspirators at ECM enter the encircled border space with a particular set of practices—the creation of an invitational environment, intention setting, leaving space for what emerges, focusing on feelings, approaching Faith in new ways, and being community minded—they cultivate the soil for new practices to emerge. These emergent practices—making space for agency, focusing on what is wanted, sharing, giving, and

trusting, and building a conspiring community—are able to grow from previous practices and focus special attention on self, community, and future.

**Making space for agency.** Agency emerges as a common theme throughout ECM programs, and within this space for agency, co-conspirators are able to practice self-determination and self-reflection. Bone, Griffin, and Scholtz (2008) explain that agency exists within the space created by an environment of safety, freedom, value and openness, and within the invitational environment created at East Central Ministries, the theme of agency emerged among co-conspirators. Programs like the community food co-op create space for agency through empowering approaches to food distribution centered on relationships, and community-run projects emphasizing co-conspirator participation.

When Rhonda was working to reimagine the food co-op, she explained how ideas of agency were built into the planning:

While there are at least four local churches distributing food, there is a great need for a consistent food program that builds relationships, responsibility, and dignity within the people. The co-op provides an innovative and empowering alternative to traditional food banks and pantries. Participants gain a sense of dignity by earning their food rather than receiving a hand-out. In addition, they learn to work together to self-accomplish goals rather than become dependent on social service agencies. (Newby, 2002)

Co-op members come together in the warehouse to sort food and set up a grocery store, then shop for the foods they and their families like. Afterwards they clean the warehouse and participate in other volunteering projects. Co-op members are in charge of the

management of the co-op, enacting agency in collaborative decision making with each other.

A short story by John, written in the Fall 2003 Newsletter, illustrates what this approach to food distribution looks like in practice, and how it creates space for agency even for new co-conspirators.

Just the other day, as I was taking a load of food to the ministry, a gentleman caught my attention at the stop sign and asked if he could have a loaf of bread. We were only 2 blocks from the ministry, so I told him to walk over to the ministry and he could have the bread. To be honest, at first I didn't feel very good about myself as I drove off. I thought to myself "Why didn't you just say yes and let him grab the bread out of the back of your truck?" Fortunately, and to my surprise, about an hour later he walked through the front door. He said his name was Donald and that he was in town working for the State Fair. We talked for a few moments and I told him about our food co-op and offered him the loaf of bread. Donald said that he was going to be in town for a few months and was interested in joining the co-op. So we filled out his paperwork and then he began helping another gentleman, John, break down boxes in the backyard. Soon enough the rest of the food arrived and we began sorting it. Donald spent the rest of the afternoon with us; he worked, shopped for his food and got a ride home with John who also lives in the neighborhood.

I guess when Donald stopped me in the street, I could have told him to grab a loaf of bread and driven off. I would have felt good about myself for doing a good deed and he would have gotten his bread. Fortunately, something

(someone) stopped me and had me ask him to go to the ministry. You see Donald received so much more that day than just a loaf of bread. He got three bags of groceries, the chance to earn his food, the dignity of contributing, a new friendship, and he got a place where he can learn about the love of Christ... all in one day (East Central Ministries, 2006a).

This story highlights just one of the many moments co-conspirators actively choose to create space for agency; as the moments build off one another, the space for agency expands.

The emphasis on co-conspirators' participation in their own solutions and own future carries over from the co-op into all of ECM's other projects, widening the space and opportunities for agency. Blanca explains that at One Hope Clinic, patients are actively encouraged to participate in their own health, and through this participation, "they become a partner in the decisions the doctor makes." At Escuela Luz del Mundo,<sup>30</sup> middle school students "that often otherwise feel marginalized in their community, realize that they do have power to influence their situations" through innovative lessons requiring active participation. For example, in Spring 2014 Morgan and I were invited to observe the students' projects on biomes; they prepared written descriptions of aspects of their biomes, constructed 3D models, and delivered an oral presentation urging visitors to invest our (fake) money in a conservation plan they personally developed. Finally, rather than simply giving out chicken coops, the "Just Add Chickens" project asks families to participate in the building and installation of their coops to create a sense of pride and ownership.

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<sup>30</sup> Light of the World School

John explains that previous mission trips helped him understand the agency that rests in inviting people from host communities to participate in a project rather than having outsiders doing it for them:

I had done some mission trip stuff taking kids to, you know I took a group of 30 kids from Alaska down to Juárez to build a house, and um, I was much more interested in how do we help the family participate in building this house than in a bunch of kids who know nothing—slopping some stuff together and probably it looks like crap for them? So, yeah somewhere in there it was kind of instilled in me. (personal communication, July 5, 2013)

While John saw the usefulness in these youth mission trips, he also saw that approaching host communities using an *us* helping *them* model could diminish opportunities for agency in the space. Inviting co-conspirators participation also creates greater opportunities for self-determination.

Self-determination “allows individuals to make their own decisions about how they wish to live their lives and accords respect to others’ capacity and right to constitute their worlds as they choose” (Foss, 2009a). East Central Ministries takes an approach to community development that respects the self-determination of co-conspirators through a shift from focusing on issues to focusing on neighborhood. John explains that when he first came to work in the international district, Temporary Aid for Needy Families (TANIF) had just been implemented, which he explained put families in the welfare system on a five-year lifetime limit for receiving assistance like food stamps or financial help. Based on this, many faith-based and non-profit organizations were applying a mentorship approach to families in need, focusing on the transition from “welfare to

work.” John explains that a crucial shift from focusing on “welfare to work” to focusing on the international district as a neighborhood opened up space for self-determination in community development:

You know, if you focus on an issue, by nature you’re kind of presenting yourself as an expert, or, “I have a solution for this issue that’s why we’re getting into it, and there are people who have this issue or problem, and so were gonna come in, a little bit on top to help change them.” If you focus on neighborhood that has a different, all of the sudden I didn’t have an issue to fix. It’s obvious that this neighborhood east of the fairgrounds, two square miles, La Mesa neighborhood on the north side of Lomas, Trumbull neighborhood on the south had a strong reputation as the war zone, and people referred it to that kind of informally, but everyone knew where that was, and most people in the city knew to stay out of it. But it put me as somebody that had to come and learn, not as somebody that was coming with a solution. (personal communication, July 5, 2013)

And ECM has learned. After shifting their focus to the neighborhood rather than on deliberately setting out to work on a specific issue, “ECM spent several years listening to and partnering with the community” resulting in projects based on “what the community wants” (One Hope). Neighbors have since continued to come together “to discuss and plan a better community” (2013 Annual Report). This coming together to listen and discuss leads to what co-conspirators call “true community driven work,” and they express the desire to use their skills and assets to “change whatever the community thought was important” (Lidia).

The quote below, posted on ECM's website, exemplifies the concept of self-determination and the role it plays in community projects.

Go to the people.  
Live among them.  
Learn from them.  
Love them.  
Start with what you know.  
Build on what they have.  
But of the best leaders,  
When their task is done,  
The people will remark,  
“We have done it ourselves.”  
Ancient Chinese philosopher, Lao Tzu

ECM's emphasis on self-determination grounds the principles of community programs. For example, the community food co-op is guided by principles of “voluntary and open membership, democratic member control, member economic participation, equality, and caring for others” (Bulten, 2004).

Ryan and Natalle (2001) make a case for the addition of self-reflection in the practice of invitational rhetoric, because this would offer greater possibilities of understanding self and other and ultimately transcending difference. At ECM, self-reflection allows co-conspirators to relate to one another in meaningful ways. For example, in her discussion of community, Morgan explains:

We are known and understood by friends and family near and far, as much we know ourselves, let ourselves be known, and take the time to know and understand others. This process is lifelong; understanding why we act and respond the way we do; glimpsing and then realizing the role that fear plays in dominating our relationships, actions, and responses to experiences and people. (“Some thoughts on community...,” n.d.)



At ECM, co-conspirators practice self-reflection by putting themselves in someone else's shoes, learning from past mistakes, practicing intentional communication, and actively letting go of control. John explains that growing up he always felt more comfortable with people characterized as "outsiders" or "underdogs" positioned on "the fringe of society," going on to say, "and so, my frame of mind is always a little bit geared to, what are they thinking? How do they feel? What does this look like for them? Or feel like for them?" He acknowledges that coming from a privileged position sets him up to be perceived in a particular way:

Um, I mean, growing up in Grand Rapids as a White kid in kind of a little bit of the city, near suburbs, um, yeah I knew I fit into the predominant group that came across as a bunch of assholes, saying we have all the answers for you guys.

