

THE PSYCHO-SOCIAL BENEFITS OF BACKYARD AND COMMUNITY GARDENING  
AMONG IMMIGRANTS

by

KELLY BYERS

(Under the Direction of Maria Navarro)

ABSTRACT

The objectives of this study are to provide a phenomenological understanding of the impact of the relationships between people (in this case, immigrants) and their gardens, and to gain a better understanding of how the immigrant experience and gardening are connected. Feminist research methodology guided the study, using semi-structured interviews as a means to interact with participants. There are several reasons, both environmental and psycho-social, why gardening is beneficial. Some reasons include improved nutrition, lower costs for produce, enhancement of the environment, improved health through exercise, and stress reduction. Furthermore gardens create space for social engagement and provide means for individuals, especially those not native to an area, to maintain parts of their culture through recreating familiar landscapes and cultivating culturally-relevant foods. Finally, this research seeks to destabilize the culture/nature binary by illustrating how the two are connected and similar, in the sense that they can both be constructed and performed.

INDEX WORDS: immigration, gardens, psycho-social, culture

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## DEDICATION

To those who do not let school interfere with their education, this thesis is dedicated to you.

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How do I begin to thank the many people who have helped me through the journey that is graduate school? To my committee, Maria Navarro, Jennifer Williams, and Cecilia Herles, thank you; without your constant encouragement I could not have endured this process. Thank you tremendously for being patient and understanding with me while I slowly found my voice. I appreciate you three more than you can ever know.

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## **CHAPTER 1**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **Background to the Study**

On an early summer afternoon in May, a friend invited me to her residence at one of the graduate family housing sites on the campus of the University of Georgia. For weeks she talked of the community garden she recently joined at her residence. It was her first time gardening and she loved it. Not only did she enjoy putting her hands in the soil, planting seeds with her son, and eating her own food, but she also enjoyed getting to know her neighbors. The garden was conducive for providing intimate encounters because although it was sizeable, the actual plots were approximately four feet by four feet. While this may seem minute, the plots were brimming with a wide array of produce. As I walked through the various garden plots, I could not help but excitedly yell, "Are these people from Asia?," or "I bet these people are from Latin America!" It was truly a joyous experience to meander through the garden while guessing which respective countries the gardeners could have possibly come from. There were whole plots of bok choy, Japanese eggplants, hot peppers, and more. As I continued to walk through the garden it occurred to me that these individuals and families were not only making attempts at cultivating and maintaining their food, but potentially their culture.

Like the enthusiasm and joy, thoughts flooded my mind about how when people move to a new place there are several prevalent questions that range in extremity, such as, "why do people wear their clothes in that way?" to "why do these people put so much sugar in their tea?" While these questions may seem irrelevant

or trivial, when one is in new culture these questions are important. Slight nuances can make people feel out of place, different, and uncomfortable. Practically anyone who has traveled to a new place, even if on vacation, can attest to this. As a result, people tend to assimilate or acculturate to their new surroundings. This adjustment may include adapting a new language, a new clothing style, a new cuisine, or even a new culture.

This mere garden allowed me to ponder in a way I never had before as to how people cope with this adjustment through a specific food culture. In a time rife with new experiences, gardening provides an outlet to retain agricultural and culinary habits of a specific culture or region. Sam Bass Warner (1987) documented the positive effect of immigrants on a community garden in Boston, where people from Latin America, southern Europe, and Southeast Asia moving to the area increased the local interest in community gardens. In addition, these international gardens contributed to a wide variety of cultivation techniques and dietary variety while the migrants employed their rural skills (Hynes, 1996; Warner, 1987 as cited in Irvine, Johnson, & Peters 1999).

Even more than a coping mechanism, something therapeutic or relaxing, I began to see gardening among immigrant communities as a means of control. If these garden plots could allow people to control their agriculture production and thus dietary practices, then certainly they could control and maintain some aspect of their culture. Massimo Montanari (2004) elaborates on the idea of food as culture, theorizing that culture is a human construct, a performance, something that is produced. Similarly, Montanari (2004) discusses how food is culture because it is a

production. People do not seek to use simply what is in nature, but they seek to create food, and a specific type of food at that. Furthermore, the idea that food is culture is strengthened by the act of eating. The reasoning behind this is that people get to pick and choose what they eat, as opposed to consuming anything. The practices of choices and control is what, according to Montanari (2004), constitutes food as culture.

The unique agricultural practices of a culture, region, or even family take on their own significance. Something as simple as hoeing a certain way may be meaningful because it perpetuates a certain cultural aspect. Indigenous or traditional knowledge can almost be equated with habits with an unknown source. For example, a friend from Cameroon once taught me that after pulling weeds from around the corn, one should use the weeds to make a circular mound around the corn stalk. This friend explained that this action helped to support the stalk and prevent it from falling over. However, she could have just as easily responded to the question, “Why do you do that?” by explaining that this is the Cameroonian way or that her parents did it like that. While practices may remain, it is possible that the reasoning gets lost along the way.

This study is intended to explore the relationship between people and their gardens. It is also to provide a venue for people to discuss the role gardening plays in their lives, as well as the benefits they perceive from engaging in this activity. Certainly, this study is largely for my benefit as a graduate student, but it is my hope that the process would be enjoyable for the participants and that they truly would

gain from reflection and conversation about a part of their lives that probably does not get much recognition.

### **Locating the Author**

Positivist research is something of which I am well versed, and I thoroughly enjoyed partaking the in process previously. It was a wonderful and cathartic feeling setting up camp in the library, being enveloped by sky scrapers formed of books, becoming one with my topic and consequently my computer. Things are different now and that idea is much less appealing. The wonderful and cathartic feeling I get from research now finds its home in the *questioning* of research, the problematizing. The positivist approach to research fails to satisfy me and I am left wondering if there is a better way.

The Women's Studies department at the University of Georgia opened my eyes to a different research agenda. They taught me to see that something was missing from that research approach. Real words and experiences are vital to research. Emotions are vital to research. People are vital to research. Books alone will not suffice. It is not just the words, experiences, and emotions of the subject that are missing, but that of the researcher as well. It is possible for the researcher to be entirely present in the research and it still be deemed *good*. The researcher does not have to be present in what Laurie Thorp (2001) calls a "disembodied voice," instead through reflexivity the researcher can be known to the audience just as the research participants would.

Undoubtedly, deciding on a research topic for this thesis was a huge struggle for me. I knew it had to be qualitative, but even with that I struggled. I think I

wanted a research topic to pick me. I wanted to feel as if I was benefitting someone else through my research, not just myself. That did not happen. After months of floundering without a thesis topic, a decision, which I then believed to be so critical and formative, it happened. The clouds parted and I had a wonderful moment of elation and clarity. That day in the garden I was the happiest I had been in a long time in Athens. I felt a connection. I felt close to nature and life in general. I knew I wanted to be part of that experience and I wanted to hear more from people how gardening added to their lives.

### **Statement of the Problem**

“Exactly what does this mean?” I find myself asking this question whenever I come near this section. I do not necessarily see a problem; instead, I see an opportunity for me to explore a moment in time that created extreme happiness for me, yet piqued my interest in a relationship between gardening, people, and place. But if I had to, and I do, I would say the problem is this:

- For a plethora of reasons, moving to a new place is immensely challenging
- People need to feel as if they belong in said new place
- People employ certain methods and tools to help them establish a sense of belonging
- For some, gardening is one of the tools.

### **Purpose of Study**

Walking through the community garden elated me. I smiled more in those brief minutes than I had in an entire semester. There was something about that

place, about place in general. I wanted to know how gardening allowed people to demonstrate a sense of place and belonging. The purpose of this study is chiefly to explore and document a phenomenological understanding of the impact of the relationship between people (in this instance, immigrants) and their gardens. Phenomenology “holds that all knowledge is of phenomena and all existence is phenomenal (drawing more on the senses than on thought)” (Worthen, Sanders, and Fitzpatrick, 1997, p. 70). In other words, this project attempts to draw a connection between the benefits of gardening and the immigrant experience. Both gardening and the personal experiences of those individuals and families new to a community or, more dramatically, a country are important on their own.

Specific objectives of this study include:

1. Enable participants to engage in reflecting upon and articulating their own self-perceived benefits of home or community gardening.
2. Derive a relationship between the immigrant experience and gardening.

### **Limitations of Study**

Admittedly, this section of my research left me feeling the most burdened and the most excited. I honestly love delving into the ethics, problems, and limitations of research. However, engaging in such criticism leaves me feeling paralyzed and unable to go forward with research of human subjects. Luckily, conducting qualitative research allows for, and encourages, the researcher to acknowledge problems of research and reflecting upon them, but going forward nonetheless.

Harry Wolcott (2002) writes, “As far as I am concerned, one can be ethical or one can conduct social research, but one cannot be both ethical and a researcher in such settings. I’ll opt for the label of researcher. I’m prepared to take my lumps” (p. 145). Appreciating Wolcott’s opinion, but ultimately disagreeing, it took a long time for me to reach the conclusion that one can be ethical and be a researcher, but it indeed requires a great deal of reflexivity and understanding. In fact, this thesis research proved it is possible, or at least that I can overcome the fraught feeling that overwhelms me when I contemplate how to conduct social science research. I actually feel as if my research positively impacted both the research participants and myself. The women reflected on a part of their life in a way they previously had not and expressed genuine interest in the topic. I benefited simply through connecting with the participants and learning about their lives. Not to mention, I benefited in a way that enabled me to advance academically. The following sections allow me to reflect on several problems of research that could be perceived as limitations to my study.

### ***Language***

Although I felt the English language abilities of the respondents involved in this study were above par and I did not perceive it as a barrier in the interview process, many of the participants mentioned language as being a barrier upon their arrival to the United States; therefore, it would be remiss of me to not mention the issue of language and communication as a limitation.



## ***Positionality***

Positional binaries, such as insider/outsider, us/them, and self/other, are largely discussed in the Women's Studies curriculum, especially as it relates to research methods and this has undoubtedly influenced my approach to and understanding of research. Especially due to the nature of this research study and its focus on immigrants, it would be uncouth of me to not mention the positioning of identity and how it materialized in my research.

