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Methods
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Sowing Hope to Harvest Change:
Exploring the Development of Ontario’s First Community Garden

“La verdad es que yo no sabia nada de jardines comunitarios o la importancia de el origen de la comida cuando primero empecé. Pero ya que estoy aquí, miro que si se necesita en la comunidad.” I thank Gloria and continue on to Estela sitting next to her. I am conducting a focus group with women from the Huerta del Valle community garden (HdV) - a community garden project created by Pitzer College’s Pitzer in Ontario program in the city of Ontario who’s aim is to promote a healthy lifestyle and create food sovereignty in the community. After spending 10 weeks in the field with Huerta del Valle I have called the four “main” women of the group, Rosio, Gloria, Estela, and Monica together to discuss the future of HdV and what direction they would like to see the project head in. We eat ceviche tostadas with lots of Tapatío as we sit around Monica’s kitchen table. The women share their opinions with me ranging from the importance of having a garden in the area, and the benefits they believe the garden will bring forth, to why they have stuck around and supported the project for so long. As HdV continues to make progress in becoming a nonprofit organization and actualize itself to the South Ontario community focus groups such as the one we’re having tonight are critical for the future of HdV in determining what path the organization is going to take in moving forward.

The HdV story began almost a year and a half ago when Kaiser Permanente proposed to give out one million dollars in HEAL (Healthy Eating, Active Living) grant money to the city of Ontario in order to increase physical activity and provide access of fruits and vegetables to a particular area of the city that is in dire need of social change. Different organizations proposed
their projects- including Pitzer College in an attempt to get some of the funding offered and in the end nine different organizations were chosen including Pitzer, San Antonio Hospital, OMSD, and Loma Linda Medical Center. The project received a three year grant and a substantial piece of land in South Ontario. A year and a half later there are still community members involved in the project that were part of the original framework and I have called them together to hear their stories. I met the HdV group/staff during the first week of February when I participated in one of their “work days”. The group consists of 10 women and 7 men- predominantly of low income, minority families. Although the garden is currently being funded by a Kaiser HEAL grant at that time the group was kind of at a “stand still” waiting for their land use agreement to be finalized by the city. I took advantage of this pause in progress to collect data from the surrounding community in regards to their feelings for the garden, what they expect, what they’d like to see, what they need, etc.

Ontario is a steady growing metropolitan area located in San Bernardino County, CA. Despite being in the middle of the desert with average temperatures at the 80 degree level and having to grapple with water access in its beginnings, Ontario was originally started as an agricultural city. Citrus was the main attraction to the Ontario area although peaches, walnuts, and grapes followed closely.\(^1\) Even though the city’s agricultural priorities have changed over time with industrialization, city development and expansion it is still easy to see the remnants of what once was an agricultural hot spot while driving down its “main” Street, Euclid Avenue. Strawberry fields, lettuce and corn blocks, even active dairy farms are still in the area to date. With this array of agricultural choices in the area there has been controversy as to whether or not Ontario is really a “food desert” as it’s currently classified by the USDA. According to the USDA there are many ways to define which areas are considered "food deserts" and many ways

to measure food store access for individuals and for neighborhoods. Most measures and definitions take into account at least some of the following indicators of access:

- Accessibility to sources of healthy food, as measured by distance to a store or by the number of stores in an area.
- Individual-level resources that may affect accessibility, such as family income or vehicle availability.
- Neighborhood-level indicators of resources, such as the average income of the neighborhood and the availability of public transportation.\(^2\)

