**Week 5 reflection: Reflecting on meaning and on my own role as a researcher**

As I engaged in this topic of green leisure as resistance and revitalization, I started a mini garden of myself. Planting my seeds, I felt the care and love. When my eggplant was finally ready to be picked, I found joy and beauty. I thought of large lot owners whom I had met through this study. I will never have the lived experience of someone who was born and lived in the stigmatized neighborhood for the entire life, but at that moment, I understood exactly what they meant by *“a heart-warming thing”* when they talked about harvest season. This illustrates my research experience of moving back and forth between two worlds, outsider, and insider worlds. Considering my background, I initially located myself within this research as an outsiderwho attends to what I hear and sense (Charmaz, 2006). With direct involvement with study participants, however, I moved from the outsider role into the participant role and integrated insider views in this study.

As a doctoral student from South Korea, I must admit, I was not familiar with the complicated details of urban vacancy issues in an American context that is built upon discrimination, poverty, and racial isolation. The bright side of this naivety was my openness to learning from lot owners and they offered fresh perspectives on almost every question that I had, and I enjoyed seeing things through her lens. Their unique lived experience as a gardener and lifelong resident in a high-vacancy neighborhood inspired me to think more critically about the terminology used in this study (greening, leisure, gardening, and beautification). For example, the term “greening” is typically used in urban development literature as the installation of green infrastructures such as urban parks and green spaces. Their perspective on greening, however, was more associated with behavior and positive intentions to change natural conditions of a site

in ways that are beautifying. I was keen on asserting boundaries around a definition of green

leisure that is aligned with this context.

Engaging in this research increased awareness of my privilege as a middle-class academic while studying leisure experiences of under-served neighborhoods in Chicago. Once I realized I have privilege that I rarely had to think about racism and neighborhood context, I strived to bring into awareness my own biases. In addition, I engaged in a one-hour discussion with my colleagues to understand my assumptions and preconceptions relevant to the research topic. Some questions addressed in the session were: *what is the neighborhood stigma? What would be my emotional responses to the high-vacancy neighborhoods? Do I have a fear of neighborhoods and why?* After this honest conversation in a safe and comfortable setting, I became more aware of the dominant discourses and thoughts on Chicago’s neighborhoods and implicit attitudes and racism that may lie at the unconscious level. I could have, for example, made wrong assumptions that residents felt hopeless about neighborhood changes before the Chicago Large Lot Program if I had not been critical of my own preconception about the negative, dark narrative about high-vacancy neighborhoods.

After my interview with large lot owners, I deeply reflected on possible reasons for their voluntary behavior to make positive changes to the abandoned lot beyond the impact of this program. Acknowledging that Chicago’s Large Lot Program is not a panacea, I was more interested in understanding how the program became a catalyst for re-invention and re-bonding of neighborly relations.

Reference:

Charmaz, K. (2006). *Constructing grounded theory: A practical guide through qualitative analysis*. Sage Publications.