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FROM THE EDITOR

Many sociologists have argued that how an organization begins has a profound and nearly unavoidable effect on its long-term character and success.1 With this inaugural issue, the Chicago Journal of Sociology has reached the end of the beginning—or at least the end of a beginning. This issue is certainly a celebration of an important milestone in the life of our little journal, but it is also an opportunity to reflect on what our beginning means for the future. Who are we now, and who will we be going forward?

One answer is that we are a journal that publishes excellent student papers. The papers presented in this issue are not only exemplary in their execution, but also in their diversity. They are both qualitative and quantitative in their methods, and they range in scope from entire nations (the United States and Singapore), to online communities (Facebook and Craigslist), to happenings in our own back yard (Chicago and Hyde Park). They examine culture, politics, policy, education, labor, and fundamental human questions about trust, safety, and community. The diversity of these papers reflects the diversity within sociology as a discipline, and I am confident that every student who reads this issue can find something that speaks to their own projects and research interests.

We are also a journal built as a resource for undergraduate students. One artifact of this commitment is our unusual publication cycle, which runs from May to December. This issue is premiering in the first weeks of winter quarter, the last chance for fourth-years to work on their BA papers before complete drafts are due. It is our hope that these model papers will be a useful reference guide for these students. Furthermore, if these fourth-years go on to publish their work in the CJS, our staff will help them polish an enviable writing sample well in advance of graduate school application deadlines. Finally, the lull from December to May affords the CJS a unique opportunity to be more than just a publication; as we move into our first winter quarter, we are exploring the possibilities of sponsoring workshops and speakers to enrich the undergraduate program.

Our devoted editorial staff has turned out to be one of CJS’s greatest assets—and possibly the most surprising one. Staffing the journal was an early source of uncertainty, since the journal came into existence just as the students were scattering for summer break. Our team formed on Basecamp, an online project-management platform, and the majority of new staffers had never met each other in person. Defying expectations, our team was incredibly engaged and productive, and the excitement surrounding the project was infectious. At the risk of embarrassing one of the now-associate-editors, I share this quote taken from the “Staff Bios” thread, where staffers introduced themselves at the outset of the project: “Hooray! I’m so excited to work on this with you [all]. It’s exactly what I want to be doing. Really.” I attribute some of this early exuberance to the fact that our staffers genuinely love their major. I hope that the CJS will continue to be fueled by the love of the discipline, of the department, and of our community of peers.

The CJS staff is arguably the biggest beneficiary of our organization. The student editors get to dig into the mechanics of excellent thesis papers, often long before they will have to create one themselves. Student editors also learn how to take papers that began as coursework and retool them for an audience of peers. The ability to write in a way that resonates with readers will serve the student editors well, whether they aspire to academia or other professions.

This undertaking is still so fresh and new that everyone who has touched it has left an indelible mark. First and foremost we owe a debt of gratitude to Professor Evans. The journal is his brainchild, and we could not have accomplished this without his support. I am also deeply grateful to Katie Muenck, who agreed to mastermind the design for the journal in August, back when I still doubted that we could rally a staff, much less publish a quality journal in four months. Thank you to the authors for trusting us as custodians of their work, and to our

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1 See, for instance, the works of Arthur L. Stinchcombe, Michael T. Hannan, and John Freeman.
mentors for sharing their expertise along the way. And thank you to each and every member of the staff—to the recent alums who generously gave their time from all corners of the globe, and to the current students who decided to make this organization a part of their lives.

Only time will tell if we manage to overcome the liability of newness\(^2\), but with the support of the faculty, the enthusiasm of the student editors, and the exemplary work of our authors, I’d say we are off to a good start.

Thank you, dear reader, for seeking out this PDF and becoming a part of our story.