Many factors influence and shape one's position, which is often interpreted as power, such as race, gender, age, class, and educational status. The way these factors influence a researcher's position is often referred to as standpoint theory. The research questions, analysis, and presentation of data can all be affected by one's position, especially when this position is one of privilege and those studied are marginalized based on race, class, and gender (McCorkel & Myers, 2003). Typically the researcher feels as if she or he has the upper hand in the relationship with their informant because they are usually of the university setting which often indicates being of a higher class and status. While I admit that initially I was conscious of what I wore, how I spoke, and what showing up to interviews in my Prius would say about me, my fears soon dissipated. Yes I was a graduate student toting a consent form and an audio recorder, but the women I interviewed were all older than me, clearly wealthier than me, and most of them hold advanced degrees. I quickly found my position as the young graduate student simply wanting to know details about the women's lives.

As far as the other categories that could separate the researcher and the participant, I found because all of the participants were women it was easier for me to relate to them and engage in dialogue. Additionally, I did not feel a cultural gap between myself and the respondents, despite the fact they were immigrants. I credit my extensive travel experience and my occasional feelings of being born in the wrong country for being able to relate to the respondents with ease. Additionally, it seems because none of the interviewees were from the same country, and hardly the same region, that it was easier to differentiate between the various cultures and not lump them into one cohesive category.

### ***Interpretation of Interviews***

The presentation of the participants is limited greatly by my interpretation, or construction, of their stories. Irving Seidman (2006) writes, “The narratives we shape of the participants we have interviewed are necessarily limited. Their lives go on; our presentations of them are framed and reified. ... the narratives that we present are a function of our interaction with the participants and their words” (p. 129-130). Although interviewing participants certainly has its strengths, particularly because it allows us to understand details of people’s lived experiences from their point of view, it also is subject to the researcher’s interpretation of the stories. The task of the researcher, then, is to understand how people construct and interpret their social reality (Esterberg, 2002). Esterberg (2002) writes, “There is no social reality apart from how individuals construct it, and so the main research task is to interpret those constructions. The focus is on how given realities are produced” (p. 16). The researcher, too, produces social constructions and so the

research process can be seen as that. It is impossible to truly capture the viewpoints of others, therefore “the researchers writings are always interpretations of what they *think* their research subjects are doing” or saying (Esterberg, 2002, p. 16).

### **List of Terms**

- *Acculturation*: the process of espousing traits or patterns of a dominant culture, but allows for the maintenance of one’s original culture as well.
- *Assimilation*: the process by which an individual or group adopts the dominant culture.
- *Community gardening*: broadly interpreted to include agricultural activities done by groups or individuals, usually residents of apartments or cities, on land that is either public or collectively owned or managed (Coe, 1978; Irvine, 1999).
- *Indigenous knowledge*: a relationship and a process. Indigenous knowledge is what one does based on what one knows; it represents an integration of person, place, product, and process. As it is a process of learning based on a relationship, some believe that defining the concept, limitations and constrictions are placed on indigenous knowledge (McGregor, 2004).
- *Immigrant*: loosely defined as someone who moves from one place to another. For the purpose of this study, it is defined as someone who has moved to the United States from another country.
- *Post-positivist research*: a rejection of the positivist approach to research. It is hard to provide a standard definition, as there are several different lenses

through which to view this research. Two of those lenses are applied in this research, feminism and naturalistic inquiry.

- *Psycho-social*: pertaining to both psychological and social factors.

### **Scope**

It should be noted that this research will examine the immigrant experience, with a particular focus on assimilation and acculturation, however in no way does this research intend to measure or judge how well the participants have or have not assimilated. In other words, unlike much of the research that uses a language of success, this research is strictly to tell vignettes from specific immigrant's lives, not determine how well they have adjusted. Furthermore, this research focuses on the people interviewed and does not intend to represent any specific group or speak for all immigrants. Generalizations are not to be made based on this research.

### **Assumptions**

The following assumptions are accepted in this study:

- The realities we engage as researchers can never be value free or objective
- Realities are multiple and constructed.
- This thesis is not to be viewed as completed thought on a subject, but rather a snapshot in time.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **Introduction**

Laurie Thorp (2001) writes about the process of reviewing literature, “For many, writing the review of literature has become a deadening task. Past tense, abstracted knowledge, sterilized, clipped and hermetically sealed leaves the author distanced and isolated from ideas that should invite and engage” (p. 10). I find myself in agreement with her beautiful articulation of what I am certain most graduate students feel. Instead, Thorp (2001) recommends that we embrace a new perspective toward and new purpose in the literature review task, we should view it as a conversation with our elders helping us to frame thoughts about a subject. While the literature review process is supposed to enhance credibility and serves as a cornerstone for the rest of the research process, I find, however that the task should open the researcher to further situating themselves by selecting the information they want to guide their actions and impose meaning. Reviewing literature can be an endless process, which leaves the researcher to pick and choose what they deem worthy and appropriate. However, I did not necessarily find the literature on the topic at hand worthy or appropriate. In many cases I found the literature lacking, which helps to further situate the belief that reviewing literature is “incomplete, contestable, situated, and personal” (Thorp, 2001, p. 11). Nonetheless, this section serves the purpose of representing where I “found my footing before I set out” (Thorp, 2001, p. 11).

## **The Immigrant Experience**

The concept of the immigrant experience is largely based on a division of worlds or regions and how these worlds or regions define one's culture and identity. The idea of two conflicting cultures or identities, as experienced by immigrants in a new location, is commonly known as "culture clash" (Ngo, 2008). Ngo (2008) critiques the cultural difference model as a way of understanding the immigrant experience through "binary oppositions between tradition and modernity, East and West, and First World and Third World, among others" (p. 5). These binaries are based on the universalization of a host country's (in this case the United States) dominant experience, values, and culture as well as what is established as the norm. This norm is reified when other groups or individuals are brought into the fold. This classification system results in the new group being categorized as deviant and inferior to the norm (Nesdale & Mak, 2000; Tsai, 2003, p. 80). Ngo (2008) indicates two reasons why this approach is problematic:

First, the emphasis on traditional cultural values reifies the notion of culture, positioning it as some thing that is fixed or a given, rather than as a social process that finds meaning within social relationships and practices. Second, binary oppositions inscribe judgment and a pecking order (i.e., good/bad, ours/theirs) into cultural practices and values (p. 5).

It could also be argued that all immigrants, regardless of country of origin, are placed in one sweeping category without allowing room for individual experiences.

This sort of approach encourages the lumping together, or essentialization, of all people from a particular region or country into one category, disallowing for individual experiences or identities. Additionally this cultural difference model is inadequate because it fails to address the complexity of the immigrant experience,

the “inbetween,” which Ngo (2008) refers to as the fluid and changing nature of culture and identity (p. 5). The model is also problematic because as a result of reinforcing divisions people are consequently straddle two worlds. In a study conducted in Australia, it was found immigrants struggle with the difference between two cultures and feel pressured to meet the standards of both cultures (Nesdale & Mak, 2000). Such a cultural binary, however, allows for conversations of acculturation and assimilation. Without strong divisions, the concepts of adjustment would be irrelevant.

### ***Acculturation and Assimilation***

The literature on assimilation is slightly convoluted as, in recent years, it has shifted drastically in its direction and approach. Until recently, most literature on immigration patterns revolved around those who migrated to urban areas, however, as immigrant settling patterns change, the literature is forced to change with it. Therefore, the focus is less on city-based dwellings and has started to incorporate smaller cities, towns, suburban and rural areas. As Waters and Jiménez (2005) point out, this empirical shift is necessary not only to more accurately depict and understand immigrant patterns, but also because it allows for discussion on how region or place of settlement impacts the assimilation process.

The discussion on immigration, and thus assimilation, tends to be divided into two categories: European immigrants and non-European immigrants. It is also approached from a generational standpoint, for example first, second, or third, generation immigrants (Lalonde & Cameron, 1993; Nesdale & Mak, 2000; Ngo, 2008; Waters & Jiménez, 2005). Waters and Jiménez (2005) mention it was

previously thought the first generation, or the foreign born, were less assimilated and had less exposure to the dominant culture of the new place, i.e. American culture. This concept or approach is particularly interesting, especially as patterns become more porous and less coherent, and as the “American lifestyle” permeates various cultures to such an extreme degree.

Nesdale and Mak (2000) use a model predicting the degree to which immigrants identify with the host country by studying four factors:

Immigrants’ acculturation attitudes towards the host country, their relationship with members of the dominant cultural group in the host country, the success they experience as new residents in the new country, and the extent to which they live within their ethnic environment rather than the wider society (p. 486).

The fourth factor attempts to study the extent to which immigrants feel located within their ethnic environment, i.e. to what extent to the immigrants remain attached to their traditional behavior or way of thinking. This concept is widely interpreted, but it does suggest that engaging in behaviors that adhere predominately to their ethnic group or culture weakens the likelihood of the immigrant identifying with the host country. However, in relation to immigrants engaging in gardening, Morgan, et. al. (2005) write, “To be sure, by growing what they perceive as ‘authentic’ homeland food, not only do migrants recall and relive past experiences, but most importantly they are also able to dwell in both the homeland and the new country” (p. 97). This quote illustrates the point that nostalgic recreations of place are not directly correlated with the desire to return to one’s home country, but instead demonstrate the ability to straddle two cultures and a desire to dwell and to remain.



## **The Benefits of Gardening**

Louv (2005) discusses nature in terms of what it has to offer people as well as what people have to lose if they fail to embrace the importance of nature in their lives. Although Louv (2005) is mainly discussing the importance of nature in the lives of children, his mention of the psycho-social benefits are applicable to adults as well. He writes about nature offering healing, especially in the face of destruction; nature as inspiring creativity and a capacity to wonder; a solace from the rest of the world; nature as a provoker of humility; and nature as an alternative to the cultural world (Louv, 2005, p. 7-8).

As a perceived disconnection from nature increases in the United States the research on this subject is consequently gaining enormous ground, especially as the implications arise pertaining to human health and development. Biophilia and ecopsychology are just two of the more modern theories on the connection of nature and health. Although not universally accepted by scientists, biophilia is defined as “the urge to affiliate with other forms of life,” or the relationship between people and natural landscapes (Louv, 2005, p. 43). Ecopsychology, while also describing a relationship, addresses not only what humans do for the earth, but what the earth does for us and our health. Thomas Roszak (cited in Louv, 2005, p. 44) spurred research on how physical and emotional health is impacted by nature. These impacts on health can include better concentration, bonds with nature that encourage environmental stewardship, and creativity (Louv, 2005, p. 44).