(personal communication, July 5, 2013)

Because of this, John actively practices self-reflection to better understand marginalized perspectives in a respectful way:

I think people almost have to have some kind of personal revelation to it, and especially maybe some kind of personal experience of, hey, this is when somebody came in acting like I knew nothing and was gonna tell me how to fix everything. How did I feel about that? I mean that's kind of the sense, is any time somebody comes in and doesn't know you real well, but thinks they do and thinks they know what's best for you, um, how does that make me feel? So you almost have to kind of internalize that piece of it to be able to step out and um, or, I guess another way of saying it is you have to identify with the underdog. You have to kind of put yourself in their shoes and understand that, it's, that's hard for

especially White guys who don't necessarily need to feel that. Sometimes it's a voluntary thing to try and put ourselves in that place cause we don't, I don't know what it feels like to be discriminated against due to gender or race or anything else. At least not that I know of. (personal communication, July 5, 2013)

Blanca expands the practice of "putting yourself in someone else's shoes" to deal with interpersonal conflict at ECM. When helping two people mediate a conflict, she encourages them to see things from the perspective of the other: "Well let's now put you in that person's shoes and you tell me, why did they react this way? And I think maybe it doesn't solve the problem for them, but they start saying 'well, that's true.'" Blanca adds that over time she sees this practice changing the way people think and hopes they begin to see themselves in others.

Practicing self-reflection also helps co-conspirators learn from their mistakes. The Fall 2003 Newsletter explains that "failures were addressed and learned from that year," a common sentiment in many stories at ECM (East Central Ministries, 2006a). John explains that this process, while not always easy, deepens relationships among co-conspirators. Ten years later, in the Fall 2013 newsletter, John tells a story of his own self-reflection in a relationship with another co-conspirator:

Mike and I go back 13 years; we've seen some of the worst and best in one another. For the last few months, Mike was doing well, peaceably living in our backyard Urban Farm as a temporary solution to his chronic homelessness. Every day he cleaned up the chicken coop, ate lunch with us, and provided comic relief. My heart sank when I received a call one morning, requesting that I get back to the office quick. The tension and fear was palatable when I arrived, and

Mike was in the front yard wild-eyed and yelling at everyone and no one, guarding several boxes that held all his earthly possessions.

In passing, a couple days before, Mike mentioned he found somewhere to live. To expedite his moving process, I asked others to move his stuff to the front yard—ready to load into the truck. Based on past experiences with Mike, I should have known better and the explosion could have been avoided. Because threats were made I banished him from ECM, leaving everyone empty and exhausted. If I had stopped and thought about my commitment to love my neighbor, and less about running a clean, efficient ministry, I know the ugly chaos and yelling could potentially have become a conversation of grace and understanding. But I didn't. I am again humbled and so thankful that the Jesus I follow is all about 2nd, 3rd...and seventy times seven chances. Daily I mess up; daily I receive His grace and forgiveness.

Mike came to ECM yesterday. We hugged and both were able to deeply apologize for the hurt we had caused the other. This is the ministry of reconciliation that I was called to 14 years ago. A ministry of grace, forgiveness, and transformation that walks alongside the messy lives of others, and allows me the freedom to expose my own messiness. This is the ministry I am called to lead, and I am grateful for those who have joined me (East Central Ministries, 2013a).

In learning to practice greater self-reflection, co-conspirators are able to build off intention setting and practice communication with greater intentionality. John and Morgan's working relationship and friendship offers perhaps the best example of such self-reflection in practice. Morgan explains that one way they engaged in such self-

reflection as by reading a book on enneagrams, which help you to determine your personality out of nine different types. She explained that once she identified her type, so many things about her thoughts, feelings, communication style, and way of seeing the world were brought to the surface. She had John read the book as well, and they were both able to create a better understanding of themselves, what communication between them could look like, and how to understand each other better.

Morgan described watching John and his communication style develop and change over time, saying that in recent years, he has become increasingly self-reflexive. She explained that he is always asking questions like, “if we do this, what would that mean? How would it be interpreted? What would it look like?” (personal communication, February 10, 2014). This has increasingly led to her own openness in communicating her feelings with John. For example, Morgan explains that because she is a woman and looks younger than she actually is, this leads to people at meetings typically making eye contact with and directing conversation at John. She describes feeling comfortable expressing her frustration about this to John and feels grateful that he listens and takes her frustration seriously.

Finally, at ECM co-conspirators describe how they actively reflect on their own tendencies to desire control in order to mindfully let go of control. I bring students to ECM to learn and teach about invitational rhetoric. During one such classroom visit, John explained that it is not always easy to communicate this way; it is something he has to practice. He said it would be much easier to just take control and make decisions, and that it takes work to take a step back and invite others to be equal participants in the decision-making process. For example, John said that the health clinic is not a goal he ever had, or

a project he really wanted to pursue. Community members identified healthcare as a major need and goal and collectively created One Hope and the vision of what it would be. John explained that if he had positioned himself in control and made decisions on his own, the health clinic, one of ECM's most successful projects, would never have been created.

While working in the greenhouse with John and Morgan, I got to witness another interesting conversation about control. We were filling pots with soil, and both John and Morgan had very different ideas about how that should be done; Morgan likes it to be organized, John is a little quicker and messier. Both of them acknowledged the fact that they actively have to work at letting go of control, even for something simple like working to fill pots in the greenhouse.

**Focusing on what is wanted.** Growing from the soil they cultivated in early practices, co-conspirators are able to practice focusing on what is wanted. This means that rather than focusing on existing problems and using material resources to solve them, co-conspirators focus their change efforts on what they can imagine and want to happen. Co-conspirators at ECM begin by shifting the focus from structures and material resources to dreams and imagination, demonstrating something different, and focusing on self. This mirrors what Foss and Foss (2011) call moving from constricted to constructed potentiality. Often, efforts at change in the international district have focused on enforcement and monetary solutions, which co-conspirators argue are not effective. John explains that when he first started working in the international district, "there were neighbors marching with blow horns yelling at drug dealers at the time. Standing outside of some drug houses yelling at 'em" (personal communication, July 5, 2013). This was

coupled with Mayor Marty Chavez's "city strike force," which shut down houses suspected of drug dealing, focusing strongly on enforcement approaches. For John, enforcement alone was not enough:

Enforcement maybe gets people out of the neighborhood who mean this neighborhood harm or throws them in jail, or whatever it is. But it still doesn't deal with the root issue of why the violence, why the crime, why the brokenness. And that's where my faith, how do we deal with that aspect of it. We can't just tell kids to not do drugs or you know we have to be creating solutions, programs, bringing them together, looking at teaching them little business skills so that they have something positive to step into instead of just being told what's wrong.

(personal communication, July 5, 2013)

Other change efforts have focused on monetary solutions, which co-conspirators argue are not enough to create change on their own. Becky explains that "it is dangerous to imagine money solving our problems," and John expands on this idea, adding that a focus on money often leads to unsustainable development projects. Often, UNM along with other groups obtain grants to do projects in the international district, "and they come in in a flurry of well-intentioned ideas, but it's based on 'we have a grant to do this, that or whatever.'" John explains that these groups bring community members together to talk and get them excited about projects that could do some good; "but what comes out of it is a research paper or a bunch of good ideas that are rarely implemented because when that grant money dries up the whole thing kind of falls apart...when the money's gone, the people are gone." For John, this just ends up causing more damage and disempowerment rather than creating lasting change:

I mean in the short term maybe something happens, some kids are educated. In the long term though, it often leaves a neighborhood wondering what was that? People are here and now they're gone. And I feel personally that it just kind of leaves a little bit more of a we can't do it ourselves, we needed them to do it for us and now, when they're gone, we can't do it, and we have some remnant or some memory of something reminding us that we're incapable of changing ourselves or helping ourselves or whatever. And so you do that enough over the years and I think it kind of feeds into a disempowerment of neighborhoods.

(personal communication, July 5, 2013)

For John, witnessing approaches to change focused on material resources led him to question what he could do differently. He explains "I'm not an activist in the sense that I don't have the internal fortitude to keep hounding systems and structures to change. I get burned out with that." He began thinking about how he, and ECM, could work outside the governmental and social structures he saw as unable to change the root causes of social problems:

I always gear more towards how do we just create a solution? Even if it's not a massive solution. But for us... is it a solution so that we can bypass some of the structures instead of trying to get them to change? Can we do something different? (personal communication, July 5, 2013)

In bypassing structures, co-conspirators focus their change efforts on imagination and dreams, demonstrating something different and producing self-change in the process. Part of working in community at ECM is "becoming aware that another world is possible" and keeping co-conspirators "united in a positive view of the future." The

community is invited to imagine something different, and Morgan explains that the practice of imagining is where change begins:

*Awareness precedes change* is the Growing Awareness slogan. We believe that in order for change to happen, change in an attitude, a heart, a relationship, or a neighborhood, there must first be a vision for change; we must be able to *imagine* something different. This imagination and awareness is absolutely necessary in transformation. (“Welcome to growing awareness,” n.d.)

