Community Gardeners’ Perspectives on Race Relations

BY

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SUMMARY

Community gardens are settings in communities that provide a myriad of health-related benefits, however, one of the central themes in the literature on community gardens is the importance of the social context of the setting, which is known for engendering positive interactions between different cultural and racial groups of people. Researchers have begun to explore how ethnicity, culture, and race broadly manifest in diverse community gardens, but lack a critical examination of race relations. The purpose of the study was to understand and describe how community gardeners conceptualized race relations in their racially diverse community gardens. The study used a qualitative grounded theory methodology to provide a rich description of gardeners’ lived experiences and understandings. Eleven participants from different racial/ethnic backgrounds who were active gardeners in racially diverse community gardens in Chicago were interviewed. Semi-structured interviews and participant observations were used in facilitating the constant comparative method of qualitative data analysis. The narrative that emerged illustrated how participants’ understandings of different racial groups in the garden changed over time since being involved in the setting. Participants first recognized racial stereotypes in the garden, then through teaching and learning around garden activities formed strong family bonds, and then finally came to understand race in a contextually colorblind way. The emergent themes described a social process that both contributed to the literature on the social context of community gardens and elaborated on several shortcomings of race relations theories used in the literature.
I. OVERVIEW

Community gardens are becoming increasingly popular as a method of urban agriculture because of issues such as lack of access to affordable healthy food in communities and individual residents wanting to live a more sustainable lifestyle (e.g. “going green”) and eating local, organic food (Draper & Freedman, 2010). However, the literature on community gardening identifies it as having a unique social context that allows for the formation of strong relationships and social networks between different groups of people. As such, community gardens have been presented as settings that bridge social capital in diverse garden settings (Firth, Maye, & Pearson, 2011; Glover, 2003; Glover, 2004; Shinew, Glover, & Parry, 2004). Researchers have only recently begun to explore culture, ethnicity, and race in community gardens and the majority of the studies lack a critical examination of how these constructs manifest in relationships between gardeners.

Only one study has explicitly focused on race and race relations in community gardens, which was framed with contact theory (Shinew et al., 2004). Contact theory, which has frequently been used to frame studies of race relations, posits that interracial contact increases the likelihood of close interracial friendships and is a key factor for improving racial attitudes and behaviors (Allport, 1954). Shinew et al. (2004) argued that the community garden context could improve race relations within communities because the setting fits all of the following contact criteria: (1) Contact occurs non-competitively, (2) contact is personal and informal, (3) relevant authorities approve of the contact, and (4) the setting confers equal status of the different races (Jackman & Crane, 1986; Shinew, et al., 2004).
Contact theory assumes an individualistic perspective and framework, but race is a complex construct grounded in socially constructed systems of social, historical, and philosophical processes that emerge from social interactions and institutional structures over time (Markus & Moya, 2010). Several other theories of race relations address this shortcoming, namely critical race theory, a sociocultural framework of race relations, and social capital theory, which will be discussed at greater length in the review of background literature (Erasmus, 2010; Fisher, 2011; Plaut, 2010). These theories could potentially intersect and explain how community gardeners understand race relations in their community gardens.

Researchers argue for a shift in theoretical and methodological approaches to studying race relations that consider the lived experiences of participants (Dixon, Durrheim, & Tredoux, 2005). Glover (2004) posits that social context, particularly in diverse community garden settings, is best captured through interpretive methods that focus on the meaning people assign to their experiences, and how they understand phenomena in their own lives. Therefore, a qualitative approach is suitable in the study of race relations in community gardens because it focuses on participants’ voices and experiences. The purpose of this study is to understand and describe how gardeners conceptualize race relations in their racially diverse community gardens. The current study uses grounded theory methodology to provide a rich description of gardeners’ perspective on race relations in their community gardens.
II. LITERATURE REVIEW

In this section I will review the literature relevant to the study. I will first provide the definition of race and race relations that I will be using in the study. Next, I will review theories of race relations in the literature, including contact theory, critical race theory, Plaut’s (2010) sociocultural framework, and social capital theory.

Next, the review of the literature on community gardens is organized as follows. First I will discuss the function of community gardens and then the social context of community gardens. Although the literature has only recently begun to explore culture, ethnicity, and race in the community garden context, I will review the few studies that examined these constructs in community gardens.

A. Defining race

Race and ethnicity are not discrete qualities that people inherently have, but rather a complex system of social processes. I am using Markus and Moya’s (2010) conceptualization of race as based on historically derived and institutionalized ideas and practices that categorize people into groups according to perceived physical characteristics like skin color, which are often believed to be innate and biological.

Ideas about race are grounded in socially constructed systems of social, historical, and philosophical processes that emerge from social interactions and institutional structures over time. The ecological framework used in the present study is consistent with this understanding.
such that it also recognizes the influence of multiple social systems over time on the contexts in which people live and relate to one another (Trickett, 1998).

Markus and Moya (2010) frame the construct as “doing race,” which involves noticing physical characteristics, assuming these characteristics imply generalities about a person, participating in the perpetuation of the social structures that preserve a racial hierarchy, and rationalizing inequalities based on these physical characteristics. A racial group is defined as a group of people categorized by the physical characteristics of race (Markus & Moya, 2010). I am also relying on Markus and Moya’s (2010) definition of race relations meaning interactions between two different racial groups influenced by the social process of “doing race.”

Markus and Moya (2010) defined ethnicity by shared culture, history, and language, which can also include multiple races of people. Helms and Talleyrand (1997) reject the notion that ethnicity should be used as a construct to capture all aspects of race and culture, and stress that race and ethnicity are separate constructs. Their argument relies on the complexity of race as a construct and that while there is no evidence that racial characteristics imply biological differences, people are indeed treated differently on the basis of their racial characteristics (Helms & Talleyrand, 1997). The idea that race is “in our blood” has long pervaded our culture and led to a variety of discriminatory policies. Problematic assumptions of race lead to the idea that conversations about race and ethnicity are uncomfortable (Markus & Moya, 2010); people appreciate differences, but also fear being called racist or privileged. People may also try to minimize differences and pretend they do not exist or matter, also known as colorblind ideology (Markus & Moya, 2010). Though I recognize that race and ethnicity have been used interchangeably in previous research studies, I am approaching this study with a focus specifically on race instead of both race and ethnicity. Race has been historically tied to
inequalities in power and privilege, whereas ethnicity is commonly used in America to celebrate cultural differences in a positive way. Previous literature on race in community gardens is also less developed, with only few studies on the topic; therefore, a study with an explicit focus on race could uniquely contribute to the literature.

For sampling purposes of the current study, I am a definition of race based on the U.S. Census Bureau’s definition of racial group categories, which includes White, Black or African American, American Indian or Alaska native, and Asian, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013). In addition, I included Hispanic/Latino, two or more races, and other as racial categories.

The reason for including “Hispanic/Latino” as a racial category is that while the U.S. Census considers “Hispanic/Latino” as an ethnicity and not racial category, Latinos/Hispanics have been racialized in the American context and often self-identify “Hispanic/Latino” as their racial category (Flores-Gonzáles, 1999; Rumbaut, 2000). The “Hispanic/Latino” category represents an extremely diverse group of people, including immigrants from a multitude of Latin American and Caribbean countries. This homogenizing categorization ignores distinct and diverse experiences of Latinos with regards to their racial, class, and political experiences in their home countries (Rumbaut, 2009). After immigrating to the United States however, Hispanics/Latinos are introduced to a new racial context, which often does not adequately represent how people define themselves, particularly for second generation Latino youth (Flores-Gonzáles, 1999). Analyses of the 2000 census demographics revealed that 43% of ethnic Hispanic/Latinos identified as “other race” (i.e. not “White,” “Black,” or “Asian”). Additionally, in a national study in 2001 with Hispanic/Latino immigrants and their children that incorporated “Hispanic/Latino” as a racial category, three fifths of the parents defined themselves as “White,”
compared to one fifth of their children; 41% percent of the children endorsed the
“Hispanic/Latino” racial category (Rumbaut, 2009). Qualitative work has also supported the
notion of “Hispanic/Latino” as a racial category, such that Latinos, particularly second-
generation immigrants, felt completely separate from the dominant White and Black racial
paradigm in the U.S. and described themselves as uniquely “in-between” the two groups (Flores-
Gonzáles, 1999). Because of the racialization of the “Hispanic/Latino” group in the U.S., and
with many in the group self-identifying “Hispanic/Latino” as their race, I added the racial
category to my sampling definition of race.

B. Race relations

In this section I will review prominent theories of race relations in the literature. First I
will review social identity theory and then contact theory. Then I will describe some limitations
of using contact theory to frame the study of race relations, namely that it should incorporate a
more structural approach that places individuals in a broader social context. I will then discuss
some additional theories of race relations, namely critical race theory, a sociocultural framework,
and social capital theory, which address the shortcomings of contact theory. I will then argue that
these theories should not be opposed but rather intersect with one another in framing our
theoretical understanding of race relations.

a. Intergroup relations

In psychology, much of the literature on race relations has been mostly
understood within social psychology through the study of intergroup relations, which is
grounded in social identity theory (Turner, 1986). Social identity theory proposes that an
individual’s self-concept is derived from membership to a categorical group. According to
Turner (1986), a social group is defined as two or more individuals who perceive themselves to
be members of the same social category. In order for a group to be well defined and stable, there must be a satisfaction of needs, attainment of goals, and validation of attitudes. Stereotypic perceptions are also inherent in social categorization in the group, and this increases the perceived intergroup similarity. While social cohesion is not always necessary for group formation and behavior, social identities are essential; individuals must be cognizant of their categorical membership within the group (Turner, 1986). Intergroup relations, or the relationships between ingroups and outgroups are defined through social identities.

b. Contact theory

The study of intergroup relations frames contact theory, which posits that under certain conditions, interpersonal contact between different racial groups is one of the most effective ways to reduce prejudice (Allport, 1954). The information exchanged between groups is assumed to be positive, which helps form positive perceptions of the groups as a whole, and reduces outgroup bias. Pettigrew (1997) maintained that increased contact between ethnically diverse groups might improve communication, which in turn may reduce and debunk stereotypes. Jackman and Crane (1986) summarized four conditions in which contact between two racial groups can foster positive perceptions: (1) The contact must occur in a non-competitive context, (2) the contact should be personal and informal, (3) any relevant authorities should approve of the contact, and (4) the setting must confer equal status of the different races. In addition, Hoffman, Espinosa Parker, Sanchez, and Wallach (2009) argued for the importance of superordinate goals and prosocial behavior in contact between different ethnic groups because simple contact without superordinate goals may in some cases increase racial tensions.
Dixon et al. (2005) coined the term “optimal contact strategy” to refer to the social psychological movement that aims to identify all possible conditions under which contact works and reduces prejudice. However they note that this strategy creates an unattainable utopian ideal:

When it is conjured into existence, “optimal contact” usually takes the form of short-lived laboratory analogues or highly localized interventions in the field. These interventions may be successful in creating small islands of integration in a sea of intolerance, but they are unrepresentative of wider processes of contact and desegregation. (p. 700)

In the quest for optimal contact, an unintended consequence has been the neglect of how participants themselves make sense of their interactions with other social groups (Dixon et al., 2005). Through the use of scales and questionnaires to measure contact theory variables, researchers reinforce their own assumptions that participants’ own conceptions of race relations are explained by contact theory. In response to these problematic issues, Dixon et al. (2005) argued for a shift in theoretical approaches to studying race relations that consider the historical, material, and ideological practices from which race is derived. Several alternative theories of race relations have been articulated to address this shortcoming of contact theory and are described in the following sections.

c. **Critical race theory**

Unlike contact theory’s acontextual focus, critical race theory locates discourses of race in historical, economic, and sociopolitical contexts that are collectively a product of social processes, similar to Markus and Moya’s (2010) definition of race (Erasmus, 2010). Contact theory focuses on understanding and knowing outgroups in a general sense, while this variation of critical race theory emphasizes a critical reflection of the self in various historical, economic, and sociopolitical contexts. However, critical race theory does not attend to the role of specific settings and community contexts in race relations.
d. **Sociocultural framework of race relations**

Plaut (2010) proposed a framework to address racial and ethnic differences and disparities. This framework was developed in response to the shortcomings of the intergroup relations paradigm, which assumes race is an abstraction that resides in the mind of individuals, and pays little attention to how race is influenced by the sociocultural contexts in which these individuals navigate. Racial disparities occur across various domains, including wealth, employment, health, housing, and education. The focus of Plaut’s (2010) proposed sociocultural framework was to address these disparities by highlighting the structural realities of racial differences. An individualistic perspective holds a “bad apple” view of racism, which places the individual at fault; people become the racists, which makes it increasingly difficult to interpret racism at a systematic level. Plaut (2010) argued that a theory of race relations must be able to address why and how social structures create racial differences, and how they inform individual understandings of race. This sociocultural perspective reflects a structural understanding of the experiences of various racial groups.

e. **Social Capital Theory**

An additional way of conceptualizing race relations is through the perspective of social capital theory. With its roots in sociology, the concept of social capital refers to features of a social group like networks, norms, and trust that facilitate cooperation for mutual benefit. Social norms of reciprocity and trust between two groups of people are traditional forms of social capital, which are usually created through social networks (Putnam, 1995). Glover (2004) likens social capital to an investment, similar to financial capital, such that individuals access resources through social relationships, through both weak and strong social ties, that they
otherwise would not have access to. The production of social capital is only maintained through invested social networks (Glover, 2004).