The idea of gardens as structured landscape as a restorative and therapeutic space is not a new concept. Louv (2005) and Coe (1978) provide several examples

throughout history of gardens used as therapy, also referred to as horticultural therapy. They mention how Chinese Taoists were creating gardens over two thousand years ago for the health benefits, English gardeners recommended gardening in order to preserve one's health, and as early as the 1800s in the United States, Scotland, and Spain evidence the use of gardens as therapy for people with chronic and mental illnesses. While claims made today regarding horticultural therapy are not as far-reaching, there is a realization that artificial urban environments contribute to fatigue, inefficiency, and alienation.

The same impacts and benefits from engaging with nature can apply to gardening, as it is a form of getting in touch with nature. Gardening is not merely about food. In the process of putting food on the table, or even flowers in the vase, people learn about the seasons, the sun, other life forms, nutrition, and exercise. Gardening nourishes both body and soul (Colorado Master Gardener<sup>sm</sup> Program; Swain, 1993). Hammond (2003) writes how gardening has multiple perspectives and it plays a different role for every one. Multifunctionalism is a concept which assumes agriculture serves many purposes, such as producing food, sustaining landscapes, protecting biodiversity, and promoting health to name a few (Erjavec, Erjavec, & Juvancic, 2008). Although this term is usually used to discuss European agricultural policy discourse, its multifunctional nature makes it work in this context as well because it illustrates how, in addition to food production, gardening and agriculture serve society on a much larger degree. Multifunctionalism as it pertains to the psycho-social context is clearly presented at a far smaller scale. Additional functions of gardening contributing to society, such as health benefits or

opportunities for community building, are often overlooked because of their intangible nature.

### ***Community Gardening***

Community gardening is a sweeping concept covering a wide range of activities. The outcomes of community gardens include personal, health, aesthetic, social, cultural, environmental, and economic benefits: improving quality of life; alleviating barriers between different groups or ethnicities by working in close proximity and towards a common task, which serves as a catalyst for neighborhood and community development; stimulating social interaction; developing a sense of unity; encouraging self-reliance; the development of civic pride; beautifying neighborhoods; increasing physical activity and access to fresh vegetables, thus positively affecting health, creating opportunities for recreation, exercise, therapy, and education; producing nutritious food; reducing family budgets; reducing the mileage between food and consumer; and conserving resources; preserving green spaces; providing opportunities for intergenerational and cross-cultural interaction (American Community Gardening Association; Balmori & Morton, 1993; Coe, 1978; Lawson, 2005; Loven, 2005; Shinew, Glover, & Perry, 2004). As evidenced through the plethora of associated benefits, gardening impacts people and communities in a variety of ways that is unique for each group of people.

There is a misconception that community gardening is suited for poorer groups or neighborhoods and while some speculate that community gardens started this way, it is not true today. There are a plethora of individuals and groups of people interested in community gardening, for reasons including sustainability,

increased relationships with their food and their neighbors, etc. (Irvine, 1999). Clearing up this assumption is necessary because it mirrors large amounts of literature on immigrants being poor and marginalized which may be true in many cases, but was not so with the sample of this study.

### **Immigration and Gardening**

An aspect and potential benefit of gardening not widely researched is the impact of gardening and immigrants to the United States. In her book on the history of community gardening in the United States, Lawson (2005) mentions themes connecting immigration and gardening: nature, education, and self-help. While these themes certainly apply to non-immigrant gardeners, she does focus on how immigrants are directly impacted by these themes. Regarding the theme nature, Lawson (2005) mentions how urban or community gardens, at least in the early twentieth century, were viewed as transitional spaces, especially for immigrants. Gardens were seen as an attempt to introduce immigrants to nature in order to encourage them to relocate outside of the city. According to the American Community Garden Association (n.d.), many immigrants that migrate to the United States come from more rural agricultural settings. This may or may not be true today, for immigration trends are changing rapidly. Some areas may receive a higher percentage of immigrants from urban areas, while others may continue to receive a higher percentage of immigrants from rural areas”

People who immigrate to the city or country could be looking for a solid connection to their new surroundings through their gardens. However, Balmori and Morton (1993), in their book *Transitory Gardens, Uprooted Lives*, write, “The truth is

that all gardens are transitory—more like our lives, less like architecture: we build them to give an illusion of permanence. In this way too they resemble our lives” (p. 1). This transitory nature of gardens is meant to be a strength, not a weakness. To a degree they reveal the capability of human beings to alter and transform their environment in order to sustain themselves. Additionally, according to Balmori and Morton (1993), gardens, can represent a new language, one that may not be expressed or heard in another way. Also, through individual creative expression they help break barriers of identity, such as education, race, class, gender, etc.

In addition to Lawson’s (2005) three themes, a fourth one should be introduced: culture. Sam Bass Warner (1987) studied the history of community gardens in Boston, Massachusetts. His emphasis quickly shifts to the viewing of gardens as the embodiment of cultural histories. He compares gardening to sports, literature and religion by stating that they all “stand as intermediaries between the merely personal and the powerful blare of the dominant commercial and official cultures” (Warner, 1987, p. 99). While the comparison to religion or sports (which is considered a religion in some places) may seem odd, Warner (1987) is indicating that appreciation for and participation in these activities is often shared with others of similar interests and beliefs, allowing people the alternative of going at it alone. Often times there is a dominant cultural norm, but gardening is an activity that can be done without institutionalization. Instead, it is an activity, an expression, of ordinary people. Again, like sports or music, gardening is a leisure activity and dominant cultures typically do not outweigh one’s customs. Gardens can easily serve as significant cultural reminders, especially of agrarian traditions.

While there is an abundance of literature pertaining to immigration and large-scale agriculture, little research exists discussing the impact of smaller scale or community gardening on the lives of immigrants. Of the few studies and articles found regarding the connection of immigration and gardening, many of the studies compare immigrant gardens to the traditional Victorian English garden (Morgan, Rocha, & Poynting, 2005). Most of these studies came out of larger cities in England or Australia where they also considered the relocation site of immigrants in urban gateway cities like London or Sydney and where the image of the English garden may be more prominent or familiar. Morgan, Rocha, and Poynting (2005) conducted a study of immigrants in a small area of Sydney, Australia where they focused on the gardens of immigrants, often referred to as backyard museums, and how they revealed stories of the immigrants through landscape, saying that, unlike the traditional English garden, the gardens were “often places of work, noise, and disorder, with creative labour being expended to symbolize connections not only to homeland but also to Australia and to other cultures” (p. 95). From this research they analyze two different types of immigrant gardeners: those who grow produce similar to their homeland, and those who transform their backyards into “exhibition spaces” as outlets for creativity (Morgan, Rocha, & Poynting, 2005). However, this research study is not necessarily comparing gardens of immigrants to any other type of garden, except perhaps the kind they would maintain in their home country.

### ***Food Consumption***

Among the reasons mentioned for immigrants gardening, along with the recreation of familiar landscapes is the inaccessibility of familiar foods. Those who,

upon relocating, have a difficult time procuring “exotic” foods and ingredients are often left with no other choices besides attempting to grow them on their own (Morgan, Rocha, & Poynting, 2005).

The study of food is interesting for many reasons, but particularly because food offers insights into cultural values as presented by Mintz (as cited in Watts & Goodman, 1997):

For us humans, then, eating is never a ‘purely biological’ activity...The foods eaten have histories associated with the pasts of those who eat them; the techniques employed to find, process, prepare, serve and consume the foods are all culturally variable, with histories of their own. Nor is the food simply eaten; its consumption is always conditioned by meaning. These meanings are symbolic...they also have histories (p. 10).

Eating is more than an act of placing food in one’s mouth, chewing, and swallowing. It symbolizes our most deeply felt experiences and expresses things that are often difficult to express using language (Inness, 2001, p. 111). Furthermore, it “constitutes the most intimate act of our existence” (Inness, 2001, p. 5).

This is particularly true of immigrants who, “by growing and cooking traditional foods they reconnect with their homeland through taste, sights, and smells” (Morgan, Rocha, & Poynting, 2005, p. 96). The eating of ethnic food in the United States is commonplace, however the frequency and abundance of such options results in taking for granted the exposure to cultural tastes. For immigrants, though, their food rituals “have the ability to unite us across generations, politics, gender, class and culture” (Thorp, 2005, p. 127). Furthermore, “cooking serves as a conduit for that knowledge” that is passed down from generation to generation even if they pick up new and unexpected meanings along the way as a result of being removed from their original background (Inness, 2001, p. 7).

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **METHODS AND PROCEDURES**

“Something significant occurs between plants and people that cannot be captured with quantitative evaluation alone” (Thorp & Townsend, 2001, p. 348).

#### **Research Methodology**

According to Shulamit Reinharz (1992) research methods involve questions of identity and difference. Method involves the question, “what do I feel comfortable categorizing myself as?” This proves to be a challenging and disconcerting task, feeling as if I have to adorn a label for my approach that is wholly guided by my desire to be as ethical and confirmable as possible. Viewing method not as “the codification of procedures’ but rather as ‘information about ... actual ways of working’” (Daly & Mills, as cited in Reinharz, 1992, p. 5) helped me move forward in this process.

Seeing as I have to choose, I claim feminist research methodology as the basis of my research design. The difference between methods and methodology should be noted here, although the two words are often used interchangeably. Methods are techniques for gathering evidence and methodology is the theory and analysis of how research should proceed (Harding, 1987). Because I consider myself a feminist and a researcher and because the only qualitative research exposure I have had was through a feminist lens, I assume that my methodology is inherently feminist. This explanation may seem deficient, but Reinharz’ (1992) definition of a feminist research method supports my view: “Feminist research methods are methods used



in research projects by people who identify themselves as feminist or as part of the women's movement" (p. 6). Furthermore, Reinharz (1992) references two other feminist scholars, a Canadian political scientist named Naomi Black and a U.S. sociologist Marjorie DeVault to help explain feminist methodology. Black (as cited in Reinharz, 1992) says that feminist research "insists on the value of subjectivity and personal experience" while DeVault (as cited in Reinharz, 1992) believes, "the dilemma for the feminist scholar, always, is to find ways of working within some disciplinary tradition while aiming at an intellectual revolution that will transform the tradition" (p. 3). I use these two quotations to get across the point that feminist research is not about researching women, but instead about one's approach to research. The second quote particularly speaks out to me as a new researcher being forced to claim a methodology because it demonstrates the generous view that feminist research holds toward epistemology. It broadens the realm of who can be a "knower," who can create knowledge, what is legitimate knowledge, and what can be known (Harding, 1987; Reinharz, 1992).

