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# Navigating the Plot

unearthing women's stories at the allotment

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Submitted in accordance with the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

York Business School

York St John University

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*This doctoral thesis is dedicated to my late mother, Camella, who shared with me her love of reading, who nurtured my relentless curiosity, and whose belief in me was unwavering.*

*Thank you.*



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## Abstract

*Navigating the Plot* contributes to academic literature within the social sciences, human geography, gender studies, and critical plant studies by exploring the allotment as a gendered space. Specifically, this thesis interrogates women's experiences at the allotment, looking to the ways they are influenced and affected by and through their gender.

Working within a feminist epistemology I explore women's stories at the allotment, giving voice to their experiences and histories within these spaces, and adding to a lean discourse exploring this landscape through a gendered lens. Using ethnography, creative methods, and semi-structured interviews with nineteen allotment holders who identify as women in the north of England, I contribute new ways of perceiving and understanding this space, with a fresh focus upon the ways women move, exist, and feel within their plots as individuals, with others, and alongside the more-than-human.

Through this thesis I illustrate new insights about women and the allotment across three main areas: (i) *bodies*, (ii) *becoming*, and (iii) *belonging*. From discussing experiences of menstruation at toilet-less allotments through to disseminating complicated relationships with slugs, I demonstrate the intricate ways gender can dictate and orientate embodied experiences at the plot across the physical, the self, the emotional, the political, and the philosophical, whilst untangling messy webs of interconnected ideas and theory.

From soil to plate and from bulb to vase, the bounties of the allotment are enjoyed by many, yet this piece of feminist research shows how, for women, these spaces are ones of radical transformation, resistance, and experience. This creative, visual thesis enriches our understanding of an environment historically rooted within masculinised tradition, whilst disrupting and deconstructing allotment stereotypes and uncovering insightful, meaningful and nuanced ways of seeing, knowing and perceiving these colourful, lush, growing spaces.

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# Chapter One || Growing Roots

## an introduction



**Photograph 1.1.** *Oakley on her way to her plot*

## 1.0. Chapter introduction

This reflexive, feminist thesis explores the ways in which the allotment is a gendered space, interrogating how gender can influence the ways this landscape is navigated, orientated, and experienced. As a reflexive piece of work, this thesis begins with discussing how this project came to be, and the ways in which my history and lived experiences as a researcher have influenced it; this is an important part of the research story, and it is apparent from before the thesis began. It is, therefore, a logical place to start.

Following this, this introductory chapter seeks to establish this thesis more broadly. It provides context of important terminology that helps to situate this project, including what is meant by frequently used terms such as ‘gardening’, ‘allotment’, and ‘community garden’, setting the scene for this research, and demonstrating the nuance within our understandings of these green spaces, and the activities undertaken there. This, in turn, highlights why this piece of research is both necessary and meaningful.

From here, I provide academic grounding for this thesis, covering the research rationale, as well as giving context for who this project affirms as ‘women’. Following this, I offer an outline of the theoretical framework within which this thesis sits, along with a summary of the research questions and aims, and the contributions to knowledge it provides. Finally, this chapter provides a roadmap of this thesis in the form of an overview of the seven remaining chapters.

### 1.1. Context

To those who know me, to describe my doctoral research as “plants and gardening” is of little surprise. My social identity, somewhat unintentionally, sits firmly within this area thanks to a keen interest in plants, a collection of botanical tattoos, a passion for plant-related literature, a flourishing yet overrun small garden, and a keen eye for trying to root every type of fruit or vegetable stone or seed I come across. Plants have, for me, become an essential part of my way of *being*.

My identity as being synonymous with plants was not, however, always the case. Like many, I grew up uninterested in gardens and gardening, yet I hold countless memories of times spent trailing after my mother in garden centres. From childhood, I distinctly remember being in our garden in early spring, rolling the soft leaves of the woolly hedgenettle ('lamb's ear') my mother was about to plant between my thumb and forefinger, enjoying the softness of the foliage whilst listening to her talk, breathing in the paraffin scent of her wax jacket as she readied the tough soil. For me, the garden was not about plants, but was time spent with my favourite person. As I grew up, I spent less time in the garden, yet my mother's interest in plants continued and we would still, on occasion, head to the garden centre where my fingers would pull me to seek out and caress the soft, furry leaves of that same perennial, green leaf.

It is of little surprise, then, that when my mother died unexpectedly that I found myself drawn back to garden centres, looking for a comfort I could not locate. I quickly learnt that there is a softness to plants, and I took delight in nurturing and tending to various cheese plants and spider plants, embracing a strange new sense of responsibility. There was (and remains) a deep-rooted irony in my relationship with plants; tending and nurturing plant-life, keeping them alive and taking care of them, whilst being rooted within (and coming to terms with) significant loss. Because of this, I now hold a passion for plants that is beyond the ways they grow, stretch and reach, but exists because of how the repetitive nature of tending to them makes me feel, allowing me to simply, *be*. This is, as I show within this thesis, not unusual. Working with and alongside plants affords people embodied experiences beyond gardening. Plants and gardens are things and spaces that allow people to build meaning, connections and community, where they can process and channel emotion and feeling, and where they can find (potential) ripples of solace, peace, and joy.

Looking into this kind of experience, I found that whilst there is an abundance of research which explores the general benefits of gardening, both through a therapeutic lens (e.g., Sempik et al., 2005; Kim and Park, 2018; Harris, 2017; Diamant and Waterhouse, 2010; Horowitz, 2012; Howarth et al., 2016; Kavanagh, 1995) and in everyday gardening (e.g., Scott et al., 2015; Hawkins et al., 2013; Soga, Gaston and Yamaura, 2017), the majority explores this for men and women. I found that there was minimal research looking to women specifically, both in terms of

therapeutic gardening (e.g., Park et al., 2016; Eriksson, Westerberg and Jonsson, 2011) and the everyday gardening (e.g., Infantino, 2004; Bhatti, 2014). More than this, when looking to research about gardening in general, I noticed there was minimal work looking to women and gardening outside of the home garden, and further, with only a few papers looking specifically to women in spaces such as allotments and community gardens (e.g., Buckingham, 2005; White, 2011; Grabbe et al., 2013; Moore et al., 2014).

My relationship to plants was inspired in ways that sits outside of the picture most literature portrays: a traditional nuclear framework within the domestic home. Gardening was brought into my life by a single parent (my mother) and was nurtured and maintained in its early stages within a circle of women (mothers of friends, and friends). In turn, I have shared and inspired my friends (the majority of whom are women) with my passion; gifting seedlings and cuttings, and sprouting stones for them, helping them to start their own collections. Undoubtedly, I was surprised by how little representation was given within the academy to women and gardening, especially with regards to the ways it benefits women's lives, and the meaning that these growing practices and activities can imbue. More, I was surprised by the ways women were brought into the conversation; almost always within the private garden sphere, and nearly always conducted in comparison to or alongside men, and often surrounding a home-making discourse. As with many pockets of society, women do not seem to take up space within this green-fingered academic landscape.

Women have been inherent to my interest in this hobby. Moreover, it has been the community, sharing and networking that have been critical to this, along with the ways gardening made (and makes) me feel, and the meaning I have built into the process of *doing*. Because of this, I questioned why I could not see this reflected more in the literature and with this, posing further questions; what does gardening mean to women? How does being a woman change relationships and meanings to this pursuit? Why do women grow? What does the allotment landscape look like across communities of green-fingered, soil-clad, women?

## 1.2. Research overview

### 1.2.1. Background

Gardens are an important facet of the British every day. Gardening has been described as Britain's most popular leisure activity (Alfrey and Sleeman, 2003), with the country having long been described as a "nation of gardeners" (Alfrey and Sleeman, 2003: 9; Wiles, 2015: 341) which is often extended to the English identity that aligns cultural value with the garden and gardening. Indeed, Morris (1996: 59) refers to gardens as "key sites within the cultural landscape", whilst Bhatti et al. (2009: 61) describe the home garden as an "extraordinary place full of enchanting encounters".

Looking to the media, it is difficult to disagree with this portrayal, with gardens covered within most types of broadcasting in the UK (Bhatti, Church, and Claremont, 2013), including across newspapers with gardening sections, magazines dedicated to gardens and gardening, along with books and newsletters, as well as radio broadcasts and television shows. Social media, too, has seen an upsurge in the ways in which it is used to create, share, and interact with gardening-related matter, especially Facebook, TikTok and Instagram (Park and Shin, 2021; Parenti, 2023). This is not entirely new, with gardening content being part of the general media since the 1990s and important for the nation's lifestyle (Taylor, 2016), rippling throughout our homes and our day-to-day in what we read and scroll over, see on television, and listen to with podcasts and radios. This is, as Taylor (2016) shows, linked to consumer spending and capitalism, with the British cultural shift moving from a civic culture to a consumer one (Bauman, 1987), which is motivated by cultural consumption (Chevalier, 1998) where lifestyle projects, like gardening and Do-It-Yourself, become mechanisms which help people cope with the stress of modernity (Chaney, 2001). People invest in these forms of lifestyle culture, and they become "imbued with ethical, moral and aesthetic significance" within people's everyday lives (Taylor, 2002: 482), especially the home. Gardening does not just occur in the domestic, however, and is seen in rooftop gardens, balconies, roundabouts and wastelands, in public gardens, orchards, and parks, as well as sites like community gardens and allotments, with much media (like books, podcasts, and social media) aligning to these interests and locations.

Allotments are a key part of gardening culture within the United Kingdom (Crouch and Ward, 1989). The National Society of Allotments and Leisure Gardeners (NSALG, n.d.-a) estimate that in 2021 there were around 330,000 plots in Britain, with around a further 157,000 people on waiting lists for a local plot. But what are they? Allotments are large spaces of land, usually owned by local authorities, which are broken down into plots. A full plot is around 250m<sup>2</sup>, which can be further divided into half-plots/quarter plots when demand is high (Crouch and Ward 1989; Crouch, 1993). Individuals from the local community apply to the local authority or to local allotment sites for a plot, with many having a waiting list. When sites are available, they are offered to those at the top of the list and are rented in exchange for a fee. In terms of purpose, the allotment is used for the cultivation of fruits, vegetables, and plants, as well as recreational purposes like flowers (Jensen and Sørensen, 2020). Traditionally, they are spaces which have held a role within the self-provisioning of food (Crouch and Ward, 1989) and are strongly associated with specific culture and tradition within these spaces. Specifically, having gained national prominence during World War I and II, they were stereotyped to working class men digging at rows of vegetables, growing prize winning produce, and using tried-and-tested means of growing, which was all embedded within a culture of reciprocity and the exchange of seeds, plants, produce and advice: the allotment way of life (Crouch and Ward, 1989; Crouch, 1993; Crouch, 1989; Jensen and Sørensen, 2020).

With such descriptions, it is easy to see these sites as places connected to men. Research often supports this, with both Perez-Vasquez et al. (2010) and Kettle (2014) finding that men are both more likely to be associated with these spaces and be the people who spend more time in them. Conversely, the NSALG (n.d.-b) found that whilst women made up 2% of allotment holders in 1973, by 2003 this had increased to 20%, with Susan Buckingham's (2005) work echoing much of the same trajectory in 2005. Fifteen years later in 2020, the Association for Public Excellence (APSE, 2020) found that nationally, around 50% of allotment holders are women, with some more location-specific studies mirroring the same, with recent research showing that 64% of allotments in London are occupied by women (Fletcher and Collins, 2020).

This development within who uses allotments today is important, as with change comes an evolution of how these spaces are engaged with, and what they mean to these different people,



altering influences within activities, communities, and networks. Yet, as I have highlighted, the academy does not seem to be reflecting or representing this. Research like Buckingham (2005), White (2011) and Moore et al. (2014) begin to give space to women, illustrating elements such as why and how they grow at the allotment, but understandings of their experiences such as how they navigate these spaces, the meanings they build, and the ways they move within and embody such landscapes, is still largely unknown.

## 1.2.2. Rationale

This research exploring the allotment as a gendered space sits at an intersecting juncture between sociology, human geography, gender studies, and critical plant studies, and makes an important and valuable contribution to a lean discourse academically, but also within our understanding of the allotment space more generally. The work highlights the allotment landscape as complex, with nuance and diversity, and as a place more than ‘just’ for growing fruits and vegetables.

This research develops a discourse of the allotment as a gendered space, and as a feminist one, bringing with it important discussions surrounding gendered bodies, meanings imbued with these landscapes, as well as relationships with the self, with others, and to the more-than-human that exist there, too. Moreover, conducting this research disrupts traditional ways of knowing and seeing the allotment, looking beyond the cloth-capped older man that we are used to envisaging. As mentioned, research such as Susan Buckingham (2005), Moore et al., (2014), and figures by the NASLG (n.d.-b) demonstrate that allotments are spaces that women are using, and as such this representation needs to be echoed back within the literature, and within our understanding of these social spaces, especially through a gendered lens.

A feminist approach is important for this work as it is looking to interrogate, deconstruct, and disrupt a space (the allotment) which has previously marginalised and ignored women as social actors. In working to change this narrative, this thesis holds a commitment to represent women’s voices, rather than reproducing the invisibilisation of their lived stories, experiences, and histories. Underpinned by feminist theory, in this way, this qualitative approach allows for the conceptualisation of research questions to be focused upon the participants, further honouring

their perspectives and experiences, looking to the ways they engage with and imbue these (allotment) spaces directly. Moreover, this work seeks to answer the research questions that are worth exploring within this area, considering how and where value is placed on data, and what this means, rather than simply identifying gaps and answering them, without looking to the value of the research or the meaning within the production of the data. In doing so, this thesis works in conversation with a choice of creative methods and semi-structured interviews, and as I discuss further in chapter three, this allows for the participant's stories and experiences to be at the heart of the thesis, aiding to unearth rich, detailed, and nuanced data which can be understood in ways that are both representative, meaningful, and with depth.

More specifically, research looking to women, the allotment, and how we can explore this environment as a gendered space in creative qualitative ways has the potential to embrace valuable routes of enquiry that are pertinent to these landscapes. This includes considering how women enjoy and spend time in allotments and, informed by current narratives within the academy (see Bhatti et al., 2009 and Buckingham, 2005), the ways in which roles and tasks are undertaken, assigned, and/or managed. Along with this, we can question the way(s) that these spaces serve as mechanisms for women in different ways than they have been conceptualised more traditionally, how this can alter how they see themselves and how they identify within these spaces, and what purpose this encumbers, including community development, novel narratives and experiences, physical benefits, and different ways of growing, both literally (in terms of vegetation) and more holistically (as people). As I have highlighted, existing literature has so far focused on the private domestic garden, with little expansion on this to more public spaces, like the allotment or within community garden spaces, where roles and rationales may alter and diversify. In expanding this discussion and research, questions surrounding women's experiences in these spaces can be raised, along with queries regarding the way(s) they navigate them, the hurdles they encounter, and the way(s) that their gardening practices evolve or alter within this space.

Much of the research that exists discussing 'who' uses allotments and 'how' is a growing body of work, but importantly, it is largely conducted within a gender binary, with a limited specific focus. Whilst a small amount of research has looked specifically to women in such shared

growing spaces (e.g. Buckingham, 2005; Raisborough and Bhatti, 2007; Braga Bizarria, Palomino-Schalscha and Stupples; 2022; Moore et al., 2014), the majority of the wider (and certainly, influential) literature, like Crouch and Ward (1989), Bhatti et al. (2009), Bhatti and Church (2000) and Bhatti (2014), have focused on how both men and women experience gardening more generally. Moreover, the popular work surrounding allotments and wellbeing tends to look to people's experiences more broadly, without specifically looking to or considering the influences of gender (see Bishop and Purcell, 2013; Wood, Pretty and Griffin, 2016; Soga, Gaston and Yamaura, 2017; Webber, Hinds and Camic, 2015; Clatworthy, Hinds and Camic, 2017). Across the board I acknowledge there has been little research looking specifically to those who identify as men, but equally, this is also true in terms of exploring experiences with those who identify as women. Here, this research can begin to address this sparsity within the academy, concentrating solely on women.

Similarly, much of the research that has been conducted has been both cis-gendered and heteronormative, with little attention given to people who exist outside of the traditional gender and sexuality binaries, including trans people and queer people. Conducting research that is more inclusive creates valuable opportunities to explore how gender and sexual identities can influence, change, and/or evolve women's experiences in allotment spaces, especially as community, networking, and relationships to others can be pivotal to time spent in such environments. Braga Bizarria, Palomino-Schalscha and Stupples (2022), when doing a literature review exploring urban agricultural initiatives as feminist spaces, found no literature that spoke to non-binary or trans-perspectives, stressing a much-needed call for further research. Similarly, there is little research like Moore et al. (2014) that is taking steps to disrupt the heteronormative approach and look to queer women's experiences at the allotment. Not only is conducting such work more inclusive, but it is through disrupting these traditional assumptions and approaches that research can look to the allotment and include a wide range of people, many of whom may have an array of identities and sexualities, that spend time in these green growing spaces. Importantly, in doing so, research can ask questions about the ways allotments are used, navigated, or experienced through such non-traditional approaches, as well as interrogate how different meanings can be imbued within these spaces, and what this means for relationships to society, to others, and to the more-than-human.

### 1.2.3. Research questions and methods

This empirical research sets out to explore the allotment through women who use them. Looking to their experiences, stories, and histories, I consider how allotments are gendered spaces, what these spaces mean for women, and how the ways they navigate and experience these spaces can be affected by and because of their gender. In doing so, I explore the different ways women can dictate and orientate themselves within this landscape, as well as how these spaces can influence, impact, change and/or transform for women, across their gender and sexual identities, bodies, everyday lives and family set-ups, along with how they develop meanings, lived experiences, and relationships with themselves, other people, and the more-than-human that they encounter.

To achieve this, I posit four main research questions, which were developed through an inductive, feminist research approach:

(i) *How are allotments gendered spaces?*

As demonstrated in this chapter, gardens have a history of being more aligned as men's spaces, yet research and statistics highlight that more women are now using allotments. This first, and perhaps biggest research question considers and explores the multitude of ways in which allotments are gendered spaces.

(ii) *What do these allotment spaces mean for women?*

The second research question evolves the former and explores what these spaces mean for women, specifically. There is a dearth of literature which explores allotments for women, and this research question addresses the meaning of these landscapes for the women who use them, looking to why they use them, what they gain from them, and how these spaces may or may not hold meaning (and why).

(iii) *How do women experience and navigate these spaces?*

This third research question looks to address how women navigate allotment spaces, and how they navigate the allotment as a gendered space. More than this, it also looks to how they experience these landscapes, and what this means for the meanings that are built and attached there, and to their time spent at and in these sites.

(iv) *How does being a woman inform the use, navigation, and experience of the allotment?*

The fourth and final research question looks to encompass the other research questions and asks how being a woman informs the ways in which the allotment is used, navigated, and experienced, both independently, with others, and alongside the more-than-human. This research question interrogates what it means to be a woman at these sites, including elements of day-to-day experience, motivations, and the ways their gender (and gender identity) changes, or informs this.

Whilst I cover this in more detail in chapter three, it is useful to understand how I looked to explore these research questions. Data was gathered through a reflexive, feminist methodology which employed three main methods: (i) ethnography (ii) participant-generated photography and diaries and (iii) semi-structured interviews. Nineteen participants were recruited for this research, all of whom identified as women, were aged between 29 and 78 years of age, and held an allotment somewhere in the north of England. Ethnography visits were carried out with the participants at their plots from March 2022 through to September 2022, whilst each participant also had a disposable camera with 36 exposures to use throughout this time, along with two diaries, which they could fill out how they wished. Finally, semi-structured interviews were carried out across September and October 2022 either at the participant's allotments, in their homes, or online. During these conversations we spoke about their allotments, their experiences and their stories as women who grow, using a semi-structured interview schedule I had designed as well as discussing their photographs at length.

Several themes were identified and consideration of them all goes beyond the scope of this thesis. As such, the themes which spoke most strongly to the participants were given the most consideration. Consequently, the discussion chapters of this thesis are made up of three interconnected and entangled themes which create key discussion points about the participant's data, and for this thesis. They are: (i) *bodies*, (ii) *becoming*, and (iii) *belonging*. Whilst I discuss them across three distinct chapters, it is important to consider and understand them not as siloed, but as interconnected, across each other, whilst also working as standalone conceptualisations of the allotment.

## 1.2.4. Terminology

Before continuing with this thesis in more depth, it is important to cover important points of terminology and who this thesis includes and acknowledges in its frequent use of the word, *women*.

Feminist scholarship works to deconstruct and disrupt the predominantly masculine cultural way of approaching society, working to create a feminist perspective which acknowledges women's voices and lived experiences which have traditionally been silenced and marginalised by men (Greene and Kahn, 1985). As established, this research looks specifically to women, and is looking to widen our understandings of allotments, which are traditionally masculinised spaces, and explore how women navigate, experience, and operate within these landscapes. Differences, here, can arise in terms of who researchers can mean and understand by 'women', and are often informed by researcher viewpoints, philosophies, and approaches.

As a researcher engaging with participants whose lived experiences and varied histories are central to this piece of work, it is important to acknowledge that I view and understand gender as a social construct, which is variable, flexible, and fluid, housing the ability to change both over time, and within cultures and societies. As such, in line with the definition set out by the World Health Organisation (WHO, 2021), gender within this thesis is viewed as "a person's deeply felt, internal and individual experience of gender, which may or may not correspond to the person's physiology or designated sex at birth". This is in line with conceptualisations of womanhood which move away from the traditional constructs of men and women whose gender identities are seen within heteronormative paradigms (Byrne, 2003). As Byrne (2003: 445) points out, "in a...postmodern world people can choose from a range of identities, recomposing biographical narratives of self and re-presenting themselves anew." Within this thesis, therefore, I understand 'women/woman' to include anyone who self-identifies as a woman. I also employ the term 'self-identify' through Byrne (2003: 443), understanding it as "our own sense of ourselves as persons". This further means that I understand 'women/woman' to be inclusive of trans-women and cis-women, and I conduct this research as a trans-inclusive piece of work.

Here, I use the terms ‘trans’ to encompass the identities of those whose gender identities do not correspond with society’s assumptions based on the sex they were assigned at birth (Serano, 2016), whilst the term ‘cis’ denotes those whose assigned gender at birth corresponds to their self-defined gender identity (van Anders, Caverly and Johns, 2014; Detournay, 2019).

Reflective of this position, where possible within the construction and design of this research and writing of this thesis, I have made a concerted attempt to avoid using research conducted by gender critical scholars or engage with work which is intentionally exclusionary of trans individuals. Whilst it is difficult to ensure this in its entirety, my attempt reflects my position as an ally, as well as a way to avoid reproducing the institutional violence that much of such trans-exclusionary, gender critical work can produce.

### **1.3. Thesis structure**

Following this introductory chapter, the remaining thesis is broken down into eight entangled sections. They are as follows:

First, **chapter two** (Fertilising the Academic Landscape) sets the scene with a broad academic *literature review*. As this research sits at an interdisciplinary juncture, a broad discussion is important to understand this thesis, the subject area(s) around it, and the research that informs it. As such, this chapter provides a brief history of gardening and of the allotment, giving insightful depth and creating a foundation for this thesis. Following this, the chapter looks to theoretical understanding of space and place, using Foucault (1986) and his concepts of heterotopia and utopia, as well as work influenced by Soja (1996) and third places, demonstrating how the allotment is a place where meanings can be built that goes far beyond growing. This chapter also looks to understand the benefits of gardening in allotments, considering health as well as capital and the ways allotments are places people can grow food, learn skills and knowledge, as well as create communities and networks with social cohesion. Finally, this chapter explores literature surrounding women and gardening, looking to the limited histories we have about women in these spaces, and showing the ways they can forge important relationships, and develop and show environmental practices and politics through their green-fingered work. This chapter

demonstrates the limited research that has been conducted so far that explores the allotment through a gendered lens, highlighting the importance and necessity of such scrutiny.

Next, in **chapter three** (The Allotment Toolbox), I cover the research *methodology*. Here, I describe the ontological and epistemological foundations which underpin this thesis, highlighting the significance of conducting this research using a reflexive, feminist approach, and illustrating the value of centering participant voice. This chapter also describes the participants, including how they were recruited for this project, and provides key information regarding this cohort of women. Following this, I explain and justify why I chose to use ethnography, creative methods, and semi-structured interviews for this piece of work, as well as detail how I employed these methods at a time when the country was still affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. This chapter also discusses the data that was collected across these methods, and how this was transcribed and analysed. Finally, this chapter ends with an in-depth reflection of the ethical considerations that occurred throughout this research, as well as how some of these issues impacted and effected the project design and process.

With **chapter four** (An Assemblage of Women) I provide important *participant biographies*, alongside a photograph I have chosen from each participant's disposable camera. This chapter brings to life each participant, providing a vignette of who they are and what they grow within their allotment.

In **chapter five** (Digging at the Data I) I begin discussing the data surrounding this project, and the themes within it. This chapter focusses on *bodies*, and looks to the way women's bodies encounter the allotment and how they navigate the challenges that they are often faced with, within this space. Specifically, this chapter explores the toilet-less allotment and unearths how women handle needing bathrooms in these spaces, including as transwomen, and as women experiencing menstruation, and miscarriage. This chapter extends this conversation further, looking to naked bodies, too. Specifically using Lizzie's "hillbilly hot tub", I discuss bathing at the allotment and consider the allotment as a site of radical encounter, where they become places not just to be dirty, but also to be clean. With this, I also explore nudity in this landscape and the ways some bodies can claim this space, whilst others cannot. It is through this chapter that I



explore and interrogate issues surrounding power and embodiment, encapsulated within the functioning, moving, thinking, feeling (and sometimes naked) human form.

With **chapter six** (Digging at the Data II), I further discuss the data collected and I explore the notion of *becoming* at the allotment, interrogating the ways in which women orientate themselves and identify, and exploring how they see themselves within this space. Here, I look to how the participants refer to themselves, deconstructing what we understand by words like “gardener” and “allotmenteer”, unearthing how we can situate this across skill, knowledge, expertise, and gender. With this, I analyse how these women build meaning within these spaces, looking to how this links to facets of their self-identity, and how they are perceived by others. Exploring this further, I speak specifically to the allotments of Fauna and Lizzie, looking at how they build meaning within these sites of growth, and possibility. Moreover, I look to notions of homemaking, hospitality, and sexuality, queering the allotment and disrupting this landscape, approaching it as a space of continuous growth, development, and evolution; of *becoming*.

Next, with **chapter seven** (Digging at the Data III), I begin the final discussion of the research data and I consider the notion of *belonging* at the allotment. Within this chapter I explore the messy, entangled multispecies relationships that exist across the human and more-than-human at the allotment, understanding this through a lens of care. To do this, I look to the participants’ relationships with growing, consider the marketisation of produce, and the ways the women protect their growing fruits and vegetables. Here, I explore the more-than-human relationships that exist at the plot, and the tensions that exist when interrogating who does (or does not) belong in the allotment, specifically looking to the messy, complicated relationships many of the participants have with slugs. Following this, I expand this interrogation and look to explore the allotment through the physical land and how the participants build relationships to the earth, particularly through the practice of composting. Beyond this, I explore the meaning that is built within the allotment through a political lens, and then more conceptually, look to edges and boundaries. With this chapter, I build the final piece of this thesis, demonstrating that the allotment is a complex space full of entangled, tentacular tensions, relationships, and meanings, showing that this landscape is so much more than just a place to grow for these women.

Finally, in **chapter eight** (Going Over), I provide *the conclusion* for this thesis. Here, I knit together the discussions and interrogations that constitute this piece of work. To do so, I provide a summary of the main findings of this project, covering the ideas that I have developed and explored. Following this, I look to detail the contributions this thesis brings, and the ways it adds critical pieces of knowledge as well as interesting ideas to an ever-evolving academic landscape. I demonstrate the importance of looking to women in the allotment, showing how valuable it is to explore these sites beyond a landscape in which to grow, and instead as a messy site of complexity, resistance, transient change, and radical transformation, with active, leaky humans and more-than-humans, who hold and encounter each other through entangled, knotty relationships. Finally, I explore the ways in which future research can develop this thesis, looking to consider this area more broadly within a more diverse group of participants, and consider questions future research can pose that will evolve this work even further.

## **1.4. A way of working**

This thesis, whilst written in a traditional format, unfolds slowly, reflecting much of the happenings of and within the allotment. The literature review (chapter two) fertilises the ground upon which the thesis grows, providing broad but important discussions regarding relevant theory and existing research and literature, helping to build a picture of this area of study. Upon this, the methodology chapter (chapter three) sits, working to give structure to how this research was developed, designed, and conducted. The product of the thesis then grows from and around these two foundational components, with three discussion chapters (chapters five, six, and seven). Here, the ideas contained within these chapters emerge slowly and affectively, with care, and sometimes – much like which often happens at the allotment – in surprising and unexpected ways. With this, I have purposefully written this thesis in a way that does not reveal the ideas and contributions of this piece of work all at once, but instead, I allow for these novel ideas, discourses, and discussions to reveal themselves over time, as each chapter grows and flourishes.

Furthermore, this is a thesis of telling of women's stories from landscapes that are enjoyed through our experiences and through our senses; allotments are places of nature and noise, of colour and blooms, of scent and smell, and of taste and texture. This embodied, sensory element

is a key part of the fieldwork and for the writing of this thesis, and it has been troublesome to translate this into a lexicon that reflects the often-ephemeral allotment experience. Instead of hoping imagination and words alone transcend enough to bring to life these sights and smells, I have provided photographs throughout this thesis. Most of these photographs are those of the participants, who captured these images as part of this research on flimsy, disposable cameras. Other, fewer, images are my own, snapshotting elements of the research process, including recruitment, data analysis, ethnography, and interviews.

These visual aids bring to life this important research, whilst simultaneously placing the participants and their allotments at the very centre of this thesis. Throughout the thesis there are images that reflect, support, and/or illustrate the discussion points or narratives that are built throughout this work, along with a pseudonymous photograph of a participant at the beginning of each chapter, reminding us of whose these stories are about. Each photograph throughout this thesis is labelled, detailing whose camera and allotment the image is from. Occasionally, where the photograph is not a participant's, this is indicated with 'author's own', illustrating my vantage point. This work is both *for* and *about* these women, and their continued presence throughout this thesis exists not just as participants, but as a reminder that these women that I talk about and whose stories I tell, exist alongside us in our world, and without whom, this research would not exist.

# Chapter Two || Fertilising the Academic Landscape

a literature review



Photograph 2.1. *Suzie at her plot*

## 2.0. Introduction

This chapter works to root this thesis within the academic literature, creating the foundation for this project. First, the chapter starts with a general history of gardening, illustrating the ways in which both the space of ‘the garden’ and the doing of ‘gardening’ is deeply rooted within British culture, whilst also highlighting the nuances in our understandings of these words, and bringing the focus to the allotment. Following this, I underpin this nuance in terminology with theory, looking to how we can understand gardens and growing spaces using theoretical consideration of space and place, utilising work by Foucault (1986) and Soja (1996), building further understandings of how growing spaces are places in which meaning is imbued. Next, I expand upon these meanings and look to the benefits of gardening, across both physical and mental wellness, as well as the ways in which capital can be developed, accrued, and grown, using work by Bourdieu (1986, 1989) to underpin this. Finally, I look specifically to women and gardening, exploring the history of women in green growing spaces, and the ways in which we can consider gardens as feminist spaces, across food production, care, and community.

## 2.1. Gardening: a history

The quintessential English Garden is a familiar, everyday landscape, steeped in antiquity, and a successful national cultural stereotype of Britain (Bhatti et al., 2009; Bhatti, Church, and Claremont, 2014; Bhatti, 2006; Tilley, 2015; Lowenthal, 1991), which can be witnessed through a vibrant history of garden design and horticulture, as well as within other cultural artefacts in the likes of classical and contemporary poetry, literature, and art.

There is, however, difference in how we can understand what we mean by the term, *garden*, with various disciplines looking to this site differently. Scholars Mark Bhatti and Andrew Church (2000: 183) understand it to mean the domestic private garden, and specifically as “an area of enclosed ground cultivated or not, within the boundaries of the owned or rented dwelling, where plants are grown, and other materials arranged spatially”. Whilst effective, this definition is complicated by the ways many homes have two gardens, which are separated into the “front garden for show, but the back garden for privacy”, where back gardens can be thought of as

“secret gardens, private and available by invitation only” (Bhatti, Church and Claremont, 2014: 42). The boundaries of these spaces are both literal and metaphorical; the front garden is the space that the public often see that homeowners feel represents them, whilst the back garden is the space for privacy, welcomed to others by invitation only. Both spaces are usually demarcated somehow, with fences, pavements, small brick walls, and hedges bordering front gardens, whilst back gardens are often surrounded by tall hedges or fences, where peering eyes cannot see in.

Importantly, the term ‘garden’ is not limited to just the domestic, which is useful for our understanding given the increase in attention garden spaces have received since the late 1990s (Longhurst, 2006; Bhatti and Church, 2000; Bhatti, 2006). Beyond the home, the ‘garden’ can pertain to several different green spaces, including community gardens, stately homes with gardens, council-run gardens with free public access, botanical gardens, balcony gardens, allotments, and rooftop gardens. Such spaces exist on an agrobiodiverse continuum, with some having structure and tradition, like mowed lawns and trimmed topiaries, whilst others have high levels of biodiversity, like compost bays, and no-dig vegetable beds, supporting an intricate web of natural ecosystems (Lin, Egerer and Ossala, 2018). This diversity is also reflected in the use of the land, with variety in what is grown and where, such as vegetables, medicinal plants and herbs, spices, mushrooms, indigenous plants, wildflowers, fruit trees and other productive plants, as well as livestock for eggs, meats, milks, and wool (Taylor and Lovell, 2014). Woo and Suh (2016) highlight that this diversity within different growing spaces is an important development away from the traditional focus of the private garden, demonstrating not only how important these environments are to people and their culture, but that gardens are more complex spaces than we first understand. This multiplicity of the term ‘garden’ also expands what we can understand to be grown and what tasks are to be undertaken in these spaces, what (or whom) we mean by ‘a gardener’, and what we understand of the action or activity of doing ‘gardening’.

Historically, the term ‘garden’ began in landscape and design literature in the early nineteenth century, and the common use denoted private and personal green domestic spaces which was synonymous with the upper classes (Gaskell, 1980). At the same time, however, it was also used as a term to describe spaces of “dissipation and ill repute” (Gaskell, 1980: 480) for the working classes, who did not have any personal green space, who could be found seeking “amusement and

gratification” and drinking in gardens away from their homes (Gaskell,1980: 480). More recently, Gross (2017: 17) writes that the verb ‘to garden’ means “to lay out, cultivate, or tend” whilst the term ‘gardening’ is better used to refer to “the job or activity of working in a garden, growing and taking care of plants and keeping it attractive”. This includes gardening as a “past time” or “the work or art of a gardener” (Gross 2017: 17). Here, compared to the earlier definition by Bhatti and Church (2000), there is a broadening within the meaning of the term, with laying out, cultivating, and tending taking place in numerous spaces, from windowsills through to orchards, with similar being applied to the process of growing and taking care of plants. We no longer need to be constricted to the domestic garden as we might, given history, assume.

Along with ‘garden’, the term ‘horticulture’ is a widely used related synonym. Diane Relf (1992:159) suggests that a comprehensive definition of horticulture can be:

the art and science of growing flowers, fruits, vegetables, trees, and shrubs, resulting in the development of the minds and emotions of individuals, the enrichment and health of communities, and the integration of the garden in the breath of modern civilisation.

Here, ‘horticulture’ further broadens our understanding of the landscape beyond the private garden further, adding in the growing of fruits and vegetables, which are popular in allotments, and expanding what we can consider is grown in gardens in terms of produce, and variety. As such, we move from the typical stereotype of the home garden that is associated with ‘the garden’ and evolve this to the inclusion of community and the processes of enrichment and wellness, rather than focusing on the means or output (e.g., to grow for the produce). Furthermore, we can look to spaces that allow the doing of gardening to become a shared activity rather than a domestic duty or on an individual activity, and include friendships, relationships and the development of communities and networks, as well as benefits to health and wellbeing to our understanding.

We can see that there are no simple or unified way in which to use the words ‘gardener’, ‘garden’, or ‘gardening’: they do not mean one simple action or way of being or one specific

place. Understanding and acknowledging this is important if we are to interrogate and deconstruct what these spaces can mean, how people navigate and exist within them, and why.

### 2.1.1. The allotment

One space that we can understand as a variation of a ‘garden’ where ‘gardening’ is undertaken is in shared garden spaces, like allotments and community gardens. Just like the words ‘garden’ and ‘gardening’, so can ‘shared garden spaces’ be understood in several terms, including ‘shared green spaces’, ‘shared urban spaces’, ‘agricultural spaces’, as well as terms which often pertain to specific locations, like allotment plots. When compared to the private, isolated space of the domestic garden, the notion of urban garden spaces broadens our understandings of what we can consider as ‘gardening spaces’. They are places that allow people to engage with growing in urban environments, bringing people together and building communities, whilst also providing people with access to land that they may not have at home (Murphy, Parker and Hermus, 2022; Nikolaidou et al., 2016).

Allotments are a key location of shared gardening in Britain, and according to the NSALG (n.d.-a) there are over 330,000 plots across the country. But what exactly are they? David Crouch and Colin Ward (1989) have written extensively about this space in their influential book *The Allotment*, and for them, the allotment is abstract, and is “shorthand for a number of people, places and activities” (Crouch and Ward, 1989: 26). To the outsider, allotments are “deeply hedged and intimate secret gardens” as well as “newer wide-open sites...with rows of cars, their boots and hatchbacks open to reveal forks, spades and bags of compost” (Crouch and Ward, 1989: 24). Such descriptions merge images of suburbs and villages, as well as remote smallholdings and open landscapes of arable land, leaving much with the creativity of the reader. Importantly, there is no ubiquitous understanding or meaning for what we know or define as ‘the allotment’. There are, however, stereotypes of the people and places from photographs of the past. We can imagine them as plots with:

rows of sprouts and cabbages, little homemade huts and broken fences,  
smouldering bonfires- and the solitary figure of a cloth-capped unemployed  
worker, his shabby collar turned up against the wind, pushing his bicycle



home with a bunch of carrots over the handlebars (Crouch and Ward, 1989: 24)

Allotments are, however, more than this simple stereotype. Rather, they have a long and complex history, tied up in the beginning with disenfranchised “men in the wood” who owned small parcels of land (Banham and Faith, 2014: 218), evolving into spaces that we are familiar with today because of war, movements propelled by social reformers, a generation of industrialised cityscapes, and emerging more recently with notions of urban sustainability and environmentalism (Crouch, 1989; DeSilvey, 2003; Buckingham, 2003; Crouch and Wiltshire, 2005). In the United Kingdom, the term ‘allotment’ began to appear in enclosure acts within Parliament in the early 1900s, where green provision was given to the poor as a source of food growing. Soon after, the 1908 Small Holdings and Allotments Act was developed (Willes, 2015), protecting these spaces. With this, we can consider allotments as community spaces which are gardened as individual plots within a communal environment (Kingsley et al., 2009). More specifically, using the Allotments Act 1922, we can understand present day ‘allotment gardens’ as “parcels of land not exceeding 40 poles (or 1,000 square metres) which is wholly or mainly cultivated by the plot-holder for the production of vegetables or fruit by him/herself and family”. Legislation still informs allotment land today, with the 1908 Small Holdings and Allotment Act being a foundational stone, strengthened by the Allotments Acts of 1922, 1925 and 1950. Such legislation protects this land, meaning local authorities (who often own allotment land, as per the statute) cannot sell the space, and instead, they must continually provide the land in its traditional form only, as an allotment.

Allotments are not always just available on statutory land, and they can also be found in private space, too. As such, the National Society of Allotment and Leisure Gardeners (NSALG) exists as the main arbiter for allotments, representing and upholding the rights and interests of the allotment community across the United Kingdom. Membership of the NSALG (n.d.-b) is made up of allotment associations, societies, schools, local councils, private landlords, and individuals. Membership allows for the benefit of several provisions provided by the association, including rent and plot size policies, legal advice, insurance help, waiting list advice, and assistance with community access, livestock, flooding, as well as food provision and food banks. The NSALG

motto is to “protect, promote, preserve” (NSALG, n.d.-c) allotment space and home growing, whilst also providing informative and impartial advice, especially as many people may not realise that allotments are managed and allocated (rather than freely available) or indeed, are not free. They suggest that allotments are on average 10 poles (250m<sup>2</sup>) in size (NSALG, n.d.-a), and whilst people still grow fruits and vegetables as early legislation stipulates, there is often additional plant life grown, including ornamental flowers and other plant life that is not for consumption and which are often grown alongside the more traditional fruits and vegetables, as well as the tending of some livestock, such as chickens, hens, and rabbits. Local authority rules do influence this, however, and not all sites are allowed all (and in some cases, any) livestock.

Access to allotments has, for a long time, been managed traditionally. Outside of London, under the Small Holdings and Allotments Act 1908, all local authorities are mandated to provide allotment provision to residents, with the NSALG (n.d.-a) recommending that 20 plots should be available for every 1,000 households. Plots are provided by local authorities in exchange for a fee, but they can also be privately owned, managed by social co-operations, or governed by some churches or parishes. Usually, allotment holders are required to live within a certain area, postcode, or mile-radius from the sites, with many having waiting lists of applicants, and each site tending to function slightly differently (NSALG, n.d.-a). Interestingly, since 2012, the Association for Public Service Excellence (APSE) has created the annual *State of the Market* report, which identifies key findings and points of value around the use of allotments within communities. In 2023, the report found that the fee rates for allotments have generally increased, with over 50% of local authorities charging over £70 per annum for an allotment, although costs vary in line with different facilities and plot sizes (e.g., quarter plots (two poles), half plots (five poles), full plots (ten+ poles), allotments shops, toilets, lighting, social events etc). The report also notes many councils are halving and quartering previously full-size plots to address large waiting lists. Indeed, 30% of allotment providers across the country recorded waiting lists with over 1,000 people, and 22% with lists of between 500 and 800 people, which sits alongside figures showing that there were over 157,800 applications across the year (APSE, 2023).

Extending from allotments, we can also consider community garden spaces, especially as they often cross over in terms of locale and are seeing an increase in popularity across several societies

and cultures (Malberg Dyg, Christensen and Peterson, 2020). Defining community gardens is like defining allotments, with no ubiquitous classification. Whilst Kingsley et al. (2009) define allotments as plots within a communal environment, 'allotments' are mechanistically different to 'community gardens', and it is within this difference that we see variation in the mechanics of these landscapes. Moreover, the doing of 'community gardening' itself is different to the activity of 'gardening in a community garden' (McGuire, Morris and Pollard, 2022). 'Community gardening', which is the act of planting and growing in shared spaces within and across local communities, can occur in a plethora of spaces, from guerrilla gardening in public spaces, through to back alleys, public parks, abandoned wastelands, and building rooftops (Hung, 2017; Martin, 1996; Sen, 2023; Specht, Reynolds and Sanyé-Mengual, 2017; Milbourne, 2021; Graf, 2014; Lawson, 2004), whilst a 'community garden', on the other hand, is different. Unlike allotment plots, which are individually leased, archetypal British 'community gardens' are plots that are shared by a multitude of individuals, usually chartered by an overarching separate body like a charity, or through a collective grassroots group. These collective spaces are important, and often function as integral parts of community landscapes, with horticulture being a key benefit alongside a multitude of other holistic, physical, social, and emotional advantages.

Many allotments have plots that specifically function as what we can understand as 'community gardens', and there is much crossover in both how they are used, and how they are engaged with, yet they are fundamentally different in terms of mechanism and purpose. The focus of these community garden spaces is often a combination of the connection of food, nature, and community (Firth, Maye, and Pearson, 2011), and this common space can often be the foundation for shared community action (Linn, 2007), especially for vulnerable populations (Datta, 2019). They are spaces that involve the communal cultivation of plants, which can vary according to local need and desire of both the spaces and residents (McGuire, Morris and Pollard, 2022), and they are often places where everyday people collectively work together to improve their circumstances in life. This allows for collective food production, the promotion of community health and wellness, connectedness and diversity through plant cultivation, as well as collective action, environmental education and consciousness (Meade et al., 2016; Nettle, 2016; McVey, Nash and Stansbie, 2017). Moreover, they are spaces synonymous with public interest, and compared to traditional allotments, they have greater open access with democratic forces

which determine how they are run, giving greater freedoms and less regimentation, with larger spaces often providing facilities for education and training, developing in line with wider community needs (Milbourne, 2011; Firth et al., 2011; Crouch and Ward, 1989).

Whether we know them as ‘an allotment’ or a ‘community garden’, there are elements to these sites that are common, stereotyped, and which signal how the land is used:



**Photograph 2.2.** *Allotment sites from this research, showing typical allotment characteristics*

Whether it is rickety sheds, rows of vegetables and fruits, teepee bamboo poles topped with yoghurt pots and milk cartons, spades and secateurs, blue water drums and green composting tubs, or the ramshackle greenhouses and polytunnels, there are signs and giveaways that tells us these spaces are allotments. More than this, whilst allotments are often placed on public land, they are commonly situated on sites hidden from prying eyes, glimpsed only quickly from a distance, visible only transiently, and accessed only by those with the key, the code, or the know-how (or, know-who). These plots are “intriguingly hidden publics” (Moore et al., 2014: 332), framing towns and cities with their rough edges and bricolage of contents, appearing between places and from train windows, and often leaving the viewer wondering what they just saw (Moore et al., 2014; Crouch and Ward, 1989). They are the perfect site to peer into cautiously, curiously, asking more about these spaces, and what goes on there.

## 2.2. Space and place

The activity of gardening can occur in various spaces and places, from the private domestic garden to the community garden and allotment, through to guerrilla gardening on roadsides, tub gardening on rooftops and terraces, and gardening in public parks and gardens. Growing and gardens, however, have meaning beyond these locations, and to consider this further it is helpful to look to theories of space and place.

### 2.2.1. A theoretical lens

There is an abundance of work exploring the theoretical and conceptual understandings of space and place, and to cover it all is beyond the limitations of this thesis. Research has, however, long identified that there is a relationship between landscape and experience, determining that experiences within our everyday environments are influenced by space itself, and the activities within it (Crouch, 2010; Massey, 2006; Rose, 2002; Soja, 1996).

We can, in the first instance, further understand gardening spaces (and especially allotments and community gardens) through using work by Michel Foucault (1986). In his essay *Of Other Spaces*, Foucault (1986) suggests that the world presents us with oppositions that we take as givens, including private/public space, family/personal space, and work/leisure space. These elements of the everyday, he argues, are mediated by in-between spaces, allowing for the hidden presence of the sacred: they are “utopias” (Foucault, 1986: 24). More, these utopias are in-between locations with no real place, existing as imaginary spaces where society is in perfect form, placeless, transformed against the dominant everyday reality. As counter sites to these “utopias” we find “heterotopias” (Foucault, 1986: 24), which are spaces rooted within reality. They exist in their own enclosed space or within their own cultures, with their own existing and established norms, and can be seen as a pause within ordinary time, like prisons (Johnson, 2013), music festivals (Wilks et al., 2016), and museums (Hetherington, 2011), for example.

Whilst his comments on it are brief, ‘the garden’, Foucault (1986) argues, is a space we can consider as both heterotopic and utopic. For him, gardens are a contradictory emplacement; within them, it is both the actual world and reality, as well as an unreal world that is exaggerated

and imaginary beyond what we think can exist, like paradise. The garden, in this way, can become a small part of the world but also the world in and of its own totality (Foucault, 1986). It is a space of paradox, where art meets nature, artifice meets truth, imagination meets reality, representation meets being, and the mimesis meets origin (Marin, 1992). More, the garden, is a site of ambiguous and uncertain dualism, with spatial incompatibility, symbolic in their idealised and re-imagined place of perfect mythological social order, whilst also being a liminal space within our every day, situated outside of reality but remaining connected, transforming the real world outside.

With this, we can also consider the garden, and particularly the allotment, as a “thirdspace” (Soja, 1996: 6); a notion closely related to Foucault’s (1986) conception of heterotopia (Soja, 2008; Maier, 2013). For Soja (1996), understanding of space needs to move away from this dualistic binary, preventing the reproduction (and understanding) of spaces in certain, particular ways. Here, inspired by Soja (1996), DeSilvey (2003: 444) writes in depth about “third spaces” (rather than Soja’s (1996: 6) “thirdspaces”), describing them as “tangled contingencies” (Bhanba, 1996 cited in DeSilvey, 2003: 444). More, we can understand third spaces more specifically as “constructed environments” (Das, 2008: 297) that foster community and communication (Jeffres et al., 2009), which are not easily categorised into binary terms (Larsson and Nygren, 2024). These third spaces exist “as part of the public domain” and as “sites of many functions conventionally equated with the private sphere” (Schmelzkopf, 1995: 379). According to Jeffres et al. (2009: 334) they are sites we often see within communities, such as “bars and coffee shops, the beauty salons and barbershops, bowling alleys and recreation centres, public places where people meet, congregate and communicate”, and are spaces where people are expected and anticipated to spend time, enjoy, and socialise. As Jeffres et al. (2009: 335) further highlights, they are unique public spaces where people can be socially active agents, where the spaces function for “spontaneity, community building and emotional expression”. It is here, within this discourse, that we can see that allotments exist. They are spaces between the private and the public, between work and leisure, between the urban and the city, between production and consumption, and between the solitary and the shared (Larsson and Nygren, 2024; DeSilvey, 2003). More, we can understand them as spaces to spend time, as places to enjoy, as

environments to build community, and as landscapes outside of the private domestic garden and away from the workplace, where people can meet and congregate, and be active, social agents.

Understanding gardening and with that, allotments, as third spaces is also important because it allows for differentiation from leisure spaces. The undertaking of gardening is often referred to as a leisure activity or a hobby (Cheng et al., 2010; Hawkins et al., 2011; Genter et al., 2015), yet it is not always viewed like this for everyone, all the time. For some, 'gardening' is an extension of housework whilst 'the garden' is a place they can seek solace or quiet. The space of 'the garden' and the action of 'gardening' sit in a space which is in-between, and this may be often driven by the chaos that can come with some growing spaces, which is especially true for allotments. For instance, depending on how overgrown an allotment is inherited, people can be more inclined to see them as spaces of work rather than leisure (DeSilvey, 2003), especially if there is a lot of hard manual labour to undertake. This is further magnified with allotments (and community gardens) because they are not owned but long-term leased, adding to our understanding of them being a liminal in-between, where people can deny having full responsibility or accountability because the space is not their full possession.

Whether private domestic gardens or shared places like allotments and community gardens, such green space sites can be successfully considered as third spaces (Larsson and Nygren, 2024; Noori et al., 2016; Koopmans et al., 2017), sitting in the in-between: between the private and the public, between the city and the countryside, between the leased and the owned, between work and leisure, between the solitary space and the shared space, and between the self and nature. More, they are spaces that contribute to people's lives in an abundance of ways, including creativity (Crouch, 1993), culture (Aptekar, 2015; Glover, Shinew and Parry, 2005), and belonging (Ong et al., 2019; Biglin, 2020), as well as providing community (Kingsley, Foenander and Bailey, 2019) and as a space away from modern urbanisation (Milligan, Gatrell and Bingley, 2004). Whether they are used to escape domestic life, to spend time with others, to take part in leisure or hobby activities, or as places to immerse in nature, gardens (and their myriad of forms) are more complex and hold deeper meaning than they first appear.

## 2.2.2. Understanding through space and place

Whether it is as heterotopias and utopias (Foucault, 1986) and/or third spaces (Soja, 1996; DeSilvey, 2003), we can begin to understand how the locations of gardens and the doing of gardening become important as both a symbolic space, and as a literal place, where time is spent and where people build meaning, community, and belonging (Noori et al., 2016; Friedmann, 2010; Biglin, 2020; Truong, Gray and Ward, 2022). Indeed, gardening has been described as “the most intense form of place-making” (Crozier, 2003: 81) and to explore these landscapes further, including allotments further, we need to look to how people understand, experience and build relationships to and within these spaces even further.

The terms space and place are conceptually inseparable (Casey, 1997), yet they are also distinct. In an everyday sense, place is everywhere and is a ubiquitous term. Often, we are so familiar with the phenomenon indicated by the word ‘place’ that definitions elude us, and the concept is easily ignored, simplified, or misunderstood (Malpas, 1999). Place, then, becomes both “simple and complicated” (Cresswell, 2004: 6), whilst space is more conceptual in its form (Cresswell, 2004).

Our understanding of the complexities of space and place has been aided through developments within human geography and the spatial turn of the social sciences (Cresswell, 2004). Central to this was the development of ‘place’ as a key concept in geographical inquiry by the late geographer, Yi-Fu Tuan (1974). He argues that through human perception and experience we can begin to understand the world *through* places. Space, Tuan (1974) suggests, is an open arena of action with movement, whilst place is for stopping, pausing, and for involvement; place, then, becomes space with meaning. From the stable and secure position of place we can consider the openness, freedom, and potential thread that space can provide. Moreover, as space allows for motion and movement, each pause provided by place allows us to transform open-ended space into meaningful place. It is *through* place where an affective bond between people and the environment can develop, where meaning, attachment, value, and belonging can evolve. Tim Cresswell (2004) adds to this work and suggests that we need to consider place as distinct from space, and from landscape, both of which are often conflated for ‘place’. For Cresswell (2004), place is space that holds meaning, and our attachment to space gives people a sense of place, which helps us to understand and contextualise the world. Moreover, he argues that



landscape is different because we are not in it, or a part of it, even if we give it meaning and interact with it. Landscape is visual, referring to part of the earth's surface which we can view from one spot. This is different to space and place, where space exists between places; landscape is always on the outside, to be looked in at, whilst space and place are experienced from within.

Gardens, whether understood as allotments, community gardens, and/or the private home garden, are, then, spaces that have the potential to become place. They are locations that people attach meanings and are spaces that people can exist within. They are dynamic, often reflecting community production, which Harvey (1996) argues is important in understanding what we consider to *be* place. Moreover, for Malpas (1999), social activities and institutions are expressed in and weave through structures of place, as well as physical objects and events that both contain and constrain those activities, and it is in these structures of places that the possibility for social change can arise. Gardens are places where the human and the more-than-human interact, with much meaning developing within these sites from gardener's ritualistic and repetitive use of the space. Moreover, many allotments sit upon sites that exist because of legislation which protects the land, or from the efforts of residents to protect sites with no statutory guard (Crouch, 1993; Crouch and Ward, 1989; Scott et al., 2018). Without these sites existing, the spaces would not hold meaning. As Cresswell (2004:49) states, "place must come first – that the possibility of society – and these social constructions – only exist because of place".

### 2.2.3. Embodiment and performance with nature

Place is a way of seeing, knowing, and understanding. When we look at the world as an abundance and accumulation of different places, we learn to see many different things, which includes attachments and connections between people, and between people and the land (Cresswell, 2004). There is importance, here, in understanding what meaning places bring to people, how this is constructed, and how it becomes attached.

Place cannot be reduced to being simply understood as 'space with meaning' (Tuan, 1974), or to being only important in relation to the social, cultural, or natural as separate. Instead, place is a phenomenon that brings the social, cultural, and natural together, helping to reproduce them

(Sacks, 1997; Cresswell, 2004). In this way, places not only *are*, but they *happen* (Casey, 2001, emphasis added). Feminist geographer Doreen Massey (1994, 1995a, 1995b) developed an understanding of space as the product of intersecting social relations, whereby to understand space fully we must consider bodies, objects, and flows in new ways, too. Space, she writes, is “the definition of the world we all live in” and that it is a “pincushion of a million stories” (Massey, 2013: para 8). For her, place is the external abstract world, affecting and imbuing our understandings of our surroundings, our attitudes, and our politics. More, desire and imagination are embodied through our encounters in the world, and this is marked within these spaces (Radley, 1990). The ways people interact with space, then, become important in our understandings of what constitute and make up place. Here, furthering work like Tuan (1974, 1977) and Cresswell (2004), geographers have tried to repatriate place by showing the significance for human meaning, intentionality, and social action (Larsen and Johnson, 2012). In this way, the individual becomes pertinent to the construction of meaning with space, looking to the ways people move, speak and experience space through and in relation to the body, the “embodied ontology of living”, and the “feeling of doing” (Crouch, 2010: 1). In this way, the world is not human-centered but participative (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004 [1987]), fuelled by possibility. Crouch (2010: 2) sees this as “flirting with space”; a way in which to consider the threads that connect everyday living with the ways the world is experienced, and the ways space is a fusion of “features, movements, energies; ideas, myths, memories, actions; an active ingredient in processes of feeling...Space is complex, multiple; existing and constituted in energy, living, doing, thinking and feeling.”

Like Massey (1994, 1995, 2013), Crouch (2010) argues that space is an encounter with actively involved individuals, and Tim Ingold (2000, 2008, 2011) echoes this through considering bodily performance. He suggests that through encounters with objects and individuals, space can facilitate us to build meaning within places, and that people can engage with an expression of the self through landscapes; in doing so, we construct and constitute the very process of *doing*. Grounded in the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1962), Ingold (2000, 2004, 2008) argues that this embodied practice gives individuals an awareness of being somewhere. Crouch and Parker (2002) further this as a person’s sense of existing in terms of actions, things, and cultural contexts, while also encountering inhabited volumes of space. It is this feeling of doing that can help

people make sense of how emotions can be physical and imbued within their environment (Harre, 1993). Moreover, much of this awareness is of *being* somewhere and building meaning within these spaces we inhabit, which comes from “a feeling of belonging within the rhythm of life in place” (Cresswell, 2004: 64). This participation in daily performances allows people to become familiar with and feel part of a place, developing feelings of belonging, while those who do not know the routine or the specific ways of being will appear clumsy and out of place (Cresswell, 2004).

Here, we can use this thinking to understand garden spaces. These spaces are built upon routine, with much time and activity dictated by nature, including the seasons, the weather, and the growing cycle, which then inform the tasks needed to be undertaken, such as digging and turning soil, mulching with leaves, weeding, and planting new bulbs. These necessary tasks sit alongside personal routines, lifestyles, and sometimes, family routine and commitment, which can be thought of as formations of living (Lorimer, 2005) within a “time-space routine” (Seamon, 1980: 149). The garden, and more specifically the allotment, is a place for practice and development of skills and the *doing* of ordinary acts, as well as a location for thinking more abstractly, including the ways we think and see the mechanics of space and place (Crouch 1989; Crouch and Ward, 1989; Crouch and Toogood, 1999, Crouch 2003). Here, we can learn about people’s relationships to space, as well as to gardening.

Whether it is as a hobby farmer, an allotment worker, or a vegetable grower, when people engage with garden spaces, they are part of a passionate, intimate, and material relationship with the soil, the grass, the plants, and the trees that root within these spaces (Lorimer, 2005). It makes sense, then, that such ecologies of place are created by and through processes like community, friendships, physical health, and mental health, and that these spaces go beyond the harvesting of cultivated produce (Lorimer, 2005). Landscape, it can be argued, is produced and exchanged with others, becoming *a place* around those involved (Miller, 1984); the allotment presents an opportunity as landscape, as a place created by ordinary people (Crouch, 1989), where people can “imagine one’s place in the world” (Crouch, 2010: 16). Here, there are intimacies and intersubjectivities that people can benefit from when interacting with plants, trees, and people

(Cloke and Jones, 2002), and through these entangled relationships we can consider place-making agencies, creating and building feelings of belonging.

The outdoors is a kaleidoscope of significance where practice, bodies, friendships and play mix (Crouch and Toogood, 1989). Certainly, it is through our bodies, and particularly our feet, that we are most fundamentally (and continually) in touch with our surroundings (Ingold, 2004, 2008). Often people, throughout their daily lives, make their way by foot on familiar terrain and the paths, textures, and contours, which vary through the seasons, become incorporated into embodied capacities for movements, awareness, and responses; their “muscle consciousness” (Bachelard, 1964: 11). In this way, spaces and places are woven into life (and lives woven into spaces and places) which is a never-ending continual process (Tilley, 1994). Acknowledging the body allows us to consider the different ways we can, from a sensory and embodied perspective, build information about the world around us, helping us understand how crucial the physical self is in understanding the importance of place and the meaning(s) built there, including notions of citizenship and belonging, where social agents feel a sense of their own contribution in relation to a place or territory (Crouch and Parker, 2002).

Furthering this, Bhatti et al. (2009) and Crouch and Parker (2002) have found that people who garden, in the *doing* of the practice, generate ideas and values that are attached through embodied practice. Ontological knowledges are opened through this *doing*, and each time this is enacted and performed, beliefs and values are reasserted, allowing for a process of *becoming* to develop and continue (Crouch and Parker, 2002, emphasis added). These encounters help people to make sense of the space around them, developing feelings of belonging, growing a sense of space, as well as building relationships with others, and providing ways to express values, feelings, and desires (Crouch and Parker, 2002). Bhatti et al. (2009) extend this, arguing that enchantment is found within the garden, where every-day domestic tasks can become pleasurable when “time seems to stand still *in a specific place*” (Bhatti et al., 2009: 61, emphasis in the original). It is this enchantment through these encounters that transiently transform connections with the natural and social world, which create moments that stay with us as valuable experiences, lingering through memory and imagination (Bhatti et al., 2009; Mowla, 2004).

Ingold (1993: 153) argues that the garden is not a landscape but a “taskscape” where landscapes come to life and time emerges in the unfolding of life through doing, and where “the pattern of dwelling activities” are enacted. Dwelling, according to Mitch Rose (2012), is not only building place, but is about place-making in a way that is visible and identifiable to both ourselves, as well as to others. Gardens, in this way, reflect design and preference, including diversity and preference of and for plants, choices of vegetables, styles of gardening, and biopolitics (e.g. no-dig, organic, etc). It is here, in this “taskscape” (Ingold, 1993: 153), that we also see and experience the mundanity of gardening, like the digging, planting, pruning, and mulching (etc), and the ways in which these everyday experiences are often reliant upon the use of body technique, the senses, and tools (Bhatti et al., 2009). These bodily encounters, using the senses, and engaging bodily practices whilst “doing-gardening”, which is part of an “affective process”, creates these enchantments (Bhatti et al., 2009: 61), providing a grounded performance, where the embodied act(s) of the allotment relates to senses of self, nature, and landscape (Crouch, 2003). It is this accumulation of *doing* with meaning which contributes to the ways in which gardens evolve to become important spaces and meaningful places.