In her dissertation, Fisher (2011) provided an illustration of theoretically pushing the boundaries of intergroup relations by extending it to a different paradigm of social capital theory. Fisher (2011) based her discussion of interracial relations in contact theory, and argued that social capital is the antecedent to intergroup contact, such that there must be a creation of social capital for meaningful positive contact to occur. There are two types of social capital: bonding and bridging. Bonding social capital refers to creating and maintaining strong ties within a homogenous group. Because bonding social capital increases relationships with members of peoples’ own ingroups, people are unlikely to come into contact with diverse others, or members of outgroups. Bridging social capital implies opportunities to create stronger social networks between different racial groups. Though bridging social capital refers to initially weaker social ties, it also implies that because people have more social contact with members of their outgroups, they are more likely to develop positive trusting relationships with diverse others. Fisher (2011) argued for the inclusion of social capital in the study of intergroup relations, such that if bridging social capital can occur in diverse communities, individuals would strengthen their social ties with racially diverse others, which could therefore improve interracial attitudes and reduce prejudice.

Although the previously discussed theories of race relations can be independently informative, no single theory of race relations captures the complexity of community gardeners’ lived experiences. While the current study focuses on participants’ understanding of race relations in community gardens, I argue that contact theory, critical race theory, Plaut’s (2010)
sociocultural framework, and social capital theory may potentially intersect in theoretically explaining gardeners’ collective narrative.

C. Community gardens

In this section I will describe the community garden literature. The history of race relations in a community is important in assessing how relationships are formed and maintained in community gardens, because the context from which the gardens emerge frames what happens within them. Therefore, in the following review of the community garden literature, history will be discussed first. Then I will discuss the function and social context of community gardens. Lastly, I will review the emerging literature on culture, ethnicity, and race in community gardens.

a. History

Community gardens are plots of land typically in an urban setting that are grassroots, community-based efforts to grow food. Community gardens have been historically created in response to a crisis. The earliest community gardens emerged in response to poverty during the economic crisis of 1893 in Detroit. The aim of the garden program was both poverty relief and promotion of independence, a model that was then adapted to other major large cities in America (Kurtz, 2001). During both World Wars, community gardens were used to increase the supply of food for Americans, and by World War II, the “victory garden” campaign was established. By 1944, 18 to 20 million families were supplying 40% of America’s total vegetable supply (Okvat & Zautra, 2011). Victory gardens sprung up in response to economic hardships and food shortages as a way for communities to independently develop their own source of food. The victory garden model now serves as the foundation of traditionally organized community gardens in urban areas today.
The most common distinction in defining community gardens is between allotment and traditional community gardens (Firth et al., 2011). In allotment gardens, membership fees are required and the garden member is assigned an individual plot within the overall garden space. Social networking and collaboration is not necessary in allotment gardens because the individual plot is not owned and shared by several people. For the purposes of this study, I use the term community garden to refer to traditionally organized community gardens, in which the members collectively decide on the purpose of the garden, design, and the usage of the space. These decisions are usually contingent on garden members’ worldviews, culture, and community needs. The community takes ownership of the community garden, which is often viewed as a space that inspires shared action.

b. **Function of community gardens**

The literature on community gardens is relatively new and a majority of the early research focused generally on what community gardens do for people and why they are created. Draper and Freedman (2010) completed one of the first reviews of the early literature on community gardens from 1999-2010. The thematic analysis of 55 articles related to the purposes, benefits, and motivations of community gardening. Nearly half of the articles reported that community gardens had health benefits, such as physical activity, diet, and improved mental health. Community gardens also served to provide people with more access to food and a greater sense of food security. Several studies tied community gardens to an increase in economic development and the use and preservation of open space (e.g. many community gardens were created from previously vacant lots). Some studies reported community gardens were a way for communities to beautify their neighborhoods and provide better spaces for leisure and outdoor recreation.
Above all, a central theme that emerged from the review was the importance of the social context that was created and maintained in community gardens (Draper & Freedman, 2010). Community gardens served to improve social interactions and cultivated relationships between different groups of people in the garden. The following discussion elaborates on those articles relating to the social context of community gardens from Draper and Freedman’s (2010) review of the literature.

c. Social context of community gardens

Community gardens bring people together, which is seen as the most important aspect of the social context. Glover (2003) noted that community gardens strengthen social networks in a community considerably more than their urban roles normally allow. Community gardens may also serve to strengthen weak social ties between different groups of people, particularly for those who are marginalized. By facilitating improved social networks in lower income and ethnic minority neighborhoods, gardens play a role in developing communities (Malakoff, 1995). In an analysis of gardening programs in California, Twiss et al. (2003) argued that the improvement of social networks within communities resulted in knowledge and skill enhancement, as well as behavioral and systems change. Gardening provided opportunities for members to develop leadership, organizing, cultural competency, planning, implementation, and evaluation skills. Community gardens are also apolitical settings in the community that embrace diversity of worldviews. King (2008) reported that gardens contribute to resilience within a diverse community because they offer spaces for communication, deliberate co-learning, relationship building, inclusiveness, and resource sharing, especially with diverse garden members. Overall, the gardeners viewed the setting as a way to successfully bring different
groups of people together who would not normally socialize, which has important implications for the study of interracial relations in community gardens.

Most of the research on the social context of community gardens is framed with social capital theory, because the setting is conducive to cooperation, bridging between different groups, and improving trust (Alaimo, Reischl, & Allen, 2010; Firth et al., 2011; Glover, Parry, & Shinew, 2005). Social interactions in community gardens contribute to both bonding and bridging social capital. Glover (2004) argued that (1) a focus on the social context of a community garden is absolutely necessary when studying issues related to bonding and bridging social capital, and (2) social context is best captured through interpretive methods that focus on meanings that people assign to their experiences and how they understand phenomena in their own lives. Therefore, a qualitative narrative study was carried out to understand the experience of community gardeners and how they interpreted their social interactions in the community garden. Glover (2004) collected stories related to the development of a community garden in the Midwest that was developed to combat urban decline and gang violence in the community. Gardeners reported that the setting fostered the creation of new social networks that then led to further socializing outside of the already established social networks. The community garden was both a consequence and source of social capital within the community.

d. Culture, ethnicity, and race in community gardens

Most of the literature on community gardens refers to the strengthening of social networks and social capital, with few articles connecting this theme to racially or ethnically diverse community gardeners, let alone race relations (Glover, 2003; King, 2008; Malakoff, 1995). However, social capital theory has been presented as a useful alternative to contact theory in understanding race relations in community gardens. Fisher (2011) argued that bridging social
capital is inherently related to forming relationships with racially diverse others, because bridging social capital refers to strengthening weak social ties with different groups of people. Firth et al. (2011) sought to explore how gardeners attribute meaning to their community gardens in the UK, with a social capital framework. Both gardens created opportunities of bridging social capital between racial groups, as shown in this quote from a gardener in the study:

A few years ago there were barriers between the Asian and Black communities, but these have been broken down as people have joined in our food-related activities. (p. 565)

Bridging social capital was possible with the sharing cultural practices in growing and cooking food from the gardens (Firth et al., 2011).

In a similar study, Kurtz (2001) investigated three Minneapolis urban vacant lot community gardens, with a particular focus on defining different types of community gardens. In the communal garden, a participant reported that the garden connected people from different cultures and also of different classes, along with beautifying the neighborhood (Kurtz, 2001). Saldivar-Tanaka and Krasny (2004) tracked the development of several urban Latino community gardens in New York City. One gardener commented on how the gardens helped people learn about their neighborhood community, by bringing together and learning from people from different cultures. As a function of bridging social capital, these community gardeners seem to recognize their gardens as spaces that allow them to form meaningful relationships with people of different ethnicities and races.

In a more in depth analysis of race in community gardens, Dunford (2009) completed a ten year long ethnography of vacant lot community gardens in the North Lawndale community in Chicago. Community gardens were framed as empowerment projects, capable of bringing together different groups of people with a clear diversity of worldviews, histories, and
motivations for gardening. In Dunford’s (2009) discussion about race, Blacks and Whites involved in the North Lawndale community gardens valued both gardening and urban Black history quite differently. The most prevalent discourse was from the staff and non-local White individuals assuming the motivation for the gardeners, who were mostly Black, stemmed from “gardening like they used to in the South.” Within this assumption from the staff is that the gardeners were good at gardening and enjoyed the activity, when in fact some of them did not (Dunford, 2009). These gardeners associated gardening with a history of necessity that symbolized burden rather than opportunity. Buying food at the store was a way of “getting ahead in life” because it implied more financial security. Dunford (2009) noted that for urban Blacks in North Lawndale, gardening represented practical and function purposes, whereas for urban whites, gardening was more of a luxury tied to aesthetic, ideological and social relationships. Dunford’s (2009) ethnography demonstrated the importance of approaching the study of community gardens with an ecological perspective because of the complex histories of race relations. The ecological principle of succession, which refers to the historical forces that shape persons, settings, and events over time (Trickett et al., 1985), is reflected in how the Black gardeners conceptualized gardening very differently than the White gardeners, and thus had different motivations for gardening in the city.

In light of these studies that concern issues of culture, ethnicity, and race, only one researcher investigated the community garden context with an explicit research aim of studying race relations in the community garden. Shinew et al. (2004) investigated whether more interracial contact in community gardens improved interracial relations between gardeners in a St. Louis community garden. The study was grounded with contact theory and argued that community gardens are ideal contexts for which to study interracial contact. The goal of the
study was to examine whether gardeners perceived their community garden as a setting that “bridges” or brings together Black and White residents in their neighborhood. Based on participants’ responses to the question, “Out of 100%, what percentage of people in your garden are Black/White?” the researchers created a dichotomous interracial contact variable in which “20% or less” was coded as low interracial contact and “20% or more” was coded as high interracial contact, for the opposite race of the participant. For example, if a Black participant reported that their garden had about 15% White people, they would fall under the low interracial contact group. The results showed that while there was some level of interracial contact in the community garden, “low contact” participants did not differ from “high contact” participants on a measure of interracial socializing in the garden, regardless of race.

Shinew et al. (2004) argued that community gardens are effective in promoting interracial contact, however they state in their discussion that their dichotomous measure of interracial contact was not a good indicator of the construct. The researchers did not implement multiple measures of interracial contact, nor did they assess how long participants had been involved in the garden. Additionally, interracial contact was the only race relations measure in the study, which did not imply perceptions or attitudes about an interracial environment, nor take into account contextual factors. However, participants did report that their community garden brought different racial groups together (Shinew, et al., 2004).

Ultimately, Shinew et al. (2004) provided preliminary evidence for the use of the community garden context in studying interracial relations, however additional research is needed to clarify the relationships among the racially diverse community gardeners. The current study address the shortcomings of Shinew et al. (2004) by focusing on community gardeners’ own perspectives on race relations, and is guided by a framework that allows for a more complex
understanding of race and race relations, not limited to percent of racial groups in community gardens.
III. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The ecological paradigm is the guiding framework for the study, and refers to the interdependence of people and the various social, physical, and cultural contexts in which they live (Trickett, 1998). The ecological framework reflects my contextually based understanding of race relations and the social context in general in community gardens, and subsequently my approach to developing the interview guide.