Co-conspirators are also encouraged to dream. The La Mesa Community Garden and Park conversation was framed as a chance to “dream out loud about possibility.” Community members were encouraged to explore their “thoughts, interests, and dreams,” and later come back to get a shovel and “plant some trees.” Dreaming is also what helped many co-conspirators re-imagine the way they practiced church. Rhonda explains “John was the first person who ever gave me permission to have a conversation about this. He encouraged me to dream about what I thought ‘church’ might look like and challenged me to try to help make it happen.” John also passed this invitation to other co-conspirators in the Fall 2004 Newsletter:

Do we need permission to dream? Do we need permission to try new approaches? God has already given us the permission. What do we need from others is the freedom to try. Answer honestly, are the religious structures around you assisting you in making disciples for Christ or have they put a box around your thinking of how it should be done? How willing is the Church to go beyond its own walls? How willing are we to dream? (East Central Ministries, 2004a).



In addition to encouraging imagination and dreams among co-conspirators, ECM also works as a “demonstration of something different.” John explains that sometimes people need to “see something new that they can be a part of” and he hopes ECM can serve that purpose: “I want us to be a little bit of a demonstration for just sparking creative, imaginative ideas for how people can live different, act different with each other.”

The Pennsylvania property is an excellent example of demonstrating something different. Located on “one of the most dangerous corners in all of Albuquerque,” where “drugs, prostitution and crime are common,” this home houses Luis and Bob and gives ECM an opportunity to “do something different here, something that can change lives and change the neighborhood.” Luis describes how living and working in the Pennsylvania house has given him the opportunity to create change by demonstrating something different:

I was like homeless and John told me, I have a property and I just need that you take care because in that property it was like a drug dealer’s house. So we are taking care of that things. Almost all the people go to paint the wall and he paint it, we paint everything again. We try to fix that corner. And we did already. So no more drug dealers over there on that corner. It was a hard work, but we fix it. Every time they used to go to knock me the door because they want like drugs and all that kind of stuff. I used to work in the night because they were fighting or they drinking in that place or have to tell them to go away. Little by little I start to understand that it’s a, not church, but it’s a community place. And they respect it now. . . Every time that they paint something, I paint them back, the color, you

know what I mean? And one neighbor from the front they say, you don't get tired to do that? I told her, if they are not getting tired to do bad things, I am never going to get tired to do good things. Every time that they paint, I paint them back. I don't let them chance to stay more than two or three hours the graffiti that they put over there. If they put trash I pick it up, or whatever they do. . . . Because I told them, for me, I get the paint free, they have to spend money to write that thing or they had to steal it, so I don't know who's going to get tired. Him or me. I think that they get tired sometimes. But now it's better. You're going to see that the corner is nice. (personal communication, February 4, 2014)

Finally, co-conspirators focus on self-change. John explains that “ECM has given each one of us the opportunity to become an agent of change for our community,” and Luis says he wakes up every morning grateful for “the opportunity to change and be a better person than yesterday” (East Central Ministries, 2013e). Co-conspirators work to make small changes in their own lives, like growing their own food, buying local and organic, capturing rainwater, and teaching children to appreciate nature, but Morgan explains that “these small things can transform lives” (“Welcome to growing awareness,” n.d.). Finally, by focusing their efforts on changing themselves, co-conspirators also support one another through change. Karla likes to “highlight the important things in life” for herself and others; Sandie, an intern from Germany, enjoys supporting “people who want to change something and make it better;” and Bob hopes that his decision to change through helping others creates a domino effect: “as you help people and they see how it impacts them, then hopefully they'll turn around and when they see someone in need

they'll turn around and be helpful to others” (personal communication, February 4, 2014).

ECM's approach to development and change differs from traditional top-down approaches where organizations enter communities with the assumption they have the answers to problems, then dictate what changes should be made and how spaces should be developed. Instead, co-conspirators focus change efforts on themselves and on whatever positive possibilities they can imagine or dream up. These approaches in turn create a greater space for agency in development as every co-conspirator is able to participate in identifying and implementing change in the development of their community.

**Sharing, giving, and trusting.** Because co-conspirators laid the groundwork with such care when they entered the encircled border space, unique ways of practicing sharing, giving, and trusting are possible. Resources are shared and given as a way to express love and care, and trust is practiced through various actions and uses of space.

Food is the one of the main things that is shared at ECM. After a community dinner where I shared my findings with co-conspirators, explaining the central role I saw food playing at ECM, we talked about the important role food played in our lives as part of the culture many of us share. Karla explained that “food is love,” and I agree that food is a way to show *cariño*<sup>31</sup> for another. ECM's website quotes Michael Pollen explaining that “the shared meal elevates eating from a mechanical process of fueling the body to a ritual of family and community, from the mere animal biology to an act of culture.”

Shared meals were an important practice as ECM began reaching out to future co-conspirators and continues to be an important community building practice. In the early

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<sup>31</sup> Affection

years, ECM held a community meal before church services: “people from the neighborhood are invited to eat with us and, no, they don’t have to stay for church” (East Central Ministries, 2005). This practice continues at Casa Shalom, where co-conspirators share potluck meals together on Sunday afternoons. At the La Mesa Community Garden and Park Conversation dinner was served at 5:30 before the meeting began at 6:00, and a sign outside the church invited anyone in the neighborhood who wished to come share a meal together.

Sharing meals together is also an interpersonal-relationship building process. Former volunteers Brad and Erika used to share community meals with neighbors in their apartment complex, and Amanda, their 11-year-old neighbor, wrote them a letter describing what this meant to her and her family; “thank you for all of the help you gave me and my mom for getting us food. Oh, thank you for today’s breakfast, it was a big breakfast but really, really delicious.” In the Winter 2013 Newsletter, Rhonda explained that her favorite moment of the last year was when she spent an extra long lunch with another co-conspirator, because “people have the tendency to open up when they are sharing food and out of the office setting” (East Central Ministries, 2013d).

When it comes to *cariño* through food, ECM community members would agree that the most *cariñosa*<sup>32</sup> co-conspirator of all would have to be Shirley. Shirley always makes sure that the people and pets at ECM have something to eat; “Tigger and the rest of the office are spoiled daily by Shirley; she loves making lunches for all of us and giving Tigger treats.” Even when Shirley is rushing off to one of her many daily lunch dates, she makes sure that there is something ready for whoever is working at the main office to eat. Everyone generally breaks for lunch at the same time, and we sit together in

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<sup>32</sup> Caring

the living room (sometimes in front of a fire) to talk and share a meal. It is a special practice for everyone, especially Shirley: “that is such a pleasure because I think it’s wonderful when we as a family here at ECM can sit down and eat together. That’s a really great thing in my life as well as theirs” (personal communication, February 4, 2014).

At ECM, trust is practiced through unique actions and uses of space. For example, there are often large envelopes full of cash that need to be deposited at the bank. One day John handed me a particularly large envelope, gave me directions to the bank, and asked me to make the deposit. Bob and Shirley also make regular deposits. For me, the fact that whoever is around and available at the moment is asked to deposit earnings from ECM’s projects implies a great deal of trust. Additionally, at ECM, multiple cars are used for different projects like picking up food for the co-op, donated items for the thrift store, or garden supplies for the urban farm, and these vehicles are shared by whoever happens to be making a pick-up at that time. John will joke that cars always seem to break down when Bob is the one using them, but this is never meant or taken seriously; there is an understanding that these things happen, and people will work together to make sure the vehicles are up and running again in no time. This sharing of cars also leads to keys being given out, lost, and found frequently, which adds to the level of organized chaos Morgan and John often joke about.

Finally, the door to ECM’s main office is generally left unlocked as long as there is at least one person inside working, and based on its location in the international district, this implies the greatest amount of trust. This community is often framed as dangerous, unsafe, and not to be trusted. So to be able to walk up to a building, open the

door, walk inside, and talk to whomever happens to be there at the moment implies trust of the community in a way that words cannot.

**Building a conspiring community.** The practices that cultivated the soil when ECM entered the encircled bordered space, and the emergent practices that bloomed from that soil ultimately work toward building a conspiring community. A conspiring community is characterized by the relationships that are cultivated within it, relationships rooted in equality, and involving commitment to one another, support, and sharing.

Co-conspirators at East Central Ministries construct equality in unique and relational ways. In invitational rhetoric, equality is “a commitment to replace the dominance and elitism that characterize most human relationships with intimacy, mutuality, and camaraderie” (Foss, 2009a). At ECM, equality is discussed as sameness: “I am just a person like them, no more and no less, simply the same,” and as a foundation of welcoming: “we live in the international district, which means that anybody could come through that door. Everyone is equal.” Vicky explains that East Central Ministries is a space that teaches people to live in equality:

*La organización lo que está dando la oportunidad que conozcan que todos somos seres humanos que podemos participar y ayudar, no nada más cuando hay un Katrina un temblor un tornado, ósea es todo el tiempo todo el tiempo. Creo eso. Que lo que a mí, me han enseñado aquí.*<sup>33</sup> (personal communication, February 4, 2014).