It is evident that nature can help us understand traditions and everyday practices, as well as performances of the body and the self. Space can be understood through *doing*, not only felt through the body, but rather as constituted through feelings, sensations, and the expressed combination of these things (Ingold, 2004). As Crouch (2003) highlights, this includes cultivating and tending to plants, as well as engaging in activities that involve escape, self-discovery, or self-assertion. Gardeners also benefit from this feeling of awareness of “body-contact” (Crouch, 2003: 23), which help build values leading to self-expression. This allows nature to emerge as a means of making sense of the world, and of us (that is, surrounding people or the self), which is a form of ontological and practical knowledge (Shotter, 1993). This allows for a reconfiguration of nature into a bricolage of objects, renderings, and ideas, which in turn make sense of surrounding space, building attachments, and developing a sense of place, and with that, belonging. This is particularly important as increased urbanisation has left people feeling detached from the natural environment and nature spaces reserved for visual contemplation and attachment (Ingold, 2004), yet we often find that an important intrinsic

connectedness to the natural world and the more-than-human still very much exists (Guillone, 2000; Haraway, 2016; Myers, 2017; Lormier, 2005).

#### 2.2.4. Entanglements with the more-than-human

This relationship between people and the more-than-human within green spaces (like allotments) is important. Often the relationships between people and the more-than-human can influence how people (and other beings) exist in these geographies, changing and informing much of the relationships built there, including the ways these locations are engaged with and experienced, and the ways meaning and relationships are built to and within place and space.

The term 'more-than-human' refers to living beings that are not human and is used interchangeably with other terminologies including 'nonhuman', and 'other-than-human' – in general, there is no ubiquitous definition. Within this context, I use these terms to describe the other-than-human forms that exist entangled alongside humans, existing together, co-fabricated (see Whatmore, 2006). This includes things like insects, birds, and animals, as well as flowers, plants, vegetation, and roots, along with the micro-life that exists in the garden, like bacteria, fungus, and algae, where we can see that there is a knotty assemblage of beings existing in such space (Ogden, Hall and Tanita, 2013). Such ideas and usage of such conceptualisations are important as they challenge human exceptionalism and situate humans and the other-than-human as ecological participants (O'Gorman and Gaynor, 2020). Importantly, Plumwood (1993) suggests that such an approach helps to move away from the traditional dualistic fantasy, where the natural world sits in comparison to the human world, allowing the more-than-human to be reconceptualised as having agency, and with similar qualities more associated with humans. This allows us to work against this hyper-separation of humans as separate and away from the rest of nature (Plumwood, 1993). Such an approach creates an understanding for how humans and non-humans dwell together (Souza Júnior, 2021; Abram, 1996; Turner, 2014; Tronto, 2014), which is valuable in light of the Anthropocene, where we exist in an epoch when humans are having a substantial negative impact on the planet (Steffen et al., 2011; Moysés and Soares, 2019; Armiero and De Angelis, 2017). More, we can consider too, the Plantationocene, which puts colonisation, capitalism and commodification of the natural world, along with social inequality, at the centre

of this conversation (Davis et al., 2019). These facets are important, especially when looking to explore the ways people engage with green spaces, like the allotment, and how relationships are built with and alongside the more-than-human and within these spaces, acknowledging the tensions that can arise, such as who is valued within these spaces, how meaning is made in these spaces, and how people are impacting the natural world through their actions, along with benefiting from nature.

Along with thinking about relationships with the more-than-human, Haraway's (2016) term "critters" aids our understandings of this interconnected conceptualisation, which is also important. For Haraway, (2016: 1), "critters" refer to microbes, plants, animals, humans, nonhumans and machines. Here, we are *all* critters, and the use of one term allows for our understanding to be more encompassing, without the hierarchy that comes from using separate words across species. With this, Haraway (2003) frames humans and non-humans as companion species, arguing that neither exist without each other, describing these relationships as "tentacular" (2016: 30), whereby everything exists intertwining with everything else. This is what we can consider as a form of entanglement, and more specifically, it is productive, where critters are reliant upon each other, with neither being what they are without the other, regardless of what space they exist within. Critters exist like this in a constant state of co-existence, and are biophysically and socially formed; this, Haraway suggests, is 'natureculture' (see Haraway, 2003), emerging from the interrogation of the human/non-human dualism and the environments in which they are entangled. Here, these interwoven relationships are forms of kinship; intimate and active, making space for expected and unexpected encounters and connectivity, in what Haraway calls "hot compost piles" (2003: 4) of nonhuman stuff.

A key part of these entanglements is 'becoming-with' (see Haraway, 2008). Here, becoming, she argues, "is always becoming *with*, where who is in the world is at stake" (Haraway, 2008: 244, emphasis in the original). Becoming-with is about thinking about life, and rectifying the erroneous dualistic belief that humans are separate from the earth's ecological community (Wright, 2014), acknowledging the active and responsive participation of the non-human, where we can engage with "making kin", cultivating "response-ability" (Haraway, 2008: 104). This is, for Haraway (2008), about relational ethics and the non-optional relationships that exist in our

everyday practices that we must endure. These relationships rely on each other, along with other beings with little self-involvement, made up of these various entanglements and knots, embedded within each other through layers of complexity. This goes beyond “making kin” and onus (again, as “response-ability”) and looks to the stories we conjugate and tell (‘yoking together’; see Haraway, 2016). This thinking joins those/that which have always been apart, while recognising who belongs and who does not belong, questioning (and reframing) what make us human, and others as separate. More, it is acknowledging that everything is implicated within everything else through connections within and with the world – these tentacular relationships (Haraway, 2016). Here, Haraway (2016) echoes Deleuze and Guattari’s (2004 [1987]) analogy, where the rhizome roots reach and grow around and upon each other. Both ways of thinking demonstrate the importance of entangled, knotty, tentacular relationships (Haraway, 2016) but more, allow us to consider how the relationships built not only *through* but also *within* the space and place of the allotment, leading to further question the ways women exist, experience and navigate this space and the activities and relationships that co-exist there.

Further, the entangled, interconnectedness of species highlights important complexity within these human/more-than-human relationships within these specific sites and spaces. More importantly, we can consider oppression across these relationships, pressing that not all species are oppressed or considered alike or welcome (Bidart-Lloro, 2019; Plumwood, 1993; Tronto, 1998). There are important conversations to be had regarding differences in allotment spaces and who can claim space (or who cannot), who is welcomed (or who is not), who is made to feel that they belong (or not), and what this means for how people interact and experience these places. This goes beyond people and, often, there is contention regarding which more-than-humans (including humans) have a place and are welcomed within this environment, along with who (or what) have specific uses, or whose existence in the plot can be capitalised upon, used, or is a problem, including birds, slugs and weeds (Ginn, 2013; Pitt, 2018; Tsing, 2015; Myers, 2015). The allotment is a multispecies, complex, landscape (Van Doreen, 2014, 2017; Pitt, 2018; Pottinger, 2018) and through considering the relationships and interrogating notions of belonging in such spaces, we can explore how women build, develop, and foster such interconnectedness with the more-than-human, and look to what this means specifically within the allotment.



## 2.3. Benefits of gardening

Gardens, in their many forms and with their many inhabitants, are important in terms of what these spaces (and places) mean to people, the relationships with the human and the more-than-human that are built through and within there, and what activities and actions people do within them. They also have benefits to people beyond inhabitation of space and place, and can have positive influences on people's physical, social, emotional and mental health. Research suggests that the physical side of gardening, such as the touching and interacting with soil and the earth in relation to our bodies can be beneficial to people in various ways (Ober, Sinatra and Zucker, 2010; Chevalier et al., 2012; Oschman, Chevalier and Brown, 2015; Kale, 2019). As such, gardening is recognised and recommended as a therapeutic activity (Genter et al., 2015). This is built upon the understanding that the interactions between human and nature, such as planting and gardening (Scartazza et al., 2020) as well as time spent in the natural environment and around natural ecosystems (Aerts, Honnay and Van Nieuwenhuyse, 2018) can be beneficial to health and wellbeing. As such, gardens (and gardening) have been argued to be one of many 'therapeutic landscapes', which provide opportunities for meaningful activities, embodies restoration, sociality, and safety (Bell, Wheeler and Pheonix, 2017).

More than this, gardening provides benefits at a wider societal level and a community level. Garden spaces like allotments and community gardens are important, especially for those passionate about gardening and growing, because community spaces can grow and be cultivated from these spaces that value plant life. We live in a society embedded within urbanisation, with fewer green spaces and more built-up cities and towns, and often these garden spaces contribute to valuable edible landscapes that exist within these cityscape environments on both public and private land (McLain et al., 2012). More than providing food, these spaces are becoming increasingly important to people's experiences of social and cultural wellbeing (Uwajeh and Ezennia, 2018), especially as people rely (more and more) intellectually, emotionally, physically, and spiritually on our relationships with nature and green space (Guillone, 2000). Importantly, along with these benefits, allotments and community gardens can further help make urban spaces more aesthetically pleasing, can build communities, raise social capital, promote food security and nutritional education, and as a result, improve health (Buckingham, 2005;

DeSilvey, 2003; Egli, Oliver and Tautolo, 2016; Kingsley et al., 2009). In this way, shared gardening spaces provide “transformative politics of encounter” (Askins, 2015: 473), bringing together diverse groups of people, especially where there has been an absence of community engagement in public spaces (Cumbers et al., 2018). Such transitions create palpable results that are felt both at an individual level and at a deeper societal level, reverberating through the community and neighbourhood (Hale et al., 2011; Cumbers et al., 2018; DeSilvey, 2003).

Here, we can consider Bourdieu’s (1986, 1989) notion of capital. For Bourdieu (1986, 1989), capital is accrued over a lifetime, paving ways for different types of success, or acquisition. He argues that there are four types: social capital (hailing from shared values, and allows people within shared networks to achieve a common purpose), economic capital (which is monetary and based upon financial resources), cultural capital (which is bedded within knowledge, taste, and preferences that can be used by social agents), and symbolic capital (which is grounded within how someone is recognised, at an intersection between class and status, and refers to social elements like reputation and qualification). Capital, Bourdieu (1986, 1989) argues, is accrued and exchanged in ways that assist people as they make transitions across the life course, from education into employment, graduating towards success and affluence. This is, however, not equal across society; because of class and status, some people inherit more social and economic capital than others, changing opportunities and accumulation, and often, barring many from social mobility (Morgan and Parker, 2017; Morgan, Parker and Marturano, 2020).

Both Putnam (2001) and Field (2003) argue that the ideas set out by Bourdieu (1986, 1989) are too individualistic, and that social connections are more than just individual superiority and personal gain. Instead, they suggest that focus is given to the role of community and the interlinking relationships that exist between the people within them, with Putnam (2001) emphasising the importance of building trust and solidarity. Importantly, Miller et al. (2015) highlight that such ties benefit both the individuals and wider society, whilst Jarret et al. (2005) suggest that community-based programs, especially those with structured-based activities (e.g., in some community gardens) help people develop meaningful connections with others, which helps them to create and exchange personal capital, but also develop reciprocity and relationships with the communities around them.

Here, urban garden spaces (like allotments and community gardens) can be considered as places where people build social capital, facilitating varying types of social integration, and building inclusive, community-driven, shared spaces (Porter, 2018; Christensen, Dyg, and Allenberg, 2019; Degnen, 2009; Pitt, 2015, 2018). Both Pudup (2008) and Porter (2018) argue that shared gardens help build society and promote positive social change, which some community services may not be able to achieve. Moreover, food justice initiatives employ home and community garden projects as part of an anti-oppression transformational strategy, aiding equity and social change, as well as benefiting health, environmental sustainability, and food sovereignty (Bradley and Herrera, 2016).

Shared gardens are under-represented as critical spaces that facilitate routes of self-provision alongside other benefits (Smith et al., 2015). Caring for plants, seeds, and soils, along with growing fruits and vegetation that are products of hard work is meaningful, both on a physical level and more holistically, being heavily linked to nutritional wellness and mental wellbeing which can be useful against the pressures of modern everyday living (Scartazza et al., 2020, Pitt, 2018; Biglin, 2020, 2021). Moreover, shared gardens are important places that can help people develop and nurture feelings of identity, citizenship, and belonging, along with a sense of responsibility (Kettle, 2014; Schechtman, 2014; Moore et al., 2014; Stenner, Church and Bhatti, 2012). This highlights the multiple practices that people attend to when growing in allotments, like the planting, tending, harvesting, eating, and exchanging, all of which are acts of production and consumption (Goodman et al., 2010; Miller, 2015). In this way, allotment holders contribute to non-marketised food supplies by giving away portions of the crop and vegetation that they produce (Miller, 2015; Myers, 2015; Irigaray and Marder, 2016), which is a key part of allotment culture (Crouch, 1989; Crouch and Ward, 1989; Dobson et al., 2021) and sits in opposition to the neoliberal globalisation of current food chains (Allen and Sachs, 2012; Sachs, 2020; Gray and Sheikh, 2021). This importance is magnified when we look to this as an alternative food network, drawing on the ways we can self-produce and consume food today (Miller, 2015; Gray and Sheikh, 2021), especially as people become increasingly aware of the variations in materials, cultures, and moral economies of food production and consumption, such as organic practices, fair trade practices, and animal friendly practices (Goodman et al., 2012). Moreover, gardening and growing can provide food and nutritional security, which is important in the light of the

current cost of living crisis (Edmonson, 2020), as well as for improving family health (Kortright and Wakefield, 2011), empowering women (Cadzow and Binns, 2016; Moore et al, 2014; Puig de la Bellacasa, 2010, 2017), promoting social justice (Ioannou et al, 2016; Tornaghi, 2017; Miller, 2018), and preserving local and indigenous knowledge and culture (Kimmerer, 2013). One of the most obvious benefits to this self-sufficiency is the access to fresh fruit and vegetables, which is cited frequently as a motivation for many gardeners (Alaimo et al., 2008; Hsu, 2015; Botta, 2016), especially as it can enhance food availability and quality. Healthy food is not seen as a luxury in the global north but a basic need which is threatened by the current globalised food system (Partalidou and Anthopoulou, 2017; Pani, 2020; Soares et al., 2015), and this has been magnified with the recent COVID-19 pandemic (Mead et al., 2021). During this time, Mead et al. (2023) found that people who were growing their own food had lower experiences of food insecurity and higher self-reported well-being than those who were not growing their own produce. This echoes Alaimo et al. (2008), who found that adults with a household member who participated in a community garden consumed fruits and vegetables 1.4 times more per day than those who did not engage with any community garden work.

Access to, along with the sharing of, a diverse selection of foods sits alongside the exchange of skills and knowledge often shared as part of joint garden spaces. This includes learning about how to grow different types of foods and plants, knowledge regarding permaculture and various growing methods and approaches, accruing advice and tips from others in the community, discovering more about how to cook and eat produce, and expanding nutritional knowledge; all of which enhances the benefits of the product from seed to plate, as well as adding to the community and social networks. This helps to create new forms of social relations around working with food that leads to important forms of social empowerment for people, while simultaneously helping to re-energise communities, especially those in deprived areas (Cumbers et al., 2018; Crozier, 2003; Putnam, 1993). This also enhances the social, emotional, mental health and wellbeing of the garden community for both experienced gardeners and new members alike.

Shared green spaces evidence important benefits not only for food production and health, but in terms of social and emotional mental health, community building, social interactions, and the

building and development of capital which can aid people in their lives beyond these spaces. They are spaces that go beyond the practical and are landscapes where we can see relationships and rapport, skills and knowledge, community and cohesion, as well as the more expected benefits for physical health, mental wellness and the harvesting of produce.

## **2.4. Women and gardening**

So far, we can see the ways in which gardening and growing can benefit people, and how this is reasonably well researched and represented within the literature. Encouragingly, research is now asking deeper and more specific questions around mechanisms, relationships, and interactions between people, place and space, and the links to gardening and growing plants and vegetation. A key area that is less understood within this, though, is that of gardening and gender, and especially in shared urban garden settings.

Scholars such as Bhatti and Church (2000), Buckingham (2005), Moore et al., (2014), Allen and Sachs (2007), Hondageu-Setelo (2010) and Zypchyn (2012) have acknowledged the lack of discussion around gardening and gender and have tried to address this. Work within leisure studies, too, acknowledges that gardens are spaces where gendered behaviours and expectations can be seen (see Bhatti, 2014; Taylor, 2016; Rainsborough and Bhatti, 2007; Parry, Glover and Shinew, 2005). The focus of a large majority of this work, however, has been on the domestic garden, and relationships and discussions about gardening outside of the home space and gender are still largely under-acknowledged and under-researched.

It is particularly important to explore this area, not only because women's experiences are important and deserving of this time, consideration, and space, but in doing so, we can look to women's experience not just in opposition to men's, but alongside men's, and alongside others who do not identify as men, or women. Essentialising gender is an important consideration when looking to this kind of work, and in working to widen our understandings of such under-represented areas (such as women in shared urban spaces) we can begin to bridge such divides, approaching research (and the development of knowledge) more inclusively, and less in such stark binary terms.

Looking to the literature there is a range of writing that explores women in the garden landscape, with much of this coming from the sixteenth century onwards. Influential texts include Catherine Horwood's (2010) *Gardening Women: Their stories from 1600 to present* and Twig Way's (2006) *Virgins, Weeders and Queens*. Much of this work is not focused to the garden itself, but covers other areas of influence like literature, poetry, and art. Much of what is written are accounts from women who either were working-class and working in places like country gardens or parks, or more frequently, are stories told through letters and biographies of women who were married to gentry, living in large country houses, stately homes, and mansions with an abundance of land. There is little contemporary writing about women who had smaller, more usual, everyday homes, with more limited, everyday garden spaces, and there is even less in terms of women growing fruit and vegetables, with fewer still pertaining to growing spaces like the shared plot of the allotment.

When looking to gardening and growing food at the allotment, the narrative pushes this as a task and a space designed for men. Indeed, the allotment has been described as “an annexe to other male social sites such as working men’s clubs and betting shops” (Crouch and Ward, 1989: 98), where the role of women in gardening is acknowledged less when compared to men (Howard, 2003; Howard, 2015). Crouch and Ward (1989) and Buckingham (2005) both highlight that men have been involved in the home growing of food since the seventeenth century, and this is where the idea of it being thought of as ‘men’s work’ is rooted. The most significant exception to this, though, has been during times of war. Through 1916, whilst men were conscribed to serve in World War I, women were taking up the roles of gardeners in domestic gardens as well as in parks, market gardens, and garden nurseries, whilst “graduates trenched potatoes, housewives stripped sprouts, and the Girls Training Corps turned bombsites into allotments” (Way, 2006: 213). Inspired by efforts during World War I and in response to rationing, similar efforts were echoed during World War II with the ‘Dig for Victory’ campaign. Because of the amount of produce being imported into Britain at the time, the ‘Dig for Victory’ campaign began in the autumn of 1939, helping to focus efforts on homegrown and locally produced work and vegetation (Ginn, 2012), where women were encouraged to “Lend a Hand on the Land” (Way, 2006: 217). This inspired an upshot in allotment use, and the movement created a surplus of fresh food for the country, leaving space on shipping vessels for war supplies. This concentration to

make Britain increasingly self-sufficient at a time of crisis brought with it the creation of the Women's Land Army, placing over 6,000 women in "agricultural, gardening, and market gardening roles" (Way, 2006: 217), as well as in other non-traditional areas, such as munitions, auxiliary services, and engineering (Milkman, 1987; Korczynski et al., 2005). This, momentarily, disrupted traditional stereotypes of many positions, like farming and agriculture, as being men's roles, especially as in 1941 all women aged between 20 and 40 years were obliged to register for war work (Way, 2006). These posts were, however, temporary and, as Ginn (2012) highlights, although the campaign created perceptions of national solidarity, it reinforced many gender assumptions of pre-war ways of gardening and growing food, with women having their domestic labour limited by the male-dominated hegemonic society. The contribution from women in these ways would only be necessary whilst the men were at war, and upon their return, they would return to their subordinate positions in the home, and kitchen.

This perception of gardening in general has not altered markedly within the literature, and research suggests that gardening is often perceived more as men's work (Bhatti and Church, 2000) where women "do their work and know their place" (Riley, 1990: 67). Whilst Riley's work is dated, the general trend still reflects that men conduct much of the gardening work that is considered 'hard work' in growing spaces. As Parry, Glover and Shinew (2005) and Taylor (2016) argue, men carry out 'harder' tasks like digging, mowing, and heavy lifting. Women, conversely, take on the 'softer' tasks, reflecting their more usual position within the domestic home and concentrating on more aesthetic, easier duties in the garden; a "genteel elegance of middle-class femininity" (Taylor, 2016: 145). This kind of work includes design and planning, deadheading, potting seeds, weeding, and watering. In this way, for many men, gardening is toil, whereas for women it is imbued with a sense of tenderness, reflecting similar other tasks, like housework, or paid work (Bhatti and Church, 2000).

Such conversation is interesting, especially the differentiation of tasks in the garden and the way this can alter or align with gender, because this contradicts history. Work with flowers is commonly viewed as a woman's hobby or a craft, carried out as a past-time after the domestic labour is complete and is not seen as a skill-based activity with sense of purpose, unlike tasks carried out by men (Fox, 2017). Yet contrary to this, floristry started as a recreational hobby for working-class men (Scott-James, 1981). Evolving in the seventeenth century from Flemish and

French refugees, floristry appealed to cottage weavers in Britain (most of whom were men) who had the space and time to grow flowers and care for their gardens. This is particularly important, as Taylor (2016) highlights, because they worked at home and at the loom. Here, they had access to an abundance of flora, along with free time that afforded them the opportunity to work on the land, planting, tending, and growing flowers that could be transformed into bouquets; much like it could be argued that women do today (Parry, Glover and Shiness, 2005; Parry, 2018; Bhatti and Church 2000; Bhatti, 2014), yet the role of women in managing home gardens and shared gardens in contemporary society is neglected and undervalued (Kothari, 2003).

Floristry highlights a key tenet of our understanding of gardens, growing, and gender: care. History revisionist Susan Groag Bell (1990) argues that women have been nurturing and tending in men's landscapes since the eighteenth century. Often, at this time, women were involved in activities that demonstrated acts of care; working-class women were 'tending' to local village people, children, land, plants, and animals, whilst upper class women were designing, arranging, and looking to import and export lawns, plants, seeds, and flowers, whilst other lower-class women worked for the upper-class women, tending to their gardens and children.

Indeed, Bell (1990) explains that many women within garden scholarship have been forgotten and their influence on the landscape has been erased. Women have grown plants and herbs since the Middle Ages, and this historical narrative is often characterised through women's urge to nurture and care, driving our understanding of why we see women being active in garden spaces. Today, a similar argument can be found, with some noting that, whilst they do not necessarily agree with the claim, the garden space is often viewed as a feminine one precisely because of this apparent nature to nurture (Horwood, 2010; Plumwood, 1990; Alaimo, 1994). Howard (2003, 2015) suggests that women dominate in terms of plant use and management as housewives, and that they are "plant gatherers, home gardeners, herbalists, seed custodians and plant breeders" (Howard, 2003: 17). Such roles as herbalists can be seen in pockets of our history, too. For example, as Willes (2015) points out, historic archives show that doctors at St Thomas's Hospital employed an herbalist (a woman) to provide the raw material for many medicines and ointments that the apothecary (a man) prescribed for patients, yet he was paid more, and she was



hardly acknowledged. Moreover, a great deal of the benefit of women's plant knowledge was used right until the establishment of the National Health Service in 1948 (Willes, 2015).

This is echoed more recently in community garden settings, where it has been observed that there is a higher proportion of women volunteers, and given this position of unpaid voluntary work, it can be understood as a reproduction of caretaking responsibility (Mayrhofer, 2018; Petersmann, 2021). This is in addition to findings that suggests that women show more environmental concern than men do (Kennedy and Dzialo, 2015) and stronger positive environmental attitudes and behaviours (Chen et al., 2011; McCright, 2010). Such attitudes can likely influence garden activity, including volunteering and horticultural practices, like chemical-free methods, and gardening with an ethic of care (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2010, 2017; Tronto, 1993, 1998; Buckingham, 2005; Wells and Gladwell, 2001; Warren, 2000); indeed, Buckingham (2005: 177) argues that "it is women, regardless of social class or education, who are creating an impetus toward more environmentally sustainable methods of local food growing". Similarly, research has found that, due to the 'mother-effect' (Blocker and Ekberg, 1989), those with children show more concern for the local environment than non-mothers (Mohai, 2014; Dupont, 2004) and this can inform greater environmental awareness and consciousness of environmental justice, as well as climate change and environmental damages, future safety, and the protection of offspring.

This explanation of horticultural care as a biological and innate tendency is troubling and deterministic (Thompson, 2017; Plumwood, 1993), and it is damaging to our understanding of women and nature (and more specifically, gardening). Women's affinity with nature is often sat alongside narratives surrounding reproduction and a feminine urge for children (Applegarth, 1988; Tronto, 1993, 1998), yet in today's modern society some women are, for example, choosing to not reproduce *because* of concerns regarding planetary and environmental health (Schneider-Mayerson and Leong, 2020; McCright and Xiao, 2014; Arnocky et al., 2012). Moreover, this tension is reaffirmed by the anthropomorphisation of the natural world into a 'Mother Earth' discourse, separating men and women and stressing the life-giving and nurturing elements that often embody motherhood (Jelinski, 2010; Plumwood, 1993), reiterating the notion that women are predisposed to care more for the natural world. Here, we can look back

to Haraway's (2003) concept of 'natureculture' and understand the tensions that exist within this narrative through considering how women can co-exist in a space at the same time as the more-than-human in ways that are entangled, rather than separate and dyadically, or with one being more superior than the other (Turner, 2014). More, rejecting this traditional view of women's predisposition to nurture nature, and therefore, care, works to address the fact that these elements exist separately and that one does not equate to the other; disrupting the notions of "women=mother, woman=feminine, mother=nature" (Cuomo, 1998: 126), which are problematic and harmful. Such narratives risk devaluing movements to try and bridge inequalities within nature and gender, as well as speaking to the exploitation of both women and the degradation of the natural world, along with this natural affinity of care women are so often assumed to have with nature (Irigaray, 1985; McLaughlin, 1997; Thompson, 2017; Plumwood, 1993; Tronto, 1993, 1998; Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017; Rainsborough and Bhatti, 2007). Indeed, such care is not a private or maternal duty but is a foundational ethical and political principle which shapes our interactions with others, including in green spaces and with the more-than-human (Tronto, 1993, 1998; Irigaray, 1985).

Consideration around this is also crucial because of the ways in which women have been seen to have an anticipated closeness to nature through their uncontrollable, leaky reproductive bodies (Alaimo, 2008), which have been seen to imprison them, distorting the ways in which alternative realities (such as the non-reproducing body) can exist. In this way, both women and nature are connected through their subordinate positions within dominant, western patriarchal society (Mellow, 2000; Beauvoir, 1974; Ortner, 1972; Plumwood, 1993). Likewise, it can further be argued that the way in which women engage with and connect with nature can be seen as not only because of the patriarchy, but instead as a form of resistance against this system (Rainsborough and Bhatti, 2007; Parry, Glover and Shiner, 2005; Braga Bizarria, Palomino-Schalscha, and Stupples, 2022). More, such relationships, acts of care, and experiences in green spaces can be seen as resistance against repression that many pockets of society create, especially within third spaces (Soja, 1996, 2008), and are ways in which women can disrupt the micropolitics of everyday life that they often experience and endure; striving for empowerment, making space, and commanding forms of control in a society that works hard to marginalise and oppress. Rather, these spaces can be empowering for women, providing them with opportunities

to become self-producers, and to feel empowered within their bodies and identities whilst taking up space in locations that have historically been so synonymous with men (Parry, Glover and Shinew, 2005; Braga Bizarria, Palomino-Schalscha and Stupples, 2022; Christensen, Dyg and Allenberg, 2019).

The very ways that garden spaces can be empowering are key to our understandings of growing spaces and gender. A large proportion of the literature that explores gender and gardening has been conducted within leisure studies, looking specifically to the domestic garden, and with gardening viewed as a hobby (see Bhatti and Church, 2000; Bhatti, 2006; Parry, Glover and Shinew, 2005; Taylor, 2016; Rainsborough and Bhatti, 2007). This is in line with work around 'leisure landscapes', which (again, not unlike the earlier mentioned 'third space' discourse) can be considered as sites of consumption, spectacle, and socialising (Caudwell and Browne, 2011: 117). Such sites contain equal and unequal gender relations and are environments that can reproduce gender roles and power-based gender relations. This is particularly important because they are sites that are often without many of the structures in place in the everyday, unlike the workplace or the home (Henderson and Shaw, 2006; Shaw, 2001; Shaw, 1994). Here, in leisure landscapes, meanings and practices exist in both shared and private gendered spaces, reflecting many of the tensions and conflicts that exist specifically within gendered places, and in wider society (Bhatti and Church, 2000; Bhatti, 2006). Such sites are important because they are "powerful settings for human life, transcending time, place, and culture" (Francis and Hestor, 1990: 2), facilitating the communication of important ideas surrounding relationships to culture, politics, and gender ideology (Bhatti, 1999). This is important because often these leisure landscapes are the spaces that we can consider as third spaces (see Soja, 1996 and DeSilvey, 2003). Much of the literature surrounding third spaces, as Fullagar, O'Brien and Lloyd (2019) highlight, does not address how gendered a lot of these spaces are, with spaces like pubs, clubs and some sporting environments working to exclude women in the contemporary context of patriarchal domination and power relations. Yet these third spaces are important places for women as they are locales where they can perform different identities, build meaningful connections, and develop communities and relationships. Building upon existing third space work and looking to expand this to the shared garden environment means we can question the ways in which women use these spaces (e.g., allotments) as third spaces, and how their gender and identity can change, alter, or evolve their

experiences and ways in which they navigate these sites. Not only this, but we can also look to question why this happens, how this happens, and importantly, what this means.

As discussed earlier, gardening in domestic spaces has been found to have a gendered differentiation of tasks, with research such as Bhatti and Church (2000) finding that women will undertake the more difficult tasks, like lifting or digging, when a man is unavailable. Similarly, in shared spaces, men are often recruited for (as well as volunteer for) heavy, labour-intensive tasks for which they are deemed “more natural” where “jobs that required a lot more strength or stamina were thought to be more appropriate for men”, whilst women take on more visual tasks, like determining plant locations and directing where holes should be dug (Parry, Glover and Shinew, 2005: 189). More than this, leisure spaces like gardens and allotments are often locations where gendered roles are negotiated, restructured, and altered by personal choice and self-determination, which particularly impacts women. ‘Leisure time’ and ‘work time’ is continually fought for and (re)negotiated by women as they try to resist constructs of traditional, normative assumptions of femininity, working to develop complex, empowered agency with actions and behaviours of their own will (White, 2004; Henderson and Gibson, 2013; Green, 1998). It is through leisure activities, especially those activities that may not be so expected with those who identify as women, where they can develop self-procured feelings of independence, freedom, and confidence (Wheaton and Tomlinson, 1998). This attention to women’s agency is framed within and alongside political resistance, which is an ongoing relationship against the reproduction of traditional, normative gender relations (Rainborough and Bhatti, 2007; Bhatti and Church, 2000). Urban garden spaces are important within this discussion because they provide a critical angle to help understand how women operate, navigate and experience such spaces. Allotments and community gardens can be seen as an extension to the private garden, yet they also differ greatly (Bhatti and Church, 2000). Such shared spaces, for instance, are only available to certain residents (e.g., those from a surrounding postcode), the land is more open and exposed than many home gardens, and there are rules and regulations to abide by. Layered over these formal controls are traditions, customs, and practices from generations of land holders that are dominated by certain cultures, genders, and class. When those from non-traditional backgrounds enter these spaces (such as women), they transgress the informal customs and expose a process of social change (a “*mise en scene*”, as Buckingham (2005:173) describes it), challenging these

patriarchal, masculine traditional practices and the allotment ways of life (Crouch and Ward, 1989; Moore et al., 2014).

More than this, gardening in contemporary shared spaces demonstrates activities (and, with that, a space) that can expose gender roles and relations at both a micro and macro level (Bhatti and Church, 2000). They are spaces which help create opportunities that bridge resistance with the personal development of power, and the freedom to cultivate new identities and ways of being in spaces that are not necessarily controlled by the assumptions (or expectations) of the patriarchy (Henderson and Shaw, 2006; Shaw, 2001; Shaw, 1994; Tuan, 1977; Crouch and Ward, 1989; Proshansky, Fabian and Kaminoff, 1983). Within allotments and community gardens, roles and responsibilities are not automatically divided by gender like they often are in the domestic garden space. Parry, Glover and Shiness (2005), for instance, explored roles and gender in community gardens. They found that for their participants, roles were not divided by gender, and that instead “one’s physical ability often dictated what roles one took on within the garden”, as well as skills and knowledge, with people doing what they are “good at” (Parry, Glover and Shiness, 2005: 184). This is echoed in the literature, with community gardens being seen as spaces that women have found to be empowering not just for food sovereignty, but through the building of relationships as well as the resistance and negotiation of roles and responsibilities (Hynes, 1996; Rainsborough and Bhatti, 2007; Kettle, 2014), with many women being the founder of the community spaces within which they participate (Parry, Glover and Shiness, 2005). Drawing upon work by Shaw (2001) and the reconceptualization of resistances of gendered norms, Parry, Glover and Shiness (2005) found that women acknowledge and recognise problems or issues within community sites, actively working to develop and organise solutions, and maintain the spaces with co-operative leadership, all the while demonstrating initiative, ambition and drive, and taking away important feelings of self-worth and pride. Here, the shared urban garden becomes – once more – more than a space within which to grow, but one with gendered meaning, interpersonal relationships, and personal development.

## 2.5. Concluding remarks

Gardens are complex and important spaces. Moreover, gardening can positively benefit people in numerous ways. Discussing such benefits is important because this helps us to look at how these mechanics work, how this can vary across populations and cultures, and what this variation means in terms of experience and the building of personal meaning and relationships; gardening is, after all “the work of human agency, a very personal act steeped in emotion, family history, and identity” (Bhatti, 1999: 184). The ways gardening is beneficial, too, is full of nuance, and this is imperative to not only our understanding of how people navigate these spaces, but also aids in giving voice to those from oppressed or marginalised groups.

As this chapter has also shown, notions of space and place are important to understanding why people grow. In doing so, we can look to understand how and why people develop senses of place, attachments and meaning to these spaces, as well as nuance in their approaches, looking to how people understand their experiences. Meanings developed from and within allotments, as well as embodied agency, is never static nor complete. The power of gardening is found in the simultaneous existence across “the complex ecology of spatial reality, cognitive processes, and the real world” (Cresswell, 2004: 56), and in understanding how space and place form, we must accept that there is a mixture of a rich intensity of form, function, and meaning, along with spatial ambiguity. Undoubtably, however, it is through place that we can garner meaning from the world, as well as experience the world around us.

To explore these nuances in how people experience and navigate places like urban gardens, we need to explore the relationships that exist within and around these environments, including the more-than-human. Hale et al. (2011) suggests that to do this, we must look to the physical aspects of nature and the environment around us (e.g. who we are, where we are, what these spaces means to us and why), as well as the social structures that these people and spaces sit within, which so often dictate and inform how people operate. Here, we need to deepen our understanding, and look to how people (especially those who identify as women) use growing spaces, interact with these places and the beings within them, and what they take from these environments, both in a literal sense and metaphorically, using a holistic view encompassing the

transactions between subject(s) and object(s), the person and the garden, the place and the space, as well as the environment, the mind, the body, the past, the present, and the future (Duff, 2010; Summers et al., 2012).

Ingold (2004, 2008) argues that increased urbanisation has left people feeling detached from the natural environment, echoing Weber (1913, 1922, cited in Schluchter, 2017), who characterised modernity with disenchantment. Importantly, at a micro-level, gardens are spaces people seek to create meaning, wonder and re-enchantment through close connection with nature (Bhatti et al., 2009). These encounters temporarily transform the connections people have with both the natural and the social world, where they are faced with something both real and, at the same time as Foucault (1986) suggests, uncanny and mysterious amid the familiar and the everyday (Schneider, 1993; Bennett, 2001). They are spaces where people can re-enchant themselves back to the present, and retreat from the frenetic pace of public, work, and domestic life, whilst actively taking control over some part of their environment, and in turn, their future. They are spaces, too, that reflect overarching and prevailing social issues linked closely to power, culture, class, ethnicity, and gender, and there are significant social and environmental consequences connected to the way in which people garden, the reasons people participate in gardening, the relationships that they build within these spaces. It is in these multiple dimensions of gardening as a sanctuary and an experience coupled with the social inequality and power on which questions about people, experience, and place rests (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2010).

As I have shown, gardens are spaces that we can consider are important to women. As Rose et al. (1997) show, landscapes that are banal, like gardens, have been ignored from deep scrutiny through a gendered lens, yet it is within these very spaces that women have expressed a relationship to landscape. I argue that gardens are complex spaces, and that women have interesting, flexible, and changeable relationships to these growing spaces and all of the beings within it. I acknowledge that research into garden spaces has increased in recent years, but I also argue that there is more work to be done in spaces that focus centrally on the shared garden space, beyond the private and domestic garden, looking to the more contemporary urban garden setting(s). As Massey (1994) highlights, most of society's spaces are gendered spaces, and within these sites there are multiple social meanings and possibilities. Whilst we can consider the

domestic garden to be such a place (Bhatti and Church, 2000), I argue that we need to look beyond these boundaries and look to shared growing sites, where there is a dearth of literature surrounding the experiences, benefits, and hurdles of those who identify as women in such spaces (Biazarria, Palmino-Schalscha and Stupples, 2022; Perry, Lynam and Anderson 2005).



# Chapter Three || The Allotment Toolbox

## research methodology



Photograph 3.1. *Hen working on her plot*

### **3.0. Chapter introduction**

This chapter gives an account of the research process underpinning this thesis. First, I discuss the research philosophies and approaches that inform this work, providing a reflexive commentary about my influence on this research. Following this, I provide information regarding participant recruitment, including how I recruited participants, where I centred recruitment geographically, and key points of information regarding the women who took part. Next, I cover the research methods that were employed across ethnography, participant-generated photography, participant diaries, and semi-structured interviews, providing a reflection on the use of creative methods in particular. I then cover both data transcription and data analysis, discussing the thematic analysis that was carried out, illustrating how I conducted this, and how the analysis evolved. Finally, I detail various ethical considerations that were taken under review for this project, as well as the challenges that were encountered, including the COVID-19 pandemic, along with reflections surrounding friendships, gifts, and leaving the field.

### **3.1. Epistemology and ontology**

Philosophical positions regarding knowledge construction are often reflected in the paradigms researchers use to answer questions. In this case, I conducted this research from a reflexive, interpretivist, feminist position.

An interpretivist paradigm means it is understood that knowledge and our comprehension of the social world is influenced by “social construction, language, shared consciousness and other interactions” (Berryman, 2019: 273), with a focus on the ‘how’ and the ‘why’. With this, a feminist epistemology that is rooted within a feminist ontology addresses the fact that social knowledge is both part and product of the human social experience, acknowledging that social life and experience are not mutually exclusive (Stanley and Wise, 1983). Combined, the motivation of the thesis becomes the exploration of how social relations (specifically, in allotments) produce and maintain, as well as disrupt and transform, inequalities from which women often suffer (Gobo, 2011). This puts epistemological considerations of knowledge,

specifically “the social construction of gendered knowledge and practice” (Lather, 1988: 57) at the centre of my work.

Critically, feminist researchers often seek to explore why and how things happen through hearing about experiences, listening to stories, and empowering voices that are frequently ignored or forgotten. A feminist epistemology considers how gender can influence what we consider legitimised knowledge, and how this is reproduced and represented (Harding, 1991; Cope, 2002). This is not only about gendered knowing but looks to gendered barriers and hierarchies that prevent such knowledge production and understanding (Anderson, 1995). This is particularly important because the construction of knowledge is an active process, involving active people who develop knowledge through experience, as well as navigate a world in which their knowing, understandings, and identities are all positioned differently (Anderson, 1995). This influences what we consider as knowledge and how this is reproduced and represented. A critical aim of feminist research is to conduct inquiry on behalf of women and other oppressed groups to unearth subjugated knowledge(s), including those whose voices have been devalued by the dominant, patriarchal, hierarchical forces (Hesse-Biber, 2012). Moreover, such research should be not just *on* women, but *for* women (Stanley and Wise, 1983, DeVault, 1990), bringing them to the centre of research, asking them about their lived experiences, acknowledging their vulnerabilities and resistances, and using this as the starting position (Harding, 1991). This is important as, historically, women’s active role in the generation of what is included as legitimate knowledge has been seen as less significant, valuable, or important than men’s (Cope, 2002; Skeggs, 2001). With this, the focus of this research are the voices and stories of the women who participated in this research, with a continued commitment to a participant-centered approach, representing the participant’s lived experiences and narratives through empowering, collaborative practices which shape much of the knowledge and data collected, as well as the direction and outcome of the research, and this feminist way of working is visible through each stage of this research process, and throughout this thesis.

### 3.1.1. Reflexivity

The ways in which knowledge is produced and legitimised can be seen in much of our everyday realities across the media, culture, socialisation, religion, values, politics and economics (Cope, 2002). These everyday realities influence researchers, affecting the ways we understand what is worthy of being researched, how this research should be conducted, and with whom (Frohlick, 2002). Importantly, a feminist approach permits researchers to listen more, empowering participants to talk about their lived experiences and histories, approaching the field with flexibility, adaptability, and malleability, all the while reflecting upon the creation and legitimisation of knowledge. One way that this can be achieved is through employing reflexivity; a feminist approach which rests upon the researcher being part of the process, demonstrating the importance that in order to understand someone else's world with agency, depth and meaning, you need to be part of it, whilst also acknowledging our positions within the social world (O'Reilly, 2011; Davies, 2012; Benson and O'Reilly, 2022).

Alongside a participant-centered perspective, employing a reflexive feminist approach also allows for the examination of the researcher's impact upon research, working with this influence, and creating space for this impact to become part of the inquiry while the researcher witnesses and records the lived complexities of the social world (Finlay, 2002; Kincheloe and McLaren, 2000; Rooke, 2009; Ramazanoglu and Holland, 2002; Letherby, 2003). All research is impacted by the person doing it (Stanley and Wise, 1983), yet situating the researcher within the research process works to capitalise on this (Davies, 2012; Rose, 1997; Letherby, 2003; Carroll, 2009).

Importantly, addressing this through reflexivity acknowledges the way power relations can determine how knowledge is produced (England, 1994; Wasserfall, 1993; Faria and Mollett, 2016; Day, 2012), and considers how ascribed characteristics like gender, class, and race can aide the understanding of power relations, while scrutinising the relationships between the researcher and the researched, shaping the knowledge that is produced, all the while questioning who is heard, and whose experiences, vulnerabilities, and resistances are valued (Oakley, 2016; Davies, 2012; Benson and O'Reilly, 2022). Haraway (1988) calls this 'situated knowledges', pressing the importance of specifying and addressing the 'knower', concentrating on power relations and knowledge production. Further, she argues that knowledge is determined and framed by social situations of the epistemic agent, including race, class, and gender, which informs how people are

structured and restructured by their current situation(s), like geography, history, or the gendered body. Knowledge is fundamentally conditional, pivoting on social location as well as body-specific advantages, which are often incorporated into the research process (Haraway, 1988; Hinton, 2014; Nightingale, 2016). Situated knowledges demand positioning and subjectivity that is carefully attending to power relations within knowledge production. Rather than assuming the knowledge that is developed through research as an ultimate truth, situated knowledges allow for new, unexpected, and surprising forms of knowledge production, making way for interesting and nuanced realities to emerge.

Reflexivity is an iterative, continual and active process that occurs when conducting research. In doing this, researcher assumptions and interactions are continually reviewed as the research progresses, and research practices and processes are consistently reflected on, to maintain high quality research and data (Crotty, 1998; Yanchar, Slife and Warne, 2008; England, 1994). Acknowledging the researcher's place and influence in their research, along with the ways participants exist within the research process, benefits the data, the writing, and the research experience. More, engagement with the participants alongside the process is important; listening should be a deliberate and conscious action, with the researcher continually reflecting upon their privileges, biases, social positions and identities (Faria and Mollet, 2016; Daley, 2010; Reay, 1996; England, 1994; Acker, 2000). Doing so means the researcher is more than a neutral, fixed entity (Cotterill and Letherby, 1993) and is acknowledged as an active social agent, just like the participants. In this way, research is not conducted to seek immediate answers, understandings, or explanations; instead, research opens doors to participant stories, acknowledging the importance of relationships and rapport between the researcher and the researched, and helps bring the participant's stories to life, situating them as the focal point, both within the research and the creation of knowledge.

### 3.1.2. This research

Through employing an interpretivist, feminist philosophy with a key participant-centered approach, and through using creative methods, I have worked hard to ensure that this research gives space to the participant's voices, prioritising their experiences and stories, whilst



simultaneously promoting collaboration and reflecting on power dynamics, with much of this dictating how the participants engaged with their data and what this looks like. Further, this research has not been conducted in a way that was confined by an anticipated framework or expectation of findings, nor is their data based upon my interpretation alone as the researcher. Instead, this research was given the space to unfold within the field, and this thesis is a snapshot of what the participants have shared, captured on film, and expressed through their diaries and interviews. This research is made up of their experiences and stories told through their words, their images, and their voice.

This piece of work, however, does not go unaffected by me as the researcher, and my silhouette within this research is palpable: I am, after all, a subjective being, active in society, with thoughts, feeling, and opinions, along with my own lived experiences, life stories, and histories all of which inform my position in the world. Moreover, as a white, early-thirties, child-free, first-generation university educated, middle-class, cis woman, I am an ‘insider’ to this research and some of these participants (Hayfield and Huxley, 2015; Bukamal, 2022; Bridges, 2001; Acker, 2000), sharing similar characteristics to many of them. Further, as already established, I have a keen interest in plants and gardening, which is reflected in my hobbies, my tattoos, and my attempts at gardening. These are elements of my social world that impact how I have designed this research, but also how I understand these participants, and in part, how they understand me. More than this, my insider status brings familiarity between the researcher and the researched, allowing for a more ethical representation of the voices of the participants (Bridges, 2001; Hayfield and Huxley 2015; Greene, 2014). Indeed, the participants and I spoke about (and to) our commonalities often, with conversations ranging from personal life events like the doctoral experience and being a child-free women in your thirties, through to more subject-specific common interests, like the difficulties of germinating avocado stones and the frustrations of plants being eaten by wildlife. These conversations, both general and personal, were meaningful encounters which enriched the research experience, as well as helped build rapport and feelings of trust between me and the participants, and are reflected in the data and body of this thesis.

As well as an ‘insider’, I am also an ‘outsider’ (Kerstetter, 2012; Bridges, 2001; Acker, 2000; Naples, 1996), where I do not share analogous experiences with these women. For instance, I do

not have an allotment, and my horticultural knowledge pales in comparison to many of these women. Further, many of them exist in ways different to my own; some have children or are married, many cook, and many enjoy the hosting and hospitality that their growing and cooking environments bring. As a childfree, unmarried woman who dislikes both cooking and hosting, I am unable to understand these practices from my own position. Yet, importantly, this kind of distance can contribute to a better understanding of the researcher, the researched, and the research process (Naples, 1996; Acker, 2000; Carroll, 2009). Indeed, this distance from the participants helped to build my relationships with many of them, and our conversations. Here, many of the women shared personal experiences with me, such as living in remote locations of the world, of raising children, and of ill-health, as well as provided me with important life lessons, such as how to make compost, how to be a beekeeper, and clever insider tricks to help maximise soil nutrition. These important conversations, of both a personal and a practical nature, were an important part of this research process too, providing me with important opportunities to ask meaningful questions, to open further discussions, and to interrogate the ‘why’ and ‘how’ of their experiences and actions both at the allotment, and in their wider lives, from a place without presumption or judgement; a place that existed precisely because their experiences and histories are so different to that of my own. Here, our differences aided the research process and provided interesting and invaluable experiences and conversations.

My place within this research also exists on a personal level. More specifically, as a researcher, an academic, and a student, I have closely identified as a quantitative investigator for many years. Holding an undergraduate degree in an applied science and a postgraduate diploma in an allied healthcare profession, my master’s dissertation in Sociology was my first real experience of embracing qualitative approaches to actively conduct research. In truth, even at this point, I conducted that dissertation using content analysis, reducing several documentaries down to phrases such as “the number of appearances” and “the number of references to”, staying as close to quantitative practices as the process would allow. This doctoral thesis, then, is my first true experience of conducting a large independent piece of deeply qualitative research. Consequently, along with the learning curves of all doctoral research journeys, I have also experienced the unyielding task (and impact) of unlearning most of what has been presented to me as rote for the best part of a decade. This includes making room for reflexive practice, working in a way which

tells stories, and which acknowledges feelings and emotions as part of a research process, and giving space for ideas and data to “linger deliberately” (Royster and Kirsch, 2012: 84), rather than limited, structured, controlled analysis. With an education history of embedded within such quantitative ways, this has been difficult, but it has been integral to this piece of work, and as such, I can only really describe this experience as *intellectually transformative*. I have learnt that research does not need to be oppressively systematic, and that being wholly value-neutral or objective is not paramount – rather, it is beneficial to the research process and to academic writing to embrace our lived experiences, histories, and active voice, and to use them. More, through engaging with a wide variety of qualitative feminist ideas, theory, and knowledge, I have had my mind opened to a myriad of approaches, philosophies, methods, and critical considerations that make up this thesis. In turn, this has reframed everything I thought I knew about research, data collection, analysis, writing, and indeed, the social world.

With these new knowledges that I hold I have been able to deeply (re)consider who I am as a researcher, and this has continually shaped my doctoral research. Now, as an interdisciplinary, mixed methods academic, a fundamental motivation for me as a researcher is to create work which has the potential to change even a small aspect of the shared, social world for the better, in ways that are meaningful, insightful, and where possible, creative. More, I have learnt to embrace my own interests and passions within this and to make this part of my research journey, granting myself permission to embrace ideas using exciting, reflective, creative methods, along with capturing personal and meaningful qualitative data, and engaging with research in ways that I am personally invested within; elements that before, I simply did not think (or agree) was possible.

Ultimately, this thesis is both *for* and *about* the 19 women who took part in this project and their allotment plots. It provides space for them to share their stories and experiences, as well as their struggles and celebrations as they circumnavigate this muddy landscape in visual, creative and engaging ways. Whilst this is a thesis about 19 different who women who grow, I also acknowledge that I, as a woman who grows, play an important part of this as a listener, researcher, and as the navigator of this written journey. Here, I have held a continued commitment to encapsulate their stories and experiences, illustrating them with snippets of their



own words, ruminations, and photographs throughout this thesis, presenting their narratives in ways that are personal, honest, and sometimes, surprising, and writing about them in a way that is personal to me, whilst being as open, engaged, and as natural, as possible.

## 3.2. The women



Photograph 3.2. *A selection of the participants who took part in this research*

### 3.2.1. Recruitment

Due to COVID-19, recruitment was conducted online. Recruitment began at the end of November 2021 and was complete by January 2022. Requirements for participants to take part were minimal: they needed to be 18 years old or over, identify as a woman, and use a green space that was not their home, such as an allotment or a community garden, on a regular basis.

#### 3.2.1.1. How?

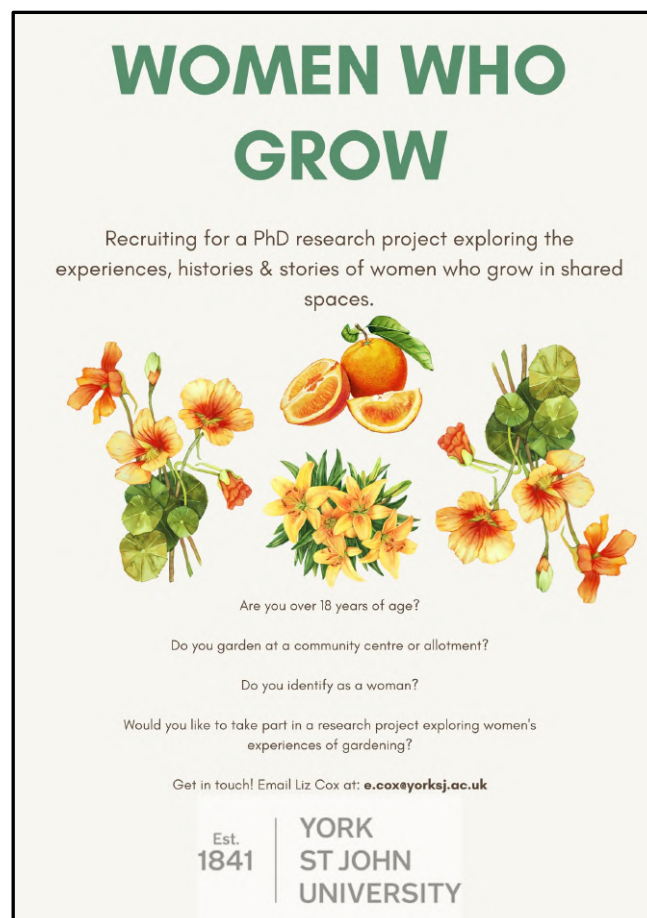
To recruit participants for this research, snowball and purposive sampling approaches were employed.

Snowball sampling is a popular, flexible method that is often employed within qualitative research. Crucial to effective snowball sampling is networking and referral, with participant

numbers increasing, much like a snowball, as word-of-mouth progresses (Geddes, Parker and Scott, 2018). Once initial participants who fit the criteria have been recruited, they are asked to share word of the research. For this research, I relied heavily on social media (specifically, Twitter), finding this to be an effective way to start the participant snowball. As suggested by Gelinas et al. (2018), I created a separate Twitter social media handle to my own personal account, and I used this to advertise my project, requesting that people share the tweet, and to send me a direct message with any questions. Here is an example tweet:

Are you a #WomanWhoGrows in the North of England at a #CommunityGarden or #Allotment? Fancy participating in a PhD project exploring women + gardening? DMs are open - please get in touch. Please share!

I also attached a copy of a recruitment poster:



**Figure 3.1.** *Recruitment poster*

Once posted, I shared and retweeted this several times. The posts proved popular and were shared with various allotment groups and people, demonstrating an effective way to access people situated within wider parts of the population I could not reach otherwise (Gelinas et al., 2018).

As people agreed to take part, many continued to share my project, snowballing to other participants, with various people reaching out with questions, expressing interest. As many potential participants mentioned that they knew recruited participants, I began a first-come-first-serve system to avoid unethical bias (Patel, Doku and Tennakoon, 2003), working to avoid unconsciously favouring friends of those already recruited over strangers. When participants expressed interest, I sent them the Participant Information Sheet (Appendix A) along with clarifying questions to determine where they gardened, helping me to direct recruitment. I emailed people one-by-one, sending out information sheets to people in clusters of 3 and giving people time to respond. If they confirmed they were able and wanted to take part, I sent them a consent form (Appendix B). When this was returned to me, they were then classed as “recruited”.

Methods of purposive sampling were also employed during the recruitment stage. This requires the researcher to make decisions about participation based upon criteria, such as specialist knowledge or a capacity or willingness to participate (Oliver and Jupp, 2006). In this instance, participants had to lease an allotment or engage in a community garden environment, which they needed to do regularly, along with having an active, engaged interest in growing and cultivation.

### **3.2.1.2. Where?**

The potential for research locations for this project was broad, with community gardens, shared spaces, and allotments considered. Ineligible locations included home garden spaces, and any growing space that was for business use (e.g., flower farming). Locations were also required to be in a commutable distance, and I limited this based on financial and logistical necessity to a 100-mile cap from my own postcode, which also kept recruitment consistent.

As recruitment gained traction, I began mapping out the participants' locations on a roadmap. This helped me to recruit in location-based pockets, where fieldwork would then be carried out

by seeing multiple participants in similar areas on the same day. Doing this also helped me to avoid mistakenly recruiting a participant who was within a long commute but was not within a travel-distance to another participant, as I knew this would make visits costly and difficult. In the end, many participants were reasonable distances from each other, and this did not pose an issue. By the end of recruitment, the participants were spread across 5 main geographic sections across the north of England.

### 3.2.1.3. *Who?*

This research focused on women who garden in places outside of their home, like community gardens and allotments. The recruitment criteria for this research, therefore, was simple: participants were required to be 18 years or older, identify as a woman (including ciswomen and transwomen) and they were required to frequent the growing space on a regular basis.

Over 60 people expressed interest and over a 3-week period, 20 people were recruited. Due to life events and time constraints, one participant withdrew in May (2022), leaving 19 participants taking part to completion. None of the participants were known to me prior, and all participants leased their own allotments (either alone or with someone else). Participants were given a participant number which was used to identify their participant materials, as well as to code documents that contained information about them.

To learn more about the women, biographical details were taken after our interview in the form of a short, informal questionnaire. Due to a personal COVID-19 exposure the final five interviews were conducted online, and this form was sent by email. Some participants did not return this, leaving 17 in total. This form was purposefully designed so that the participants could complete it in terms of self-identity, and were asked questions regarding marital status, race, class, and sexual identity. This style allowed for nuance, and for participants to expand on their answers, as well as leave spaces blank if they desired. As such, there is some differentiation in how what information was provided.

All the participants leased at least one allotment plot in the north of England, which varied in size from 24ft<sup>2</sup> up to 436 ft<sup>2</sup>. Ciswomen (n=18) and transwomen (n=1) took part, with the participants

aged between 29 and 78. Most of the participants were working in full-time or part-time roles (n=14), and those who were not formally employed were either retired (n=2) or home-schooled their children (n=1). The women who took part in the project came from an array of educational backgrounds, holding further education qualifications (n=2), bachelor's degrees (n=7), masters degrees (n=6) and doctorates (n=2). Most of the women identified as heterosexual (n=10), whilst others identified as queer (n=1), bisexual (n=4), or aromantic/asexual (n=2). Most were married (n=9), with others partnered or co-habituating (n=3), single (n=3), or separated (n=1) and divorced (n=1). In terms of social class, the women self-identified over a broad range, including middle class (n=8), lower middle class (n=2), working class (n=1) or lower working class (n=1). Two participants both penned "I identify as working class but other people will think I'm middle class", whilst others answered, "not sure" (n=2). When asked about their ethnicity, one participant identified as "mixed white and black Caribbean", whilst others identified as "white British" (n=9), "British" (n=2), "white" (n=3), "white Irish" (n=1) or "white Irish/British" (n=1).

### **3.3. Methods**

Multiple qualitative methods were employed for this research to gather rich, meaningful data and a deeper understanding of the research topic (Burton and Obel, 2011). Further, using a pluralistic approach (Chamberlain et al., 2011) meant that the methods rely upon each other, providing a holistic benefit, capturing rich dimensions of understanding (Hall and Howard, 2008). None of the methods were seen to have greater importance over the other, aligning with the research aim and question, which addresses nuanced and complicated questions exploring people, their experiences, and their life histories; all of which require expansive and multidimensional modes of study (Beckman, 2014).

Pluralistic methods are also important when we consider the interdisciplinary work of feminist study. This research crosses boundaries of sociology, geography, gender studies, and critical plant studies, as well as being informed by feminist literature, ethnographic approaches, and academic scholarship across health and wellbeing, social studies, women's studies, nature studies, cultural studies, philosophy, and human geography. As such, multiple methods allow for an intellectual energy that answers a demand for varied and informative methodological approaches (Cole and

Stewart, 2012). I employed three complementary methods: (i) ethnography including participant observation, (ii) arts-based methods including participant diaries and participant-generated photography, and (iii) semi-structured interviews.

### 3.3.1. Ethnography

Rather than it being a singular approach, the term ‘ethnography’ embraces a multitude of qualitative practices including participant observation, interviewing, as well as other collaborative techniques which can be adapted and altered for different research settings (Pink, 2001; Pink, 2015). A feminist ethnography looks specifically to women’s experiences, exploring the ways the wider social world shapes them (Perry, Lynam and Anderson, 2006) whilst considering how intersectional structures are “lived, reproduced, and challenged on a daily basis” (Skeggs, 2013: 74). This gives a view from below (see hooks, 2000[1983]), or the standpoint of the nonprivileged (Williams and Sjoberg, 1993). Whilst it is argued that social research is observational because researchers cannot study the world without being part of it (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2019 [1983]), participant observation is a core function of ethnographic research (Crang and Cook, 2007) and is especially relevant to feminist ethnography. Rather than it being seen in a traditional positivistic sense, where people are watched, observed, and noted on from the outside, Wogan (2004) and Geertz (1998) see it as a revolutionary praxis, referring to it broadly as ‘deep hanging out’. It is through this intimate, long-term engagement with people and being part of their lives and social worlds that we can learn about the lived experiences of others, while simultaneously questioning our own assumptions, discovering new ways to be thinking, seeing, and acting in the world (Shah, 2017).

Reflexivity can also be employed here, as feminist ethnography gives the researcher more consideration than other research methods (O’Reilly, 2011), influencing how ethnographies are recorded and detailed, transforming the canon of ethnography and providing rich, evocative, colourful pieces of rigorous writing (Richardson, 1997; O’Reilly, 2011; Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). Such an approach recognises that there is a reciprocal relationship between the ethnographic text and the research process, acknowledging that the researcher is part of the world of study (Silverman, 2020), allowing for the social and political to become research

extensions (May and Perry, 2017; Longhurst, 1994). This is important from a feminist position, as the researcher can ‘place’ herself in the research (May and Perry, 2007; Cotterill and Letherby, 1993; Davies, 2003) while acknowledging that they will be entangled in networking and relationships that help co-create the social world that is being studied (May and Perry, 2007). In this way, feminist reflexive ethnography creates an “agile, dynamic, creative, and temporal approach” to fieldwork, in which the researcher’s practices are “reflected upon, developed, and changed over time” (Benson and O’Reilly, 2022: 179). More than this, it is about learning as the research develops, adapting and evolving the process through open channels of communication between the researcher and participants, without forgetting personal and social influences and potential (Benson and O’Reilly, 2022).

Feminist ethnography was employed in this research as it is an effective way to study and explore people’s social worlds in everyday, natural settings, and collect a high standard of qualitative data. This was bolstered by participant observation, participant diaries, participant photographs, and various interactions and conversations. Initially, I planned to start fieldwork in early February (2022), visiting each participant at their allotments fortnightly. My intention was to spend time with these women at their plots, engaging in some activities around the allotment together. Doing this would allow me to develop relationships with the participants, while providing an opportunity to see and experience their everyday allotment experiences. I hoped to learn how they encounter and navigate these spaces, learning about what they grow and how they do it, and gain understandings from them as well-versed experts in growing. Unfortunately, the pandemic halted my plans, and I was to wait to begin the visits. Further unexpectedly and linked to the pandemic and Brexit, fuel prices rose exponentially (Milewska and Milewski, 2022; Du et al., 2023; Breninlich et al., 2022), which made the longer-term view of fieldwork difficult. With this in mind, and conscious of research schedules and funding deadlines, I decided to increase my virtual communications with the participants. I also altered how often I would see the participants from fortnightly to at least monthly, seeing those who were nearby more often, and making sure I stayed in touch with other participants through WhatsApp, engaging with what they were doing at their allotments with various photographs, videos, voice notes, and written updates.

I visited participants as often as possible across Spring, Summer and early Autumn (2022). Flexibility was key, especially knowing participants had several commitments, different ways of working, and various ties and routines. The day before I was due to visit each participant, I sent them an email or a WhatsApp message to check they were still available, and still happy for me to visit. I was acutely aware I was going into their spaces, and whilst they had agreed to take part, consent is fluid and changeable. Checking they were still happy for me to spend time with them was both within my duty as a researcher, but also out of respect for their space and time.