Within community psychology, diversity is not limited to categorical and population specific ways of thinking of race and gender, nor is it restricted to the individual level, but is located in the heart of a multilevel systematic framework, to settings and contexts as well (Trickett, 1996). More specifically, I am drawing from the Trickett, Kelly, and Vincent (1985) principles of the ecological paradigm: cycling of resources, adaptation, interdependence, and succession.

From an ecological perspective, persons can be seen as resources because of the social networks that are created in the community garden context. The settings of the gardens themselves can also be viewed as resources, both physically by providing food and socially as space in which the social networks are created and maintained. Gardening events are also resources that maintain social networks while also making use of the setting as a resource for the event. Collectively these resources are interdependent and embedded in the history of each community garden and surrounding community.

The principle of succession is particularly important because the historical context in which community gardens are created shapes the function of the space and possibly those who...
garden in it. Gardeners’ behaviors reflect the interdependence of their own values and the cultural, community, and garden specific factors, at any particular moment in time. Gardeners’ values may be influenced by their racial identity, which in turn may influence how they think about race relations in their garden. Current cultural norms in the larger society may also shape their views of race relations. Social relationships formed in community gardens may change how the gardeners think about their social relations outside of that context, particularly because those involved in community gardens most likely live in the same neighborhood.

The ecological principle of adaptation is also reflected in the community gardening setting. Participating in the garden can be adaptive for the individual, dealing with an issue that is addressed by the community garden, such as food insecurity. The garden as a whole can be an adaptation to the community, which may not have many green spaces. Ultimately, community gardens are collectively formed as a way to cope and adapt to various issues in the community, which are certainly influenced by the history of race relations in the community.

Understanding the social context of community gardens from an ecological perspective is useful in framing how relationships are created and maintained in the setting. An ecological approach to the study of race relations in community gardens accounts for more than individual and interpersonal aspects of how interracial relationships develop, by recognizing the influence of historical factors and motivations (succession), structural and institutional social processes (interdependence), and ultimately how the cycling of all these factors may influence how an interracial relationship develops in a community garden (cycling of resources).
IV. CURRENT STUDY

Preliminary research on community gardens has highlighted the importance of the social context of the setting (Draper & Freedman, 2010). More specifically, researchers posit that diverse community gardens bring different cultural and racial groups of people together (Dunford, 2004; Firth et al., 2011; Kurtz, 2001; Saldivar-Tanaka & Krasny, 2004). However, only one study specifically focused on race relations in community gardens, and used contact theory to theoretically frame the study (Shinew et al., 2004). Contact theory should not be used as a sole framework in the study of race relations because it does not account for the influence of contextual factors (Dixon et al., 2005; Erasmus, 2010; Hewstone & Swart, 2011). In addition, the experiences of the gardeners may not be truly reflective of contact theory or other theories of race relations. The literature lacks a grounded understanding of how gardeners understand race relations in their diverse community gardens.

The ecological paradigm highlights the interdependence of social settings, cultural and societal norms, individual level values, and history (Trickett et al., 1985). Researchers have identified the need to approach the study of race relations to consider the historical and social processes and that emerge from social interactions and institutional structures over time (Dixon et al., 2005; Erasmus, 2010; Plaut, 2010). An ecologically framed investigation of race relations can therefore contribute to the literature. The social context of diverse community gardens is best captured through qualitative methods that focus on gardeners’ lived experiences and perceptions (Glover, 2004). As such, the present study uses grounded theory methodologies to provide a rich description of gardeners’ understandings of race relations. The following research question will
be investigated with the guiding framework of the ecological paradigm: How do gardeners understand race relations within the context of racially diverse community gardens?
V. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHOD

Grounded theory was used as the qualitative methodology for the study, however grounded theory techniques were used to develop a rich description of a social process and not a theory. This methodology allows for themes to emerge from the data (Strauss & Corbin 1998). Consistent with the interpretive tradition, the researcher cannot completely bracket him or herself out and produce results fully grounded in the data. Therefore it is important to explain my own position with respect to this phenomenon, since it influences all aspects of the research process. My framework is the ecological paradigm, which defines the relationship between the researcher and participants partially as the source of construction of the phenomena’s meaning (Trickett et al., 1985). My work is also informed by familiarity with prior literature on race relations in community gardens. Additionally, I define myself as a multi-ethnic Latina with both Cuban and Puerto Rican heritage. I also consider myself a community gardener, having experience in community garden settings for four years. I share the belief that community gardens serve as a space to improve the relationships between different social groups because I have experienced it first hand and have seen it happen with other gardeners. My views on community gardening are overwhelmingly positive, as I have never experienced any problems in the setting. Additionally I come from a middle class background in a suburban setting, which may shape how I approach community gardening differently than if I had come from an urban setting.

My position may have impacted how participants responded to my questions and how the interview conversation was shaped. I therefore made a conscious effort throughout the data
collection process to understand the potential negative impacts of community gardening, since I already personally endorsed the positives. As a community psychologist, I continually negotiated my multiple roles, with the aim of being flexible and open to the redefinition and ripple effects of the research.

A. **Sampling and recruitment**

The individual community gardeners were the unit of analysis and the community gardens in the Chicago metropolitan area were the settings. Participants were sampled using purposeful theoretical snowball sampling, in which I aimed for a sample of racially diverse community gardens first to then sample participants from. Strauss and Corbin (1998) refer to theoretical sampling in grounded theory work, which involves sampling individuals purposefully to generate codes and to develop a broader understanding of participants’ experiences.

The community gardens had to be racially diverse, in the Chicago metropolitan area, not limited by neighborhood income, active in the summer 2013 growing season, and communally organized (no pure allotment gardens). I defined racially diverse gardens as having at least 2 racial groups with each group being at least approximately 30%, not limited by specific kind of racial composition. For sampling purposes, I used a modified version the U.S. Census Bureau’s definition of racial group categories: White, Black or African American, American Indian or Alaska native, Asian, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, Hispanic/Latino, Two or more races, and Other (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013). Participants had to be at least 18 years old, living in the Chicago metropolitan area, self-identified community gardeners, actively involved in a racially diverse community garden during the gardening season of 2013, and able to speak English. Gardens with a mix of communal and allotment style organization were eligible for the study, and gardeners had to be active in communal style gardening.
Recruitment for this study involved several stages. First, racially diverse community gardens were identified with the help of a community informant. This informant was involved in a community garden organization that provides long-term protection from potential development for community gardens throughout the Chicago region. This organization built strong relationships with many community gardens, as they helped develop local partnerships, resources, and opportunities for community gardens. Additionally, during the summer prior to data collection I worked with the organization on their own community garden project throughout Chicago, and was therefore able to establish relationships and trust with the organization and several community garden members throughout the city.

I approached the community informant with my inclusion criteria for community gardens and together we identified several potential sampling sites based on the key informant’s familiarity with the gardens and both of our working knowledge of the gardens in Chicago. Seven community gardens were selected for recruiting participants. The community informant only provided contact information for the gardens, and did not contact any potential participants. This contact information included the name of the garden, location, and phone number and/or email of the head gardener. All community garden contact information was publicly available through the community organizations’ website.

I used this contact information to recruit participants through emails and phone calls. All community gardeners that were contacted for the study were recruited. The research investigator and participants mutually agreed on a time and place in which one on one interviews would take place. The interview was semi structured using the guide in appendix A. During the interview, every participant confirmed that his or her community garden was racially diverse, based on the sampling criteria. Each interview took a maximum of an hour and half. After the interview was
completed, participants were thanked for their participation in the study and compensated with $15. Additionally, I asked the gardeners if they knew of any other garden members in their community garden that would be interested in participating in the study. Every referral was recruited using the same process outlined above.

B. **Description of the sample**

There were a total of eleven participants in the study from six different community gardens. The community gardens that participants were involved in were geographically dispersed throughout the city of Chicago. Purposefully sampling gardens across the city was done to better represent race relations in gardens across the city, not limited to a particular type of neighborhood racial context. Each community garden was located in a different neighborhood. Of the six neighborhoods in which the gardens were located, three were primarily Black in terms of racial composition. One neighborhood was primarily Black and Hispanic/Latino and another neighborhood was primarily Hispanic/Latino with a growing White population. The last neighborhood was considered racially diverse (Yonek & Hasnain-Wynia, 2011). All of the neighborhoods were either middle or lower class, with the highest neighborhood median income of roughly $39,000 and the lowest median income of roughly $24,000 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013). The gardens themselves were not always representative of the neighborhood in terms of racial composition, as three gardens were situated in the three racially homogenous, primarily Black, neighborhoods.

There was a maximum of three participants sampled from each garden, and in two community gardens only one participant was sampled. The sample of participants was racially heterogeneous, with five Black participants, five White participants, and one Latino (i.e. not Black or White). The sample comprised of eight females and three males. Participants also
varied in their age, from young adults to older adults. *Table 1* lists pseudonyms of participants and their respective community gardens. The settings of the interviews also ranged widely from the actual community garden itself to the participants’ own home to public coffee shops. If the setting of the interview was in the community garden, I also participated in gardening activities either before or after the interview.
TABLE I
DESCRIPTIVE CHARACTERISTICS OF INTERVIEWEES AND GARDENS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Race of Participant</th>
<th>Community Garden Pseudonym</th>
<th>Racial Composition of Neighborhooda</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pam</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Black/African-American</td>
<td>Rainbow Garden</td>
<td>Primarily Black</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rita</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Hispanic/Latino</td>
<td>Four Square Garden</td>
<td>Black and Hispanic mixed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Debbie</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Black/African-American</td>
<td>Four Square Garden</td>
<td>Black and Hispanic mixed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angie</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Four Square Garden</td>
<td>Black and Hispanic mixed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Penny</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Sunshine Garden</td>
<td>White and Hispanic mixed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sally</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Sunshine Garden</td>
<td>White and Hispanic mixed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sandra</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Black/African-American</td>
<td>Market St Garden</td>
<td>Primarily Black</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alexa</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Black/African-American</td>
<td>Market St Garden</td>
<td>Primarily Black</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seth</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Black/African-American</td>
<td>Conserve Garden</td>
<td>Primarily Black</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jim</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Conserve Garden</td>
<td>Primarily Black</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coby</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Green Area Garden</td>
<td>Racially Diverse</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: All community gardens were racially diverse, which was defined as having at least 2 racial groups with each group being at least approximately 30%, not limited by specific kind of racial composition. Racial group categories included: White, Black or African American, American Indian or Alaska native, Asian, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, Hispanic/Latino, Two or more races, and Other (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013).

aCategories for racial composition from the neighborhood were simplified from census data (Yonek & Hasnain-Wynia, 2011).
C. **Data Collection Instruments**

Grounded theory methods of data collection were used for the study, with interviews taking precedence in the type of data collected. Open-ended questions in interview data reflect the exploratory and descriptive nature of this study, and do not limit participants’ responses to a scale of measurement. I developed codes and categories from the data and engaged in the constant comparative method of analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Interviews were transcribed and coded as data were collected, which informed the ongoing development of interview guides throughout the process as analysis continued. This design allows for flexibility such that the development of the interviews and collection of data was a fluid process. The timing of the data collection and analysis was purposeful such that all data were collected during the growing and harvesting season, Fall of 2013, because summer is the time that garden members interact with one another the most.

a. **Interviews**

Before each interview began, participants were informed of the purpose of the study as well as their rights to withdraw from the study or skip any interview questions. Participants were then given consent documentation in accordance with the IRB protocol. The semi-structured interview guide brief and consisted of open-ended questions and orienting probes. I attempted to make the interview flow like a natural conversation, thus not all questions on the interview guide were asked, nor in the same order for each participant. Variations between interviews were expected, but each interview included elaborations on key concepts outlined in the guide.

The interview questions were framed by the ecological principles of the Trickett et al. (1985). The principle of **succession** guided questions about gardeners’ personal history and
motivation for getting involved in their garden, as well as the history of the community garden in general. The principle of adaptation was reflected in questions pertaining to how the community garden functions within the neighborhood and what purpose does it serve for both the participants and the greater community. The principles of Cycling of resources and interdependence led to the development of questions about the different people in the garden and how they related with one another. These principles also guided questions about what a typical day in the garden setting is like and events that happen in the garden. The interviews ended with questions about race and race relations, which were guided by a combination of all the principles, which asked about participants’ own understandings of race and race relations, then neighborhood level influences on those understandings, and finally probes regarding how these understandings may have changed over time (see Appendix A for the full interview guide).