There are mixed feelings amongst the Ontario residents as to whether or not they would like their city to be classified as a “food desert”. “Un desierto? No. Si hay mercados en la área... fíjate, aquí esta las ‘Food 4 Less’ o la Cardenas bien cercas... pero lo que pasa es que esos productos que venden allí no sirven. Un desierto no somos- mas como un lugar de desechables”. I can sense Monica’s frustration. She is not angry that access to produce is not readily available in the area, on the contrary she feel that it is, but she questions the point of having store shelves stocked up with fruits and vegetables if the quality is no good? She feels as if the residents of her community are being served table scraps. Other residents however feel differently. “Por supuesto que somos un desierto de comida! Mira aquí afuera de mi casa- solo hay comidas rápidas y conveniente- que hamburguesa, que tacos, que sándwiches. Si queremos productos frescos tenemos que irnos a otras ciudades a localizar la. En donde esta la justicia?” Rosio is also frustrated but for different reasons. ‘Where is the justice?’ She asks. She is tired of having to drive to other cities in order to obtain fresh produce for her family. She is fed up with looking outside her window and only seeing fast food restaurants available as eating choices in the area.

As my time in the field with HdV increased and conversations with members became more intimate I began to question how people with such different perceptions of their city, the food access available to them, and the region surrounding them could agree so wholeheartedly

on the importance of introducing a community garden into the area. I wondered what
significance the garden really had for them. What were the unspoken visions of such a space?
And ultimately how they hoped the garden would transform their community? At this point I
knew I would have to examine the interconnectedness of power relationships within the city in
respect to the community members, politics, race, and even gender to find answers. It seemed
feasible that a low income, community of color was utilizing the garden as a form of agency to
be heard amongst the surrounding clamor of egalitarian voices that were often making choices
for them.

Having spent almost two decades living in the Ontario area as a child and then into
adolescence allowed me to witness first hand the massive structural changes that took place as
the city expanded. More industrial complexes and growth ultimately lead to less agricultural
space and more pollution. When I came back to the Ontario area to work with HdV after having
been away for years the divide within the city- between North Ontario and South Ontario was
evident. In regards to cleanliness, amenities such as public spaces, and housing North Ontario
seemed to be flourishing as it benefitted from the revenues of the city’s growth and expansion.
South Ontario on the other hand could be classified as “alarming”. The situation on most blocks
tended to be the same, extremely small houses “overflowing” with minorities, public spaces that
have been left unattended, and English seldom spoken. I wondered if the members of HdV saw
the stark segregation of race and class that I did within their city- and if they did, what were their
feelings on the matter. In order to obtain this information I used various research methods such
as one-on-one interviews, focus groups, surveys, and of course detailed field notes from my
experiences and conversations with the members of HdV. I employed these methods using an
epistemological philosophical assumption as Creswell would describe, “as an attempt to lessen
the distance between [myself] the researcher and that being researched”3, ideally as a practice to become an “insider”. Following that, I deemed it appropriate to be operating my research through the theoretical frameworks of Social Constructivism and a little bit of Advocacy/Participatory worldviews. The Social Constructivist aspect of these two frameworks will allow me to construct and interpret meanings of various situations while in the field with HdV whereas the Advocacy/Participatory framework will enable me to give “voice” to the participants throughout the research process as well as determine avenues for change.4 Going into the research process I felt confident that I would be ‘accepted’ by the community I was researching for numerous reasons, such as…

- I am a minority- my parents are both Mexican immigrants whom have had similar experiences in the U.S. as the families of Huerta del Valle have had.

- My language skills were up to par in communicating with team members in their native language. Spanish is my first language and thus if a community member was having difficulty or couldn’t express themselves properly in English they felt comfortable communicating with me in Spanish.

- I was familiar with the area and its living conditions- as mentioned earlier, having lived in the Ontario area for most of my childhood and young adult life I felt confident talking about structural changes, giving directions, and knowing about regional realities versus written demographics.

Considering the amount of time I spent working with the HdV community I feel as though I created sustainable relationships that allowed the members to speak candidly when we discussed issues that would affect the progress of HdV, such as the Alternative Food Movement, race, class, and even gender.