During my visit participants often gave me tours of their allotments, showing me what they were growing, pointing out things that might have changed or was new, and teaching me about plants, fruits, and vegetables. Some participants invited me to work with them, digging and weeding, demonstrating the importance of 'doing' compared to 'talking' (Tilley, 2006; Hitchings and Jones, 2004). For others, instead of working, we wandered and talked, deep diving into the contents of their allotment, meandering around their plots, talking about their experiences, sitting and drinking tea, and enjoying each other's company. Here, cooking, eating, and sharing food became a useful research tool (Johnson and Longhurst, 2011) as it triggered conversations that helped me to develop nuanced understandings of their experiences in these spaces, in similar ways that the *doing* of the allotment did.





**Photograph 3.3.** *Lizzie capturing me beekeeping (photograph: author's own)*

Time, here, was troublesome, especially with financial/fuel constraints. Many of the participants worked full-time and had allotment routines. Some would spend all day there, so organising to visit them was relatively easy, while for others the allotment fitted around their busy schedules, visiting their plots in the pockets of available time they had. This difficulty was magnified by the seasons, governing much of what activities happen when, where, and how. As such, whilst I intended to spend equal amounts of time with everyone, the reality was that I spent more time with some participants than others. Where possible, I tried to make up for this using email and WhatsApp, which was also more successful with some participants than others.

Overall, whilst logistically difficult, my plot visits were full of rich, friendly, and affirming experiences, with welcoming women who were keen to share their allotments (and their produce) with me. Whilst external, uncontrollable factors made it harder, this was time well spent, and invaluable to this research process.

### 3.3.2. Creative methods

Creative methods refer to creative, sensory, and embodied research which typically bring individuals into the research in some way (Kara, 2020), and arts-based methods stand as a particularly effective route for gathering rich data to explore and interrogate people's social worlds and experiences. Visual research methods are one tenet of arts-based methods, seeing significant expansion within several fields, including cultural studies, sociology, and human geography (Rose, 2016), as well as being popular in conjunction with ethnographic approaches (Barley and Russell, 2019). With arts-based approaches, focus is placed upon what is created or seen, along with what it means to the person creating it. This is a nuanced method of research production, as the data is created for the research, rather than being part of something else that is added in retrospectively (Rose, 2016: 307).

#### 3.3.2.1. *Participant-generated photography*

One branch of creative methods used in this research was participant-generated photography. Photographs are important because they can contain many varied meanings. Moreover, they are both taken and at the same time, made (Chaplin, 2004: 36) as well as never viewed as just 'a photograph'; we tend to focus on the content of the image, with our understanding of what the image means varying according to the context within which it is viewed. Photographs, then, are valuable, as they can encode large amounts of information within a single representation, framed within space and time, where they "cry out to us to imbue them with meaning" (Grady, 2004: 20). As Susan Sontag (1979: 179) remarks, photographs "come from their being material realities in their own right, rightly informative deposits left in the wake of whatever emitted them...images are more real than anyone could have supposed" and in this way, they are an important method of capturing social life. Previous research has benefited from photography-based methods and demonstrate that they can be used in a variety of settings, including physical and mental illness (Donnelly et al., 2021; Mizock, Russinova and DeCastro, 2015), areas of young

people's lives (Loizou and Kyriakou, 2016; Loizou, 2011) and pre-school life (Rayna and Garnier, 2021), as well as research around socio-political issues including displacement (Esin and Lounasmaa, 2020), women's lived experiences as refugees and asylum seekers (Sirriyeh, 2010; Brigham, Abidi and Zhang, 2018), violence and conflict (Bau, 2015; Fairey and Orton, 2023), as well as climate change and sanitation (MacArthur et al., 2022; Hazenbosch et al., 2022).

In this way, this research benefits from using participant-generated photography. Creating photographs as data is important as they can bring understanding to stories, while also allowing for the exploration of personal meaning, as well as reflecting upon the construction of knowledge regarding people's experiences and histories. Here, each participant was given a disposable camera (stickered with their participant number) that had 36 exposures, and they were asked to photograph and document their everyday allotment experiences over nine months. They had creative freedom with this and were asked only to avoid taking photographs of children and other people's faces, and ensuring they obtained consent. They were also asked to avoid capturing images away from their plot, nor anything unsuitable or sensitive. Because the project was running over several months, participants were asked to try and note each exposure number and some notes about their photograph, as this would help prompt them in their interview, where the images become key elicitation tools of conversation.

From a feminist position, photographic methods are important because they can work to disrupt traditional power balances. By giving the participants a disposable camera and asking them to document a space that is important to them, they are being given space to capture moments that are theirs and of their choosing; a power transformation that is also reflected in the research process itself (Murray and Nash, 2017; Harley, 2012; Holliday, 2004). Similarly, by giving the participants the camera rather than relying on the researcher as photographer, there is less disruption or distortion of normative practices in the everyday setting (Ferguson, 2013: 8). This not only unsettles their traditional position, situating the participants as the experts, but reflects a disruption against the hierarchical patriarchal forces that these women navigate in both the allotment, and wider society.

Using disposable cameras rather than smartphones or digital cameras was also intentional. The process of making (versus taking) a photograph is complicated, and is influenced by gender, class, and age (Harper, 2004: 93). Disposable cameras are a reasonably low-cost option that can be readily provided, removing any assumption that the participants own or can operate a smartphone or a digital camera. They are simple, without focus on expertise, and use a 'click and shoot' method without the need to consider technical aspects, like aperture or focal length. The photographs can also not be manipulated, curated, or deleted. This, again, was intentional, so that the participants did not become concerned about the image, and did not waste time re-shooting the picture.

Using disposable cameras was also used to create a sense of surprise and anticipation, as the participants would need to wait to see the photographs, which is not unlike the allotment. The women could predict what their photographs would look like, planning what they capture much in the same way that they approach their plots, envisaging their seeds and bulbs and what will grow, yet both are unknown until the result(s) (the photographs and the plant) are visible. Moreover, using disposable cameras gave a rawness to the photographs that is reflected in the allotment, with messy edges, wonky angles, and surprising results, like blind bulbs that grow unexpectedly flowerless, giving a juxtaposition that was both topical and complementary to the research itself.

Using disposable cameras as such means that the participants choose the data, leaving what they choose to photograph and what do they choose to leave out in their control, demonstrating notions of gendered agendas (Solomon and Spence, 1995; Janning and Scalise, 2015). In the same way that an interview transcript or an ethnographer's fieldnotes tell us what happened, so do these photographs, recording vital pockets of knowledge which tell a story and demonstrates history, transitioning from simple images to important, complex sociological tools and data (Grady, 2004), and this is particularly apparent when using photographs as elicitation tools in interviews. As researchers, we often collect the stories of others and reflect upon them ourselves in light of the narratives we have at our disposal, knowing that meaning can be lost and devalued when placed in the context of another. By using participant photography as an elicitation tool, whereby the participants talk to the researcher about their photographs, this risk can be

minimised. From a feminist perspective, this is important as the researcher can look at the photographs alongside the participants (Rose, 2016), allowing the participants to share the stories around the images, ensuring the viewer (the researcher) understands the image from the photographer's (participant) perspective, with their meaning and intention (Kindon, 2003). Moreover, when the researcher engages this way, anticipated and unanticipated meanings can be unearthed, as the narrative communicated is the one intended (Banks 2008; Drew and Guillemin, 2014). This is important because photographs are polysemic, where meaning lies in a constant state of flux between never reaching an absolute truth nor being seen as a record, producing a trace of an event or history (Manghani, 2013). Here, *looking* at a photograph and understanding is not conflated with *knowing* the true meaning and depth behind the image (Rose, 2003, 2014, 2016), and through discussing the photographs with the participants, there is no misinterpretation or misunderstanding of the intent or purpose of the image(s).

The disposable cameras were collected and sent for development in August (2022). With both researcher/researched power in mind, along with an awareness of (mis)attributed meaning to the photographs, I purposefully did not look at the images prior to discussing them with the participants; instead, I intentionally shared this experience of seeing them for the first time, with them.



**Photograph 3.4.** *Oakley capturing her reflection in the shed window*

Using this photography-based approach was generally a success. Some participants engaged with this element of the project more than others, with some participants using only half of the available roll (15 images), whilst others took as many as the film roll would allow (38 images). My worries about having several hundred photographs of thumbs were (mostly!) unfounded, with many of the photographs being good quality, capturing what the participants hoped. Most of the participants made notes of what they had photographed, and we used these as prompts in our discussions, with many of the images eliciting bigger conversations about their stories and experiences at their allotments. Some participants, when talking about their images, said that a number were ‘filler pictures’ as they were trying to use up the roll, yet many of the photographs worked as intended: “as an inventory, as evocation, and as performance” (Rose, 2016: 327).

### **3.3.2.2. Participant diaries**

Participant diaries were also employed within this research, especially as they are reliable, useful and “profoundly...feminist” (Rich, 1976: 217) tools that can help further our understanding of another person’s thoughts, feelings, and experiences in the world. Further, they are accessible,

working to establish ties in ways that are comprehensible, whilst having the power to connect our current self with our past self and our future self (Huff, 1989).

Across disciplines, modern research lauds diaries as excellent ‘documents of life’ (see Plummer, 2001) that can be used to explore and understand people’s intimate everyday experiences (Harvey, 2011). Diaries can be used as a research tool to be completed while research is on-going (Scott, 2022; Woll, 2013), in a private format that is used as an elicitation tool for interviews (Harvey, 2011), or before interviews (Zimmerman and Wieder, 1977; Latham, 2003; Thille, Chartrand and Brown, 2022). They can also be used alongside other methods, like photography (Scott, 2022) or focus groups (Meth, 2003). Diaries are particularly useful because they can provide insight into experiences regarding specific events, situations, or circumstances (Elliot, 1997; Travers, 2011), as well as a way for people to log their events of daily life (Bolger et al., 2003; Ketelle, 2012).

Diaries are a reliable and interesting way to capture experiences and reflections of the everyday, as well as the stories of people in certain circumstances and spaces, and they are a key part of this research bricolage. Further, reflecting the feminist methodology that penetrates this work, diaries give participants the power to reveal and share nuggets of information and knowledge that they want to reveal, on their terms; they become another tool to give voice to the participant, unearthing their stories, in ways that they can choose and control.

For this research, participants were given two diaries (stickered with their participant number) at the start of the fieldwork, with more available if needed. Participants had freedom with what they chose to record in their diaries, and how. They could draw, write, paint, press flowers, create poetry, make lists, give diary entries, and do almost anything they wanted. Their only restriction was to avoid revealing any sensitive information about themselves (or others), and to avoid recording anything inappropriate.





**Photograph 3.5.** *A selection of the diaries and photographs that were sent to participants (photograph: author's own)*

Participants kept their diaries until the end of the project, and they were collected after their interview. Participants who were interviewed online were asked to post their diaries back, however two participants did not do this. In general, there was mixed engagement with this activity, with some participants only filling out a few pages, while others used their diaries in the initial stages of the project, giving up soon after; one participant described in her diary that it felt like homework. Others told me they really enjoyed this element, using it as a creative outlet; writing, drawing, pressing flowers, using it like a bullet journal and so on. One participant (Hen) even attached pieces of pottery she found at her plot:





**Photograph 3.6.** Examples of participant's diaries, including Hen's pottery (photographs: author's own)

Several participants, like Lizzie and Fauna, used their diaries to show their everyday plot experiences, detailing what they had done each day, drawing up planting plans and lists, and writing about their hopes for the future growing season. Many, like Hen, filled their diaries with narratives of their successes and failures, events at the allotment, and how they were feeling about jobs undertaken at the plot. Lots of participants reflected in their diaries, and some shared personal elements of their experiences that they wanted to impart but did not necessarily want to talk about with me in their interviews, like their experiences of menstruation at toilet-less allotments.

Whilst there was a varied response with the dairies, many participants seemed to enjoy it. Several commented at the end of the project that doing the diary allowed them to reflect on elements of their time at the allotment in ways they had not done before, and that they enjoyed having this opportunity, which felt like an additional, welcome benefit.

### 3.3.3. Interviews

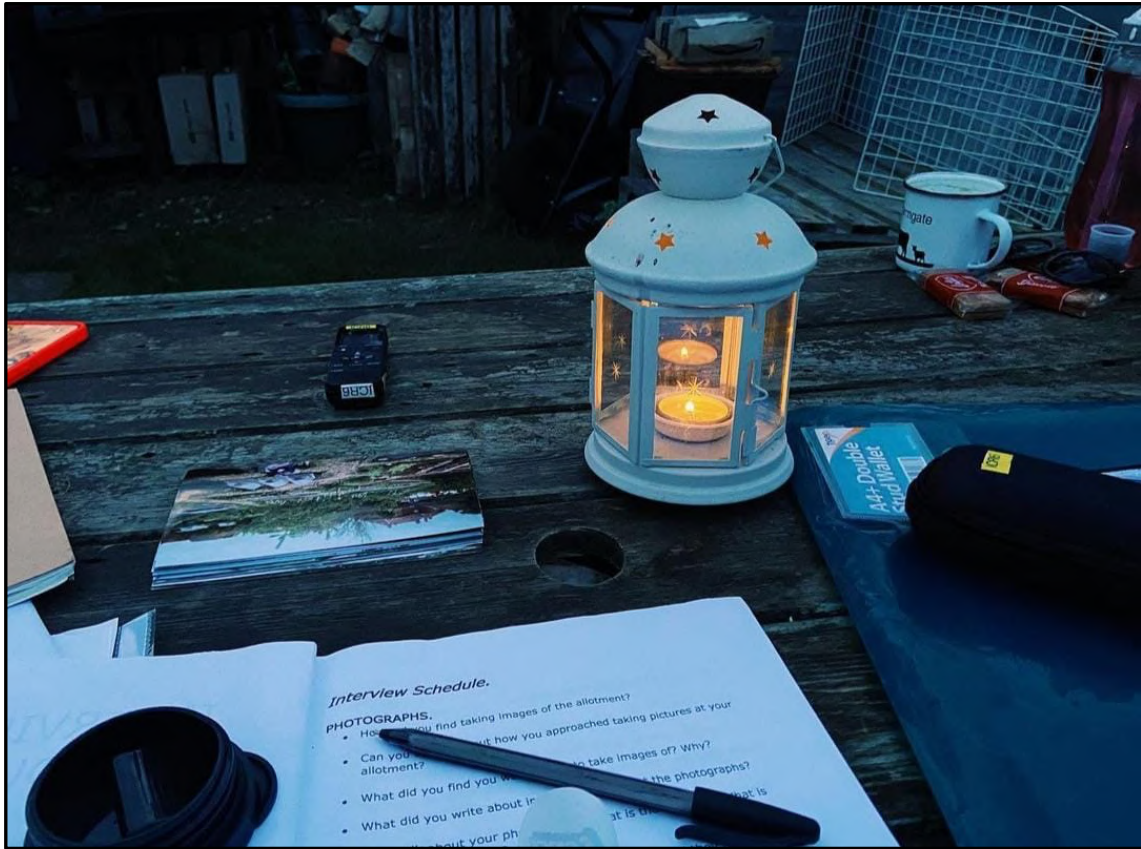
Conducting interviews as part of wider ethnographic research is important, as the researcher and the researched have often already established an on-going relationship (Davies, 2012). This

relationship and rapport can help provide valuable insight within an interview. Importantly, from a feminist perspective, this relationship is important because interviews can be a dyadic, collaborative exercise between the researcher and the researched, which helps to recognise the limits of a researcher's knowledge and situate claims *alongside* participants (Monk et al., 2003; Pratt, 2010), rather than from a more benevolent, knowing position. Importantly, it also gives attention to the relationships with the participants beyond what is said just in the interview (Davies, 2012), acknowledging the rapport built throughout other research encounters.

Semi-structured interviews are a qualitative approach comprising of a series of prompts and predetermined questions that are open-ended in structure (Given, 2012). They allow for creative yet carefully considered questions, while also allowing for broad, open-ended, interesting answers. Researchers will not usually pre-plan the structure of questions, and will instead use an interview schedule, which list topics, prompts, and potential open-ended questions (Davies, 2012). A key part of semi-structured interviewing is that participant responses are "open-ended, in their own words and not restricted to the preconceived notions of the ethnographer (Davies, 2012: 95).

Semi-structured interviews that are part of ethnographic research do not occur as part of the ethnographies, but instead are organised around the research, where they are "bracketed and set off in time and space as something different from the usual interaction" (Davies, 2012: 95). For this project the participant interviews were conducted from 4<sup>th</sup> September through to 8<sup>th</sup> October 2022. I aimed to meet as many participants as possible at their plots, however this was not always possible. Whilst most met me at the allotment (n=13), some participants met me at their homes (n=2) and for some met me online (n=4).

To each interview I took a copy of the interview schedule I had developed, which consisted of potential questions and prompts across several areas, including about the allotment itself, participant growing practices, experiences at their allotments as women, allotment safety and risk, and questions around community and network. I also prepared some reflective questions about the research project, including how they found taking photographs and using diaries, and their more general research experience.



**Photograph 3.7.** *Interviewing Lizzie at her plot (photograph: author's own)*

To try to minimise being seen just as ‘a data collector’ and to reduce participant anxieties, I took an intentional feminist approach to the interviews, employing a natural, casual tone that was much like our conversations at the plots. I avoided asking direct, interview-style questions, and used prompts and subtle questions when we were talking. I let participants lead our conversations, only steering the discussion if it seemed it was becoming tangential or if the participant was not particularly forthcoming. All the interviews were recorded with a Dictaphone (including online), and participants were told they could pause at any point, which we did.

Before beginning the recording, I flipped the photographs to avoid seeing them and numbered them on the back, which helped with transcription and data analysis. On occasion, we sometimes discussed the participant’s diary during our interview, but most of the participants gave me these separately. For some participants, when we discussed a more sensitive topic that they wanted to talk about but not in our interview context, they would indicate that this was “in my diary” (e.g., Heather when discussing menstruation) and, acknowledging the hint, I would move on.

Conducting the research from a reflexive feminist position was particularly useful for the interviews as it gave me flexibility and malleability (Linabary and Hamel, 2017; Hesse-Biber, 2007). More specifically, while I was mindful that I had an idea of what we would talk about, I was also aware that I would need to be open to an array of answers and be prepared to ask questions that I had not thought about, depending on the flow of our conversation. This was particularly useful after talking with Gwen, who was also the first interview. Following our conversation, I spontaneously asked if she identified as a gardener, as previously I had not considered this, assuming everyone identified this way, to which she replied, saying “now yes, but not before! Before I didn’t identify as an outdoors person, never mind anything else!” (Gwen, interview, 04/09/2022).

Here, she raised an interesting point, highlighting important nuance in the ways in which the participants saw themselves. Responding to this, I proceeded to add this into the interview schedule, making a note to speak about this with as many participants as possible. Had I employed a more structured approach, and more, had I continued to embrace many of my quantitative ways as a researcher, I would have denied myself this malleability, and I would not have benefited from this consideration Gwen had given me; I am grateful for both her inspiration, and the ability to enrich the data in this way.

### 3.3.4. Participant packs

I hoped to give the participants their recruitment packs in January (2022), but due to COVID-19 I was unable to do this in person. Whilst there were no government mandated restrictions in place at this time, cases of COVID-19 were rising, and I was aware of being a conduit for infection (Elliott et al., 2022). I felt this posed too much of a risk for the participants and myself and I decided to post out the participant materials. I reasoned this decision against the time of year, where there was minimal activity going on at the allotments, and so postponing meetings with the participants in person and starting my visits later would not cause a problem for the research. It was my hope that by the time spring appeared and allotment activities resurface, infections would be declining.



I emailed the participants about the change of plan and my intention to post out the materials, and they all agreed, sending me their postal details. In their participant packs I provided everything I would have given them in person, along with a few additional items:



Photograph 3.8. Participant packs (photograph: author's own)

Using compostable postage bags, I sent the participants their disposable camera, two diaries, a copy of the information sheet (Appendix A), a consent form (Appendix B), and copies of the methodological information sheets (disposable camera, diary, interview; Appendices C, D, and E respectively). I also sent multiple copies of the consent form for people they may photograph (Appendix F) along with a cover sheet reiterating their consent. I also included a poster which gave them some photograph pointers and an infographic instructions sheet for the disposable camera:



Figure 3.2. Guidance posters for taking photographs

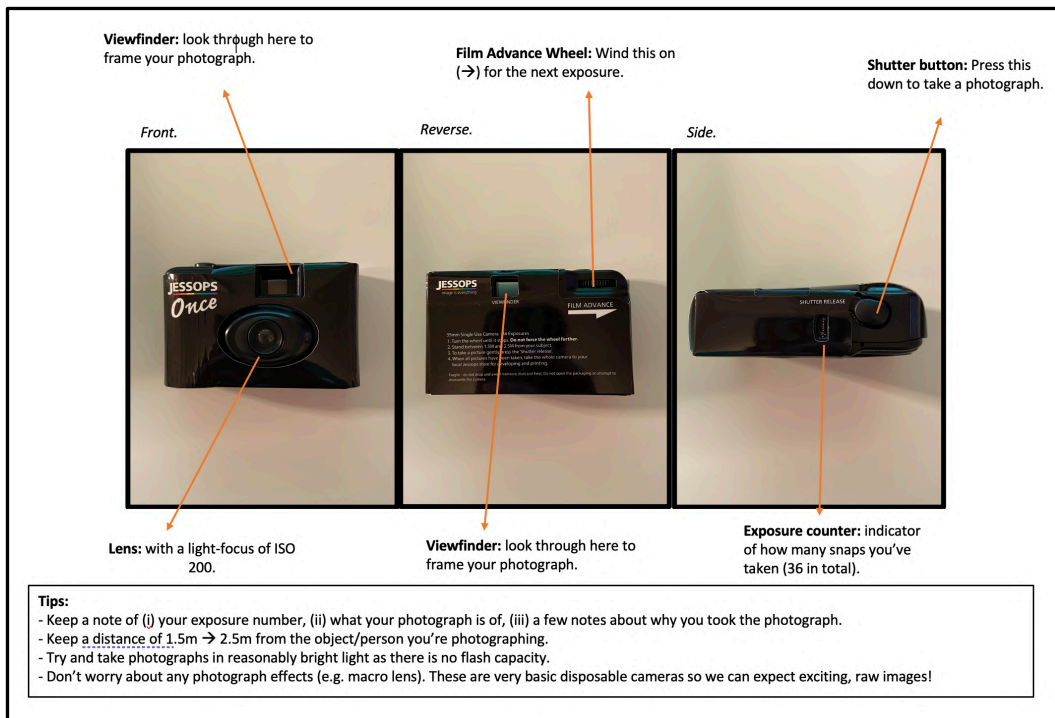


Figure 3.3. Guidance for using the disposable camera

Finally, I also sent an envelope labelled “open for a surprise!” which contained a QR code on a piece of coloured card, which took them to a video:



Figure 3.4. An A6 card which directed participants to a short video

I recorded and uploaded this video to YouTube, which was made in lieu of meeting the women in person. In this, I introduced myself, provided an overview of the project, and went through the contents of their package. I also reiterated for them to contact me if they needed, stressing that there was no right or wrong way in which to take part in this project, and expressed my thanks to them for taking part. I was keen to reiterate all of this with them, and being unable to do it in person, a recording felt a good alternative.

I also supplied some vegan sweets and a packet of wildflower seeds as a gesture of thanks.

### 3.3.5. A reflection on creative methods

Overall, the methods employed within this research were a success, and a great deal of rich, detailed, insightful data was collected, cumulating in this interesting, varied thesis. In terms of using creative methods, all the participants engaged with most of the approaches employed, with everyone using their disposable camera, and everyone taking part in a semi-structured interview. Only two participants did not return their participant diaries, and two participants returned to me detailed word-processed reflections, rather than the notebook I had provided them. Most of the participants used more than half of their rolls of photography film, and more than half of the participants filled at least one of their diaries. Encouragingly, many of the participants

commented on the methods used either throughout the fieldwork or at the end of their interview, saying that taking photographs and using a diary had given them time to reflect on their experiences and time spent in the allotment, and that they found value in these tasks, giving them welcome pause for thought. Furthermore, going through the photographs with the participants and sharing the first viewings of their images was delightful, with many participants showing enthusiasm and joy for what they had captured, sharing information about their photographs, and often commenting on the distant experience of the anticipation in waiting for film to be developed.

Importantly, a critical reflection from the methods that I employed also surrounds the use of using creative methods and pertains to how some participants worried about doing these parts of the project “right”; in particular, the photographs and the diaries. Having read some literature surrounding this before the fieldwork began (see Bagnoli, 2009 and Frith and Harcourt, 2007), I was aware that participants might be concerned about this, but I was surprised to the extent to which this was apparent throughout the research process. Participants shared with me on multiple occasions that they were worried they were taking pictures of the “wrong” things, that their pictures would be “bad” because they were on a disposable camera, and that their diaries would be “boring” (fieldnotes, various dates); for them, the allotment – especially during the initial stages of the growing season – was not a place that seemed interesting, and so they were worried about whether their photographs and reflections around this were “right”. I was conscience to assuage their concerns, reiterating that not only was I not worried about this, but there was not really any kind of “wrong” creation. More, I reiterated that I was interested in their everyday experiences within their plots, regardless of how mundane they thought this might be. Further, I stressed that even if all their photographs were dark, gritty, and unintelligible, or their diaries were short and what they deemed as uninteresting, we would still be able to talk about it, and that I was sure this would be interesting and valuable. For some of the participants, this quelled their concerns, and they relaxed more within the process. For others, the disposable cameras were a worry that that would be apparent until the photographs were developed, and they could finally see that their images. For a small few of the participants, their worry about the photographs turned into frustration, as when we were looking through their images, they were critical about them, and with that, their own abilities, often commenting on the lack of lighting,



poor object positioning, or lack of focus. Again, I made sure to reassure the participants about their photographs, pointing out how useful and interesting they were regardless of quality or light, reminding the participants about the rudimentary nature of the disposable cameras, and that this was intentional.

Here, however, I realised that while I had consciously employed disposable cameras to try and avoid the participants spending too long editing or (re)photographing their snapshots, the downside of this is that digital photography standards are still applied, even to film photography methods, especially in a world of social media and “instagrammable” photography (Lobo, 2023; Leaver, Highfield and Abdin, 2020; Christanti et al., 2021). More, while I could work to comfort and reassure many of the participants, it was clear that when using creative methods, some people will worry about this more than others. While I am confident that I recognised this and tried to assuage the participants concerns as and when they arose, I am not sure that I could have employed any measures that would have avoided this happening. As such, this research evidences that participant worry, in this way, exists, and is an element that researchers who are employing creative methods would benefit from being mindful of, and to continue to be aware of through the research process, assuaging concerns where possible, and, importantly, making this a key part of the discussion with the participant(s) within the research process.

### **3.4. Data analysis**

Upon the completion of fieldwork, all electronic data was stored on the password-protected university OneDrive. Physical data was stored in a locked cabinet on university premises.

The material data for this research included several photographs from my visits, my researcher diary, reflections and fieldnotes, email and WhatsApp communications between myself and participants, as well as participant photographs (n=607), diaries (n=17), and interview transcripts (n=19).

As a feminist piece of creative participant-centered research, analysis of the data was an inductive process, whereby understandings were formed and grounded through and within the data (more

specifically, participant voice), rather than applying the data to any pre-existing theory or assumptions. This was particularly important as the data gathered was complex, knotty, and entangled. Further, a development of the understanding(s) of the data was on-going, whereby I continually reflected upon the research process, upon each visit, and upon my communication(s) with the participants throughout fieldwork, analysis, and the write-up process. The analysis, then, did not begin once the last interview was conducted and fieldwork ended, but began with the fieldwork, continuing throughout the data collection and transcription, throughout the coding and thematic analysis process, and during the write-up of this thesis.

### 3.4.1. Transcription

Before data analysis could take place, each interview was transcribed. This process started soon after the final interview was conducted and was on-going for two weeks. I carried out the transcription myself, which was done in a rudimentary fashion using QuickTime Player to play the audio files (at a slower speed), while the interviews were written into separate Microsoft Word documents. Audio files were deleted after each transcription and the interview transcripts files were stored on the password-protected university OneDrive.

Whilst transcribed text can never fully represent the complexity of people's interaction(s) or be entirely error free (Sandelowski, 1994), this can be mitigated through an active, conscious, creative process (Forbat and Henderson, 2005; Bucholtz, 2000). Here, transcription was an "interpretative act" (Bird, 2005: 229) and reflected much of the theoretical feminist framework underpinning this research (DuBois, 1991), guided by reflexive and feminist theory (DeVault, 1990) and transcribed in a way that was accurate and representative. Through transcribing in a way that shows "responsible knowledge" (see Skeggs, 1997) I could show the women's voices in the truest way, allowing the women to *hear themselves* within the anonymised data.

To do this, I transcribed the interviews verbatim. This included illustrating when participants paused ([pause]) and laughed ([laughs]), as well as keeping vocal disfluencies such as "umm", "like" and "oohh". I also kept any colloquial language and curse words, and retained any lexical errors that could, in other circumstances, be corrected. I also made brief notes if there was

anything specific about the way participants spoke, such as intonation, that could alter how the transcript could be interpreted in the future. Through transcribing in this way, I created accurate, representative, and true interview data, which is an essential part of giving voice to women in research (DeVault, 1990; Reinharz, 1992).

Rather than member checking the transcripts with the participants (Birt et al., 2016; Forbat and Henderson, 2005), I reflected upon some more sensitive topics, and I spoke with the participants in detail about any uncertainties I had in terms of the data, including worries regarding any concepts or ideas that might risk misinterpretation or misrepresentation. Examples of this include talking with Mary about how I write about her body in chapter five following our interview, as well as discussing with Lizzie and Gwen about how I speak about their identities as queer women in chapter six. This helped to ensure that this thesis is accurate, but more importantly, that the participants were happy with how they would be discussed and represented within it.

The 19 interviews ranged from 54 minutes to 3 hours 33 minutes, totalling a little over 36 hours of audio content, and were transcribed into 673 pages at one and a half spacing (or, over 258,000 words). Transcription was a long but necessary process, bringing further meaning and understanding to the thesis beyond a pragmatic process. Transcribing the data myself afforded me the opportunity to gain a closeness to the data that I would not gain compared to if the transcription was outsourced (Tilley, 2003). Whilst I was present at the interviews, I was often thinking about where the interviews were headed and what the next question might be with the participant, rather than being continually mindfully present. Transcribing these same interviews gave me an opportunity to re-listen to our conversations in a quiet place, in a way that was both literally and metaphorically slowed down. This transformed the transcription further into a reflective process, allowing the data to “linger deliberately” (Royster and Kirsch, 2012: 84). affording me the chance to “consolidate and congeal” thoughts, interpretations, and ideas (Bird, 2005: 245). As such, data analysis was not a singular event, but part of an inductive, meaningful process.

### 3.4.2. Thematic analysis

Based on work by Braun and Clarke (2006, 2012, 2019, 2020), this data set was analysed through guiding principles of thematic analysis (TA).

TA is an approach to data analysis that can assist in generating comprehensible patterns in a way that is meaningful, especially with qualitative data that has intricacy and complexity (Braun and Clarke, 2006, 2012, 2013). More, it is a useful and enriching tool which can capture complex, chaotic, messy, and contradictory relationships that are present in both the real world and in data (Braun and Clarke, 2013). TA is a recursive and iterative approach to data analysis (Byrne, 2022), involving the researcher going backwards and forwards through stages of reading and re-reading data, highlighting and coding data, and generating themes of the data from these codes. The process of coding and theming the data are integral to TA; codes are building blocks (Byrne, 2022) and can be understood as labels for pieces of information that help the researcher address the research question (Braun and Clarke, 2006, 2012). Codes come together and create themes, which tell an interesting or important story about the data from the research (Braun and Clarke, 2019, 2012, 2006).

Taking an inductive approach, informal analysis of this data occurred naturally throughout the fieldwork, including with research reflections and from on-going conversations with participants, but formal analysis was concentrated during the TA process. The process for this research involved overlaying details from the ethnographies, the photographs, the diaries, and the interviews, as well as reading and re-reading the interview transcripts, fieldnotes, and participant diaries multiple times, while thinking about the time spent with the participants and my own photographs.

Rather than use computer software like NVivo, I conducted the analysis by hand. Crucially, this process allowed me to learn that whilst everything was important, not everything could be (or should be) included, and doing this process myself was key to my transformative academic journey. As such, I was systematic but creative (Crang and Crook, 2007) and I let the data drive the analysis. With this, I accepted that analysis would be multi-layered, as well as elusive and multiple, and more than anything, messy (Law, 2004).





Whilst much research lauds methods that are value free, using thematic analysis from a feminist position helps in preventing the silencing of women's voices, acknowledges that the very nature of research conducted by another person cannot and never will be value free, and that we can benefit from this (Burns and Walker, 2005; Braun and Clarke, 2019; Braun and Clarke, 2021). This approach acknowledges that I, as a researcher and as a subjective being, will have impacted how I have coded and themed this data, with another researcher likely to find different, yet still important, research findings should they assess the same data set. With this in mind, however, the data analysis was grounded within the data set and not in my own personal opinions or experiences of the research. Moreover, the process of repeatedly reading, re-reading, coding, and theming the data illustrates that whilst I will have had some effect upon this process, the data still reflects the participant's voices and stories.

### **3.5. Ethical considerations**

From its initial inception, running through the design process, analysis, and write up, ethics and ethical issues course through the research process. More, the consideration of ethics does not stop at the writing stage, but continues as the work enters the academy, contributing to both subject knowledge and to knowledges about the research process. Importantly, ethical considerations should not be viewed as hurdles or burdens but seen instead as an important element of the everyday craft of research, guiding our decision-making (Fluehr-Lobban, 2013). This becomes more important when we consider the close interactions between researcher and those being researched, and the relationships and rapport that are built (Miller, 2017), as well as the importance of power and the unequal relationships that exist between researcher and participant (Hesse-Biber, 2007; Letherby, 2003).

This research was conducted within an ethical framework where decisions were made in line with elements of good ethical practice. Particularly, this research adhered to ethical rules and regulation at an institutional level and at a level that followed official guidance by the British Sociological Association Statement of Ethical Practice (BSA, 2017) and the International Visual Sociology Association Code of Research Ethics and Guidelines (Papademas and IVSA, 2009). This research was also underpinned by my own morals and values regarding respect, autonomy,

and open conversations, as well as my beliefs and acknowledgement surrounding power, interpersonal relationships, and equality (Marzano, 2007; Price and Asquith, 2008). Before any research activity was conducted, institutional ethical approval was applied for, which was granted by the York St John University Ethics Committee on November 5<sup>th</sup>, 2021.

### 3.5.1. COVID-19

A large proponent of this doctoral research was designed and conducted during a time when the COVID-19 pandemic impacted much of the globe, significantly altering how and when research could be conducted, especially as many people were directed to work from home and social contact was reduced. When participant recruitment began in December 2021, there were few governmental mandates in place, but the Omicron variant of COVID-19 was rising (Elliot et al., 2022). By the time recruitment was finished in mid-January 2022 over 140,000 cases were being reported daily (Elliot et al., 2022) and health agencies urged a cautious approach, dictating much of how the first few months of this research was conducted.

Because of COVID-19, society became a risky environment in new ways (Swenson and Roll, 2020), and ethical research issues in times of the virus were magnified (Marino et al., 2020). Such impacts included moving data collection online (Howlett, 2022; Moises Jr, 2020), figuring out how to navigate working safely with clinically vulnerable populations (Teti, Schatz and Liebenberg, 2020), ensuring participant comfort (Howlett, 2022; Khan and MacEachen, 2022) and researcher safety (Meskell, Houghton and Biesty, 2021), as well as more familiar ethical challenges, such as maintaining anonymity and confidentiality within these novel approaches to data collection (Hall, Gaved and Sargent, 2021).

At the time of recruitment, I acknowledged that whilst there were few government mandates in operation restricting social interactions, COVID-19 was an important consideration. I was concerned that I would quickly become a conduit for the virus, posing a risk to my participants and their friends and families, as well as to myself and my own circle, and consequently I needed to be considerate of the ways in which I conducted this research, even if the research was in the open air.



Ethically, I was also careful when speaking about COVID-19 knowing that there was tension in people's approaches, with 'antivax' attitudes and various conspiratorial discourse throughout society (Mylan and Hardman, 2021; Douglas, 2021; Pummerer et al., 2022). When I informed the participants that I would be pausing meeting with them until Omicron posed less of a risk, I was clear that their safety was my priority, as well as my own well-being. I informed them about how I would be progressing when we did meet, giving them a multitude of options which acknowledged a range of personal approaches (e.g., face masks, social distancing). I also requested that if anyone had tested positive for the virus, were symptomatic, or had been around anyone who was positive or symptomatic, to cancel our plans. I encouraged participants to order the free COVID-19 lateral flow tests that were available, and at each available opportunity I also ordered packs that I could then provide to the participants if they needed them.



**Photograph 3.11.** *COVID-19 lateral flow packs for fieldwork (photograph: author's own)*

Thankfully, infection rates of the newest COVID-19 variant were highest during a time when the allotment is least active, and as an alternative to spending physical time with the participants, I kept in touch through email and WhatsApp communications. This was a useful and successful way in which to build rapport and relationships at a time which echoed uncertainty and strain.

I paused meeting with the participants until infection rates were lower, and I reminded participants as casually (yet as frequently) as I could regarding testing and to cancel our plans if they were unwell. Doing research during this time was difficult and fieldwork was conducted to a background hum of the virus, although I only had to cancel visits a handful of times due to either participants testing positive, or myself. In general, participants communicated with me about COVID-19 with a great consideration; sending me photos of their negative tests, letting me know how they were, and cancelling our plans if needed.

Designing and conducting research during a pandemic was stressful, and I encountered difficulties and challenges that I (along with most of the world) was not prepared for. Doing my doctoral research at this time, however, gave me insight into the ways in which we can re-design research, as well as react and respond to situations beyond our control. It also gave me a novel insight into unexpected ethical challenges and considerations, as well as my ability to think about and design research in new ways, outside of traditional approaches, and prioritising facets that are often not given great credence, such as clinical vulnerabilities and personal opinions of health, well-being, as well as autonomy and ownership in terms of contagion, risk, and illness.

### **3.5.2. Researching ethically**

This research was designed with ethics in mind, and in ways that would pose as few issues as possible. Given that this research engaged with people, however, there were several factors that were important to consider. As a guiding principle, this research followed traditional moral codes of practice which included requiring informed consent, ensuring no harm to participants, and guaranteeing participant anonymity and confidentiality (Pollock, 2012; Hammersley, 2015).

As an interpretivist, feminist piece of work that holds a commitment to participant voice, this research was conducted within an overarching lens of care (Tronto, 1993, 1998). This is a feminist-based approach that emphasises a researcher's need to focus on "responsibility, social interconnectedness and collaboration" (Groot et al., 2018: 288). This framework acknowledges that humans are relational and interdependent (Barnes et al., 2015), with attention not on rules or principles but care and empathy (Groot et al., 2018; Tronto, 1993, 1998), and this ripples through my research. From the way in which the idea came around, which was centred around acknowledging who was underrepresented and whose voice was not heard, through to how the research was designed and conducted, I was able to give participants control and agency, as well as be present, showing this in my communications, reflecting that I was listening, and *hearing* what they were saying. Crucially, this helped me to foster a safe research environment wherein the participants knew I cared about them, for them, and how their voices and stories were represented in this research. This approach continued to run into the data analysis and write-up, where I have ensured that the participants' voices are represented thoroughly, accurately and kindly, and in ways that they know to be true, with as much transparency possible. Accurate representation and giving the participants voice is critical, and flows throughout this thesis, which is echoed in the ways in which I have spoken with the women about the data, and about the sensitive topics and discussions we have had, clarifying details and discussing this with them, before writing

### ***3.5.2.1. Participant's details***

Anonymising data is a routine expectation of standard ethical practice (BSA, 2017; Godfrey-Faussett, 2022, Creswell, 2013) and can help protect participants whilst maintaining their social-emotional health and physical safety (Lahman et al., 2023). Yet, often, this type of 'masking' (Jerolmack and Murphy, 2019) which conceals or distorts information (like names of people and places) can be problematic, erasing elements of religious association, cultural background, and/or class, with feelings of loss of identity and key biographical detail (Allen and Wiles, 2016). Against this traditional, paternalistic approach of anonymisation, some feminists argue that we must allow the personal into public discourse (Kirsch and Ritchie, 1995; Rich, 1984), placing emphasis on the personal, and situating women at the centre of our work (Skeggs, 1997). As such, I set out to carefully balance ethical requirements at both institutional and organisational levels (e.g. BSA,

IVSA) whilst also considering my own epistemological and ontological position. To do this I developed a two-pronged approach to the anonymisation of the participant data, covering (i) geographical location and (ii) participant identity.

With geographical locations, unlike some research (see Sherman, 2009), I did not want to create new pseudonyms for the towns and cities in which my research took place. Doing this felt frivolous, and risked placing ideas of what the locations might be like from their name alone: “-shire” might suggest affluent, and “-ton” might suggest a large town, for instance. Instead, I have been purposefully vague when discussing this data, using only “the north of England” as a signifier. This is personal; as a northerner myself, I argue that what we hold as *the north* is dictated largely by where we are from, our own biographical histories, and what we understand this region to be. By being purposefully vague, not only am I leaving the geography of the research to the imagination of the reader, but the participant’s plots remain entirely confidential and, broadly, unknown.

Similarly, I have not used the participants’ real (or given) names in this thesis, nor with any other individuals who may appear, such as partners or allotment friends. Instead, everyone has a pseudonym. Inspired by Allen and Wiles (2016) and Lahman et al. (2023, 2015), I gave participants a choice with their pseudonym: they could pick their own name, or I would create one. Giving participants options disrupts the traditional status quo of sociological research (Lahman et al., 2023), whilst also empowering them and giving them a greater sense of research control. It was also an important component of building rapport with the participants as many of those who picked their own pseudonyms told me why they picked their name, and what it meant to them.

With this particular focus on the ways pseudonyms can hold meaning for participants, I wanted to extend this meaning to the participants who asked me to select their pseudonym. Again, inspired by Allen and Wiles (2016) and Lahman et al. (2015, 2023), I was keen to give attention to their pseudonyms, rather than pick and assign at random. More specifically, by embracing feminist ways of thinking I wanted to ensure that the participants would still feel a sense of familiarity within the research *through* their pseudonym. As such, for these participants, I looked

to their given forename and surname and explored the various meanings, histories, and translations using various Internet searches. I looked to search results which had nature-based connotations, or if this was not possible, looked to translations which could become names. Whilst this was often quite difficult, demanding some creative thinking, it was an excellent exercise in developing participant rapport. Each time, I explained how I had come to each of these pseudonyms, giving the participant the breakdown of their research name evolution along with the pseudonym itself. Many of those who picked this option were grateful for this, and they commented on how I had journeyed from their name to their pseudonym. This was important, as I wanted to explain my choices, but also illustrate how whilst their given name was not used, they were still present in the research in more ways than 'just' their data.

A similar approach was taken for the people participants mentioned, such as their friends or their allotment neighbours. For these people, their pseudonyms were either chosen directly from the participant, or we came up with their name together based on their names, or characteristics about them. Whilst it did not feel as necessary to develop the same kind of meaning, it was important to give the control of the choice of pseudonym to the participants.

### **3.5.2.2. Photographs**

Using visual methods, such as disposable cameras, is a valid and interesting methodological choice, but like many methods, it comes with some potential ethical issues. The first issue here surrounds copyright, as although the participants are capturing images at my request, legal ownership over these images is theirs (Wiles et al., 2008). To prevent ethical issues arising in the dissemination of the research, I requested participants transfer copyright to myself as part of the consent form. All participants agreed.

A more complicated ethical problem with visual material is that of managing anonymity and confidentiality (Wiles et al., 2008), especially given non-participants could be photographed. Here, I wanted to balance participant's agency pertaining to their ideas and experiences whilst maintaining the foundational ethical principles of confidentiality and anonymity (Allen, 2015). To manage this, in the instances where people's faces are photographed, I have pixelated them.

Pixelating is a popular method within visual methods (Lomax, 2020) and manages anonymity of the individual's photographed whilst retaining the integrity of the participant's image.

### 3.5.2.3. *Fieldwork*

Conducting research off-site and alone as a woman can be risky (Johansson, 2015; Clark and Grant, 2015), and fieldwork can be a disorienting experience with immersion taking time and with periods of self-doubt and loneliness (Congdon, 2015), all of which can be compounded by the strange environment.

The fieldwork for this research was centred within and around allotments, and as such, came with a potential of risk. Allotments are areas that are often large, open spaces. Whilst different plots can be demarcated, they are often on large portions of land that are usually spacious, exposed, and isolated. Many allotments do not have lighting and at night, they can quickly become dark and, sometimes, unsafe places; whilst many allotments are locked communities, this is not always the case, and as such, they can become places of dangerous encounter.

It is well documented that women have a heightened awareness of everyday risks than men (Stanko, 1993), and that they will often implement risk-management strategies to prevent personal attack (Roberts, 2019) that are seeded in the gendered lessons of personal safety and awareness that women are taught from their youth (Green and Singleton, 2006). As someone who identifies as a woman, attempting to mitigate risk in a landscape that was unfamiliar and isolated, and that I might experience in both low-light and the dark, was not new to me. As such, carrying out a risk assessment at the allotment sites during my first meeting with the participants, having already used the internet to explore what kind of area the plots were in, did not feel unusual. Unbeknownst to the participants, I noted what kind of area the allotment was in, how open the site was, whether it was a gated community or not, and what surrounded the allotment site (e.g., homes, shops, countryside). I also took note of whether I felt safe with each participant, or if anyone gave me any cause for concern: these women were, to begin with, strangers to me as much as I was to them. Once back to my car, I made notes about each plot and how I felt about being there. Doing this exercise was important, since if the allotment site seemed or felt unsafe or was somewhere I felt at risk, it would not be appropriate to continue. Importantly, with

my lived experiences of risk, and particularly as a woman, I felt confident in my judgements. No concerns were noted at any of the plots, all the sites were deemed to be accessible, suitable, and safe, and most of all, all the participants were warm, welcoming, curious, and keen to begin the research. Any worries I had about fieldwork and risk were quickly assuaged.

Whilst I felt safe and comfortable at the plots, I did make sure to implement elements of good research practice through my fieldwork, especially as the seasons changed. Examples included parking on the allotment sites rather than on nearby roads away from the plots, avoiding being at the plots alone (e.g., if a participant was late, I would wait in the car), and where possible, I would leave the allotment before it was dark. In general, I found the participants were also considerate of this. Most accompanied me to my car, or they would ensure I had left their allotment site safely by watching as I drove through padlocked gates that they would open for me. Often, in an evolution of the “text me when you’re home!” (see Schaefer, 2018) etiquette I am used to experiencing with friends, a similar expectation was enacted. Without really thinking about it, as the participants and I left, I often asked them to let me know when they were home and they, too, would often ask the same of me: both of us, without questioning, obliged.

#### **3.5.2.4. Interviews**

Interviews are an effective tool to garner further understanding into people, their lived experiences, and the ways in which they navigate social space. They are also tools to collect data that come with some ethical considerations.

All the interviews were planned to be carried out at a location the participant felt comfortable and that was private, and this was either the participant’s plot, or in their homes. Location is important as it can change the dynamic of an interview, as well as the content that is discussed. Participants need to feel comfortable, safe and importantly, at ease (Adler and Adler, 2002), as they are more likely to talk more openly in spaces that they are familiar with and comfortable (Trell and Van Hoven, 2010; Gillham, 2000). I decided, given the nature of the research, to interview as many of the participants at their plot as possible. Here, it is quiet and private but is also somewhere they are at ease. It also meant that we could do the interview as a walking interview, if they desired (Evans and Jones, 2011). When the allotment was unavailable or the

weather made it unsuitable, we met at their homes. Additionally, due to COVID-19, I moved the final four interviews online.

Research has found that because they have the opportunity, participants sometimes feel compelled to discuss their experiences and elements of their lives that they had not anticipated (Kirsch, 2005). This can be magnified both because the researcher is a stranger (Letherby, 2003) and because of the rapport the researcher and the researched can build, leaving participants feeling comfortable to discuss personal, private, or sensitive matters. Such oral histories have the potential to unearth powerful, and sometimes triggering emotions and memories (Shopes, 2011; Pascoe Leahy, 2022) and this requires ethical consideration (Cave and Sloan, 2014). Through employing an ethic of care (Groot et al., 2018; Tronto, 1998) and a feminist approach to research, my focus for the interviews was to listen carefully to the participants' stories, and to facilitate the in-depth conversation we had (Dempsey et al., 2016), referring only to my interview schedule as a guide, and letting the participants lead our conversations. Having come to know the participants well by the time the interviews took place, I was aware that some participants may discuss difficult topics or emotive content. As such, before we began the interview, I reiterated that we could pause the conversation at any time, as well as skip past any questions or topics they did not feel comfortable discussing. I placed the Dictaphone in the middle of the space between us, showing the participant how to pause it, letting them know that they were free to pause the recording at any time. Doing this let the participant know that they also had control within this situation, and that whilst we were conducting a semi-structured interview for the purposes of my research, our power here was as equal as I could facilitate.

### **3.5.3. Friendships and gifts**

In conducting a feminist piece of work that focuses upon representation and voice, along with the ways I was keen to develop rapport and relationships with the women taking part in this research, it is important to consider how these relationships developed, and the friendships that formed.



Much of the personable work that is done that creates and develops researcher-researched rapport is invisible (Miller, 2017), developed through sustained and meaningful processes (Tillman-Healy, 2003). Doing this, once again, invites a feminist ethic of care (Groot et al., 2018; Tronto, 1998), as well as encourages dialogue that is meaningful and personal, allowing the researcher to exist in a way that is part of the participant's world. Building relationships with participants and developing rapport is best done with understanding, empathy, and deep engagement (Jackson, 2021), yet such relationships can invoke power imbalances, which can become problematic (Whitaker, 2011). It is important, therefore, to reflect on these friendships, and understand what this means for the researcher, the participants, the data, and for the research more broadly.

My relationships varied with the participants in this project. With some, it was distanced, having mostly email communications, whereas with others, I had a great deal of contact, seeing them regularly at their plots, and spending time with them both in person and through WhatsApp and social media. The development of these friendships helped build rapport, facilitating our conversations, our interview, and their engagement with the research project itself. The relationships we built created fields of trust and understanding, and the participants understood not only what the research meant to me, but how much I respected and valued their conversations, and what they were revealing to me within these discussions.

A key part of my relationships with the participants was gifting. The giving and sharing of produce are a huge part of allotment culture (Crouch and Ward, 1989), and participants often gave me food that they had grown themselves. Across the project I was sent home with an abundance of rhubarb, jostaberries, strawberries, cabbage, cucumbers, potatoes, jams, and cordials, to name just a few. Initially, I had mixed feelings about this. I was very grateful, especially because it was so delicious, but it felt wrong to accept their gifts as they were, after all, taking part in this research for me. How could I take more from them? I soon realised, however, that this is rooted deeply within allotment culture, and sharing the fruits of the allotments is second nature to many growers. After receiving several gifts, this soon became reciprocal and my gifts to participants involved ice cream and drinks on hot days, snacks for an alfresco picnic, and a germinated avocado plant after a participant (Heather) told me she had struggled to get hers to root. I documented some of the gifts I received:



**Photograph 3.12.** *A selection of the gifts I received throughout fieldwork*

These gifts ranged from a mustard and nasturtium plant ‘sandwich’ Lorena made for me (bottom left), through to jam from Lizzie (top left) and a selection of homemade pickles and fresh vegetables Heather gave me after our interview (top right). Elements of their personal life, too, were present, with Annie gifting me some dried petals and flowerheads from her wedding bouquet (middle, left), which she grew at her plot.

As well as gifts, the presence of this research project was sometimes seen at the plot. After a conversation about toilets with Heather (see chapter five), this plant pot feature appeared at the allotment on my next visit:



**Photograph 3.13.** *A feature of the research at Heather's plot (photograph: author's own)*

This demonstrates the way in which this project rippled through to the participants, and that this was not so much a one-way relationship, but that they too were thinking and reflecting like I was as the research project progressed. I was enthralled with this addition to her plot but, as a reflexive feminist researcher, I was deeply considerate to what this meant ethically, and whether my presence and rapport would start to change the evolution of the research. Whilst I could not control this, I thought about how I needed to be cautious about how my presence could influence some of the participants, keeping an awareness of it should this develop further.

Similarly, I was conscious that my relationships with the participants developed as the project went on. Some participants invited me to events outside of the research, and whilst some of these activities would be part of my usual personal life, I was mindful of over-*rapport*, identifying too closely with some of the participants (Miller, 1952). Having reflected on Heather's toilet-plant

pot, I realised that I needed a degree of separation where possible, and that deeper friendships could be placed on hold until after the fieldwork. I declined many of their invitations, citing that fieldwork and teaching was keeping me too busy. I felt guilty for this as it felt deceptive, and I was building great rapport with many of these women, but it felt the ethical choice, and more, the right choice for the research. Upon reflection, I was pleased I did this. I mediated my friendships with the participants well and I do not think my presence at the plot, nor through our WhatsApp exchanges and interactions on social media, impacted the research negatively. This is, however, a difficult line to toe, and the success of this requires reflection, reflexivity, and an acknowledgement of such friendships existing and what this means. Failure to do this could have altered what the participants shared, how they shared it, and may have led them wanting to make sure they gave me the data they thought I wanted, which was what I hoped to avoid.

Traditional approaches demand the researcher to be value free, to be in the field as a data collector, and to be detached from the process; unemotive and robotic. I did not take this approach with the women who took part in this research, as I felt this went against my personality, but also in terms of what the research meant to me and how important the participants were (and are) to the research. Taking a feminist approach to this research and ensuring that these participant's voices are heard and represented meant developing rapport and relationships. A failure to do this would have been a failure of this research. As such, I became interested, attached, and invested in the participant's lives and allotments, and this brought both joy and insight. They told me stories and anecdotes that were private, personal, and meaningful, and it is this that makes the data of this research so rich, detailed, and meaningful. This is in part due to the ways we worked together, communicated, and how they understood this research, along with how they understood me and I, them. Without this, the data would look very different, and I am thankful for the opportunities this research gave, the friendships that I have made from this, and the conversations and discussion we have had as a result.

#### **3.5.4. Leaving the field**

Leaving the field is a pivotal part of the research process, and in some instances the negotiation of highlighting the end of the research process can be difficult (Caretta and Cheptum, 2017). Whilst

leaving the field was quite straightforward, this does not mean that it was not complex, and it went beyond simply leaving one environment (the allotment) and returning to another (the desk).

As the interviews grew closer, I knew that I needed to make a choice regarding how I would handle the process of the fieldwork ending. I was conflicted, as I did not wish to make a fuss about it, but I also wanted an act of closure for both myself, and the participants. I decided to do this in two ways; the first was to ensure that the very last question I asked my participants in their interview was “would you like to add anything else?”. This gave the participant the opportunity to discuss anything they felt we had not talked about, but it also paved the way to bring a sense of finality to the interview, and the research. From here, I could ensure that I could thank them for taking the time to participate, expressing my gratitude, and emphasising the key role they have within the project. Doing this gave me a sense of finality, too, but was mostly necessary to show the women how important they are within this process, and to acknowledge this, beyond a simple “thanks”.

The second act of closure of the project was emailing everyone after the last interview was conducted. In this email I reiterated my gratitude, attached a copy of the Debrief (Appendix G), emphasising that if they had any questions or concerns, they were still able to contact me. Doing this meant that they had the power to contact me if they wished, and that whilst the door was closed in terms of the fieldwork, they could still access me should they need it. Giving them this option was, for me, a way to acknowledge that their participation was more than quid pro quo but came with no obligation. I received a mixed response; some participants did not reply and I have not heard from them since, whereas others replied bidding a sense of farewell, expressing thanks and how they enjoyed the project, wishing me luck with my writing, whilst a number replied and expressed how they hope to stay in touch. It was here that I was added to the official *Plot Luck* WhatsApp group with an open invite (see chapter six), and I was grateful for this act of friendship. Sending this email, too, gave me a sense of a closure on the research: that fieldwork was complete, and now the write up was to commence.

A question which came to my mind at this point was whether I would ever truly leave the research field. Having completed the fieldwork, and now the thesis, the answer here for me is “no”. I think about the participants frequently, and I wonder how the pockets of their life that they shared with me are evolving. How is Annie finding her plot (chapter five)? Does Fern feel more confident in her skills and abilities yet (chapter six)? Has Lorena found a way to win her battle with the slugs (chapter seven)? Yet, whilst I do not speak to many participants who partook in this fieldwork, a handful remain in my life. They exist either as friends, who I see and spend time with, or they exist as people I engage with through social media, seeing the bird’s eye view of their lives that they share publicly, like Ettie’s newborn baby, Fauna’s new business venture, and Lizzie’s latest DIY challenge. I am still part of the wonderful *Plot Luck* group chat, and a handful of participants, like Mary and Fauna, continue to send me updates with videos and photographs of their allotment, sharing their successes and battles at their plots. I welcome their stories, engaging with these conversations and interaction. Is this still research? At this point, probably not. But is this a form of friendship, however close or distant? Absolutely, and which I hope continues long after this doctoral research has finished.



# Chapter Four || An Assemblage of Women

## the participants



Photograph 4.1. *Wanna at her plot*

## 4.0. Chapter introduction

This chapter contains biographies of the participants, giving an illustrative outline of who these women are, what they do, and where they find joy within their allotments. The order that I have listed the participants in is the order in which they were recruited and assigned their participant numbers (i.e., Vivien was the first participant to consent, Gwen was the last). This includes a missing number (9), representing the participant who withdrew from the research. Whilst these participant numbers were perfunctory in the beginning, they began to develop meaning to me as the list became more familiar, especially as I exchanged emails, coded their notebooks and cameras, worked with their anonymised data files, kept records of quotes that situated themselves against a list in my mind reminding me which participant number was whom, and as I made a mental image of which pseudonym translated to which person I knew by face, personality, and plot.

A process that was used for data organisation and data protection became part of the research process, and the natural arrangement within which these participants became listed was soon embedded within my memory; a list I now know by rote. As such, this is reflected here.



## 4.1. The participants

### 4.1.1. Vivien



**Photograph 4.2.** *Vivien's Brussel sprouts*

**Vivien**, a university professor, is a 48-year-old cis white woman. Having grown vegetables at home for a decade, she has held her half plot for around three years with her husband. Vivien's passion at the plot is food (especially squash) and she loves cooking, pickling, and preserving her self-grown produce. She grows an array of vegetables at the site, as well as some berries and a few pollinators for the bees. She loves the ways the allotment provides for her and her family at mealtimes, and as part of this, she is enjoying learning new skills and methods of food growing and preservation, often sharing her knowledge and tips with her friend and fellow participant, Fern.

#### 4.1.2. Suzie



**Photograph 4.3.** *Suzie's hops*

**Suzie** is a 34-year-old cis white woman who is a self-employed account manager. She has had her current plot for over four years, which she tends with her partner. Her plot is on the same site as Fauna's and is one of the largest within this project, at around 300m<sup>2</sup>. Suzie grows vegetables, fruits, and flowers. She is particularly passionate about eating seasonally, locally, and ethically, and there is a strong link between her kitchen and the plot. She loves harvesting and foraging (especially for mushrooms) and is keen to learn more about growing and cultivation.

#### 4.1.3. Christina



**Photograph 4.4.** *Christina's tomato plants*

**Christina** is a retired 62-year-old cis white woman who, having tended to a community plot before, has now held her allotment for around two years with her husband. She shares a half plot with a neighbour, where they have a quarter plot each. She is inspired by what they eat as a family, growing mostly vegetables, with her favourites being potatoes, leeks, and courgettes. She also tends to some fruit bushes that came with the plot, and grows a small number of flowers, including geraniums. Her favourite part of having the allotment is the end of winter when she goes back outdoors and starts off the new season once again.



#### 4.1.4. Oakley



**Photograph 4.5.** *Oakley's plot bathed in sunshine*

**Oakley** is a 63-year-old self-employed cis white woman. She has held her half plot for over eight years, and she tends to it mostly on her own, with some help from her husband. She grows vegetables, some fruits, and a few flowers. She is passionate about eating seasonally, loves growing potatoes, and will try and plant at least one new vegetable each year. Oakley is very social on her plot, knowing many of the members of the allotment site (including Vivien) through her role running the allotment store once a week, as well as through her work with the allotment committee.

#### 4.1.5. Heather



**Photograph 4.6.** *A summer sunset at Heather's plot*

**Heather** is 37-year-old cis white woman who is a doctoral researcher and a curator at a local museum. Having held allotments since 2014, she has tended to her current full-sized plot for three years. She mostly looks after the plot on her own, with her partner joining on occasion. Heather grows a variety of fruits, flowers, and vegetables. She loves to grow everything and is particularly excited by growing big squashes and pumpkins. She loves learning by trial and error, and much of her allotment life is influenced by her enjoyment of cooking and experimenting in the kitchen. Without doubt, her favourite part about the allotment is the digging.

#### 4.1.6. Annie



**Photograph 4.7.** *A sunflower at Annie's plot*

**Annie** is a 29-year-old cis white woman who, having finished her PhD, is an information analyst. Inspired by growing plants in pots at home, Annie is on a new allotment journey and has only held her first half plot for around a year. Annie tends to her allotment mostly on her own, but will sometimes have help from her husband, as well as her parents when they visit. Annie grows flowers, fruit bushes, fruit trees, and some vegetables, and loves seeing the plants grow from tiny seed to flower and vegetable. Most recently, she has grown flowers on her plot that became her bridal bouquet, which she is very proud of.



#### 4.1.7. Hen



**Photograph 4.8.** *Nasturtiums at Hen's plot*

**Hen** is a 31-year-old cis white woman who works as a research support librarian. Having had a plot previously, she has had her current half plot for around three years with her husband. Hen loves learning about the growing process and will research before she starts growing new and exciting things. She grows lots of different vegetables as sustainability and eating seasonally is important to her, but she is beginning to grow more flowers, as she wants to help the pollinators.

Watching seedlings germinate is her favourite part of growing, and she loves to grow squash, courgettes and cucumbers, witnessing the big green leaves which tease the arrival of the glorious vegetables.

#### 4.1.8. Lucy



**Photograph 4.9.** *Lucy's potato harvest at the plot*

**Lucy**, a lawyer, is a 37-year-old white cis woman. She has looked after her plot on her own for around five years. She grows fruits, vegetables, and flowers, and much of her growing is informed by what she and her husband eat, avoiding things that are often found in her weekly vegetable box. She especially enjoys growing things that she does not usually see in the supermarket, like Romanesco cauliflower. For Lucy, the best bit about the allotment is seeing the abundance that happens naturally, and the way such a tiny seed holds so much potential. Like Heather, she loves digging for potatoes.