I feel comfortable claiming feminist research methodology as my approach because it outwardly claims to be fraught with problems and accepts that there are no absolute solutions. Also, feminist research methodology recognizes and accepts that a plurality of approaches exists. Harding (1987) problematizes feminist methodology by raising the popular question, "Is there a feminist method?" She argues against a distinctive feminist method of inquiry based on the notion that "preoccupation with method mystifies what have been the most interesting aspects of feminist research process" (Harding, 1987, p. 1).

Another methodology that I have grown comfortable labeling my research as includes naturalistic inquiry (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I choose this because it is equally fuzzy and undefined, and I believe it to be influenced by feminism.

Naturalistic inquiry claims to be a new paradigm, one responding to the problems associated with positivist research. Lincoln and Guba (1985) profess:

It has so many names because the persons who profess to practice it tend to take different views of what it implies, in the same way that persons who profess to be Christians may nevertheless prefer to be known as Catholic, Orthodox, Lutheran.... They hold to these more specific labels in an attempt to differentiate their particular doctrines from those of others... (p. 7-8).

Naturalistic is just one way to approach the alternative; others may view it as phenomenological, subjective, postpositivistic, qualitative, or humanistic.

### **Population and Sample Selection**

Participants were specifically or purposively selected (Worthen, Sanders, & Fitzpatrick, 1997) as volunteers for the interviews. Selection was based on the individual's willingness to discuss both their experience as immigrants and their home or community gardening practices. Word of mouth was used as a recruitment technique; peers and classmates connected with me individuals who identified as immigrants and gardeners. Additionally, a recruitment letter [Appendix A] was sent to various list-serves at the University of Georgia as well as to participants of the graduate family housing community garden in order to procure volunteers for the study. Recruiting participants was difficult as few people responded to the emails, and those who did responded at a leisurely pace. It took about three months to obtain the seven participants. Reasons for the low return rate, particularly in the community, could be related to their language abilities. As it turns out, the parents

of the students largely run the community garden. Furthermore, the parents seldom speak English, which could possibly discourage participation.

This considerably small sample size, however, is typical of qualitative studies. Furthermore, as Thorp and Townsend (2001) mention, “The power of purposive sampling is situated in its ability to ground the inquiry in emic views of local respondents” (p. 350). Indeed, the participants were wonderful and excited to answer my questions and learn more about the concept presented to them.

Out of the seven people interviewed, all of the respondents ended up being female. This result, however, is not indicative of my pursuits. In no way was I singling out female participants. However, it could be that the list-serves selected for recruitment contained an audience which was largely female. The participants, in other categories, were very diverse as demonstrated in Table 1. The countries of origin included Brazil, Iraq, Kenya, Colombia, France, China, and Germany. The ages of these women ranged from 34 to 80. However, because the women, with the exception of one participant, hold advanced degrees, have good English skills, and are probably at a high economic level compared to other immigrants, the participants may be more similar to each other than to other immigrants.

Table 1

*Demographic Questionnaire Results*

	Age	Gender	Race/Ethnicity	Home Country
Participant 1	47	Female	Hispanic	Brazil
Participant 2	49	Female	Middle Eastern	Iraq
Participant 3	34	Female	Asian	China
Participant 4	80	Female	Caucasian	France
Participant 5	36	Female	Latino	Colombia
Participant 6	57	Female	Human being	Germany
Participant 7	50	Female	Black	Kenya

**Instrumentation**

***Researcher as the Instrument***

Both feminist methodology and naturalistic inquiry place a heavy emphasis on the role of the researcher, therefore, it is only appropriate to mention the role of the human instrument in research. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985):

Such a contextual inquiry *demands* a human instrument one fully adaptive to the indeterminate situation that will be encountered. The human instrument builds upon his or her *tacit* knowledge as much as if not more than upon propositional knowledge, and uses methods that are appropriate to humanly implemented inquiry..." (p. 187).

The necessity of a human instrument is based on the idea that the nonhuman instrument lacks adaptability and the ability to adjust to the variety of realities that are embedded in qualitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The concept of adjusting and adapting to emerging realities is also framed as empathetic neutrality (Patton, as cited in Williams, 2007). Empathetic neutrality is the "ability to 'take and

understand the stance, position, feelings, experience, and worldview of others” (Patton, as cited in Williams, 2007, p. 39). Finally, the researcher’s practices of reflexivity should not be dismissed in qualitative research, but should be acknowledged and thus incorporated into the project.

### ***Interview protocol***

Interviews were the chief method used to collect data. A semi-structured interview protocol was used to guide the interviews. The protocol was developed during the summer of 2009, reviewed by my advisor, and approved by the Institutional Review Board. The final interview protocol consisted of thirteen questions.

### **Data Collection**

Data was collected through open-ended, semi-structured interviews that took place during the months of August to November of 2009. The participation in these interviews was voluntary and participants signed a consent form [Appendix B] indicating they were informed of their rights as human research subjects. Prior to the actual interview, the participants were asked to fill out a demographic questionnaire [Appendix C] which included age, gender, ethnicity, occupation, and hobbies. One of the participants expressed distaste for the ethnicity category, saying that she had never been asked that question prior to moving to the United States. She answered, “human being.”

With the exception of one interview conducted on Skype, the interviews took place at the respondent’s home and included a tour of the garden interspersed with conversation. If the tour of the garden took place before the actual interview, there

was some backtracking during the actual interview in order to ensure that the information was included on the record. The interviews typically lasted about forty-five to sixty minutes, and were audio-recorded for the purpose of transcription and analyses. All of the interviews were conducted in English.

An interview protocol [Appendix D] was used during the interviews as a guide. The respondents usually had little problem leading the conversation and it naturally flowed in the order that I anticipated. The conversation began with the interviewee discussing when they moved to the United States and why, followed by a discussion of what that process was like. This included mention of perceptions upon arrival to the United States and challenges encountered. The interviews also consisted of conversation regarding the development of their homes and gardens, a look into the importance of culture in their gardens, and what the interviewees perceived as benefits of gardening.

### **Analysis**

Data analysis is the creative process of making meaning (Esterberg, 2002, p. 152) out of raw materials. The meanings are not inherent in the interviews, they have to be drawn out and discovered. Furthermore, this is not a passive process. Instead, it is quite active and can be done in many different ways.

According to Esterberg (2002), the data analysis should begin during the data gathering process. Analyzing the data during the collection process is beneficial because it allows you to begin noticing themes and thus incorporating them into the data collection process. For instance, the first two participants

mentioned the role of class in deciding to garden and what to grow. Because of this I decided to incorporate this issue into my interviews.

Following the interviews, the researcher transcribed the audio-recordings and coded them following both inductive and deductive approaches. Qualitative coding involves three basic procedures: “a) noticing relevant phenomena, b) collecting examples of those phenomena, and c) analyzing those phenomena in order to find commonalities, differences, patterns, and structures” (Coffey & Atkinson, as cited in Esterberg, 2002, p. 158). The use of inductive open coding (Esterberg, 2002) allowed for certain constructs or themes to emerge because the focus was on what was actually present in the data and less on preestablished codes. The open coding was followed by focused coding (Esterberg, 2002). After recurring themes are identified, a deductive focused coding can be done by reviewing the transcriptions again and searching for specific codes. Based on the notion that different people can interpret raw material differently, the transcriptions were then coded by peers for inter-rater reliability.

## CHAPTER 4

### FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

#### Research Objective One

Enable participants to engage in reflecting upon and articulating their own self-perceived benefits of home or community gardening.

#### *Multiple Benefits/Multifunctionalism*

On a sunny afternoon in September I walked to the community garden at the graduate family housing site. I was tired, but eager to conduct an interview with this woman, especially since she was the only participant from the community garden to respond to my request for interviews. She did not disappoint. As I approached the garden a petite Chinese woman in her mid-thirties swayed from side to side and she wore a curious smile. I finally made my way to her and we introduced ourselves and then she gave me a tour of her plots and showed me what each vegetable was, guessing at English names for most of the crops. Finally we sat on the grass and conducted the interview listening to the marching band practicing down the road and defending ourselves against the insects sneaking into our ears, noses, and mouth. After talking for a while, the participant began to discuss the benefits she drew from participating in the community garden:

But one thing I think is because I love the gardening because that can get the many benefit from here. One is exercise and you also can get, uh, nutrition for and you can lower the cost, of course. Yea, the other thing is you can make friends, especially at the beginning.

Despite the broken English, this quote perfectly articulates the concept that gardening has many benefits and serves many functions and the garden setting



enhances this variety. While the benefits the individual gardener experiences can be identified as benefits in the community garden setting, there are social aspects of gardening that are enhanced by directly participating with others. In the sentence above four benefits or functions are highlighted. There are many more benefits mentioned by this participant and by the others; over 25 benefits were mentioned. Certainly many of the benefits overlap and I find it difficult to isolate them from each other due to their interconnectedness. Also, it is important to highlight that the benefits perceived can be filed under both objective one and objective two, however the benefits that directly relate to the participants experience as an immigrant will be reserved for discussion of objective two. The following subsections explore various benefits and functions of gardens individually.

### ***Connection to Nature***

As proposed by biophilia and ecopsychology (Louv, 2005), people desire a connection with nature. While there is nothing wrong with enjoying the ocean or mountains, or even hiking and kayaking, gardening provides a different sort of connection, a more active connection. When asked generally about the benefits of gardening, a participant from Brazil said:

So for me gardening is one of the ways that I express that connection with nature and you know, trying to protect the environment as much as I can. It's just because it's part of who I am, and it's not really, um, for any other reason. ... The stress relief and the relaxation in fact that you get through putting your hands on dirt and, you know, taking care of plants and it establishes a connection with nature that we don't get anywhere else. You know, you don't get that by watching a video of how a plant grows on the Internet. You know, it's a different kind of connection and I think that's the reason why I, I'm involved with gardening and I involve other people in gardening in what I do is because it's the real connection. It's where your soul expresses a connection with nature, ... that connection with nature that you cannot get

anywhere else. But you know, touching dirt and soil, and planting, the lifecycle, you know, you create.