Before I could begin to analyze the data collected from my experiences with HdV I felt it necessary to greater familiarize myself with issues that undoubtedly would have substantial

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4 Creswell, p. 21-2.
impact on HdV’s actions and practices, a major component being the Alternative Food Movement. As the “green movement” continues to gain momentum in the U.S. consumers are becoming grossly aware of the consequences involved with industrial/commercial agriculture techniques such as genetically modified organisms, pesticides, and heavy machinery. Not only are consumers alarmed at the effects that these practices are having on the environment but have also began to question the effects that daily consumption of such products is having on their bodies and overall health. As a way to counter or put an end to such environmental and bodily harming practices consumers are turning to an alternative to industrial agriculture, in most cases being organic foods.\(^5\) This is primarily where community gardens come into play.

As a response to conventional agriculture the emergence of community gardens has become a growing trend that numerous metropolitan areas across the nation are partaking in. By transforming “un” or under utilized land to create “green” spaces in urban areas that can provide local families with fresh grown produce; communities are developing a sense of food sovereignty as an alternative to buying produce at local supermarkets and contributing to the capitalist economic system. The ultimate goal of urban farming or community gardens is to provide fresh produce to families that otherwise would have limited access or selection to choose from. Unfortunately, as the desire for having community gardens unfolds in urban areas one begins to see emerging trends of hierarchical structures in regards to socioeconomic categories. The Alternative Food Movement (AFM) is inherently being lead by affluent communities of white privileged residents that intend to “save” lower income or poverty ridden communities from social inequalities. However, literature pertaining to the AFM seldom regards race and/or class as concentrations to aid in research and subsequently, as community gardens continue to

emerge at an accelerated rate across the nation it is evident that they are intended to primarily being utilized and operated by minority populations. The progressive growth of community gardens nationwide can thus be seen as a method for minorities to counter/combat the alternative food movement. By examining literature pertaining to the issue I gained valuable input from scholars in the AFM field.

The Alternative Food Movement aims to provide communities with an “alternative” to conventional agriculture. However, the shape of the movement in the past 25 years has taken a strong direction in providing the “alternative” only to affluent (or more so white) communities with farmers markets and community supported agriculture while providing very little to minorities or communities of color.6 Even more detrimental, when AFM practices are applied in conjunction with Food Justice Practices the process of getting “better” food to low income or minority residents becomes a hierarchical structure that creates white sovereign subjects and discounts the participation of minorities in the process. As Guthman recounts from her own research of observing her undergraduate research students, ‘the interest of the student’s participation was based on their white desires- not on the minorities needs’. Extending that further, Guthman points out that a more critical component is the unconscious ways in which whiteness works to shape the social relations and spaces of alternative food [practices].7 Subjects that tend to overlook race or choose not to address their white privilege are then overlooking major aspects of not only their role but the populations they are attempting to help. Minority communities reflect certain cultural aspects specific to their race that must be addressed by researchers in order to fully engage the population in the projects they aim to create. As Delany would argue, race gives shape to space, gives meanings to places, and conditions the experience

7 Guthman, 432.
of embodied subjects.\textsuperscript{8} Thus when attempting to involve minorities or low income communities in alternative Food Practices socioeconomic factors must be included.

By excluding socioeconomic factors such as race in AFM research, conclusive data from such studies is limiting the benefits that can arise from implementing a community garden into a low income or poverty ridden area. For example, factors such as gender, race, employment, place and length of residence can influence gardeners’ perception of benefits emerging from community gardens. Waliczek (\textit{et. al}) finds in their nationwide survey of community gardeners that female community gardeners placed higher value on the benefit of saving money, and African-American and Hispanic gardeners valued the gardens more than Caucasians and Asians.\textsuperscript{9} Thus the importance of including race and gender become evident in surveying community garden as there are multiple perspectives as to what is deemed “beneficial” or of “importance”.