#### 4.1.10. Nell



**Photograph 4.10.** *Nell grew four kilograms of broad beans*

**Nell** is a 40-year-old cis white woman who has had her current half plot for two years, having previously tended to a different plot at the same site for two years prior. She looks after the plot with occasional help from her husband, as well as her children. As she home-schools her daughters, the allotment works as both a green space for quiet and contemplation, and as a busy classroom. With a keen eye on the kitchen and cooking, she largely grows vegetables. Nell loves the whole process of allotment gardening and enjoys spending the winter reading and planning the next season, dreaming up “big goals” for the coming growing season.

#### 4.1.11. Mary



**Photograph 4.11.** *Mary's food haul*

**Mary** is a 54-year-old white transwoman who has held her full plot, on her own, for over a decade. Mary's large plot is surrounded by privet, and is situated in secluded, peaceful woodland. She grows fruits, vegetables, and has a small bed of flowers. With a busy work schedule, Mary's allotment is somewhere she always makes time for. She loves the abundance of food that the allotment provides, as well as the peace and calm. She loves growing fruit and vegetables, and her favourite part of the allotment is the eating of the delicious home-grown produce, having witnessed it all flourish from soil to plate.



#### 4.1.12. Lizzie



**Photograph 4.12.** *Lizzie's 'big plot' in the sunshine*

**Lizzie**, an administrator, is a 37-year-old cis white woman who has two allotments, which she has cared for on her own for over six years and two years respectively. Lizzie grows vegetables, flowers, fruits, plants, and trees, as well as tending to bees. At the plot she has an array of cooking equipment, a working heated bathtub, a fully stocked shed, a useable hand-built kitchen area, and a compostable toilet. She also hosts a monthly supper club where, amongst others, Gwen and Wanna are frequent guests. The plot is a big part of her life, and she is very adventurous in her growing, trying everything and anything she can get her green-fingered hands on.

#### 4.1.13. Dawn



**Photograph 4.13.** *Roses in bloom at Dawn's plot*

**Dawn** is a 31-year-old cis white woman who works as a content writer. She has tended to her plot for around three years with her partner (and dog). Her half-plot is in a peaceful pocket of a busy city, moments away from her house. Dawn grows a range of vegetables, fruits, and some flowers at her plot. Having completed a PhD exploring literature and climate change, she is mindful of her gardening practices and environmental impact. Eating seasonally and locally is important to her, and she grows a lot of fruits and vegetables that she can use in the kitchen. As she feels she is still new to allotment life and as a self-proclaimed forever student, she loves to learn about allotment growing and cultivation, growing different fruit and vegetables, and making the most out of her glorious little pocket of green space.

#### 4.1.14. Lorena



**Photograph 4.14.** *Lorena's plot at sunset*

**Lorena** is a 34-year-old cis mixed-race woman who works as a sexual violence advocate and who has had her plot for over a decade. Whilst she initially began her allotment journey with her partner, and then her friend, she now tends to her plot on her own. Lorena grows an abundance of plants, fruits, and vegetables at her plot, and loves experimenting, growing something new wherever she can. For Lorena, her allotment is a way of life, and her culinary activities are dictated by both the plot and seasons, especially as she loves to cook and eat locally as well as seasonally. One of her most favourite parts of the allotment is when the conditions are just right for digging and sowing; the damp soil that separates perfectly, the smell of petrichor, and the deep colours that she can unearth, show her perfect sowing conditions, and remind her of the potential for growth and produce, and the excitement that is to come.



#### 4.1.15. Ettie



**Photograph 4.15.** *Ettie's collard greens*

**Ettie** is a 34-year-old cis white woman who works in the National Health Service. She has held her plot for around three years and tends to it with her partner. Her plot is very large, covering approximately two plots-worth in size. Ettie experiences a lot of joy from her allotment, and one of her favourite parts is witnessing her seedlings pop up from the soil, grow, and develop into a delicious vegetable or a colourful flower. Whilst critters eat much of her produce, she loves sharing the space with the birds and the animals. Her passion and love for her green space is reflected in her allotment social media account, where she has over 10,000 followers, but she is adamant that she will never “dance around a spade!”.

#### 4.1.16. Fauna



**Photograph 4.16.** *Fauna's tomatoes, which she grows to make chutneys*

**Fauna**, a support worker, is a 50-year-old cis white woman who has tended to her plot for around five years. Sharing the same site as Suzie, her plot is also one of the largest within this project, at around 300m<sup>2</sup>. At her site, Fauna spends time at her plot, as well as at the site's community garden, and is the chairperson for the allotment committee. Whilst her father, daughter, and friends are frequent visitors to the plot, Fauna looks after her plot on her own. Fauna has largely grown fruits and vegetables in the past, but is now focusing more on growing flowers, with dahlias being a popular choice. Fauna enjoys spending time at her plot, regardless of the green-fingered tasks that may need to be done, spending many afternoons with coffee, making dinner, and soaking in her vibrant, peaceful green space.

#### 4.1.17. Fern



**Photograph 4.17.** *Inside Fern's polytunnel*

**Fern** is a 42-year-old cis white woman who is a university lecturer. She has tended to her half plot for around two years with her husband and children. She grows some flowers, and lots of vegetables, focusing on growing food that her and her family enjoy eating. Fern sees herself as a novice in the allotment and enjoys learning about cultivation and new ways of growing. She is friends with Vivien and gets lots of tips and hints from her. Her favourite thing to grow is Cavalo Nero kale, because it is both delicious and very easy, providing an abundance of tasty green leaves.



#### 4.1.18. Wanna



**Photograph 4.18.** *Wanna's scarecrow (David Attenborough)*

**Wanna** is a 51-year-old cis white woman who has had her plot for twenty years. She holds the plot on her own, but her husband helps occasionally. Wanna mostly grows fruit and vegetables but will sometimes grow flowers. She has a small water feature on her plot for the insects and birds, as well as a small seating area, where she and her husband enjoy having some hot tea and biscuits after some hard work on the plot. Wanna is social at the plot, although I'm not sure she would admit it, and she has a good relationship with her plot neighbour, as well as being a member of the committee (as is her husband), and she always enters the annual plot show with a scarecrow (where she usually wins a prize). She is good friends with Gwen and Lizzie, and they all often spend a lot of time together at each other's plots, especially Lizzie's.

#### 4.1.19. Dizzie



**Photograph 4.19.** *Dizzie's strawberry haul from the allotment*

**Dizzie**, a retired teacher, is a 78-year-old cis white woman who has had her plot for over thirty years. Dizzie has varied experiences around the world with growing spaces, having had an herb garden in Australasia, a small window ledge in Africa, and a small holding and two allotments around the British Isles. At her plot she grows an array of fruit, vegetables, and flowers, and is passionate about the produce she can tend and nurture. She manages her plot on her own, and her husband has the plot next door, which she almost project manages. For Dizzie, her allotment is more than a hobby and is a way of life. Since having children, she has always wanted to grow her own food so that she can provide for her family, and as an avid cook, she thoroughly enjoys the hospitality element alongside the picking, the cooking, and the sharing that the allotment affords her.

#### 4.1.20. Gwen



**Photograph 4.20.** *Gwen's allotment in summer*

**Gwen** is a 36-year-old cis white woman who works as a project manager. She is on quite a new allotment journey and has held her plot for around a year. She is enjoying learning about the allotment way of life and is keen to expand her tips and tricks for cultivating flowers, fruits, and vegetables. She looks after the plot on her own (watched over by her rescue dog) and gaining support and advice from her friends Lizzie and Wanna. She enjoys the physical side of gardening (but less so with the weeding) and looks forwards to the harvesting of the vegetables, especially the abundance of courgettes and pumpkins.



# Chapter Five || Digging at the Data (I)

‘bodies’



Photograph 5.1. *Lizzie at her allotment*

## 5.0. Chapter Introduction

A central theme that arose throughout this research has been that of bodies, generating questions and discussions surrounding how women's bodies exist at the allotment, and with that, how they experience and navigate this landscape. This has led to thinking about embodiment in this space, considering how women exist in everyday life at the allotment, and how they and their bodies encounter and orientate this space. As such, this chapter interrogates ideas around bodies and bodily experience, finding itself centred around the bathroom (at the allotment). This sits across a range of topics, including toilets and toilet access, as well as the distinctive lived experiences of menstruation and miscarriage at the allotment. This chapter also expands our understanding of the bathroom at the allotment more conceptually, and with it, looking to bathtubs; specifically, to Lizzie, who has a working, heated bathtub on her plot ("the hillbilly hot tub"). Here, this chapter brings to light the ways in which bathtubs on the allotment can become objects of transformative, radical use within this space, and discussing what this means. From there, this chapter also discusses nudity, bodies, and power, and more specifically, who can claim space in this way.

This chapter highlights the importance of bathrooms at the allotment, both in a literal sense and more abstractly. Moreover, it demonstrates the importance of bodies and embodied experiences in the allotment, and the ways that a lack of bathroom provision can be detrimental and harmful to the bodies which need them. Ultimately, this chapter shows that bathrooms at the allotment can make sense both in a practical way, necessitated through living active bodies, and through a more holistic, spiritual way, drawing upon ideas and discussions around dirt, cleanliness, power and belonging.

## 5.1. Bathrooms and the allotment

Women's bodies, like allotments themselves, are both marvellous and messy. They move throughout these spaces carrying, digging, lifting, planting, and chopping. They graze, cut, sweat, grunt, and ache. They excrete, expel, leak, and bleed. They manoeuvre, compensate, and negotiate, existing often cyclically alongside the plants, fruits, vegetables, and flowers, as well as

with the other bodies around them. Women's bodies, cisgender and transgender, exist both similarly and differently from cis men and trans men's bodies, and discussion of these active, biological bodies becomes pertinent to examining how those who identify as women exist, traverse, and experience the allotment, with and without safe, clean, and private bathroom spaces.

As I have highlighted in chapter two, the allotment can be considered as a third space (Soja, 1996; DeSilvey, 2003). Third spaces are understood to be "constructed environments" (Das, 2008) that generate at the crossroad of spaces that are in-between others. This includes between the private and public, between work and leisure, between production and consumption, and between solitary space and community space (DeSilvey, 2003). Allotments are sites that can be understood as a third space (DeSilvey, 2003), where community and connection are integral to the mechanisms of the landscape, and where people will spend a variety of time, from a few hours to a full day. And yet, as popular, well-used, engaged, social third spaces, only 31% of allotment sites provide toilet access (APSE, 2023).

Lack of toilet access in society is not uncommon, and research highlights that the lack of facilities in public spaces is a longstanding issue (White, 2023; Wiseman, 2019; Kitchin and Law, 2001). Further, inadequate access to private, comfortable, and convenient sanitary facilities "disproportionately affects people with ill health or disability, the elderly, women, outdoor workers, and the homeless" (Royal Society for Public Health (RSPH), 2019) and is one of the most common forms of discrimination experienced by girls and women (Schmitt et al., 2018). The RSPH (2019) argue that 'potty parity' laws should be in effect in the UK, mirroring parts of Canada and the United States, ensuring fairer provision for women, moving the current British standard of the 1:1 ratio of female to male toilets to 2:1. As Molotch and Noren (2010: 2) write, the toilet is "a foundational start point where each of us deals directly with our bodies and confronts whatever it provides, often on a schedule not of our own making". More than this, women take twice as long as men to use the toilet, yet this additional time, as both Edwards and McKie (1996) and Plaskow (2008) illustrate, is not because women are preoccupied with their appearance as often stereotyped, but it is because of practicality. Physical bodily differences alter the ways these spaces are engaged with, including entering and locking a stall, removing and hanging clothes, sitting, using toilet paper, and redressing, all of which require more labour than

the use of a urinal, as does biological necessity and care, like pregnancy, breastfeeding, menstruation, and menopause. Indeed, there are around 18 million bodies of menstrual age in the United Kingdom, and around a quarter of these will be menstruating at any one time (Jewitt, Mahanta and Gaur, 2018). Moreover, the RSPH (2019) point out that lack of toilet provision means that people practice deliberate dehydration and/or “holding it in” (2019: 8), exacerbating problems like interstitial cystitis, which is much more common in women (Plaskow, 2008). Pregnancy also contributes to women’s toileting needs, including vaginal childbirth, which can lead to lifelong bladder problems. In fact, 30% of women between the ages of 15 and 64 suffer from some form of urinary incontinence, as opposed to 1.5% to 5% of men (Plaskow, 2008). Clearly, paucity of toilet provision is not only inconvenient in the short-term, but has clear longer-term, everyday impacts too.

Crucially, this discussion of toilets is central to allotments. As highlighted in chapter one, there is a trending increase of women renting allotments, and therefore a consequential demand for toilet access and the requirement for better sanitation provision in these shared spaces. History is important here. As sewer systems developed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, public health legislation permitted toilets for just men in public spaces (Stanwell-Smith, 2010), with women seen as not requiring them in public because of how little they left the private home. Later, as women’s rights evolved, both men and women’s public toilets were built, with men able to use these for free whilst women were charged a fee (Banks, 1990). As Pickering and Wiseman (2019) note, this focus between the private and the public and which bodies are policed has been acknowledged through a gendered lens by feminists, and the neglect of women’s needs come because of the “hierarchised binary of male/female, mind/body, public/private” (Pickering and Wiseman, 2019: 752). To this end, some spaces mirror history in this way, with certain environments welcoming certain bodies (or not), with certain provision provided (or not). The allotment, I argue, is one such space, where women’s bodies and their sanitary needs are forgotten, or in part, unacknowledged.

According to The Provision of Public Toilets report (2008) published by the House of Commons, the Public Health Act (1936) grants local authorities the power to provide public toilets but does not hold them under duty to deliver them. Outside of this legislation, guidance

for toilets and toilet access comes from the NSALG, yet this is similarly minimal. As the main arbiter for allotments, providing guidance on several relevant issues for allotment committees and users, the association provide advice surrounding toilets and sewerage. The NSALG (n.d.-e) acknowledge that toilet facilities are important for allotment users, and they advise that whilst compostable toilets are beneficial on allotment sites, they simply refer allotment committees to the landowner, noting that they will need to “check with the landlord of the site before the installation of communal toilets” (NSALG, n.d-e). Similarly, the influential “Growing in the Community” guide (Crouch, Sempik and Wiltshire, 2001) provides detailed advice on the management of allotments for stakeholders. They acknowledge that toilets are useful as many plot holders are likely to spend a great deal of time at the allotment, however guidance simply states that “lavatory facilities will be welcome” (Crouch, Sempik and Wiltshire, 2001: 46), without expanding further. Given that local authorities are under no legal obligation to provide sanitation facilities and given that the main body supporting allotment associations mentions toilet provision from a distance, it is unsurprising that this research has found sanitation provision within this landscape to be grossly inadequate, especially for women.

Within this project there were 19 participants spread across 14 different allotment locations in the north of England. Of the 19 participants, only three women (Heather, Lorena, and Hen) had easily accessible toilet facilities at their sites. Four women (Fauna and Suzie, Dawn, and Nell) had toilet facilities but access was difficult (e.g., key access, specific opening times), and 12 did not have any toilet access at all. In other words, of the 14 sites involved in this project, three sites (21%) had readily available toilet facilities, three sites (21%) had facilities with difficult access, and eight sites (57%) had no toilet provision.

There seems to be little recognition of the daily personal issues that people can encounter when faced with a lack of toilet provision, or of the social, economic, and spatial limitations this causes (Green, 2003). From speaking to the participants, conversations are had at the sites about this, yet when these conversations are taken to the committee, the women are often faced with a resistance to provide. More, because there is little policy or guidance that highlights the importance of toilet access at allotments and given that there is no legal requirement for toilet provision to be provided at these sites, it appears that the ‘norm’ is to not provide anything until



pressure or money allow for it. In this way, a facility that is often seen as a human right (at least in the global north) becomes one of luxury. Here, Robyn Longhurst's (1997:496) words resonate, and the unearthing of the ways in which lack of toilet access impacts and is harmful for the women's bodies which need them in these spaces has "the potential to prompt new understandings of power, knowledge, and social relationships between people and places". Those identifying as women, because of the paucity of toilet provision, risk being excluded from fully participating in the allotment milieu because of the unequal relations of those who use them, especially as allotments have been historically masculinised spaces (Buckingham, 2005; DeSilvey, 2003; Moore et al., 2014). Moreover, the toilet (or lack of) reflects how parts of society functions; who it values, how it separates people, and whose bodily demands it prioritises or ignores. As Wiseman (2019) articulates, "toilets are at the centre of what it means to belong, to *feel* included, valued and of worth" (Wiseman, 2019, original author's emphasis).

### 5.1.1. Toilets

The distinct lack of toilets at allotment sites was an issue within this research. Both from the ethnographic visits, where it was a problem both for myself and the participants, through to our discussions during my visits and during our interviews together, where we discussed and disseminated their experiences as people who use and spend a great deal of time at their allotment sites.

For a minority of participants like Christina and Dawn, the lack of toilets at the allotment is not a problem as their sites are situated very near to their homes. For others, like Heather, Lorena and Hen, open access to a shared working toilet is provided. Heather is one of the few participants who has a purpose-built toilet at her plot (compared to the composting toilets available at other sites), where a brick outhouse houses a ceramic toilet and sink, using rainwater from the guttering for water and drainage. We discussed her site having facilities during one of my field visits (fieldnotes, 14/05/2022) and she was surprised that those with access are in the minority. For her, she told me, it is a prerequisite and that she would not lease a plot at a site that did not provide some kind of bathroom provision.

Hen also benefits from toilet access at her allotment, in the form of a hand-built composting toilet. The toilet provision here is reasonable, but not particularly welcoming; access is tricky if the user is not able-bodied, the door lock does not attach properly, the light was not working, and the building is reminiscent of a Portaloo: wobbly and temporary. Various signs indicate how to use the compostable toilet, such as keeping the toilet lid closed (“for composting action”), along with the planning regulations issues by the local council. A sign, written in block capitals, also indicates to “only throw toilet paper in the toilet. Everything else take it home” (fieldnotes, 08/05/2022). As there are no hygienic bin facilities (e.g., a sanitary bin), this seems to include used period products, reflecting the narrative of limited provisions and acknowledgement for only certain bodies and certain needs.



**Photograph. 5.2.** *The compostable toilet at Hen’s site (photograph: author’s own)*

It was a similar story at Nell's allotment, where toilet access here is only provided with a key. She described that "you have to pay [pause] for a key", going on to detail that "it is a composting toilet. Sawdust goes in. I don't think there is a light". Whilst I did not venture into this toilet, Nell's description suggests that it is not particularly well maintained, or welcoming. For others, like Fauna and Suzie, toilet access is a problem because of the very limited time the facilities are available. At their site, the toilet is only accessible when the allotment store is open, which is for a short window of time once or twice a week, as well as being on the other side of the sizable allotment site. This makes it largely useless for them both.

More commonly, lack of toilet provision is a problem. Many of the participants without toilets on site live at least a 15-minute walk or a short drive away from their plots. Some participants, like Dizzie and Vivien, have very open plots with little to no private enclosed space (e.g., a shed), and no on-site bathroom facilities. For Vivien, she just "can't go to the toilet there". She has raised this with other tenants, and it is something she feels the committee should do something about, but the site remains without toilet provision. Dizzie's allotment, meanwhile, does not have a toilet as the original compostable unit was burned down and never replaced. I asked her if lack of provision was a problem and she candidly said that she had not really thought about it (fieldnotes, 27/05/2022). We discussed this further in her interview (05/09/2022), and for her, because the allotment is a 20-minute walk away she can "easily be caught short". She said that it is "a drag" and that she must "think about this before I leave home", but it is not something that she has raised with fellow tenants or the allotment society. Whilst generational in part – born in 1944, Dizzie is the oldest participant in this project – the way in which she is unfazed by the trouble the lack of toilets poses, and the way it is accepted as normal for her, reflects a wider societal backdrop and women's inconvenience becomes a given, almost anticipated, social experience (Blumenthal, 2014: xii).

Indeed, the missing spaces of toilets at allotments can be understood as a wider reflection of our patriarchal society; especially when considering how allotments have been heavily masculinised in the past. Blumenthal (2014) suggests that such patterns of difference can be "derived through and from embodiment" (2014: 184). He argues that "patriarchal knowledges work reflectively, embracing sameness...systematically subduing difference" (Blumenthal, 2014: 184). In this way,

we can understand the experiences of Dizzie (and others) and the acceptance that some spaces will not have toilet access as a consequence of the ways society focuses on the primary needs of cis men, as compared to other bodies. The normalised or standardised body becomes that which has a penis; the body which can urinate standing, hidden, and quickly. With this, bodies without this capacity become marginalised in these spaces.

Like many, Annie is faced with the problem of not having any toilet access at her allotment. Her half plot is situated at a site that is both very open and very visible. She does benefit from a shed, but it is very small and would not accommodate even a temporary make-shift toilet. Consequently, within her allotment space, she has no real privacy and cannot create her own bathroom facility.



**Photograph 5.3.** *Annie's plot*

Annie lives “a good half hour away” from the allotment, so the lack of toilets and lack of space to create her own make-shift bathroom is a problem. I asked her about how she navigates this:

If I need a wee at the allotment I have a few choices: I can walk home and come back, which is 20-30 minutes round trip, the problem is I might not come back if I go home [laughs]. I can also go to the coffee shop across the road which involves buying a drink, that's £4 and means I'll need a wee again, so you can see the problem there, or I can go to the gym which is opposite, but I don't like to do that when I'm not in gym clothes because, you know [pause] like in winter I don't have the confidence to go in with my boots on or whatever [pause] or [laughs] I can piss myself which is the cheapest option, but again, less than ideal! [laughs] (Annie, interview, 17/09/2022)

This problem that a lack of toilet access causes her is exacerbated because she is also diabetic. She discussed how it can impact her time spent at the allotment:

It means that if my blood sugar is high, I need to wee all of the time because it's a symptom of it [pause] which is annoying. Because really, in many ways, exercise is good for lowering blood sugars and gardening is a form of exercise, and I love it because it doesn't feel like exercise, so in many ways it should be a really great space for that [pause] but I'm hindered because a symptom of my illness is that I need a wee a lot and there's nowhere to go... I do think the toilet [not having them] is a gendered thing, but it is so much wider than that because it's about accessibility too (Annie, interview, 17/09/2022)

For Annie, the practicality and enjoyment of the allotment would be vastly improved with toilet facilities, both from a gendered perspective, and an accessibility one. Whilst she has created ways and means to navigate the necessities of her body with her diabetes in mind, her allotment site is not a place that considers such needs. White (2023), Slater and Jones (2021), and Wiseman (2019) highlight how these disabling environments have deep implications for individuals and the ways in which they can and cannot access places, as well as the barriers to feelings of citizenship and belonging. Often research exploring toilets focuses on more traditional public places and traditional places of everyday life, like town centres, supermarkets, and on public transport.



Importantly, this current research highlights that places like allotments, too, are spaces that are unhelpfully contributing to the exclusion of some bodies as a direct consequence of the lack of sanitation.

Toilet access is not only important on a practical level, but a on a personal, embodied level too. Trigg (2012) argues that it is through the body that we make meaning of both the world and our position within it: “being-in-the-world means being *placed*” (Trigg, 2012: 4, original emphasis). Bathrooms play a part of this as they are uniquely gendered spaces, where gender and gender roles are enacted (McGuire, Anderson and Michaels, 2022), giving some people feelings of belonging and of inclusion within everyday society. For participants like Mary, the lack of toilet facilities can be even more complex. Like Dizzie, Mary lives over 4 miles from her plot and her allotment does not have any toilet access, while her plot also has no shed or equivalent private space. Whilst she does benefit from more privacy than most as her allotment is surrounded by a tall privet, this does not detract from the problem that there are no sanitary facilities available.

For Mary, the answer to this is using a secluded corner of her allotment:



**Photograph 5.4.** *Mary's corner*

The issue of having no toilet is magnified for Mary; she is a transwoman and as such, the toilet space is imbued with more anxiety and emotion for her than others may experience (fieldnotes, 15/05/22). More, she told me that needing the toilet at the allotment is one of the few times she will use “the boy card”, making use of a corner of the allotment, but only if this is unavoidable. Whilst she acknowledges this has some benefit (e.g., she can urinate discreetly and stood up), this comes with its own complexity. Understandably, she has a difficult relationship with parts of her body, and specifically what she refers to as “the appendage” or “it” [penis]. Consequently, needing the toilet at the allotment causes her anxiety. To be able to alleviate herself with “the boy card” is a “needs must” scenario, and she tells herself she needs to “get over” urinating standing up. She went on to say that she will squat, just like any other woman would, which she prefers, but she is very conscious of her body and of herself when she does this. This highlights how vital a private, confined, safe toilet space is for people on allotments, and how this is a problem affecting more than just those ‘without a penis’ as we might assume; it is a problem for other bodies, too.

### 5.1.2. Finding solutions

Clearly, toilet access (or lack of) at allotments is not uncommon and because of this, allotment tenants just like Dizzie, Vivien and Annie, become constrained by the “bladder leash” (Kitchin and Law, 2001; Cooper et al., 2000). At the allotment, this “bladder leash” restricts how long people can stay in this space, along with how they experience and participate with this landscape. To deal with this and counteract the lack of provision, several participants have devised workaround methods, creating their own facilities with equipment that allows them to fashion make-shift versions of toilets.

Ettie and Oakley, for example, both talked about using concealed spaces on their plots, which are both large and open. Ettie told me that because there are no toilets at her site, she uses the space behind the cabin where “there is a blind spot”. Ettie linked the lack of toilets at her site to the culture that is present at the allotment, which is a site with a traditional majority population of men. Many participants echoed Ettie’s sentiments, and the general theme for many of the women



is that because the allotments are so historically dominated by men, toilets are very much an after-thought (or, not a thought at all).



**Photograph 5.5.** *Ettie's blind spot*

Similarly, Oakley has a plot at the same site as Vivien, where this is also no toilet. In her interview (05/09/2022) she said that whilst she is quite happy to have an “alfresco wee” because she is an “outdoorsy type person”, she also understands that not everyone would feel comfortable doing that. While walking around Oakley’s allotment she pointed out the private space she uses on her site, which is behind some fencing and is sealed from view:



**Photograph 5.6.** *Oakley's plot*

Oakley is an active member on her site, volunteering for the allotment store on a Sunday and has a good relationship with many members of the committee. She told me that:

The one thing that I have been pushing with the committee, and will continue to push, we don't have any toilets on this lot and we have a lot of female lot holders and we should have toilets. It's not the point of having a toilet, it's who's going to look after them. I said we should get composting toilets (Oakley, interview, 05/09/2022)

Perhaps more importantly, at Oakley and Vivien's site the reason they do not have a toilet is not because of money but because of maintenance. Oakley said:

It's not the money, we have the money, it's just the argument of who will look after it, but composting toilets look after themselves, really (Oakley, interview, 05/09/2022)

This was not an unusual comment. Speaking to Dawn, she told me that the toilets at her site are for "emergencies" (fieldnotes, 14/05/2022) and the general approach to the facilities was to avoid

using them because of the maintenance. There is a cleaning rota, she said, but it is the women who tend to sign up for this (fieldnotes, 14/05/2022). Similarly, when talking about toilets over coffee at Lizzie's plot with her and Wanna (fieldnotes, 13/05/2022), they discussed how their site used to have a toilet-block, but it was burnt down. They both commented that they did not mind that it had not been rebuilt because often the men left the toilets in an unpleasant state, and they were glad not to have to clean it. Here, we can see the ways in which men, who have been the traditional allotment holder, ripple through and impact women's experiences at the allotment, shaping how they navigate parts of the sites. For participants like Dawn, Lizzie, Wanna, and Oakley, communal toilet facilities would benefit their time spent at the allotment, but they also have the potential to change the allotment site from a leisurely third space (Soja, 1996; DeSilvey, 2003) to a space reflective of the domestic, with cleaning work and maintenance, which is expected to be undertaken by women. Here, it is the women who are fighting for change to make the allotment more inclusive to their own bodies, but it is also these bodies who will likely be responsible for the upkeep and maintenance, yet the facility would be utilised by many of the allotment population.

Because of the common lack of toilet facilities at the allotment sites, many of the participants have developed creative ways in which they can, at a minimum, urinate at their plots if they need. Wanna, who has had her allotment for 20 years, spoke to me about this during one of my visits (fieldnotes, 13/05/2022). She told me how she was sure most women on allotments will have developed their own ways of managing the need for a toilet, pressing how important shed spaces are, and how these small huts are multiple in their uses. She showed me her small caravan camping toilet that she keeps in her shed, which she uses if her husband is at the allotment with her. If she is alone, she opts to use a trug, discarding the urine on the compost, as the nitrogen is useful for fertiliser.

Wanna was right: she was not alone in doing this.

Like others, Suzie does not have access to a communal toilet or a shed where she can create a make-shift bathroom at her plot, and like Wanna, she uses a trug in a corner of her allotment. Whether she is comfortable with this or not (she said she "doesn't mind") she has little choice in



the matter. Her allotment is a 30-minute up-hill walk from home, and for her the impact of the “bladder leash” (Kitchen and Law, 2001; Cooper et al., 2000) is very real. She acknowledges this in her diary, writing that “it’s a bit annoying, weeing over a bucket but...you know!” and capturing her bucket on film:



**Photograph 5.7.** *“That’s my wee bucket!” – Suzie’s trug*

In her interview Suzie told me that her and her partner (a cis man) have “talked about building our own compost toilet at the allotment” to attend to what they have both recognised as an important problem. Concerns for health and safety were something she spoke about as a potential hurdle, as compostable toilets need to be managed properly to create compost which is hygienic. Moreover, building their own toilet is costly and not something that they can currently financially justify. Ultimately, having accessible communal toilets at the allotment site, where all allotment tenants and visitors would benefit, is the real solution to this problem, rather than individual tenants having to take on this burden and responsibility.

Lizzie, on the other hand, acknowledged the lack of toilet facility at her site and embraced this as a challenge. Lizzie has two plots at two different locations (which she calls the ‘big plot’ and the

‘little plot’), and whilst she started with a bucket in the shed at both sites, this was not enough at the ‘big plot’, where she spends a large amount of time. To address this, she built her own composting toilet:



**Photograph 5.8.** *Lizzie’s hand-built compostable toilet (photograph: author’s own)*

For Lizzie, building the toilet was an important part of the “social aspect of the allotment”, going on to say:

I built an out-house so that I would have the facilities and I could spend all day here. I would live here but I’m not allowed due to the terms of the tenancy agreement [laughs] (Lizzie, interview, 06/10/2022)

The benefits of this facility go beyond Lizzie, and the toilet is an infrastructure that many of her friends and visitors appreciate. Lizzie’s plot is an integral part of a monthly supper club that

herself, Gwen, Wanna, and some other non-participants join in with. They bring a host of foods, which in part always consist of allotment-grown seasonal produce, and together they cook a delicious, shared supper. The social element that is part of Lizzie's experience at the allotment means that a toilet is imperative to the enjoyment of the space. I asked Lizzie about her feelings regarding the paucity of toilets at allotments:

It's opened my eyes more to that as a wider issue...It is something you need to think about, and for some, the bucket in the shed works and that's enough. But you know, I'm a bit extra in all ways, so I built my own toilet [laughs] I own that! (Lizzie, interview, 06/10/2022)

By building her own compostable toilet Lizzie has been able to alleviate, manage, and respond to her own body (and those who visit her plot), as well as attend to this inequality through being an active agent and finding a solution to the problem she (and others) is faced with. Yet, this carefully crafted compostable toilet that she has created and constructed symbolises the very gap she has filled. Lizzie has built a toilet as a direct result of the allotment space not having any toilet facility because of the ways our patriarchal society so often leaves women's bodies silenced and invisible. The toilet she has built, which is hugely successful, is in some ways a problem: she should not have to create her own toilet space; it should be provided.

Neoliberal ideology argues that women are "subjects of capacity who can lead responsabilised and self-managed lives through self-application and self-transformation" (Scharff, 2016: 217).

Moreover, as Foucault (2008), Brown (2003) and du Gay (1996) argue, individuals are expected to be entrepreneurs of their own lives and their own selves, who work on themselves so that they can better themselves. Here, it is women who must better themselves, and this is particularly apparent when it comes to management of the body. Whilst this may usually be seen in body politics when addressing embodiment and beauty norms (Mahoney, 2022; Elias, Gill and Scharff, 2017) this theorising is also applicable to the allotment. Women who cannot access a toilet at their allotment are burdened with needing to self-manage their bodies and/or the environment around them, seeking to solve the issue at hand themselves, either through their own means, or through trying to manage their time to align with their (often unpredictable) bodily functions. This self-management of bodies and space can be argued to be empowering, and that taking this

control creates a sense of autonomy and authority over their bodies and space. It is troubling, however, that this self-managed approach ignores the consequences of this governance, which can be argued to be a form of policing (Khader, 2018). Whist writing about it in relation to poverty, Chant (2006: 191) suggests that such burdening can be considered “a feminisation of responsibility and obligation”, where women must engage in additional work to exist comfortably in certain spaces, and this in essence, is a misconception of empowerment. Khader (2018) further argues that this *disempowerment* comes down to being faced with a choice of bad alternatives (e.g. using a trug in a shed or risking cystitis from dehydration), but also that women are expected to do more (e.g. finding the solutions to the missing sanitary facilities), reflecting many of the power structures that surround women and the actions (or options) (un)available to them.

On her site, Lizzie is an important source of innovation, and she has found ways to recycle and reuse many resources to satisfy unmet needs on the plot, including the toilet. In this way, she has made her plot a place of value both for herself and for others. She holds a wealth of knowledge which she shares in abundance, and she uses this to create the environment at her plot. From a barren empty parcel of land, Lizzie has created a vibrant community, a place of calm, and perhaps more importantly, a place to pee in peace. Here, rather than reproducing the problems she encounters at her site, she is an active agent finding solutions. As Susan Buckingham (2005) points out, women’s presence on the allotment is transforming the space from a place for “male active and retired workers” to an “embourgeoised and more socially diverse” place, especially as more women are taking part in allotment gardening (Buckingham, 2005: 171). This growth of the space leads to different ways of approaching growing, varied ways to use the land, and the evolution of provisions that the allotment requires to function equally, inclusively, and appropriately. A clear example of this more progressive use of the space are the ways in which those who need to devise toilet provision are either creating it through a central shared means, like Oakley and Vivien are fighting for, or through building their own personal resources, like Lizzie. The issue of lack of sanitation provision, then, becomes more than a gendered issue, and is also a political and structural one, one which, yet again, reflects the patriarchal power relations and neoliberal ideas of responsibility that continue to constitute and regulate society (Edwards and McKie, 1996).



Women's presence on the allotment, whether ciswomen or transwomen, reflects their right to participate in this space, but the lack of toilet access is much more than an accessibility issue. It is a gendered issue, and a political one, forming barriers and hurdles that allow or hinder women's participation in an aspect of what can be everyday life. As a direct result of where society positions them as women, they are having to regulate, manage and control their own bodies through being active agents at the allotment, finding solutions to problems that predominantly and ultimately arise because they are not cisgender men in a patriarchy.

### 5.1.3. Menstruation

The lack of sanitation provision at allotments, even at a basic level, shows a lack of awareness of the physical, corporeal, and biological characteristics of different people. More, the dearth of toilet facilities in spaces like allotments reflects and perpetuates widespread gendered inequality, which align with many of the inconveniences and humiliations that countless women experience every day (Plaskow, 2008). "Women not only piss and shit, they also menstruate" (Wiseman, 2019: 795), yet society perpetually teaches shame and taboo regarding women's bodily functions; especially with menstruation, with much of this stigmatisation serving to limit women's ability to fully be present and take part in their lives and wider society (Johnston-Robledo and Chrisler, 2020; Chrisler, 2013). "Menstrual etiquette" dominates how women engage with menstruation, which comprises of an intricate set of rules guiding and governing how this portion of their everyday lives ought to be kept hidden and secret (Moffat and Pickering, 2019; Laws, 1990). This is because different bodily fluids are seen as having "different indices of control, disgust, and revulsion" (Grosz, 1994: 195) and unlike some other excretions, like ear wax or tears or semen, menstrual blood is seen as abject (Kristeva, 1982); "dirty, disgusting, and defiling" (Young, 2005: 111). More specifically, according to Grosz (1994), menstrual blood defies boundaries and permeates borders of the self and of social legitimacy, crossing the pre-determined boundary of inside the body, to the outside, where it is unwelcome. Here, humans assign symbolic meaning to nearly everything that they encounter through a naming and classification system (Douglas, 1966). In this way, Mary Douglas (1966) argues, nothing is dirty *per se*, but instead things that are seen as dirty or disgusting are simply away from their intended place, upsetting hierarchy or order, and consequently, these systems they imbue. As such, we can understand that menstrual

blood is not a question of dirt or dirty in and of itself, but that we can understand it is “matter out of place” (Douglas, 1966: 47 – 59). Moreover, menstrual blood is a by-product, that “permeates, lurks, lingers, and at times, leaks” and is unpredictable because of the ways that “body fluids flow, they seep, they infiltrate; their control is a matter of vigilance, never guaranteed” (Grosz, 1994: 194). This argument suggests that “women’s corporeality is inscribed as a mode of seepage” (Grosz, 1994: 203), with out-of-control boundaries (Moffat and Pickering, 2019; Longhurst, 2001) that cannot be trusted in public, unlike male bodies, which are seen to be secure, autonomous, and controlled. Ussher (2006: 19-20) refers to these bodies that bleed as “unspeakable bodies”, with their out-of-control, boundary breaking functionality that requires menstruation to be surrounded by a silence of shame, with women being vigilant around concealment, self-surveilling the body, and (re)producing the conceptualisation of women’s bodies as othered (Wood, 2020; de Beauvoir, 1974).

Importantly, whilst the majority of those who menstruate are women, it is not an experience unique to them; not all menstruators are women, as people such as transgender men and intersex people can still experience menstruation (Bobel, 2010: 11). Moreover, not all women menstruate. Inspired by literature such as Miyagi et al. (2021), Koskenniemi (2023), and Bobel and Fahs (2020), I use terms such as ‘people who have periods’, ‘bodies that bleed’ and ‘menstruators’ in allyship alongside the various individuals who experience the bodily reproductive process (or betrayal) of menstruation. All the participants who took part in this research identify as women, but not all necessarily menstruate, and who does and who does not experience this, was not ascertained. Whilst I was interested in the experience of menstruation at the allotment, especially having to navigate it myself, I did not wish to press participants to speak to me about it. I allowed for participants to talk about it if they wished, following their lead. Some participants like Ettie spoke to me about it very openly, whilst others, like Heather, signposted me to their diaries, where they wrote about it instead. Other participants, like Suzie, spoke to me in more detail about the obstacles she encounters with managing her period at the allotment over WhatsApp rather than in our interview or during my visits. Many participants, like Dawn, Dizzie, Gwen, Hen, Lorena and Wanna, did not raise it at all, reflecting the ways women are made to broach menstruation; silently, hidden and ignored.

Toilets are an integral part of the “menstrual etiquette” (Pickering and Moffat, 2019) toolbox, and lack of access burdens those who menstruate. Burdens that bleeding bodies endure to maintain this bodily activity as unseen include keeping tampons and sanitary towels hidden, disposing of used period products privately and silently, and working mindfully to avoid leakages and stains that can reveal the pollution of menstruation (Burrows and Johnson, 2005; Brantelid et al., 2014; Moffat and Pickering, 2019). People who menstruate not only work hard to ensure that others remain unaware of their bleeding bodies, but also depend on technologies, like product dispensers and hygiene bins, to facilitate rendering menstruation invisible. When these technologies are absent or poorly maintained there is a double burden: periods must stay invisible, but it must be done within limited infrastructure or support, and without the drawing of attention (Moffat and Pickering, 2019). This pressure, then, to maintain the silence around their period limits many menstruators capacity to challenge the neglect they face, perpetuating their exclusion from public spaces (Mofatt and Pickering, 2019).

The allotment is, undoubtably, one of the spaces that people can become excluded from when the sites do not have adequate provision for their bodily needs. Unsurprisingly, given how many participants did not have access to toilets at their sites, menstruation came up as a theme within both fieldwork and findings.

Access to a toilet is a prerequisite for Heather. She reflected on such access in her diary after we had chatted about it, and notes that a lack of toilet access at the allotment can be a big barrier because:

You don't know when you're going to bleed, how heavy it is, what might happen, it's a real like, I hadn't really thought about access to hygiene facilities but like, I think it's really important (Heather, diary)

Moreover, she expressed how in allotment communities it is not often discussed or acknowledged, illustrating this in her interview, saying “you know, there's not been a period section on ‘Gardener's World,’ and it's never talked about!”. She is not wrong: so many of the allotments failed to have toilet access, and there seems to be a causal relationship between toilet

access, those fighting for toilet access (i.e., menstruators), and those denying toilet access, such as those allotment committees with a majority cis-male population.

Whilst I never spoke with Lizzie about menstruation, by building her own toilet she is providing a means to ensure that herself and/or any guest on the plot who experiences periods can attend to their needs. We know that the infrastructure is not available at her allotment site and without this self-built toilet, there is fear of breaching the discursive silence surrounding periods demanded by “menstrual etiquette” (Moffat and Pickering, 2019). Whilst used period products like tampons and towels cannot be discarded in composting toilets, having the privacy to be able to deal with this in a safe, secure purpose-built outbuilding is much better, on many levels, than the alternative options, such as doing so from behind a concealed fence like Oakley, or behind a cabin, like Ettie, as is common in locations that are situated off-grid and in shared community spaces (see Pickering, 2010).

For Suzie, she has learnt how to handle her period at the plot using a trug because she has no alternative. For her, this is sometimes difficult and requires forward planning, burdening her with preparation, like making sure she has handwipes, alcohol gel and water, ensuring that she can contain her period cleanly, but importantly leak-free, as demanded by “menstrual etiquette” (Moffat and Pickering, 2019). We spoke about whether the lack of toilets is an issue for her:

Ummm, it can be when I'm on my period, ummm, [laughs] because I suffer from bad periods and they're really heavy so, and then, sometimes it's sudden, you know? And I've got to deal with it, so if I'm up there it's like, “oh no! What do I do?”...So, I use a Mooncup™... I took hand sanitiser and I emptied it into a bucket and diluted it and put it on the compost heap. I'm not sure if that's okay, to be honest, because it's human blood...rats was my worry, really. But, ummm, yeah. I won't use that compost for like, years, so like I'm not worried in that way. But yeah, it was a like [pause] “this feels strange!” (Suzie, interview, 12/09/2022)

Echoing Kristeva (1982) and Grosz (1994), Suzie's experience of menstruation at the plot nods to the scholarship about menstrual blood being abject and disgusting. There is tension here in terms

of dirt and classifying what is 'dirty' within the confines of the allotment. Gardeners often use fish blood and bone meal fertiliser (an all-purpose plant feed made from fish remnants) on their soils as it provides nutrients for the earth and plants. Yet, as Suzie highlights, the notion of doing this with menstrual blood seems strange and unacceptable, requiring justification, and would be, in some ways, deemed a renegade act, even though some communities do this with composting faeces practices (Pickering, 2010). Discussions of a similar ilk were had with Oakley and Vivien, who both (separately) spoke with me about an allotment neighbour who has (what are viewed as) unorthodox practices. Their neighbour intentionally saves urine at their home in large plastic bottles and brings to it the allotment to use it on their compost. Several participants stated that various men on their allotment sites will urinate directly on the compost, and as I heard from participants such as Wanna and Fauna, some women will urinate in a container and dispose of this on their compost; this is acceptable as the nitrogen is great for early-stage fertiliser. The neighbour here, however, breaches boundaries in her use of the urine on the compost because it is done intentionally; the urine is saved, purposefully collected to be taken to the allotment. Oakley and Vivien further told me that their neighbour further breaches expected boundaries and uses chicken blood on her soil, which comes from the poultry that she rears and tends to at home, prior to slaughter. Vivien told me that whilst many see her practices as "chaos", she thinks she is "a character" and is the "one person I look to for advice". Here, we can see that what is defined as dirt or dirty practices is more than "matter out of place" (Douglas, 1966), and is deeply political, as well as relational (Pickering, 2010). The stigmatisation that is so often felt with matters of menses, where menstrual blood can be compared to toxic waste, that which is dangerous and fear-invoking rather than as a fluid of nutrients and goodness, is deeply embedded in the discourse surrounding it. Suzie's first worry regarding using her menstrual blood on the compost was how it might encourage rats, yet using animal blood on soil to maximise nutrients is normalised (and standardised practice), just like using horse or alpaca manure. The problem is not that it is blood that will be used on the allotment, it is that it is *uterine* blood. This is magnified from the ways in which menstruating people are so used to keeping the process of periods hidden and private, away from the public eye. There are tensions, here, between the open, natural space of the plot, pulling and tussling with the very natural process of menstruation, which is socialised to be kept a secret.

Understanding menstruation at the allotment can also be conceptualised through thinking about dirt and belonging, which Pickering and Wiseman (2019), Pickering (2010), and Wiseman (2019) argue, is key. Questions arise about who is welcome in certain spaces, and what dirt renders people “unwelcome in certain spaces” (Pickering and Wiseman, 2019: 747), as well what matter we can consider as ‘dirt’ and what we can consider as ‘a useful by-product’. Women’s bodies as ones that leak and excrete are socialised through a civilising process (Elias, 2000[1978]), whereby expulsions must be considered only in the private sphere, made to be invisible in the public gaze, and reduced to private spaces, like the bathroom. More than this, the contents of these natural bodily processes, and particularly of menses, do not belong at the allotment, and deliberations of this as something to be used in soil could be seen as unspeakable and unwelcome. This sits in direct opposition with bone meal fertiliser, which is a by-product from the slaughter industry. Whilst detritus from fishing commerce makes for a useful ground feed, Suzie’s concern about using her menstrual blood within the compost illustrates the ways in which certain ‘dirt’ has a place at the allotment, and certain ‘dirt’ does not. With this, certain bodies are then seen as welcome to the space, and some as not. Certainly, bodies experiencing menstruation with no accessible, available sanitary facilities are made to feel unwelcome and as though they do not belong. Moreover, paucity of toilet access and sanitary facilities and the impact this has on bleeding bodies navigates us back to thinking of allotments as third spaces, too, and in terms of citizenship and belonging (both outside of dirt, and within dirt). We already know that allotments can be considered as third spaces, and that a central proponent of third spaces is the building and experiences of communities and social ties. An important aspect of these third spaces is feelings of citizenship and belonging, and these, according to Yuval-Davis (2006), can be found in places that provide feelings of ‘at home’, or similarly, allow for feelings of social value and worth (Wiseman, 2019). Importantly, feelings of belonging (or not belonging) are interconnected to the experiences and intimacies of everyday life that we are faced with in such landscapes (Wiseman, 2019). In relation to toilets, the lack of access and facilities for those who menstruate at allotments render these bodies to be understood and experienced as invisible and unworthy, as well as nonbelonging and unwelcome. Historically, citizenship has been understood through activities in public spaces, and these activities have almost always been enacted by men (Wiseman, 2019; Plummer, 2011). Allotments, as places that were once so popular with men yet that demonstrate a lack of toilets, tell a different story. It tells menstruators

who come to use these spaces that their bodies and their lived experiences of periods are not welcome: that they do not belong.

Issues around toilets, sanitation, and access can seem myopic and banal, but understanding who can and cannot access toilets and who might need the provision of such facilities is important; lack of access, especially when thinking about menstruation, becomes more than an everyday issue and instead becomes a reproductive human rights issue, as well as a matter of power.

Plaskow (2008) points out that the dearth of women's toilets reflects an absence of women from within social hierarchies. Toilets are such an important part of people's day-to-day, but this is especially true for those who bleed, and it is so often these individuals who menstruate who experience oppression and subordination within society. Being unable to access toilets is to the detriment of menstruator's physical and mental wellbeing. Being unable to change or refresh tampons, sanitary towels, menstrual cups and/or menstrual sponges in bathrooms that are private, secure, and clean, is exclusionary and discriminatory. Perhaps the attitude at allotments is determined from more archaic views, especially with the traditional population being so historically centred on those who do not menstruate. Within Susan Buckingham's (2005) research, for example, which highlighted increases in women accessing allotments, she quotes a survey comment from her research, which stated, "women shouldn't have allotments because they won't work them during their menstrual cycle" (Buckingham, 2005: 176). Attitudes such as this may likely be found within many allotment communities because of the types of traditions (e.g., gendered opinions) that can be witnessed within them, like at Ettie's allotment site, which is used primarily by older men. This may also explain why many sites are without appropriate toilet functions, as those who experience menstruation would (or should) not be found at allotments, making toilet access somewhat irrelevant. Those who do menstruate do use allotments, however, and without toilet infrastructure, those who bleed face a double burden; they need to source their own structure(s) or tools in order to alleviate themselves if they hydrate and need to urinate, but then those that experience menstruation need to further ensure that they have the appropriate facilities to be able to manage their periods in their own, personal way. Privacy is needed, receptacles, bins and waste products (such as nappy bags) might be required, along with water, hand sanitiser, and toilet paper. Such burdens can also be stressful because appropriate sanitary items are needed to reduce infection, reduce conditions like Toxic Shock



Syndrome (TSS) and dehydration, and as well as generally being a key part of toilet-related anxiety and stress.

In her satirical essay published for *Ms* magazine in 1978 (which has since been re-issued), Gloria Steinem shows how menstruation, which we know can be thought of as dirty and stigmatised, would become positive and worthy of attention if it was associated with men's bodies. She suggests that it would become enviable and boast-worthy, with men bragging about "how long and how much" (Steinem, 2019 [1978]: 151). Whilst dated, the premise of Steinem's point remains. Menstruation is both a gendered and a political issue, and if cis men's bodies were the ones who had to experience (and often endure) the monthly inconvenience (as we are taught to view it), there is no doubt there would be more toilets available, more facilities available, and menstruation itself would be talked about with candour, rather than shame and dismissal.

#### 5.1.4. Pregnancy loss

Menstruation is not the only consideration we are faced with when thinking about bodies and the allotment. Another important experience that was highlighted during this fieldwork was pregnancy loss at the plot.

We have already seen the heavy burden menstruating bodies carry in keeping this process secret and concealed; to not bleed unexpectedly, to not leak, and to not reveal the body as a reproductive, active agent. The same can be said about the pregnant body, which grows bigger, takes up space, emits mucus and milk, and risks leakages and breakages. Similarly, too, can also be said for the miscarrying body, which bleeds and excretes. Looking to the literature, the experience of miscarriage (interchangeably, I also use the term pregnancy loss) is becoming more openly written about, both within the media and within the academic field, such as Victoria Browne's (2022) monograph *Pregnancy Without Birth* and Rebecca Feasey's (2019) recent paper discussing the ways celebrities speak of pregnancy loss. Compared to other experiences, however, it is still largely under-represented and under-researched, which is disconcerting given one-in-four women will experience pregnancy loss (Feasey, 2019).

Reflections on the experiences of miscarriage is important, and writing about this in the specific context of miscarriage in public places is crucial. This is not just because it tends to not be written about, but also because it is experienced by an abundance of bodies who operate and exist within society. It is important to acknowledge this, and to acknowledge those who talk about their experiences, and what this means for our understanding of the reproductive womb in public spaces, as well as what this means regarding sanitary provision within such environments, how this affects experiences, and the ways people navigate these spaces at these times.

During my interview with Ettie, she talked about her experience of miscarriage at the allotment. I had asked her about the allotment's toilet provision, and soon into this conversation she told me about her pregnancy loss at the allotment, speaking about it in a very meaningful yet blunt way. Like most of the participants, there is no toilet at her allotment, and normally, if she needs to, she will use a secluded spot behind the cabin as a make-shift bathroom. She expressed how not only was this a problem generally, as well as for her as a woman who menstruates, but this was especially troubling as someone who has experienced pregnancy and miscarriage at the plot. She told me that she has experienced multiple miscarriages, and that in the November of the previous year (2021) she had visited the allotment whilst miscarrying. During this time, she was "bleeding extensively, for quite a long time", going on to say:

I desperately wanted to go to the allotment but because it was coming in waves I couldn't physically go unless I wore one of those, basically, one of those nappies they give you in hospital, like a maternity nappy, because pads just weren't cutting it, and because of how conscious I was. I was like a grown woman rustling about like a 3-year-old [pause] me head was absolutely battered and I needed the space, but where ours is, the actual plot, is at the bottom of a very long path. I'd say it's a good half a mile, three-quarters of a mile, a good 10-minute walk to get to the plot. I was anaemic, I was depressed as shit. I was just [pause] like I say, toilets are a massive thing. Especially for women. Periods, definitely. But any kind of miscarriage, baby-related [pause] Jesus, and that's the time you need it [the plot] the most (Ettie, interview, 07/10/2022)

For Ettie, the allotment was a place of solace, but at a time when she needed this peace, the plot became a place she felt unwelcome, directly because of the lack of sanitary facilities that her body needed. This then governed her experience of her miscarriage. She described what visiting the allotment was like during this time:

I did go and I did try it, a couple of times, and the only real reason I couldn't do it is because, I think, I think, [pause] and I know this is grim, but at that point there was, you know, parts of tissue coming away and I'd have to put it on the floor and it was [pause] there, like, you know? A lot of shit goes through your head anyway, and it's not great (Ettie, interview, 07/10/2022)

Ettie here highlights an important element of what a lack of toilets means to this experience, which resulted in her being faced starkly with both the process, along with the biological materiality, of miscarriage; loss of uterine tissue is part of pregnancy loss, but this was magnified for Ettie because of the lack of a toilet. Brittany Leach (2021) argues that, in terms of abortion, feminists need “richer and more compelling accounts of fetal remains” (Leach, 2020: 141), and I argue that this too is applicable for miscarriages, especially those experienced outside of the bathroom space, where individuals can be faced much more literally with their loss. Understanding this experience in landscapes where toilet access is unavailable has a bigger implication, deepening what can be an already difficult experience. Ettie was faced with a position of conflict; she wanted to go to the allotment, a place of sanctity where she was used to feeling peace and calm, but the physical, biological loss, this blood and tissue, meant that, without a toilet, the allotment was not a safe space for her. Experiencing and enduring pregnancy loss is, in and of itself, deeply disquieting, but to be faced with this so literally can magnify this. Ettie and I spoke about the importance of a bathroom space at the time of a miscarriage, and the ways in which these spaces imbue feelings of cleanliness (e.g., soap and running water), of practicality (e.g., the toilet bowl as a receptacle), and of privacy (e.g., closed doors, a lock). She described it as:

It's the knock on of the guilt [pause] it's the, it's the, it's the “is it a waste product?” you know? It's a minefield...[in a bathroom] you're sanitary, you

don't feel dirty, you don't feel guilty, it's part of a normal process (Ettie, interview, 07/10/2022)

Discussion of dirt and belonging arise, once again, as it did with issues of menstruation. The lack of bathroom access and facilities to help Ettie stay clean means that experiences of dirt and dirtiness were magnified for her. Being clean, and cleaning, are “responses to dirt which are about creating a sense of order in a disorderly world” (Shove, 2003 cited in Pickering and Wiseman, 2019: 755) and this, along with the civilising process of keeping such expulsions secret and hidden (Elias, 1978, 2000), suggests that miscarriages when encountered should be as private as possible, somewhere in the home, and ideally in a secluded room (Pickering and Wiseman, 2019).

Similarly, this links back to the work of Mary Douglas (1966). I contend that we can understand and look to the miscarried foetus as “matter out of place” (Douglas, 1966: 47-59), where the ambiguity and uncertainty of this matter crosses with conceptualisations that vaginal blood loss (and other tissues) is dangerous and polluting. We know there is a hierarchy of bodily expulsion, resulting in an etiquette that governs bodies, where the likes of earwax, tears and semen are acceptable, but where menses (and other vaginal fluids and tissue) should remain invisible and be kept out of sight and in secret. Douglas (1966) argues that when boundaries become blurry or unclear (like leaky period blood) they are viewed as marginal; more, they garner a sense of “neither here nor there” (Murphy and Philpin, 2010: 539). The same can also be said for miscarried matter, which crosses a boundary into the ambiguous, going beyond the ordered expectation (Douglas, 1966). That is, a miscarried foetus should, at any stage of pregnancy, be inside the body until birth, yet if (and when) it crosses this boundary, it becomes polluting, disruptive, and dangerous; dirty. Casper (1994) argues that the miscarried foetus is a source of uncertainty, falling between both human and non-human. Kent (2008: 1748) develops this and argues that foetal remains can be understood across several different terms due to the discursive content within which it is placed: “baby, mother's tissue, waste tissue, a cadaver, an organ donor, a scientific object, and a source of stem cells”. Here, foetal remains can be thought of as abject because they fall into the borderlands, between subject and object, between the “in-between, the ambiguous, the composite” (Kristeva, 1982: 2). In this way, just like menstrual blood is to be

managed in a way that is hidden and secret, so too, should miscarriage. This is much harder to manage, however, because blood loss can be heavy and may often come under the gaze of others, like partners or clinicians (Murphy and Philpin, 2010), yet this is magnified, placing a bigger burden on these miscarrying bodies, when bathrooms are unavailable and public space is unaccommodating to their needs.

For Ettie, managing her pregnancy loss became tied to what she could (or could not) access at the allotment. Without toilet access, either on her specific plot or more communally, she was limited to how she could be an active participant at the site, which we can consider as an evolved form of the 'bladder leash' (Kitchin and Law, 2001), which reframes her feelings of belonging at the allotment. For her, the allotment is a space that, because of the other allotment holders who are men, she already feels an outsider. As I discuss further in chapter six, she is often openly ignored by the men around her while her partner (a cis man) is welcomed and openly invited. These feelings of exclusion, of being unwelcome, and of not belonging, were intensified during her experience of miscarriage, and this is amplified when we know the allotment is a space where citizenship and belonging are created and negotiated (Pickering and Wiseman, 2019). Ettie's bleeding, miscarrying body struggled to align with any feelings of belonging she might have built previously as a direct result of the lack of toilets. This, once more, reflects power and power positions, making it clear that bodies experiencing pregnancy loss do not belong at the allotment; certainly not while there are no sanitary facilities. Had those facilities been available, had her bleeding body been acknowledged by the space and those within it, and had she been able to use a private, secure and safe bathroom to become clean, distanced from the tissue her body was rejecting, navigating the loss in the place she had been socialised and expected to experience it (such as in a bathroom), she could have also been able to enjoy the plot for what she craved for so much; the nature, the peace, the solace.

This experience of being so close to her pregnancy loss in terms of the physical, the psychological, and otherwise, also had a longer-term impact on Ettie's relationship with the allotment. The allotment, for her, is a space of calm, of sanctity, and of wellness, and was a place she craved when she was going through this difficult experience of miscarriage. Yet, because the allotment could not cater for her heavily bleeding body, and because the allotment continued to

grow and surpass her own previously growing body, it became the enemy; a place where she did not want to be near or associated with. In fact, she said she “resented the space so I gave up a bit...I fought to get back”. We talked about this more when we looked at one of her photographs:



**Photograph 5.9.** *Ettie's Pompon ('Pom Pom') dahlias*

So, I've had three miscarriages, and I got into growing flowers after the first one...The flowers themselves carry significant meaning. This is the first time I've grown them at the allotment. I did them at home before. The toilet was a big deal, and I sound like a weird Earth Mother, but I was pregnant when I was on the allotment and I feel [pause] I sound like a bit of a knobhead [laughs, pause]...you're in nature, you're pregnant, you're growing food, you're growing a baby. It felt gorgeous [pause] and then when we lost it, I weirdly begrudged everything we were growing on the

allotment. That was still growing but I wasn't. I was really narked. Probably mentally I would say I wasn't very well. I didn't go to the allotment after one of the miscarriages for about six weeks. Every time I went it upset me, it was so closely linked to being pregnant. It was my safe haven. It was lush. I was growing food, I was going to be a Mam, but then...[trails off] (Ettie, interview, 07/10/2022)

We know that because of the lack of toilet facilities Ettie was faced with her miscarriage in a literal, corporeal way, yet she was also betrayed by the allotment on a deeper level, in turn further heightening and intensifying her experience. The allotment was a space that was growing new life alongside her own body, which had been growing its own new human-life. Suddenly, the plot became a space that was still growing in abundance at a time when her body was losing (and lost) the baby she was hopeful for. The plot, then, became a hostile space that was unable to accommodate that same body during (and after) loss. As a result, she “really struggled” with the allotment. This feeling is augmented when we know that creating life was part of what Ettie had always seen as something her body would do:

When you lose a baby – is it a baby? [pause] – I just [pause] my core was shaken to nothing...Doing that allotment gave me a sense of purpose, where I saw it as an enemy when I was trying to be this Earth Mother (Ettie, interview, 07/10/2022)

For Ettie, the experience of a miscarriage at the allotment was intensified (and betrayed) by the lack of toilet provision. Had the allotment had adequate provision, her miscarriage may have been less traumatic, or in part, she might have found some solace in the allotment space as a place to nurture both her bleeding body and her mind. Rather, the allotment magnified an already difficult experience, leaving her with more than the corporeal blood of the loss on her hands, turning what was a place of joy and peace into one imbued with turmoil, resentment, and anger.

It is true that miscarriage is not uncommon, and pregnancy loss is a potential for the fertile reproductive body in society, and with that, in public. Here, as with menstruation, the same argument stands for the importance of access to toilets in shared and public spaces, with further



emphasis on the important need for those who menstruate and those who can become pregnant. This is illustrated with Ettie's experience and the impact that this had on her and her relationship with the allotment. Undoubtedly, whilst Ettie represents one voice of 19 within this research, she will not be alone in the experience of pregnancy loss in public, and in having trouble accessing sanitary facilities, especially at this time. There will be many women and pregnant people who will have had similar experiences in allotment spaces, along with other environments without toilet provision. These experiences are unnecessary; if only society could see past the cis-gendered masculinised formation as the 'normalised' body, provide sanitary provision and welfare as standardised, and finally deem both spaces and these (other) bodies important enough to receive the attention they both demand, and deserve.

## **5.2. Bathtubs at the allotment**

Bathrooms are important to the allotment, and it is not only toilets that align this conversation to this landscape; we can extend this narrative to the bathtub, too.

Bathtubs in the allotment are common features and were something I witnessed across my fieldwork. Along with wandering around the participants' plots, learning about their habits and experiences, I also walked around the wider allotment sites, understanding what kind of location these allotments were situated within and observing what kinds of activities different people took part in, from afar. A key element of allotment culture is the penchant for reusing and recycling (King, 2007), with household objects that are frequently discarded providing a great deal of value. Examples include using old Anderson air raid shelters for coverage or for storage; creating plant structural support systems out of wire mesh and discarded wood and poles; engineering compost bays out of old wooden pallets; and reusing yoghurt pots, drink bottles and milk cartons for germinating seeds, covering pole-ends, and creating pigeon deterrents. Bathtubs, too, were commonplace and used as either water butts, or for planting root vegetables like carrots, parsnips, and beetroot.