Equality is also constructed by the deliberate and intentional break down of hierarchies, and Lidia’s approach to One Hope Clinic is an excellent example of this process. Lidia

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<sup>33</sup> The organization gives the opportunity to know that everyone is human and can participate and help, not only when there is a Katrina or earthquake or tornado, it’s all the time, all the time. I believe this. Like I was taught, I’m teaching that here.

uses a ladder metaphor to describe her work at One Hope Clinic, explaining that she is always a community member first, so she can climb to the top of the ladder to talk to medical professionals, but she always comes back down the ladder to her community

**Professionals**



Climbs the ladder when she needs to

**Community**

Stays grounded in the community

*Figure 6: Ladder metaphor*

When doctors from UNM ask Lidia how to be a community healthcare provider, she explains to them that they need to come down the ladder—they spend too much time at the top. She explained that she has even had to distance herself from UNM at times because doctors and medical students are working in ways sometimes not compatible with the community. She also explains that everyone is at an equal level in the clinic. When community members are doing *salidas* with patients, doctors will often take out the trash. Everyone should feel like no job, no matter how small, is beneath them.

In order to further demonstrate this concept, Lidia told me the story of a summer pharmacy intern from California. While he seemed agreeable in front of Lidia, other people at the health clinic told her that he refused to do tasks like cutting up fruit for the waiting room or watching patient's children during their appointments. She sat down

with the intern and explained that cutting up fruit for patients and watching their kids contributes to their health as much as their time speaking to the doctor does. So he does not get to pick and choose how and when he will contribute to patients' health.

Another way Lidia works to achieve equality in the clinic is encouraging people to let go of ego, particularly through professional titles. She explains that she understands medical school is difficult, and people are proud of their accomplishments and want to be acknowledged as doctors, but that title can place barriers between people.

But if you're gonna do true community work then you need to stop being the doctor so and so and this so and so, because the minute that you put a title between two people, then there's a distance, and then one person goes above the other. And so with our community as it is, they're already vulnerable, they're already in a lot of need, and so when you put a title over their head then they feel like they have to respect you. Not that they won't respect you, but they give you this other type of respect. And as it is in the Hispanic, the Mexican culture, doctors are like Gods. And so whatever a doctor says goes. And so in order for us to break the barriers and to really open that communication and see us as a partner rather than as someone whose telling me what to do, then you need to do that. And so we had to do that, and I was very open about that, I was like you know what? I'm not going to refer to you as doctor so and so, I'm gonna call you by your first name. (personal communication, February 4, 2014)

And this goes for Lidia too:

Just like people call me by my first name and that's fine. Not a lot of people, people come through the door all the time and they don't know I'm the director of



the clinic. It doesn't really matter. I'm the one who's doing the *Salidas* for them. It doesn't really matter, I'm showing an interest in their health, in their wellbeing, in their person. And so it doesn't matter if I'm the director or not. (personal communication, February 4, 2014)

ECM opens a unique window into understanding how a neighborhood can become a community. It does not just emerge on its own, but comes from the cultivation of relationships that emphasize support, commitment, and sharing. Relationship building informs every aspect of ECM programs, including their approach to discipleship:

East Central Ministries is a relational ministry, meaning that one of our main goals is to build long-term lasting relationships with our neighbors. This is a unique approach in a "social service" organization because we actually encourage people to return to participate in our programs on a regular, long-term basis. It is through these long-term relationships that we are able to share our faith with our friends. ("How we disciple," n.d.)

This focus on long-term relationships is evident in the development of the community co-op that "facilitates supportive relationships" and in the ever-growing list of new projects guided by "cultivating quality relationships" (East Central Ministries, 2013d).

This focus on community emphasizes feelings of connection to others in the community and connects ECM to the larger Albuquerque community. In a post entitled *Some thoughts on community...* Morgan asserts that "there is a deep craving, an absolute need in the human heart for true community: to be known and to be understood" ("Some thoughts on community...", n.d.). Relationships of knowing and understanding are felt by community members as friendships, and sometimes even strong family ties. For example,

Bob, a key volunteer with whom I spend most days, explains that he enjoys being with people, and the friendships he has formed through participation in his men's group are some of the most fulfilling aspects of his participation at ECM. Lou, another community member, describes the relationships she has developed with others at ECM as making up her "intended family."

With these friendships and family-like ties come interpersonal conflicts. Membership at Casa Shalom means agreeing to "resolve differences between neighbors in a peaceful and loving way with reconciliation as a priority," and Blanca, the Administrative Manager, explains that one thing she loves about working at ECM is that "even though you have problems you can talk about them. You can resolve them." This intentional approach to resolving conflict sustains feelings of community connection.

ECM forms connections with the larger Albuquerque community through selling plants and ollas to nurseries and visitors to their Urban Store, and UNM classes bringing students for tours and volunteer projects (East Central Ministries, 2012). Finally, just to give another idea of how this process of relationship building works, John acknowledges that although early on ECM became a great community gathering place, some people in the neighborhood did not wish to come to a "ministry." In response to this, co-conspirators went out into the community to "relate in ordinary ways," like having community meals in apartment homes, supporting community gardens, and participating in organizations like neighborhood associations and schools for the "cause of building supportive relationships" (East Central Ministries, 2004).

These community relationships are also characterized by practices of commitment, sharing, and support. On their website, ECM displays the following quote by Wendell Berry about community commitment:

A proper community, we should remember also, is a commonwealth: a place, a resource, an economy. It answers the needs, practical as well as social and spiritual, of its members - among them the need to need one another. The answer to the present alignment of political power with wealth is the restoration of the identity of community and economy.

For John, this idea closely aligns with what he has read in the Bible about the early church meeting together and taking care of each other financially if anyone was struggling, and so the families in Casa Shalom formed an association based on this biblical approach to manage their shared property. Families are committed to each other financially because of shared loans and have agreed to come together and cover someone's mortgage if they are prevented from paying that month. The bylaws also state that members of Casa Shalom are committed to meeting together, sharing meals, and encouraging each other spiritually.

Co-conspirators at ECM also build relationships in the community through sharing time, space, and stories. The community comes together for gatherings at Casa Shalom, parties, and work days at different ECM locations like the new greenhouse. At these gatherings, they participate in activities like community worship, shared meals, games, hitting *piñatas* for celebrations, and reading groups. In addition to shared living spaces like Casa Shalom, community members share gathering spaces like a Laundromat, courtyard, and various existing and planned community gardens. Finally, co-conspirators

share the stories of their lives with one another and with supporters from across the U.S. through profiles on their newsletters and questionnaires on the website.

Finally, many co-conspirators explained that for them, being a community means showing support and encouragement for one another. Karla, a pathways navigator at One Hope Clinic, says that her job is important to the community because she is “able to advocate, encourage, and support the families and people most in need” (East Central Ministries, 2013d). During my time at ECM, I have witnessed countless acts of support in community relationships, but I will close with one in particular which I believe stands out as an incredible moment of community.

Cristina worked at ECM for 13 years, and was one of the founding members and leaders of the Community Co-op. When asked how she was feeling, Cristina was famous for saying “Como La Fanta,” which Luis explained to me referenced a Fanta soda ad in Mexico making a connection between drinking Fanta and looking like a Fanta girl, and Rhonda equated to her colorful bubbly personality. She was also a founding member of Casa Shalom, worked on the council that formed One Hope Clinic, and served as the main community event planner and piñata maker for all the parties. For over a decade Cristina was on a waiting list for a liver transplant, which she finally received last November. Her body, however, rejected the liver and she passed away on December 3, two days before her 50<sup>th</sup> birthday.

In the Winter 2013 Newsletter, Rhonda described the pain caused by Cristina’s passing: “because she was so loved and so involved, Cristina’s passing is leaving a rather large hole in our community. It is particularly sorrowful for Casa Shalom, where she lived and was more than a friend, she was family. And although we are all hurting, we

can find that joy we loved so much in Cristina by realizing that Heaven just got a little more colorful and bubbly” (East Central Ministries, 2013d).

A couple of weeks after her passing, a party was thrown at Casa Shalom in Cristina’s honor. I helped John put together a poster with pictures of Cristina and space for people to write remembrances, and before we sent it to be printed at UNM he had me ask for input from all the co-op women who had spent so many years working in community with her. The day of the party, volunteers and staff at ECM and families at Casa Shalom all came together in the courtyard with food to share, and they all took time signing the poster and sharing stories about Cristina. Francisco, Cristina’s husband, had just returned from her burial in Texas and received many hugs and words of encouragement from the community. John explained to me that the other members of Casa Shalom had been covering Francisco’s mortgage during Cristina’s decline in health and were even trying to figure out how to help put money together for funeral arrangements. John described being deeply touched by this action, saying “we aren’t even family and we are coming together to help” (personal communication, December 15, 2013). This type of support is a product of the approach to community East Central Ministries is constructing in word and action.