Gardening can be part of the reciprocal relationship between people and nature described by ecopsychology. It is a way humans can contribute to the equation. Many of the participants used the verbiage that gardening also provides avenues to nurture the environment while reaping benefits; in the case of the participants vegetables for food consumption and flowers for many reasons, but particularly aesthetics. The German participant put an interesting spin on the concept of nurturing:

It's [gardening] a burden too, because you feel responsible. I feel really, you can see above my sink, there are all these little things that probably anybody else would throw them away, but I give them a chance. Can you root? If you root, I'll give it a chance.

This indicates that while nurturing is prevalent, and people certainly benefit, caring for nature is not necessarily for self-gain.

The theme of connecting to nature also applies to connections with various life forms in the wild. Many participants mentioned gardening as a good way to interact with animal life in nature. A few respondents talked about humming birds, squirrels, and deer. The German participant expressed her and her husband's complex relationship with wildlife guided by the idea of sharing:

Sharing. A garden is about sharing. I forgot to say something too, the animals in the garden. I spoke about the snakes. Yea, the bad ones, but still, maybe it's not, I'm afraid of snakes, but it teaches me also to be careful, to look out, and to respect. It's their habitat, I'm only, I'm only, I'm intruding on their space. So, the squirrels, I love to see, I was all excited when we moved here because we came from a big inner city. Now, I hate the squirrels. No, I don't hate the squirrels but they make a lot of....the deer in the other garden, I couldn't grow anything from two meters down because the deer would eat up, and the chipmunks, and the humming birds. ... My husband loves humming birds. He could sit here; he sits here for hours and watches them.

He makes films, you know, it's, yea...Sharing. Sharing is a big part of my garden.

Her sentiments are so powerful because while she expresses her dislike for particular aspects in nature sometimes, she genuinely appreciates the life cycle and still believes it inherently good. The participant from Kenya also addressed a love/hate relationship with deer and insects which turned her leafy greens into lace. Even when they feel defeated by wildlife, the participants still appreciate and respect the relationship.

A connection to nature through gardening is also significant because it happens right in people's back yards which ameliorates a distinction between the urban and the natural. The two can coincide, bringing nature closer to home instead of resigning it to far off places.

### ***Health Benefits***

The health benefits associated with gardening are many and the participants certainly focused on them. Health benefits here will be divided into psychological health and physical health, realizing that overlap is unavoidable.

#### *Psychological Health Benefits*

Every participant mentioned how gardening contributed to her psychological well-being. The participant from China explained how she perceived gardening:

Oh, usually when we're gardening we can maybe, uh, one is the gardening you can forget the business and you can maybe less the stress. Maybe every time when that is the happiness when I go to the garden. Those are my, uh, when I get the vegetables and get the fruit from the garden and it's the best time to enjoy the life.

According to this participant, gardening reduces stress by providing an outlet to concentrate on something besides the routine tasks of work or school. Similarly, the

Brazilian participant mentioned stress relief as a benefit she experienced from gardening. Knowing she directs a community gardening non-profit organization, I asked her if she felt her community would agree and perceive the same benefits.

She replied:

I'm going to have to say yes. Those people that take the steps to really, um, give, um, you know, give time to, find time in their busy lifestyles to garden, either by being part of a community garden, or by, you know, growing in their backyards or growing in pots, or whatever. I think that people that take the time value that, that they pretty much finding the same realization that...they get some psychological and behavioral benefits from it. They feel calmer, or you know, it's a stress release kind of therapy.

Similarly, the interviewee from Iraq said:

Just from looking at flowers. I love flowers. It makes me happy and gives me peace of mind. It relaxes me. I have a friend of mine, she's also Palestinian, and she gardens a lot. She's big on gardening. Not vegetables, but flowers. And that's her only stress relief. She says she has to do it.

The views of the respondents stress the psychological aspects mentioned by Louv (2005); interacting with nature not only is therapeutic, relaxing, or stress-relieving but it provides a solace from more hectic parts of our lives and it renews people.

The ability to gain tangible benefits from growing flowers or vegetables is connected with a sense of responsibility for life and increases the self-esteem of the gardener (Coe, 1978). Additionally, she writes that self-esteem often leads to feelings of "security given by the assurance of permanence and duration..." (Coe, 1978, p. 22).

The psychological benefits of gardening are sometimes difficult to measure. The benefits of a community garden can often be measured based on instances of social interaction. However other more abstract factors included sustained interest and fascination. Coe (1978) writes, "Fascination counts for more staying power than the more material motives of saving money or eating well...." (p. 23). The tangible

psychological benefits of gardening are not to be discredited, however. Especially for beginning gardeners, tangible benefits are important.

One participant even used the words spiritual support to describe a psychological aspect of gardening. She said:

On Wednesday morning, I got up at 5:00 or so to be at 6:30 at the place. So I open the garage door. I have these spring roses. There was one rose right in front of my garage door opening, totally out of season, you know. That was for me, to tell me, you know, have a good day. I sent a picture with my phone to my husband. I said, "Can you believe that?" He said, "You see, that is your garden telling you to have a good day." It's funny. I'm not a very deeply spiritual person, but I think I draw a lot of spiritual support from my garden.

I was not expecting spirituality to present itself as a benefit from gardening, and I have not looked much into it, but I feel compelled to include this story. It was obviously a salient memory for this woman and it certainly stuck with me too because I think we all appreciate those moments when we feel as if the world is speaking to us and sending positive vibes. This woman was the only person to mention it in those words, but I can see the spiritual connection to gardening or at least the longing to feel connected to or at least part of something much bigger than ourselves.

### *Physical Health Benefits*

With one respondent in particular, I am glad I clarified that I gathered she felt gardening was relaxing. The German interviewee quickly and adamantly opposed the idea that gardening is relaxing:

It's not relaxing. That is, I think, a total myth. It's not relaxing; it is, you know, relaxing for me seems to be very physical. I associate that with physical. It's not relaxing, but it's good for the head, yea, it's good for the mind. If you say that is relaxing yea, but its hard work. It's very stressful on the body and that's what people do not realize. When people say, "oh my god, you have a green thumb." There is no such thing as a green thumb. You

don't do gardening with your thumb. You do it with your back and with your knees. Absolutely. Your fire ant bites and scorpion bites and bee stings. Yes, it's rewarding to see that you can get things to grow.

More than anything, this woman's opinion reveals how differently people perceive things. While the other women viewed gardening as relaxing, they described it in ways that lacked action verbs. On the other hand, the German participant focused on the fact that gardening is extremely physically demanding, which aligns with what many other participants claimed as a benefit. Many of the respondents felt as if gardening was a form of exercise for them.

Other aspects pertaining to the physical health benefits include increased nutrition as a result from eating fresh foods. Often time this was materialized through discussions of how the gardeners preferred organic to conventional products using chemicals and pesticides. For example, the Chinese interviewee said:

I think the benefit, one is maybe the nutrition. I mean, oh, for example right now they have a lot of fertilizer use in the commercial products and actually I would like to use my own product, or organic.

The participant from Colombia expressed similar sentiments:

No, when I started I was not thinking about that [health], but now the more I learn about food policies of this country, the more I want to grow my organic things and know what I'm eating and what my kid is eating, and also you know, health.

While none of the participants cited any sources claiming organic food is healthier than non-organic, the participants believed in and supported the production and consumption of organic food. This view could reflect the educational levels of the participants, as it seems the more education one has received, the more likely they are to prefer organic. Also, the desire for organic products, especially as it relates to

children, could demonstrate gender roles in relation to food consumption, since women are typically charged with providing food for the family.

Another example of a health benefit derived from gardening is the use of plants for medicinal purposes. The respondent from Colombia elaborated on this idea:

The other thing about health, you know, in Colombia, as well as in Mexico, for every single ailment there's an herb and a tea and I like that too, and I like with my kid, I also try to...like if she has a tummy ache give her something from the garden instead of giving her a pill.

Again, this example could serve to illustrate the role of women or mothers as the nurturer and caregiver.

### ***Social Benefits***

The social connections present in gardening are certainly more obvious in the community garden setting as proximity aides in the fostering of intimacy. While sharing a space with others and feeling a sense of community is not a relationship of causality, it would be hard to refute that sharing a space and a sense of place are key ingredients. The participant whom I interviewed who was active in the community garden said this about her experience following my question, "Has it [the community garden] created a greater sense of community?":

Yea, especially in the beginning. Many people are here and we talk and have the exchange and the experience. I think it's we can meet other people here. ... I think there's many Chinese and Indian, and also some of the other countries people. So sometimes, we, when we saw the other people do the special thing when they were, we never seen before, we ask them how to do that or why they do this, why the, what the advantage by do that? We can have conversations with other and make friends.

Unfortunately, I was only able to interview one member of the graduate family housing community garden. This was really disappointing for me as it is the place

that served as my inspiration. However, I found social benefits embedded in the individual gardener experience, which is one finding I did not expect.

Many of the gardeners talked about the role gardening played in their social interactions with others. The participant from Colombia said:

Well, you know, like I said sometimes we'll make friends just from being outside or people knocking on the door asking, "Where did you get these great poppies? Can we have some seeds?" Like sure. And also, you know, I have learned a lot from friends that say the same thing, you meet people and realize that they garden and you are exchanging seeds and plants and cuttings.

The German participant indicated that gardening, although alone in her backyard, was a way for her to articulate and remember her relationships with others. She said:

But I had luck with the things from the south of France that my aunt, my husband's aunt, gave me. I was surrounded with things. Then, as I said, my friend in Colombia, her mother gave me some ginger lily, I have ginger lily. My friend from the first place where we lived, my friend gave me cuttings from everything she has. When I go out in the morning, I'm surrounded with things that came from friends from Germany and from our friends, and it's wonderful. You can see the banana trees there, from my friend who lives in Tennessee.

Even without direct contact, this participant revealed the intense impact of sharing common interests with people, as well as the role memory and nostalgia play in our lives. Every plant in her garden tells a story and serves as a reminder not only to places past, but also to people in her past. While memories alone are great, sometimes it is nice to have a material reminder. Following the interview with this participant I began to look around at my plant collection, and they all too tell a story. Another story was added to the windowsill of my kitchen after this interview.