### 5.2.1. The hillbilly hot tub

I observed many bathtubs on the allotments across the wider allotment sites, but only two participants had bathtubs at their own plots: Suzie and Lizzie. Both had two very different uses for their bathtubs, and this makes for an interesting comparison, as well as an addition to this wider discussion about bodies existing within the allotment space.



**Photograph 5.10.** *Suzie's bathtubs at her allotment*

Suzie has six baths on her site, all of which were left from the previous tenant. They are all situated inside the “falling down greenhouse”, which makes it “a bit overcrowded”. Moving them might unearth more problems for her, especially as the previous tenant had already left them with a host of recycled or unusable detritus, including “building material...boxes of shells...bottles of an undisclosed liquid” and “carpet upon carpet upon carpet”. As such, Suzie uses the bathtubs in situ. Indicated above is her “herb bath” [L], where she has “dug a hole and stuck stuff in”, alongside [R] a bath containing parsley after it was eaten by slugs, as well as some African Marigolds and the beginnings of some tomato plants, with these ones coming from a friend she does a plant swap with. For Suzie, the baths on her plot are a reminder of the previous tenant and the mountain of rubbish that they left behind. With that, though, they are places to grow and are spaces of potential; useful beyond somewhere to bathe or to store water, and instead used for

plants and flowers. Whilst Suzie has more bathtubs than most plot holders, her use of bathtubs is quite traditional, which sits in comparison to Lizzie.

For Lizzie, her bathtub was something she intentionally brought to the allotment, and with a very different purpose than Suzie; Lizzie wanted it as a heated, working bath.



**Photograph 5.11.** *The “hillbilly hot tub”*

Concealed by beehives, a polytunnel, a bench swing, and two large fruit trees, in a secluded corner of her plot, the “hillbilly hot tub” can be found. Lizzie’s bath is, as she describes it in her interview, is “an off-grid way of heating water to a bathtub, outdoors, so that you can enjoy...a low budget hot tub!”. For it to work, Lizzie fills the bath with water. A pipe is connected from the bath to the bottom of an old cooking oil tin, which then coils around a copper pipe inside, and then comes out at the top of the tin and goes back into the bath. A firepit is placed under the tin and when lit, convection moves the water through the pipe, heating it by way of the copper pipe, and moving it back into the bath, in a continuous cycle. It takes a couple of hours to heat up fully, but this works well for Lizzie as it gives her chance to “get on and do some work” before using it.

Whilst unusual in terms of finding a working, heated bathtub at an allotment that is not used either as a water-butt to collect rainwater or as a place to plant root vegetables, there is an important conversation to be had in terms of the body and the allotment.

As suggested in chapter two, the positive health and wellbeing benefits of spending time in green spaces is well documented (Chatterjee et al., 2018; de Vries et al., 2013; Hale et al., 2011; Sempik, 2003, 2005), and similar benefits can also be found when encountering blue space, which are those with water as a focal point (Duff, 2012; Jellard and Bell, 2021; Bell et al., 2015). Like green space benefits, a wealth of research has found that blue spaces are linked to having positive effects through physical activity, wellbeing and wellness, meditative and restorative properties, along with social and community proponents (White et al., 2020; McDougall et al., 2020; Bell et al., 2015; Grellier et al., 2017). Whilst different factors around blue space provides different benefits (e.g. different types of bodies of water, different proximities etc), and whilst some of these are not understood entirely (see Foley and Kistemann, 2015), the positive relationship between water and human wellbeing is generally acknowledged and accepted.

For Lizzie, the idea to have a working heated bathtub on her allotment was inspired by a desire for this closeness to water, which was specifically inspired by Onsen ('hot water spring'), which is a common experience in Japan (Serbulea and Payyappallimana, 2012). She told me:

I have experienced outdoor bathing in hot water in Japan. It's a very, sort of, intrinsic part of the culture...communal bathing and outdoor Onsen was amazing. It means hot springs. Because Japan is a volcanic island they get natural hot springs. I'm very sad that Britain doesn't have volcanoes for this reason! [laughs] so I was just like, it's an amazing experience to be immersed in hot water in the winter...it's fantastic...you're outside, surrounded by nature, and yeah, being in the lovely hot bath (Lizzie, interview, 06/10/2022)

Spending time in and around water as part of an everyday practice and everyday life is not unusual. In some cultures, like Japan, Iceland and Finland, outdoor bathing is part of everyday routines, and such habits have been found to have a multitude of benefits, including within

community, lifestyle, and healing (Takeda et al., 2023; Huijbens, 2011; Serbulea and Payyappallimana, 2012; Hussain, Greaves and Cohen, 2019)

Relationships with water are also important beyond these health and wellbeing benefits. Spending time in water outdoors, like bathing and swimming, “reflects, produces, and reproduces socialites, attachments, and connection between bodies and water” (Moles, 2021: 21). Moreover, water has been described by Watston (2019: 135) as “a substance that has a unique power to evoke passions, attachments and a sense of connection and belonging which enrolls bodies in new socialites, alliances and politics in unpredictable ways”. Wild swimming, for instance, has been found to support practices of “conviviality, sociability, and belonging” (Bates and Moles, 2022: 1). Whilst Lizzie is not swimming at her plot, the actions of bathing and spending time immersed in water while also immersing herself in the green space and tranquillity of the allotment run true in a not dissimilar way. Moreover, we can also acknowledge the importance of the creation of this space itself. Looking to Lefebvre (1991), we can consider space as a social product, where social construction (the production of values and meanings) is produced and reproduced. This affects spatial practices, perceptions, and the ways in which people encounter and engage with spaces, especially those that are shared. For Lizzie and those who know her and her plot, this is not an unusual or unexpected additional to her allotment and activity; Lizzie loves building and challenging herself in ways outside of the expected, and we can understand the bathtub as a way that she is reproducing space at the allotment through her social (yet, private) practices of bathing at the plot. Just like wild swimmers in urban waters can cause reactions, a woman bathing on her plot is likely to cause those same “sensations, smiles, or a scandal” (Kowalewski, 2014: 172), as well as stretch our understandings of allotments and their contested uses and practices. Lizzie’s bathtub disrupts the allotment space and what is viewed as traditional understanding(s) of the site by creating space that is “produced bodily and socially...in terms of their own specific bodily encounter with it” (Borden, 2001: 296). Bodies (and the bathtub), in this way, change the “perceived, conceived, and lived space” of the allotment (Kowalewski, 2014: 172).

Whilst I expand more upon this in chapter seven, it is important that we move away from the traditional dualistic nature/human dyad and consider the bathtub in relation to the more-than-

human (Plumwood, 1993; Haraway, 1991). Within this context, it is not useful to consider humans as separate subjects, independent of their environment. Instead, we need to take our thinking and consider the entanglements that exist within these allotment spaces between humans, matter, and the more-than-human, looking to the relationships that develop, are negotiated, and which prescribe culture and meaning (Haraway, 1991), along with the ways bodies are experienced, enacted, and known in the multiple, in complex, relational and context-specific ways (Mol, 2002; Mol and Law, 2004; Mol et al, 2011). With this, one way in which we can understand Lizzie's bathtub at the allotment is through thinking about the philosophy of affect. Affect is the "force or forces of encounter" and pertains to our main senses, which in turn impacts our ability to exist and encounter space, like moving, acting, and thinking (Gregg and Seigworth, 2010: 2), as well as feelings of shame, disgust, hostility, disappointment, or anger (for example, Chadwick, 2021). This is important because "being in touch with the world and with oneself" is affective, and when the human mind is directed at something beyond itself, it is "constitutively feelings-involved", all of which is "affective intentionality" (Slaby, 2008: 429). Moreover, drawing on the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1962), Slaby (2008) argues that affective intentionality is a bodily affair. Here, this *feeling body* helps us not only to be aware of our bodies, the environment, and emotions and feelings we perceive, but it allows us to have "an awareness of something outside of the body" (Slaby, 2008: 434). In this way, we are not to reduce our bodies to mechanics (like movement, taste, and smell alone) but instead we need to see our bodies as central to understanding our relationships to our environments, with active feelings, emotions, and thoughts. Extending this to the work of Sara Ahmed (2013) and emotions, we can understand that these feelings "create the very effect of the surfaces and boundaries that allow us to distinguish an inside and an outside" (Ahmed, 2013: 10). Emotion here helps us understand the bathtub at the allotment, as when we look to the seeing, feeling, lived body, we can understand how the nude body, along with the experience and feeling of being partially/wholly naked in some [third] places and in some (appropriate) circumstances, like wild swimming, can translate into a "bodily experience of release", which can be exhilarating (Barcan, 2001: 303). Whilst I am not suggesting that Lizzie is prescribing to a nudist way of life, there is a stark and important similarity between the emotions and feelings of freedom she experiences in the bathtub at the plot, and that which we can understand from literature surrounding activities which involve nudity, like swimming, in public places.

With this in mind, and understanding feelings not as being something that we have, but instead as responses to objects, others, and environments, I suggest that Lizzie ‘re-encounters herself’ through these feelings and emotions which she experiences whilst encountering her bath and the process of bathing. From talking to Lizzie (fieldnotes, 13/05/2022) it is evident that the bathtub means much more to her than the “technical challenge” she jokes about. Bathing at the allotment in a mostly private and secluded section of her plot allows her to soak up the restorative and relaxation properties outdoor bathing gives, whilst still being in a space that brings her joy, happiness, and comfort. Whilst in this tub she is not separate from the allotment; she is immersed within it, whilst simultaneously immersed within the bathtub, and immersed within her body. She can soak her muscles and clean her dirty body, whilst being present with the muscles that ache and the body that is covered in soil; aches and dirt which come as a result of her body working and moving hard, helping and working the land on which the very bath sits. More, this is land that holds more meaning to her than ‘just’ an allotment. These elements of her body, her dirty skin, her bath, the soil and ground, and the allotment plot are interlinked and entangled, knotted together, as one.

### **5.2.1.1. Nudity**

As well as affect and the emotional entanglements at the allotment, we can also (once again) look to power and place to conceptualise and understand Lizzie’s “hillbilly hot tub”. Nakedness and nudity in some spaces, especially public spaces, is largely forbidden. Like much of what has been discussed already within matters of urination, menstruation and miscarriage, nudity and nakedness at the allotment have the propensity to be seen as matter out of place (see Douglas, 1966), as well as, in some scenarios, abject (see Kristeva, 1982). Some literature would argue that nudity is how the body was intended to be, and we could consider this as a “negotiation embodied in naturism” (Bell and Holliday, 2000: 127), especially when we consider some environments, like the allotment, are where we can consider the naked body in its most natural form, in a space that is enveloped by nature with the more-than-human, within a natural landscape. Social nudity, however, is generally frowned upon as a practice within the United Kingdom outside of spaces designated for naturism. Exceptions to this, of course, are usually during the summer months when the naked torsos of men’s bodies are seen in the everyday, as many male-presenting bodies remove their upper clothing as temperatures increase, and the



allotment is certainly one of these places where this is visible. Naked (men's) bodies in this sense are not matter out of place but are part of a seasonal landscape.

Frequently whilst visiting the participants I noted that many of the older men were gardening happily, shirtless, unaware of their nakedness or the gazes upon them. For Annie, her experience of this goes a step further, as at her plot there is an allotment holder who tends to disrobe entirely. She wrote in her diary about one warm afternoon she noticed her neighbour William at his plot, where he had taken off most of his clothes and "he stripped down to nothing but a straw hat, speedos, and his gardening boots...I have been informed he gardens completely naked in summer!". Later in her diary, she writes about seeing him again, but this time he was entirely nude:

Today was nice weather, and I wanted to enjoy my plot, but then saw William completely naked (beyond a hat and some walking boots) and was reminded that the space isn't really mine. I had to approach his plot to access the tap, and as he saw me approaching he turned away and crouched down by some bushes on his plot (Annie, diary)

When I spoke to Annie about this, and she said she had "complex thoughts" about it. For her, William's nudity is not a problem in terms of the act of nudity, per se:

I've seen bodies, I know what they look like, I know what a dick looks like. This isn't a surprise to me. I also know that naked bodies aren't inherently sexual, and we should be moving away as a society from that and thinking that...it doesn't actively really harm me...but then on the other hand, as much as there isn't harm [for me], but for a lot of people it might be associated with like, trauma?... and I didn't consent to seeing his body? And now, I'm doing my hobby, this thing that's meant to bring me enjoyment and I'm meant to find relaxing, it's now dependent on me being okay with seeing someone naked. I dunno. I go from one to the other when I'm thinking about it... It's almost funny but it isn't funny...Can you imagine if I went to the plot naked? [laughs]...I would never feel like I could

because of what that would be doing to other people. I think it's a male thing, to not have to think about how your actions and what you do impacts on others around you and the world...I think it's a hugely gendered thing (Annie, interview, 17/09/2022)

Her concern, here, is that whilst William's penchant for nudity does not harm her, it could harm others. More than this though, the issue lies within the ways that she did not consent to seeing his body in this way. As she discussed with me during a plot visit (fieldnotes 10/07/2022), and was also reflected in her diary and interview, when he is naked (with or without speedos) she feels conscious of herself and how she navigates the space around him, because of his nudity. This reminds her, too, that the space is not really her own, and that she is in a social space where others will blur boundaries, change the shape of her experience, and alter the way(s) in which she navigates and orients her way at the allotment.

In terms of power, nudity at the allotment is a very different story for women. Their naked bodies, whether partially or fully naked, are not usually seen at the allotment, and as Annie suggests, this naked form would be regarded as inappropriate; 'matter out of place' (Douglas, 1966). Even during the summer months, where allotment work can be particularly hard, dirty, and sweaty, women would be expected to remain clothed, unlike many men. This is not only because of wider societal norms, but because of risk of the male gaze (Oliver, 2017; Calogero, 2004; Schaare, 2000), which can leave women's bodies sexualised and objectified. Whilst this could be an unconscious perspective that is internalised from the implicit male perspective in art (Berger, 1972), the male gaze oppresses women, forcing them to police their bodies and remain hot and covered, rather than cooler, comfortable, or indeed, naked.

Extending this, when we look back to the "hillbilly hot tub", matters of bathing and washing (which are normally conducted with little to no clothing) are more usually considered to be private affairs, encountered in dedicated spaces within the home, like the bathroom (Twigg, 1999), much like matters of menstruation. To be partially or fully naked at the allotment as a woman *and* in a bath is deemed unusual, not least because of the gazes that may bestow those bodies, but also because of the potential remarks which might be made to and about them.

Similarly to Suzie and her renegade act of using menstrual blood on the compost, and not too unlike William himself, Lizzie is acting against the norm by bathing, whether fully or partially nude, in her bath on her plot. Yet, with Lizzie, I argue this is considered more unusual precisely because it is an act that is undertaken with a body in its almost-naked form, rather than it being necessarily about the bath and the act of cleansing itself. The contention does not sit with the “hillbilly hot tub”, but within the presentation of Lizzie’s body, and this would likely not be the case if this was, for instance, William’s plot (and body), instead.

Here, yet again, such experiences and people lead us to raise more questions and point out more inequalities regarding whose body belongs in these allotment spaces, and in what form, as well as who holds power in terms of how their bodies should be displayed, and whose bodies should be covered up, which is particularly important and contentious with the knowledge that some men do indeed potter on their allotments, naked.

### **5.3. Concluding remarks**

This chapter demonstrates that interrogating bodies and the ways in which women’s bodies encounter the allotment is crucial in understanding their lived experiences within this landscape. This is not simply thinking about how bodies exist in these spaces, doing the manual work in the allotment like the digging, burying, pulling, cutting, mowing, but looking beyond this and acknowledging the ways bodies exist and move within the allotment space, embodying lived experiences, histories, and stories because of their *being*: their existence. Moreover, it is about bodies that must change, move, sidestep, and navigate their way around the allotment with their bodies (and other bodies) in mind, conscious of their needs, demands, and expectations. Here, power is important, and we can reflect on the ways different bodies hold different types of power in these spaces, where some bodies mean more than others, where some bodies are ignored and invisibilised, and where some bodies can take up more space or dominate. This chapter also shows that whether it is through the personal embodied experience of immersing in water and bathing at the allotment, whether it is nude bodies, or whether it is through needing toilets, thinking and looking to the physical, tangible bodies that navigate, exist, and utilise allotment

spaces is both important and imperative to our understanding of these landscapes, and the people within them.

Bathrooms form the foundational message within this chapter. Bathroom access, and especially toilets and toilet provision, can seem trivial to many, with the lived experience of the menstruating, bleeding body often trivialised or made into humour. The reality of this bodily experience, however, can be physically and emotionally demanding and complex. Women are often taught both implicitly and explicitly that their bodies are shameful, dirty and taboo, and that the processes that occur because of being an active body, like urination, menstruation, and pregnancy, ought to be undertaken in silence, with well-kept but invisible maintenance. Places, like many allotments, that fail to host and provide toilet facilities deafeningly reinforce the burden that is placed on these bodies that bleed and need toilets that they must find solutions to their own bodily needs, in turn inadvertently quietening the need for these facilities and through this, reiterating the ways there is no necessity surrounding the facilities for these needs, and how invisible they should be.

This, in turn, affects how women navigate everyday allotment life, both on an everyday level and on a deeper level, too. The paucity of provision reflects our wider societal hierarchies, demonstrating the extent to which many patriarchal structures invisibilise women's agency and vitality and, in turn, diminishes the opportunity for these women to own and embrace their embodiment and experience (Owen, 2022; Pickering and Wiseman, 2019). Not only does being unable to access a bathroom tell women that they are unwelcome guests in certain spaces, but it also fails to allow them to exist fully as active agents in these landscapes, just as civilisation has historically barred women from existing in other parts of society. Moreover, this lack of toilets raises questions regarding what the alternative is for these people. Are they to bleed out and leak unceremoniously during a heavy period? Should they, like Annie suggests, piss themselves? Whether the answer is to build their own compostable toilet, devise a method with a trug and hand sanitiser, or to simply leave the space once their need for the bathroom outweighs being at the allotment, women who face these hurdles have no option but to (simply) find the solutions themselves, ensuring they maintain their own cleanliness and hygiene, and their own well-being.

Extending beyond the toilet, this chapter also demonstrates that bathrooms are not just pertinent to the allotment site as a landscape of dirt and mess but are also places where people – these women – can work to be clean. Allotments are often considered sites of muck and dirt, yet with imagination and handiwork, like Lizzie’s “hillbilly hot tub”, they too become a place of cleanliness and purity. They are sites where bodies can sweat, dig, and toil, but so too can they be immersed in clean water, bathed and purified, returning to their original, cleansed state. Bathroom spaces within this allotment context, then, further disrupt the traditional understandings that we hold of these spaces, becoming landscapes that we can consider as ones of radical transformation; disrupting not only what we assume of the allotment space, but also what we understand as happening there. This leads us to the next discussion chapter for this thesis, where I explore *becoming* at the allotment.

# Chapter Six || Digging at the Data (II)

‘becoming’



Photograph 6.1. *Fauna amongst the flowers*

## 6.0. Chapter introduction

How people identify in different environments and landscapes, both within their public and private lives, informs how people build and develop feelings of belonging to spaces; where, how and why they feel attachment, emotion, and connection. Here, this research highlights the significance of the ways people identify, the nuance within this, and how this can impact the ways individuals experience, navigate, and orient themselves within specific places: in this instance, the allotment.

Across this fieldwork, through speaking and questioning with these participants, it became quickly apparent that there was nuance in how these women see themselves and how they identify within these environments. Phrases and musings that cropped up a lot when talking to the participants about their allotment identity included ‘gardener’ (e.g., Lizzie), ‘allotmenteer’ (e.g., Dawn), ‘grower’ (e.g. Vivien), and ‘digger’ (e.g., Heather), along with phrases such as ‘working the land’ (e.g., Lorena) and ‘someone who is trying to grow vegetables’ (e.g., Annie). With this, we discussed identity within the allotment and how this was linked to words that their community were using, or was linked to their feelings, processes and/or their methods they employed at the allotment (like no-dig approaches or being a novice). We talked, too, about why this might be, with their experiences and their reflections on their own level of expertise (or not) being a topic of frequent conversation.

This chapter discusses and interrogates this in more depth, working to dismantle many stereotypes that are associated with those who tend to allotments. First, this chapter will explore how different participants have different ways of identifying themselves at their allotment, why this is important, and the ways they may experience their plots as a result. Then, it will look to more specific elements of the ways they build their identities in these spaces, focusing on elements of expertise and skill, which can be viewed through a gendered lens. Then, this chapter will move to explore these nuances in more depth, looking to how the allotment and identity work in sync by focusing on two participants in particular, Fauna and Lizzie, to discuss the ways in which who they are and their senses of being at their plots are presented through their sheds and their activities at the allotment, which goes beyond simply tending to vegetation.



## 6.1. Identities at the allotment

As mentioned in chapter two, allotments are rented plots of land that we can consider as third spaces (Soja, 1996; DeSilvey, 2003). Here, there are rules to abide by, contractual obligations to fulfil, and leases to be paid, yet many people who have allotments feel a sense of ownership, and that the plots are *their* spaces, where they can build and grow what *they* want. This area is murky, and whilst research such as Moore et al. (2014) have worked to disentangle this, coining plots as *privatepublic* spaces (Moore et al., 2014: 327, emphasis in the original), the blurred space of this landscape can, for some, impact how they feel about these landscapes, which in turn affects the ways they develop feelings of belonging to their allotments. Internalised questions can arise surrounding whether they do or do not have control of the plot, and fears regarding eviction can change and influence use and engagement of the space, as well as what they grow and build there. More, this can inform how these women identify as people within these spaces. Some see themselves as gardeners, doing gardening, others see themselves as caretakers of land that will soon be passed on, while others still see this without such depth, simply seeing themselves as people ‘just’ growing food. Importantly, the ways in which people identify within this green growing space are not linear or scripted, but is personal, flexible, changeable, and fluid.

### 6.1.1. Women in the garden

Within the literature there is a great deal of difference in how people who use and lease allotments are considered, as well as the references to the land itself, using an array of terms including ‘allotment’, ‘community garden’, ‘urban garden’, ‘gardener’, ‘allotmenteer’, and ‘urban allotment holders’ (see Buckingham, 2005; Crouch and Ward, 1989; Moore et al., 2014; Braga Bizarria, Palomino-Schalscha and Stupples, 2022; White, 2011; Grabbe, Ball and Goldstein, 2013; Genter et al., 2015; Kettle, 2014; Dobson et al., 2021; Corcoran and Kettle, 2019; Degnen, 2009). This lack of consistency, along with the nuance in definitions that I have already established in terms of reference to these spaces in chapter two, reflects that there is no clear-cut definition that we can understand from words like ‘garden’ and ‘allotment’ in relation to the verb, ‘gardener’, which is complicated. The privacy of gardens seems to be what differentiates the ‘garden’ from the ‘allotment’, as compared to allotments which are often open and communal, and yet this is not applicable to those allotments that are concealed by privet with their own private entrance

way. From talking to the participants, I ascertain that to understand these spaces and how these women experience and navigate them, we need to consider and (attempt to) untangle how they see themselves and how they identify within these landscapes. As Bonnes and Secchiaroli (1995: 154) maintain, the environment influences people and people influence the environment, creating a “simultaneous reciprocity of influence” regarding how people see themselves, both in relation to their environment and others, and how the environment influences them.

Looking to how the participants identify, from a self-identity point of view and in terms of what they *feel* they identify as at the allotment, it is not only about making distinctions between individuals, but extends to material objects, as well as spaces and places and the meanings that become imbued within them (Proshansky, Fabian and Kaminoff, 1983; Tuan, 1977). Here, identity theory suggests that behaviour as well as environment are linked through a form of shared meaning (Stryker and Burke, 2000), which is an internal, subjective concept of oneself. Within this, people identify with specific groups that are active within demarcated spaces, wherein people internalise the norms, traditions, and cultures that are embedded within these social identities (and places), acting in accordance with them. As highlighted in chapter two, allotments are places steeped in culture and tradition (Crouch and Ward, 1989; Crouch, 1989; Crouch, 1993), so it is unsurprising that allotments have codes and transitions that help inform people about their identity. What is interesting here, however, is how the myriads of words (like ‘gardener’ and ‘gardening’, ‘allotment’ and ‘allotmenteer’ and so forth) are used, how they are understood inwardly and outwardly, and what it means for people and their identities and ways they feel they belong (or, perhaps, do not belong).

### 6.1.2. Spatial occupation

Crouch (2010: 116) argues that people can experience landscapes that allows them to “imagine one’s place in the world” and this was true of the participants in the research. How the participants identified within these spaces tells a story on several levels, including how they feel they belong both at their plot and within the wider allotment community, where they see themselves in relation to others, and how different elements can inform and impact these

identities, especially in terms of the seemingly unspoken hierarchies, such as time of allotment service, as well as skills and expertise.

All people feel the need to belong, and this sense of belonging allows us to be part of something that we can experience through our identity (Peter, Peter and Catapan, 2015). In turn, our sense of identity is integral to the ways in which we feel we belong and have a sense of belonging in spaces, and importantly, we can belong in several different ways (Yuval-Davis, 2006). According to Yuval-Davis (2006), our identities are narratives or stories that we tell ourselves and to others about who we are, and who we are not. Such identities can be collective or individual, and they can relate directly or indirectly to our own perceptions of ourselves, or to others' perceptions of what it means to be part of a group, or a collective. Narratives can "shift and change, be contested, be multiple. They can relate to the past, to a myth of origin, or can be aimed at explaining the present" (Yuval-Davis, 2006: 203), and this multiplicity of different interactions of personal identities connects to various social contexts (Schechtman, 2014). Here, social identities can emerge because of the connections we generate and experience between people and places, especially when placed within a personal historical context (Harding, 1991). More than this, the presentation of our identities to others can alter the judgements they make. These presentations, Marya Schechtman (2014) argues, are important because they can quickly tell someone else something about us, such as what we might be doing within certain spaces, placing people with value and belonging to certain locations and environments.

The history of the allotment is a key part of understanding how different people identify, feel a sense of belonging, and experience these spaces. We know that, traditionally, the allotment is rooted within a masculinised environment (Crouch and Ward, 1989; Moore et al., 2014; Buckingham, 2005) and as chapter five (and chapter seven) demonstrate, this tradition and way of allotment life can influence allotment setups and facilities, as well as relationships surrounding bodies, the more-than-human, and boundaries. How we exist within spaces influences how we feel we belong to them, with spaces also influencing how we build identities within them; both of which influence, direct, and inform the meaning(s) we can build within and take from them. This also influences who we feel we are within these environments, and gender is important here. Leslie Kern (2019) notes that gender can influence how we move through spaces, how we

live our everyday lives, and facilitates the choices available to us within society. Writing about herself she says, “my gender is more than my body, but my body is the site of my lived experience” (Kern, 2019: 8). In this way, being at the allotment as people who identify as women informs much of how the participants feel they belong to these spaces. Moreover, discussing and interrogating this deconstructs many traditional masculinised allotment assumptions, illuminating them as important feminist spaces. Unpacking the nuance that forms the differences in the ways these women operate and occupy their plots, as well as their differences and similarities in terms of their identity and belonging, shows the gendered agendas that I argue are apparent in the allotment landscape, and is an important part of understanding these spaces in terms of women’s access, acknowledgement, and experience.

Before discussing the ways in which the participants identify at their plots, it is important to consider how these women occupy their allotment plots more generally. A simple approach to broadly understand how people develop their identities and the ways they belong to their allotment sites is by considering how these spaces are occupied. Here, the ways people exist within such spaces, including their motivations and lived experiences, for instance, inevitably impacts how people see themselves as part of the landscape. Stenner, Church and Bhatti (2012) suggest that there are four ways in which people can occupy home garden spaces, and I argue that this can be applied similarly to the allotment. Specifically, I argue this based on the conversations and time spent with the participants, without losing sight of the fact that the garden and the allotment are (and should be viewed as) separate spaces that are experienced differently.

For Stenner, Church and Bhatti (2012) the four modes of occupation are; (i) a *naturalistic* occupation, whereby we inhabit the literal enclosed space that gardens present us with, (ii) a *nostalgic* occupation, where we occupy the space but the space also occupies us through memory and reflection, (iii) a *pragmatic* occupation, where the garden space is for practical work, where weeding and digging and planting is prioritised, and (iv) a *mimetic* occupation, which considers the interpersonal dynamics and ways people imbue space through social activities. They describe the garden space here as a place for social events, and a place of dynamic and social displays, as well as spaces of power and status.

Generally, all four of these modes of occupation were witnessed across the participants' stories and experiences, and within their allotment spaces, with many of the women showing occupancy across multiple stages. For example, people like Fauna, Annie and Lizzie all enjoy their allotment space for the enclosed quiet their plots provide; they enjoy the naturalistic occupation of their sites. Fauna and Lizzie, however, also very much enjoy the physical work that comes with their plots', like the digging, lifting and planting (the pragmatic occupation space), whilst Lizzie further enjoys elements of mimetic occupation, organising various social activities at her allotment. Similarly, Heather and Lucy both experience elements of nostalgic occupation, with Lucy recalling how her father took her to his plot when she was young, while Heather speaks of having a penchant for soil and being mucky from childhood. Both Lucy and Heather enjoy their allotment now for a similar pragmatic occupation of the space, expressing that they both loves planting and then digging up potatoes. For Dizzie, she experiences the allotment across most of these modes; first as someone who sees her allotment as a way of life, whereby the nutritious produce is for the family (a naturalistic occupation), but also as someone who enjoys the pragmatic occupation with seed sowing, growing, and digging. She also occupies the space through nostalgia, taking enjoyment from reflecting on times of travel around the world where she held different types of gardening spaces in different countries, with different climates and landscapes. For Dizzie, then, there is complexity in how she occupies her allotment; the practicality and tangibility of produce are deeply interwoven with her memories of places she has been and lived. This is unsurprising given she has occupied her current plot for over thirty years, never mind her adventures elsewhere.

Understanding that the allotment can be considered within these modes of occupation (Stenner, Church and Bhatti, 2012) and more specifically, seeing that this makes sense contextually, is important because it shows that the allotment is a space that is beyond just a place to grow, and is somewhere that people exist within (naturalist), linked to themselves (pragmatic), in relation to their histories (nostalgic), and their personalities (mimetic). Within this thesis, there is clear commonality between participants in how they engage with their allotment spaces, across enjoying the space for the fresh air and tranquillity, while reliving childhood pasts and thinking fondly of times and adventures in the dirt and with the ground, through to enjoying the practical elements of the allotment and the produce it gives, as well as the social elements including

friendships and various allotment social events. Here, where the participants diverge, is in how they see themselves and how they operate in these spaces, along with who they are (or not) within these (sometimes walled, sometimes open) landscapes.

### 6.1.3. Nuance in labels

Potential nuance with the participant's identities as gardeners (or not) was not something that, initially, I planned to talk about, or that I thought would be a point of discussion or contention. As mentioned in chapter three, the question occurred within the interview schedule following my first interview with Gwen (04/09/2022). She raised how she has shifted from being a non-gardener to a gardener, and the notion that this is potentially transitional and transient, I thought, was interesting. Having talked to Gwen about it and hearing how changeable this seemed, and as a reflexive researcher, I decided to then ask everyone about whether they see themselves as 'gardeners'. Doing this would allow me to see how identity in the allotment can change, as well as the nuance within this. After only speaking about this with a handful of the participants, it was soon clear that this question would be answered in numerous ways: some had a confident agreement that they see themselves as 'a gardener'; some debated and queried the question, working out their identities as we talked; and some gave the question serious pause for thought and reflection.

For a few participants, they answered the question, "Do you identify as a gardener?" quickly. When I asked Nell, who has leased two plots over four years, she said "Ummm...yeah? [shrug]". She seemed unsure, so I re-phrased the question, showing more rationale with the question itself. I asked if referring to her as 'a woman who gardens' made any difference to her, and she replied, "I wouldn't be fussed by the distinction" . When I asked her to expand on this, she said that the word 'garden' itself did not have any specific connotations, and for her, she is a gardener. Nell was not alone in this, with Christina, Lizzie, Mary and Fauna all similarly answering quickly and confidently that they consider themselves as "gardeners".

For Oakley, who has had her plot for two years, the way she identifies as a gardener comes from putting several pieces together, like a puzzle which makes up her wider identity from parts. She said:

That's an interesting question you ask...I guess I am a gardener in that I have a garden and I tend it. I plant, grow, harvest, and enjoy. I also love to learn about what grows, give everything a name, photograph, draw. I also love to just be there, see, hear, smell, feel, taste. So yes, I'm a gardener!

(Oakley, WhatsApp, 07/09/2022)

Other participants gave the question similar rumination, agreeing that they were gardeners, but pondering over the question. Annie, who has held her plot for a year, was hesitant before deciding to agree, reasoning her answer:

Ohhh [pause] I really don't think I've thought about it! Hmm. I mean, yes.

I guess? I mean, I garden. It's what I do. It's something I enjoy. It's something that if I don't do it, I miss it (Annie, interview, 17/09/2022)

I asked Annie if she would rather identify as something like 'a woman who gardens' rather than 'a gardener', she responded:

Hmm [pause] I perhaps hadn't thought about the ways an allotment can be gendered and in gardening in a public space and what that means. I think about being a woman in society...but I don't ever really think about it. I know I'm not not a woman, and don't think about it that way...I think [pause] I think I'm more aware of my gender at the allotment than I am in my own garden. If I'm in my own garden I'm probably a gardener, but at the allotment, I think I'm a woman who gardens. It's more salient, I think (Annie, interview, 17/09/2022)

Here, Annie shows that the question garners reflection and thinking about what it is about the allotment space that means something more to her than, say, her home garden. Her lack of certainty speaks to the nuance that sits within how "salient" this sense of identity is, which is also reflected through the way she feels she fits at the allotment in stark contrast to the home garden.



In the home garden, this identity is more certain. The open, shared landscape of the allotment itself can cause the edges of self-identity to become blurred or confused, even though some would argue the same skill is being employed on both sites. Yet, the private space of the home garden, which does not tend to be shared and where there is little tendency for the comparison of skill, knowledge, or know-how, seems to change how people see themselves.

Similarly, Lucy, who has held her plot for five years, also reasoned her stance on her identity at the allotment based on location, juxtaposing the allotment to her home garden. Her identity as a gardener comes from having both spaces to grow in but is much more contingent on having a garden at home. She said:

Yeah [pause] I would say I do now. I spend quite a lot of time either doing it or thinking about it or planning it [laughs] I guess also I have the capacity to garden as well. I think even if I wasn't doing that much gardening because I know I could do it, because I have the allotment, but I also have a garden at home with a raised bed, so I feel like even if I wasn't very active I would still kind of use the label. But I guess aside from the practical, I'm interested in the stuff around it, like [pause] yeah, the theories and the practices and how you grow and why it's good and that sort of stuff...I just don't associate the label with just the allotment. If I only had the allotment, I don't think I would put the label gardener with that. It's more like with the home, the ornamental stuff...and I do both...if I just had the allotment, I would say I was an allotment holder (Lucy, interview, 04/10/2022)

Similarly, Vivien felt like her identity as a “grower” was linked more steadily to the location of the allotment in direct comparison to her garden at home. She said:

I think I'm a grower. I think that's how I would describe myself. I'm a grower. I grow things. I don't see my plot as a garden in any way. It's not pretty. Sometimes it's very pretty but it's not there to be pretty like a

garden. Or to be aesthetically pleasing...but yeah, I don't think of it as a garden (Vivien, interview, 08/10/2022)

Some participants struggled more with the question. For Heather, who has had an allotment for several years, she found it difficult to answer. She said:

Hmm [pause] I don't know. I don't think I would say that [pause] I wouldn't say that gardening was my hobby, and I think that's because of my association of the home, but I would say [pause] like, I have an allotment. Yeah...The allotment is such a normal activity and something that everyone should have access to. Making it like, I don't know [pause] you know? Sorry. I don't know (Heather, interview, 03/10/2022)

She later went on to say:

I don't think it's part of my identity as it is for other people?... I think I see it as another aspect of like, you know, the like [pause] you might learn to drive a car and it's just something that you do, or like [pause] you learn to swim, and you might swim [laughs] ... I think for me it's the doing, it's not like... I think it's the doing, it's not like, I don't know. Again (Heather, interview, 03/10/2022)

From our conversations more broadly, I knew that Heather found this a difficult question to answer because having an allotment can be seen as a privilege, linked to social class, race, access, and inequality. Having come to know Heather, she is active within her community, is very aware of social justice, and works hard for positive social action. To her, as we can see in the quote above, the allotment is a place everyone should be able to access, affording everyone the opportunity to grow their own food and experience the abundance of benefit from using and spending time in an allotment. By making it a part of her identity, Heather, it seems, feels like it widens the gap between those who can access allotments, like herself, and those who cannot, many of whom live in the neighbourhood where she lives, which is a multicultural part of a large city. Because she does not believe that this injustice of access is acceptable or justified, making the

allotment and the allotment culture part of her identity goes against this position, and what she is striving hard for in terms of equality and equity.

This was also reflected in how Heather spoke about looking like “a wanker” at the allotment, and more specifically, an allotment wanker with allotment paraphernalia. This conversation came up within the discussion of two of her photographs and evolved from some of our earlier conversations (fieldnotes, 10/08/2022).



**Photograph 6.2.** *Heather's allotment trolley*

For Heather, there is irony in her allotment trolley, as:

It's a festival trolley. We got it for festivals but now I use it mostly for the allotment and I thought that's a funny point of middle age [laughs] its very practical. I look a prat but it's very [pause] sensible (Heather, interview, 03/10/2022)

However, using it means more than this private irony that seeds from her youth, and is centred in how other people will see it and form judgements of who she is:

I think other people will look at me with a trolley full of plants and think of me as a hardcore gardener, but I just think it's funny that's full of plants and compost when it used to be full of cans and vodka (Heather, interview, 03/10/2022)

This, as we have seen from the literature (Stenner, Church and Bhatti 2012; Yuval-Davies, 2006; Schechtman, 2014), is about spatial occupation and how this links to how we see ourselves within the doing of activities, but it is also about judgements from others. Materialities like the trolley are signifiers that suggest Heather lives her life in a certain way, with certain privileges, suggesting she might be of a certain class or status. We spoke about this more with another photograph:



**Photograph 6.3.** Heather's basket full of harvest (complete with yellow socks)

She said:

Harvest basket! [pause] it was a bit late [pause] sweet peas, gooseberries, raspberry, some kind of jostaberry, potatoes [pause] and my yellow socks

[laughs] swanning about with your harvest basket [pause] I feel like I look like a wanker (Heather, interview, 03/10/2022)

Here, I asked her if she was conscious of looking like an “allotment wanker”, which seeded from a discussion was had in relation to social media earlier in the fieldwork (fieldnotes, 10/08/2022). She said:

Yeah, because I think I do. Despite what I think and my opinions I can definitely see [pause] and particularly like, so sometimes [pause] I get accused of being a hipster. I have tattoos and you know, wear colours, and regardless of any kind of original definition of a hipster [pause] and I think I am a bit conscious of looking like a stereotype that I have negative feelings towards, but like not enough to change my appearance or laser my tattoos [laughs]...I don't want to look like a wanker. I think like [pause] I don't know [pause] oh god [laughs]...am I ashamed of being a gardener? Hmmm [pause] I think it's because I assume that other people have the same stereotypes that I have, and I don't want to be [pause] you know [pause] be that. You know. And I should probably acknowledge that most people don't give that any thought. To be fair when I walk between here and home, no one says anything, but if I notice anything it's their faces where it's like this cute smile where they're like “aw, look at the vegetable lady” [laughs] (Heather, interview, 03/10/2022)

The way Heather appears, along with how that appearance tells a certain story about her is a point of contention and is magnified when we look to how she feels regarding the allotment as a space of privilege. Here, the labels associated with allotments and gardening tell a different story, and one she would prefer to be muted, or at least, less obvious, which is emphasised with wider current cultural trend and popularity surrounding plants, gardening, and the growing and self-provisioning of food (Burke et al., 2022).

For other participants, like Hen, their identity at the allotment is linked to space, but is complicated by the way that she feels that the allotment is something that she does, rather than is. She said:

Well, I think 'allotmenteer' feels more natural. I think 'gardener' is quite specific and it makes me think more about a garden that's associated with a house...hmm [pause] that's not true with what it means but it's just the association I have. In the same way that I am a woman, but I don't really think about it very much...I am a woman, and I am a gardener...but I don't necessarily frame either of those things to myself. It's just [pause] an externally understood label that describes a being or an action that is kind of a stencil....I think I probably would say 'allotmenteer' but I think there's also, or there can be, a resistance to attach any kind of label that is a doing label if you don't feel sufficiently proficient...well, I'm not a gardener because I'm not a professional or I haven't done it for a certain amount of time or I'm not proficient in such a way...I think I prefer [pause] to think of it [pause] as a verb rather than an identifying label....It's to do with the *doing* [emphasis]. When I'm gardening, I'm a gardener, but when I'm not, I'm just a person...it's what I do therefore it's what I am! [laughs] (Hen, interview, 08/10/2022)

Interestingly, both Annie and Hen comment that they have not really thought about their identity in the allotment in general, nor in terms of their gender, because of how they naturally do not think about this in their everyday lives, unless they need to. This highlights the ways we, as people and as women, exist in the world in ways that can feel mechanistic, usual, and every day, without thinking about our positions, identities, or our genders, and how these elements can inform each other without our conscious knowing. Our bodies, in this way, are the vessels by which we exist in the world. Perhaps, more than her gender, Hen takes some umbrage with aligning the allotment with her identity because of the connotations this has with how skilled and experienced someone may need to be or to demonstrate. This expertise or knowledge base seems, in some ways, to justify the appropriate or warranted label: those who are skilled are a gardener, but those who are novices are not skilled and are, therefore, not gardeners. By aligning

her identity in this space more with the *doing* than the *being*, Hen (and Heather) work against these stereotypes (and assumptions) that people can make about them with regards to these spaces.

Risman (2009), in this instance, would argue that spaces like the allotment are landscapes where the social structure of gender can be undone directly through non-normative gender interactions, institutions, and activities. Others, such as Butler (2004) and West and Zimmerman (1987), suggest that gender can both be done and undone in these contexts (and spaces).

Through unsettling the ways in which they can present themselves and perform, and in turn, *doing* gender, women can reshape hegemonic expectations and beliefs, subverting and depriving reproduction of these traditional gendered expectations and actions. Allotments, and the practice of gardening (or not), is a complex space and potentially unstable activity, with entangled, messy elements of both a performative space and action. Gendered expectations are important with this because of the rooted traditions that often embalm the allotment, and with that, 'gardening' becomes more than an act of *doing* gender (and with such, *being* a gardener). More specifically, because skills, knowledge, and expertise hold a deeply gendered division in many social and professional places within society, they are factors which can be seen to influence how people experience, navigate, and perform within certain spaces, and as part of these social institutions. The allotment is an imbued, embodied space that is governed by hegemonic and societal expectations and teachings, with much of this praxis dictated by the expectations of women in which is frequently determined by men, who we know are historically more likely to be the traditional figure within the allotment (Crouch and Ward, 1989; Perez-Vazquez, Anderson and Rogers, 2010; Kettle, 2014), although, of course, women too can do this. As such, as Hen highlights, looking to skills, knowledge and expertise informs much of how people will (or will not) identify in these landscapes.

#### 6.1.4. Skills, knowledge and expertise

Hen raises an important point in terms of the connection between skill, experience, expertise and novice status in relation to how women associate and identify at the plot. Gardening in its more general and traditional form, as discussed in chapter two, can be characterised as a leisure activity and a distinct form of outdoor recreation, historically taking place in the home garden (Bhatti



and Church, 2000, 2004). Often, these gardens were seen as spaces for the reproduction of caretaking activity (Mayrhofer, 2018), where a division of labour could be witnessed (Braga Bizarria, Palomino-Schalscha and Stupples, 2022), with men carrying out the harder, heavier tasks and women doing the softer, easy duties (Taylor 2016).

Through a leisure studies lens, gardening and identity can be understood using work by Robert Stebbins (1997, 2005), who suggests that through using a categorisation process, leisure can be classed as ‘serious’, ‘casual’, or ‘project-based’. ‘Serious leisure’ is the systematic pursuit of an activity that an individual regards as substantial, interesting, and fulfilling while also acquiring specific and special skills, knowledge, and experience. In contrast to this, ‘casual leisure’ includes activities that are immediately rewarding, are reasonably short-lived, require no special training or knowledge, and are often engaged with for pleasure or enjoyment. Lastly, ‘project-based leisure’ constitutes activities that are short-term, infrequent, creative, and carried out in free-time. Alongside Stebbins’ work, gardening can be also understood using identity-based activities theory, and the work of Paul Ghee (2013, 2015, 2016, 2017), which looks to the ways we use language and what we call ourselves, such as gardener, birdwatcher, or fan-fiction writer (Ghee, 2016) and consider how these labels align with our actions. Importantly, such labels are freely chosen, rather than externally applied. Such work is important because, when thinking about third spaces (Soja, 1996; DeSilvey, 2003), work at allotments is not always viewed or experienced as a leisure activity. Gardening blurs the nature of the conceptual divide between work and leisure (Bhatti and Church, 2000, 2004) because it involves a range of activities which can be viewed as chores for some, and pleasant activities for others, and this in turn can change how we see ourselves, and what labels we might attach. A good example of this is with digging. When I asked Heather what her favourite part of the allotment is, she said:

Digging!...I don’t get it. I get people with limited mobility get frustrated by it, but I love it. It’s not a chore. I mean, yeah, it hurts and stuff. I get to the point where I’m like when can I start digging this up! Lots of people hate it but I love it! (Heather, interview, 03/10/2022)

Lucy felt similarly, with digging being a favoured activity, especially for potatoes:

I love digging for potatoes. I don't know if I took a photo of it, but I meant to take one when I was digging them up. It's like finding golden eggs in the ground. Its great! (Lucy, interview, 04/10/2022)

Lizzie, when asked what her favourite part of the gardening in the allotment was, felt similarly, acknowledging that for her the physical labour was part of the real joy:

Hmmm [pause] I think it's the hard work but it's also the moment after the hard work where you can be bloody proud of yourself. You've put in the hours, you know you have laboured, and it's not even...the harvest part, although that is part of it...it's just knowing that you know, you have achieved this (Lizzie, interview, 06/10/2022)

For many of the participants, the hard work and “graft” (Ettie, interview, 07/10/2022) is much of where meaning lies within the allotment, and with the labels they feel associated with. Digging, uplifting, rooting, weeding are all tasks that go on in these spaces that are expected, anticipated, but sometimes enjoyed and sometimes dreaded. There is no ubiquitous experience of joy or distaste within these sites. Rather, there are jobs at the allotment that need doing weekly, monthly, and seasonally and much of this is accepted for these women, yet their differences lie in how they see these tasks, and where the enjoyment grows. For Fauna, for instance, her favourite part is the seedlings, and seeing them grow:

I like sowing the seeds, I get a lot of satisfaction from sowing the seeds... I think it's the success from sowing to seedling that really pleases me, so [pause] that initial [pause] YES! (Fauna, interview, 12/09/2022)

Previous literature like Bhatti and Church (2000) and Parry, Glover and Shinew (2005) suggests that women like Heather and Lucy enjoy those tasks more synonymous with the traditional men in garden spaces, which are seen as the hard, labour-intensive work, whilst Fauna enjoys the softer activities, like sowing seeds, yet Fauna looks after her allotment primarily alone. The digging and the uprooting and the heavy lifting are still done by her, the difference is just in where the joy lies, rather than what tasks are being avoided.

Acknowledging this bifurcation and diversity in enjoyment (or not) of tasks is important, especially when looking to activity-based identities, because it helps further our understanding of how people organise, experience, and relate to activities that they take part in (Gee, 2016, 2017), as well as how seriously they take them (Stebbins, 1997, 2005). Taking this thinking, we can look to how different approaches to the allotment can influence how people see themselves within these landscapes, and what this means for how they feel, and how they encounter the space. Encouragingly, Patricia Kettle (2014) conducted research which explores motivations for investing in allotment gardens, and within this, whether there is a 'typical' allotment holder. Kettle's (2014) work demonstrates that differences in approaches to the allotment, including how skills, methods, and motivations can influence the ways people carry out their allotment tasks, as well as what they actively do in the allotment, how their allotments become imbued with meaning for them, and how this can influence their time spent in these spaces, along with what they grow, and what they take away from their plots, both in terms of harvest, and in terms of experiences of (re)connection to the land, and to others.

Similarly, within this research, there is nuance across people's feelings of identity, and with that, their sense of belonging at the allotment, which links to what they do there, and this is more important to some people than for others. Moreover, people's constructions of themselves, both inwardly and outwardly, can be linked to the ways in which people may feel (or not feel) secure or threatened (Yuval-Davis, 2006). Several participants, like Hen, discussed how what they feel in terms of identifying as a gardener (or not) within their allotment space is deeply linked to expertise, knowledge, and skill. Often, such participants would compare themselves to other allotmenters/gardeners, either on their plots or within popular culture, as well as talk about the hierarchy that often exists, silently, within these green spaces.

Both Wanna and Suzie positioned how they felt about their identities at their respective allotments based on skills and expertise, but in relation to how they do this within other elements of their life. For Wanna, who has had her plot for twenty years, when asked if she identifies as a gardener, she said, "Hmmm [pause] I garden, so I suppose I am a gardener? I sew and I call myself a sewist...so, let's say yes!". For her, whether she is a gardener or not does necessarily

relate to the allotment specifically, but instead to how she positions herself as a “do-er” of other things; it is relative.

Suzie felt similarly, but for her it worked in the opposite direction. She said:

Ohhhh! This is interesting! I’ve never really thought about it. I don’t really label myself as anything like that? I don’t know. I’ve got an art degree but I wouldn’t say I was an artist [laughs, pause] (Suzie, interview, 12/09/2022)

Here, knowledge is important and is the foundational building block for both Wanna and Suzie, shaping how (and why) they identify (or not) at the plot. This was seen with other participants, too. Dawn, who has had her plot with her partner for three years, discussed how unsure she was regarding her identity at the allotment. She spoke about how expertise was important to her identity and linked this, once more, to knowledge and knowing, saying:

Ohhhh, that’s an interesting one!...Hmmm, I think I’d probably identify more as woman who gardens purely because I feel like I’m still so much at the beginning of like, everything there is to learn about gardening. I’m such a novice. If I was a gardener, I’m a novice gardener. I’ve not had enough time to absorb all of the knowledge I need to absorb...there’s always more to learn and always more to read because I can describe myself a certain way or because I can take on that label (Dawn, interview, 26/09/2022)

Heather was similarly unsure, ruminating on knowledge and expertise which links to profession. She said:

Some people refer to themselves as growers which I think is really wanky, because it’s like, people who do it professionally describe themselves as growers so when you’re talking about Miriam’s 12 cucumbers, that’s not the same as the field of sugar beet. It’s not the same! It’s a false equivalent.

So I don't have a word [laughter]. I've seen allotmenteer too, but I don't really like it (Heather, interview, 03/10/2022)

For Heather, how she identifies at the allotment is in comparison to other sectors of agriculture, and her focus is more on the by-product and the produce, rather than knowledge or approaches taken. By positioning others who she feels are more suitable and equipped to call themselves growers with a focus on the rewards, she draws a clear boundary of what the allotment means to her and how it forms her identity, rather than it being about what information people learn, or which methods of note they use, which other participants focused on. Here, there are rules that determine identity, and who can and cannot be attributed or claim certain labels, or within certain understandings of what the term can mean.

Fern, on the other hand, immediately linked her identity as a gardener (or rather, her non-identity as a gardener) to her level of expertise and what she knows. When asked if she identifies as a gardener, she laughed a lot and then said "No! I don't feel like I have any expertise!". Given her certainty and the way she found the question humorous, I proceeded to ask her if this would make her feel differently if she could identify as a woman who grows instead. She said:

Umm, no. I don't know. I sort of feel like allotments are not gardens.

There's a real distinction there. And I feel like gardens are, I mean not that there isn't a level of planning in the allotment, but there's some differences ...with allotments there's a purpose, it's [pause] productive or, you know, even though that's even actually sort of the financial incentive to do it, because it isn't financially beneficial, there's something about, like the excitement. I'm still excited when something grows. I grew that from seed!

That blows my mind...it's just so exciting. I get so excited. I just didn't think I would be able to do it! (Fern, interview, 03/10/2022)

For Fern, how she sees herself on her plot is linked both to what she knows, but also how novel and exciting it is. For her, it seems that she will be an experienced, knowledgeable gardener with expertise when the process of the growing becomes familiar, less exciting, and, in some ways, mundane. From speaking with these participants, from spending time with them, and from

getting to know them, I argue that this excitement and passion is what makes them the experts, with the skills and the knowledge, even though many of them protest vehemently not to be. Like Dawn, this excitement and this desire for knowledge is what drives them to learn more, to try new methods or approaches, and to develop their knowledges to *become* experts. Without this excitement, which fuels their passions and their consistent pleasure of planting and harvesting, these women's plots (and the women themselves) would look vastly different.

### 6.1.5. Gender and expertise

Annie and Hen both alluded to their gender when discussing identity at their plots. This is important in relation to the ways we develop identities, but this is especially so when discussed with elements of knowledge, expertise, and confidence, which is often gendered.

As I mentioned in chapter two, the media can play a key part in the ways in which we see the allotment and who should (or should not) belong there, along with how people determine how they should (or should not) see themselves within this landscape. As such, the participants often used popular culture as a baseline or a reference point to position themselves. Standards are set by programmes like *Gardner's World*, celebrity figures such as Monty Don and Charles Dowding, as well as various social media influencers, trends, and themes. Gender came up frequently when looking to both popular culture and social media, and it seemed that whilst many influential figures were men, such as Monty Don, Charles Dowding, and Arthur Parker, there seems to be a change of this narrative with women also being mentioned, including Sarah Raven, Poppy Okotcha, and Frances Tophill. Many of these figures were referred to as 'gardeners', which is unsurprising given that many of these green-fingered celebrities are seen in large domestic gardens, and participants used such figures as a guide to compare their levels of knowledge or successes. It seemed that for some, to be on the television or to have a high social media following was on par with being a successful gardener, or how experienced and knowledgeable they appear to be (ergo, a professional, or more commonly, an expert).

I discussed with some participants the relationships they have regarding who they view as experts, how this influences how they see themselves, and the relationship this has with their

gender. Ettie spoke directly about the link between professional qualifications, experience, and identifying as a gardener (or not). When talking about her identity at the allotment she echoed some similarity to Dawn, saying:

I will identify [pause] if anything, it's a 'novice gardener' because I haven't got a clue. I would say, again, I don't like the word but 'allotmenters'. I know that's bandied about a lot. I can't say 'grower' because it sounds like I grow green [marijuana], wrong part of the world for that! I'd say 'allotmenter' if anything, but I really just say that "I try and grow my own veg"! 'Gardener', I don't use because I don't feel like I have the knowledge to back it up, I don't know enough. I've started doing the RHS course [laughs] another career change! But even then, having that qualification wouldn't make me use it. If it was my profession or my level of expertise was enough to share advice with people, that's when I'd say I was a gardener. I'd maybe just say I'm green-fingered! (Ettie, interview, 07/10/2022)

Here, we can, once more, consider the work of Stebbins (1997, 2005) and Gee (2013, 2015, 2017) and their suggestions regarding expertise and how seriously the activity is taken, but we can be critical and consider whether this is applicable to everyone. For Ettie, even having the potential qualifications and the knowledge that is meant to reflect expertise, and confidence is marred by what it means to exist in the world as a woman; Ettie is oppressed by a hegemonic, patriarchal society in terms of her position as a direct result of her gender. Whilst we did not discuss it directly, from her experiences on the plot alongside the many men who use her allotment site, it is highly likely that these people who often mansplain her, belittle her, or ignore her would likely be those who would feel confident, and this is perhaps rooted in their longevity at the allotment, knowledge accrued, or qualifications undertaken.

Ettie is at a site that is saturated in the traditional, masculinised allotment culture that Crouch and Ward (1989) describe, with the cloth-capped older man tending to his prized leeks, having grown them annually at their allotment for decades. She described her plot in our interview:

I think it's no coincidence that our plot is massively dominated by them, the old school, [location redacted], kind of, old miners who have nothing to do with their time [pause] that's who it's literally full of...I think there's a culture where we are, you can see it, that some of the plot holders are very much of the mindset that they're growing as a survival thing, because that's what they eat. That's fine. It's embedded, very old school... it's definitely the demographic...the misogynistic arseholes (Ettie, interview, 07/10/2022)

Being surrounded by this culture impacts how Ettie sees herself within this landscape, especially as a woman who is disrupting much of the tradition of the allotment identity in of itself (and its usual stakeholders). Ettie is often ignored, yet her partner [cis man] is acknowledged, and she has had trouble joining the allotment association and being a part of this culture, as they have (unsubtly) hinted that they would prefer her partner, rather than her, to join:

I'll hear people say, "Hi Stephen" and they'll ask how things are, and then they'll say "Hello darlin'" to me. Fuck off! I'm never asked how the plot is or anything. Stephen was invited to join the association, but I was given the details – "Can you give this to Stephen? He can join, it's a tenner though!" so I said "Oh, can I join?" and they said, "Oh, it's only one person from the plot", and you know, I thought, nah I don't want to join. It's a clusterfuck of nonsense. Sorry. But [laughs] it does my head in!" (Ettie, interview, 07/10/2022)

Hearing about her experiences, it is evident that Ettie's allotment neighbours very openly dismiss her both as a woman, and as someone with an allotment. Yet, having seen her social media account, talked to her, and seen her large, open, colourful plot, Ettie is a knowledgeable, skilled expert. Ettie's lack of confidence surrounding her position at the allotment is likely impacted by those around her, who treat her like she is either not there to work her allotment, or is new to the space and who does not know what she is doing, yet it is clear that she is passionate about her allotment, and she is very knowledgeable.



She told me how proud she is of her successes, and how she tells people about it:

I will say I do get very smug [pause] an ego stroke when I grow shit hot food [laughs] my pumpkins at the minute [references a photograph on her social media] that was a staged photo and I'm not even sorry! The wheelbarrow full of pumpkins, phwoar [laughs]. I get ribbed a lot from people I work with, like, "here she goes, she's on about her marrows!" Yeah I am, and you're going to listen, bastards! (Ettie, interview, 07/10/2022)

Ettie does talk to people about her achievements and her plot, sharing what she knows both in person and on social media. This shows, in some ways, part of what it is to be an influence upon other people, and therefore what can be considered, an expert. It is apparent, though, that Ettie does not feel this.

Annie, having quite a similar experience, spoke about this bluntly when we talked about how she feels she identifies on the plot. After discussing her gender and how she feels that she acknowledges herself (her lived body) differently on the plot to her home garden, I asked her further about expertise, and if she felt her gender was related to this. She said:

I think that [pause] I don't want to generalise [pause] but I think that if you're a man, you probably have more confidence about your interest and your place so even if a man had never gardened got an allotment, they would probably have the blind confidence to think they are doing the best job in the world, but for a woman it's different. I'll happily hold my hands up and say, "I have no fucking clue what I'm doing", but it's in contrast to the people around me who do know what they're doing (Annie, interview, 17/09/2022)

She also spoke more about her experience and about her plot:

There's a few people at my allotment that used to have my plot, which when I first started, I thought was great. I thought...they can tell me what bits are sunny and what gets wet and what sort of stuff is growing and stuff, but I've realised that even though they're really nice, it adds a layer of

[pause] I don't know [pause] I don't know if it's perceived or real, but it adds almost a layer of judgement... There's that element of it. And then I think it's just [pause] just the general dynamics of the fact that most of the people there have had an allotment for a really long time and they are very established plots. I'm really enjoying the process of not knowing and having that learning process and then these people can kind of, whilst trying to be helpful, it almost bypasses that by saying "don't do this", "do that", and it's like, but I want to figure it out for myself? They all try to be helpful but also, it's sometimes a bit overbearing (Annie, interview, 17/09/2022)

Whilst they discuss it differently, Annie and Ettie have had similar experiences at their plots, which impacts how they identify within these landscapes. Both women have been made to feel by others that they are not good enough, and that they are not experienced, knowledgeable women, which is then reflected in how they see themselves. The critique they have received becomes internalised, much like in many pockets of society where marginalised groups feel oppression because of male-dominated culture and societal expectations. The experts, who are seen as those plot holders who are experienced by traditional standards, hold a duty to nurture those newer, more novice plotters, to help build and support them whilst they traverse the fresh ground, rather than make them feel inadequate, invisible, or insecure.

Elsbeth Probyn (1996: 6) suggests that identity is transitional, always producing itself through a "combined process of being and becoming, belonging and longing to belong". We can see among these women that self-identity at the allotment, and in turn feelings of belonging and being a part of a group or culture within these landscapes, is not something that is fixed, or stable. Identity, and what constitutes identities, is fluid, transient, changeable, and personal. To identify as a gardener or an allotmenteer or a woman who grows requires several different characteristics that appear to be diverse and individualistic. Whilst some elements of allotment identity, and thus a sense of belonging to a landscape and a culture, are necessary, it seems that there is a wealth of nuance in what constitutes this. There is no set level of education necessary, or specific type of involvement. Gardeners, allotmentees, growers, and women who grow can all tend to different

plants, or fruits, on their sites. They can use the plots alone, or with other people, and they can focus on as many or as few facets of their choosing that we know exist within these sites, whether this is to grow food, to dig soil, to reap the wealth of produce, to socialise, and/or for the mental wellbeing. Determinants of *how* people can become *what* or *who* is personal and self-directed, as well as being made up of others' assumptions, suggestions, and relationships. In terms of identity, it is clear that within these allotments spaces, this goes beyond what the participants know and the techniques that they use on their plots for them to feel and identify in certain ways, but it is also about who they are as individuals, the confidence they hold about the ways they feel they are, and the ways they feel they belong to their spaces, to the culture, and the wider community.

Moreover, this discussion around identity and what this means in the allotment landscape is important because it is meaningful; how people identify helps us to understand how people encounter, belong to, and navigate certain spaces. From talking to the participants there is a disconnect between how these women view themselves as experts (or, more likely, not) and whether other people who are not allotment holders would feel the same. From my experiences with the participants, I would argue that all the women who took part in this research are experts. They are well-informed and skilled, they hold a wealth of knowledge, they know tips and tricks, they can identify plants and flowers, and they successfully grow, harvest, and share an abundance of fruits and vegetables through the year. More than this, they are caring and passionate and have a real affinity for their allotments and their produce, sharing the space (and often their food!) with the people they welcome in.