## **Conclusion**

After analyzing interviews, field notes, the website, and organizational documents, I found that East Central Ministries is representative of a bordered space and reacts to the border in ways that open up greater possibilities. When encountering the line of division between *nos* and *otros*, co-conspirators react to it by joining the ends of the line together to create a permeable, fluid circle around the community for *nosotros*. In

this circle, community members enter with practices that allow transformative soil to be cultivated: creation of an invitational environment, intention setting, leaving space for what emerges, focusing on feelings, approaching faith in new ways, and being community minded. From this soil, emergent practices are able to bloom: making space for agency, focusing on what is wanted, sharing, giving, and trusting, and ultimately building a conspiring community. This conspiring community opens up ways of being in the world and achieving change that do not exist in the same way outside it.

## Chapter 5: Conclusion

Given my previous experiences in rural Ecuador witnessing the harm that can be caused to communities through the use of unsustainable development practices, I was interested in understanding how development can be done differently in a way that respects the input of communities where projects are taking place. Rather than entering a community and attempting to create a community-based participatory research project focused on development, I chose to use my dissertation project as a time to learn from a community development project that was already working successfully and had already been sustained over time. My specific purpose for this project was to uncover practices of invitational social change used to create sustainable solutions to community identified problems.

To answer my research question, I worked with East Central Ministries, a faith-based community development organization in Albuquerque's international district. Having already volunteered and taken students to ECM for over a year before my dissertation project began, I knew the organization had successfully worked with community members to create community projects, and I knew they used an invitational method of outreach. My method for collecting data was grounded in ethnography, meaning that I observed and participated in day-to-day activities at my field site, and co-conspirators and I collectively created understandings of communication. As I encountered theories that reminded me of what was taking place in the community, I brought them to co-conspirators, and we talked about what the theories meant at ECM and how ECM added new understandings to theory. At ECM I participated in informal conversations and conducted longer, semi-structured interviews in which I learned more

about the community and approaches to communication used at ECM. I also collected organizational documents including newsletters, grant proposals, annual reports, organization surveys, and the website. I took photographs of various ECM projects to better understand how the spaces create and facilitate communication. Finally, after each visit to ECM, I wrote detailed field notes about events that took place and conversations I had with co-conspirators.

My analysis showed that the community surrounding East Central Ministries is characterized by bordered elements; being separated from the larger Albuquerque by strict lines of division as well as containing remnants of the Mexico/U.S. border. By choosing to encircle the border space, co-conspirators create opportunities for practicing invitational rhetoric. Practices in this study are conceptualized as ways of being, relating to others, and performing actions, and are both communicated and enacted by co-conspirators over time. As the name suggests, practices also involve practice; they do not emerge on their own, and are not sustained without a consistent renewal of commitment. Initial practices used by co-conspirators at ECM to cultivate the soil of possibilities include the creation of an invitational environment, intention setting, leaving space for what emerges, focusing on feelings, approaching faith in new ways, and being community minded.

Creation of an invitational environment means establishing conditions of safety, freedom, value, and openness, using communication that respects participants as well as the larger natural environment. Co-conspirators practice intention setting by beginning each project with clear intentions for how communication will take place, a commitment to shared time and space, a specified approach to outreach, and the goal of sustainability.



With this focus on attention also comes the practice of leaving space for what emerges, meaning allowing unspecified actions to take place in messy, silly, and creative ways. Focusing on feelings means using co-conspirators' feelings as a guide for how to imagine and create projects and how to measure change. At ECM, co-conspirators practice approaching faith in new ways that transcend traditional faith/secular boundaries. Finally, co-conspirators enter the encircled border space with the practice of being community minded, or thinking of the group instead of the individual, and living and working together.

From the soil cultivated in these initial practices, emergent practices—making space for agency; focusing on what is wanted; sharing, giving, and trusting; and ultimately building a conspiring community—are able to bloom. Making space for agency means that agency exists within the space created by an environment of safety, freedom, value and openness, and in this space, co-conspirators are able to practice self-determination and self-reflection. In this space co-conspirators also practice focusing on what is wanted, meaning that rather than focusing on existing problems and using material resources to solve them, co-conspirators focus their change efforts on what they can imagine and want to happen. Sharing, giving, and trusting are practiced through sharing and giving of resources and displaying trust through actions and uses of space.

The practices used by co-conspirators at ECM ultimately work together to enable the practice of building a conspiring community, characterized by relationships rooted in equality and involving commitment to one another, support, and sharing. This conspiring community opens up ways of being in the world and achieving change that do not exist in the same way outside it.

### **Three Cs of Invitational Transformation through Transcendence**

The practices identified in my analysis serve to conceptualize the way invitational rhetoric happens in the real world. Co-conspirators make use of invitational concepts to construct new ways of being, relating to others, and performing actions through communication. These practices take place over time, and co-conspirators renew commitments to perform them with intention. In order to further illustrate the significance of these practices, I offer a model for the three Cs of invitational transformation through transcendence, consisting of transcendent invitational change through: (1) community; (2) consciousness; and (3) conspiratorial acts.

Community begins with individuals choosing to embody invitational rhetoric as a way of life; expanding when multiple individuals who have chosen this path make the choice to live and conspire in community with one another and disengage with structures that limit their potential for transformation. From this community, a transcendent consciousness emerges allowing individuals and their ideas to move fluidly across boundaries. This community and consciousness is ultimately not isolated but conspiratorial; through identifying and conspiring with other individuals and communities, invitational transformation is sustainable and expands through a web of connection.



*Figure 7: Three Cs of invitational transformation through transcendence.*

**Community.** In this invitational model for transformation through transcendence, community begins with choosing to live invitationally, and these choices are made at an individual level. First, the practice of intention setting is a way to mindfully move through daily experiences. People frequently move through the world without intention; whether driving to a place and not remembering how they got there or saying things they did not mean because they were speaking without thinking. So mindfulness, or moving through the world by setting intentions, is something that can be practiced individually and brought into actions performed alone and in interactions with others. Another way

individuals can practice living invitationally is through focusing on feelings. Often people are taught to put emotions aside in favor of thinking, acting, and being rational. Through a focus on feelings, people are able to reflect on when they feel safe and when they do not, what feels right/good and what does not, and what they need and do not need. With these feelings as a guide, individuals can navigate through life with a focus on what direction feels right for them.

When multiple people who have decided to live invitationally come to live and work together this allows for the creation of the conspiring community. This community is characterized by community mindedness and an invitational environment, which lead to constructing a space where things can happen outside of existing structures.

Community mindedness is an individual choice to think in terms of the community instead of just the self. For individuals who have chosen to live and work together in an invitational, transformative way, there must be an intentional effort to build and sustain this community collectively.

Community mindedness creates new ways for neighbors to relate to one another, and East Central Ministries provides several examples of this. At Casa Shalom neighbors care for each other like families, as seen in the care provided for Francisco during Cristina's illness and passing. People who are not related by blood or marriage are living in community with one another, and as part of this community displaying a unique type of trust. Because they are committed financially to each other, there is a trust that everyone is doing their best to do their part and pay their mortgage. If someone is unable to pay, there is no question that the other residents will come together and make sure they have not only their mortgage covered. Other needs are met as well—food, transportation,

spiritual guidance, comfort in times of grief. I have never witnessed another neighborhood in Albuquerque or anywhere else where people relate to one another with this type of trust and commitment.

The invitational environment is characterized by external conditions of safety, freedom, value, and openness. As community members work to build these concepts into the practices of their daily lives and bring them into their interactions with other community members, the community space as a whole becomes enveloped in the invitational environment. This invitational environment does not just emerge on its own, however. Co-conspirators must build it into their daily experiences to create greater options for themselves and others.

In this community—characterized by community mindedness and an invitational environment—the focus is shifted away from structures that inhibit co-conspirators from living with freedom, health, and resources and co-conspirators transcend these limitations all together. Because there is not a reliance on structures and/or a focus on changing them, alternative possibilities are created within the community by co-conspirators. East Central Ministries offers several examples of what happens in a community when co-conspirators shift the focus away from inhibiting structures; I will discuss access to health care as one primary example. Co-conspirators identified access to health care as a felt-need in the international district, feeling restricted by issues like legal status and language and cultural barriers. Rather than challenging health care as a problematic institution, co-conspirators created a solution to health care that worked for them and their community. So while they may not have access to health care in the larger Albuquerque area, within the encircled border community at ECM, access to health care is a reality.

**Consciousness.** In the community created by individuals who have chosen to live invitationally, a transcendent consciousness emerges allowing people and ideas to move fluidly across boundaries. By leaving space for what emerges co-conspirators develop a “tolerance for ambiguity, which means trusting the process of living invitationally and being comfortable with whatever uncertainties it raises. This transcendent consciousness begins at an individual level but has collective possibilities.

Gloria Anzaldúa explains that borders create the opportunity for border dwellers to develop a *mestiza consciousness*. *Mestizas* straddle multiple cultures and value systems at once, developing a *new mestiza consciousness* with a “tolerance for ambiguity” (Anzaldúa, 2007, p. 101). This consciousness allows for *mestizas* to transcend international, cultural, gendered, sexual, class, and other boundaries to create new understandings and ways of relating. East Central Ministries provides several examples of what this transcendent border consciousness looks like on individual and collective levels through the transcendence of borders between people.