In accordance to Waliczek’s investigation, Wakefield (\textit{et al}) similarly felt that minorities are largely excluded from AFM research and community garden studies as race is often left out of the investigations. Wakefield observed that much of the literature focusing on the benefits of community gardening use “anecdotal” evidence and seldom involve gardeners from diverse cultural backgrounds.\textsuperscript{10} According to Wakefield and colleagues that conducted a case study focusing on the health benefits provided by community gardens towards minority gardeners, the participants- minority community residents believed that their involvement in the garden and gardening process provided them with a variety of health benefits. The most frequently commented benefit was the access to fresh fruits and vegetables that otherwise would be very

\textsuperscript{8} David Delaney, ‘The space that race makes’, \textit{The professional geographer} 54 (2002), pp. 6–14.
expensive at the local market but Wakefield observed increased physical activity and increased mental health as high ranking benefits as well. This sense that gardening contributed to mental health was voiced repeatedly in the interviews and focus groups:

\[\text{. . .sometimes when you are stressed out. . . when you go to the garden, you feel different.}\]
\[\text{... It helps you hold onto life.}^{11}\]

Wakefield’s findings with the minority populations tending and operating community gardens concluded that the positive impacts of community gardening extended beyond the individual and impacted the community as a whole. Social relationships increased creating safe spaces for individual relationships to flourish thus repeating the cycle of improved individual health.

Overwhelmingly, articles that did focus or address issues of race, class, and even gender demonstrated positive impacts and benefits of having a community garden in low income areas. Brown and Jameton whom primarily focused their study on hunger in America and the amount of produce community gardens can create concluded that community gardening can save families a significant amount of money over the course of a year. When considering the (relatively small) fee that gardeners pay for their parcel in the garden low income families-primarily minorities can greatly reduce grocery bills while still providing nutritious food to their families. In the study Brown and Jameton report,

\[\text{The average gardener can produce } $240 \text{ worth of food for no more than an outlay of } $9. \text{ In the past year, home gardeners of the Washington DC metropolitan area produced over } $1 \text{ million dollars worth of food that would not otherwise have existed.}^{12}\]

Since hunger is generally considered a health concern in the U.S.- particularly in young children by providing access to food needed to alleviate the hunger felt by those [minorities] whom

\[^{11}\text{Wakefield, 97.}\]
\[^{12}\text{Brown, 23.}\]
otherwise wouldn’t be able to afford produce from local markets, community gardens are thus providing a health benefit not just to the individual but to the surrounding community as well.

Taking the idea that community gardening benefits the community as a whole; McClintock addressed the issue through a different perspective. In his study, McClintock focused on a more macro level of analysis examining how reconnecting an individual to their food- as urban agriculture does- communities are in a sense reducing the amount of fuel used to transport produce from remote locations thus improving air quality, providing their community with fresh produce thus more nutrients that can be consumed, and strengthen community relationships through increases of human and ecological health awareness. McClintock goes further in his analysis by placing strong emphasis on macro aspects of community gardening in minority communities stressing the focus of ‘strengthening cultural ties’. As minority groups use their time on community gardens to grow native plants and vegetables they are in a sense reinforcing their ties to their homeland and consequently to other minority gardeners who can relate to their situation.

The separation of people from the food they consume has created a movement by minority groups to partake in community gardening. Examining the health benefits of community gardening on a macro level such as McClintock, Hale conducted a study demonstrating the negative health aspects that already exist in the U.S. such as increasing obesity rates and heart disease- conditions that are prevalent in minority groups- and then goes on to explain how one can counter the effects of such conditions. Incidentally, activities used to counter the effects of such conditions were already being performed in the garden. For example,

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14 McClintock, 200.
increased activity, better/healthier eating choices, and yes, even support systems. Hale’s research primarily focuses on the relationship between food environments and health ultimately determining that health is inevitably affected by the way that food is grown and accessed. By growing their own food minorities are then not only reaping the economic benefits of community gardening but also taking in the psychological benefits by accessing or reclaiming their agency through food sovereignty. When speaking about the process one gardener even stated,

“I feel like I’m a co-creator in the world with my garden, helping bring forth life, nurturance. It nurtures me as much as I nurture it. And it gives me hope.”