## **6.2. Home is where the plot is**

Through spending time and talking with the participants, it is evident that allotments mean different things to different people; certainly, in terms of how they identify at the plot, along with how their plots are encountered, and in terms of relationships to the space. The meanings imbued, attached, and felt go beyond this, linking to how the allotment can demonstrate what these individuals feel *as people* and with that, who they are; this, I argue, can be seen within their allotments, in what they grow, and what they build there. More specifically, I contend that the allotment is a place which echoes thoughts by Shotter (1993), who suggests that being in nature

helps people to make sense of the world and of ourselves, forming both ontological and practical knowledge(s). Here, I claim that the allotment plays a central figure in this way for two participants in particular – Fauna and Lizzie. More specifically, I argue that specific structures on their plots work to help them build their identities and sense of self, along with influencing how they encounter, orientate, and navigate this green landscape. Whilst many participants had sheds or storage facilities at their plots, the structures Fauna and Lizzie have, along with how they use them, tells a much more personal story.

### 6.2.1. Fauna's Shed

Fauna has had her allotment for around 5 years. Whilst her daughter, her parents (her mother passed away shortly after fieldwork ended) and her friends are frequent visitors, Fauna does most of the work on her plot herself. Fauna is content with this setup; she has been a single parent for 16 years and is used to her independent lifestyle. Separate to this, yet still relevant, Fauna has a history of alcohol dependency and offending. She told me that she came about having her own plot after a group she is part of decided to access a shared plot through an alcohol recovery service that they had used. She said:

Erm, so we all had problems with alcohol, and we decided as a group of friends that we would come and do something outdoors and away from a service environment. That was, 5 years ago? And after about 4 months I decided that I loved gardening, but I didn't love them and I wanted to come on my own [laughs]...I saw this current plot, which was incredibly overgrown...it looked better for me on my own, and I've not looked back, I guess! (Fauna, interview, 12/09/2022)

Walking around the plot, talking to her about it, and reading about her allotment in her diary, it is very clear that this is a space she spends a lot of time in, investing thought and energy. A reflection from my field journal illustrates how palpable the importance of this space seemed:

Visited Fauna today. Had a lovely walk around her allotment...She is a real pro...Her shed is so lovely. Very scandi-hygge? White. Very chill. She cooked me a great lunch of gnocchi and homemade pesto on a camping

stove, with basil she had grown (and foraged garlic??). Had a cafetiere coffee – very boujie – and a lovely chat... Very welcoming person. I can really understand how she feels so at home here. It's very enclosed and private but she has made it homey? Like it suits her? Feels similar in vibe to Lizzie's place. Need to reflect on this more: what is it about these spaces? (fieldnotes, 16/07/2022)

Regardless of her schedule and the various people who depend on her both in her personal and work life, Fauna spends a great deal of time at the plot. It is somewhere she goes to spend mornings or afternoons, as well as a place she will go to “pop down” (several diary entries) or have a “fleeting visit” (diary entry, 01/02/2022) if she is busy. Without doubt, she always makes time for the allotment, and this was evidenced in her diary:

Friday 1<sup>st</sup> April: After dropping F at school I have the whole day to myself. Straight to the allotment.

Friday 15<sup>th</sup> April: Happy Birthday F – 16 not a baby any more. I snuck up to the allotment for 10 minutes to check tulips and water seedlings.

Tuesday 19<sup>th</sup> April: Back to work today so a brief visit to allotment as F went to gym.

If she is unable to go for what she feels is enough time, she feels emotions surrounding this, whether this is because she is too busy and stressed, whether it is because she needs the peace, or whether it is because she knows she has tasks to do. This is also reflected in her diary:

Friday 11<sup>th</sup> February: Managed to take a breath today eventually. Always busy on my last day of work before annual leave. Now lets get to the allotment.

Wednesday 23<sup>rd</sup> February: Today is my day off but never completely off duty. Child, school, Mum, dementia, hospital – Dad always present and in need of time. NO ALLOTMENT.

And if she is not at the plot, she is buying bulbs, researching seeds, learning new skills, or eating last year's harvest. Without doubt, the allotment is always present for her, even if she cannot physically be there:

Monday 14<sup>th</sup> February: ...No time for allotment today and no car – flat tyre...new flat tyre. Had to console myself with looking at more flower seeds.

Friday 13<sup>th</sup> May: No allotment today but I did use some of last years allotment chilis.

Much of her enjoyment from the allotment is based, in some part, on her history. She said:

I think, because if you'd seen me 10 years ago, I know I've only had the allotment about 5 years, but I had a relapse 6 years ago, so I got this after that bit; 7 years ago it is. 7 years. And I wouldn't have even had a glass, I'd have had the bottle in my hand. And now I have a cup of coffee or a plant or a pair of secateurs. It's that busyness that I think. It's something I've always noticed. Someone in recovery will always have something in their hand because that's the automatic reaction, to have a drink. A pen or a bottle of water or they still smoke or whatever, there is always something they hold. And I guess gardening – plants, tools, coffee, tea – is mine  
(Fauna, interview, 12/09/2022)

As such, a key part of her time at the allotment is her shed, which in many ways doubles as a small kitchen space, resting space, and storage facility:



**Photograph 6.4.** *Elements of Fauna's shed that she photographed*

Inside there are rustic do-it-yourself shelving spaces that hold cooking paraphernalia, including spices and oils, pickled and preserved fruits and vegetables from the allotment like chutneys and jams, along with some cooking equipment, like a camping stove, a cafetiere, and some utensils. There are also items of crockery that are left-over spares from her flat; single plates and bowls from broken sets, odd mugs, as well as a large unused mixing bowl that is perfect for foraged allotment treasures. Here, she often makes beverages and meals for herself, and for others:

Friday 1<sup>st</sup> April: "...Made lunch in my shed. Gnocchi with PSB [purple sprouting broccoli] and confit tomatoes, this year and last years harvest.

Sunday 3<sup>rd</sup> April: Spent a little time at the plot today, enough for a cup of coffee and a chance to admire the tulips coming through.

Saturday 30<sup>th</sup> April: I cooked a left over brunch at allotment today.

Delicious sitting eating and chatting to Liz. Didn't get much work done.





and reminiscent of Bhatti et al. (2009: 61), Fauna's shed has a sense of (re)enchantment, where "time seems to stand still in a specific place"; here, time feels left at the entryway to the allotment and, here in this shed, we cannot feel the frenetic pace of modern life, but instead, we can sense a simplicity of living.

### 6.2.2. Lizzie's 'Utopia'

Like Fauna, striking similarities can be found at Lizzie's plot. Both women are deeply passionate about their allotments, growing an abundance of produce, building impressive and meaningful structures, and spending time at their allotments for reasons that go beyond gardening: they spend time there for themselves, for their wellbeing, and for their ways of life. These allotments, for these two women, are much more than 'just' places to grow.

Lizzie's plot is not what we might understand or expect to see as a usual allotment, and she jovially told me on my first visit that my expectations of others should not be built based upon what I was seeing, and she was not wrong (fieldnotes, 04/05/22). Lizzie's plot is what I would describe as a visual paradise, and, through no influence of Foucault (1986), we together aptly named her plot, 'Utopia', and can be seen below:



**Photograph 6.6.** *Lizzie's plot, with her table, bath, beehive, a kitchen, and toilet*

Lizzie's plot is very impressive, and she is immensely proud of it. Here, she has an array of features, including a working, heated bathtub (see chapter five), a fire pit, a table with bench chairs, a swing seat, seating in the polytunnel, bunting, a fully equipped shed, a well-stocked drinks caddy, a composting toilet, active honey-producing beehives, and a functional extension to the shed that mirrors a domestic kitchen.

Importantly, Lizzie sees her plot like an extension of her home. We discussed this in her interview when we were talking about the ways she uses the allotment:

The plot is an extension of the kitchen...but mainly the home. With my space I have this living area, I have the kitchen, I have seating, I have a space for outdoor living, so that I can spend as much time down here as I want to. It is, for me, an extension of my space, you know. In the summer I

spend as much time outside as I can and I've built things to make that as comfortable and practical as possible (Lizzie, interview, 06/10/2022)

'Utopia' is an important place in Lizzie's social life because it is the location where the supper club, *Plot Luck*, takes place. Here, Lizzie, along with Gwen and Wanna and others, gather at the plot to eat together. They usually devise a theme depending on the time of year, and where possible, bring homegrown fruits and vegetables, along with home-cooked food using produce from their plot(s). It is clear from spending time with this group of women that *Plot Luck* is important to this friendship circle, and for Lizzie, and as such, the allotment is an integral part of this. It is the place where she can feed her friends, often going to elaborate lengths for these get-togethers:



**Photograph 6.7.** *Plot Luck* (photograph: author's own)



She describes *Plot Luck* as:

Getting together, catching up, and having a nice time. I also just enjoy being able to lay a nice table, to provide hospitality really, in the very original sense of the word (Lizzie, interview, 06/10/2022)

Crucially, COVID-19 really spurred on the evolution of *Plot Luck*. Lizzie obtained this 'big plot' in February 2020, before the global pandemic began in the United Kingdom. Lizzie said:

When we were allowed to finally socialise, we were only allowed to socialise outside. This space evolved to accommodate that, to give me and friends by extension, a safe place to be able to gather, you know, in the outdoors. To provide facilities to safely come together after lockdowns and everything like that (Lizzie, interview, 06/10/2022)

Inspired by social media, Lizzie sets the dining table with crockery, cutlery, glasses, and drinks. Bunting often adorns the plot if celebration is in the air, and there are seasonal touches, like pumpkin shaped glassware for Halloween-themed hot chocolate. She has also built seating and provides cushioning so that the plot is comfortable, both in her poly tunnel and for the main dining table, and there is a small gazebo for shelter if needed.

The kitchen area is similarly elaborate, where she has workspace and a sink, as well as storage for condiments, pasta, coffee and tea, along with cooking utensils and washing up equipment. She also has a camping hob to hand, a smoker (which also works as a barbeque and pizza oven), and a fire pit which can be cooked over. Like Fauna, this is not here for show or to look ostentatious; she uses everything frequently, and with pleasure. Quite literally, the only thing missing from the kitchen at this plot is not the kitchen sink (she has that), but a running water tap. Instead, she fills the sink using a watering can.

For Lizzie, the allotment is a space where she has built a sense of home, and the motivation is for her to share this with others, and this is where her allotment and Fauna's allotment tend to differ. Whilst Fauna spends quite a lot of her time at the allotment on her own, soaking in the stillness and peace, Lizzie loves to share her space with others, inviting them in, and sharing food and

drinks. Yet not unlike Fauna, Lizzie has built this environment almost entirely on her own, too. Moreover, like Fauna, she has forged a way to transform this space from one of abandoned overgrowth into one of curated vegetal activity and reproduction that is coupled with friendships, laughter, and food.

Without doubt, both women have created impressive, warm, and welcoming home-like spaces with the craft of their hands, freewill, and imagination. Their allotments, and more specifically, the sheds and spaces that they have created, are places that are deeply imbued with meaning, and that attach to their senses of identity, of who they are to themselves, and of who they tell the world they are. These sheds, kitchen tables, and cooking areas are far more than just spaces within an allotment; they carry and create a larger, deeper, and somewhat unexpected personal story.

#### **6.2.2.1. *Homemaking***

Both Fauna and Lizzie have created allotments deeply imbued with meaning. Many would find their spaces unusual and unexpected, yet Crouch and Ward (1989) point out that there is no typical allotment holder or site. Instead, there is an abundance of allotment diversity, which varies across countries, and people, telling a necessary story that allows us to understand these women, and their allotments, further.

Whilst the participants do not live at their sites, they are spaces where they are recreating elements of the home and are sites of place-making, which we can understand as “the set of social, political and material processes by which people iteratively create and recreate the experienced geographies in which they live” (Pierce, Martin and Murphy, 2010: 54). Given gardening has been ranked amongst the “most intense forms of place-making” (Crozier, 2003: 81), this is also unsurprising. Understanding how plot holders form these bonds, of which place identity is a component of self-identity (Proshansky et al., 1983), means we need to look to how plot-holders generate these “meanings, qualities, imaginings, and attachments” (Noori and Benson, 2016: 293). In other words, we need to look to how and why they transform their allotments into these home-like spaces, and how this is in association with who they are.

Historically, allotments and the sheds built within them have acted as a “masculine, heteronormative, private sphere” (Moore et al., 2014: 329), traditionally forming a place for men to escape the feminine domestic (Crouch and Ward, 1989). Here, sheds were important as they were not just for tools but were for “men and cups of tea, and escaping nagging wives” (Moore et al., 2014: 329). In this way, elements of ‘home’ are, in part, a piece of the traditional jigsaw of the allotment. More recently, this is similar on allotment sites like Fauna and Lizzie, yet it is enacted in a very different way.

According to Bhatti (2006: 321), notions of ‘home’ goes beyond place-making and, instead, are forms of “being-in-the-world”, which is “emplacement or physical rootedness from which the individual engages with the outside world”. Home, here, is intertwined with cultural meanings, lived experiences, and sits (once again) between the social and the physical. For Bhatti (2006: 322), making sense of home is an embodied practice, where “domestic routines of everyday life...are carried out through the gendered body”, where the body and dwelling combine. More, creating a sense of home is “iterative, is always being created, is unstable and endlessly deferred” (Waitt and Gorman-Murray, 2011: 381). Creating this is not simple and static, but a dynamic process that involves both inside and outside the private and public (Hooykaas, 2021), with a key part of this being “the act of dwelling and engaging with a space, a sense of belonging and empowerment, and a space of residence” (Hooykaas, 2021: 65). Like identity in that it is a constant, active process (Stephen, 2001), the process of homemaking is dynamic, capturing individual agency and household practices, which help to constitute and construct meaning and value of home (Putnam, 1993).

Fauna acknowledges that her allotment is an extension of her home. First, she sees the allotment as part of her garden because she has little access to green space at her flat:

For me, I don't have a garden at home, I have a tiny strip in front of the flat and we don't particularly like sitting outside with all of the hundreds of other neighbours where that's very communal, so [pause] here's my garden (Fauna, interview, 12/09/2022)

Moreover, the extent to which her plot has been curated to feel like her home is more *certain* rather than an *implied* sense. When we spoke about her shed while discussing her photographs (Photograph 6.4. and 6.5.), her response was:

It's hooooome! Yeah [pause] it's my little home, isn't it! It's the beginning of what I want the shed to be. Somewhere I can just go and cook dinner and stay down there all day...it changes all of the time...there's the elderflower cordial I made, and some chutney jam I made and, errr, the little one, that has chili jam in it, and there's tomato chutney too. All from the plot!...the little stove is a lifesaver because I have so much tea and coffee. I couldn't keep leaving the plot to go somewhere for it so having that is brilliant...it's not just a shelter (Fauna, interview, 12/09/2022)

Thinking about this, we can look back to work by Tim Ingold (1993: 153) and understand that Fauna's allotment not as a landscape, but a "taskscape", where we see patterns of dwelling. Fauna's shed is symbolic of this act, through the ways we build place in a distinct and identifying way (Rose, 2012), and we can see *parts* of her; be it in the mis-matched crockery that comes from her house, to the lino print on the wall that shows her passion for the act of gardening, through to the copious jars of jam, pickles, and preserves that she loves to make from her own-grown produce. More than this, we can look back to Crouch and Parker (2002) and see that it is through this *doing*, the building of the shed and the sense of space within it, that Fauna is attaching her beliefs and values within (and through) these encounters, where she builds her sense of belonging as well as expresses her attitudes, feelings and desires. Here, the shed represents Fauna in ways beyond her love for the allotment and growing plants; it is more than this and is part of her sense of self and her identity, where she creates who she is, and who she wants to be; a state of *becoming* is constant and ever evolving.

Fauna's shed is also important to her as a place of meaning-making and of dwelling because it is her *own* space. The allotment site is one of contention, sitting between the rented and the owned, yet by building the shed and using it in this way, Fauna is creating a space that is her own, not only in ownership, but in belonging (both literally and figuratively). This is emphasised as the flat that she lives in with her daughter is also rented from her local housing association.

Both places (the allotment and home), then, are not hers by ownership, but are places she can imbue with meaning. The allotment shed, I contend, is more meaningful because it is *hers*: she built it, she owns it. Whilst the shed sits on land that is leased, and her allotment and her flat are leased, the shed is very much her own. Here, she cooks, she eats, she socialises, she rests; she tends to herself, both physically with food, drinks, shelter, and rest, as well as mindfully, as it is a place to ground herself, and to pause. Here, she does things that many will do in their own home. This is why this is more than just a shed, for her: it is, as she calls it, home.

For Johnston and Valentine (2003: 100), home can be considered within Western culture as “a private, secure location, a sanctuary, a locus of identity, and a place where inhabitants can escape the disciplinary practices that regulate our bodies in everyday life”. The creation of Fauna’s shed in this way is a form of self-expression, where she is projecting a sense of her identity on the plot through these material elements (Bhatti, 2006). Moreover, these feelings of home outside of the domestic space that are being shown and experienced are more than a personal preference; they depend on others also sharing those spaces, and the ways they enact their preferences and practices, especially when we consider what is available to assist in the homemaking, including materiality (Boccagni and Duyvendak, 2020; Smets and Snee, 2017). Whilst perhaps not as explicitly obvious as Lizzie, we can see from Fauna’s diary entries and from my experience visiting her plot, Fauna welcomes several people to her site, including her daughter, her parents, and her close friends, where she cooks for them, and the space becomes a place for socialising and meaningful connections, much like can be created (or recreated) in her home. This is a key point of having an allotment, whereby active participation goes beyond what we assume to be “mechanistic or material maintenance”, and can fulfil “important, deep-rooted and personal and social needs” (Crouch and Ward, 1989: 257).

#### *6.2.2.2. Hospitality*

In very similar ways to Fauna, Lizzie’s plot is also more than just an allotment. Together, when Lizzie and I looked at her photographs (above), she expanded upon what she had said earlier:

My beautiful new kitchen I installed!...this really brings the home to the allotment, really. For me almost, the two aren’t separate. This is just part of



my home like the bricks of where I live. If I could have this attached to home that would be the dream, that's how we're meant to live. So, you know, I have the facilities down here to live here, exist here, do the work, eat the food, make a brew, to do everything a human needs to do down here. And to be outside and be immersed in nature. To pick the courgette, walk 50 yards, cook the courgette. It's [pause] it's amazing (Lizzie, interview, 06/10/2022)

The way in which Lizzie's re-creation of the home is through the kitchen both specifically, and so *obviously* (rather than a more implied kitchen, like Fauna), is important. The kitchen, both as a concept and as a physical space, is complex; like the home, it is a "multifaceted space with many ideological, historical, and political strands attached to it" (Scicluna, 2015: 173). At the allotment, the kitchen as a political site disrupts a space we previously consider more as a domestic place, and a location which is often romanticised as the hearth of the home (Scicluna, 2017; Freeman, 2004). Moreover, we can consider the kitchen as a feminine space; an environment which is thought of closely with women's bodies, a space dictated by "nurturance, social relations, education, care, and processes of feedings that occur over the life course" (Scicluna, 2015: 173).

Without doubt, Lizzie uses the kitchen space at the plot as a place where feeding takes place, demonstrating this primarily through *Plot Luck*. Of note, Lizzie, along with Gwen, Wanna, and the others who often attend, are all cis-women and are here, arguably, replicating what we see in many societies around the world, where feeding is predominantly done through women and through close association with household labour (Cadieux, 2016). Yet, I contend that they are disrupting and deconstructing what we can think about as this domestic, feminine space, whilst they cook and eat outside, which Alexander (2002: 686) argues is a "exclusively male activity". More than this, as Cadieux (2016: 66) notes,

garden stories show us how the politics of feeding moves from the home spaces where food is imagined to be properly procured, prepared, and eaten, through a series of social networks that form around gardening outside the conventionally imagined backyard-to-kitchen produce supply chain.

Whilst this is argued within a moral political context, this withdrawal from mainstream economics with homegrown produce that is enjoyed outside of the traditional kitchen is an integral part of *Plot Luck*, and highlights the socio-political importance of the allotment, especially as a space that can radicalise (and disrupt) allotment traditions and assumptions.

Third spaces (Soja, 1996; DeSilvey, 2003), as we know, are important to understanding allotments, and this chapter has already acknowledged that there are tensions between the boundaries of work at the allotment and the ways it can provide joy, where some tasks are chores, and some are pleasure. Alexander (2002) suggests that home gardens are rarely included in the consideration of the domestic, and this is further blurred when we consider allotment sites as spaces of domestic work (whilst also knowing they are sites of leisure). This is further complicated when we know spaces like Lizzie's kitchen and social gathering like *Plot Luck* occur, which can be both seen as social and domestic, as well as pleasurable and domestic work. More, both home gardens and allotments are sites often seen as places of labour production, sustenance, and nutrition (Alexander, 2002). This complexity, however, is not surprising. Building upon work by feminist geographer Gillian Rose (1993), Robyn Longhurst argues that gardens are paradoxical spaces, flooded with contradictions, and that are "betwixt and between" (Longhurst, 2006: 581). Whilst she concentrates on domestic gardens, we can consider her work within the space of allotments, given the well-evidenced public/private divide. Here, too, we can see that allotments are similar to the ways Foucault (1986) positions the home garden, where he argues that gardens are spaces that function as places for breaking rules and creating different ways of existing, with boundary pushing realities, behaviours, and orders. In a utopic sense, for him, they are places where ideal social orders can be projected, where they become "the smallest part of the world and then it is the totality of the world" (Foucault (1986: 26). They are heterotopic: places beyond the practice of everyday life.

Extending this thought, using Fauna and Lizzie's sites, we can understand allotments as liminal spaces (Alexander, 2002); complex and fluid, disrupting notions of the inside and the outdoors, with both chaos and control, boundaries and freedom, where, not unlike women's bodies are viewed (see Grosz 1994 and Kristeva, 1982), they can be described as "leaky" and that they "cannot be contained without labour...the essence of such gardens is that they are partially

uncontained” (Alexander, 2002: 686). Lizzie especially disrupts what we assume of an allotment space and a kitchen space to the outer boundary. *Plot Luck* and the ways she uses her allotment in this way, with the cooking, the social elements, and for mirroring of how she can exist within the home space (but at the allotment) in such obvious, celebrated ways, is a radical evolution of how we can understand both domestic life, and iterations of family life. At ‘Utopia’ we move away from the masculinised allotment, and we can understand the allotment as a feminine space imbued with elements of the domestic, while also further understanding the allotment as spaces encountered with meaning, and importantly, as non-traditional, non-heterosexual, non-masculinised, spaces.

### 6.2.2.3. *Que(e)rying the allotment*

Lizzie’s plot is, undoubtably, very important to her. It is important on a physical level for the crops and vegetation and flowers, and it is important for her on an emotional, social and mental health level, with her zen-like bath and her pockets of peace. More than this, though, I argue that the importance of the plot for Lizzie extends beyond this, and it is important as a place of meaning-making, the building of self-identity, and a place where Lizzie can *be*: especially as an asexual (sexual orientation; ‘ace’) and aromantic (romantic orientation; ‘aro’) cis-woman.

As an ace and aro woman, Lizzie experiences little to no sexual or romantic attraction to other people (Milks and Cerankowski, 2014). Asexuality, as Milks and Cerankowski (2014) write, is not a new phenomenon. Instead, it is the new community and new languages that are forming that make it appear novel within current discourse. Importantly, within this thesis, I write about Lizzie and her ace/aro orientations as queer. From looking to the literature, there are conflicting standpoints regarding whether ace/aro orientations should be included within this narrative and considered as part of the LGBTQ+ community (Maliepaard, 2015). I include ace/aro orientations as queer based upon the definition by Miller (2015: 38), who define queer as “inclusive of any variety of experience that transcends what has been socially and politically accepted as normative categories for gender and sexual orientation”. More importantly, I approach it in this way because Lizzie self-identifies as queer. It is also important to consider Lizzie’s sexuality (and allotment) through a queer lens because this research is built upon feminist thought. By considering her allotment in this way we disrupt and deconstruct the ways that expected and

traditional sexual and gender hegemonies continually shape society; a queer lens helps to illustrate the messiness of everyday lives, of bodies, and of people (Cook, 2014).

In the same way that sexuality and queerness can be fluid (and messy) so can meanings and understandings of the home and the domestic be fluid (and messy). Space, generally, is often seen as largely heterosexual (see Visser, 2008, 2016), as are notions of home (Morrison, 2012; Oakley, 2016), yet we know that ‘home’ can take on an abundance of meanings, made up of several different relationships and kinships. Home as a heterosexual space, too, reiterates wider imaginings of how we understand the domestic, with “femininity, family, and home...synonymous with public consciousness” (Scicula, 2015: 177). A queer lens allows us to add important, additional layers of meaning to understand Lizzie’s plot and her experiences here, alongside her kitchen, and organisation of *Plot Luck*, all of which gives rise to our understanding of spaces where we can perform different versions of femininity, going beyond heterosexual, capitalist, hegemonic norms.

*Plot Luck* is an important facet of Lizzie’s allotment life, which is facilitated hugely by the kitchen she has built. She writes about it at several points in her diary:

5<sup>th</sup> February: We celebrated Lunar New Year down on the plot this evening. We got Chinese takeaway and I made tiger cupcakes and we sat in the rain and had a good catch up.

13<sup>th</sup> May: Plot Luck Dinner! Just what I needed!

24<sup>th</sup> June: Pizza night on the plot! Homegrown tomatoes for the sauce, homemade dough and a salvaged BBQ for the ‘sun’. A fun night and only one small fire occurred...oops!

Here, Lizzie, as a queer woman, is reclaiming her allotment space as her own, and in doing so, disrupts a landscape that we know to be historically male (Buckingham, 2005; Crouch and Ward, 1989) and often, heterosexual (Moore et al., 2014). At her allotment Lizzie performs what we can consider the expected woman’s role in the domestic home, undertaking care activities such as cooking, and providing and nurturing for others. I argue that as an asexual/aromantic woman,

Lizzie is pushing boundaries of social norms and expectations, dispelling and changing what we think of as a woman's place or role. Whilst Lizzie is cooking, providing, and nurturing for her friends (here, I wish to highlight that Gwen also identifies as an ace/aro woman) which she thoroughly enjoys, she is doing so *beyond* her position as a single woman. Here, she is making an active choice to care for and nurture people who are not a husband, partner, or a child. In fact, as an ace/aro woman, this friendship group can be seen as part of her chosen family. Her allotment is the site for this nurture and care, and this is perhaps more important because she is under no obligation to provide it, unlike how she might be expected to provide such care in a home kitchen in a heteronormative household. This is vital, as feminist and queer geographer Knopp (2004, 2004) highlights, as spaces of such social mobility become mechanisms for people to transform, becoming their truer sense of self, as well as providing an opportunity to build alternative communities. Indeed, we know that gardens are liminal spaces (Foucault, 1986; Alexander, 2002), and more than this, they are special places where the possibilities for the self are endless, where the self can grow and escalate, and people can *become*; especially if this has previously been silenced or invisibilised elsewhere, in other pockets of society. For Lizzie, the allotment, and more specifically, *Plot Luck* at the allotment, is a space (and time) within which she can be her true self, surrounded by people who know and accept her for this.

An important facet of her plot is that Lizzie chooses to invite people, as well as organise events like *Plot Luck* into her space; a space that is “an uncloseted space that is otherwise heteronormatively represented” (Brown and Knopp, 2008). She said:

For me, this is my space. I invite people into it. It's not a communal area.  
This is my place, and I welcome who I want to. I'm in control of it (Lizzie,  
interview, 06/10/2022)

Lizzie's power of both self-identifying as a queer woman – welcoming who she chooses into her space – and creating a space with parallels to home, means we are able to understand her iteration of allotment-as-home through a queer lens, and particularly as “a space that offers safety, privacy, and preservation, albeit through ambiguous and paradoxical qualities” (Waitt and Gorman-Murray, 2011: 1380; Gorman-Murray, 2007). More, the plot and the home, here, are nuanced in terms of boundary, weaving notions of the private and the public, as well as intertwining values

and politics, lived experiences and living bodies. Homemaking, in this queer sense, allows us to consider “the domestic in the plural” (Scicluna, 2015: 175), where home-space is interwoven with ideology and practices, and the use of “domestic” no longer equates to a fixed space, like the building of a house. Further, Rachael Scicluna (2015: 175) suggests that notions of the domestic “encapsulate the home, the legal structures of kinship and marriage (including same sex unions), relationships with significant others who reside within or outside the house, and meaningful possessions”. Here, Lizzie demonstrates that there are other ways in which women can exist, disrupting the heterosexual, feminine assumption that society often expects. Moreover, she shows us that women can experience the world outside of the heteronormative ways in which people see and expect much of society to live by and within, pushing the boundaries of what we understand and perceive that exists within different shared environments, such as allotments. Importantly, when places (and people) disrupt this heteronormative, traditional way of understanding home and spaces of meaning, such sites become (public) places of resistance and radical change (bell hooks, 1990). Such spaces offer an alternative way of understanding being at home, and the value of certain domestic practices, as well as turning something every-day (e.g., cooking for friends) into a political and symbolic act. Indeed, “home is politically and culturally loaded and endows the lived experience of being-in-the-home with a multiplicity of meanings” (Scicluna, 2015: 180).

Research such as this, along with work by the likes of Moore et al. (2014), who explored a young lesbian and bisexual women’s allotment, are important because they disrupt and pose challenges for traditional theorisations of allotments. Using their term *privatepublics*, Moore et al. (2014) argue that these allotment spaces, when considered through a queer lens, create “paradoxical intimacies” that are “not necessarily possible in the usual private sphere of domestic home” (Moore et al., 2014: 327). Expanding more-than-human conceptualisation by Donna Haraway (2008), they suggest queer allotments materialise ‘natureculture’ (Haraway, 2008) which can mean that such landscapes appear as an everyday utopia. These are, according to Moore et al. (2014: 337), “sites and spaces which aspire to accomplish some routine aspect of social life in a more democratic, equal, or freer fashion”. I suggest here we witness this at Lizzie’s plot, too. At ‘Utopia’ she is creating, doing, and *becoming* through her plot, through her allotment kitchen, and through the monthly *Plot Luck* supper club, demonstrating these everyday utopias as more

complex and intricate than they seem on the surface. Queer allotments allow for sexuality (and gender) to materialise from the private and into the public, in a space that is both private and public, emerging in ways that are intimate and meaningful, changing the boundaries of what we know and understand as the private and the public (Moore et al., 2014). Moreover, using *privatepublics* (Moore et al., 2014) to understand the dualism of such spaces demonstrates the ways in which these spaces are paradoxically public and private (Rose, 1993). This contradictory nature of the private and the public, which is not unlike allotments themselves, offers a balance whereby these spaces are in public spheres but benefit from being hidden from view in a literal sense, and therefore offer some privacy, while also existing in a space that can still be shared and encountered in a public way; everyone has left ‘home’ in order to be at the allotment, to attend *Plot Luck*, to spend time in a new form of home: Lizzie’s home-at-the-allotment.

### 6.3. Concluding remarks

As this chapter highlights, the allotment contains multitudes. This is not only through the ways in which women identify within the allotment, such as a gardener, as an allotmenteer, or as a person who *does* gardening rather than *is* a gardener, but also in terms of who people *are* and *become* within the allotment, beyond being at the allotment to simply tend to plants or sow seeds.

In terms of identities and belonging, it is important to acknowledge that the creation and acknowledgement of labels, even linked to facets imbued in our everyday life like identity, can be advantageous or disadvantageous to different individuals. Labels can fail to acknowledge the complexities of the ways in which identities are developed or attributed, especially if they are not self-ascribed, as is common in instances of social injustice and oppression. This chapter, through using women’s experiences, demonstrates that to be labelled a gardener suggests knowledge and experience, whether novice or expert, rather than in terms of the constraints that can come from such knowledge and experience (or lack of). This is important, too, in terms of access: access to knowledge, communities, power, food, and to meanings and bonds. It is important to look at how people *are* gardeners (or not), what they might prefer to be denoted as, and why this might be. It is also important to explore what it is they want to do with that label, and what it means to them and their experiences to be labelled as such. The allotment can, therefore, be a place of

empowerment, challenging gender norms, legitimising women as a subject of study, and transforming people's sense of identity, and consequently, ways of belonging.

This chapter also highlights important conversations regarding inner-allotment spaces, like kitchens and sheds, specifically looking at Lizzie and Fauna's plots. In this way, this research demonstrates how women's experiences and existence in such landscapes goes beyond 'just' their identities at their allotments, and instead they shake up and disrupt traditional notions of the allotment. Previously such spaces have been seen through the masculinised stereotype from the 1980s; slabs of beers on a weekend afternoon with the football on the wireless, flasks of tea and a cigar to avoid the wife at home, or perhaps a wrapped sandwich in a bait box enjoyed on a mid-week plot visit. These spaces were important then (Crouch and Ward, 1989) and they are, as this chapter shows, important now but in different, more radical, feminist ways, illustrating nuance, diversity, and meaning.

More than this, this chapter has, through unpacking women's experience and engaging with concepts of feminist sociologies and geographies, presented a more subtle, important distinction of what it is to be a woman in the allotment, and has worked to interrogate and unearth our understandings of women's experiences, stories, and histories within these spaces; considering and looking to how women think, see and feel about themselves, about how others see them, and about how they move within these spaces, building, growing and tending. Identity, feelings of belonging, and the ways people navigate their allotment plots because of identity, belonging, and the ways we build meaning and feelings of place is complex and messy. For many, it is not as simple as 'gardening at a plot', or existing as an 'allotmenteer' at their site. People within these sites are not stable and fixed; they are changeable entities with thoughts, feelings and lived experiences who exist in and on these landscapes in fluid and diverse ways. In this way, the creation and generation of identities, of belonging, and of building place, whether through home, through friends, through their sexuality, through their gardening praxis, is never complete, but instead is always growing, building, and traversing the social world. Just like the season changes and the tasks in the allotment are never ending or never fully finished, neither are these women. Their identities keep moving forwards, along with their feelings, and the ways



they navigate and experience these spaces. They are, in this way, not just working on a sense of being, but instead are always in a flow of *becoming*.

The creation of these allotment spaces in such a way, in contemporary society, by women who have important and complex nuance in how they identify and belong within and to the allotment space, tells us much more about them and their relationships to these blossoming, bountiful landscapes, and as such, this is where we find ourselves with the next and final discussion chapter, where I look to relationships and *belonging* at the plot.

# Chapter Seven || Digging at the Data (III)

‘belonging’



Photograph 7.1. Heather at her allotment

## 7.0. Chapter introduction

The final discussion for this thesis surrounds *belonging*, which in this context, refers to the ways in which different beings, including the more-than-human, are seen to have a place (or not) in the allotment, along with how they can make others feel like they do (or do not) belong in these spaces. In exploring and interrogating this, this chapter works to show the tensions and strains, along with the joys and the pleasures, within the relationships that develop, grow, and evolve at the allotment. The participants in this thesis demonstrate complex, intertwined, tentacular relationships and encounters across the nonhuman, other people, wider communities, and the planet. This chapter interrogates these relations, looking to who is welcome and belongs at the allotment, who is thought to have a place at the allotment, and who is fought against, and the entanglements that exist between.

### 7.1. An ethic of care

As discussed earlier in this thesis, entanglements with the more-than-human are a central proponent to understanding the allotment space and the ways in which people (and others) exist in these locations and across these landscapes. A key part of living alongside these “knotty assemblages of humans, other species, and things” (Ogden, Hall and Tanita, 2013:7) is learning to live with them as kin (Desai and Smith, 2018; Haraway, 2008). With this, we can consider the notion of *care*, which is important both more broadly in relation to the more-than-human, and more specifically in relation to the allotment. Importantly, care is a human concept, but it is not a human-only matter (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017), spanning across people caring for themselves, for other people, and the more-than-human. More, it is this interconnectedness that is a significant part of what makes for a flourishing allotment, yet within this, different types of care exist, in different ways, privileging different things, events, and beings (Slater, 2016; Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017). In turn, this allows people to exist with and alongside the more-than-human across “our bodies, ourselves, and our environment, all of which seek to interweave in a complex, life-sustaining web” (Tronto, 1993: 103).

More specifically, we can consider these relationships through a feminist ethic of care (Tronto 1993, 1998), which allows for us to deepen our understanding of these entangled interconnected relationships between (and across) the more-than-human in the allotment space. Further, it allows us to consider this in a way that works to avoid reinforcing the human/nonhuman binary, where often people are positioned as the superior, benevolent being that looks after and cares for those around it (Turner, 2014; Plumwood, 1993). Allotments are spaces where people cultivate vegetables and flowers, alongside building social bonds, and embracing and engaging with the human and other-than-human community; all of which encompass collective care across the land, people, and the more-than-human. Again, rather than considering people and nature as separate and dyadic, we can disrupt these dichotomies and embrace them as interconnected, embodied relationships.

This approach also creates important space to challenge gendered assumptions about care and caregiving, disrupting assumptions regarding who can and should care, what types of care is given value, and how this care is recognised and provided (Tronto, 1993, 1998). Here, Tronto (1993, 1998) argues that care should not be considered a private, individual practice but instead as a collective process of social and political concern which attends to the needs of others. Through recognising who we should care for, how we should do it, and the ways care can be resourced and valued, Tronto (1993, 1998) further challenges care as women's work, arguing that it is relational, as a fundamental human need for society, with mutual responsibility and accountability from those it encompasses regardless of gender; all of which requires energy and effort(s) which are shared and ongoing, helping to sustain relationships and communities.

Such thinking encourages a critical and reflective approach to how we understand gendered care, especially in relation to nature and the environment (McLaughlin, 1997; Raghuram, 2019; Petersmann, 2021), and provides an opportunity to challenge and, ultimately reject, the socially constructed dyadic narratives that associate care as women's responsibility and caregiving as an inherent, biological trait (Tronto, 1993, 1998). As discussed in chapter two, equating "women=mother, women=feminine, feminine=caring" (Cuomo, 1998: 126) is both theoretically and practically harmful, situating caregiving and moral responsibility directly with women, and often overlooking the systemic inequalities that exist within this around power and privilege,

along with intersectional factors like gender, race, class and sexuality. With this in mind, the discussion of care is important for this chapter, and I work to explore the various ways in which care is manifested by the women within this thesis through the different ways care is shown and enacted, along with what this reveals about the participant's experiences, horticultural approaches, and relationships at their plots. It is important to note, however, that I consciously avoid imposing patriarchal, socially constructed expectations and narratives upon the participants, working to avoid limiting gendered narratives of women and caregiving. Instead, care, like many themes explored in this thesis, is acknowledged as a complex, messy, multifaceted, and sometimes contradictory, concept. More specifically, with this thinking I show how the women in this research care at the allotment through their actions with and for the more-than-human beings that grow and visit their plots, the ways they protect and tend to their growing produce, the ways they treat and approach different welcome and unwelcome critters at their plots, and the ways they value and approach the land and the species in and around their allotments. Critically, whilst 'care' is an important theme to understanding the women's relationships and with that, notions of *belonging* at the allotment, I am careful to avoid reinforcing the narrative that this should be anticipated or expected, or that that the women should be motivated by care, precisely because they all identify as women. Further, as the actions of care differ across the women and across their plots, I am neither suggesting that different forms of care are superior to others, that some women care more than others, or that some actions of care are more acceptable; all which risks showing deviancy within gendered identities and reinforces societal expectations and narratives. Instead, through their experiences and stories, I illustrate the various ways acts of care exist interconnectedly at the allotment, in different expressions, with different beings. This is particularly important because care at the allotment is an integral part of these women's experience(s), which in turn recognises the entangled, interconnected, and knotty relationships between people, the land, and the critter community. In doing so, I show that, in different and multiple ways, the participants "cultivate the ability to care about earth others...as earth others" (Warren, 2000: 121), which informs and fosters a key demonstration and sense of *response-ability* (Haraway, 2012), along with critical elements of sustainability, connectedness, and often, social justice. More, I argue that multiple realities can be true at the same time: that women can and do show care, but that this does not mean that they are, in doing so, adhering to this paternalistic assumption of care that society has constructed, nor that care is binary and instead, that it exists in

multiple forms, in multiple ways, with multiple species, simultaneously. Further, I also demonstrate that some enactments of care may, in other scenarios, be viewed as a 'lack' of care, whilst in the allotment, they can be considered more as a reflection of the hierarchy of care that exists in these landscapes, and this is equally as important.

Importantly, care can be considered to inform much of how these women look after their allotment plots. More, these acts of care when viewed through this ethical and political lens has important and influential potential to transcend and transform how they go about their everyday in relation to this landscape, the more-than-human, and the wider planet (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2010, 2017; Tronto, 1993, 1998). As this chapter will discuss, women's biopolitical approaches to their allotments, which are often rooted within notions of care, influence how they plant and grow, along with the relationships and interactions they develop and foster at their plots. These actions and encounters forces us to recognise that these spaces exist not as a binary where human and nature are separate, but instead as a place where people can cultivate communal, entangled practices over time, fostering a sense of renewal and with that, regrowth (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017), while simultaneously centring care into a framework of permaculture, further dismantling patriarchal assumptions of the associations of women with the natural world (Mellor, 2000; Tronto, 1993, 1998).

This very appreciation of care in a world of entangled, knotty 'natureculture' (Haraway, 2003) is important because not only does it disrupt the human/nature binary, but it raises key questions and disrupts traditional viewpoints surrounding obligations of care in a more-than-human environment (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017; Tronto, 1993, 1998). It is not just about physical elements in such spaces that people must look after, but it instead posits that these critters (Haraway, 2016) are to be engaged with as "mutually constituted" with matter and meaning (Barad, 2007: 33). Inspired by Tronto's work (1993, 1998), Puig de la Bellacasa (2017: 145) argues that actions of care go beyond the human and includes "the plants we cultivate, the animals we raise and eat (or rather not), and Earth's energetic resources: air, water. It is in connection with these that human and nonhuman "individuals" live and act". More, for her, this approach to care is crucial because of the ways it is embedded within this entangled web of complex relationships with the more-than-human, the planet, and in part, the future. Our

relationships with the more-than-human and our actions within permaculture impact more than ourselves and the people around us in the immediate, and instead we are *part* of this ecosystem – *part* of earth – as bodily beings; we are “lived material processed by other forms of life” (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017: 145). How we encounter these worlds, then, is important to our conceptualisation of care, and we can look to it as a vital lively interaction between people, the social, and the cultural worlds they embody (Lin, Martin and Chen, 2022).

Here, concepts of proximity and distance come into play, allowing for a disruption of thinking that ‘encountering’ equates to ‘closeness’, transgressing assumptions that to care (feeling) and to show caring (doing), along with being a part of something, we need to always interact with, build relationships with, and care about things directly and in proximity. This is important for spaces like the allotment because encounters are not just immediate face-to-face happenings with people or the more-than-human like we might assume, but contain thinking about care and encounters more cerebrally, like in the future. More, we can understand this as generative care (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017), where new possibilities for life and relationships can grow, especially as ‘gardening’ (regardless of the locale) can be viewed as an “anticipatory practice” (Ginn, 2013, 2016) that is driven by time and effort for thinking and planning the future, bringing certain ideas and desires into the present, and with hope that these plans will come to fruition alongside (or sometimes, against) nature.

Without doubt, care and the entanglements that exist at these plots are complicated, emerging within and through the allotment in a multitude of ways. As this chapter shows, care exists as a quiet undercurrent, informing much of who (or what) belongs and who (or what) does not belong. More, it facilitates growth, where these women tend to their seeds, soils, and vegetation so that they can produce fruits and vegetables. Care, too, exists within and across the wide expanse of the more-than-human, from seed to plate, and from fungi to slug, through to the other beings that exist alongside the women. Care exists within these allotments for the women and their families, where produce is grown so that these women can provide, bringing home gluts of produce to provide for friends, family, and other allotment folk. Care also exists in relation to compost, and to the nutrients the women provide the allotment itself, utilising products that the allotment created and regenerates with. Finally, care also exists for these women

themselves, within and across the plot; where these women can take time for themselves, and for the creations they grow, in ways and means that they develop, caring for the allotment in their own, individual way. Importantly, this complex and messy landscape that care sits within at the allotment provides a pivotal point from which we can begin to explore these integral relationships and entanglements, which further inform these women's experiences, transforming the ways they exist within their plots, alongside and with (or, sometimes, not) the more-than-human that exist there.

## **7.2. More-than-nature...**

Relationships and entanglements with nonhumans at the allotment are a key contributor to the participant's experiences and stories within this thesis. Here, I begin to dissect and interrogate these important discussions surrounding the more-than-human, consider elements of care, and interrogate the burgeoning and sometimes fraught relationships that occur within these spaces, and how the women within this research approach this.

### **7.2.1. For the bees and beyond**

More-than-human presence at the allotment is an integral part of the allotment landscape, and this was apparent throughout this research. There were tensions, however, with the more-than-human, which centred on who (or what) is welcome, who (or what) is deemed to belong on the allotments, and who (or what) is unwelcome, or removed from the plots.

Nonhumans came up in conversation across a variety of subjects, including produce being eaten or stolen, methods of tending to seedlings, critters in the compost, as well as pollination and plant health. Addressing the relationships with the nonhuman on allotments is important as they are landscapes where we can see the blurred boundaries between nature and culture (Panelli, 2010). Importantly, as Hannah Pitt (2018, 2015) describes, we need to address the ways practices can interact with values, raising awareness and attention for the more-than-human which ought to be encouraged, rather than critiqued. Specifically, notions of who or what belongs (or not) in these spaces is associated with ecological contribution or value, like bees, for instance, are



welcome pollinators, whilst the slug is the allotment pest, vilified. For many, pests only take or destroy, while those that contribute food, or bring joy are welcomed (Pitt, 2018, 2015).

For some, the ways in which the women grow and tend to their allotments echoes Pitt's (2018, 2015) work, and were strongly associated to the ways in which the critters at their sites contribute to their eco-communities, and with that, elements of care; variation lies within the extent to which these nonhumans were part of this world, where they were positioned in this hierarchy, and whether they were of a risk (or not) to these spaces.

Suzie is very ecologically aware, and many of her choices at the allotment are dictated by her passion and care for the environment. With this, she eats seasonally, buys ethically sourced seeds, and is highly aware of her impact on the planet, using local businesses as much as possible. Moreover, coupled with growing her own food, she forages in local woodland to minimise ecological harm and her engagement with our capitalist marketized system. Suzie's permaculture ontology, which reflects her everyday habits that follow nature's patterns (Burnett, 2008) and care (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017), demonstrates a maintenance of principled integrity and acknowledges the allotment as an entangled, interwoven, interdependent way of life. For Suzie, who describes her relationship with nature as "we're not...as humans, trying to conquer nature. We are nature.", some of what she plants and grows is not for her own consumption or enjoyment but is for critters around her. The fact she can benefit from or eat this produce is a bonus, rather than primary motivation. There is a deep entanglement between nature of the allotment and where Suzie sees herself alongside it; like Haraway (2018, 2008), Suzie and her ontology epitomise both 'natureculture' and 'becoming-with' the space. For her, she wants her plot to be "a living space where things live in it when I'm not there" (Suzie, diary).



**Photograph 7.2.** *A bee enjoying a cardoon at Suzie's plot*

We spoke about one of her photographs which showed a bee enjoying a cardoon. She said:

Ahh the cardoon! I do like looking at them... it's just so unusual, and the bees were loving it. It worries me, you hear a lot about like, bee populations declining and what that means, so to provide something for them, like, I try and rescue bees if I see one struggling! (Suzie, interview, 12/09/2022)

Nell and Ettie had similar feelings to Suzie. Nell has a busy home life, so with her allotment she needs to strike a balance between family and the plot. She told me:

My allotment isn't really set up for nature. I have beds, there's not many perennials, there's no trees, and there's not many shrubs and things like that. I'm aware of that...it's important. My aim for next year...is to put more perennials in so I can make my life easier...but it's good to create a habitat for insects and stuff (Nell, interview, 26/09/2022)

For Nell, allowing the plot to grow cyclically with perennial plants means not only is less time and energy needed to tend the plot, but she will be providing for critters too. For her, both

elements are important; she wants to let nature do nature's natural thing and helping nature where she can.

Ettie's plot is in a similar vein. For her, the allotment was a source of tension following her miscarriage at the site (see chapter five) and because of this, she knew she would spend less time at the plot than she had done before. When discussing her photographs, she said:

I realised that this year I'm probably not going to be as invested in the plot, so I thought, well, "fuck it, let it go wild and grow!" The beauty of it is...it was covered in bees, covered in birds, there was rats in it, but I don't even mind them [laughs]. I was like "hi friend!"...letting that go wild is one of the best things I've ever done...there's loads of bees and then the flowers have gone wild because I've brought them [bees] in! (Ettie, interview, 07/10/2022)

Nature, for the likes of Suzie, Ettie and Nell is welcomed in, cared for, and celebrated at their plots, and it is this that encourages and dictates their planting choices. This is magnified through the ways critters impact pollination, and the consequential bloom of flowers, fruits, and vegetables that occur. Here, in these spaces, nature is in charge, and the women are there, alongside.

### 7.2.2. Nature as a resource

The entanglements between these women and critters at their allotments is a balance between nature being natural (and doing what nature does best: growing), nature working for the women and the women benefiting from this, and nature being commodified. With this commodification, it is not to be understood in a way that is marketized but should be considered as a way in which nature produces and people can reap this. This thinking echoes work by Anna Tsing (2015) who, in her book *The Mushroom at the End of the World*, shows the ways in which the matsutake mushroom is grown across the globe, yet is abused within the global supply chain that cannot always produce for the demand, often impacting other elements of the world (e.g., trees, workforces). Tsing (2015) demonstrates that the value of the matsutake is extracted and

shifts as this demand ebbs and flows, and as a result human encounters with the mushroom are entangled, have the potential to be harmful, and can be long reaching in messy, multispecies assemblages.

The relationships between produce, people, and the allotment are not on the global scale of the matsutake mushroom, but the encounters and entanglements between the human and the more-than-human is not dissimilar. Produce at the allotment is grown by the women through the planting of seeds and bulbs, which is done often intentionally, although sometimes can be accidentally, like through self-seeding. Yet, regardless of intent, much of the development of seed to vegetable, or bud to flower or fruit, depends on pollinators, who are workers of nature like bees and beetles. Without critters that visit their plots, an abundance of fruits and vegetables simply would not grow, and without the produce, many of the allotments would be redundant to the women, as for them they grow because of the fruits and vegetations they can garner. Critters, in this way, are a necessary resource on the allotment.

A lesson learnt underneath an apricot tree at Lizzie's plot is illustrative.



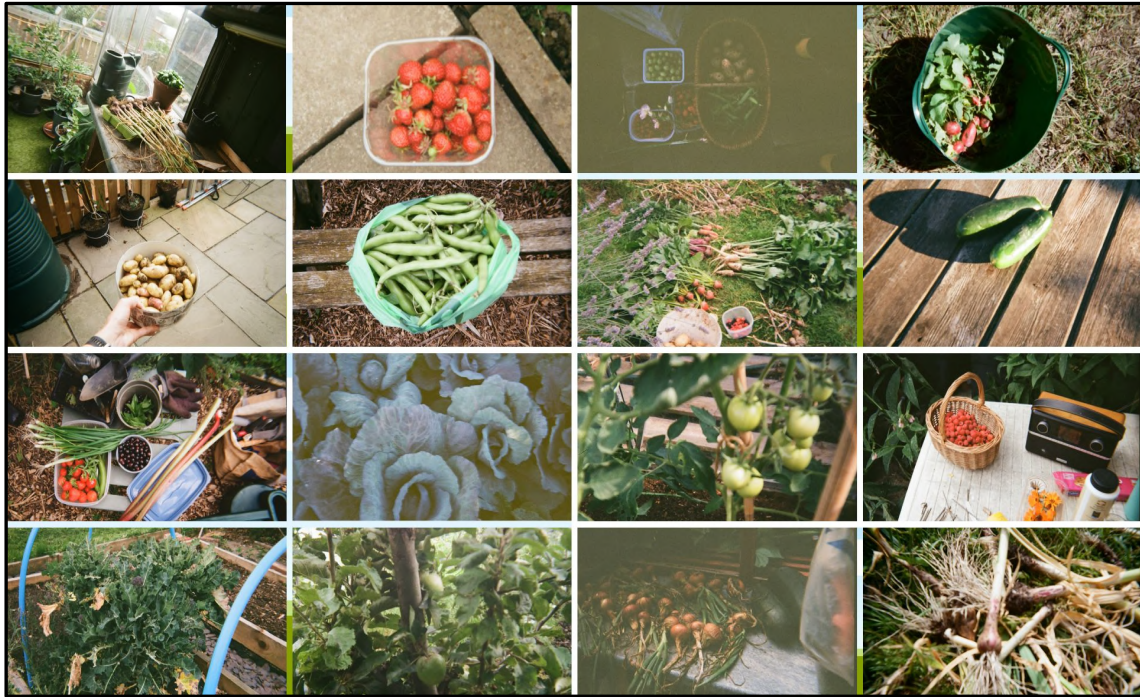
Photograph 7.3. *Lizzie's apricot tree*

Whilst sat beneath the tree at this table, Lizzie taught me that for fruit trees to successfully seed fruit, self-fertile fruit trees need the flowers that they grow to be pollinated, which is done by insects including bumblebees, honeybees, flies, beetles, butterflies, and wasps. Such critters transfer pollen from the male part (the anther) of a blossom on one tree, to the female part (the stigma) of a blossom on another tree. Once this occurs, the flower will begin producing fruit. Whilst often this can be mimicked with human intervention (e.g., hand-pollination), the evolution of fruit is largely based on the labour of critters and their movement(s) between trees and the act of pollination. Because of such behaviour, there is a type of hierarchy of what critters will be seen as welcome and belonging into the allotment landscape, with some (e.g., butterflies, honeybees, moths) welcome more than others (e.g., aphids).

Such discussion reflects who is welcome to the plot (and who is not), as well as demonstrating a hierarchy of who is cared for at the plot (and who is not), with the basis rooted in how they benefit the ecology of the allotment. Pitt (2018: 3) suggests that “care for nonhumans requires a sense of connection...combined with a degree of disconnection”, pressing that for those who interact with the more-than-human, it is crucial to acknowledge the ways in which the focus is often how we as humans can benefit from the critters; care, in this sense, does not come without a critter price. More, Gray and Sheikh (2021) suggest that landscape and nature are seen by many as passive, where nature is a resource to be extracted, profited from, controlled, and mastered, reflecting capitalist and colonial histories, whilst Myers (2015), Irigaray and Marder (2016) and Marder (2013) argue that this goes beyond food and people growing produce and is about plant ethics. They argue that humans often see plant-based non-humans with a vegetal passiveness, where they are valued no more than as a resource for human need and desire. Specifically, Marder argues that people must reassess how we position and value the more-than-human, calling for a “vegetal democracy” based on a “common participation in life” (Marder, 2013: 52), acknowledging the ways plant life grow and is structured, how it is rooted, and that the ways in which these critters exist is more advanced and complex than humans appreciate.



Most of the participants grew some kind of fruit or vegetables, with the amounts they grow and the varieties of choice varying:



**Photograph 7.4.** *A selection of the participant's harvests from their allotments*

Pictured, we can see an array of produce the participants grow, including Oakley's strawberries, Annie's radishes, Nell's broad beans, Ettie's collard greens, Wanna's raspberries, and Vivien's purple sprouting broccoli, along with Dizzie, Suzie and Christina's spring onions.

Yet, among this array of produce, there was a divide in terms of how the women position their allotment spaces and the ways in which they use the land, and what (or who) they feel *belongs* in these spaces, and what (or who) they choose to care for within their allotments. For some participants like Dizzie, Vivien, and Christina, the purpose of the allotment is to grow food, and so the plot and the critters are quite openly a resource. Speaking to Dizzie, who is an aficionado in allotment growing, it was clear that the purpose of her plot was to provide for her family:

I've always wanted to grow my own food but it's because I wanted to grow food for the family. I see it as part of housekeeping...I grow food to eat. I like to live cheaply, and I like to live [pause] I know where my food comes from, I always want to know where my food comes from...I always look at

the labels now, scrutinise what's in everything! (Dizzie, interview, 05/09/2022)

For Vivien and Christina, while ornamental plants and flowers are welcome and a pleasant addition, especially when they can see the pollinators visit, the real purpose of the allotment land is growing food. Their priority is the plants that will grow and provide for them, especially as they can pick flowers elsewhere. Moreover, for these women, their allotments are functional spaces towards self-sufficiency. All of them, too, commented on what it means to take this food home, to cook it, try new methods of pickling or preserving, and to share the produce that they have planted, tended, and harvested. This is, for them, much of what imbues their sites with meaning, and care here is shown to those in their family and friendship circles, where they can provide food and sustenance from their plots in gifts of gluts. More, whilst these women grow food because they enjoy caring for the allotment, the plot and the plants that grow are a resource from which the purpose is for them to take, and to enjoy. Lefebvre (1991) argues that it is through capitalism that we construct understandings and ideas about what social space is and how it is produced according to the needs of the capitalist society. Here, the allotment can be viewed as its own mode of production, and within this space the purpose (or the extraction of value) is within the harvest and vegetal produce that can be grown within it, maximising the land, and the use of that landscape. Once again, according to Lefebvre (1991), space is socially produced, and it is this that affects the social practices within places. Here, the expectation of the allotment is to grow and to produce food, which is exacerbated by neoliberal globalisation (Allen and Sachs, 2007) and the food system that society sits within.

This emphasis on produce is not the same for all the women. For others, the produce that they can harvest are an added benefit to an experience that they enjoy the activity of; the process of the growing, and the ways they can tend to and care for the produce and critters that they encounter is the main motivation, whilst the harvests they can collect from the land is a simple bonus, sitting in opposition to how the likes of Vivien and Christina feel.

For Heather, it is more about the activity of the growing:

I think it's the doing and the activity. Like the fact we get all of this fruit and vegetables and flowers is amazing and wonderful, but like even when that doesn't happen [pause] you know? (Heather, interview, 03/10/2022)

Similarly for Annie, it is the process of the growing that is important, giving meaning for her at her plot:

I don't grow fruit or veg out of a desire to become self-sufficient, or to disrupt supermarket supply chains. I do it because I enjoy the process. If I'm left with anything edible at the end, that's just a bonus! (Annie, interview, 17/09/2022)

It is also not just exclusively about the fruits and vegetables at the allotment as flowers can be an equally important and a valuable resource. Whilst Annie enjoys the growing process more than the produce she can garner from her plot, she focused on flowers more than vegetables this year. This was because she wanted to grow her own wedding posy:



**Photograph 7.5.** *Annie's freshly picked bouquet flowers, and her wedding posy*



Similarly, but for different reasons, Hen started growing a lot of food produce at plot initially, and now wants to diversify and plant more flowers. She said:

I'm increasingly growing flowers. I've sort of, I had ideals about starting off growing a significant quantity of food and being more sustainable but in time, I've just found so many of the crops have failed and it's quite demoralising, and I really enjoy just seeing the pollinators on the site, so as time goes on I've been growing more flowers just for the joy that it brings really [laughs] (Hen, interview, 08/10/2022)

For Fauna, her position as chairperson at her allotment site means she experiences the plot both on a personal level and thinking about the wider community, especially when encouraging people to engage with the community allotment. For her, in this role, it is not necessarily about the produce, and the benefit of this space rests more on the social and cultural capital that can be accrued around it (Bourdieu, 1986, 1989; see chapter two). When talking about what the community plot means to her in this position, she said:

For me it's more about [pause] it's about the educational journey from soil to plate...so instead of the dinner plate having a potato, carrot, broccoli or cabbage, you know, that, well there's an aubergine and we'll grow it and learn how to cook it (Fauna, interview, 12/09/2022)

For her, the community allotment is not just a space that can provide food but also is a place that can afford individuals to grow and garner knowledge which they can then take into the wider community. Whilst the physical food they may be able to grow is of great importance, the knowledge and skills are invaluable. Nature, here, is a resource but is one which is much bigger than what we have come to understand (e.g., food); rather it is about using the space to gain and use social and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986, 1989; Putnam, 2001; Field, 2003), allowing people to accrue and share knowledge, empowering them to develop and grow in a space which is tended and cared for, in order for them, too, to develop and grow.

For Fauna herself, as seen in chapter six, her allotment is a space that is important to her outside of the traditional produce paradigm, and over time, how she uses the plot and what she grows,

has changed. Initially, the allotment was a place for food, providing a useful resource, but now she has learnt that this is not what benefits her the most. Vegetables and fruits are a joy, but the real beauty in what she wants to tend to and spend time with – ‘becoming-with’ (Haraway, 2016) – are the flowers:

Initially I kind of, you know, it’s an allotment and therefore you grow vegetables and then gradually, it’s got more about plants and flowers...I grew vegetables for the first three years and then I realised I was giving away more than I was eating...growing things that I was just getting rid of (Fauna, interview, 12/09/2022)



**Photograph 7.6.** *Fauna’s flowers*

Walking around her plot with her, Fauna’s passion and tendency to care for flowers is clear; she spoke about them with tenderness, touching them as we walked around, telling me their names, how they grow, why she had planted them, and what she hopes for the future. She spoke too about what she had been doing to help them, such as getting alpaca manure from a nearby farm and making ‘golden tea’ (a water and alpaca poo soak, for feed), along with telling me about which critters had ventured into her plot, like a local badger and the many slugs. In doing this, Fauna echoes Tim Ingold (2000, 2008, 2011), demonstrating that her ‘knowing and showing’

comes from her engagement with her senses. Ingold (2000, 2008, 2011) argues that when we walk around landscapes, we inhabit them, thinking *with*, *from*, and *through* things, rather than about them. It was clear that whilst she enjoyed the tomatoes, strawberries, squash and garlic that she grows, Fauna's allotment has, through her, grown and changed from a place that produces out of practicality to become a place to imbue her senses, creating a myriad of colour and scents, and is a place of joy and pleasure where she can *be with*. Whilst she cuts the flowers before they go to seed to take them home to enjoy (or to give away), the ways in which the flowers become a produce of the allotment feels different from vegetables and fruits. The flowers give an embodied experience, engaging the senses, providing a feeling of luxury and pleasure, rather than the more practical and transactional feelings that come with growing food, in terms of food and nutrition, and the process of taking them from the soil (especially root vegetables). More, Fauna immersed herself within her plot as she shared it with me, which was reminiscent of being in Lewis Carroll's (1993) 'Wonderland'; I felt we were both *in*, *among*, and *with* the flowers, absorbing the colours and the smells that surrounded us from all angles, touching the soft petals or seeing the bees and hearing the birdsong, enjoying the flora simply for their *being* there, all the while the bumble bees and butterflies gorged on pollen.

### 7.2.3. Working together

Sometimes, the relationships that these women have with their allotments is a mixture of both providing for and caring about the critters that grow at and visit the plot while simultaneously using nature as a resource. In this way, it is about garnering the most potential from their allotment spaces for produce, as well as becoming-with and caring for the range of critters they encounter within these spaces; sharing the environment, working alongside them, and acknowledging that this space is both for humans and nonhumans, while trying to grow as successfully as they can.