On an individual level, Lidia shows how hierarchies between people can be borders and demonstrates ways to break down these borders in the healthcare system. Borders between doctors and patients can be heavily pronounced, and Lidia explains that this is even more common in the Latino community where doctors are constructed as “gods” (personal communication, February 4, 2014). At the One Hope Clinic, Lidia transcends these borders by avoiding titles and making sure every staff member, whether working at the front desk or as a doctor, plays an equal part in doing tasks that need to be done, like taking out trash and cutting up fruit. In *salidas*, a space is constructed for

patients to become active participants in their healthcare, working in collaboration with doctors.

Approaching faith in new ways achieves a collective form of transcendent consciousness—giving people space to figure out how their unique spiritual path will look and how it will cross and merge with the paths of others. Collectively, co-conspirators at ECM work to transcend faith/secular boundaries that sometimes serve as lines of division in other faith communities. In conversation and in organizational documents, many co-conspirators self-identify as Christian and present this as their reason for working with ECM. However, they stress that they do not expect others to share that identification, and co-conspirators do not need to be Christian to work with ECM and participate in its programs. They also use space and action to transcend faith/secular borders by taking church out of the building on Sunday and practicing church in relationships with one another.

The relationships built through living invitationally in community with others also facilitate a move towards transcendent consciousness. For example, at ECM the line between neighbor and family member is transcended, with co-conspirators sharing resources like food, space, and sometimes finances. In my visit to another ministry during my field research, I saw people fighting over food as a scarce resource. At ECM, co-conspirators organize donated food and shop for what they like, constructing food as an abundant resource to be shared. At Casa Shalom, neighbors share spaces like the courtyard and Laundromat, and in some cases, share financial resources with one another when a family cannot make their mortgage payment or are going through personal struggles.

The actions described above create a consciousness among co-conspirators that transcends boundaries. They relate to each other in new ways by eliminating hierarchies, and organize homes and families in ways that transcend traditional neighborhood organization. They also develop a comfort with the uncertainty that comes with individuals navigating their own unique paths to spirituality.

**Conspiratorial.** In the invitational model for transformation through transcendence the space of possibility and transcendent consciousness constructed in community are not isolated, but conspiratorial. What I mean by this is that co-conspirators conspire, they plan creatively and connect with others to maintain that their own conspiring community is sustainable and connects to other conspire communities through a web of change.

Using practices of invitational rhetoric, co-conspirators work to ensure that projects contribute to environmental sustainability, and they create projects with sustainable intention. For example, ECM projects like the community food co-op and urban farm work together for environmental sustainability. Co-op members take spoiled food from the co-op to the compost bins at the urban farm. The chickens eat what they want, and the remaining food becomes rich compost over time. This compost is used to make soil for seedlings sold at the urban farm, and the cycle begins again.

Sustainability of projects is also intentionally built into the planning process. For example, John explains that when he was looking for solutions to the housing issues in the international district, he wanted to create solutions that were sustainable over time. For Casa Shalom, mortgages are set at a low rate to ensure families can keep up with them and do not lose their homes. Additionally, projects like “Just Add Chickens” are



created with the intention of families raising chickens to produce eggs as a sustainable food or income source.

Perhaps ECM's greatest move towards ensuring the sustainability of their social change efforts rests in their focus on youth development. Every year and semester, ECM offers internships and volunteer opportunities for young co-conspirators. Here, they "gain hands-on experience in ministry and community development by shadowing and assisting staff members," and "learn leadership, ministry, community development, and social justice principles through trainings, through seeing them in action, and through participating in them at ECM" (East Central Ministries, 2013c, *Rebuilding Broken Walls*, 2010). All this is done in an effort to "help raise up the next generation of ministry leaders" (East Central Ministries, 2013c). In the Summer 2013 newsletter, every intern described the various ways their families were impacted by ECM: "My family has benefitted a lot from ECM;" "ECM helps me and my family in many ways." While seeing the impact ECM has on their families and themselves, these young co-conspirators in training are ensuring the very program they have benefitted from will be sustainable.

This conspiring community does not happen, or remain, in isolation. Demonstrated by the four outer circles in my model of invitational transformation through transcendence, as a community and consciousness bloom from the soil co-conspirators have cultivated, the blooms pollinate other projects in the international district, and other blooms spread across the country. In the international district and other parts of Albuquerque, ECM connects with projects and people who are creating similar change efforts. For example, as I began writing this conclusion I had the privilege of attending an event held by the Story of Place Institute in the international district. People

were asked to bring whatever they could to create a makeshift living room in an empty lot where conversations could be held. When I arrived, rugs and couches had been arranged around tables and lamps; there was even a television! We sat in this living room, and people were asked to talk about the issues and assets of the neighborhood and to share their dreams for the international district. People consistently talked about the people being the biggest asset and about how a sense of community is the most important aspect of creating a safe environment. This echoes what I learned during my time at ECM.

Co-conspirators at ECM have also been influenced by Shane Claiborne's *Irresistible Revolution*. Claiborne is the leader of a faith community called *The Simple Way*, located in inner city Philadelphia. Much like ECM, this community had "a dream of a village and it's coming to life" ("Local village of the simple way," n.d.). In this Simple Way village neighbors come together to share meals and prayer, plant gardens in abandoned lots, rehab vacant houses and "gather and dream and plot goodness" ("Local village of the simple way," n.d.).

Claiborne worked to help develop *Conspire Magazine*, which "celebrates creativity, connection, and faith amongst a growing network of subversive friends" (*Conspire Magazine*, n.d.). The magazine is conceptualized as a space for sharing issues that arise in community life:

*Conspire* explores in a collaborative, creative, and corporate way some of the unique issues that arise from community life. At the same time, it engages the struggles of many who are not in such communities. Some of us are seeking community. Others of us are recovering from community. Some of us would be

thrilled to find just one kindred spirit. *Conspire* exists for people in all those different places.

You'll find grounded biblical reflection; painfully honest personal stories of failure, hope, discipleship and challenge; heart-stoking artwork; poetry and fiction that's paying attention; probing social analysis; gentle and humorous confessions. It's earthy, human, thoughtful, and sometimes ridiculous. We're not holy or hip. We're just people talking about this, that, and the other as we try to live authentically (*Conspire Magazine*, n.d.).

If any of this sounds familiar, that is because East Central Ministries is a recognized *Conspire* Community. These communities are featured in print and on [conspiremag.com](http://conspiremag.com) as "local hubs for plotting goodness" (*Conspire Magazine*, n.d.). These hubs spread from California to Massachusetts and everywhere in between, and "this web of subversive friends is constantly growing." East Central Ministries is thus part of a web of conspiratorial communities committed to achieving new consciousness and finding new ways of living in the world. These communities can exist in the same geographic location, across the state and nation, and potentially expand to international contexts. The model I offer is thus intentionally vague to leave space for the limitless potential of invitational transformation through transcendence.

**Invitational Transformation through Transcendence.** The three Cs model of invitational transformation through transcendence ultimately shows how invitational rhetoric, with its emphasis on equality and understanding, can be used during change processes without demanding that others change. Identifying as co-conspirators allows community members to transcend hierarchies in relationships, positioning them to

communicate from a place of equality. Co-conspirators at East Central Ministries are working towards community development, which is focused on bringing change to communities. Their approach to change, however, is grounded in the invitational goal of *understanding*. People are working to understand their own feelings and needs then using this understanding of self to relate to and increase understanding of others. This collective process of understanding helps co-conspirators develop dreams for what they would like to see in the future of their community.

Sally Miller Gearhart explains that there is a difference between wanting to change things, and wanting things to change (Foss & Griffin, 1995). Wanting to change things means protesting and fighting against people, structures, and ideas with the intention of changing them. Wanting things to change, on the other hand, means that one can still see problems in the world they wish were not taking place, but they can choose to focus change efforts on the self and work to create opportunities outside of limiting structures, which in turn potentially create a ripple effect of change. Wanting things to change, then, is not a disengaged model; it simply shifts the energy typically spent fighting for change towards constructing new ways of being.

Using the model of invitational transformation, co-conspirators are able to commit to using practices of invitational rhetoric—not seeking or demanding to change others—and still hope that things in their community will change. Trusting the process, and committing to understanding one’s self and understanding others can still lead to the change development seeks, and so practices of invitational rhetoric can be used to create invitational transformation that begins with individuals, grows with communities, transcends limiting structures, and spreads through webs of connection.

In the Spring 2014 newsletter, John further expands on the difference between wanting to change things, and wanting things to change. First, he offers two different definitions of demonstration:

**dem·on·stra·tion** *noun* \,de-mən-'strā -shən\  
: ān event in which people gāther together in order to show thāt they support or oppose something or someone  
: ān āct of showing or proving something

John then offers two examples of how demonstration is used for change in Albuquerque:

I have been thinking a lot about the concept of demonstration.