The initial interview guide was validated through a pilot interview with a Latina community gardener involved at the University of Illinois at Chicago. The community gardening group that this individual was involved in was racially diverse. The garden this group has created focuses on heritage and cultural practices of gardening. The purpose of this pilot was to clarify and refine the questions in the interview guide.

b. **Participant observations and field notes**

Participant observations and field notes were used to develop a rich descriptive understanding of the community garden social contexts. Trickett et al. (1985) posits that in order to understand an ecological system, the researcher must be an active participant in it. Participant observations also served to gain trust and access to the community gardens’ social networks, partially because of my own role as an experienced community gardener. The participant observation and field notes took place in the community gardens, usually before or after the
interview, and allowed me to familiarize myself with the experience of a typical workday in the garden. The amount of time that contextual data were gathered varied between community gardens, since they all worked on different schedules with different tasks. I participated in several gardens’ activities (i.e. weeding, watering, harvesting) to gather data on a wide range of experiences, however I was unable to participate in all gardens. The contextual information gained from the fieldwork allowed for a more nuanced understanding of the data gathered in the interviews, particularly by gaining a better understanding of the environment in which these community gardeners interact with one another.

D. **Data analysis**

Data from the interviews were analyzed as they were collected, as described by Charmaz (2006). I used qualitative data software, ATLAS.ti to for analyzing and organizing the data. First, I read each interview transcript several times to understand the content. Line by line coding was used to identify the meaning of what was said throughout the interview and to develop codes. These meaningful codes were reflective of the concepts, or description of the phenomena. The codes were then organized into broader conceptual categories. Each broad category included a range of experiences related to that category (with properties and dimensions), and for more complex categories, sub categories were used. After transcribing and coding the first several interviews, I created a codebook to guide the coding and analysis process for the remaining interviews, which was revised throughout data collection to reflect new information and additional clarification of codes that occurred.

Miles and Huberman (1994) refer to the maximum variation strategy of sampling, which involves purposefully sampling outlier or negative cases to understand a full range of participant experiences. I applied this method in developing interview questions that informed codes and
categories. For example, for the first half of the interviews participants mostly discussed positive experiences in their community gardens. Therefore for the second half of the interviews, I added questions to the guide to probe for negative race related experiences. Theoretical saturation of the data refers to the point at which existing interview data adequately captures the range of experiences within each category. Interviews stopped once saturation was reached.

To ensure the quality of the analysis, an indicator of inter-rater reliability (Kappa coefficient) was calculated (Vierra & Garrett, 2005). The principal investigator and a graduate student coded two randomly selected interviews. Prior to coding for reliability, both coders discussed the codebook and several examples of how codes were applied to ideas in the text. This initial discussion led to slightly modifying the codebook for clarity. Kappa scores were computed after coding and ranged from 0 to 0.57. In general, because participants spoke about a wide range of topics, the codebook was extensive with many of the codes being used infrequently. This led to a very low instances of using the same code across multiple quotations for both raters. Therefore, kappa was no longer a meaningful calculation because the calculations are sensitive to prevalence (Vierra & Garrett, 2005). Both coders subsequently engaged in several discussions about qualitatively refining the codebook rather than recalculating kappa. Both raters agreed to condense the coding guide because of the low frequency of coding, such that several of the sub-codes were only used in one quotation by either rater. This led to the deletion of some codes altogether or refinement of the parent codes. For example, *Neighborhood level racial dynamics – SES differences* was used in only two quotations between both interviews. After both coders reconvened to discuss coding styles, they mutually agreed to delete the code and further clarify the *gentrification* code. After reconciling coding strategies, the
codebook was further refined to clarify code labels and definitions (see Appendix B for the full codebook).

In addition, I followed up with a subset of participants for member checking to confirm or deny my impressions of what emerged from the data, offer feedback and possible improvements, and to ultimately ensure participants’ voices and experiences were appropriately heard and understood. Two participants out of the total sample of 11 were randomly chosen and contacted to validate the results. They were both female; one of the participants was White and the other was Black. I agreed to meet the White participant at her respective community garden and the Black participant at a community gardening event that was hosted by a gardening organization, to have a general discussion about the results. Both women felt the results accurately reflected their own experiences as well as to other members in their community garden. When I spoke with the White gardener, another garden member arrived to the garden and was interested in the results. He confirmed that the results accurately described his experiences in their community garden, and greatly appreciated the discussion. All participants were given a truncated version of the results on an information sheet after data analysis was complete and agreed with the results described below.
VI. RESULTS

The ecological framework guiding the study focuses on a person in context perspective, which provided a rich description of how gardeners interacted with one another in their community gardens. Prior to presenting the main findings, I will describe the community gardens and the experience of being a gardener, from initial involvement in the setting, to perceptions of the garden group, and finally the activities that took place in the gardens. Then I will present the main findings of the current study pertaining race relations in community gardens.

A. Description of community gardening experience

a. Community gardens

In order to understand how participants conceptualize race relations in their community gardens, it is critical to describe the setting in which these relationships are created. Many participants understood their community gardens as a social rather than food related endeavor. Gardens were seen as places of belonging where people felt welcomed and eventually like they were part of a family with the other gardeners; this was facilitated through the common goal of growing food. Participants felt that community gardens were (or should be) open access spaces for everyone in the community, and were against backyard or allotment style gardens. Gardens were also viewed as commodities for the neighborhood where everyone was considered a stakeholder, and individuals involved in the garden had equal responsibility in the space. People in the neighborhood respected the community garden and “protected” the space by keeping “eyes on the garden,” meaning if any suspicious person was in the garden, the neighbors would notice and essentially police the space. As such, community gardens were often
understood as a “safe space” in the community, with several participants noting that since the
development of the garden, they had observed less drug traffic and gang related activities on
their block.

The community gardens had both positive and negative relationships with their
surrounding neighborhoods. Community gardens that were viewed as positive forces in the
neighborhood made use of vacant lots, which beautified the community as well as provided fresh
produce to residents. While community gardens were generally viewed as positive, there were
several key issues that created conflict between the garden group and the neighborhood. Every
participant in the study reported vandalism and/or theft activities as a problem in their
community garden. Some participants viewed this as a serious issue while others resolved to
plant more vegetables to account for the theft in the upcoming season. Another problem that
several gardeners reported was neighborhood residents disrespecting the community garden by
“hanging out” in the space, which usually implied activities such as substance use, vandalism, or
loitering. Several participants resolved this conflict by trying to educate the people who were
considered the sources of the problem by teaching them the value of the space, eating healthy,
and ultimately to respect the garden.

Generally, community gardens were perceived as valuable neighborhood assets, and from
an ecological perspective, could be interpreted as adaptive resources for both the neighborhood
and gardeners themselves. Participants’ positivity about their community garden provides a
“fertile ground” for interracial relationships to develop.

b. Involvement

Understanding how participants first get involved with their garden group is
particularly important considering the ecological principle of succession (Trickett et al., 1985),
such that the historical context of participants’ initial connection with the current gardeners may shape how their relationships develop over time. Participants reported getting involved in their gardens primarily through social network connections, which were created and maintained through organizations related to gardening in the city of Chicago. These organizations have access to resources like grant money, land protection, or volunteers for physical labor. Every participant in the study mentioned his or her familiarity with at least one gardening related organization. It is possible that participants mentioned these community garden organizations because they had knowledge of my position with a prominent organization, and thus felt more comfortable discussing their social network connections.

Another way in which participants got involved in their community garden was finding the garden in their neighborhood at random and initiating conversation with the gardeners working in the space. Other participants were initially involved with a local neighborhood organization (e.g. high school, affordable housing non-profit) which then developed or partnered with a community garden. Lastly, some participants actively sought out a gardening space in the general Chicago area by contacting garden leaders in their community for information about how to get involved. Each participant got involved in his or her garden in a slightly different way.

One gardener, Sally, described getting involved in a community garden as having a “low barrier to entry” because there was no expectation from senior gardeners that new people had to have previous gardening knowledge or skill. However there were still several barriers to getting involved such as language barriers and membership fees. In Sunshine Garden, which was in a Latino and White mixed neighborhood, many Latino families felt deterred from the space if emails or flyers were not available in both English and Spanish. In Green Area Garden, Coby did not want to increase the membership fee, explaining that, “I’d hate to see people have to make a
choice between having a garden and you know, making payments. It doesn’t seem like a lot in the overall scheme of things, 75 bucks, but for some people 75 bucks is 75 bucks.” Another more physical barrier to involvement was when the space had a closed and locked gate, to which Angie said, “I think because there are limited hours that the garden is open, otherwise it’s locked frequently – maybe it sends a message to people that this is private somehow?” However, several other gardeners felt that while their community garden was gated and locked, it was still considered “open access” to the community because when people were in the space, the gate would be physically open. Collectively, community gardeners’ initial involvement with their community garden acquaints them to the garden group and introduces participants in social context of the setting.

c. Garden group

Once participants were involved in community gardens, they joined a core gardening group, comprised of two to ten people, who were continually involved in maintaining the space. Participants described their garden group as broadly diverse and coming from different places in life (e.g. race, culture, nationality, possibly neighborhood, age, and careers). There were different racial/ethnic groups represented in each community garden, as well as age groups. Jim described his group, saying, “It’s like multi ethnic, multi cultural, multi gendered, it’s yeah, a lot more integrated than this neighborhood for example. I guess you could pretty much box out an area because this neighborhood is pretty homogenous with the rest of the areas around it.” Coby spoke of his garden, Green Area Garden, as “a very social thing,” and how it “brings together old timers” in the neighborhood that have historically been economically priced out of the area. For most participants, the diversity represented in the garden made it a unique space in the community, particularly for the gardens that were situated in racially homogenous
neighborhoods. Besides describing the garden group as diverse, two other main types of descriptors seemed to characterize the group as a whole: “family” and “housing status.”

**Family** was the descriptor almost every participant used for their garden group because of the strong bonds they formed with one another through the common goal of growing food. These **family bonds** are discussed more in depth later in the results as a central theme. While a majority of participants described their group as very much involved and integrated with the surrounding neighborhood, participants from Four Square Garden defined themselves and their “family” as very separate from the neighborhood. Debbie described it as, “on the outside it’s the community, but on the inside it’s family,” which seemed to imply a sense of disconnection with the surrounding community.

**Housing status** was the second important descriptor of people in the garden groups. All participants described their garden group as mixed in terms of housing status such that both renters and homeowners were involved in the community gardens.

Renters were usually described negatively as people who were at a higher income level than the homeowners, and not “rooted” in the community, which implied having no commitment to community issues. Renters were generally associated with White, middle to upper class, young adult individuals, and in some cases as displacing the lower income people of color in the neighborhood, which will be discussed at length in the later section under the theme of **Gentrification**. In Sunshine Garden, the garden group had changed over time to be more inclusive of homeowners, as both participants from the garden felt like homeowners were previously excluded. Penny described the previous garden group, which consisted of primarily renters in the neighborhood:

I think that the fact that they were just this homogenous group that didn’t interact a lot with the neighborhood and didn’t include the neighborhood in the garden, it made the
garden unsustainable because they were people that moved in and out of the neighborhood and whereas in a community garden you want to include the people who have roots in the neighborhood in the garden so that they can care for the garden in the long term, not just garden season and go.

Conversely, Sally spoke from the renters’ perspective and claimed that because she may not live in the neighborhood for another 25 years she would not be invested in long-term community priorities like health concerns.

In contrast to renters, homeowners were viewed much more positively. Participants defined homeowners as having lived in the neighborhood for at least several years and were therefore “rooted” in the community. Participants also explained how over time, homeowners learned to respect and protect the community garden in their neighborhood. Alexa described the homeowners in her neighborhood:

They’re stakeholders. They all watch. I don’t have an issue where anybody jumps the fence and vandalizes the garden or anything like that. Everybody has a respect for it because I have senior citizens, people that are home most of the time – if you dare jump that fence and try to vandalize the garden, it’s gonna be somebody that sees you and they’re gonna tell.