By centralizing the study to “tactile practices” Hale concluded in his findings that by performing gardening activities such as getting their hands dirty or tasting the vegetables they grew themselves participants felt “better” and demonstrated better health than participants who did not engage in such activities. To exclude minorities in such studies would be detrimental to results and findings as clearly there is a plethora of benefits that come with community gardens and minorities tend to be the majority partaking in the activities.

Race not only plays a major role in the benefits affecting a community when a garden is introduced but as we have also seen, greatly determines the gardener’s participation and dedication in the project as well. These actions are similarly reflected on the children of gardeners—those whom participate or would like to participate in garden projects but are dependant on adults for transportation, permission, or physical assistance in order to be successful. Pothukuchi found conclusive results to this theory when trying to assess the correlation between community garden practices and health benefits of children in a garden.

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16 Hale, 1858.
17 Hale, 1858.
community. A distinct discovery was that the number of participants in the year of research was greatly reduced at the end of the study than when initially conducted. In fact only 9 of the 25 initial participants finished the study.\textsuperscript{18} Pothukuchi explains various socioeconomic explanations to such a reduction in participation- mainly due to minority lack of resources [transportation, child care issues, etc]. Clearly since the study was conducted amongst children ultimately parent or guardian participation would have played an important part in determining the outcome of the study but this becomes a key point in the study when the community is largely of color as various socioeconomic factors are at play that would otherwise be absent in an affluent white community.

Through my investigation of academic articles on the importance of addressing race and gender when researching community gardens as an alternative food practice it was a little disheartening to find that many articles address the issue of needing more ‘race or gender’ related articles, yet very little researchers are conducting the work itself. There is no doubt that race and gender (ultimately class structures) is definitely a key factor in the AFM and one that cannot be overlooked in food justice practices. By choosing to ignore race and gender in food justice practices and the act of providing minorities with “better” food is in a sense reinforcing radicalized structured hierarchies that yet again places minorities at a disadvantage by stripping them of their voice and agency in their communities. It must be noted however that race and gender cannot be the only determent in evaluations of community gardens.

Although I felt confident going into the research process because of the many similarities I shared with the members of HdV as stated before, I had to make myself aware of my positionality going into the process as well. Once the research was underway and I was spending

more and more time with the HdV community members I began to see distinct differences between the two of us that I hadn’t considered before such as…

-The community often considered me ‘American’ as opposed to Hispanic/ Latina because of the clothes I wore, the music I would listen to, or the food I would consume. On one occasion while having dinner with a HdV family I remember embarrassment consuming me when Gloria was serving everybody big bowls of *nopales* to all in attendance. When she got to me she stopped herself and said, “Ah, tu no comes de esto verdad Marcy? Nah, tu que sabes de comida del pueblo.” She laughed with a few other members unaware that I grew up eating grilled cactus quite often.

-My education made me an ‘outsider’ to the women of the group- particularly in being able to relate to domestic hardships. Although I was a woman and Latina through their eyes I would never be able to relate to living with an abusive husband, having to care for three children on my own, or even worry about where our next meal would come from. To them I was at times a “privileged” American girl that only had to worry about her studies. This awareness caused me to quickly realize that I had to wear many hats while on site. For example, I was an intern so had to listen to my supervisors yet was part of the academy so was constantly in a position of authority being asked questions as to what would be ‘better’ for the organization.

-My Caucasian partner evoked a sense of ‘privilege’ on my part to the surrounding community. The group never questioned whether I would have access to transportation to or from events as other members- minorities or people of color might not have or whether or not I could afford to bring materials, food, or resources to group events as other members may not have been able to afford it.
My ability to speak English caused an unintended hierarchy in my relation to community members. This was especially true when meeting with city officials as often they would ONLY speak English- completely disregarding the Spanish speaking community member standing right next to me.