Albuquerque has been in the national news lately about the people protesting the high number of police shootings. I have paid close attention to these demonstrations because of my background in Criminal Justice, work among marginalized people, and past involvement on Albuquerque's Police Oversight Commission.

However, in terms of demonstration, I gravitate more to the second definition, "an act of showing or proving something." Demonstrating a different way of living is at the core of ECM. We are demonstrating how life, faith, relationships, and community can and should look in a neighborhood characterized by poverty and struggle. Our urban farm demonstrates a simpler sustainable connection to our environment in the midst of concrete and barbwire fencing. Our community run clinic demonstrates how our physical, mental and spiritual health is interconnected with deep community relationships. Our food co-op demonstrates how neighbors can be empowered to participate and share with each other in the bountiful food that stores would deem unsellable.

ECM's commitment to demonstrate a different way of living is in direct response to Jesus' teaching that as his followers we have the responsibility to help create God's intended reality, striving to live in love with each other. Our goal is that everyone who observes our small and often flawed demonstration of life together will be encouraged to create their own beautiful demonstrations in their communities. (East Central Ministries, 2014)

As they demonstrate a difference way of life, co-conspirators at ECM are hoping other individuals and communities are inspired to make changes in the way they live. This hope for change, however, is very different from demonstrates that protest in an effort to change things. Working with East Central Ministries, this study shows that transformation can be invitational and change and understanding can work hand in hand. It also demonstrates that co-conspirators do not have to fight against limiting structures, they can transcend structures all together to construct realities and ways of being that work outside them. Apart from invitational transformation through transcendence, this study also makes several other contributions to invitational rhetoric, which I will discuss in detail below.

### **Contributions to Invitational Rhetoric**

First and foremost, this project serves as a case study for the use of invitational rhetoric in a real-world context. When I teach invitational rhetoric, students often say that this approach to communication sounds nice but is unrealistic; they have trouble understanding how it would work outside of a classroom or a one-time interpersonal interaction. In this dissertation, I offer an example of how invitational rhetoric can successfully be used for community development. In my analysis I found practices used

by co-conspirators to enter the encircled border space and create new possibilities for practices within it. These practices build off one another to create a community of transcendent consciousness that spreads through conspiratorial actions. These practices both reinforce and add to previous understandings of invitational rhetoric.

A second contribution of this study is to the notion of agency within invitational rhetoric. In response to critiques that invitational rhetoric does not take the agency of participants in an interaction into account, Bone, Griffin, and Scholtz (2008) argue that agency exists within the space created by an environment of safety, freedom, value and openness. Through the practice making space for agency, co-conspirators at ECM live the possibilities for agency in the invitational environment. People in the international district are not people often thought of having a high degree of agency due to poverty, undocumented status, language, ethnicity, and gender, among other things. Because East Central Ministries creates a space for social change outside of structures of power and domination, within this space co-conspirators have agency to make their own choices about their own lives. They can come together and exercise agency to identify community felt-needs, and then have agency to work together to make sure these needs are addressed. For example, because co-conspirators exercised their agency to create solutions to healthcare needs, they now have access to healthcare that is physically, emotionally, financially, and legally safe.

My analysis also showed that incorporating self-reflection with practices of invitational rhetoric increases possibilities of understanding self, understanding other, and ultimately transcending difference, as Ryan and Natalie (2001) suggest. At East Central Ministries, reflecting on one's thoughts and actions allows for co-conspirators to put

themselves in someone else's shoes, learn from past mistakes, communicate with intention, and actively let go of control to make space for possibility. To resolve conflict, co-conspirators put themselves in the place of others to understand their perspectives and move forward. Co-conspirators also reflect on mistakes they have made in development practices and in relationships with one another to learn from these experiences and move forward in productive ways. Co-conspirators also pay close attention to their own communication styles and the styles of others to intentionally create effective communication practices and relationships. Finally, John explained that as the executive director of ECM it would be easiest to take control and make decisions on his own, and so he is constantly practicing letting go of control to make space for other possibilities to emerge informed by other perspectives.

My analysis, then, showed that East Central Ministries takes an approach to community development that puts the values and environment called for by invitational rhetoric into practice. I also found that co-conspirators create a space for agency (Bone et al., 2008), and use self-reflection to expand the practice of invitational rhetoric (Ryan & Natalle, 2001). Co-conspirators at ECM also show that concepts of intention, sustainability, trust, relationships, community, and transcendence extend the possibilities of invitational rhetoric first imagined by Foss and Griffin (1995) and extended by Ryan and Natalle (2001), Bone et al. (2008), and Foss and Foss (2012).

First, *intention* is a useful addition to practices of invitational rhetoric. While this may sound commonsense, this approach to communication does not come naturally, and as Foss and Griffin (1995) explain communication is often characterized by efforts to change others. To get out of the tendency to try to control others, co-conspirators have to



practice letting go of control and set intentions to communicate with one another in respectful productive ways. This change does not happen overnight, and invitational rhetoric is therefore something people have to practice.

*Sustainability* is introduced as an extension of the invitational environment to respect the natural environment where communication is taking place. Sustainability is also an intention for community projects to continue and thrive in the hands of community members. Sustainability of ECM as a whole is ensured through the development of youth projects and programs to ensure young co-conspirators can carry on the work and change that have begun in their community. Sustainability as an extension of invitational rhetoric means that the work that is done to create an environment of safety, freedom, value, and openness, that privileges equality, imminent value, and self-determination will not just continue on its own. These practices are cultivated over time and must be nourished consistently if they are to continue to flourish.

Invitational rhetoric assumes a “trust that others are doing the best they can at the moment” (Foss & Griffin, 1995), and at ECM co-conspirators elevate *trust* as an important way to practice relating invitationally. As discussed in my analysis, multiple co-conspirators are trusted to make large deposits at the bank, cars are shared (and keys are misplaced), and doors are left unlocked to imply trust in a neighborhood that is often constructed as dangerous. The financial commitment to one another at Casa Shalom also implies a trust that everyone is doing the best they can to contribute, and no co-conspirator is simply accepting a free mortgage from others. Finally, through communication from an invitational standpoint is based in understanding, co-conspirators

are trusting that others will respect and value their experiences and perspectives. Without that trust, this approach to communication would not be possible.

At ECM, *relationships* are an important concept for the practice of invitational rhetoric. Invitational relationships are rooted in equality, and involve commitment among co-conspirators, support, and sharing. From these relationships come greater possibilities for collaborative projects. Relationships also cultivate the soil for invitational rhetoric to blossom and reinforce community. East Central Ministries' practice of invitational rhetoric is also largely grounded in the concept of *community*. Co-conspirators carefully define community as a place where they think of the group instead of the individual, and they live and work together in ways that rely on the commitment to group over individual. Entering the international district from an invitational standpoint allows for the creation of this intentional community, and this community in turn creates an environment where invitational rhetoric can flourish and inform every action and interaction.

At East Central Ministries, practices of invitational rhetoric ultimately lead to *transcendence*. Co-conspirators transcend the structures that have limited access to healthcare, employment, housing, and even physical safety. They also develop a tolerance for ambiguity, existing in in-between spaces like the international district with remnants of the Mexico/U.S. border. Co-conspirators use transcendence to cross, bridge, and/or breakdown boundaries between people; eliminating hierarchies in health contexts, and blurring lines between neighbors and family.

In transcending faith/secular binaries, co-conspirators at ECM achieve what Delgadillo (2011) calls spiritual *mestizaje*. Delgadillo extends Anzaldúa in discussing

spiritual *mestizaje* as a transcendent approach to spirituality aimed at achieving a heightened, embodied consciousness of justice. When co-conspirators describe sharing time and meals with each other as church, they are achieving this embodiment of justice. They are using faith as a way to ensure emotional and physical needs are being met when they otherwise may not be.

This approach to spirituality also focuses on the journey to critical awareness, not prescribing a path. This means that this is an ongoing process that individuals must figure out for themselves, and there is not one set way of achieving it. This journey mirrors ECM's practice of leaving space for what emerges. While co-conspirators follow their own spiritual journeys, these merge at ECM to achieve a greater level of intensity as Delgadillo suggests. For example, in early newsletters John described his own need to find different ways to "do" church, and Rhonda explained that she was inspired by someone offering a possibility for faith that she had needed and had not found before (East Central Ministries, 2006a). When their paths merged, the intensity of ECM's efforts began to increase, and with each new co-conspirator this journey and consciousness of doing church differently intensifies. Finally, the actions of co-conspirators express a "connection to the sacred, a recognition of worlds or realities beyond those immediately visible and respect for the sacred knowledge these bring" (Delgadillo, 2011, p. 4).