Ultimately, the garden groups in community gardens were viewed as diverse, social, and familial. In addition, housing status was important in terms of the sustainability of maintaining the garden.

d. **Garden organization and activities**

From an ecological perspective (Trickett et al., 1985), the community garden necessitates the interdependence of its gardeners for it to thrive, particularly in the case of communally organized gardens. Participants organized around core garden activities, which often served as the catalysts for interracial relationships to develop within the garden group.

There was variation in the organizational structure of the garden groups, ranging from an extremely hierarchical structure (with an executive director, garden leader, and maintenance
team), to garden groups that disliked rules and hierarchies and worked together organically and in an unplanned way. Common activities that gardeners reported interacting around included garden tasks (weeding, planting, composting, moving piles of dirt, etc.), planning (organizing garden events like watering days, fundraising events, or parties), outreach (working towards getting the surrounding community more involved in the garden), and celebration (potlucks, end of season harvests, parties). When asked about conflicts within the garden group, almost all participants reported that disagreements about garden activities like planting or garden layout were resolved by holding meetings with other gardeners and making collective decisions. Participants never regarded these disagreements as important or damaging to their relationships with one another because they were almost always collectively resolved. Generally, garden activities often necessitated that garden members work together, which in many cases led to the development of interracial relationships.

Overall, describing the gardening experience contextualizes the social process of race relations in racially diverse community gardens. From an ecological perspective, it is important to understand the setting in which gardeners’ social experiences take place, as well as the various influences and motivations for participants’ involvement in community gardens. Although the results still serve as a description of a social process, it is necessary to set the stage in order to understand the actors at play: who they are, where they come from, why they got involved, what they think of each other, and what they do.

B. **Main findings on race relations**

The current study used grounded theory techniques to develop a rich description of how gardeners in racially diverse community gardeners experience and understand the social process of race relations in the garden context. The most prominent narrative that emerged in the study
was how participants’ understandings of the construct of race and racial groups changed over time since being involved in the garden. This largely linear social process was individualistic while influenced by garden group members, the community garden, and finally the neighborhood (see Figure 1). The following themes emerged, and characterize the stages of this process: “Seeing race,” Recognizing difference at first, Teaching each other and learning from one another, Family bonds, “We all look green,” and Gentrification.
Figure 1. Central description of the social process of race relations in racially diverse community gardens. This process occurs over time and takes place at the individual level, representing how gardeners’ understandings of race changed over time, influencing how they experienced and conceptualized race relations as a whole. Gentrification at the neighborhood level influenced this process, namely in how participants “saw race” and recognized difference at first between racial groups. The commongroup identity of being a community gardener was formed through the processes of teaching/learning and forming/strengthening family bonds. This commongroup identity supplanted previously perceived racial differences (“We all look green”).
When participants first get involved in their community garden, they “see race,” such that they either understood the construct of race as skin color or they had trouble differentiating race, culture, and ethnicity. Recognizing difference at first refers to when participants are initially involved in their community garden and recognize, and in some cases endorse stereotypes about, different racial groups in the garden. Once participants organize around garden activities, they report teaching each other and learning from one another, which leads to the formation of strong bonds based on their common goal of growing good food. This fosters a feeling of being like a family and the family bonds formed within the garden group then allowed participants to “see past race.” The theme “We all look green” refers to how community gardeners’ sense of colorblindness is compartmentalized, such that they do not feel race exists or matters in the garden context. However, they still acknowledge race exists outside of the community garden and that issues of prejudice and racism are problematic in society. This was a contextual expression of colorblindness that is not reflective of traditional discussions in the literature, which frame colorblindness as a more stable and universal perspective on race (e.g. we live in a “post-racial society” where race and racism don’t exist anymore). Lastly, gentrification, a changing neighborhood racial dynamic, influenced participants’ understandings of race relations in community gardens. These themes emerged across participants’ racial, age, and gender groups. The only exceptions were the themes Recognizing difference at first and gentrification, in which the varying pattern of responses will be explained in more detail in the respective sections below.

a. “Seeing Race”

In order to describe race relations from the gardeners’ perspective, it is imperative to know how gardeners understand the construct of race. There were two main categories that
emerged in how participants understood the construct: difficulty in differentiating race, culture, and ethnicity and skin color. Additionally, I will also describe race as racism as a somewhat separate but related category to “seeing race”.

The most common category of “seeing race” was the difficulty in differentiating race, culture, and ethnicity. When asked of how participants understood race, some spoke about culture broadly, others used language referring to ethnicity more than race, and several gardeners explicitly regarded race and culture as “difficult to pull apart.” One example of this difficulty in differentiation was when I asked Sally if she regarded race and culture as different. She responded, “Oh I guess I don’t really. I mean yeah. I realized the longer I’ve been here, I really don’t know much about I dunno Mexican culture and I think it is kind of hard for me to differentiate between the two.” Later in the interview, she recalled a story of conflict between the garden group and I followed up by asking her if she thought of that conflict as cultural or racial. She replied, “I think that was more of a cultural conflict. I mean but I guess that there is a sense that culture is born out of race to an extent. I dunno where the two - like there’s sort of a fine line where the two separate.”

The second most common way participants understood and defined race was skin color, as a physical characteristic or, “by the way people look.” These participants regarded culture as a person’s upbringing or ethnic group. Sandra explained, “For me, like you just are born with whatever you’re born with racially. What you have culturally is how you were brought up… So everybody is culturally individual even if they fall in some neat category whether they’re White or Black or Asian or whatever.” When I asked her if there are different cultures represented in her garden she replied, “It’s mainly Black and White. So it’s not like a variety of ethnic groups per say… but I mean the Black can be from anywhere you never know. And those who are
considered White, they can be Irish, they can be so many things. That’s how I define it.”

Participants who understood race as skin color generally did not have difficulty explaining their definition.

Lastly, a related but somewhat separate category, race as racism, is worth noting within the discussion of participants’ conceptualizations of race. Two participants from Four Square Garden reacted to questions about culture and race by stating that racism did not exist in the garden, which suggests they felt it was important to be clear that the garden was not a racist space and that race was generally not something pleasant to talk about. Both of these participants were people of color; Rita was Latina and Debbie was Black. In the interview with Rita, I asked her to clarify if understood the identifiers she was using to describe the people in her garden (i.e. White, Black, Latinos) as culture or race, and she replied, “Culture yeah. I don’t have feelings of race, I don’t feel racism. In the garden I don’t feel that, racism.” I clarified that I was not asking about racism, to which she then said, “No I don’t see nobody have that. I don’t see myself, but culture yes. Like I talk loud, like I talk a lot, and maybe the White girls are more calm.” In this particular case the participant may have wanted to make sure that I did not think she was racist.

Debbie had a similar reaction, but in response to a question where I did not actually use the word race: “So you mentioned earlier that in the core group of gardeners here, there are people from different cultures. How has that been like to work together?” Her response was the following:

There is no, we don’t talk about racism. Like I said, we don’t talk about racism, we don’t bring racism, we treat each other with respect. We all treat each other like human beings.
Rita and Debbie’s reactions could indicate that perhaps “seeing race” was perceived as an act of racism itself. Their reactions may also relate to the difficulty in differentiating race, culture, and ethnicity, such that they stressed the concept of culture, possibly for fear of being labeled racist.

b. Recognizing difference at first

Participants first “see race” in different ways, which was then related to how some participants understood different racial stereotypes in the garden. Recognizing difference at first refers to how community gardeners recognized and in some cases endorsed stereotypes of different racial groups when they were first involved in their garden. This theme is placed towards the beginning of the narrative, because it refers to the time when community gardeners first start working together with their garden group. One illustration of this theme is how Jim drew from his upbringing as a White middle class individual to explain how he initially understood racial stereotypes and their connection to class differences. He went on to explain the process:

Where I grew up, you’re fed all the lines that you would be fed when you’re in like one of the big conservative, economically well to do areas that you know, there’s certain classes of people that are just lazy and don’t want to do work and they pretty much deserve the area that they live in because it’s their fault – that’s not an uncommon line of thinking where I grew up, and then when you get there [the community garden] you start talking to people and you realize, for the most part, they’re just as studious and hardworking and good as everybody else, it just so happens that their lot in life isn’t as good as the advantages that the people that I grew up were given.

In some cases, participants spoke more personally about holding negative stereotypes about other racial groups. For example, Angie began talking generally about people, “There are a lot of people that don’t have the opportunity to face maybe hidden prejudices they may have had, or work like through feelings that they may have had that they didn’t know they had, that they may have been blocking.” However she ended her explanation by connecting this process to her own
experience, “I feel like the garden has given me the opportunity to like maybe face things I didn’t realize I even possessed, growing up in a suburban White neighborhood.”

One participant connected her ideas about racial stereotypes to **gentrification**, which is a theme discussed further in the results section. Throughout her interview, Sally alluded to gentrification as a changing racial dynamic happening at the neighborhood level and that as a White person moving into the neighborhood, she had certain perceptions of Latinos that had already been living in the neighborhood, based on racial stereotypes connected to gentrification. Later on in the interview she said, “I think prior to coming here I sort of saw it as more [metaphorically] Black and White than I have after hanging around longer… We all just want to be happy and safe and have good things going on and that like our ideas of that might differ but I feel like my ideas of the tension in the neighborhood have lessened a lot after getting to know the people that actually live here instead of just assuming.” She connected this change in understanding explicitly to her participation in the community garden, in getting to know Latino families that were homeowners in the neighborhood. One important thing to note about this theme is that the only participants that spoke explicitly about this process were White, and happened to be the only White participants in the study. This theme could therefore be a racially White specific process.

c. **Teach each other, learn from one another**

The most prominent theme in the data, mentioned by every participant in the study was that once participants were involved in their racially diverse community gardens, because of cultural differences within the garden group, they taught each other and learned from one another varying culturally based gardening practices. Usually the nature of community gardening necessitates that people work together to complete the same task (e.g. planting,
harvesting), so gardeners almost always exchanged information about different practices related to garden activities. Some dimensions of teaching and learning in the garden included cooking, language, gardening techniques, ideas about family, and culture in general.

Many gardeners illustrated their learning process with the example of trying and cooking different foods. Rita said, “We have so many kinds of lettuce that I’m like oh this is good! That I didn’t know. So I learned that from them…. I didn’t know about all these kinds of squash. And then now I like all of them! So I learned that, and how to make it different.” Teaching and learning language was relevant in Sunshine and Four Square garden, which were bilingual (Spanish and English) garden settings. All of the participants involved in those spaces reported learning language skills from the other gardeners. One of the bilingual garden groups in Sunshine Garden consisted of several Mexican families. As described earlier, many gardeners spoke about feeling like a family with their garden group, and in this particular garden, the fact that several generations of Mexican families were active in the garden perhaps contributed to this feeling of “family” within the garden group. Penny described this process:

I think definitely like culturally, we’ve learned a lot from each other, with regards to food in particular. There’s always a lot of food in the garden and people are teaching each other recipes. And I think with language and the culture you also get a window into a life view of the culture. So we’ve - I mean it’s been interesting to see for example how different the Mexican families are with their children, or the white families are with their children.

Given that many families were involved in community gardens, another dimension of teaching and learning was age, such that the older taught the younger and the younger learned from the older. Angie recalled an experience in her garden:

A few years ago we had a group of ladies who were like in their 70s and 80s who were originally from the south who lived on farms as young women and had a lot of knowledge and recipes and things that they would share. That was really amazing because I was younger than them and grew up in Michigan like in a suburb, and it was
just really great to learn a different tradition and a different connection to food, you know then what I had grown up with.

In addition, Sandra, from Market St Garden, spoke about her experiences teaching children in the garden: “I have one little girl and we were growing potatoes. I showed her where the potato was growing and I let her dig out one, and she was just excited about it. So I think that’s where it starts, showing the kids, and maybe they’ll have a better understanding as they grow, seeing where food comes from besides the grocery store.”