Noticing her lush Christmas cactus, I asked the participant if I could take a clipping



because I managed to kill a previous clipping a friend gave me. I am happy to report that the cactus is still alive and is budding at this very moment. It pleases me to no end that I am able to apply the lessons I learned through interviewing the participants on a daily basis now.

### ***Impact on Children***

The theme of impacting children, and thus family, was a theme I did not expect, although I do not find this theme surprising at all. Again, all of the participants I interviewed were woman, and with the exception of one they all have children. All of the participants with children discussed the interaction and perceived impact of their children in the garden. There are so many subsequent benefits from gardening and the impact it has on children.

The participants phrased gardening as an activity the whole family can do together. In particular, the participant from Colombia said, "This is one thing we do together, the three of us. ... So that part of the family being able to be outside and make projects and playing. We play in the yard a lot." Similarly, the interviewee from Iraq describes the significance of gardening for their family:

You know my husband, like, his dad taught him the gardening. He used to work with his dad. Every time he tells, oh me and my dad did gardening and he did this and he used to do that. It's all about gardening. They both did that. So he wants to do the same thing for our little boy who is 11 years old. So he is the one who helps him with the garden here.... So, and he likes to pass that on to him. I think it's important to, also to teach him to eat healthy food. He doesn't eat tomatoes, but now that he has cherry tomatoes over here, he cut them and washed them and he was like, "wow, it tastes good!" Like, woah, what happened?

Also, the respondent from Iraq saw gardening as a family not only as a time to bond, but also as a way to teach responsibility through chores, especially with the younger children.

Ultimately, though, the respondents were satisfied and relieved that their children know where their food comes from and realize that food does not grow packaged. One participant fondly remembered a time with her son:

When they were bigger, my father took them, he, I remember, my oldest son coming back, he was so excited; Opa had taken him to dig out potatoes. He had no idea how potatoes grew, but that, I mean he was probably five or six, but it was this huge thing, “oh my god, the potatoes.” That’s when you realize, yea sure, you know that, for you it’s just a fact, but you have to learn it at some place. You know, you have to. So that’s very exciting.

As Louv (2005) points out, as we distance ourselves from nature, there is also a correlating distance from food and knowledge of its production. It is important to maintain such knowledge. Rishbeth (2004) also highlights the role of education in cultural landscapes such as gardens in maintaining such knowledge. Her emphasis is based on the idea that children of different backgrounds can learn about a wide array of cultural and gardening practices, especially in the case of community gardens. Also, the children of immigrants are likely to have less connection to their heritage due to influences of their new surroundings, but the garden provides a tool to maintain a cultural identity because it can help materialize and represent often abstract, ancestral practices and pass on certain traditions to younger generations (Morgan, Rocha, & Poynting, 2005; Winterbottom, 1998 as cited in Rishbeth, 2004).

Control was the language I used to conceptualize part of this research. I thought that through gardening one could control aspects of their food consumption as it related to their culture or identity. However, the mothers were all in

agreement concerning the fact that they could control various aspects of their child's diet by growing their own food and ensuring it met their standards, which translated as organic in all cases.

Perhaps the most interesting finding related to the impact on children, though, was that none of the participants themselves actively participated in gardening as a child. The participant from Brazil began gardening at the age of 18, but the others have fond memories, but memories formed on the sidelines and hardly recall much contribution. The respondent from Germany discusses this more thoroughly:

I think I was kind of indifferent as a child. I think, I did, it was there, so I liked to have the fresh fruit and whatever, but I certainly did not appreciate it because I did not know the difference because everybody had that.... I don't think I appreciated it very much because it was normal.

At the time, I found this phenomenon surprising because these women all loved gardening and had beautiful spaces to prove it. The same rings true for myself, though, which makes it easier to relate to and understand this perspective. I, too, had no desire to garden as a child and getting my hands dirty was quite possibly the least attractive activity. However, now I love gardening. One participant described a similar pattern with her son:

My son, my oldest son, in Washington, he lives in Washington, has for several years now. He has a balcony. It's so incredible. When he comes here he says, "Let's see mom, what's new here? Oh I can take a cutting of this." ... My son in Seattle now. He has a very small balcony. But yes, he has a tree, he has a hanging plant. It's very, it's um, I'm glad because I see, I don't know if it's, yes, I guess it's important for me to give that, to continue that. I think it's not important because it's *me* giving something, but because it's from the people before me, you know. I'm just the chain. But it's important to me that I don't stop the chain and that I continue it....

This particular quote reveals the hopefulness of that pattern and that lacking direct involvement with gardening as a child is not necessarily a predictor of future behavior.

### **Research Objective Two**

Derive a relationship between the immigrant experience and gardening.

#### ***Immigration and Culture***

During the interviews, many of the respondents commented on their cultural allegiance to their home country. Some felt a particularly strong connection, while others blatantly admitted to feelings of strong disconnect from their culture, which greatly influenced their decision to move to the United States:

Well, I guess, um, I would mention that I really never been very, um, um, in touch with the cultural aspect of, you know, Brazil, and the lifestyle in the broad sense.... But I guess, that's why when you asked me to be interviewed I was wondering if I was really, because, because of my lack of connection with my culture....

This particular quote from the Brazilian participant reveals a great deal about identity and culture. While each of us has a culture that we identify with, it may not be the one we were born into. One's cultural identification greatly influences their ability to live in and be part of a specific place.

Along the same lines, discussing the adjustment period to the United States many of them cited language as being the largest barrier, understandably. Honestly, I expected more vibrant discussions about this particular topic. I expected the respondents would have had a more difficult time adjusting to a new place and culture than they alluded to. Contrarily, several of the respondents explained that residing in larger cities in their home country made their transition less of a shock

and more bearable because it was not such a drastic change. Additionally, some of the respondents discussed how American culture had infiltrated or permeated their own culture, making the adjustment less drastic:

Nowadays, the Brazilian culture is very much Americanized unless you go to remote towns, you know, they keep at a slow pace kind of lifestyle. But the midsized cities, everything's Americanized and it's very standardized and it's fast food and a hectic lifestyle....

The view of this particular respondent is pertinent to Waters and Jimenez's (2005) theory of shifting the focus of immigration away from a generational lens.

Regardless of whether or not the immigrant was of the first, second, or third generation, an introduction to the culture prior to the actual immigration alleviates some of the tension that comes with relocating to a new place or region.

One respondent said, "So I think garden puts a lot of things in perspective."

Her explanation was so poignant:

Plants, like people, get adapted. Like the banana tree. Who would have thought that banana trees could grow here and have bananas? Yes they can. Maybe not the first year or the second year or even the fifth year, but after that maybe one of the little, that grows out of the big one, got acclimated to the Georgia climate. And that's the same with people, you know.

This is probably my favorite quote from all of the interviews. I agree that it puts things in perspective, particularly the time it takes to adjust. Adjusting, and I use that word carefully as an alternative to assimilation and acculturation, does not always happen quickly. Sometimes it is actually a really slow process. One of the women I interviewed, even though she has been in the United States for over 10 years expressed she still does not really feel adjusted. The banana is a good lesson in identity, I think. It seems like the banana feels at home now, but it does not cease to be a tropical plant. It can maintain both identities and so can people.

### ***Landscape and Place***

Montanari (2006) writes, “In this process of development, human societies have never simply adapted to the conditions imposed by the environment. At times societies have modified them, sometimes in profound ways, introducing cultures from outside the indigenous areas and changing the landscape itself as a result” (p. 6). Similarly, Rishbeth (2004) looks at landscapes, particularly urban ones, as a response to different needs of ethnic groups, such as designing and managing a space that reflects one’s ethnic or cultural heritage. In other words, ethnic diversity is inherent in society today and is reflected in the design and management of landscapes. A participant from Kenya mentioned something along these lines: “I think it’s [gardening] cultural. For me it’s going back to my childhood.... Feeling connected to my background and my heritage. When I grow the Jefferson vines...so going back to nature and going back to my roots and giving that to my kids.”

This response given by the respondent aligns with Rishbeth’s (2004) assumption that gardens are “territorial domains where users re-create a lifestyle” similar to one they experienced back home (p. 313). This process provides an opportunity for immigrants to connect with past experiences and recapture certain elements of their lifestyle in their home country (Stodolska, 1998 as cited in Rishbeth, 2004). Marcus (1995) writes about her immigration to the United States in her mid-twenties and how she immediately began to create what she deemed an “English garden” based on her conceptualization that it was distinctly different than the gardens of her neighbors. She writes:

Gardening permits me to reproduce the place and activity that gave me the most profound experience of centeredness and nurturance during those impressionable and sometimes fearful years of a wartime childhood. I am seeking that numinous connection with earth and nature, first experienced in childhood, as the age-old tasks of sowing, tending, and harvesting are repeated in their appropriate seasons (p. 35).

Gardening, then, serves not only as a means of recreating a certain culture, but, as expressed in attempting to recreate childhood memories, a certain experience or place (Bhatti, 2006; Marcus, 1995; Rishbeth, 2001; Rishbeth, 2004). One of the participants gave a good example of this idea:

So my garden in Saudi Arabia, that was probably the first thing where I lived in the desert, an oasis sort of thing. I had water, I planted stuff and but within a year I had a garden. When I went outside, I saw the things I was familiar with. I think growing is an important thing to me. I don't know. My grandmother had a rose garden. She had beautiful roses. My daughter, she bought a house in Atlanta last year, the first thing she did was plant roses in front of her house, in memory of her great grandmother. My father loved gardening, he helped his father when he was older and when my father retired he went every day to the garden and helped my grandfather. When I had a garden here, my father passed away (she starts crying), and I planted the things my father planted in his garden. It didn't always work, you know.

Another example comes from the participant from Iraq:

[My mom] plants, see these flowers on the table, these zinnias, because we had them in Baghdad. We always have like tons of them in the front of our house. She always grows them, and I always grow but this time they didn't come out for some reason. So she cuts them and brings them to me, as a memory or back home. It's my favorite flower.

Again, Marcus (1995) writes, "This phenomenon—creating a garden that repeats some aspects of an earlier, fondly remembered place—may be more common than we think. For re-creating some aspects of childhood garden is more possible for most of us than re-creating the home itself" (p. 35). Furthermore, Rishbeth (2004) writes about the landscape creation experience, "...[it] includes aspects of refuge, recreation, cultivation and cultural expression. Making the place

gives value to their culture and acknowledges their experience of migration” (p. 313-314). Then, the landscape takes on the role of a “cultural artifact,” transposing an image from one place to another, no matter how exaggerated or idealized it is (Rishbeth, 2001, p. 357). Simply put, “nostalgia is intrinsic to the human condition” (Rishbeth, 2004, p. 315).