### **Suggestions for Future Research**

This dissertation has several implications for future research on possibilities of invitational rhetoric, spiritual *mestizaje*, and community development in the U.S. and international contexts. First, this project serves as a case study for how invitational rhetoric can be practiced to achieve change. Future projects could examine if these

practices for achieving change work in contexts other than development, like conflict resolution. For example, during a mediation certification at UNM, I found that careful attention was paid to constructing communication based in understanding the perspectives of others in an interaction. It would be interesting to uncover if and how the practices that create understanding are invitational. Additionally, future research could examine other possibilities for what invitational rhetoric can “do.” I found that it can help achieve sustainable change and create new approaches to relationships and community, but what could invitational rhetoric mean in education, politics, and other arenas?

Second, in their approach to out-of-the-box Christianity, East Central Ministries exemplifies spiritual *mestizaje*. Future research could examine other examples and possibilities of spiritual *mestizaje* in other religious communities and organizations. Additionally, ECM represents just one of many Conspire communities. It would be interesting to observe if the practices of invitational rhetoric used at ECM are exemplified in other Conspire communities. It would also be useful to spend time in these other communities to discover the unique practices they have created in their projects and ways of relating to one another.

Finally, this dissertation highlighted an example of a community development project in Albuquerque’s international district that was already successful and had already been sustained over a period of 14 years. Future research could examine if some or all of the practices of invitational social change at ECM could inform new community development projects. For example, what would happen in Marianitas, Ecuador if community members began a new community development project informed by the

practices used at ECM? What new practices would community members create to address their unique needs?

### **A New Development Story**

Through my dissertation project, I have also found that East Central Ministries offers an approach to development that creates possibilities through a focus on symbolic resources, differing from Margaret's approach with Las Colibris in Marianitas, which focused on material resources. When Margaret entered Marianitas, with what I believe was the best of intentions, she used a top-down approach to development. She created business cards, promotional materials, and product catalog promoting *artesanías* made in the community. She also used the internet to recruit international volunteers to the community, who in turn brought money to pay for housing which contributed to the income of the homes where they stayed.

These approaches worked well for a while, and the income generated from projects granted some women financial freedom for the first time in their lives. But one day Margaret left. For a while she continued maintaining the website, and would call Norma to arrange housing for international volunteers. But one day those phone calls stopped. No one in the community had Internet, or for that matter a computer to take over the recruitment of volunteers, and because this development project depended on Internet access to continue, an outside resource, it was no longer sustainable. Las Colibris not only lost out on the money they had begun to depend on to sustain their household incomes, but more importantly, they lost out on the opportunities for language, knowledge, sharing, and growing they appreciated from intercultural interactions with international volunteers.

East Central Ministries offers a vision of something different. First, development projects are generated together and based in the concept of community. While this term is used frequently to describe different groups of people brought together by similar interests and/or proximity, ECM carefully constructs community as a place where community-mindedness—thinking of the group over the individual and living/working together—is practiced to build the conspiring community—characterized by relationships of equality involving commitment, support, and sharing. Within this community, co-conspirators focus on the assets of the space, like empty lots that can become gardens and parks where community members can gather safely. They also focus on the unique assets each co-conspirator brings, like Blanca’s ability to manage conflicts effectively, and Leticia’s versatility and reliability in projects.

The development approaches constructed and enacted at ECM create a consciousness that transcends binaries. This is evident in Lidia’s elimination of hierarchies in the clinic, and co-conspirators disengagement with faith/secular divisions among people, ultimately leading to the transcendence of *nos/otros* divisions in development. Projects are created together, focusing on symbolic resources like dreams and imagining something different. These projects are then run by community members. For example, at the health center women from the community run day-to-day operations and conduct *salidas*. If a traditional development model had been used, and John had entered the community assuming he knew what was best and making decisions on his own, there would be no health center because that is not something he originally set out to do.

Finally, because this project is conspiratorial—creatively and collaboratively planned and enacted as sustainable, and connected to other communities—it can achieve lasting change that creates ripples in and out of the international district. Sustainability is achieved through co-conspiring to develop and implement projects in the community, so that any given project is being carried out through collaboration and does not depend on one person to succeed. For example, Morgan often travels during the slower months at the end of the summer, and the urban farm is sustained through the work of other volunteers. This is a built-in aspect of ECM—the idea that if one person cannot be there for whatever reason multiple other co-conspirators can step in and help maintain projects. As discussed above, community youth also work in collaboration with older staff and volunteers to learn about development and carry on the work being done at ECM.

This development approach is not contained within the international district in Albuquerque, but through conspiratorial practices ECM is connected with other conspiring communities like The Simple Way. ECM ultimately offers a glimpse of new ways to approach development that honor the communities where projects take place, focusing on creating a community, allowing a new consciousness to emerge, and conspiring with others to expand change efforts and possibilities, sustaining them over time.

### **What Does this Mean for East Central Ministries?**

I have described how the findings in my analysis demonstrate a particular formation of community, arising consciousness, and conspiratorial efforts. I have also demonstrated how these findings extend understandings of invitational rhetoric and

contribute to communication literature. I would like to close with a discussion of what these findings mean for East Central Ministries.

As I completed my analysis, I was invited to a community dinner for ECM staff, volunteers, and a visiting work group from Michigan. At this gathering, co-conspirators gave me the opportunity to share my findings with them, and after we had all finished eating I stood up and described the major themes that emerged in my analysis. Lidia helped me with translation, as I playfully told co-conspirators my brain takes so long to switch during translation that we would end up staying an extra three hours if I translated alone. I gave each co-conspirator a questionnaire to ensure that they were able to contribute their opinions to the final product and also be referred to in a way that felt comfortable: *nombre/name*; *nombre que le gustaría que se llame en mi ensayo /name you would like to be called in my paper*; *¿con que está en acuerdo? ¿en que no esta en acuerdo? / what did you agree with? disagree with?*; *¿que agregaría usted? / what would you add?*; *¿qué cambiaría usted? /what would you change?*; and *¿algo más? /anything else?*

After I described my findings, co-conspirators began to stand up to share their feedback, saying that I had described things they felt for a long time but could not put into words. This sentiment was echoed on the questionnaires: “I agree with everything that was said. You put into words what our feelings are” (L. Regino, personal communication, March 11, 2014); “Although at times we ourselves don’t know how we work, for you to say it, it is really great. I feel that it is exactly how the ministry works.” (K. Castañeda, personal communication, March 11, 2014).



This led to a large group discussion where co-conspirators began to stand and talk to each other in ways that reinforced community. They explained that their community is a unique, special place and reminded each other that even if things become difficult, they must continue to work together for the community. On questionnaires, they reinforced this community discussion: “We work for our community! That is the main point of our work here!” (S. Becker, personal communication, March 11, 2014); “I agree that the first and very important theme is community. All of us do it for love of others. We do it for the community, not ourselves” (K. Castañeda, personal communication, March 11, 2014); “Todo lo que hacemos, lo hacemos para compartir”<sup>34</sup> (L. Fragoso, personal communication, March 11, 2014).

Becky added that she was grateful to have youth participation in the community recognized: “I am so glad you recognize the youth in the community are being prepared to carry on this work, because that is such an important piece to me” (personal communication, March 11, 2014). Vicky highlighted ECM’s transcendence of divisions: “Estoy de acuerdo se hable de ECM como una organización sin divisiones, sin barreras de idiomas, de religión o cualquier concepto que intente separar en la comunidad, para la comunidad y para la misma organización”<sup>35</sup> (personal communication, March 11, 2014). Finally, Bob explained that in this community, diversity is privileged: “We are all so different and that’s what I love about this. We have the freedom to be different” (personal communication, March 11, 2014).

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<sup>34</sup> Everything we do, we do to share.

<sup>35</sup> I agree with describing ECM as an organization without divisions, without barriers of language, religion, or any other concept that intends to separate the community, for the community and for the organization.

This group conversation lasted for a long time, and later, John and Morgan explained to me that they had never seen a staff or community meeting lead to that type of conversation—a conversation that re-energized co-conspirators and reminded them why they do what they do. Co-conspirators explained to me that my project was helpful for getting them to open up to each other in conversation and expressed hope that this dissertation could potentially show what was happening at ECM to the larger Albuquerque community: “I think your paper will be another means for other sections of Albuquerque to know what ECM does and perhaps help ECM even more with other projects” (Agustina, personal communication, March 11, 2014).

When I first expressed the desire to work with ECM for my dissertation, I talked to Morgan in the greenhouse. She told me that she and John thought this would be helpful for ECM to re-imagine and reinforce who they were as an organization and reflect on where they come from in order to decide on future directions. These goals were reflected back to me in Morgan’s feedback during the community dinner:

You don’t know how meaningful, how big it is to hear you say these things, even way back two years ago. Your insight in observing and putting words to things that we have felt and believed—to hear this is so heartening and meaningful...

Thank you! I can’t express how valuable your working, observing, and sharing with us here at ECM has been” (personal communication, March 11, 2014).

Of every contribution I hope this dissertation has made, I am proudest that it was useful for my co-conspirators at ECM in some way.

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