Teach each other, learn from one another can be thought about as an “intermediate” process in the overall narrative. Gardeners reported recognizing difference at first between others in their group, which was associated with racial stereotyping. After working together around garden activities, participants reported learning and teaching different cultural practices. In probing for race on the topic of teaching and learning, community gardeners only endorsed culturally specific processes. However, these cultural processes then influenced how gardeners understood race and race relations in the community garden (i.e. “We all look green”), particularly after forming strong family bonds with one another.

d. Family bonds

Over two thirds of participants in the study characterized their garden group as a family. Garden members became very close friends and acted as a support network for each other, like a “second family.” These strong bonds tended to go beyond the food related cultural practices that gardeners learned from one another. Alexa explained:

Well I think with the people that are members of the garden, with everybody that is here coming from a family structure realize what family is and that’s why we embrace one another… You can see where we have something in common that helps build a strong bond in our relationship. If it was to get to the point where we’re not gardening anymore, god forbid, I think we could still have strong relationships because there are other avenues of interest that we do have.
Participants explained that the practice of teaching and learning in the garden around a common interest (gardening) was key to forming strong bonds with one another. For example, Rita said, “You know, you share something that you believe in. So we plant together. But we believe that we want to collect fruits and that we want to enjoy that, so I think that makes us more united… They are not my blood family. But you know. When we see all of us we are so happy, believe it or not. And it’s because of the garden.”

While most of the participants in the study spoke about organically forming a “family” in the garden, participants from Sunshine Garden found the process of forming family bonds to be more difficult. Sally recounted an incident in the garden when a garden manager needed to be chosen to organize watering schedules. The White gardeners did not include the Latino gardeners on this decision making process and therefore the “ballot” was between having Sally as the garden manager or no manager at all. The Latinos in the garden were confused as to why a manager was needed in the first place and, “why this person is suddenly coming into power.” The confusion created some tension between the groups. In addition, language barriers also served to distance the two groups in the community garden. Both Sally and Penny voiced gratitude for being able to learn Spanish from the Latino gardeners, but also noted that because of the language barriers, as well as the manager incident, that it took their garden group more time to feel like a family.

e. “We all look green”

The theme, “We all look green,” refers to the idea that being active in community gardens over time “erases color” in how participants “see race.” This understanding is contextual such that they do not feel race exists or matters in their community garden, but acknowledge that
race exists in the neighborhood and that issues of prejudice and racism are very relevant in
society. For example, when asked about race in her community garden, Angie said:

Oh, I really don’t think that it matters, as an internal thing. But it definitely matters in our
society, and I think like right now, people are ready to really like break through whatever
barriers and we just need the tolerance as human beings and openness and something in
common to really like tie us all together because racism still exists definitely. I think it’s
silly, like it’s naïve of people to pretend it’s not there, cause it’s there.

She positions herself by saying at first that race does not matter internally, to her personally, but
that racism does exist in general. She continued her explanation within the context of gardening
and said, “I feel like since I’ve lived in Chicago for me personally it’s just like erased color kind
of in the way that I perceive people. Sure I see different races, but it’s, that’s one of the reasons
why I live here.” This particular quotation captures the contextual nature of the theme, such that
being involved in community gardening in Chicago has “erased color” for Angie, however she
still “sees different races” and “racism still exists definitely.”

Another illustration of the theme was when Alexa was asked about race in her garden, she replied, “Yeah they are from different races but as they say, we all look green. I think that
when I look at everybody, that’s what I see is green. I don’t have to stop my conversation and
change and discuss something different because they want to talk about the same things I want to
talk about.” She goes on to explain how the “green” is calming and uniting whereas race was not
something pleasant to talk about and implies difference. She said, “You don’t really want to
interject negativity into that environment, you want it all to be good. I’m not saying it doesn’t
exist, again, because the garden is like family.” While this woman sees green in the garden
because of the strong familial bonds that were formed, she still acknowledges that race still does
exist.
This theme reflects a compartmentalized understanding of colorblindness, which is normally discussed in the literature as a universal belief system about race and race relations. In addition, participants’ experiences do not fit within the paradigm of Whites holding colorblind attitudes against Blacks to minimize race and racism, because participants endorsed the theme regardless of their own racial group. “We all look green” is related to recognizing difference at first such that gardeners’ discussion of endorsing racial stereotypes is always framed as a previous understanding that has since changed (e.g. “not seeing” race anymore). Four of the five White gardeners that recognized difference at first also endorsed the theme of “We all look green.” Teaching and learning in community gardens revolved around common goals and garden activities, which then led to the formation of strong family bonds around those common connections. These intermediate thematic processes may therefore be fundamental in the formation of participants’ colorblind understandings of race in their community gardens. Theoretical connections between the findings and the literature will be discussed in more detail in the discussion.

f. Gentrification

The central description of race relations in community gardens emerged as a personal and individual process over time, which was influenced by gardeners’ relationships with one another, the garden group as a whole, and neighborhood racial dynamics. The theme gentrification refers to participants’ concerns about the neighborhood changing in terms of the housing status (renters/homeowners) of its residents, which was perceived as intrinsically tied to power differentials with race and class. Usually more renters were moving in to neighborhood and were almost always recognized as White middle to upper class people displacing people of color that were of a lower socioeconomic class. Gentrification influenced how participants “saw
race” and recognized difference at first in the garden, particularly in shaping their understandings of stereotyped racial groups (i.e. the stereotype of the “gentrifier” as a White middle to upper class renter).

In the current study, gentrification only seemed to occur in communities surrounding the two gardens in racially diverse neighborhoods - Sunshine Garden and Green Area Garden. Additionally, only White participants spoke explicitly about this theme. Green Area Garden is situated in a neighborhood that is regarded as one of the most diverse neighborhoods in the city of Chicago (Yonek & Hasnain-Wynia, 2011). However, Coby perceived the neighborhood as “divided” rather than diverse. Throughout the interview, he continued to reference gentrification, and framed it as low income Black people getting “pushed out of where they used to live.” The community garden was the only space in the neighborhood where Coby felt that the previous residents that were “pushed out” were able to interact with new White residents. He said, “It’s like the one place that I can think of where all walks of the way get together and mingle happily. I’m not sure anywhere else, it’s a pretty well stratified neighborhood at this point.” Coby’s experience of working in a garden with people on both sides of the gentrification boundary (a major street in the neighborhood) influenced his understanding of race relations, particularly with the initial theme discussed earlier, recognizing difference at first, with the focus on stereotypical judgments:

It’s not what we think about this guy on the other side of the street and they’re African Americans and so therefore they’re poor to do wells and what have you. I’ve got plenty of poor to do wells on this side of the street, you know and then there’s the rich to do wells - there’s a little bit of everybody in every community. People are mostly just people if you give them a chance. Stereotyping is so easy, right it’s so easy to stereotype.

In the other community garden, Sunshine Garden, the “old timers” in this case were Latinos, primarily of Mexican descent. Both participants I interviewed from Sunshine Garden were
college aged White woman, and one in particular discussed how gentrification influenced her own understanding of people in the community. This gardener, Sally, felt personally accountable for what she thought of as conflicts in the neighborhood between the “gentrifiers” and the “old timers.” She went on to explain,

I know sometimes I feel kind of guilty cause that general guilt of like, I moved to your neighborhood! I know gentrification is a big thing and there’s a lot of forces behind it but I mean just for me sometimes I feel kind of guilty like shit, like I moved into the neighborhood, I don’t want to effect your life in a negative way and I feel like I might be but you’re also very nice and like I know I don’t need to treat you differently on that basis.

This particular quote highlights how her feelings of personal responsibility for neighborhood level changes in racial dynamics, which then influenced how she interacted with Latino neighborhood residents on an interpersonal level. Toward the end of the interview, Sally explained that her involvement in the garden changed how she “saw race,” which was explicitly related to her understandings of gentrification. She recalled, “I think prior to coming here I sort of saw it as more [metaphorically] Black and White than I have after coming around her longer… we can all just kind of live here and coexist pretty well. And that maybe not everyone in their 20s is like an evil force on the neighborhood you like we’re not this army of terror!”

Gentrification was related to the idea that perceptions of class differences were connected to racial differences at the neighborhood level. From an ecological perspective, gentrification was interdependent with participants’ initial understandings of race in their community gardens (i.e. “seeing race” and recognizing difference at first). The current study captured an individualized social process that was influenced by neighborhood level processes as well, as depicted in Figure 1.
VII. DISCUSSION

The most prominent narrative that emerged in describing the social process of race relations in diverse community gardens was how participants came to understand different racial groups in the setting, from first endorsing stereotypes (recognizing difference at first) to forming a strong bonds over a common goal of growing food (teach each other, learn from one another and family bonds) and finally to understanding race in a contextually colorblind way (“We all look green”) (see Figure 1).

This process captured participants’ understandings of race relations generally, however not every gardener had the exact same experience along this process, mostly because of the neighborhood context of their community gardens (see Table 2 for reported themes by participant).
### TABLE 2
REPORTED THEMES BY PARTICIPANT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>“Seeing Race”</th>
<th>Recognizing difference at first</th>
<th>Teach each other, learn from one another</th>
<th>Family bonds</th>
<th>“We all look green”</th>
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*Note: R indicates the participant reported or endorsed the major theme.*
For participants from Sunshine Garden and Green Area Garden, Gentrification influenced how they “saw race,” with both themes involving the connection between class and race. However, every participant in the study spoke of teaching and learning as a central process happening in their diverse community gardens. In addition, almost all participants described their garden group as a family and spoke in great lengths about how they formed friendships and strong bonds with one another in the garden because of their connection to food.

The theme, “We All Look Green,” was manifested in primarily three ways. First, participants such as Angie, Sally, and Jim spoke of how their understandings explicitly changed over time from first “seeing difference” and explicitly identifying and in some cases endorsing racial stereotypes between different racial groups, to then not “seeing race” in the garden and recognizing they don’t acknowledge the stereotypes anymore. Penny, Rita, Alexa, Seth, and Debbie did not explicitly discuss a change in understanding, but still endorsed the theme. However, Sandra and Coby explained that their “upbringing was the same,” meaning they have always been in racially and culturally diverse environments, so to these two participants they still acknowledged the thematic idea of “We all look green,” but explained how and why their understandings remained the same. Even though participants expressed this theme in different ways and for different reasons, “We all look green” was still prominent in the data.

A. Intersecting theories of race relations

While the aim of the current study was to describe the social process of race relations in racially diverse community gardens from the perspective of the gardeners, several key theories in the literature are useful in theoretically explaining the results as well as highlighting the unique contributions of the current study.
a. **Contact theory**

First and foremost, the only study in the literature that investigated race relations in community gardens used contact theory to theoretically frame the study (Shinew et al., 2004). The current findings are supportive of contact theory in the community garden context such that the more community gardeners were in contact with one another, their relationships improved, as evidenced by the formation of family bonds over time. However, the process was much more complex than increased contact, reduced bias, and positive relationships. Because contact theory does not account for the contextual influences on gardeners’ contact with one another, it is insufficient as a sole theoretical framework for race relations in diverse community gardens.

b. **Critical race theory and sociocultural framework**

Several other theories of race relations offer a more critical discussion of the contextual influences on race and race relations: critical race theory, Plaut’s (2010) sociocultural framework, and social capital theory. I argue that these theories can intersect with contact theory in framing race relations in the current study.