As a result of these undeniable differences I found it paramount for me to be on the field as often as possible with HdV. The Pitzer in Ontario program advocates for social change through community based research and action. In order for positive change to occur we must be willing to hear the voices of community members otherwise we are setting our own agenda and reinforcing socially constructed class hierarchies. In order for HdV to accept me I took the advice of Mahasveta Devi when addressing subaltern research and breaking apart ‘otherness’, “…you have to go there you have to live and trust them. Once you give trust they give you back trust…” The community must see the sovereign amongst them, as one of their own before they can trust them and that’s what I intended to do.

When conducting myself amongst the HdV community (through qualitative as well as quantitative research) it was important to be aware of cultural normative amongst the members that may seem foreign or “wrong” to me. I assumed this would not be a problem because of my background and positionality, however, I was clearly mistaken as I realized during a HdV weekly meeting when the members were deciding what seeds they wanted to order from Johnny’s (seed supplier) to plant in the garden. “…frijoles y tomatillo también” one of the new members suggests as the meeting chair wrote all of suggestions on the board. Cactus, chayote, corn, and lima beans have all been suggested by members and now pinto beans and green tomatoes are added to the list. As the suggestions keep being thrown out I can’t help but notice

that the club members tend to comment and make physical gestures such as “mmm...” sounds, licking their lips, or rubbing their stomach as if mentally tasting each product as it’s said out loud. The trend in the emerging suggestions is evident— all the produce is generally of central or South American origin and typical food staples in Hispanic/Latino communities such as the families that make up Huerta del Valle and their neighbors in South Ontario. The question however is more so why these families choose these certain products as opposed to turnips, cabbages, and radishes of a traditional European diet, or say eggplants, barley, or rhubarb commonly found in Asian diets. Using the theoretical approach of cultural capital to examine the situation I began to see the undercurrents of habits, traits, and characteristics of culture and heritage that are shaped by “micro habits” that are culturally integrated into each of our lives since birth.

Cultural Capital according to Lareau and Weininger is most often linked to the findings and interpretations of French sociologist, Pierre Bourdieu. Bourdieu developed his interpretation of cultural capital when examining education and created two main categories for the concept that he felt explained it thoroughly— 1. That cultural capital denotes knowledge of “highbrow” culture and 2. Researchers assumed that the effects of cultural capital must be partitioned from “proper” skills, abilities, or achievements. Cultural Capital can thus be defined as: The systems of value and meaning that an individual can use or draw on to explain the “normative” in their community. According to Bourdieu then, the micro habits that are integrated into our lives day in and day out are what distinguish high class from low class—for example listening to country music or bluegrass versus classical music or drinking beer at local bars on the weekend as opposed to drinking fine wine, and going to museums. However, in recent days we begin to see scholars’ starting to consider Bourdieu’s reasoning “outdated” and no longer distinct to class production. In 2001 Sullivan defined cultural capital as “familiarity with the dominant culture in

the society…” and in 2002 Eitle and Eitle claimed that it was “attitudes, behaviors, preferences, and credentials commonly used for social and cultural inclusion and exclusion.” Lareau and Weininger summarize their interpretation of cultural capital by stressing, “…it allows culture to be used as a resource that provides access to scarce rewards, is subject to monopolization, and under certain conditions, may be transmitted from one generation to the next.” Although cultural capital is still used to examine the micro interaction processes of one’s daily life to see how they measure up to what is “expected” or the cultural normative the normative ultimately is grounded on dominant culture and therefore has great potential to exclude minorities. Furthermore, cultural capital greatly depends on place and in the U.S. it conveniently uses “standards” that benefit white, middle class families.