Maximising and protecting their crops are important to many of these women, and often compromises are made within their allotments, illustrating strained more-than-human entanglements, where relational acts of care wrestle against one another. Many participants employ methods that specifically protect one type of critter (e.g., seedlings, vegetables) from

other critters (e.g., slugs, pigeons), which is indicative of an unspoken allotment hierarchy. Many use nettings and/or wire-mesh cloches to cover crops, while others make small structures out of recycled material to scare or detract unwelcome critters. Several of the women captured these methods on film:



**Photograph 7.7.** *Participants protecting their plants*

*Top row, L-R: Suzie's pigeon defence with mirrors and foil, Oakley's blue water-pipe cloche hoops across her plot*

*Bottom row, L-R: Ettie's anti-rat mesh corridor, Fern's protected collard greens, Dizzie's wire net shield over her strawberries*

Some participants had assorted results and mixed feelings towards using physical methods at their plots:

I try not to use nets because they can be harmful to wildlife, like birds and hedgehogs. I only use them sparingly on brassicas later in the season (Lizzie, WhatsApp, 3/11/2022)

I was really upset because the deer ate all of my strawberry plants because I didn't net them...I don't net that much but I don't need it. I net carrots and I did net beans, but the second lot which I put in haven't come to anything because it was too late because of the fucking deer eating them all!

[laughs]...I didn't anticipate them [strawberries] to be completely decimated! (Vivien, interview, 08/10/2022)

I put net over it [beans] because the birds kept pulling them out and it was really annoying. I'd never had broad beans pulled out and there's more magpies the nearer to the edge you go, and they're naughty! They do it for fun. They don't eat it, they just want to dig it out with their pointy beaks [pause] but they are pretty so, you know...[shrugs] (Heather, interview, 03/10/2022)

Having their allotment produce either partially or wholly eaten and/or destroyed was a common frustration. Much of the irritation comes from the way growing plants from seed is labour intensive, involving a great deal of care that comes from an attentive and embodied practice (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017); using time and energy, along with appropriate soils and feeds, watering correctly, and checking up against late frosts, bad weather, or signs of disease. More than this, the harvest is what many of these women wait on: to enjoy the fruits of this very labour. For some, to lose their vegetation to critters feels a loss which demands they raise their grievances because of the injustice. For others, they feel that they have earned the fresh, ripe strawberry or the delicious plump squash after so much care. Both approaches, however, show a familiar interdependence between the human and the natural world.

It is not just critters eating the food and flowers that the women try to navigate but weeds too. Most participants spoke to me about a slew of different varieties, with many referencing couch grass, bind weed, and mare's tail. Weeds pose a particular problem because whilst some look "nice and pretty" (Annie, interview, 17/09/2022), a contractual responsibility to manage them is a large part of the participant's leases, with some allotment sites enforcing this more than others.

People like Annie and Suzie approach weeds in a very relaxed way:

Who am I to take it out and tell it not to grow there? I leave them (Annie, interview, 17/09/2022)



I mean, I will pull weeds out, but I'm not [pause] it's like ironing. There's more to life than like [laughs] if it's something that's going to overtake the crop, then I need to deal with it, but then sometimes I just don't have time and I have to weigh up where the priorities lie (Suzie, interview, 12/09/2022)

Others feel like weeds are sources of shame, with Wanna documenting the first sight of mare's tail at her plot in 20 years:



**Photograph 7.8.** *“There it is, laid out!” – mare’s tail at Wanna’s plot*

When we talked about this, she said:

Mares tail! We haven't had any for 20 years and it's been wonderful, and people ask me what I'm doing to try and avoid it, but then this year I think it's started to come here. It's the shame! The shame. The mare's tail! God [pause] but you just kind of accept these things are part of it (Wanna, interview, 11/09/2022)

There is worry from Wanna about judgement, as encountering these weedy critters is not like encountering others, and the shame and sense of disappointment that comes from having weeds on the plot is palpable. Part of this is about trying to control nature and accepting that often this is not possible; these women can work alongside the flourishing life within the allotment, but they can never control it; there is “no self or subject to bring under control” (Ginn, 2016: 116). As such, weeds are generally accepted as an inevitable annoyance at the allotment, and as part of this, many of the participants acknowledge that certain critters will come to the plot regardless of what they do.

For some, instead of using large blockades or deterrents, they have come up with ways that they can grow plants or counter-act potential losses while acknowledging that they need to work with and along-side the more-than-human both on and within their allotments. As Robin Wall Kimmerer (2013) emphasises, the focus should not be thinking about how plants are useful for human purpose, but instead we need to cultivate mutually beneficial connections with plants. These methods, and the thinking of reciprocity and working *with* the various more-than-humans, highlights the depth of the partnership (and acts of care) that occurs between these women and the plants (Ginn, 2016), the ways in which people and plants can be understood as allies (Myers, 2017), and how people treat plants as deserving of their care (Hitchings, 2007; Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017). Combined, we can think about this as “true care” (Stuart-Smith, 2020: 75).

Heather’s plot is a great example of this relational care (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017; Tronto, 1993, 1998) and what we can consider, *working-with*. When I asked her what her least favourite part of the allotment is, she said:

Weeds. I don’t mind *weeding* [emphasis]. But weeds [pause] because they don’t do as they’re told! So I’ll be like “no dandelion, I’m digging you out” and you leave a tiny bit and the dandelion will be like “Aha!” and it comes back. Part of me is like, weeds deserve as much space as everyone else but also, I’m a bit like, “could you just not though?” ... I’m trying to replace weeds with marigolds...I’m saving the seeds and where there’s an edge...I’m going to try and replace that with marigolds and hopefully

they'll swamp out the dandelions and other shitty things! (Heather, interview, 03/10/2022)

To combat the weeds at her plot, Ettie tries to companion plant. She puts raspberries around strawberry plants, which helps to suppress the growth of weeds, as well as using rhubarb leaves for covering soil to defend against the bindweed. Here, for both Heather and Ettie, having weeds at their allotments is less about overcoming them and more about working with the welcome plants to lessen those that are unwelcome, demonstrating both a more-than-human hierarchy and the ways people and plants can work together, within these landscapes.

Some participants are very relaxed about the more undesirable critters on their plots, and this is reflected in the ways that they implement measures against some (but not all) of them. Rather than use physical blockages, some participants plant sacrificial crops, while others use noisy and bright decorations in the hopes that these discourage unwelcome guests. In this way, there is a type of moral consideration that is being enacted, where the wellbeing of others (a form of care) is given due consideration (e.g., birds getting stuck in netting), which informs their choices. This is often different from the world outside of the allotment, where care for nature is largely forgotten because it is not entirely human-focused, lacking qualities that are beneficial for people (Plumwood, 1993). Here, care is witnessed again in these spaces, with some of the women *working-with* the knotted, interconnected elements of their plots, working with and across the more-than-human, in order to tend to themselves and their families for food, while also working to care for the more-than-human, both in terms of vegetables (which they benefit from), and the critters that might also need the vegetation, as well as the safety and nature of the plot.

For some participants, this *working-with* nature and care is very evidently part of their allotment ethos. Lorena, Lizzie, and Ettie, for example, prefer to plant sacrificial crops on their sites. For them, by planting more than they need, many of the critters will not eat the entire harvest, leaving some untouched for their own consumption. In this way, these women are similarly caring for these critters by providing them with food, but they are also working alongside them, trying to accomplish success both for the non-humans, and themselves.



Some of the participants use creative methods to prevent critters. As seen pictured (see photograph 7.7), Suzie uses a variety of recycled waste material to deter some critters, including old cans from the previous tenant, empty drink bottles, and pieces of mirror and tinfoil, while Lizzie uses bunting over her vegetable beds which makes a loud rustling noise that deters the birds away.

And sometimes, even with the best tricks, tips, and planning, things still succumb to the more-than-human. Heather documented what birds can do to unguarded seeds:



**Photograph 7.9.** *Bird destruction at Heather's plot, and the remaining seeds*

She reflected on this in her diary:

Ummm...outrage! I'd left a couple of seed packets out where I'd sat at lunch and went to tidy them before dinner. Some bastard birds (doing their natural bird thing, obv) had pecked open my beans packet. Found the Yin Yang ones on the next-door plot, but ALL THE BROAD BEANS WERE GONE ☹️ (they were a special medieval variety!) (Heather, diary)

Existing as an undercurrent at the plots, there is certainly a hierarchy about who and what is welcome at the allotment, and when. For many of the participants, even though they want to protect their produce, most recognise that non-human encounters are simply part of the process. Many of the women talked to me about this, articulating these entanglements with consideration:

[laughter] I'm kind of conflicted about it. I'm pissed off that they [the deer] ate my strawberry plants but then, I love that it's just animals hanging around and I wish I could see them! [pause] so, I think [pause] "well, if you want to eat them, you go on". I'm okay with it (Vivien, interview, 08/10/2022)

You accept that a third of the harvest is going to be food for all of the wildlife that comes and visits, and you can't like the fact the wildlife's there and then not accept that you need to feed it! (Fern, interview, 03/10/2022)

I like to try and remember the saying: 'if something isn't eating your plants, you're not part of the ecosystem and that's a bigger problem'...whilst cursing them out! (Lizzie, WhatsApp, 03/11/2022)

Many allotment holders will work to implement measures that will help preserve or protect the plant-life they have tended, with almost everyone acknowledging that they will never overcome the full population of the unwanted guests at their sites. They recognise that those creatures who will take the berries and the seeds, or who will munch the hostas or the dahlias, are to be encountered at the plot. Rather than seeing them as the enemy, they are 'becoming-with' in a

world of ‘naturecultures’; one which is informed with an ethic of relational care (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017; Tronto, 1993, 1998), regardless of their possible frustrations.

#### 7.2.4. Sticky slugs

Whilst many participants expressed that there was little they could do about many of the non-humans who eat and destroyed their allotment produce, one critter was particularly unwelcome: the slug.

Slugs are one of the most common critters on the allotments and there was a consensus among the participants that they are unwelcome. Heather called them “frenemys” (diary), illustrating the tension between both natural friend or foe, while Lizzie (interview, 06/10/2022) referred to them as “bastards!” and her “nemesis”. The unwanted presence of them was also reflected in the participant’s photographs, with several documenting slug invasions, and many of them talking about slugs with distain during my time at the allotment, and in our interviews.

Slugs are common within the horticulture literature, and resentment towards these gastropods is not surprising. In the UK, over 15 billion slugs can make their way into our green spaces, with the average garden attracting 200 slugs a year, where they can devour over 800 grams of plant matter annually (Ginn, 2013; Ford, 2003). For a minority, slugs are a natural part of the allotment site, not invoking much animosity:

They don’t bother me. Slugs, spiders [pause] I’m not really bothered. I just move them on. Pests aren’t [pause] they’re not pests, they’re just part of it!  
(Ettie, interview, 07/10/2022)

If the slugs come and eat some things like, I’m like “okay, the slugs came and ate things”. I don’t think I see it as a personal affront (Dawn, interview, 26/09/2022)

For others, the slug presents as a critter who tests the women’s resolve to live alongside some nonhumans (Hinchcliffe, 2007), especially as they are seen as both laughable and revolting (Ginn, 2013). Slugs, as Lorimer (2007) highlights, have no aesthetic charm, and they are unusual in their

shape and form with no face or hands, while being renowned for being sticky, leaving long slime trails in their wake.

This stickiness, I argue, is one of the main reasons why the slug is so undesirable. Echoing earlier discussions surrounding Mary Douglas (1966) and Julia Kristeva (1982) around dirt and the abject (see chapter five), Christine Battersby (2013) suggests that there is a sticky boundary between humans and some nonhumans like the slug, reminding us that this leaky stickiness gives form to invasion, rendering bodies and objects fluid and changeable. Here, we can see similarities between how we view the slug and my earlier discussion surrounding women's leaky bodies. The slug, with its soft, alien-like face and clear trail of excreting substance is seen as ill-fitting, inappropriate and unwelcome at the plot, creating a sense of unease, with 'matter out of place' (Douglas, 1966). This, I contend, is echoed in how society views women's leaky bodies; sticky, dirty, and inappropriate, leaving their own certain type of *mess* at certain parts of the hormonal cycle. This same 'matter out of place' (Douglas, 1966) however, is where we can see a form of unity between women and these nonhumans, and where we can see there is a sense of sharing the world (or, space) with these critters; where in these moments of connection within and because of the allotment, we can see they are "unavoidable and frequently messy" (Morgan, 2019: 120).

Irrespective of these conceptual tentacular entanglements between the slug and the women, the unease the slugs create for many of the participants is obvious, and the slug's abject existence was reflected with many participants. Lucy and Lorena described them as "awful", whilst Suzie called them "disgusting" and "horrendous". Suzie photographed a slug and told me:



**Photograph 7.10.** *Suzie's 'acrobatic' slug*

[laughs] That's a slug. And it was disgusting!...It was just doing some sort of acrobats, it was [pause] they're just [pause] they're horrendous... I just really don't like them (Suzie, interview, 12/09/2022)

She shared with me that many slugs contain a toxin and if eaten by a human, it is fatal. From this she said that she does not mind the leopard slug, which is a very large, spotty species, because they eat other slugs – but even then, her overarching feeling is that she really does not like them. Whilst for many the slug was irritating rather than threatening, yet for Suzie, the slug is more than a predator at the allotment and represents a nonhuman abject form of possible danger.

For many, the slug represents potential vegetation loss. For every dahlia or kohlrabi that these women tend and plant, there are several slugs waiting hopefully and expectantly to gorge on the fruits of this Other – the human's – labour. The allotment, even when carefully curated and protected, can quickly become a free-for-all for the slug, whose nocturnal movements go undetected until the fresh morning light, where their sticky, slimy trails are visible.



During our interview Wanna talked emphatically about her frustrations she has with slugs:



**Photograph 7.11.** *A slug's lunch at Wanna's plot*

Oh yes, LOOK AT THAT! Slug damage! [laughs] I was really cross that they ate that. Really cross. I was really cross, and I came down, and I said to my husband “look at that!” and he said, “never mind!” [laughs]. I’d spent weeks, they were grown from seed. I’d grown them from seed, I’d ordered them specifically, I’d planted them...that one had been munched but it just had the tiny bit in the middle it grows from. I think the others have been completely annihilated! It was really annoying because I was struggling with the compost and things were not growing, and then he said, “never mind!” (Wanna, interview, 11/09/2022)

Wanna had intentionally purchased some blue Winter Squash Uchiki Kuri seeds, cared for and tended to them at home, and transplanted them to the plot when they were ready, but many of her budding seedlings were “annihilated” by slugs. Her frustration, which was compounded by her husband’s lack of sympathy, was clear. Thankfully, she had purposefully planted more than she needed, and this diligence meant she was still able to harvest some squash. Care, again, is

complex, interconnected and entangled, and is not only about tending to the seeds to grow the squash but is about care for her (and her husband's) future self in terms of supplying them with food, and for thinking ahead, over-preparing seedlings, and for care of the plant potential.

Even when the participants did try to protect themselves (through their plants) from slugs, their efforts were often thwarted. Suzie told me:

So, there was some peas, not many, but yeah...we built this tee-pee structure...and I put some gigantic green beans down and, they were going up it! The slugs managed to go along the vine, all the way up, about two metres high, and eat the flowers! [laughs] (Suzie, interview, 12/09/2022)

For many of the participants, just like Wanna and Suzie, the battle with the slugs is deftly fought but rarely won. Many participants expressed how this was simply par for the course of having an allotment, and the presence of the slugs is just nature.

Lorena and Suzie said:

I just think you have to accept that there will be crop damage and you'll have to worry about it and it's sad and all of this. I've just come to terms with them, everyone hates them, but we have to live alongside them [slugs] [laughs] (Lorena, interview, 08/10/2022)

It's just like, you know, shit happens [laughs] it's a bit annoying, but I don't really get too hung up on it, and we move on the next issue [laughs] of which there are many! (Suzie, interview, 12/09/2022)

Allotment life means seeking out ways to skilfully maximise potential allotment hauls, planting and growing in ways that can save and protect produce. Echoing the discussion above, the slug is often pitted against other life found at the plot, solidifying its place at the bottom of the allotment hierarchy. Many participants spoke about pollinators, who are welcomed to the allotments because of their ecological contribution to the landscape, whereas slugs are viewed only for their

destruction and harm, even though they are excellent for composting and decomposition. As such, they are “ripe for killing” (Pitt, 2018: 18).

For some, harm is part of encountering slugs, whilst for others, it is about relocating them away from the allotment. To combat them, one option is slug pellets. These are an effective way to deal with slugs and can help to off-set guilt that may come with killing them more directly (Ginn, 2013). Since March 2021, there is only one type of slug pellet approved for non-industry growing and organic approaches and it has been found to be an effective tool for gastropod management (Rae et al., 2023). For Wanna, using pellets was not something she felt she had a choice in doing:

I don't usually [pause] I don't usually use slug pellets, but I was *driven* [emphasis] to it. These aren't the nasty one. I mean they are nasty if you're a slug but they're the organic one. You can't buy the nasty ones anymore!  
(Wanna, interview, 11/09/2022)

For Heather, nematodes are her method of choice. Nematodes are a microscopic creature, which act as a parasite against other insects. Mixed with water, the slurry is poured onto soil. When a slug eats the slurry, a bacterium is released into the body that kills them, and the nematode then eats the host (Kiotke and Fitch, 2013). They are used by many organic growers because of their chemical-free origin. For others, like Lorena and Suzie, slug pellets and nematodes were not methods they wished to employ, preferring to use more holistic approaches that are aligned more with their personal care ontologies. Suzie for instance, as a very eco-conscious individual, does not like the idea of killing nonhumans, even slugs, preferring to use more natural methods:

I don't use pellets or anything, and I'd never ever use pellets because I know they don't just end with the slug, but they end with the hedgehog that eats it. It makes its way through the system...I've been using eggshells, that's meant to keep them away, and coffee! (Suzie, interview, 12/09/2022)



Like Suzie, Lorena is very aware of her impact on the planet and prefers chemical-free methods:

I don't use pesticides because I'm on their patch...I'm coming in and disturbing it all...I'm putting vegetables in that they bloody love so of course they're going to eat it! (Lorena, interview, 08/10/2022)

She went on to say:

I've tried loads of different things!...I've put traps down, I've put wool pellets down, but I also just don't really believe that pellets really work. I've tried eggshells which I do still do a bit but I'm one person and I don't eat that many eggs... I try and pick them [slugs] up and I walk them to near the house because you have to move them 400 metres or more. There's studies where they've put nail varnish on them. I sometimes throw them over the hedge and I'm sure they've probably hit people, but I just throw them [laughs] if not I put them in a pot and I take them back with me and I dump them under a tree opposite the flat and I'm sure they're perfectly happy there. There's no gardens nearby to that. Well, there probably are but they'd need to go over two roads! [laughs] (Lorena, interview, 08/10/2022)



**Photograph 7.12.** *“This is me picking the slugs off the lettuce!” – Lorena*

Indeed, the literature Lorena is referring to suggests that slugs exhibit homing behaviour, often returning to the same hole in the ground at the end of a night (Brooks, 2013), highlighting the difficulties the women are faced with in terms of protection and strategy. For Lorena, shielding against the slugs is a dance between moving the slugs away from her allotment, and testing out methods that are known to be effective that are chemical-free. Such methods that are popular include copper rings, salts and mats, coffee grounds, broken eggshells, acorns, beer traps, eco-friendly pellets, frog houses, as well as using cat food to encourage hedgehogs (Ginn, 2013, 2016).

A key issue with slugs is around boundaries; creating protective distances and spaces within the plot and around the plants that the women know slugs will target. Suzie, for example, grows calendulas, which deter them:

You can probably smell them! They're quite potent and they're quite sticky as well so, another slug repellent. I don't even know if it works but when I cut the heads off when I dead-head I just put them around other things to

try and keep them away. The smell apparently keeps a lot of things away!

(Suzie, interview, 12/09/2022)

The methods many of these women use in relation to slugs reflects much of their relationships with the more-than-human. Many expressed some discomfort at the idea of killing the slugs, regardless of their dislike towards them:

Errr, well, I have accidentally trod on a few [laughs]...it was genuinely an accident! (Suzie, interview, 12/09/2022)

I've drowned them in beer, rotted them down, that was awful [pause/looks horrified] (Lorena, interview, 08/10/2022)

Collected what felt like hundreds of slugs and dropped them off on some grass near my flat... It makes me feel better than any of the other methods I've used in the past to 'dispose' of them. (Lorena, diary)

Here, it is evident Lorena and Suzie are not comfortable with the idea of "disposing" (Lorena, interview, 08/10/2022) of the slugs. Suzie's laughter after admitting to standing on some slugs, Lorena's language, and Wanna who describes being "driven" to use slug pellets, illustrates that there are tensions between how these women feel about the slugs on their plots, how they feel about nature, and what they feel they need to do to save or salvage their much-cared-for crops. Ginn (2013: 539) describes this as a performance of "double detachment", where people seek to "distance themselves from slugs through a variety of killing practices" while at the same time "seek to detach themselves from the business of killing" through the way they describe it and how they feel about it. For Ginn (2013: 539) this illustrates how green space "proceeds through acts that speak simultaneously of encounter and detachment", where the aim is not necessarily to kill slugs, but to simply not have to encounter them in the first instance: a "hoped-for absence" (Ginn, 2013: 540). Here, allotments are spaces of paradox, where there is existence of both acts of care (of both plants and, in some ways, the slugs) and killing (of the slugs and through the slugs) simultaneously.

For Christina and Lucy, literally killing slugs is a viable and often necessary component of having their allotment:

I'm very happy to kill a slug if I see it. I would never [pause] I don't use anything chemical or anything but if I see a slug...I'm quite happy to get a pair of scissors and just cut a slug in half... I really don't like slugs [laughs]. Snails, I give a throw and maybe they will survive that but, you know. But, yeah, and beetles I will kill. I got lily beetles on the fritillaries, and I was quite happy to squash them. I'm quite happy to kill things! (Christina, interview, 27/09/2022)

I mean slugs are the worst and I will massacre slugs [laughs]... I think slugs are the ones that I have the least time for. I had a really gross experience where I had a lovely echinacea plant and I thought it's going to be great and I went outside one night and there was a slug orgy on the plant, it was the most disgusting thing I've ever seen. I started killing them by chopping them in half and I think "it's okay it's a quick death", and I ended up having to put them near the tree at the end of the street. I had a trowel full. There was about twenty! It was repellent... They're awful! (Lucy, interview, 04/10/2022)

The killing of non-humans, including slugs, is a common sight at allotments, and these actions call us to consider power, agency, and the more-than-human, underscoring the normativity of the "banal violence" people commit through everyday practices (Yusoff, 2012: 58), and disrupting what we can consider as acts of care (Tronto, 1993, 1998; Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017). Cutting up slugs with scissors would be a largely unusual practice in spaces outside of the allotment, yet within them, it is an acceptable, often anticipated, practice. Here, some lives are valued and are seen as liveable, whilst others are overlooked (Yusoff, 2012), reiterating the hierarchy of care that underscores much allotment activity. This is especially important because rarely is the loss of life left in mind during the reflections of eating home-grown food that has been at the result of certain sacrifice (Yusoff, 2012; Derrida, 1991). Moreover, when care and killing are located together, they become "situated, co-constitutive practices" (Govindrajana,

2018: 81). Green spaces, like gardens and allotments, are spaces of flourishing activity with many forms of life, yet the slug in this context, is ejected from this notion by being a risk to the plants and vegetation that it surrounds, lurking as an “ever-present threat” (Ginn, 2013: 533).

Some argue that there is inescapable, unavoidable violence within multispecies encounters (Roe and Greenhough, 2023) as the care for some critters translates into the death of others; indeed, Haraway (2008: 80), in her text *When Species Meet*, suggests that “there is no way of living that is not also a way of someone, not just something, else dying differentially”. Death, then, can allow us to understand more about human/nonhuman boundaries (Baker et al., 2013) and the ways in which some beings are cared for more and are allowed to *belong*, while others are not, especially within the allotment. Moreover, both in opposition to an ethic of care and in line with it (Tronto, 1993, 1998), this allows us to consider how some critters are constructed as killable (Haraway, 2008); they are seen as beings that do not belong, and who cannot be afforded life in these plots, because other lives are more important, like the vegetables and fruits. Here, because of death (van Dooren, 2014), the restrictions of who is and is not killable is set in alignment with a human/nonhuman boundary, “upheld by human exceptionalism” (Mazhary, 2021: 5), whereby some lives and ways of being are valued more than others. Here, care for the cucumber or squash sits as more important, or more integral, than care for the slug, or the beetle. The more-than-human become in opposition within each other, and it is the women who will decide who can *belong* and who cannot.

Allotments are spaces of growth and new life. They exist as landscapes for things to grow and for humans and more-than-human life to consume, thrive, and survive. Plant-life survives because they are afforded the right conditions with the right care to thrive. So too do these plants exist in spaces that critters call home. More, plant life like leaves, fruits, and vegetables provides sustenance for humans and the more-than-human, including those who are *unbelonging* in such spaces; pests. The term ‘composition’ (see Latour 2010 and 2014) is useful here, which suggests that we as humans must work towards building a world of commonality, with a “continuity of all agents in time and space” (Latour, 2010: 484). As Ginn (2013: 534) suggests, it is a way of thinking of the world and how things can “stick together”. Working and navigating the allotment in a way that allows us as humans to *become-with* slugs, and other nonhumans, would

help diminish the reductionist hierarchies that exists. Ethically, it raises the question of how can we view the slug as unwelcome and killable (Haraway, 2008; Pitt, 2018) when the allotment space is as much their home as we can consider it the home of the broad bean, the sweetcorn, or the freesia; at what point does care end for the more-than-human and it becomes the enemy?

### **7.3. More-than-soil...**

Alongside the entanglements with the critters at their allotments, there are complicated relationships with the land at these sites. This includes the physical land, like the soil and the earth, as well as some more tense political relationships with the space. Both the physical and the intangible bricolage of the allotment, along with the entangled interconnected 'natureculture' (Haraway, 2003) assemblages within these environments, contribute to demonstrate the complexity within this landscape.

#### **7.3.1. The physical allotment**

This thesis has evidenced the ways in which the allotment space itself facilitates how the women who took part in this study build within these environments, across physical structures, plant foundations, relationships with others, and understandings of (and with) the more-than-human. More than this, it demonstrates the ways in which these women imbue complex, fluid and transient meanings and relationships within these sites. Allotments are sites of place-making, where people can establish identities and where "social relations, experiences, meanings and a sense of place are developed and visualised" (Noori and Benson, 2016: 291). A central aspect of the allotment unearthed so far is that these women create or experience a sense of possession on their plots; that the allotment is a space of one's own, that they exist within these spaces, and that these pockets of land are theirs to do what they wish.

Allotments are spaces which are not owned by those who use them but are leased for an annual fee. As such, allotment holders must adhere to rules implemented at each site and, with this, are subject to regular allotment checks, although the ways that this is implemented varies. For the women in this research there was a mixed relationship between how they felt about renting, and

how this affected how they interacted with or felt about their plots, along with what they did on/at these sites. For some, it was not a problem:

Because of the way that allotments here are structured, I feel secure in my ownership of the space. As long as I follow the rules and don't do anything to get kicked out, which I wouldn't, then I know that this is mine until I chose to give it up, because it's statutory allotment land...It can't be taken away from me unless I do something wrong... I feel it's somewhere I'll be for a long time, and it's my actions that will determine that. (Lizzie, interview, 06/10/2022)

I have ownership. Technically, I could chop down all of those trees. I wouldn't. But if I wanted to, I could. And that's nice. (Gwen, interview, 04/09/2022)

For some participants, the allotment as a rented space is not something that influences their time at the plot. They feel it is their space, and they navigated freely within it. For others, though, this was not the case. Hen spoke particularly often, and candidly, about the ways the allotment being leased affects how she experiences the site, and for her, the precarious nature of a rental contract causes great anxiety. She worries often about being evicted and having to endure allotment checks and not fulfilling rules, working to make sure she is part of the community 'enough' so as to hold on to her site. She told me she was "an anxious person" (Hen, interview, 08/10/2022) and knows she has no reason to warrant these worries, yet it dictates much of how she feels and interacts with and around the allotment. We spoke about this:

It's definitely the most negative side of my experience, really. The feeling of being a bit kind of, vulnerable, to the whims of the committee...As long as I abide by the rules it should be fine, but I just get the sense that, you know, it could be the decision of a very small number of people with this kind of power over something that means a lot to me (Hen, interview, 08/10/2022)

The potential loss of the plot is in part what causes her anxiety, especially because it is an important part of her life. The risk that she could lose it is intertwined with how she feels about



the space, which in some ways almost off-sets the joy she gains from it. Alluding to the power of the committee, she stresses the ways in which she may be, in many ways, helpless to her fate. As such, this dictates what she grows:

I think hard about what I put into that space and how much I can get back from it if it's no longer my space...it's a bit of a source of fear and discomfort to me... Things like the fruit bushes I've been holding off from because of the fear of spending money on something that might not be mine anymore (Hen, interview, 08/10/2022)

For Hen, she is conscious about how she invests in her allotment, as without the knowledge that this is a permanent fixture, she is wary to devote too much of her limited income to the space. When I visited, she spoke to me about how an obligation of her lease was that she must add a shed, but she is hesitant because it is at a considerable cost, yet failure to do so could see eviction. It was clear this blurry world of *but what if* caused her anxiety, and greatly influenced her choices and decisions. It was interesting that with this anxiety, however, she spoke of those around her in the community who had held plots for several years differently:

I've spoken to people recently who've had their plots for over twenty-five years and it's like...wow, it's lovely to have something of yours, effectively, for that long (Hen, interview, 08/10/2022)

Here, she acknowledges that for those long-term holders there is a stronger level of *implied* ownership, and that although these people have the same contractual status as her, because they have held their plots longer this improves their plot security, almost as if there is an element of 'time-served'. As such, Hen is conscious of how she presents herself at the plot within the community:

The more I'm down there and the more I interact with the community and take part in events and feel like I'm establishing myself, I do think it helps. I think it helps as well to be more than a name on a spreadsheet and to be a face that people recognise...I just worry about illness or pregnancy that will make it hard to do the upkeep and then it will be taken off us, even for a

temporary situation, because I really do want to have the plot and continue to cultivate it and have it for a long time (Hen, interview, 08/10/2022)

Here, not only does Hen show that there is a pressure to be present at the allotment to appease those around her, but she also raises potential issues pertaining to illness and pregnancy. The allotment becomes a space, yet again, within which women can become marginalised because of their bodies, even if for a temporary period. Hen reflected on this in her diary, too, demonstrating much of the same. There is a tension between what she would find as a joyous event (pregnancy) against a part of her life that she also finds happiness in (the allotment), and there is a clear anxiety for her in terms of how these two factors fit together given the vulnerability that the leasing of the allotment space presents.

Hen's relationship with the allotment changes directly because she does not own the site, and this threads to transactions of power. The risk that she might be evicted poses a worry for her, one that clearly influences how she engages with her plot and whether she feels she *belongs*, both in a physical sense and in terms of the community. This is in direct contrast to those other participants, like Lizzie and Gwen, who encounter their sites as if they are their own. It is evident that whilst there is nuance in how the participants feel about the rented status of their plots, this situation is influential to how these women navigate their allotments, governing what they decide to plant, and where (and how) they choose to invest.

For some participants, how they navigate and feel about their allotments is not related to the fact they are on leased property or that they do not own their plots directly, but instead it is about their relationship to the earth:

I feel a bit funny about ownership of land anyway. We use my plot and stuff but really, it's the earth's. I'm kind of going and messing it up really (Lorena, interview, 08/10/2022)

I've got a sense that this isn't a space that I own. It's definitely something I'm caretaking at the moment. I don't think about it as a five-to-ten-year period. I think about it year-on-year (Dawn, interview, 26/09/2022)

I want to tread lightly on it, but it wouldn't be accurate to say I was...I am imposing myself on the landscape...I don't want to build anything on the plot, I just want to convene with the earth or something [laughs] (Lucy, interview, 04/10/2022)

Participants like Lorena, Dawn and Lucy, in this context, are influenced and informed by their relationship to the planet, reflecting their wider relationships to their plots. More, this is demonstrated through their interactions with critters that they encounter, the ways that they navigate their sites as active agents, or how they feel towards their plots and their relationships with the physical land of the allotment. Within the academic literature there is discussion regarding relationships to the land, which is often centred within an important (and often global) conversation with colonisation, and/or within indigenous cultures (see Kimmerer, 2013 and Yusoff, 2018). Whilst within this research the topic of land did not arise in this context (e.g., indigenous, aboriginal, spiritual ancestry), there were conversations that echoed this that were relevant in terms of ownership, leasing land, and relationships to the land as temporary custodians. Within this discussion, it was interesting that while many people did not mention directly how they felt in relation to the physical land, like the soil, this came through within other parts of the allotment; plants and vegetation, nodes of more-than-human care, as well as more practical means within the allotment, like composting. Importantly, within this discussion, the conversation circled back to notions, feelings, and encounters of care.

For women like Lorena, Dawn and Lucy, their relationship with the plot and the way they navigate this space is imbued with how they feel about the earth, and the ways in which they want to “tread lightly” (Lucy, interview, 04/10/2022), causing as little harm or invasion to the plots as possible. In this way, the allotments do not belong to them, but they are instead working with, or on top of, the earth, *within* these spaces. This draws us back to thinking about care and the allotment, especially the work of Tronto (1993, 1998) and Puig de la Bellacasa (2017). As is illustrated above, participants like Lorena, Dawn and Lucy do not see themselves as separate from their plots, and instead, they are part of building a more-than-human “world” (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017: 2), which incorporates interweaving a “complex, life-sustaining web” (Tronto, 1993: 103). How these women see the land of the allotment dictates how they exist within these

landscapes (and, then, these worlds). The acknowledgment that these spaces *are* more-than-the-human while also comprising *of* the more-than-human means that even when the women are not physically close to the soil of the plot, kneeling down in the earth and working with the allotment, they are still considering how they navigate around it; doing so with thought, planting in ways that work for the land, and making plans that will cause minimal invasion and the least amount of damage. Here, we can look back to our understanding of encounter and closeness, witnessing that it is not just the face-to-face, tangible experiences, but also the more cerebral relationships and *thinking-with* the space. This then also becomes less about ownership, and more about a fleeting period in which the women can grow within these allotment worlds while they are taking care of these spaces using them, growing in them, and tending to them. I argue that this is not using them as a resource in the same way as I have already discussed, where these spaces can be commodified and maximised, but instead, it is within an ethical framework that these women view themselves as temporary visitors; people who have a sense of permission and are allowed to be benefiting from these spaces while they are looking after the land, who see that their relationships with these spaces are interconnected and interdependent on the 'natureculture' ways of being (or, belonging). There is an acknowledged level of respect for the land that these allotments occupy, within the context of them being in and *belonging to* nature, that goes beyond a name on a tenancy agreement. The human, here, can be seen in a guardianship post, waiting to pass on this 'response-ability' (Haraway, 2018: 104) that is so deeply embedded within vegetal and more-than-human care.

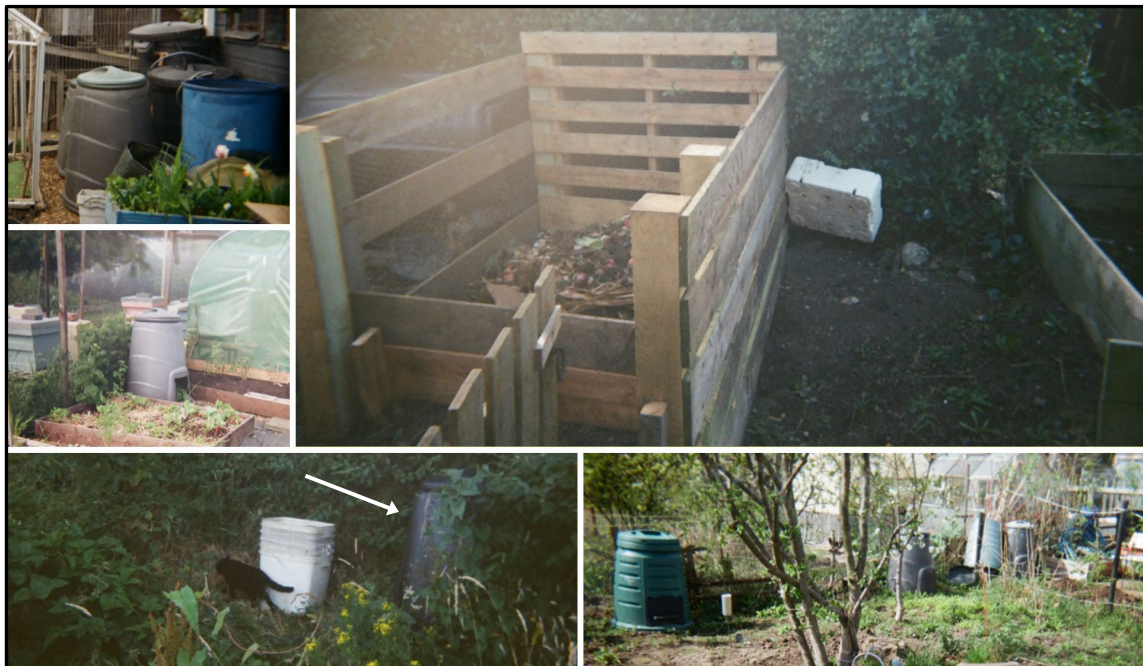
### 7.3.2. The composting allotment

Relatedly, rather than expressing a direct relationship to the land through tenure, some participants demonstrated their encounters and entanglements to the soil through the practice of composting.

Composting is a natural way in which green and brown waste matter, like leaves, food scraps, weeds, pruning, shredded paper and cardboard, can be broken down organically, and which can transition into a nutrient rich fertiliser (see Stentiford, 1996; Termorshuizen et al., 2004). Usually, waste is collected in kitchens and the home in small bins, which is transported and left in large

compost bins or bays at places like allotments. There are several different ways to create compost including vermicomposting, bokashi composting, and aerobic composting. Whilst these methods alter mostly in terms of container and process, the end results are similar, with each method producing a crumbly, nitrogen-rich, dark, sweet-smelling fertiliser which is perfect for plants and the soil.

Composting is a common part of allotment culture and was present on almost everyone's allotment. The different ways in which the participants do their composting was captured often inadvertently in their photographs, as I illustrate below:



**Photograph 7.13.** *Various compost bins captured on film*

**Clockwise:** *Christina's bin, Wanna's many compost bins, Lorena's bin hidden among bindweed with the allotment cat, one of Lizzie's spots, and Heather's selection of containers*

For many, composting at their sites is a holistic part of tending to and caring for the plot. It is a way to enrich the soil, to provide nutrients for the vegetation, and helps maximise the potential of the produce they will hopefully harvest, whilst also being environmentally considerate, utilising some of their own waste material. It is also a material labour which, after time and patience and material provision and care, will help the plants and soil, which in turn, provides for these women. Care, once again, is important. But it is not a sense of care that is altruistic,

reiterating the human/nonhuman binary (Haraway, 2003, 2008, 2016; Plumwood, 1993), and it is not a form of care that is hierarchical with people positioned as benevolent or superior (Turner, 2014). Instead, it is an interconnected act and ethic of relational care (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017; Tronto, 1993, 1998) that is afforded to the vegetation, and which benefits those consuming the harvests, those admiring or pollinating the blooms, and those who spend time on and in these landscapes; the hard work of the women caring for the allotment and doing the practice of composting benefits the environment, the women, and others; as an act of selfless, interconnected care. Further, composting is a relational practice and is based on ways of knowing; it requires people to “become knowledgeable regarding the liveliness, and needs, of a pile of compost” (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2015: 146), as well as being attune to what to do next, learning the process and transformational journey of turning waste matter into nutrient-rich fertiliser. In this way it is, for Puig de la Bellacasa (2015), “not just about compost, as compost, or like compost, but rather *with* compost” (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2010: 14, emphasis added): it is a form of *thinking-with* soil.

Not only is composting important as a feminist act of care, but it is also important because it is a transformational practice. Through composting, these women are turning material produce that is seen as waste into something useful, which in turn becomes an important part of an interconnected system that requires care, time, and attention (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2010). Importantly, composting was determined to be one way that many participants could assuage feelings of guilt towards allotment produce that may no longer be useful, edible, or indeed, alive.

Heather demonstrated this with some leeks:



**Photograph 7.14.** *Baby leeks at Heather's plot*

She said:

Some leeks! [laughs] so these are baby leeks [pause] I'll be honest these didn't grow and they died. They went to seed fast and they didn't want to be living here. They look cute but they were not successful, ultimately. I feel bad for the leeks, not for me. They never got to fulfil their potential [laughs] they're composted [pause] they fulfil their potential in a different way! [laughs] (Heather, interview, 03/10/2022)

Other participants mirrored this, too. Nell spoke about how sometimes, because she has a busy homelife and is short on time, there will often be waste at her allotment if she has not managed to harvest her crops in time. For her, she is at peace with this because any food that has 'gone over' will go back into the compost, providing nutrients for future growth. She illustrated this in her interview, saying, "like when I put the aubergines in the compost bin I was like "ah c'est la vie,

it'll be compost, grand for next year”". For others, whilst the vegetables will provide use for the compost, it is frustrating, especially if critters were involved. Christina said:

It [netting] obviously didn't stop the slugs but that annoyed me because it's wasteful and that really, yeah, it's a waste of effort but it's also a waste of good food! Yes, it went on the compost which made me feel slightly better but, you know! (Christina, interview, 27/09/2022)

In general, though, Christina enjoys composting, which is a recent addition to her allotment life. She described her enjoyment with the process as, “All of the raw food waste has gone, and lots of, you know paper and the other things you can put in [pause] it's been great!”

Similarly, for other participants, composting is strongly linked to their eco-conscious ontologies, with composting practices allowing them to avoid waste, which is a large part of an important ethic and motivation in their growing. Participants like Lorena, Lizzie and Suzie are particularly passionate about this, and they all spoke about how if there is a glut of food and the produce cannot be given away, preserved, harvested, or eaten in time, it will go back into the allotment through the compost. Suzie is interested in food waste, and for her, having a wormery at home as well as composting at the plot is a key part of this. For her, she said it is “important” that people have a “regenerative approach”, because people can understand “soil and worms and how that impacts the ground and things”. Lizzie's stance on composting similarly reflects how many of the participants feel about food, surplus, and waste:

I try to be mindful about what I do with it [surplus food]. I definitely try not to waste it...I compost, and that's kind of a last resort really. I'll eat it, if I can't do that, I'll preserve it to eat it later...I give it away, friends or you know, the food bank, and only if something is rotten or inedible, then it goes to compost. And then it goes back to the ground: it's the cycle (Lizzie, interview, 06/10/2022)

With this, composting brings us back to entanglements and bodies (see chapter five), as well as acceptable and abject waste, bodily excrement, and dirt (see Douglas, 1966; Grosz, 1990; Kristeva, 1982; Pickering, 2010). Composting is messy. It involves the physical build-up and



contribution of waste matter, like vegetable peelings, unfinished meals, coffee grounds, tea leaves, soil, dead flowers, fallen fruit, and slug-eaten and bird-pecked produce, and household mouldy food. Although sometimes the process can depend on the composting method, this mixture is often physically turned and aerated with a compost stirring tool, and as such it is often touched, felt, smelt, and encountered. Compost too, just like using manure or 'golden tea' relies on bodies and degradation; it relies on the consumption, digestion, and waste of various critters of this discarded material, which is how it is broken down into rich, dense, nutrients. Here, humans need the non-human to "reinvest our waste with purpose and life-giving properties" (Turner, 2014: 3), reminding us of our reliance and entanglements with them, and the ways critters become necessary "actants" (Turner, 2014: 3) within the allotment landscape. It also helps us in "recovering and reconstructing" our relationships with place (Turner, 2014: 5), reminding us of the interconnectedness of spaces and processes. Here, composting is an example of the entangled 'naturecultures' Haraway (2008) describes and, as Saltzman (2005) points out, rather than distinguishing culture from nature, we can instead use composting as a metaphor for the networks that involve humans and nonhumans alike. Such situational encounters help us to make sense of our own worlds, along with more-than-human wider worlds, too (Waite and Figueroa, 2008).

Time is also important on the allotment; seasons are critical and dictate much of the activity in these landscapes. Time, too, allows seedlings and buds to evolve, be pollinated, and to flourish. Time can also be the enemy; gone too fast, and the plants can bolt, vegetables go to seed, and short-lived blooms can quickly be petals on the floor. For several participants, a key part of composting is time, and many of them were still working on their first 'batches' of compost, waiting earnestly to reap the benefits of their care. When wandering around the plots, I noted that many participants spoke about the compost with an eagerness and a sense of excitement. Many expressed similar anticipations when talking about waiting for seedlings to grow, squash to be ready for harvest, or flowers to blossom. To hear this about compost felt different; that this element of the plot synonymous with waste matter, decomposition, mould and rot, could be described as something exciting and with joy, was unexpected.

Hen described one experience of composting in her diary:

I've emptied my compost, I've had a good stir. I uncovered a few earth worms, kind of enjoyed the strange healthy rotting earthy smell of the compost as it's stirred. I thought about the nutrients in the soil (Hen, diary)

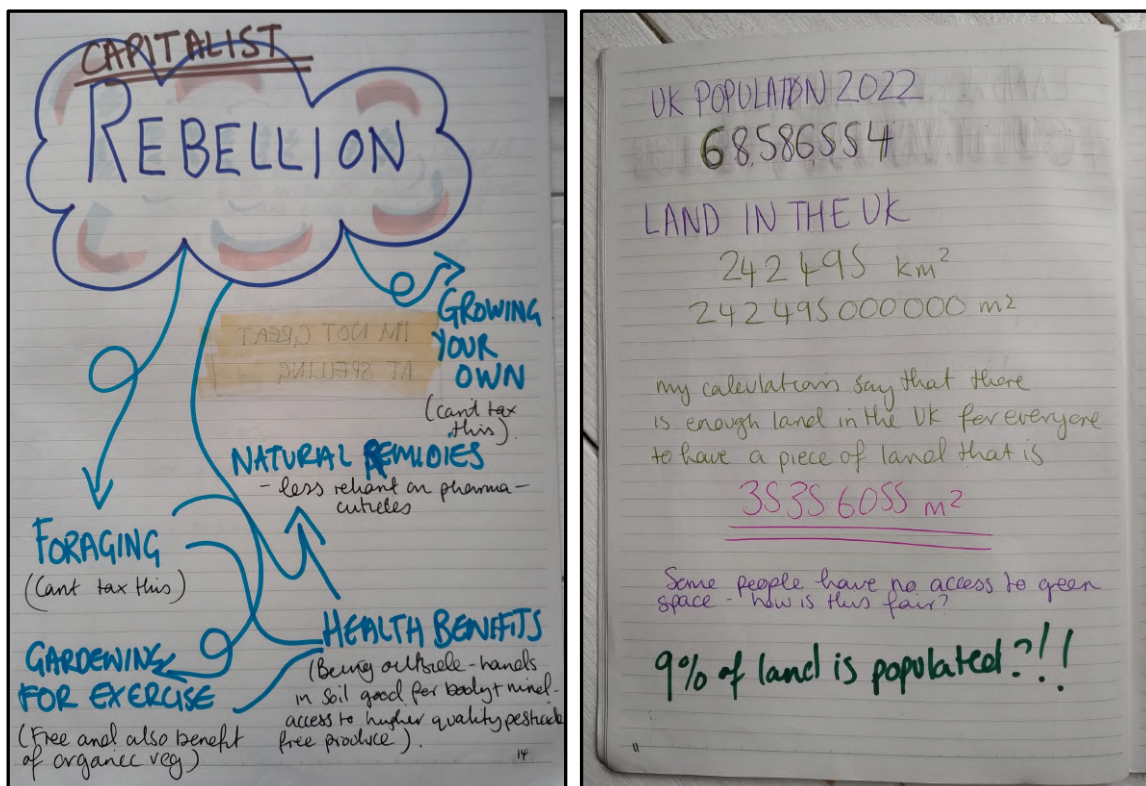
Reflecting on this, I realised it is not surprising that they are excited. Rather, it makes sense. The compost represents so much of the allotment and the ways in which these women experience and navigate these spaces, along with the stories that they tell. These women care deeply for their plots; they tend to them, and they take care of them, informing much of how they encounter and engage with the plot, often involving lengthy processes, giving the landscapes the nutrients and components nature can use to create, grow, and flourish. More than this, they give their time, energy, and input (both physical and, sometimes, emotional). These women think about what they need to plant and when, they buy the seeds and plant them when the time is right, they tend to their seedlings and transplant them when the weather tells them they should, and they care and nurture and guide the plants (whether closely or from a distance), as the critters evolve from seed, to bud, to fruit, vegetable, or flower. The compost is an integral and deeply fundamental part of that. More, it is the giving back the nutrients, goodness and wellbeing to the allotment *through* the allotment; whether this is through the scraps of food they've cooked with the vegetables from the allotment, or through the rotten foods and plants they did not catch and harvest in quite enough time, or through the plants and vegetation that did not survive and did not grow. It is yet another part of the cyclical nature of this land that these women, and the critters they encounter, inhabit.

### 7.3.3. The political allotment

For some of the participants, their relationship with their allotment is even more complex. More than places to grow, these sites are places where people can express opinion and feelings, as well as engage with wider societal issues. This feeds into the relationships they build, the meanings that are imbued within this space, and the way in which the women can both build and show a sense of self and identity through these landscapes.

In the past, allotments have been described as places for “depoliticised recreation” (Page, 2017: 9), yet for many, they are places of grassroots gardening movements (Ioannou et al., 2016), innovative practices and emerging policy (White and Bunn, 2017), as well as social justice (Miller, 2018). Radical ideas and attitudes were inspirations that were mirrored within parts of this fieldwork, and the allotment became a space of political readiness; an environment where people could express beliefs against capitalism, promote fresh ideas, reflect culture, and initiate and develop diversity. Whilst perhaps not so obvious to the naked eye or during transient moments where we peer into the allotment from the train or car window, the allotment is a place of political activity, expression, and a place of potential for radical movement and disruption.

For Suzie, having an allotment is part of her eco-conscious ethic that influences and informs much of her day-to-day practices. The allotment is a place where she can cultivate her own food and flowers, as well as provide a space for critters to feed and grow. It is also a way, through doing these things, that she can demonstrate different forms of capitalist rebellion, which was highlighted in her diary:



Photograph 7.15. Excerpts from Suzie's diary

Before living in her current location and having access to her allotment, she lived in a city where this was unavailable. Instead, she would volunteer with different food-related charity or cooperative ventures, including one which cooked surplus supermarket food “for people who were socially isolated or needed a hot meal” (Suzie, interview, 12/09/2022). Being a part of a movement that resists modern capitalism is a key part of how she chooses to operate within society. Now, growing her own foods, along with foraging harvests from public land, are ways Suzie accesses delicious and nutritious foodstuffs, whilst simultaneously engaging in political activism. For her, the food-producing plants she grows exist as political actors within her allotment site. Through the allotment and growing her own food, she can avoid paying additional monies on imported taxed fruits and vegetables, which consequently avoids supporting governmental and capitalist infrastructures, like shopping at mass chain supermarket stores, which is important to her. Growing food at her allotment, as well as local foraging, are pastimes for her that she is passionate about, while also engaging in this as a radical act against our societal systems, which is common within many foraging and politically active communities (Chang and Bai, 2020). Suzie also engages in numerous local and national plant and seed swaps, facilitating her to vary her plants, flowers, fruits, and vegetables without having to purchase them from retailers, as well as giving her access to ethical seeds and plants. Knowing where her seeds and plants come from, along with how they were planted and grown is important to her. So too is avoiding ethically questionable produce (like seeds) which have been tied to environmental problems such as habitat loss and land degradation, as well as unethical production channels linked to racial injustice, colonisation and indigenous land, as well as genetically modified crops (Soares et al., 2015; Pani, 2020; Peretti, 1998; Leguizamón, 2022; McCune, 2018; Banu and Thamizoli, 1998). Moreover, some seed practices can be tied to those with patents protected by law which make the saving of seeds illegal (this is called ‘brown bagging’; see Cantor, 1993). These elements are, for Suzie, part of having the allotment, but they are also a way in which to tie in her ecological and political beliefs; these vegetal politics are an inherent, critical part of the ways she builds meaning in her plot, along with how she grows her food, cares and tends to her plot, and navigates her allotment.

For some, the allotment is a space where growers can be sure of what conditions their food is cultivated under, what matter is used to fertilise soils and crops, and exactly where their food

comes from; what we can understand as a different form of care. Ecologically, it is also about how the produce is grown, and the ways in which the allotment navigates towards sustainable consumption and away from large-scale agricultural industries that can be problematic both for human and the more-than-human. This is ever more pressing in a time of global climate change and ecological degradation, and as such, can heavily influence and inspire how people use their allotments, what people welcome into their allotments, and what people want to take from these spaces, and why.

Lorena has had her allotment for over a decade, and with a childhood in the countryside and family in the farming industry, “living off the land” (Lorena, interview, 08/10/2022) is embedded within her way of life:

It’s so massively ingrained in what I eat and how I look after myself and what I preserve and, you know, just loads of different things that are part of my life (Lorena, interview, 08/10/2022)

Lorena has one of the most diverse allotments within this project, using the plot to vary her diet and growing a multitude of fruits and vegetables that are beyond the reaches of the traditional British allotment (or indeed, kitchen table). I asked her about what she grows:

Quite a lot! [laughs]...I tend to have courgettes and squashes...different types of beans...I’ve slotted corn in there as well...collard greens and kales and Chinese leaves, like Pak choi and Chinese cabbage and stuff, and mooli. I grow chard, and I let that self-seed everywhere...loads of that! A few different types of tomatoes if I can, umm, corn normally for baby corn, and then the last few years I’ve tried to do other bits like tomatillos and Padron peppers, different chillies, quite a lot of beetroot, radishes [pause] this year I tried Chinese broccoli which is one of my favourite new things to grow, different lettuces, raspberries, herbs, rhubarb, Jerusalem artichoke, globe artichoke [pause] a lot! (Lorena, interview, 08/10/2022)

We talked more about the importance of the food from the plot for her. She described how there are certain things she buys from the store, while other things she actively avoids, eating them only from her plot:

There's certain things I just don't buy, so that's not going to be in my diet... There's somethings I don't buy, and some things I've just never bought because I grew up eating them. Why would you buy rhubarb from the store? It's gross! Runner beans, I don't really buy. You can sometimes get them at certain times of the year, and I don't deal with that, and since I took over my plot, courgettes [pause] if I don't have enough, which has never happened touch wood. I wouldn't buy them because they're trash. They're trash from the store!... I grow stuff that you can't really get or that I think is better quality. Broad beans, runner beans, French beans... courgettes and all of the Chinese vegetables, southeast Asian vegetables [pause] tomatillos because I really like cooking Mexican food, and so I can have salsa in the freezer through the year to make different dishes! I tried to grow Poblano peppers because I want to increase the amount of recipes I can do with more authentic vegetables... I'd rather try and grow what I can't buy, you know? (Lorena, interview, 08/10/2022)

Lorena's allotment is a site of political resistance against capitalism, and is similar to Suzie in part, but in a more subtle, nuanced way. For Lorena, it is about the value, taste and meaning of the produce she grows. For her, her allotment-grown produce tastes better than the produce that she can buy from the store; produce that is often over-watered and grown in ways that speed-up the process, meaning taste is compromised, which is impacted further by refrigeration and importation (see Thompson, 2003). For Lorena, she will only store-buy fruits and vegetables if she knows she is not compromising on taste, as she can then use that allotment space for growing other things that she cannot access elsewhere. Here, it is about negotiation and mitigating what she wants to eat to what she can access, but perhaps more importantly, it all must be at maximum taste, within a framework of maximising growth at the allotment. The politics here lie in what fruits and vegetation are warranted space in her soil, and moreover, that this space is not wasted, used poorly, or without forethought. It was clear from talking and wandering around her plot

that, for Lorena, a key tenant of having the allotment is eating fresh, wholesome, nourishing foods, and being able to cook with these; to live off the land in a sustainable, nourishing, healthy, and often, very creative, way.

In this context, what, how, and why Lorena grows aligns closely with much of what is written regarding the 'slow food movement'. This is an approach to food that works in opposition to the prevailing culture of 'fast food' and looks to eating food more mindfully, as a convivial practice, encouraging cooking as a lifestyle, and considers the planet and biodiversity and the ways in which we access food. It is an approach that is against the fast pace of many contemporary lifestyles, and looks to encourage slower, more mindful, healthy, and organic practices (Hsu, 2015; Jones et al., 2003; Botta, 2016; Pink, 2007). This is greatly aligned with Lorena's approach to the allotment. For her, it is about the ways she can grow fruits and vegetation organically and mindfully, as well as allowing her to cook creatively, healthily, and in abundance. What she plants and what she grows has meaning and, with it, a future; there is hope in all her produce both for herself and the people she shares this with, and the landscape within which this grows, along with her harvests which are, she says, "sacred" (Lorena, interview, 08/10/2022).

Like Suzie, Lorena is also passionate about sharing her produce, including seeds. For her, having her allotment is an opportunity to grow in abundance, and any gluts she has she is keen to give away; again, which we can understand as a demonstration of care. More, like Heather, Lorena acknowledges the privilege of having access to a plot of land like her allotment, as well as the barriers faced by others. For her, engaging, sharing, and giving back is important. We talked about this:

I've started thinking recently about [pause] maybe...I was thinking about how I share seeds with people who I know, but I was thinking about doing starter packs with a bit of soil and seeds and putting them on [a local sharing app] for people who might want to grow but don't have the money or whatever. Just to try and help people be able to grow things on like a windowsill or something. I've been thinking about that for the last few months because there's some seeds I have so many of, but it seems a waste

to go back to the compost if they're not going to be used. (Lorena, interview, 08/10/2022)

She continued:

I was hoping I could have the same level of beans and stuff that I normally have, and I wanted to take it to [charity name] for the drop-in for refugees and migrant communities, but that didn't happen this year and that made me sad. I think I do have a lot of people I can give stuff to but if I got to a point where [pause] like should I rethink it? Should I be giving food to people who can afford it? Should I be putting it on [a local sharing app] and giving it to people who need it? I do hand stuff out to people on the street too [laughs] like there's a homeless guy I've seen a lot who's nearby around the flat and I give him vegetables and stuff, and if there's people I see regularly, or even just some random people sometimes. I'd like to do more of that...I always think about trying to get the food to people who need it but you know [pause] it feels [pause] yeah [pause] (Lorena, interview, 08/10/2022)

Here, we can understand Lorena and her allotment in terms of the political and within an ethic of care (Tronto, 1993, 1998; Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017). By using her capital of knowledge and produce that she cultivates at the plot, as well as the plot itself, Lorena wants to (and can) share this, especially with those who cannot access green spaces, or who are unable to grow their own produce. The gifting and sharing of allotment produce is a key part of plot life, embedded within allotment culture (Dobson et al., 2020; Pottinger, 2018; Gerodetti and Foster, 2016; Buckingham, 2005; Crouch and Ward, 1989). Lorena's desire to share is not unusual, and rather, I argue, it is a way of belonging to and having the allotment. More specifically, it is also a political and eco-political act, as her growing food is a form of resistance against neoliberal globalisation. For Lorena, it is about self-sufficiency in the first instance, but this extends to sharing with others, giving away produce, sharing the nutrients, and resisting and reshaping people's first-stop response to purchase from supermarkets. This small act for Lorena is a form of resistance that reshapes the landscape within her circle, and of our food systems.



Not only this, but the way in which she speaks specifically to marginalised communities (“refugees and migrant communities”, Lorena, interview, 08/10/2022) as well as to those who are unable to access green space or grow produce at home was pronounced for Lorena, and a key part of her allotment experience. This takes us back to thinking about the allotment as an act of care, and not just for the critters on the plot but also for those around the women on their allotments and those people within their own communities (Tronto, 1993, 1998). Like Heather in chapter six when looking to identity, Lorena highlights issues around who does or does not belong or have access to these spaces, and how those from marginalised communities often struggle to access such commodities. This is particularly important because research shows that allotments and community gardens are places that have been found to be crucial for place-making and therapeutic benefits for communities such as refugees and migrant populations (Biglin, 2020; Biglin, 2021; Bishop and Purcell, 2013). The allotments, in this way, become an important political space where an expression, facilitation, and sharing of social care and social consciousness becomes possible.

This demonstration and imbued meaning are not just about people, but also sits within a political consciousness:

I feel lucky at the minute to be able to have all of the things I need to provide myself with food, not just in terms of climate change, but the war [in Ukraine] and how that’s impacting food chains and things, and the economy with the cost of everything...if I really thought about it and just ate what was at home, I think I’d go for a very long time, supplementing [canned beans and lentils] with the fresh greens from the plot (Lorena, interview, 08/10/2022)

Lorena was not alone in this, and notions of self-sufficiency, climate change, and care for the planet were a consideration for many. Various participants commented on the particularly warm summer the country was experiencing and the ways this has impacted the critters on their plots, including the ways slugs and snails were showing up less because of the heat, as Mary highlighted, through to how some of the women were growing new fruits or vegetation because of the soaring temperatures at soil-level or in their greenhouses, like Heather, who managed to

grow a watermelon, and Lorena, whose lettuces were particularly beautiful and long-lasting, which she put down to the weather. Their relationships to the planet and considerations of climate change were particularly present for Dawn and Annie.

Annie, who has conducted doctoral research exploring sustainable consumption, finds climate change to be worrisome at her allotment, and she reflected on this in her diary:

Monday was 38 degrees and Tuesday was 39 degrees – yesterday was the hottest day ever recorded. The scale and severity of climate change has never felt as real, present and immediate as the last two days. I garden because I have some form of connection to the natural world, but the reality is that the natural world is not going to exist as we know it for long. The vastness and complexity of climate change often paralyses me into inaction, and it is hard to know what we can do as individuals living in late-stage capitalism...I have minimal interest in growing vegetables and instead I see it [the allotment] as a space to garden for my pleasure and according to my principles (Annie, diary)

Annie was concerned about the wildlife at the plot during these temperatures. She writes in her diary about how much of the allotment seemed fine after the heatwave, and she felt “stronger in my conviction that messy and wildlife friendly gardening is the only way I can garden”. The heatwave, and then seeing the allotment critters thrive demonstrated to her that this is how she wants her allotment to be, because it is the best for the habitats. It then inspired her to build a small pond, providing a source of water:

I feel like I needed to do something, and the most immediate thing I feel like I can do is look after the wildlife that lives close to me...the fox, and the blackbirds, and the robins, and the sparrows and the pigeons – who may have struggled without water during the heat (Annie, diary)

Building this pond was, for Annie, a personal and political stance to help critters whilst we, as a planet, endure the effects of a changing climate. Building this pond, which was a tin bath inserted into the ground, went against the plot rules as “they aren’t meant to be in containers,

they're meant to be dug in with pond liner" (Annie, diary), yet this infraction of the allotment rule book was of lesser importance to her. Adhering to the rules as much as possible (e.g., away from the path, fenced off) within her limited resources was important, but the priority was finding a way to help and care for the critters at her plot. Here, rules were a second thought and a mild inconvenience; the creatures were first.