Critical race theory focuses on how historical, economic, and sociopolitical contexts influence individuals’ understanding of race relations, and Plaut’s (2010) sociocultural framework aims to address racial disparities by highlighting the structural realities of racial differences. Because the current study was conceptually framed with the ecological paradigm, historical and structural influences on race relations were intentionally examined, corresponding to the principles of succession and interdependence. Gentrification at the neighborhood level influenced several participants’ understandings of race relations in their community garden, such that understandings of racial groups in the garden were related to stereotypes about “gentrifiers.” Over time, their ideas about race on an interpersonal level changed as well as ideas about
neighborhood level racial dynamics. In addition, historical influences on understanding race relations was important at the individual level because several participants explained how their initial racial stereotypes of people in the garden were due to them growing up in a different racial context than that of the garden; primarily suburban, White, and middle class. The current study address several contextual influences on understanding race relations in community gardens and thus supports the intersection of critical race theory and Plaut’s (2010) sociocultural framework with contact theory.

c. **Social capital theory**

In addition to critical race theory and Plaut’s (2010) sociocultural framework, social capital theory supplements contact theory by explaining the quality of interracial relationships through an exchange of resources. In community gardens, bridging social capital has been shown to be essential in improving interracial relationships (Firth et al., 2011). The current study supported this notion such that in the communally organized gardens, the members of the garden group essentially had to work together in order to grow and maintain plants to therefore have a bountiful and successful community garden. For example, Penny described a garden party event that their group was organizing and she described it as, “Managing human capital, social capital - it’s about coordinating efforts I guess. By social capital I mean like, who knows the guy at the hardware store. Can we get a discount on whatever. Like personal connections in the neighborhood.” One of the central themes, teach each other, learn from one another, involved exchanging resources in the form of cultural practices around food. This theme illustrated bridging social capital within the garden group, which seemed to be an important step prior to forming family bonds.
d. **Commongroup identity**

Collectively, contact theory, critical race theory, Plaut’s (2010) sociocultural framework, and social capital theory are useful in explaining the current findings from a theoretical perspective. However, an additional theory, commongroup identity theory, is particularly important in clarifying the results as well as elaborating on contact theory. Based on Turner’s (1986) social identity theory, the common ingroup identity model (Gaertner, Dovidio, Anastasio, Bachman, & Rust, 1993) posits that intergroup conflict can be reduced when members of the groups change their representation of membership from two different groups to one inclusive group. Instead of ‘us’ and ‘them’ the group identity becomes ‘we.’ This process values favoring the ingroup rather than rejecting and devaluing the outgroup. Additionally, the central condition that allows for the formation of a commongroup identity is commonality itself: a common problem, similarity, fate, or essentially an issue that brings together both the ingroup and the outgroup for a common cause (Gaertner et al., 1993).

One of the key aspects of race relations in community gardens was how the common identity of being a community gardener superseded racial differences. Through teaching each other and learning from one another, participants found common connections through food, which facilitated the formation of their identities as gardeners. For example, Rita described how she learned how to eat and prepare different foods through the different members of her garden. She then went on to explain that relationship process more broadly:

I can learn that everybody is different and has their own ideas and have their different religions and different beliefs. I learned that and I learned that you need to respect that, that don’t make them different. That don’t make them different from me because we have the same goal – to have a nice garden. Pero maybe we can be from different backgrounds, but we still like the same thing.
In addition, Coby described how the commongroup identity was important in Green Area Garden:

I think that’s one of the things that the garden has been very good for is to bring people of different races together in sort of a common cause right. That gives them a common language. When they’re together and you see them interacting, it doesn’t matter whether they’re young or old or Black or White or Hispanic or whatever. They’re all gardeners really doing what they like.

Sally from Sunshine Garden also reiterated, “I think we’re sort of all here for a common goal so like race and culture and that kind of stuff doesn’t really effect that much. It’s you know, TOMATOES, it’s that since idea that we want to grow something, it doesn’t matter where we came from. We’re all happy to achieve it.” For many of these participants, community gardening activities connected members of the group, regardless of perceived racial differences. The commongroup identity of being a community gardener could supplement contact theory such that not only is the contact between gardeners important for developing positive interracial relationships, but it is also the quality of their interactions, in which their mutual connection to food and gardening is key in the relationship building process. For some gardeners, a commongroup identity could have been the central factor in allowing them to “see past race” in the garden, as a direct antecedent to the idea that “We all look green.”

e. **Colorblindness**

Colorblindness is a belief system about race and race relations within society. Traditional colorblind ideologies focus on the ideas that we live in a post-racial society, the minimization of race, and understanding racism at the individual level. In a seminal book on colorblind racism, Bonilla-Silva (2006) described four central frames in which colorblind racism operates: abstract liberalism, naturalization, cultural racism, and the minimization of racism. Abstract liberalism involves using politically and economically liberal ideas (e.g. “equal
opportunity” and individual choice) in abstract ways to minimize and disregard racial inequality. For example, endorsing general equal opportunity practices in a University setting while ignoring historical and contemporary discrimination on the social, economic, and educational status of minority groups. Naturalization is a frame similar to the assumption Markus and Moya (2010) described that race is biological, and therefore racial differences are “natural” because they are biologically driven. Cultural racism follows naturalization such that it relies on the logic of cultural practices as fixed “natural” features and using that frame to justify racial inequality (e.g. “the culture of poverty”). Lastly, the minimization of race, perhaps the most salient frame in contemporary U.S. society, suggests that racial discrimination is no longer relevant in post Civil Rights America. In addition, Bonilla-Silva (2006) posit that on an interpersonal level, colorblind racism operates within a White-Black racial paradigm, with Whites holding colorblind racist attitudes towards Blacks.

In the current study, the theme “We all look green” certainly relates to Bonilla-Silva’s (2006) colorblind frameworks, namely the minimization of race. Participants report they “don’t see race” in the community garden or that race doesn’t matter. However, for many participants, these beliefs were compartmentalized, such that the colorblind framework of minimizing race only occurred in the community garden and not outside of that context. As described earlier in the results, Angie in particular asserted how race and racism still matters in society and how it is “naïve of people to pretend it’s not there.” While the exploration of these ideas is premature, conceptualizing colorblindness beyond traditional frameworks is a unique contribution to the literature. In the current study, the phenomena of participants’ contextual understandings about race relations could be specific to community garden settings as well.
The current study addresses several gaps in the literature by providing an in depth qualitative exploration of race relations from the perspective of community gardeners in racially diverse gardens. Findings suggest that the social process of race relations in diverse community gardens calls for an integration of theories on race relations, namely contact theory, critical race theory, sociocultural framework, social capital theory, and commongroup identity theory.

**B. Limitations and future directions**

The current study has several limitations, mostly regarding the sampling frame. First and foremost, I did not include racially homogenous gardens in my sample. This study only captures the experiences of gardeners involved in racially diverse community gardens in Chicago, which are less abundant than gardens with racially homogenous membership, because of the purposeful sampling method. The results of the study only serve to describe experiences that are less common to community gardeners in Chicago. Future research should address this limitation by aiming to understand the experience of gardeners in racially or ethnically homogenous gardens, considering the social context of race relations is completely different.

An additional limitation of the study was that while I intentionally tried to recruit participants who were involved in gardens geographically dispersed throughout the city I was not able to recruit participants from gardens on the south side of Chicago. Given that the south side of Chicago has a particular history of racial tension (e.g. race riots of 1919, redlining practices), perhaps gardeners in that area would describe a different experience in their community gardens.

Lastly, there was an uneven gender distribution of participants. Male perspectives on race relations in community gardens may be different than female perspectives, however there were not enough male participants to explore gender differences. Based on my participant observations in the gardens, the gender distribution of participants in the study closely reflects
the gender distribution within Chicago community gardens. Future research should aim to understand how gender roles are manifested in community gardens and why community gardening tends to be a female dominated activity.

C. Conclusion

This study makes a valuable contribution to the literature on community gardens and race relations. It is the first study to critically examine race and race relations in the community garden context from the gardeners’ perspective and therefore adds to the growing body of literature on the social context of community gardens. The current study is also uniquely framed with an ecological perspective, which addresses the identified need to approach the study of race relations with framework that considers the interdependent structural and interpersonal processes from which ideas about race are derived (Dixon et al., 2005; Markus & Moya, 2010).

Participants in the current study described their community gardens as unique settings within their neighborhoods. For a majority of participants, the community garden was the only setting in their communities where they were able to have racially and culturally diverse interactions. The current findings serve to describe specific characteristics of this unique setting and the social processes that take place within it, which can shed light on contexts in which interracial relationships can improve and racial tensions be diffused. Ultimately, this study gave voice to community gardeners and reflected a grounded understanding of phenomena.
CITED LITERATURE


https://www.google.com/fusiontables/DataSource?docid=1DZWxPHHoRTVAs8Gnqz3y7xvGnuKYlbm2Cuf5Scw#card:id=2


APPENDIX A

Interview Guide

History
• What is the history of the garden?
• Can you tell me about the events that led up to your own personal involvement in the garden?

Community Garden
• Can you describe the garden to me as it is now?
• Do you think the garden has affected the surrounding community? In what way?
• I noticed the garden is locked/open – how has that been?
• Has the garden changed about how you think about community in general?

Gardeners
• What kinds of interactions take place in the garden?
• Are there any barriers to getting involved in the garden?
• Are there certain issues that tend to bring about conflict or disagreement between the gardeners?
• Has there been a time where there has been conflict or disagreement between the gardeners and the surrounding community?
• Are there different kinds of people that garden here?
  o Ages? Renters?
  o Cultures?
  o Races?
• How has it been working with people from different cultures in the garden?

Okay so we’ve been talking about diversity broadly, with culture, age, etc. Now I want to talk about race relations in the garden. So to start out, how do you define race?
• Do you think race and culture are different?
• How do you think about the interracial relationships in the garden?
• Have you ever experienced someone in the garden treat you differently because of your race?
• Has there ever been any racial conflict in the garden?
• Have these interracial relationships changed the way you think about race since you first started being involved in the garden?
• Has it also changed how you think about racism?
• Are the racial dynamics in the community garden different from the racial dynamics in the surrounding community?
• Are there any other places in the community that you think you would be able to have these experiences, relative to the interracial relations?

Do you have any other comments or something you may not have thought of before this interview?
Appendix B

Coding Guide

1. **Garden History** - When participants talk about the history of their particular community garden. The events that led up to the existence of the space and the motivations for developing the space, and sometimes the motivation for the participant to become involved in the garden as well.

2. **Garden as unique** - When participants mention that the community garden is a unique setting in the community, usually because they say it’s the only space they perceive to be racially diverse in their community.

3. **Organizational networks** - Any references to community organizations or other community groups in Chicago that are somehow related to the community garden. Organizations have access to resources like grant money, land protection, or volunteers (these are in some cases other community gardens) and surpass physical boundaries since they are dispersed throughout the city.

4. **Garden access**: perceptions of how open to the community the garden is; this is related to the physical boundaries of the garden as well.
   a. **Locked**: When community gardens are physically fenced and locked. This is related to limited access to the community garden, or perception that the garden is not open to the community.
   b. **Open**: When community gardens are physically without a fence and completely open. This is related to the perception of open equal access of the space and it's resources to everyone in the community.
   c. **Open but locked**: This type of garden access is a mix between open and locked - usually this denotes when a garden is physically locked, but the gardeners still have the perception that the community has open access to the garden.

5. **Garden Group**: When participants describe and generally talk about the core group of gardeners (not specific people) involved in his/her community garden
   a. **Diverse**: When people talk about their group as diverse, broadly. This code also serves as a check if the gardens are actually racially diverse, from the participants' perspectives.
   b. **Family**: When participants describe the core group of gardeners involved in his/her community garden as a family. Usually they explicitly use the word family. Characterized by really strong bonds.
   c. **Organization**: This is when participants describe how their group is organized and functions in the community garden and how their activities are planned. This code often touches on issues like the communal vs. allotment style gardening, why the group decided on one or both of those organizations for the garden, watering schedules, garden managers and committees, no garden group hierarchy, etc.

6. **Garden Function**: How participants understand the function of the community garden; what the garden does for people or the neighborhood.
a. "About the people": This in vivo code is when participants talk about as functioning as a social space and also necessitating people to make it work. It also relates the idea that one of the main functions of a community garden is bringing people together.
b. Peace/therapy: When participants felt the garden was a space where they can relax and enjoy peace in their neighborhood.
c. Respect: This is when participants talk about how their community garden, since developed, has garnered respect from those in the neighborhood. Many gardeners talk about it like the neighbors have "eyes on the garden" and protect the space because they respect it.

7. Garden Problem: perceived conflict either within the garden group or between people in the neighborhood and people in the garden.
   a. “hanging out”: When neighbors disrespect the community garden space. “Hanging out” (in vivo) in the garden usually means doing nothing productive in the garden, doing drugs, drinking, trashing the space.
   b. Disagreement in the group: This problem is situated as internal within the garden group and usually involves disagreement about some issue.
   c. Vandalism/theft: Very common garden problem when gardens report people stealing food or vandalizing their property - breaking materials, ripping out plants, etc.

8. Housing status: Housing status describes either people involved in the garden or people that live in the neighborhood.
   a. Renters: Renters are usually perceived as people who aren’t ‘grounded’ in the neighborhood since they don’t have permanent residence in the neighborhood.
   b. Homeowners: Homeowners are usually perceived to be the people who have lived in the neighborhood for a long amount of time.