It is disputable, however, that it is entirely possible to recreate place similar to another country, like Brazil for instance. Two of the people interviewed for this study were from South America and both of them stated a strong longing for tropical fruits like bananas and mangoes. Undeniably those fruits are particularly difficult to grow in the southeastern region of the United States. However, the participant’s quote about the banana’s ability to adapt provides an interesting perspective on this issue. The structuring of landscape is a timely process, it does not occur overnight. Likewise, the adjustment from one culture, or place, to another is a process that takes time.

Marcus (1995) references a graduate student study on landscapes architecture where the student observed that “people planted gardens which made them feel at home... They weren’t interested in discovering which plants were ecologically best suited to their gardens “ (p. 35). This sort of process is one of trial and error. The participants referenced how they would initially try to plant crops that were familiar to them without knowing how the different seasons or environment may affect their growth. “Learning by doing,” as one participant described it.



## ***Permanency***

Referring back to Morgan, Rocha, and Poynting (2005), these nostalgic gardens are not necessarily evidence that the individuals wish to return to their home countries, it does not indicate homesickness. Instead these gardens allow cultural reconstructions demonstrating the immigrant's engagement with their present place: "... migrants reconstruct the past through the standpoint of the present in order to feel at home" (Morgan, Rocha, & Poynting, 2005, p. 96). This particular concept refutes, or at least challenges, the idea that identification with a host country is weakened by engaging predominately in behaviors that adhere to their ethnic group or culture.

Furthermore, Orr (as cited in Thorp, 2005) states:

A resident is a temporary occupant, putting down few roots and investing little, knowing little, and perhaps caring little for the immediate locale beyond its ability to gratify.... The inhabitant, in contrast, "dwells"... in an intimate, organic, and mutually nurturing relationship with a place. Good inhabitation is an art requiring detailed knowledge of a place, the capacity for observation, and a sense of care and rootedness (p. 126).

I love the choice of the word "dwell;" it creates a distinct and emotionally charged visual for me. Gardening, particularly in the case of the research participants, especially growing "authentic homeland foods" demonstrates the ability to straddle two locations or identities (Morgan, Rocha, & Poynting, 2005, p. 97). This idea also calls into question Balmori and Morton's (1993) notion of gardening as transitional spaces. While I appreciate how that thought allows for the ability of people to transform environment, this concept is problematic for me. I understand the transitory nature because all things change and die; however, gardening is quite

literally an act of establishing roots, thus can be seen as an act of intentional permanence and of rooting oneself.

### ***Food as Culture***

During the conceptualization process of this research, I began to frame both nature, in the form of landscape, and diet or food consumption as performance. I tried explaining this concept to a few people who inquired about my research, but never having heard the concept they seemed confused. In order to avoid further confusion, I will use the words of Leon Rappoport (2003) from his book *How we Eat: Appetite, Culture, and the Psychology of Food*. He says:

“...the way we eat is closely related to who we are or want to become. In effect, it is the personal and public presentation of self through food because, when it comes to personality, the uses of food are ubiquitous and often paradoxical, in the sense of being both inner and outer directed. ... Our food behavior can therefore be personal and covert (some people eat only as they truly wish to when no one is looking) or, like our clothing, part of our contrived public image (p. 51).

He makes the common claim that you are what you eat. However, based on the idea of performance, oh which he elaborates, I would venture to say, you eat what you are. I believe that Rappoport (2003) is discussing the consumption of food as a performance pertaining to lived experiences of my own. For example, my friends will often ask me, “Will you eat this even if it is not organic?” or “This is not local or in season, but will you eat it anyways?” While certainly not 100 percent of what I eat is organic, local, or seasonal my close friends and family know those things are important to me. Sometimes it leaves me feeling pressure to perform or act in a certain way when it comes to food.

I believe the performance lens applies to the eating patterns of the immigrants in this research, especially by revisiting Montanari's (2004) theory that food is culture because they are both constructed. None of the participants mentioned feeling pressured to eat ethnic or culturally relevant foods, but they all mentioned the importance of having familiar food when they first moved to the United States and how their diet remains centered on culturally relevant food. Regarding this, the participant from Kenya explained how important food is to her:

It was very lonesome. School holidays were very, very lonesome. I remember how soothing it was when we visited places like New York, the African families or American families that eat African food. We found comfort in going back to foods and tried to replicate dishes like chapattis, in Kenya with an African spice having originated in India. So we looked for wheat flour that was suitable for making chapattis. Also looking for white corn flour so we could make *fou-fou* or *oogali*. The collard greens didn't quite taste the same because the spices weren't quite what we were used to. The food made a lot of differences, if you can't find the food that you are used to it could multiply your misery or your homesickness. But with time, you acquire new tastes. Sometimes I'll go for a whole month, I can't remember the last time I ate *oogali* or *fou-fou* and I feel okay because I feel adjusted. But at the same time I have foods that I can't do that. The group I come from in Kenya, the Kikuyu, it's about 20 percent of Kenya's population, eat a kind of, I think here you call it *chili*, a mixture of corn and beans, we'll put some meat in it and tomatoes and sauté it. That I have to eat at least once a week. I've been able to find that here.

While this quote illustrates more the desire for so-called comfort foods, it certainly undergirds the idea that access to ethnic food is important. Many of the participants talked about their trips to the Buford Highway farmers market in Atlanta to procure foods they could not easily find in Athens. The drive to Atlanta can be tiresome, so many of the participants tried growing foods that are difficult to access on their own. The respondent from China said:

Um, one is they [garden] give the person, for example, for me to have the place to plant something I like. What I like, vegetable, what I like. Some of

them I can't buy from the Wal-Mart, like the, like the grocery store. I only can buy them from the Atlanta. So I can plant here so I can get the more convenient.

Not only does gardening culturally appropriate foods illustrate the importance of food to culture, but it also reveals what the participants claimed as benefits of gardening: cost and convenience. The interviewees valued being able to walk outside and harvest their dinner. Particularly in the case of the participants who cooked traditional food to their culture, growing their own food won over making a trip to Atlanta to find more “exotic” produce. Also, these exotic foods, as they are often more difficult to come by, are also often more expensive, thus being able to grow it yourself aided in costs as well.

### ***Control***

“Though we often see ourselves as separate from nature, humans are also part of that wildness” (Louv, 2005, p. 9). By gardening “we see the interconnectedness of all natural systems and thus learn to see ourselves as part of a magnificent ecological interdependence, rather than as isolated individuals” (Coe, 1978, p. 7). Again, the discussion about the banana tree’s ability to adapt depicts this notion of coming “to see that we are beautifully and intimately related to one another as well as to the soil, and the recognition of this relatedness can, at its best, come in the grand mystical realization of unity that poets, philosophers, and theologians have heralded for centuries....” (Coe, 1978, p. 7).

Marcus (1995) writes, “To appropriate space, to order and mold it into a form that pleases us and affirms who we are, is a universal need” (p. 67). While I was not approaching gardening as a means of control as a universal need, I did view

it in a way similar to what Louv (2005), who writes, “...being in nature was about *doing* something, about direct experience—and about not being a spectator” (p. 15). However, I feel I was wrong to think about nature as something humans can control, in reality nature has its own system, its own timing, regardless of how hard we try to cultivate it. In the end, “the land shapes us more than we shape land...” (Louv, 2005, p. 40).

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **Purpose and Objectives of Study**

Walking through the community garden elated me. I smiled more in those brief minutes than I had in an entire semester. There was something about that place, about place in general. I wanted to know how gardening allowed people to demonstrate a sense of place and belonging. The purpose of this study is chiefly to explore and document a phenomenological understanding of the impact of the relationship between people (in this instance, immigrants) and their gardens. Phenomenology “holds that all knowledge is of phenomena and all existence is phenomenal (drawing more on the senses than on thought)” (Worthen, Sanders, and Fitzpatrick, 1997, p. 70). In other words, this project attempts to draw a connection between the benefits of gardening and the immigrant experience. Both gardening and the personal experiences of those individuals and families new to a community or, more dramatically, a country are important on their own.

Specific objectives of this study include:

1. Enable participants to engage in reflecting upon and articulating their own self-perceived benefits of home or community gardening.
2. Derive a relationship between the immigrant experience and gardening.

#### **Review of Method**

According to Shulamit Reinharz (1992) research methods involve questions of identity and difference. Method involves the question, “what do I feel comfortable

categorizing myself as?” I claim feminist research methodology as the basis of my research design. I feel comfortable claiming feminist research methodology as my approach because it outwardly claims to be fraught with problems and accepts that there are no absolute solutions. Also, feminist research methodology recognizes and accepts that a plurality of approaches exists. Harding (1987) problematizes feminist methodology by raising the popular question, “Is there a feminist method?” She argues against a distinctive feminist method of inquiry based on the notion that “preoccupation with method mystifies what have been the most interesting aspects of feminist research process” (Harding, 1987, p. 1).

Another methodology that I have grown comfortable labeling my research as includes naturalistic inquiry (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I choose this because it is equally fuzzy and undefined, and I believe it to be influenced by feminism. Naturalistic inquiry claims to be a new paradigm, one responding to the problems associated with positivist research. Lincoln and Guba (1985) profess:

It has so many names because the persons who profess to practice it tend to take different views of what it implies, in the same way that persons who profess to be Christians may nevertheless prefer to be known as Catholic, Orthodox, Lutheran.... They hold to these more specific labels in an attempt to differentiate their particular doctrines from those of others... (p. 7-8).

Naturalistic is just one way to approach the alternative; others may view it as phenomenological, subjective, postpositivistic, qualitative, or humanistic.

### **Population and Sample Selection**

Participants were specifically or purposively selected (Worthen, Sanders, & Fitzpatrick, 1997) as volunteers for the interviews. Selection was based on the individual’s willingness to discuss both their experience as immigrants and their

home or community gardening practices. Seven people participated in this study. Out of the seven people interviewed, all of the respondents ended up being female. The countries of origin included Brazil, Iraq, Kenya, Colombia, France, China, and Germany. The ages of these women ranged from 34 to 80.