Similarly, Dawn described having environmental consciousness from a young age, having been inspired by her father who is an environmental scientist. She explained that her doctoral research, which explored climate change within literature, left her feeling very aware of planetary harm both at a micro and a macro level, and this influenced (and continues to influence) her thoughts, feelings, and actions at the plot. For Dawn, the way she navigates around the plot is with an awareness of what potential harm she might cause; harms which we all commit through the process of being a human being. She said:

When we see nature or the environment as something separate to the human, it then becomes something we can organise, control, oppress...justify taking what we need from it as well, rather than seeing humans as part of an interconnected web of life [laughs] (Dawn, interview, 26/09/2022)

I asked, given how she spoke about "taking what we need", how she felt about taking the produce from the allotment, and she replied:

I think because I've invested my time and effort and care into growing what I grow, I don't see it as like, mine necessarily...I think there's a relief in consuming things that I've helped to grow because, again, I feel like it's a release from like, going to the shops and buying things wrapped in plastic. And for me, it's again like, that sense of like, okay, well in this one tiny area of my life, this one tiny sliver of like, you know, everything that's going on, I don't feel like I'm causing harm by existing. By taking this food I feel like I'm doing something beneficial rather than negative... Having an allotment...is existing in all of these tensions. As gardeners, everyone is

going to have to adapt to the changes, that you know, with the climate we're experiencing at the moment and find ways around it, so I don't necessarily see, for example, eating the veg that I grow, I don't see that as an antidote for other things I might do that might cause damage. That doesn't cancel that out, but it's just a bit of time and a sliver of my life where I'm not doing harm. Like an absence of harm rather than serving as like an 'absolvement', if that's a word [laughs] (Dawn, interview, 26/09/2022)

Dawn navigates her allotment with an environmental consciousness and with a very clear sense of entangled relational care (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017), meaning she is aware of what she does on the plot, and how she does it with environmental care in mind. She plants flowers for the pollinators and intends on planting more of these in the coming year, "dedicating space to some more kind of wildlife friendly pollinating friendly plants" (Dawn, interview, 26/09/2022). This is strategic in part, as she already does companion planting. By doing this, especially whilst knowing her background and feelings regarding the environment, this also becomes a personal political point, and an expression of her positionality through the wildlife which, consequently, helps the pollinators and environment around her. Along with care, Dawn embodies a form of Haraway's (2008) 'natureculture', planting with purpose, encouraging the land to be as ecologically active as possible, with certain flowers (e.g., nasturtiums) planted around other vegetables (e.g., broad beans) and fruit (e.g., strawberries) which will work together, maximising her produce, critter activity, and provide them with a source of nourishment. More, she also embodies Haraway's (2008) concept of *response-ability*, paying attention to how she is implicated within the allotment, and finding a way to exist within this environment that is caring, yet geared towards living well within an approach of both relational and political ethic and sensitivity that are imbued within the everyday and everyday practices (Haraway, 2008; Myers, 2006).

For both Annie and Dawn, their activities at their allotments are more than just about nature and an ecological act of care. The allotment and the ways they move around this space, along with the ways they grow are political environmental acts of care for both the self and the more-than-

human. It is a way to tend to those critters they encounter on their plots, along with those that belong there, unseen, beneath the soil and within the compost, while simultaneously assuaging anxieties about how the changing planet might inevitably affect these landscapes soon, and in the long-term. They both acknowledge that within their power there is very little but small acts of ecological kindness and consideration that they can do to feel like they are being active agents against the bigger danger of climate change and planetary degradation. The allotment here becomes a tool to facilitate their small acts against this, while helping them with their ecological apprehensions.

As well as expressing themselves through what grows and how, the allotment is also a place where, politically, these women can demonstrate who they welcome onto their sites, or who they share allyship and solidarity with. Heather channels her political engagement at her allotment in a very visible way. For instance, for the growing year that this fieldwork was conducted in (2022) she found herself inspired by a Ukrainian artist, having written her biography as part of some voluntary work she undertakes:

Also did some thinking about a Ukraine corner. I saw a picture of peas and sunflowers by an artist called Maria Prymachenko...and I thought it might be fun / interesting to recreate it but I'm not sure how to get the peas to grow tall, singly. Then I thought I could do rows of peas in front?  
(Heather, diary)

She also planted a very creative 'Rainbow Bed' at her site, too, whereby she grew plants and flowers that would bloom in the order of the rainbow. She said she did this not only because it looked "nice and as a challenge" but because it would invite pollinators into the plot. Her inspiration for this, however, came from the allotment blog:

I thought it would be cool, and also, one of the reasons I really liked the idea of having a plot on this site, is that one of the blog posts from like Summer 2019 when I joined was that someone had put a gnome holding a rainbow and they took a photo of it on their plot and there was a short post about being an LGBTQ site and I thought that was really cute...I thought

they must be sound because that wouldn't have happened at the last site,  
and it's on a public blog and it tells you about what they want people to see  
(Heather, interview, 03/10/2022)

For Heather, creating this rainbow flower bed was not only a way to welcome pollinators to her plot, but it also shows solidarity with the LGBTQ community, highlighting her as an ally, and that her plot is a safe space for those around her. Not only did this welcome to her plot the (often marginalised) pollinating non-human community, but also a marginalised people-community too. In part, this reflects work by Tilley (2006), who describes some elements of gardening as “doing, rather than saying” (Tilley, 2006: 329). Heather’s actions speak much to her political position and can be seen without her needing to supplement understanding with discourse necessarily, but more, the actions that she is undertaking are meaningful to her, rather than her doing them to send a particular message to a particular group of people. In this way, we can understand such eco-political moves, along with those of Suzie and Lorena, as a form of quiet activism, promoting social justice and benefitting local communities through kindness, consideration and reciprocity among people (Smith, Kostelecký and Jehlička, 2015; Smith and Jehlička, 2013) as well as, as we have seen, the more-than-humans that exist within and around these spaces.

Importantly, the allotment is a space for these women where they can embrace their political positions and their wider values and allow this to influence their choices in how they grow, what they grow, and the ways they build their own sense of belonging and their relationships to these important landscapes. Moreover, these spaces also empower them in ways that they might not be able to access or enact in other parts of society. There is a sense of freedom in the allotment; to treat the environment well, to grow in an eco-conscious way, or to plant and grow against a backdrop of political tyranny, showing solidarity to those who they support. Here, the allotment is so much more than just a plot of land, and with that, these women are so much more than just people who grow.

### 7.3.4. The boundaried allotment

Narratives of boundaries and borders are seeded throughout this thesis. From thinking about space and place in chapter two, to discussing abject boundaries of leaky bodies in chapter five, through to this chapter and thinking about boundaries for critters, preventing pests accessing plants and vegetation, and the blurry relationships with some more-than-humans compared to others. Whether implied or physical, boundaries are important within a conversation about allotments. They are important as they hold meaning and contain social codes, they tell us where we might be able to go, they invite or exclude humans and non-humans from areas and environments, and they help us in the social world, telling us where is safe (or not), and who is welcome (or not). Understanding the ways boundaries and borders work within the allotment also informs understandings of place-making, and the ways these women build meaning within these plots of land, such as through chapter six. It can also inform us about how they exist and move within these spaces, which in turn, helps us to understand how people inhabit a landscape, as well as to consider how this landscape inhabits them (Feld and Basso, 1996). Indeed, as Mee and Write (2009) highlight, belonging connects to place, and it is these boundary making practices which signal who or what are in place; this is *to be* in place.

At many of these field sites, most of the boundaries and borders that were in place were physical, but they were not always obvious. Several of the allotments, such as those of Fern and Lucy, Mary, Oakley, Nell, as well as Fauna and Suzie, had plots that were clearly demarcated with fences, raised ground, stonewall, privet, hedgerow, and/or gates. Below are some examples of the physical boundaries that illustrate the demarcation of some of the plots:



**Photograph 7.16.** *Boundaries at the plot*

**Clockwise:** *wooden fences mark out Oakely's hilly plot, the bramble bush at Suzie's plot, the metal grate at Ettie's site, Nell's wooden fence which sits around her plot, the stone wall around Mary's site*

At other sites, such as where Hen, Lizzie, and Annie grow, their boundaries are implied rather than physical. The land at a number of these allotments is flat, with no physical marker or direct border or framing that denotes whose plot belong to whom; boundaries in this way are leaky, messy, and uncontrolled. Often, against this, many of the women mark their plots with wider, grassy footpaths, place down plants, or dig in flower beds to create their own border(s).

Sometimes, these boundaries and borders come about by agreement, especially if they neighbour another person's allotment, with a form of land marker, while sometimes it is just an unspoken boundary rule. Often, to the naked eye, these markers are subtle, and knowledge of these boundaries came with the permission to be in these spaces. Examples of these are below:





**Photograph 7.17.** *Allotments with subtle borders and edges*

Sometimes, some of the women put woodchip down to create paths that highlight boundaries (like Gwen and Lizzie), while others channel their creative sides, including Heather, who, in keeping with her penchant for recycling and reusing materials, uses glass bottles to mark out a path:



**Photograph 7.18.** *Heather's recycled border*

Landscape boundaries, including those on allotments, often come with meaning, as with Heather's rainbow plant bed. Such signifiers indicate, in some cases, who or who is not welcome into such spaces, and they can be used to welcome people and show allyship (like at Heather's plot), or they can be used to keep people out, like the mesh wire fencing at Ettie's site. Some of these boundaries and borders are more obvious in their meaning, like the wire fencing, or the stone walls and privet around Mary, Fauna and Suzie's plots. They work at these locations, in this way, directly to keep people out who should not be there and prevent access from anyone who is not the rightful tenant. With this in mind, it is unsurprising that some borders and boundaries can also come with negotiation and struggle (Sheridan, 2016), especially if these boundaries are implied, rather than physical. As such, in many of the allotment sites there is a constant negotiation around the physical boundaries, and the ways in which these are (or are not) implemented, respected, and used.

Hen reflected in her diary about needing to discuss the paths with her neighbour. She wrote:

Spoke to neighbours about clarifying our boundary so we can re-edge our beds some time. We each have a half-plot – two sides of the same numbered plot – and the path isn't fully straight...neighbour was fully understanding and amenable (Hen, diary)

To re-edge a planting bed, Hen needed to discuss the space and markers with her neighbour, as doing this edging would encroach on what they had been using as a grassy path that joins the plots. This was not an issue, but before she could work on her site, she felt a conversation was necessary. Here, this highlights the importance of respecting other people's plots and land, even though ownership is leasehold (her neighbours plot is still leased, rather than owned and therefore, technically, not theirs either), with who looks after what space and where being implied rather than scripted. Whilst her experience was positive and she was able to do the digging she needed to do without problem, this is not always necessarily the case.

At the height of the season, Lorena's plot is full to bursting:



**Photograph 7.19.** *Lorena's plot, full to the (implied) edges*

At her plot there is very little indication of what land is a path and the walkway, and what land is growing land and to be avoided. I loved walking around Lorena's site because it was so full and bursting with busy activity and big green leaves and growth, but I was constantly aware and very cautious of stepping straight into a collared green or a patch of rocket. Where I was allowed to go and where was land for the growing plants and the critters within them is unclear to the unfamiliar, naked eye. This echoes back to work by Ingold (1993, 2004, 2011) and Crouch and Parker (2002: 399), where we wander landscapes "with both feet", building a sense of familiarity and knowing, especially when they are spaces we encounter frequently. For Lorena, she does not need paths to indicate where she should or should not tread because she *knows* the land. She knows the space literally, but she is also attuned to the land as a space that means a lot to her, and is a place of familiarity, and feeling. She knows what the soil feels like, and where the fresh earth is compared to the harder, older land. She knows what patches have the weeds, and what patches hold the new seedlings. She knows where her feet belong and where they do not. Outsiders – that is, those who do not know these secret ways of being – are the ones at risk in this space, for



they are the ones who might clumsily step upon the wrong part of the flower bed, or planting space.

Whilst in part feeling somewhat risky (trampling critters is a *real* risk here), the way in which Lorena's plot was so full, and with that, full of a certain type of uncertainty, was part of the joy of her plot, and it was clear she too enjoyed the chaos and the lack of visible pathways. She said:

The little girl next door comes when it's really full and she's like "it's like a maze! I wish my plot was like this!" and a lot of people make comments about, like, they like the set up and it's very wild and there's no structure. Some people hate it...Next door, he's always like "I hate your plot, I don't know where to walk, I don't know where the paths are!" and people either find it funny or they hate it! (Lorena, interview, 08/10/2022)

I was not alone in noticing the lack of paths, yet Lorena's lack of visible boundary on her plot is divisive rather than an eccentricity, especially as she has many neighbours who have very neat, traditional style plots. For Lorena, this is part of her controlling (or rather, not) her allotment, by letting it grow as much as possible. She does not feel the need for demarcation and neat pathways, for her the familiar routes she makes as she walks around the plot are enough. She is the main visitor at her site, and she knows where she ought to go. This lack of clear pathway and clear border distinction also reflects who she wants to visit her site:

I've chosen to use that space and allow different people into it. A lot of the time I didn't let people into that space because I didn't have my own space. It was my sacred space that few people could come into...I know that seems like a powerful word but you know, I've had to say to certain people, "you can't come here". Or I just don't invite them because they're not in keeping with the vibe with it, or I feel like they haven't been respectful (Lorena, interview, 08/10/2022)

It makes sense in many ways, that without any fencing or large privet hedges that surround some plots, Lorena is hesitant to create clear and distinct paths, even if other people complain or tell her it is unsightly or a mess, as she told me during a visit (fieldnotes, 10/07/2022). Often, clear

pathways and borders can be mistaken as a sign of welcoming to strangers or other members of the allotment community, when people do not necessarily want such visits nor people coming in and upon their allotment site. For Lorena, her lack of borders creates her own, safe boundary.

Conversely, both Annie and Gwen have had such issues with other plot members overstepping implied boundary lines and interfering with their plots in ways they did not ask for, or want. Both of their plots are flat, with little in the way to show boundaries, with no way to fence off or stop unwanted guests coming on their plot.

For Annie, her allotment neighbour William, crosses physical and implied boundaries in more than one way. Here, we have encountered William before, in chapter six, as an allotment nudist. Here, in this act, William crosses a societal boundary, pushing social norms of exposure in a public place, boarding himself on the edge of exhibitionism, and testing other people's tolerance of what could be viewed as unacceptable behaviour, especially if they experience it as triggering and/or harmful. This is not the extent of William and walking a boundary line. On Annie's plot, he has also done this in a much more literal, physical way. She wrote in her diary that one day he "chopped down a mature greengage on my plot...because he decided it was in the wrong place". Interested in this, I asked her to expand on this in our interview:

There was a big old tree that had been growing espaliered. It has a trunk and bits going across from it and I had in passing, mentioned it to William and he said, "I'd want to get rid of it", and I was like "yeah, we'll see" and then, the next thing I knew, he got the chain saw out and was going for it!... I was taken back a bit! (Annie, interview, 17/09/2022)

Annie's plot is very open, and very easy to access. Once past the locked gate, visitors can walk over her plot with ease, especially as it is near the entrance to the site. Annie's allotment is situated at one of the smaller sites, too, with only a handful of plots in place (perhaps 15 or so), and as such, many of the allotment holders are friends with each other, often helping and working on each other's plots, sharing plants, and blending and blurring boundaries. When I visited, I found her allotment site to have a tight sense of community, but that could become a

problem, like how Annie reflects on this in chapter six. I considered this in my own fieldwork diary:

Saw Annie today!...really open, like Hen's and Vivien's (probably something to do with it being in [redacted location]?), the dynamic is very different to other places. Feels like they're all friends? The woman who used to have Annie's plot came and said hello to us. She was asking Annie about her plans. We had been in the middle of talking about how she wasn't really enjoying the plot at the mo, and this was affecting her motivation to sow so she was trying to just plant easy things, like strawberries. I could tell Annie didn't really want to talk about it? The plot neighbour left, and we carried on chatting and wandering, and then the next minute she was back with some squash seedlings. She put them down near a gap she had pointed at before, told Annie to plant it there, and gave her instructions about hole size and watering etc. I could tell Annie was grateful for the help, but also didn't really want it??...It must be hard to be social and friendly without finding it annoying? I felt a bit insulted on Annie's behalf; it was like she was being mothered, like she didn't know what she was doing?...At least she wasn't a mansplaining guy – or naked? (fieldnotes, 10/07/2022)

Because of the dynamics of this small-sized allotment, both of Annie's neighbours showed little regard for social boundaries, but in two different ways. Whilst the woman with the squash crossed lines of being bossy and infringing on Annie's autonomy, she was being helpful, which she demonstrated in a controlled and managed way – she left Annie the plants and gave some advice, rather than planting them herself, for instance. Her help, in this way, was socially acceptable, and any feelings of it being overbearing (as Annie shows she sometimes feels in chapter six) are more internalised and personal. Comparatively, however, William showed little to no regard to the way invisible borders exist, nor to societal norms that exist surrounding help and advice. Courtesy would suggest he ask Annie first whether she would like him to cut down her tree, yet likely because of Annie's age, gender, and the dynamic of the allotment she is at, he felt that this was not necessary. Having spoken to Annie, and spent time at the plot, it was clear that because she is new(er) to the allotment, and because many of the plot holders at the site have

already tended to her very plot, it seems that many boundaries, both physical and implied, are ignored here. This culture within this allotment very much dictates how Annie feels at the allotment, and how she engages with her space.

Similarly, Gwen has struggled with her allotment neighbour, Reece. She has found that whilst she is not at the plot, Reece has been on her plot, making changes. She reflected in her diary that he:

has put some of my random carpet down along the join between us. I get mine is weedy, but his logan berries and pumpkin come onto my plot!  
Why can't men ask? (Gwen, diary)

We discussed this too, where she told me that:

He *helpfully* put down non-compostable non-decomposable plastic-coated card which I've spent most of the winter slipping on or tripping over.  
When I get up to that end woe betide him! And he has still left his bloody gourds on my plot still! (Gwen, WhatsApp, 3/3/2023, emphasis in original)

For Gwen, whilst she acknowledges that he has done this to try and be helpful, because her plot is overgrown with mares tail and bindweed, and because Gwen has not had her plot for a particularly long time she found the way he did this without her permission and while she was not there, both disrespectful and inconvenient, which is magnified as she has found moving around on the card Reece placed down dangerous and slippery. This is another example of how because the allotments are flat, and because there is no physical boundary by which to stop such people coming onto these women's plots: they simply just *do*.

The ways in which these men have shown disregard for the boundaries of Annie and Gwen's plot are reflective of wider societal behaviour, in terms of how gendered society is (Massey, 1996), and how women are often oppressed or ignored (e.g., Fishman, 2019, Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2010). More, it highlights previous literature (Fullager, O'Brien and Lloyd, 2019) which has called for further exploration of third spaces as gendered spaces, because of how these places can work to exclude women and dominate with patriarchal traditional power relations. The men,

here, are performing actions they believe will be helpful, especially in light of how allotments are traditionally men's spaces (Kettle, 2014; Buckingham, 2005; Crouch and Ward, 1989; Moore et al., 2014), yet they fail to acknowledge that communication and speaking to the women who tend to these plots would be the socially acceptable, and more, polite way to see if they *need* help first. It is a patriarchal assumption for these men that they should help, and this is exacerbated by the space they are in; one that they see as their own and with that, as a man's space. Whilst in part this could be understood as an act of care, just like gifting spare plants or surplus harvest, the way in which this act is undertaken is what make these actions troubling. The crossing of the boundary and the ways in which the men undertook work within their space suggests that this goes beyond care and becomes about power and control. Further, this is magnified because of the nature of these tasks. Previous research, as I have discussed in chapter two, has found that tasks in the allotment are gendered, with men often being allocated and more likely to volunteer for those tasks seen as hard, physical work (Parry, Glover and Shinew, 2005; Taylor, 2016). Here, Gwen and Annie are both faced with a task that these men are more likely to see as fit for them to do, and so they act in a way that might have good intentions, but seems to undermine both women's positions within the allotment, and as independent allotment holders, without giving them the opportunity to negotiate these roles, or fundamentally, alter or evolve how these men see these women.

Allotments are complex spaces, full of negotiation. They are spaces that have their own rules, some which are spoken and some which are unspoken, and they have their own ways in which people and more-than-humans communicate, interact, and navigate the space. Boundaries and borders are important to this discourse as they inform the human and non-human who is welcome, who is allowed in, who is feared, and who is listened to, and who is heard. Respecting these borders, whether physical like a fence or a gate, or implied, like a grassy verge or a woodchip path, is a key facet of how the allotment can function in a harmonious way. When this fails, and respect, manners, and permission are forgotten and boundary lines are crossed, regardless of whether this has a good intent or otherwise, tensions are created, and the allotment no longer becomes a place of peace or safety, but instead of power negotiations and potential discomfort.



## 7.4. Concluding remarks

This final discussion chapter has explored the entangled, intertwined and complex subject of belonging at the allotment, and the numerous ways in which we can understand this concept, and more specifically, the nuances with regards to belonging within this specific space, through a gendered lens.

Using an understanding of a feminist ethic of care (Tronto, 1993, 1998), along with work by Haraway (2003, 2008, 2016) and Puig de la Bellacasa (2010, 2015, 2017), this chapter has considered the multispecies entanglements and relationships that exist at the allotment, and the ways in which the participants demonstrate various acts of, commitments to, and sometimes contradictory happenings of care. I have discussed the ways that women who grow can work with, alongside, and against nature, and what this means for the ways they engage with, utilise and experience their growing spaces. Within this, I have explored the ways nature can be commodified, viewed as a resource, and what this can mean for how women care for and tend to their allotments, as well as how they approach their allotment practices, and how they value the soil and the land of the allotment landscape, with such relationships to the plants and vegetation, determining what they grow, when, and why.

This chapter has also discussed the sometimes contradictory and sometimes fraught relationships that can exist when there is tension between the human and the non-human in these spaces, and the ways ethics of care can be strained when it appears that elements of nature work against growing. To illustrate this, I have interrogated and deconstructed the relationships the participants have with the critters at the allotment, including the frenemy, the slug. With this, I demonstrate that there is nuance in how women deal with these critters (or, pests), considering the ways in which they determine how to deal with destruction at the plot, and how they rationalise their approaches, from leaving the slug to exist and be in place, through to acts of violence. Again, relational care surrounds this discussion, and in exploring the ways in which care can transcend across the more-than-human, I show how this can inform who (or what) does (or does not) belong at the allotment, the hierarchies that exist in this space, and how different critters are treated because of this.

Evolving from this, I also discussed ways that the physical land of the allotment is important, building upon work in previous chapters of place-making, and demonstrating how the allotment is a landscape that generates feelings and attachments of belonging, as well as a place of meaning both to these women and, through tentacular relationships to the wider community, and the planet. Here, I showed that the allotment is more than just a place to grow, but an important place of political and ecological meaning. I demonstrate this through discussions surrounding composting, a practice that I show is built upon a foundation of care and, more than this, is an entangled but important practice between the land, the human, and the more-than-human. Through discussions with the participants, I also establish that the allotment is a site of both radical activism against capitalism, neoliberalism, and climate change, and as a place of quiet activism, where women can demonstrate their political affinity, allyship, and care to wider people, communities, and beyond through small acts and through an allotment ethic that governs growing practice.

Finally, through deconstructing how we understand borders, boundaries, and edges, I demonstrate the importance of both physical and implied boundaries, and the strains and joys that people experience and endure when people and more-than-humans blur or cross into spaces where they were (or were not) invited or welcome. I have shown the importance of the allotment as a woman's space and, through their experiences, highlight that the allotment can reflect similar behaviours and actions, strains and stressors, that we see and that women experience in wider society, where women can be marginalised, invisibilised, or ignored. I have highlighted the tension that this can bring, acknowledging the experiences of these women, negotiating and giving them the room and space that these human encounters deserve, but that are so often invisibilised.

Importantly, through focusing on notions of belonging, I have demonstrated the ways in which the allotment is an entangled, knotted, multispecies landscape full of activity, tensions, radical transformations, and acts of care. More than this, this chapter, along with chapters five and six, demonstrate the allotment as a place of complexity; it is a place of meaning, of importance, of bodily negotiations, and of human and more-than-human interaction and relationship. The allotment really is more than *just* a place where women grow.

# Chapter 8 || Going Over

a conclusion



Photograph 8.1. *Annie at her allotment*

## 8.1. Chapter introduction

This chapter works in conversation with the other seven parts of this thesis, bringing closure to this substantive piece of work. To do this, this chapter will provide an overview of the main findings. Following this, this chapter highlights the pivotal contributions this research provides, asserting the important and valuable contributions it makes to the currently lean discourse surrounding women and the allotment, and in doing so, highlights what this thesis has to offer. Finally, this chapter provides direction for future research, signposting important key points that other projects can take from this work, and where critical evolutions of this project lie, addressing further gaps within the academy.

## 8.2. Thesis overview

This thesis has explored the allotment as a gendered space. Specifically, it has studied the ways in which women navigate the allotment, questioning how gender influences and affects women's experience within this environment, and how this informs their stories and histories within and across this landscape. In doing so, this research has explored the different ways women can dictate and orientate themselves within these plots of land, as well as how these spaces can influence, impact, change and/or transform across these women's gender and sexual identities, bodies, and everyday lives. Further, it questions how meanings are developed, along with lived experiences, and relationships both with other people, and the more-than-human that is encountered.

To guide this work, four main research questions were posited:

- (i) *How are allotments gendered spaces?*
- (ii) *What do these allotment spaces mean for women?*
- (iii) *How do women experience and navigate these spaces?*
- (iv) *How does being a woman inform the use, navigation, and experience of the allotment?*

To provide insight to these questions and using a feminist epistemology, I employed a qualitative, reflexive, participant-centered research approach. As such, 19 women across the north

of England who lease allotments were recruited, and I utilised a combination of methods including ethnography, participant-generated photography, participant diaries, and semi-structured interviews. After fieldwork was complete, I carried out an analytic process using thematic analysis, and from here, developed three distinct, yet intertwined, themes; (i) bodies (ii) becoming and (iii) belonging.

The findings of this thesis are organised separately, but they are interconnected and entangled within each other. This is important, and it reflects both the allotment as a space, and of the messy, complex relationships that the women have within these spaces, across the physical, the self, the emotional, the political, and the philosophical. With each thematic discussion I worked to answer the research questions, showing what these allotment spaces mean to these women and how they navigate these spaces, using anecdotes from their lived experiences and showing how the allotment and gender entwine, as well as demonstrating what this means for their encounters at the plots across themselves, with others, and the more-than-human.

The first discussion of findings was orientated around *bodies* (chapter five). Using work by Mary Douglas (1966), Elizabeth Grosz (1994) and Julia Kristeva (1982), I discussed women's leaky bodies in the allotment, covering matters of urination, menstruation, and miscarriage within this space. I looked at how the participants handle their bodily fluids and matter at the plot, the impact of often toilet-less allotments, and how they navigate their plots as women with leaking, often bleeding, bodies. I also considered the naked body at the allotment, discussing elements of power and gender, exploring who has the right to disclose their naked body, who can claim space in this way, and the ways in which gender dictates how the body is carried within these spaces. I shadowed this with a discussion surrounding the embodied self within these sites, demonstrating how the allotment can become imbued with significant meaning through every day materialities, including the bathtub. In this way, I showed the allotment as a feminist space of empowerment and of transgression, where the allotment becomes a site of radicalisation, disrupting assumptions of these important, natural, landscapes.

In the second discussion of findings, I drew out participant's relationships to their allotments, and the ways that they engage and use the space, by focusing on *becoming* at the plot (chapter six).

Here, I demonstrated the importance of the allotment for these women personally, showing how they are places where identity is built and formed, and how this adds to how these women see themselves within these landscapes. Specifically, I looked to identity and labels, and the nuance within them through the self, and with judgements from others. I extended this further and, using work by Stenner, Church and Bhatti (2012) and Kettle (2014), explored how these labels are linked to expertise, knowledge and skill, showing how these are unstable when viewed with gender in mind. With this, I demonstrated how the allotment becomes a place that is imbued with meaning, illustrating them as sites of place-making, where women can evolve and grow. I showed, too, how skills, expertise and labels can become points of tension within spaces that are historically rooted within a masculinised, traditional culture (Crouch and Ward, 1989; Buckingham, 2005), demonstrating how this can shape plot interactions, as well as feelings towards self-worth and skill.

It is from here, using insight from Tim Ingold (2000, 2004, 2008, 2011), Doreen Massey (1994, 1995a, 1996, 2006) and Mitch Rose (2002, 2012), that I showed the importance of the plots in terms of what these women build within these sites, and the value of the space through the shed and the kitchen. Here, I looked to understandings of homemaking and domesticity, untangling what we understand by these concepts, showing that sheds are imbued with feelings of home, hospitality and friendship, as well as of the self. Further, I used a queer lens to disrupt identities in this space, simultaneously answering a call from previous literature which demands research consider women alongside gender and sexual identity within these green growing spaces (Moore et al., 2014). With this, I argued that the women within these landscapes are constantly moving forwards, working on themselves, and generating ways of being and existing within these spaces that are never finished and never complete, and are instead always in a state of *becoming*.

The final discussion of findings extended this understanding of relationships and looked to the complex, messy world of *belonging* at the plot (chapter seven). Situated within an ethic of care (Tronto, 1993, 1998) and using influential work from Maria Puig de la Bellacasa (2017) and Donna Haraway (2008, 2016, 2018), I looked to the tentacular relationships between human and the more-than-human, exploring the ways the allotment is a site for critters of all sizes, breeds, and species to share common ground. I explored the ways in which these women grow with and

alongside nature, as well as how these spaces are fraught with stress and strain when it seems that nature is working against them, highlighting this more specifically through the complex relationship many of the participants have with weeds, and the *frenemy*, the slug. Following this, I extended this conversation from the critters and explored the relationships the participants have with the land, looking more abstractly to the allotment as a space full of multi-meanings and understandings. I tied this to the physical land and the relationships the women have with the soil, building on this by looking at the messy practice of composting, taking us back to mess and bodily waste. From here, I argued that the allotment is a political space, and a site of quiet resistance, seeding social justice, and as a place to demonstrate allyship and affinity to the wider community. Finally, I highlighted the importance of boundaries and borders, both literally and metaphorically, and the ways in which relationships with others can impact, influence and change experiences and movements around the plot, showing what this can mean and the ways it can determine how people – especially women – exist within this space.

Across this thesis there are entangled themes that should be understood as fundamentally inseparable, working tentacularly across the participants, and the data. Belonging, whilst a chapter on its own, runs throughout this thesis; whether it is through bleeding bodies and naked bodies, people's identity and knowledge, sheds and homemaking, or through slugs and weeds, walls and fences, it is embedded within this work. Moreover, this thesis is built upon mess. Through dirt and blood, manure and compost, fraught happenstances and knotty relationships, this thesis shows that the encounters and relationships in the allotment are complex, and messy. These elements cannot work independently of each other, and here, they work like a rhizome; non-linear, entangled, with roots in multiple forms (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004 [1987]). Within this complexity it is clear that the allotment is a complicated, tentacular, gendered space. More, gender *matters*, and it informs how women navigate and experience this space, building stories both through themselves, with others, and alongside the more-than-human. Through looking to these research questions, and through positing the allotment as a space with complexity, diversity, and difference, this thesis shows that this landscape is more than *just* a place to grow; it is a space of nuance, of meaning, of depth, and of potential.

### 8.3. Contribution to knowledge

*Navigating the Plot* contributes valuable insight into the lives of women who have allotments, highlighting important aspects of their experiences, and giving voice to their stories and histories, demonstrating how gender in these spaces can influence the ways women navigate and orientate themselves in this landscape. This contribution is made across several academic areas, including the social sciences, human geography, women's studies, and critical plant studies. As such, this thesis contributes to multidisciplinary feminist theory and feminist understanding surrounding the allotment as a gendered space, illustrating the multilevel nuance rooted within women's experiences within these landscapes. In doing so, this thesis has presented powerful and important women's voices as part of feminist scholarship, through building relationships with women, and through answering important and previously under-explored research questions.

This research works hard to disrupt traditional knowledge and understandings of the allotment, making key contributions within more-than-human and feminist research, whilst demonstrating in rich, detailed ways, how the allotment is a gendered space. More specifically, this thesis shows the ways in which different women can experience the allotment as a feminist space in a multitude of ways. In doing so, this thesis works to deconstruct stereotypes that are commonly associated with allotments, successfully showing them as gendered spaces, and illustrating the ways women work to disrupt masculinised expectations and assumptions that traditional allotment cultures imbue within these environments. With this, this thesis supports previous research which has found that allotments and growing spaces are valuable spaces for women (Moore et al., 2014; Buckingham, 2005; Cadzow and Binns, 2016; Zypchyn, 2012). Furthering this, this research demonstrates that allotments are empowering places, where women can show political resistance, and where they can build important relationships with themselves, other people, the more-than-human, and wider communities. This research also shows that these allotment spaces work mechanistically for women, going beyond previous other work and focussing specifically on understanding *how* women utilise, encounter, and embody these environments. Furthermore, through qualitative analysis of rich data, this valuable research shows that the allotment is a complex space, full of multitudes, tentacular relationships, bleeding bodies, and intertwined connections across the human and the more-than-human. More specifically, it



shows how the allotment functions as a space beyond the traditional assumptions that the historical culture of the space demonstrates, which is as a place to grow. Rather, this is a landscape which facilitates important relationships both between people and the more-than-human, as well as providing women key opportunities to grow and develop their identities. Here, they can create environments that allow them to be who they want to *be*, making room for political activism, philosophical reflection, as well as personal development, learning, and growth. This research also shows that the allotment is a space where women can celebrate the ways their bodies move and navigate the earth, where they can be empowered to grow in ways they choose and to align with, growing plants in ways that are meaningful for them, developing their allotments into personal utopias full of fresh fruit and vegetables alongside meaning and nuance.

Vitality, this thesis brings specific contributions of knowledge to four distinct topics. These contributions evolve from the women's stories, and likely reflect and represent the experiences of many other women who tend to these growing landscapes.

Firstly, this thesis adds to literature surrounding toilet access and public space, demonstrating the importance of sanitation spaces at the allotment. Through candid conversations surrounding menstruation and miscarriage, this research highlights the necessity of providing clean, accessible toilet facilities in these landscapes. Whilst there is research acknowledging and addressing the general lack of public toilets (e.g. Kitchin and Law, 2001; Wiseman, 2019), there is little research exploring this, nor the impacts this has, in allotments specifically. More than this, there is no current discussion surrounding how this impacts women and their time spent within these sites. Toilet access is hugely important, both within allotments and in the wider community, and it is through the important experiences and stories of the likes of Suzie, Mary and Ettie, that this research speaks to a necessary conversation that does not seem to be underway, either within the academy, or broader society.

Secondly, this thesis adds to our understanding of identity, and the nuance within this at the allotment, contributing to the few pieces of work that have explored this area (see Kettle, 2014). Specifically, this research highlights that how people see themselves at the allotment – whether this is as 'an allotmenteer' or 'a gardener' or 'a grower' or whether the allotment is something that

they *do* rather than is something they *are* – is complex, personal, and individual. More than this, this thesis demonstrates this complexity and nuance within identity at the allotment beyond labels, and looks deeper, to factors of skills and expertise, and how these sit alongside gender at the allotment; all of which are elements that are often heavily stereotyped and traditionalised, especially at the plot.

Thirdly, this thesis contributes to our perceptions of critters and care at the allotment. This adds more generally to work by Tronto (1993, 1998), who discusses the entanglements and complexities of care, as well as the likes of Haraway (2008, 2016, 2018), Puig de la Bellacasa (2010, 2015, 2017) and Ginn (2013, 2016) who have explored more-than-human relationships and nature. Importantly, this piece of work adds more specifically to the under-researched area of the allotment and the more-than-human. More than this, this thesis, through the participant's stories and experiences, interrogates the messy entanglements of these relationships, and the tensions that exist between acts of care for the homegrown fruits, vegetables, and acts of violence against the critters that visit and live within these parcels of land, eating the very produce that these women grow for their own survival (both human and more-than-human). This thesis demonstrates these complex tentacular relationships, highlighting the complexities that sit within these spaces, while importantly adding to a novel discourse surrounding this from a gendered lens, disrupting the traditional, socially constructed (polarising) view that women show notions of care in specific ways, simply by being women with an innate predisposition to nurture. This research, here, raises new questions about who should receive care within these spaces (and from whom), and interrogates the hierarchies that exist in the allotment in terms of nature, gendered nurture, and gendered care.

This research further adds to the ways we can comprehend the allotment as a gendered space and with this, the novel mechanisms that exist that illustrate the ways in which the allotment is a landscape that women can build upon (and within) *for* women. Through using the stories and experiences of these women, I demonstrate that the allotment is a place of gendered refuge, and a place where these women can *be* through what they build here; literally and figuratively. Specifically, I show the ways in which ownership is critical within the plot, especially as this landscape as a third space is neither outrightly owned nor always considered as leased. Here, I

show the specific way(s) we can understand enactments of ownership, which can be demonstrated through physical buildings that are hand-crafted at the plot, like toilets, sheds, and bathtubs, as well as growing and vegetal choices. More than this, however, I develop new understandings of this space through demonstrating how these material objects aid in the process of place-making (Ingold, 2011; Cresswell, 2004, 2013; Crouch and Parker, 2002), and with that, allow these women to create a sense of home, providing space to *exist, belong*, and continually *become* at the plot. Little research has so far brought this narrative at the allotment to light, and this thesis shows how such material sites within the plot, like the kitchens, sheds, toilets, and dining tables, are paramount to women's experiences within these landscapes, altering (and adding to) the ways they move in, exist at, and experience the allotment.

This research also makes important methodological contributions, highlighting the value and necessity of feminist approaches to social research, and centring participants' voices. This research is *for* women and is *about* women, and this was achieved by keeping the participants at the heart of this work. This approach ensures that the participants are the seed of the thesis, with the research growing around them, allowing for valuable, worthy, and meaningful insights to be captured, and more than this, stories of lived experiences with truth and meaning to be told and shared. The participants are the focus of this research at every angle that the design could justify, demonstrating the rich impact that feminist research can have in this way, along with highlighting the rapport and relationships that are built, and which solidify the trust and value within the data, along with the analysis, understandings, and key messages of this work. Taking this approach is important and worthwhile, and academic research would benefit from more pointed concentration where the real story rests: alongside, and *through*, the participants.

## **8.4. Future direction**

Notwithstanding the contributions to knowledge outlined above, there remains room for this research to extend further in the future.

This research adds to a growing body of research (see Buckingham, 2005; Allen and Sach, 2007; Taylor, 2016; Parry, Glover and Shinew, 2005; Zypchyn, 2012) that has looked to address the

paucity of literature addressing gardening, growing, and gender. In doing so, this thesis highlights that allotments are important spaces for women and supports notions that not only is gardening and growing a gendered activity, with gender influencing and affecting interactions and ways of gardening, but that the allotment is also a feminist space. Moreover, this thesis answers calls from research such as that of Moore et al. (2014) and Braga Bizarria, Palomino-Schalscha and Stupples (2022) who highlight the importance of exploring people's experiences within allotments that focuses on those who identify as cis-gender or heterosexual women. This project alone, however, does not suffice, and there is still a broad gap within the academy of trans- and queer people's experiences of these growing spaces, especially those who identify as women. This is particularly important, as chapter six highlights the potential for such understanding of these landscapes, and how there is important nuance and meaning that is built within these spaces, through these importance lenses of lived experience. Future research should explore the allotment alongside gender and sexual identity more thoroughly, looking to how people demonstrate this within these spaces, and how such meaning can disrupt more traditional understandings of these environments. Moreover, looking to these spaces while considering such identities, and engaging a queer and feminist lens to understand and interrogate this area of study, can bring important understandings pertaining to gardening practice, planetary health, and more-than-human relationships. These are necessary, worthwhile, and relevant conversations, and future studies should look to this while we endure the effects of living in the epoch of the Anthropocene.

Future work should also further research within allotments and women's experiences, looking more closely to intersectional factors, such as race, ethnicity, and social class. Through using snowball sampling and through conducting research within a 100-mile radius, it was hoped that this research would be diverse, recruiting people from varied backgrounds, cultures, ages, and classes. Whilst participants were assorted in terms of their own sexual, gender, and class identities, there was not as much representation within this cohort of participants as is reflected within the wider population. Future research would benefit from looking at this more closely, to explore and interrogate the ways that facets of social class, race, and ethnicity might work to influence, alter, and orientate allotment experiences, stories, histories, and practices. Doing so would not only benefit the literature and our understandings of different women's experiences within these

spaces, but this would also look to address the issue of inequality and inequity of access to green spaces. Future research should seek to address this, looking to consider effective policy changes, attending to inequalities across social groups in order to provide as many women (along with men, and other people) as possible the opportunity to learn how to grow their own healthy, delicious food.

Importantly, future research should continue to interrogate toilets, toilet access, and accessibility at the allotment. Toilets in this landscape, as this thesis effectively, candidly and impactfully shows, is a feminist issue and a human issue. Whilst this research highlights that this is particularly important for both transwomen and cis women, this is an issue that impacts and affects all bodies. In exploring this at these sites, important policy changes and legislation can be developed, bringing the responsibility of providing sanitation facilities to that of the local authorities (or organisations) running the allotments. This is vital as with larger waiting lists and more people using these landscapes, there is a pressing need to make them inclusive and readily accessible. Moreover, providing bathrooms and toilet access would not only be useful in terms of everyday access, but it would also speak to current wider discourse. Allotments have the potential to become spaces that go beyond other traditional shared spaces and become trans-inclusive spaces as an (important) by-product of providing toilets. Often when allotments do provide sanitary spaces, they are gender neutral. In this way, the allotment can move away from this historical masculine connotation that is engrained within the culture, allowing for the potential to address the current lack of access in ways that do not further reinforce or recreate the gender binary or marginalise transgender and/or non-binary individuals. Importantly and excitingly, allotments can become spaces of radical transformation, reflecting other liberated historical elements of the allotment past, demonstrating how these open green spaces are welcoming places for people and their bodies, all of whom have a plethora of important (and acknowledged) bathroom needs.

Future research should also consider delving deeper into the more-than-human through using creative methods. Research by Pitt (2015) and Pottinger (2021) has made important moves to expand research with the more-than-human within visual, creative and embodied methodologies, but there is broad scope for future research to expand this. As this thesis shows,

creative methods can be deeply valuable, allowing researchers to illustrate participants' words, thoughts, and feelings with important visual imagery. Future research would benefit from expanding this. Scholarship with (and alongside) the more-than-human, along with the methodologies used, and the ways in which (ethically) encompassing the more-than-human *within* this would be beneficial. This could include using natural dyes from food gluts, or using sunlight and shadow to create photographic prints, for instance. Creative methods are a valuable yet underappreciated tool, but they are interesting, can be either simple or complex, and are effective methods that garner rich and interesting data that help researchers to understand the complex, knotty and messy relationships people have with the many of the critters (Haraway, 2008, 2016) people encounter in the natural world.

Finally, future research should consider exploring the allotment as a gendered space, and specifically, a feminist space, just like this research has. This thesis is important, and it has unearthed several important considerations, nuances, and stories from an array of interesting, engaging, and inspiring women. Yet, there are more experiences and more lived histories and more women's voices to be heard. This piece of research is not complete, because it can never be considered as complete, and future work can look to representing more women; this work reflects a small handful of experiences that helps us to understand a vibrant landscape that is away from the traditional male gaze of the work that has previously been conducted, but there is more work to be done. Future research should embrace this potential, and look to raise the voices and empower more women who spend time and dig in allotments, looking to their experiences across the country, and the globe, and seek to find further, fuller, understandings of how women embrace and navigate these spaces, how they manage their bodies within them, and how they overcome the many number of challenges that they are faced with, within this often masculinised space that is steeped in culture and tradition. Research needs to continue to deconstruct and dispel this institution and continue to work hard to ensure that our knowledge(s) about these spaces is as full and as complex and as intertwined as these landscapes themselves are.

# Appendices

## Appendix A: Participant Information Sheet

### Participant Information Sheet.

**Project title:** Navigating the Plot

**Primary Investigator:** Elizabeth Cox ([e.cox@yorksj.ac.uk](mailto:e.cox@yorksj.ac.uk))

**Project supervisor:** Dr Eeva Sointu ([e.sointu@yorksj.ac.uk](mailto:e.sointu@yorksj.ac.uk))

#### Invitation to participate

You are invited to take part in a research study exploring the experiences of women who are gardeners, either in community gardens or in allotment spaces. If you are over 18 years of age, identify as a women, and are an active garden at a local community garden and/or allotment, you are eligible to take part.

Taking part is entirely voluntary; it is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. It is important for you to understand what the research is about and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. If anything is not clear to you or you would like more information, please contact the research team (contact details are at the bottom of this sheet).

#### Who cannot take part?

This project explores the experiences of women who are gardeners, either in a community garden or in allotment spaces. If you do not identify as a woman, you are not eligible to take part in this project.

Researchers are required to obtain informed consent from everyone taking part in their research. If there are any reasons that you may not be able to provide your own informed consent, such as pre-existing health related issues which may impact your ability to consent (i.e. dementia), you are unable to partake in this study. If you are unsure about this, please speak with the Primary Investigator or the Project Supervisor, who will be able to advise you further.

#### What is the project about?

From soil to plate and from ground to vase, the fruits of the labour of gardening are enjoyed by both men and women.

This study explores women's experiences of shared green spaces, allowing us to expand our understanding of gender and community within horticulture. We want to hear about your experiences stories, histories and practices of gardening, and gardening as a woman.

### **What will I be asked to do?**

There are 3 parts to this project, which is expected to run over a period of 9 months, finishing at the end of September 2022. Your involvement in the project will be as minimally time consuming as possible, and different elements of the project will take place at different times.

#### **Part A – Gardening Diary**

If you consent to taking part, the first element of the project will start as soon as possible. The first part of the project is a gardener diary, which will run until the end of the project. You will be given a notebook, which you will be asked to document your gardening experiences throughout the duration of this project. You may draw pictures, save and stick in cuttings, write observations or thoughts or feelings, or make bullet point entries. The choice is yours!

#### **Part B – Gardener Generated Photography**

In April 2022 you will be given a disposable camera, and you will be asked to use the camera to take a number of photographs that best reflect your gardening experiences. This could be the friends that you have at the garden site, or images of flowers or vegetables that you have grown from seed. Anything that you feel defines or adds to your experiences in the garden can be photographed – although if you take any pictures of your fellow gardeners, you are asked to gain their permission beforehand! You are asked to make notes of the photographs you take in your notebook, and towards the end of the project, you will discuss your photographs with the Primary Investigator (Liz).

#### **Part C – Interviews**

Across August and September, once your camera rolls are developed, you will take part in an informal, individual one-to-one interview with the Primary Investigator (Liz). Liz will ask you about the photographs you have taken, and your gardening diary, along with a more general chat about your gardening experiences, your stories about gardening, and your thoughts about horticulture. The interview is expected to take between 60 and 90 minutes, and will be more of an informal conversation with a hot drink and biscuits.

### **What are the advantages and disadvantages of taking part?**

Whilst there are no immediate benefits for those participating in this project, the findings of this study may have a variety of benefits across the fields of feminism, sociogeography and sociology, as well as upon any theoretical frameworks which have been constructed by research into women's experiences of gardening. You may also gain insights about your gardening experiences and gardening habits.

Taking part in this study is not expected to cause any discomfort or distress, but if such feelings do arise as a consequence of taking part, you can access advice or support at:

- Samaritans  
Telephone Number: 116 123  
Email Address: [jo@samaritans.org](mailto:jo@samaritans.org)
- York St John University Counselling Service  
Telephone Number: 01904 876 072



Email Address: [CMHC@yorks.ac.uk](mailto:CMHC@yorks.ac.uk)

### **How will my information be used?**

The information collected during this study will be used to produce a thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. The people who might read this in an official capacity are the project supervisors, members of the defense panel, and external examiners. The information may be published in academic journals, books, presented at academic conferences, used in exhibitions, and/or used for teaching purposes. Although the information may be used for these purposes, you will not be identifiable in any way through these activities as all those participating in this study will be assigned a unique pseudonym. The gardening sites involved in this study are also only identified via a pseudonym. I will not share with anyone that you are taking part in this research. You can, however, tell people about taking part in this research if you wish to do so.

### **Will my information be confidential?**

All the information you provide will be kept confidential. This means that any experiences that you share will be used solely for academic research or teaching purposes. All your information will be stored securely and only the Primary Investigator will have access to any information that you share whilst you take part in this study. The only time that the Primary Investigator would reveal anything to an appropriate authority would be if you divulge information that they feel could potentially put you or another person at risk of harm. This decision would only be taken following full consultation with the Project Supervisor, Dr Eeva Sointu.

### **Can I change my mind?**

Yes, absolutely - you can stop taking part in the study at any time during the course of participating in the study. You can ask for the photographs you take, your gardening diary, and the data you're your interviews to be excluded from the study before **1st October 2022**. After this date, the material will be anonymised and used in the analysis. Withdrawing your data means that this data will be destroyed. You do not need to provide a reason for withdrawing from this research. If you would like to withdraw, please contact the Primary Investigator or the Project Supervisor. You may do this either on-site and in person, by using the email address provided, or by contacting the Project Supervisor by email.

### **Who can I contact for further information?**

- Primary Investigator: Elizabeth Cox – [e.cox@yorks.ac.uk](mailto:e.cox@yorks.ac.uk)
- Project Supervisor: Dr Eeva Sointu – [e.sointu@yorks.ac.uk](mailto:e.sointu@yorks.ac.uk)

If you wish to talk to an independent representative within the university and someone who is outside of this research study, please contact the Business School Research and Knowledge Transfer Lead, Dr Alexandra Dales on [a.dales@yorks.ac.uk](mailto:a.dales@yorks.ac.uk).

### **What happens next?**

Please think carefully about whether or not you wish to take part in the study. If you do wish to take part, please complete the attached consent form.

**Thank you for considering participating in this study.**

## Appendix B: Participant Informed Consent

### Informed Consent

**Project title:** Navigating the Plot

**Primary Investigator:** Elizabeth Cox

**Project supervisor:** Dr Eeva Sointu

Participant ID: .....

Please indicate your agreement by ticking the following boxes after each of the statements and sign where indicated below:

1. I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet for the above study and understand what is expected of me.
2. I understand that my participation is completely voluntary.
3. I confirm that to the best of my knowledge I do not have any pre-existing health-related concerns or issues that may affect or impinge on my ability to provide informed consent to take part in this research project.
4. I understand that I am free to withdraw study. If I choose to withdraw my data, this can be done by informing the Primary Investigator either in person or by email. I also understand that I am free to withdraw from the study after the period of data collection, but I must do this no later than 1<sup>st</sup> **October 2022**. I understand that after this date the anonymised data may already be used in the analysis and cannot be removed.
5. I understand that during the exercise involving disposable cameras, I will seek informed consent with the relevant paperwork from anybody who may appear in the photograph(s) that I take.
6. I understand that I must respect other individual's privacy and dignity when taking photographs and I also understand that I must take photographs with the disposable camera that pertain to this study only.
7. I understand that by signing to this consent form I am transferring the photograph copyright to the Primary Investigator (Elizabeth Cox).
8. I understand that anonymised data, as well as the photographic images may be published in academic journals, articles, books, presentations, exhibitions, conferences, and used in teaching material.

**Data Protection Act**

I understand that data collected from me during this study will be stored on the university OneDrive or in a secure location on York St John University premises, and that all files containing information about me will be made anonymous. I also understand that this consent form will be stored separately from any data that I provide.

I agree to York St John University recording and processing my data and that these data may be presented in other academic forums (e.g., academic journals, at conferences, or in teaching). I understand that my data will be used only for these purposes and my consent is conditional upon the University complying with its duties and obligations under the Data Protection Act.

**Your name** .....

**Your signature** ..... **Date**

**Researcher's name** .....

**Researcher's signature** ..... **Date**

Thank you for this information. Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any questions ([e.cox@yorksj.ac.uk](mailto:e.cox@yorksj.ac.uk), [e.sointu@yorksj.ac.uk](mailto:e.sointu@yorksj.ac.uk))

## Appendix C: Disposable Camera

### Photography

**Project title:** Navigating the Plot

**Primary Investigator:** Elizabeth Cox

**Project supervisor:** Dr Eeva Sointu

The next part of the project involves you documenting your gardening experiences over a number of weeks in photograph form! You will be provided with a disposable camera, which has been labelled with your unique participant identification code, and you should still have your gardening diary, which you may need to make notes about your pictures.

#### **What do you need to do?**

For this part of the project, you are being asked to take photographs of your gardening experience. You can take photographs of anything you like that reflects what gardening means to you, your experience, your passions, and your thoughts and feelings about gardening. You will also be provided with a laminated sheet which gives you step-by-step instructions about how to use the disposable camera if you're unsure.

When you have taken a photograph please note down in your diary: (1) the exposure number, (2) what the photograph is of, and (3) a few notes to remind you about why you took that image. This will come in useful when you speak to Liz about your photographs later in the project.

This photography task will run until **mid-July 2022**, when the cameras will be collected to be developed. Please use all 36 exposures!

#### **Confidentiality**

Please remember to ask for permission and provide a signed consent form from other individuals before taking photographs of anybody else.

#### **Right to Withdraw**

Please remember that if you wish to withdraw at any time, you are free to do so. You can withdraw any data, including your diary, before 1<sup>st</sup> October 2022. After this date, anonymised data may already be used in the analysis and cannot be removed. Please feel free to speak to a member of the research team, or a member at the gardening site about this if you would like to be removed from the study.

If you have any questions, please ask Liz on site, or email [e.cox@yorks.ac.uk](mailto:e.cox@yorks.ac.uk). You may also email the Project Supervisor, Dr Eeva Sointu ([e.sointu@yorks.ac.uk](mailto:e.sointu@yorks.ac.uk)) with any questions or concerns you may have.

Taking part in this study is not expected to cause any discomfort or distress, but if such feelings do arise as a consequence of taking part, you can access advice or support at:

- Samaritans  
Telephone Number: 116 123  
Email Address: [jo@samaritans.org](mailto:jo@samaritans.org)
- York St John University Counselling Service  
Telephone Number: 01904 876 072  
Email Address: [CMHC@yorks.ac.uk](mailto:CMHC@yorks.ac.uk)

**Thank you!**

## Appendix D: Diary

### Diary

**Project title:** Navigating the Plot  
**Primary Investigator:** Elizabeth Cox  
**Project supervisor:** Dr Eeva Sointu

The first part of the project is a gardening diary, which will run throughout the duration of this research project. By now, you should have been given a notebook which will be your participant diary, and it will be labelled with your unique participant identifier.

#### What do you need to do?

For this part of the project, you are being asked to record your gardening experiences. You can use your notebook to make notes and entries about anything you would like to about your gardening experiences. Examples include how you felt whilst you were gardening, what tasks you did that day, what plants /flowers / vegetables you are growing, what you may be looking forwards to in the season...anything you wish! You can draw, paint and sketch, you can collect and stick in cuttings, or you may wish to write bullet points or journal entries about your time in the garden – the choice is yours.

The gardening diary will continue until the end of the fieldwork project, when your notebook(s) will be collected. If you run out of space, please just let Liz know (either in person or by email) and she will provide you with another!

#### Confidentiality

Your diary is yours for the duration of the project, and what you write in it will not be shared with anyone else. Please note that I may include diary entries or excerpts, without identifying you, in my thesis, publication material and teaching material.

All the data collected for this research project will be anonymised, and you and your diary entries and notes will not be personally identifiable. To help anonymise this, you are asked to create a pseudonym for your participation in this project. This will be a name that you will be known as within the research; you can pick anything you want (within reason!).

#### Right to Withdraw

Please remember that if you wish to withdraw at any time, you are free to do so. You can withdraw any data, including your diary, before 1<sup>st</sup> October 2022. After this date, anonymised data may already be used in the analysis and cannot be removed. Please feel free to speak to a member of the research team, or a member at the gardening site about this if you would like to be removed from the study.

If you have any questions, please ask Liz on site, or email [e.cox@yorksj.ac.uk](mailto:e.cox@yorksj.ac.uk). You may also email the Project Supervisor, Dr Eeva Sointu ([e.sointu@yorksj.ac.uk](mailto:e.sointu@yorksj.ac.uk)).

Taking part in this study is not expected to cause any discomfort or distress, but if such feelings do arise as a consequence of taking part, you can access advice or support at:

- Samaritans  
Telephone Number: 116 123  
Email Address: [jo@samaritans.org](mailto:jo@samaritans.org)
- York St John University Counselling Service  
Telephone Number: 01904 876 072  
Email Address: [CMHC@yorks.ac.uk](mailto:CMHC@yorks.ac.uk)

**Thank you!**

## Appendix E: Interview

### Interview

**Project title:** Navigating the Plot  
**Primary Investigator:** Elizabeth Cox  
**Project supervisor:** Dr Eeva Sointu

The final part of this project is a semi-structured interview, which will be more of a conversation between yourself and Liz.

#### **What do you need to do?**

At a time that is suitable for both you and Liz, you will sit with Liz and talk about a number of things. Liz will ask you about your gardening experiences, your thoughts about horticulture, and your experiences about being a woman who gardens. Liz will also ask you about the photographs you have taken and the diary that you have kept over the last few months as part of this research. The conversation is expected to last between 60 and 90 minutes.

#### **Confidentiality**

Your conversation with Liz will be recorded on a Dictaphone. The recording will be transcribed. Your name, and any names you mention, will be changed to pseudonyms at the time of transcribing the interview recording. The transcript will be stored safely on a computer and Liz's University OneDrive account that is password protected. The recording will be deleted once it is transcribed. Materials generated through this study, such as the PhD thesis, publications, or teaching materials will never identify you by name. Anything you say will be referred to under the pseudonym either you created, or that Liz has created for you.

#### **Right to Withdraw**

Please remember that if you wish to withdraw at any time, you are free to do so. You can withdraw any data, including your diary, before 1<sup>st</sup> October 2022. After this date, anonymised data may already be used in the analysis and cannot be removed. Please feel free to speak to a member of the research team, or a member at the gardening site about this if you would like to be removed from the study.

If you have any questions, please ask Liz on site, or email [e.cox@yorks.ac.uk](mailto:e.cox@yorks.ac.uk). You may also email the Project Supervisor, Dr Eeva Sointu ([e.sointu@yorks.ac.uk](mailto:e.sointu@yorks.ac.uk)) with any questions or concerns you may have.

Taking part in this study is not expected to cause any discomfort or distress, but if such feelings do arise as a consequence of taking part, you can access advice or support at:

- Samaritans  
Telephone Number: 116 123  
Email Address: [jo@samaritans.org](mailto:jo@samaritans.org)  
Website: [www.samaritans.org](http://www.samaritans.org)



- York St John University Counselling Service  
Telephone Number: 01904 876 072  
Email Address: [CMHC@yorks.ac.uk](mailto:CMHC@yorks.ac.uk)  
Website: <https://www.yorks.ac.uk/working-with-the-community/counselling-and-mental-health-centre/>

**Thank you!**

## Appendix F: Consent Form (Photographed Individuals)

### Photographed Individuals Informed Consent

**Project title:** Navigating the Plot  
**Primary Investigator:** Elizabeth Cox  
**Project supervisor:** Dr Eeva Sointu

Please indicate your agreement by ticking the following boxes after each of the statements and sign where indicated below:

9. I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet for the above study. I also confirm that I understand that a photograph of my image is being used for the purpose of this research study.
10. I understand that consenting to the use of a photograph of myself for the purpose of this research study is completely voluntary.
11. I understand that I am free to withdraw the photographs in which I am present. If I choose to withdraw these images, this can be done by informing the Primary Investigator either in person or by email. I also understand that if I chose to withdraw the photographs of myself, I must do this no later than 1<sup>st</sup> **October 2022**. I understand that after this date the anonymised data may already be used in the analysis and cannot be removed.
12. I understand that by signing this consent form I agree that the image(s) in which I am photographed may be published in academic journals, articles, books, presentations, exhibitions, conferences, and used in teaching material.

#### Data Protection Act

I understand that data collected from me during this study will be stored on the university OneDrive or in a secure location on York St John University premises, and that all files containing information about me will be made anonymous. I also understand that this consent form will be stored separately from any data that I provide.

I agree to York St John University recording and processing my data and that these data may be presented in other academic forums (e.g., academic journals, at conferences, or in teaching). I understand that my data will be used only for these purposes and my consent is conditional upon the University complying with its duties and obligations under the Data Protection Act.

Your name .....

Your signature .....

Date

Researcher's name .....

Researcher's signature ..... Date

Thank you for this information. Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any questions  
([e.cox@yorksj.ac.uk](mailto:e.cox@yorksj.ac.uk), [e.sointu@yorksj.ac.uk](mailto:e.sointu@yorksj.ac.uk))

## Appendix G: Debrief

### Participant Debrief

**Project title:** Navigating the Plot  
**Primary Investigator:** Elizabeth Cox  
**Project supervisor:** Dr Eeva Sointu

#### Thank you for taking part in this study!

Your participation in this study is greatly appreciated. Without your participation, it would not have been possible to undertake this project which has explored women and their experiences as gardeners in communal green spaces.

If you decide you would like to withdraw your data from the study, please contact the Primary Investigator by email ([e.cox@yorks.ac.uk](mailto:e.cox@yorks.ac.uk)) no later than 1<sup>st</sup> **October 2022**. You do not need to provide a reason if you decide to withdraw. All of your data (i.e. gardening diary, photographs, interview transcript) will be destroyed, and there will be no negative consequences.

The data collected for this project will remain anonymous, and will be stored either in a secure location with Liz at York St John University, or stored securely on the university's virtual computer system. All data will be password protected.

If you have any questions, wish to find out the outcome and discussions of this study, or would like to be directed to a final copy of this PhD thesis, please contact the Primary Investigator via email ([e.cox@yorks.ac.uk](mailto:e.cox@yorks.ac.uk)). If you have any questions or concerns that you do not wish to speak to Liz about, please contact the Project Supervisor, Dr Eeva Sointu ([e.sointu@yorks.ac.uk](mailto:e.sointu@yorks.ac.uk)).

If you would like to have a copy of your photographs and/or your diary (or diaries) returned to you after the exhibition, please contact Liz ([e.cox@yorks.ac.uk](mailto:e.cox@yorks.ac.uk)) who will happily arrange this with you.

Taking part in this study is not expected to cause any discomfort or distress, but if such feelings do arise as a consequence of taking part, you can access advice or support at:

- Samaritans  
Telephone Number: 116 123  
Email Address: [jo@samaritans.org](mailto:jo@samaritans.org)
- York St John University Counselling Services  
Telephone Number: 01904 876 072  
Email Address: [CMHC@yorks.ac.uk](mailto:CMHC@yorks.ac.uk)

Thank you once again for taking part!

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