9. Involvement: How active people are in their community garden. Can range from low to high.
   a. Low is when there aren't enough "hands" to get the work done that needs to be done. Either not many people are in the garden group, they don't have enough volunteers, or the gardener thinks they could be doing better in terms of involvement.
   b. High is when the garden group is regularly in the space and are really productive in terms of work progress because people are in the space so often.
   c. Barrier to involvement: What participants believe to be preventing people from being more involved in their community gardens. Usually gardeners report low involvement more often than high involvement, and so these are basically reasons why they think there is low involvement in their community gardens.

10. Gentrification – A neighborhood level racial dynamic; social forces/structures in the neighborhood that are reinforced in the community garden, as it relates to race relations. This code refers to when the neighborhood is changing in terms of the renters/homeowners dynamic, which is intrinsically tied to power differentials with race and SES.

Race Relations: How gardeners talk about other gardeners in terms of race/how they relate and interact with them and how they then interpret that interaction.
11. **Defining race**: How participants define/understand the concept of race.
   a. **Trouble differentiating race and culture**: When participants have difficulty differentiating between race and culture and have trouble talking about them as separate constructs.
   b. **Skin color**: Race is a physical characteristic or thought of “by the way people look.”

12. **Upbringing was the same** - When participants are asked about how they understand race and race relations in the garden and then if and how those understandings have changed over time, two participants reported they didn't change their understandings at all because their upbringing was the same. That is to say, they were always surrounding by racially and culturally diverse people so to them, working in their community gardens was very similar.

13. **Recognizing difference at first** - This code relates the process of first “seeing race” and recognizing differences between different racial groups in the garden. In many cases, participants talk about holding negative stereotypes about other races of people when they first got involved. Then through having common goals in the garden and working together, their perceptions of different racial groups (what they originally thought) changes.

14. **Teaching/Learning** – Teaching and learning is most often what people report when asked about race relations broadly. Teaching/learning is always discussed as cultural. Some dimensions of learning include language, gardening techniques, cooking, what family is, and culture in general. Usually it’s the case that because of the nature of gardening, people have to work together and teach each other various things, so people almost always learn things about different people that they attribute to culture because it’s about food.

15. **Cultural/racial conflict** - Disagreement or conflict that is explicitly related to racial/cultural differences between people. Can be within the garden group or between the group and people in the neighborhood.

16. **Language barrier** - When difficulties in communication between each other serve as a barrier to improving relationships between people in the garden that are both racially and culturally different.

17. **Colorblind** - Colorblind means that race matters when participants first get involved in the garden (*Recognizing difference at first*), but through interacting in the garden, forming bonds through common goals, and becoming a family, then race doesn’t matter anymore, or they don’t see race anymore. This is regardless of the respondent’s race, class, and neighborhood.

18. **Commongroup identity** – Theoretically this is when people find a more inclusive identity to recategorize people into this more holistic "ingroup" which then reduces group biases. In the present study, the commongroup identity seems to be the gardener, with everyone having a common goal of growing food together, regardless of race/ethnicity or class.

19. **Racism** - When participants mention racism or talk about their understanding of racism. Race is not a good thing to talk about because people both don’t want to seem racist or imply that their garden is a racist space.
Appendix C

IRB Approval

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS
AT CHICAGO

Office for the Protection of Research Subjects (OPRS)
Office of the Vice Chancellor for Research (MC 672)
203 Administrative Office Building
1737 West Polk Street
Chicago, Illinois 60612-7227

Approval Notice
Continuing Review

July 21, 2014

Sarah Hernandez, BA
Psychology
1007 W Harrison St
M/C 285
Chicago, IL 60612
Phone: (312) 848-2118

RE: Protocol # 2013-0703
“Community Gardeners' Perspectives Study”

Dear Ms. Hernandez:

Your Continuing Review was reviewed and approved by the Expedited review process on June 26, 2014. You may now continue your research.

Please note the following information about your approved research protocol:

Approved Subject Enrollment #: 15 (limited to data analysis from 12 subjects)
Additional Determinations for Research Involving Minors:
These determinations have not been made for this study since it has not been approved for enrollment of minors.
Performance Sites: UIC
Sponsor: None
PAF#: Not applicable

Research Protocol:
  a) Community Gardeners' Perspectives Study; Version 2, 08/02/2013

Recruitment Material:
  a) N/A – Limited to data analysis only

Informed Consent:
  a) N/A – Limited to data analysis only

Your research meets the criteria for expedited review as defined in 45 CFR 46.110(b)(1) under the following specific categories:

(6) Collection of data from voice, video, digital, or image recordings made for research purposes., (7) Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including but not limited to research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

Please note the Review History of this submission:

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<td>Continuing Review</td>
<td>Expedited</td>
<td>06/26/2014</td>
<td>Approved</td>
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Please remember to:

→ Use your research protocol number (2013-0703) on any documents or correspondence with the IRB concerning your research protocol.

→ Review and comply with all requirements on the OPRS website under:

"UIC Investigator Responsibilities, Protection of Human Research Subjects"
(http://tigger.uic.edu/depts/ovcr/research/protocolreview/irb/policies/0924.pdf)

Please note that the UIC IRB has the right to seek additional information, require further modifications, or monitor the conduct of your research and the consent process.

Please be aware that if the scope of work in the grant/project changes, the protocol must be amended and approved by the UIC IRB before the initiation of the change.

We wish you the best as you conduct your research. If you have any questions or need further help, please contact OPRS at (312) 996-1711 or me at (312) 996-9299. Please send any correspondence about this protocol to OPRS at 203 AOB, M/C 672.
Sincerely,

Anna Bernadska, M.A.
IRB Coordinator, IRB # 2
Office for the Protection of Research

Subjects

Enclosure: None

cc: Michael E. Ragozzino, Psychology, M/C 285
Kristine Molina, Faculty Sponsor, Psychology, M/C 285
VITA

Sarah Hernandez

Sherna37@uic.edu

312 848 2118

Education

Expected 2015 M.A. University of Illinois at Chicago
Community and Prevention Research Psychology

2012 B.A. New College of Florida Sarasota, FL
Area of concentration in Psychology

2010 A.A. Broward College Davie, FL
Psychology major

Research Experience

Enlace Chicago Process Evaluation
Fall 2014 – Present
Collaborated with community organization, Enlace Chicago, to evaluate a collaborative research project that focused on Food Access in the Little Village community in Chicago. Evaluation focused on assessing the process of collaborative research within a network of organizations, from setting research goals to data collection, analysis, and dissemination of results.

Nature Playgroup Program Evaluation
Fall 2014
Collaborated with community organization, Logan Square Neighborhood Association, in developing an evaluation plan for their Nature Playgroup program. The evaluation plan included a brief review of the relevant literature on the importance of playing in nature, a logic model of the program, a plan for measuring short-term outcomes, data collection materials, and recommendations for implementation. Created surveys, observation guides, and focus group guides for data collection.

UIC Heritage Garden Program
Spring 2013-present
Coordinator of internship program. The goal of the program is to establish a sustainable educational model with activities that can help mobilize other students on campus around
environmental and cultural sustainability issues. Responsibilities included developing the internship program, interviewing and selected summer interns, coordinating gardening efforts on campus, implementing public programming, and facilitating qualitative research, documentation, and dissemination.

**Community Health Assessment in Little Village, Chicago**  
**Spring 2013 - Present**  
Community based participatory research project that identifies and describes health gaps, problems, and strengths to improve the health of the Little Village community. Used mixed methodologies to better understand key health issues identified by community partners. Developed focus group guide to assess occupational health for Latina women and analyzed qualitative data.

**Masters Thesis**  
**Spring 2013 – Summer 2014**  
*Community Gardeners’ Perspectives on Race Relations*  
Qualitative grounded theory study focusing on how community gardeners in racially diverse community gardens in the Chicago area perceive and understand race and race relations. Theoretically framed and guided by the ecological paradigm.

**Harvest Study**  
**Spring 2013 – Fall 2013**  
Served as a consultant for a large-scale study assessing community garden food production and distribution in the city of Chicago. Over 250 community gardens are included to get quantitative measurements like growing area and crop quantities. Additionally, qualitative interviews explore gardeners’ experiences in their community garden and food distribution practices. Contributed to the development of a public map with contact information of all the gardens, along with a research report about beneficial impacts of community gardens and an analysis of the gardener interviews.

**Educational Discrimination Project**  
**Spring 2013**  
Investigated the relationship between academic self-esteem and GPA, moderated by experiences of ethnic discrimination for Latinos. Used moderated regression methodology.

**Boys and Girls Club SMART Girls Intervention**  
**Fall 2012**  
Focused on reducing sexual risk taking behaviors and developing positive healthy nutrition related behaviors in African American adolescents in a low SES community. Transformed the existing program into a culture-specific intervention.

**Undergraduate Honors Thesis**  
**Spring 2012**  
*I am us: Overlapping mental representations of self and community.*  
Independent research project concerning the inclusion of community in the self-concept. Reaction time methodologies were utilized to demonstrate concrete support for the inclusion of
community in self scale. Both data collection and data analysis were performed. Thesis was defended against a committee.

**Social Psychology laboratory project**

**Spring 2012**

*Thinking about gardening: Preliminary evidence for positive outcomes*
Surveyed both gardeners and non-gardeners sense of community, mood, and self-esteem after completing a writing task that primed an experience of gardening. Focused on a more rigorous methodology and understanding more than just the behavioral experience of gardening

**Research methods project**

**Spring 2011**

*The communal self: A contextual comparison in community connectedness*
Connectedness to two differing communities was examined. Survey methodologies were employed, and two different inclusion of community in self scales were incorporated. Surveys were constructed, and data were both collected and analyzed. Results indicated significant differences in community connectedness between a student’s school and local outside community.

**Advanced General Psychology Laboratory**

**Spring 2010**
Demonstrated fundamental principles of learning through the use of an operant conditioning chamber. Focused on hands on experience with live laboratory rats.

**Teaching Experience**

**Teaching Assistant**

**Fall 2012 – Present**
PSCH 100 Introduction to Psychology
PSCH 242 Research Methods in Psychology
PSCH 331 Laboratory in Community and Prevention Research

**Guest Lecturer**

**May 2013**
Introduction to Community Psychology (PSCH 231) – Ed Trickett, Ph.D.
“Community Gardening: Building a Sense of Community around Social Justice”

**Presentations**


**Awards and Special Recognitions**

2014  
Chicago Consortium for Community Engagement (C3) Honorable Mention Poster Award

2013  
UIC Green Fee Grant - $20,000 for UIC Heritage Garden Program

2013  
Ford Fellowship Special Recognition

2012  
Abraham Lincoln Fellowship

2010 – 2012  
Florida Academic Scholarship

2010 – 2012  
New College of Florida Excellence Award

2009  
National Hispanic Recognition Scholar
Professional Affiliations

2012-present Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues (Graduate Student Member)

2012-present Midwest Psychological Association (Graduate Student Member)

Extracurricular and Volunteer Activities

Children First Make a Difference Day
Fall 2011
Constructed container gardens for families living in a socioeconomically disadvantaged area. Taught children in the community about organic container gardening.

Suncoast Gleaning Project at Jessica’s Farm
Spring 2011
Harvested produce at a local organic farm. Proceeds were donated to a local non-profit food bank, to aid in providing better quality food

Geraldson’s Community Farm CSA
Spring 2011
Performed routine farm work (harvesting, planting, weeding) with fellow students and community members.

Community Meals on Wheels
Spring 2011
Delivered fresh meals to families in need that lived in a socioeconomically disadvantaged area of the community.

D&G Community Gardening Project
Fall 2011
Developer and project coordinator. Highlighted sustainability and slow food issues, while emphasizing community involvement through the refurbishment of a residential community garden. Facilitated a community gardening event day in which local representatives of non-profit organizations hosted workshops.

Council of Green Affairs
Fall 2011
Student government organization. Served as an active member. Examined green initiatives and focused on community empowerment.
Climate Impacts Day  
Spring 2012  
Organizer. Primarily raised awareness about climate change issues and the expected sea level rise relevant to the Sarasota area.

Diversity Advancement Committee Student Advisory Board  
Spring 2013  
Secretary and coordinator of student based organization in the department of psychology at the University of Illinois at Chicago. Developed programming and initiative discussions concerning diversity research.

Community Gardening in Chicago  
Spring 2013 – Present  
Volunteered at multiple community gardens throughout Chicago to aid in the development of each garden.