The more updated version of cultural capital is evident in the practices of community members of Huerta del Valle. Throughout my internship I began to take note of certain trends of consumption and attitudes or behaviors towards the land expressed through the families I was working with. These beliefs or “norms” of eating farm fresh food, plants native to Mexico, and a desire to reconnect themselves and their kin to the land were ultimately a result of the cultural capital that was engrained in them and has been reinforced since birth. There were 5 families I worked with during my time at Huerta del Valle that were all of Mexican origin, spoke Spanish, had immigrated to the U.S., were centered around parents of heterosexual relationships, and had children. Gloria’s family consists of a mother, a father, and their young adult son whom still lives a home. Both parents are undocumented immigrants from Mexico that speak little or no English. Estela’s family was a mother, a father, and their toddler son whom had just started preschool. They too were undocumented immigrants that spoke little or no English. Guera’s

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21 Lareau and Weininger, p.573.
22 Lareau and Weininger, p.573.
23 Lareau and Weininger, p.587.
family consisted of a mother, a father, a young adult son, and an adolescent daughter. The father spoke English moderately although the wife did not. Rosio’s family was a mother, a father, a young adult daughter, and a pre adolescent son. The father was documented although the mother was not and both parents spoke moderate English. Finally, Monica’s family was a mother, a father, and two adolescent daughters. Both parents were documented and spoke English well.

On several occasions I took part in eating dinner with the families and quickly became aware of cultural normative (according to them) that would more than likely be placing these families in a cultural capital disadvantage while in the U.S. To begin, if we look at the dietary staples of these families compared to “standard” U.S. diet we can see that many of the produce-such as cactus and maize is not readily available or carried at local markets because it is not the “norm” of American diets. I asked Estela one evening where she bought the cactus they were serving as I had never seen it for sale at the local grocery stores. Estela laughed and said she grew them in her backyard. “Ya perdí la fe en las marketas. Nunca trae los productos que queremos- solo “chips” o galletas, pues mejor lo crezco yo misma!” She went on further to say that this is common on her block. Many of the local families are fed up with not finding native fruits or vegetables in their local supermarkets so they just grow them in their backyards. As suggested earlier by Eitle and Eitle, this is could be a case of culturally excluding the families that utilize these products from society; however I would like to interpret the action of growing their own produce in their backyards as a method for the families to empower themselves through normative ties of their homeland.

Aside from consumption trends, attitudes and behaviors were also greatly excluding these families (particularly women) from society as they differed from social normative. For example, over the course of 15+ dinners that I took part of the women did all the cooking (with the
exception of one meal when the husband was BBQ-ing). Even after the food was made neither the husband’s nor the son’s would eat unless the food was served to them. Gloria and Rosio have lived in the U.S. for over 12 years and have no problem with their family “system” of prepping, cooking, and serving that is in place for meal times. Since the women primarily do all of the cooking in the house they consequently do all of the grocery shopping as well. They grow various products in their backyards and buy the rest from local markets. Most meals are made [as is expected] from “scratch”. Gloria tells me one afternoon while cooking a big pot of caldo de res [beef stew] “el trabajo de las mujeres es a cuidar sus familias. Así que a mi me da orgullo a cocinarles bien- unas comidas muy ricas y por supuesto nada de lata e. Esas cosas de lata no sirven pa’ nada.” There is no doubt that her culture has instilled in her the notion that women should be submissive to the needs of and serving men. Guera echoes this ideology as she tells me one evening while cutting tomatoes (grown in her backyard) for ceviche- El me ha dado tanto a mi tanto por estar trabajando. Así que yo lo debo de cuidar a el para que sigua adelante.” I don’t question that the women of Huerta del Valle are familiar with the dominant culture of the surrounding area (all of them having lived in the U.S. for over a decade) as suggested by Sullivan. However, as they continue to exemplify the dominant culture (of machismo men and submissive women) from their homelands the micro interactions that had been embedded in them since birth (that were culturally advantageous in Mexico) are restrictive to their growth and access to agency while living in the U.S.