### **Summary of Findings**

When reflecting upon their self-perceived benefits of gardening, the participants of this study indicated there were multiple benefits of gardening, at different dimensions. The respondents indicated through gardening they were able to maintain and establish an intimate connection with nature and their surrounding environment. The perceived psycho-social benefits of gardening were immense as well. Gardening provides a time and space for therapeutic activity, while fostering physical health benefits like improved nutrition and exercise. Additionally, gardening, both in the community and backyard setting, provides a means for social interaction. A unique aspect of the social benefits is the contribution gardening can make to families. It provides an activity for the family to do together while serving as a way to teach children about food and the environment.

Regarding the relationship between the immigrant experience and gardening, gardening serves a unique function of recreating a familiar landscape, and providing an outlet for people to cultivate a specific part of their culture or "home." In addition to providing a familiar landscape, gardening provides a sense of place. The literal rooting of the plants symbolizes a felt sense of permanency. Lastly, growing culturally relevant crops in one's garden helps maintain cultural connections through food.



## **Conclusions**

### ***Engagement in Reflection***

Did I give the participants a voice? How did they benefit from engaging in this research? I do feel as if the interview process enabled the women to reflect upon and articulate their experiences of both immigrating and gardening. The women did not seem to have put the two concepts together previously, so I do feel I at least provided the participants with a new idea to ponder. One respondent said, "It's very important research. I think it is. I'll be very interested to see what you find out." The discussions enabled them, at least, to expand their understanding of the role gardening plays in their life.

### ***Multiple Benefits of Gardening***

The multifunctional nature of gardening was reified through the interviews. Gardening serves multiple purposes and they are different for each person. Some of the benefits include connection to nature, psychological benefits such as stress-relief and relaxation, physical benefits like exercise, social benefits, and impact on children and family. Also, benefits that pertained specifically to the immigrant experience include the ability to recreate a landscape, establish a sense of place, and sometimes maintain specific food habits.

### ***Nature/Culture Dualism***

Culture is often described as a construct and positioned in opposition of nature. However, this research suggests nature is a construction, specifically shaping familiar aspects of culture. Nature and culture do not have to stand on contrary sides, instead they can be reconciled and their similarities recognized.

### ***Gardening and Adjustment***

Gardening was not mentioned as the most prevalent or self-perceived adjustment tool for the immigrants in this study, however it certainly serves an important role in the lives of the individuals involved in the research because it helps cultivate landscape, food, and culture.

It is thought that gardening fosters the reproduction of a familiar landscape, which proved to be true in the case of most of the participants involved. However, interestingly, what was discovered is the participants never actively engaged in gardening in childhood. The gardens, though, still serve a function in creating not only familiar landscapes, but “backyard museums” of sorts, relics of a nostalgic time and place.

The act of gardening, seen as intentional permanence, establishes that immigrants can maintain a dual identity. Engaging in cultural behavior and eating cultural food may help to maintain one identity while the physical act of rooting demonstrates a strong connection, at least physically, to another identity.

### ***Class***

Class is something that came up in several interviews. The respondents mentioned how class, particularly as children, determined whether or not their family gardened, and if they did garden, what they grew. For instance, many of the participants mentioned that they were of a higher social class in their home countries, therefore they did not grow food in the garden but mostly flowers. Bhatti (2006) touches on this issue, saying, “...home-making through the life course also involves the construction and projection of identity and is often linked to status.

Again the garden, the way it looks, the objects that are displayed, can be an important source of self expression and reflection” (Hockey and James, as cited in Bhatti, p. 323). Furthermore, I originally expected traditional or indigenous knowledge in relation to gardening practices to emerge. This was not the case, however, and I believe it to be a reflection of class. Since the participants did not engage in gardening as children they may not have been exposed to traditional practices, but if they do employ them, simply view it as tacit knowledge.

### **Implications and Recommendations for Further Study**

The following implications and recommendations were proposed based on the findings of this study.

1. It was shown that process of reflecting on the benefits of gardening was valuable to the research participants. Therefore, it is recommended that this study be replicated with other populations in order see if the same benefits are perceived or explored with non-immigrants, with immigrants of a different economic status, or with a mix-gendered or male sample.
2. It is recommended that literature reshaping the way immigrants adjust to a host country by providing an alternative to binary language such as acculturation, assimilation, and success.
3. It is recommended that research on immigration widen to include middle and upper class immigrants.
4. It is recommended that research concerning the connection between agriculture and immigrants expand to include small-scale gardening, as opposed to large-scale agricultural production.

5. It is recommended that further research needs to be conducted concerning gardening as a tool used in the adjustment process for immigrants.
6. It is recommended that literature should investigate the occurrences of women gardeners in various countries and how that may impact gardening practices in a host country.

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**APPENDIX A**  
**RECRUITMENT LETTER**

Dear Gardener,

My name is Kelly Byers and I am conducting a research study titled "The Psychosocial Benefits of Backyard and Community Garden among Immigrants." The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of individuals and communities who participate in small-scale gardening, such as in their backyard or community plot. In particular, this study is designed to reveal the psychological and social benefits of home gardening as a means of retaining one's culture.

I am a Masters student at the University of Georgia and I am inviting you to participate in this study.

If you agree to participate, you will first be asked to complete a 6-question demographic form and then to participate in a face-to-face interview, lasting approximately one hour. With your permission, this interview will be recorded. During the interview, you will be asked questions about your experiences with and benefits of home gardening, as well as some questions regarding your food culture. Your name will not appear in the questionnaire, the interview notes, nor the tape (if we record the interview). Further, we will keep the whole process confidential.

Please consider participating in this one-time interview. I have attached for your review a consent form further describing the research. Participation is voluntary and your decision of whether or not to participate will bear no negative consequences.

If you have any questions about the research, please feel free to contact me at (803) 397-4003 or through email at [kbyers@uga.edu](mailto:kbyers@uga.edu). If you decide to participate, please let me know. If you want to, we can discuss the form further before you sign it, and before the interview begins.

Thank you for your support in this research! Your participation is greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

Kelly Byers  
University of Georgia  
[kbyers@uga.edu](mailto:kbyers@uga.edu)  
(803) 397-4003

## APPENDIX B

### INTERVIEW CONSENT FORM

I, \_\_\_\_\_, agree to participate in a research study titled "The Psychosocial Benefits of Backyard and Community Gardening among Immigrants" conducted by Kelly Byers, , from the Department of Agricultural Leadership, Education, and Communication of the University of Georgia. I understand that my participation is voluntary. I can refuse to participate or stop taking part at anytime without giving any reason, and without penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled. I can ask to have all of the information about me returned to me, removed from the research records, or destroyed.

The reason for this research study is to explore and examine personal psychological and social benefits of backyard and community gardening among immigrants and communities. Additionally, this research will provide insight into food and cultural preservation through the act of gardening. If I volunteer to take part in this study, I will be asked to:

1. Complete a brief questionnaire that will take about 5 minutes to complete.
2. Participate in an interview where I will discuss my gardening experience, particularly my perceptions about the benefits for myself or my community. If I specifically agree to it, the interview may be audiotaped.
3. The interview will take approximately 1 hour.
4. In some cases, after the researcher has analyzed the results of my questionnaire and interview, she may want to check with me whether or not her interpretations are appropriate. If she chooses to do this, she will ask me for an additional session that will take about 10 minutes (member checks).

The researcher hopes to learn more about immigrant experiences in small-scale gardening as a means of preserving and maintaining food, both culinary and agricultural, culture as well as exploring indigenous and traditional methods and techniques.

The researcher connected with this study will protect my private information and will keep this confidential by storing any forms and recordings in a secured location. No individually-identifiable information about me, or provided by me during the research, will be shared with others without my written permission. The questionnaires will be strictly confidential and will be kept in a cabinet in a locked/staffed office. All responses will be compiled and reported as a group. No identifiable information will be kept in the interview notes or audio tapes, and all information contained on the tapes will be erased following transcription of the interview.

No risk or discomfort is expected for me or any other participants in this study. I will have no incentives or compensation for participation in this research.

The investigator will answer any further questions about the research, now or during the course of the project. The researcher can be reached at [kbyers@uga.edu](mailto:kbyers@uga.edu) (Kelly Byers) for any questions concerning the research or the process.

My signature below indicates that the researcher has answered all of my questions to my satisfaction and that I consent to volunteer for this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

Name of Researcher	Signature	Date
Kelly Byers Telephone: 803-397-4003 Email: kbyers@uga.edu	Maria Navarro Telephone: 706-583-0225 Email: mnavarro@uga.edu	

Name of Participant	Signature
Date	

Consent of the participant for audiotaping the interview (initials only)  
 YES \_\_\_\_\_ NO \_\_\_\_\_

Please sign both copies, keep one and return one to the researcher.

Additional questions or problems regarding your rights as a research participant should be addressed to The Chairperson, Institutional Review Board, University of Georgia, 612 Boyd Graduate Studies Research Center, Athens, Georgia 30602-7411; Telephone (706) 542-3199; E-Mail Address IRB@uga.edu

**APPENDIX C**  
**DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE**

**Code name:**

**Gardening Demographics Questionnaire**

1. Age:
  
2. Gender:
  
3. Race/Ethnicity:
  
4. Home country:
  
5. If applicable, please provide details about your profession:
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
6. Please list any hobbies:

## **APPENDIX D**

### **INTERVIEW PROTOCOL**

1. When did you move to the United States?
2. Did you move directly to Georgia or have you been in other states/cities?
3. What were some of your reasons for leaving your home country?
4. Can you tell me a little about what it has been like adjusting to life in the United States? Was it more or less difficult than you expected?
5. In particular, will you tell me what has been the most difficult aspect for you?
6. Do you feel like there is pressure to assimilate or adapt to the dominant culture in the United States or Georgia?
7. What have been some coping mechanisms for you while adjusting?
8. Since you are a gardener, can you tell me about the role this activity plays in your life? What were some of the specific reasons you started gardening here? Health, cost, enjoyment, other people, etc?
9. Specifically, can you discuss the benefits you find from gardening?
10. How has gardening benefited you, your family, and your community?
11. Food is a very important part of culture. Do you feel that gardening has helped you maintain some part of your culture, either through culinary or agricultural outlets?
12. In your own gardening, do you apply any traditional or indigenous agricultural methods? How did you learn them or who did you learn them from? Will you describe a particular example?
13. Is there anything else that you would like to add regarding your home garden?