The cultural capital evident in the families of HdV can have its benefits as well. Estela and Gloria tell me that they enjoy growing their own produce in their backyards the way they did in their homelands. “Es otra manera como nos podemos unir como comunidad… Pues, los latinos, no? Cuando tu enotas que uno no tiene les das a tus vecinos y cuando tu también
necesitas pues otros te dan a ti también.” This unspoken “harvesting system” allows the families of HdV to connect further on a cultural level. They are all aware that their neighbors grow some sort of produce in their backyard, thus if they grow a little bit extra for other members of the community they can partake in “communal trade” program that saves them from the frustration of not finding native products at the local markets. When the system fails to take care of the population, they begin to take care of themselves.24 Rosario, Gloria, Estela, and Monica as well as the other members of HdV are aware of the conditions affecting their community. But rather than wait idly for the city to introduce new grocery stores to the area that will carry the products their culture has reinforced as “normal”, a reality they know is not going to happen they have banded together to take care of themselves.

Although the women brought forth priceless conversations and opinions, it was necessary to have conversations with all members of the garden in order to gain a true understanding of the outcomes that the community members had for the project. The current HdV family consist of 10 women- 7 of which are minorities and 4 of those that speak little or no English at all; as well as 7 men- 5 of which are minorities and 3 of those that speak little to no English at all. When all 17 participants were given a questionnaire (based on a 1-5 grading scale- 1 being strongly disagree and 5 being strongly agree) evaluating their interest in having a community garden in the area 100% of the group elected “5- Strongly agree” to wanting to introduce the garden in their community as well as “5- Strongly agree” for the need of a having a community garden in their area and 94% thought that the garden would “5- Strongly agree” bring forth benefits to their community. When asked why through further investigation the participants responded with answers such as-

“Es algo que de veras si necesitamos. Aquí los niños se la pasan comiendo pura comida de lata- de que les va a servir eso? Solo les va a dar enfermedades y lastimar su salud cuando lleguen a hacer adultos.”

“Porque la comida es muy cara por aquí! Como podemos comer cosas buenas si no tenemos dinero para comprar lo que necesita la familia?”

However, when asked why the garden was needed in the area, the overwhelming response by women (80%) said it would “improve the lives of their children/ families” while this same response [or similar] was only given by 42% of the men. “Lo tenemos que hacer para ellos” one garden mother said to me while pointing to her young child. “…los niños necesitan el jardín para ayudar les con su salud en el futuro.” “Mi esposo es diabético y mi familia sufre de obesidad- el jardín es algo que les cambiara la vida” another garden mother chimed in. As the garden mothers focused on their children and families the majority of the men, 57% of the group were more interested in having the garden around to united the community stating,

“[el jardín] Será un centro donde podremos conocer a nuestros vecinos.”

“Es algo que va apoyar a nuestros vecindarios sentir se que si somos parte de cosas mas grandes- que unidos podemos lograr lo que sea.”

It was interesting to see the dynamic of gender play out in a group where race, culture, and experiences were relatively similar. These findings only added to the reasoning that race and gender should be examined in AFM research as differences of opinion even when one category is the same still arise in the other category.

My findings have concluded that race and gender work together to demonstrate differences between majorities and minorities in the AFM, as well as on their own to demonstrate distinct differences in opinions, thought processes, and emergence of patterns within the operations of community gardens. In accordance to the literature available on the AFM and community gardens in general I have to point out that HdV was a “community idea” that was
introduced through Pitzer college- a predominantly white, affluent, academic institution by their
Pitzer in Ontario program- a course of study intended to engage students in social change
programs through community involvement with the surrounding low income, minority, residents
in South Ontario. Huerta del Valle attempts to introduce fresh, local, and organic produce to a
low income, predominantly minority community. It is hoped that with access to alternative food
choices (in comparison to industrial agriculture) families in the area will be exposed to numerous
benefits- including health from changes in physical activity, consumption patterns, and social
interactions as well as political benefits by having a voice and having food sovereignty in their
community. Throughout my fifteen week internship at HdV and numerous interactions with
members from the community and HdV families my efforts to explore the impact of race and
gender on the alternative food movement made me aware of the lack of research that scholar’s
have conducted on such topic. The literature demonstrates that white or affluent communities are
introducing and pushing forth with the AFM however it is predominantly minority communities
or people of color that are working at the community gardens set up by AFM advocates.
Projects Cited