Sincerely,

Tessa Huttenlocher
Executive Editor

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A WORD FROM OUR “SPONSOR”

Albion Woodbury Small founded the first Department of Sociology in the United States at the University of Chicago in 1892, upon the University’s opening, and then launched the *American Journal of Sociology* soon after, in 1895. Emile Durkheim began the first French department of sociology at the University of Bourdeaux in 1895, followed in 1896 by the establishment of *L’Année Sociologique*. These founders believed in the promise of sociology to comparatively understand and address the greatest problems in their contemporary society—mass urbanization, crime, and large class conflict—but they constructed educational and intellectual institutions concurrently because they recognized how the two reinforce one another. If “education is not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire,”¹ then new courses of study should give rise to novel ideas and transformative inquiry. Grappling with ideas and articulating arguments is the best education. I am delighted to see this take expression in the undergraduate sociology major at UChicago now as at its founding, and with the inaugural issue of the *Chicago Journal of Sociology* or CJS.

I suggested and “sponsored” the CJS because I have experienced the power of the *American Journal of Sociology* at UChicago to educate graduate students and faculty on the craft of scholarly communication. This education came through the production of articles, arguments, and debates that have come to define more than a century of American and international sociology. Over my past decade at Chicago, I have read and advised some dazzling undergraduate theses and seen our sociology majors go on to do remarkable things in and beyond sociology. I want these excellent voices heard, just as I believe our students will achieve their own best “vocal training” as they help each other articulate their best insights into the social and cultural world. More than just an educational experience or a showcase of student effort, I hope that influential arguments will find their first expression in CJS. I hope CJS will be a place for surprise, where intellectual and methodological risks are taken with deeper and more powerful understanding at stake. I believe that when you read these articles you will see a realization of this hope.

I put “sponsor” in quotes above because I have offered CJS only encouragement. The salaries of Tessa Huttenlocher, our founding CJS editor, and the rest of the CJS staff have been paid only in good ideas, integrity, and satisfaction borne of excellence. It has been an inspiration to work with young Chicago researchers, but it has been equally exciting to watch these young institution builders create something of substance and beauty, conveying ideas and analyses that reimagine the nature of political independence, Internet self-reflection, and the existential consequences of economic dependence. These are bold and exciting possibilities, some garnering substantial support. I have been surprised, delighted and challenged by them. I believe that you will be too.

Finally, a toast: to a brief, brilliant past that serves to prologue a distinguished future. And an invitation to be enriched by reading, commenting on, participating in, submitting to, and donating time, ideas, and resources to CJS in the months and years to come!

James A. Evans
Undergraduate Program Chair
Department of Sociology
University of Chicago

¹ Misattributed to William Butler Yeats, the original metaphor comes from Plutarch: “the mind is not a vessel that needs filling, but wood that needs igniting—no more—and then it motivates towards originality and instills the desire for truth.”
Cultural Matching in Job Hiring: The Online Labor Market Craigslist and the In-Home Childcare Industry

Alexander D. Farris
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This study explores the matching process between employers and job candidates in the online labor market on Craigslist for in-home childcare. Cultural preference matching and background matching are two mechanisms that have been identified in the literature as vehicles of labor market sorting. Although these mechanisms have been studied in high-wage, professional settings, their role in the relatively low-wage in-home childcare sector has remained unclear. To investigate, I interviewed twelve parents who used Chicago Craigslist to search for part- and full-time nannies and sitters. By analyzing parents’ deliberations over current candidates, as well as their reflections on past candidates, I found evidence suggesting cultural matching processes decisively influenced some employers’ evaluations of job candidates. Additionally, employers heavily discriminated against job candidates who displayed poor writing skills in email exchanges started in response to the Craigslist posts. This suggests the online nature of communication exchange on Craigslist creates a stiff entry barrier that, in effect, penalizes job candidates without sufficient cultural capital to produce suitably written emails. This research not only addresses how cultural matching impacts the Craigslist childcare labor market but also offers a more comprehensive view of how cultural matching affects labor market sorting across various economic sectors.

1. INTRODUCTION

Building on traditional theories of hiring and Lauren Rivera’s cultural matching theory (Rivera 2012), this paper investigates how twelve parent-employers using the online marketplace Craigslist search for, evaluate, and hire in-home childcare workers. Cultural matching theory operationalizes cultural capital theory in the labor market. It introduces three empirically-observed mechanisms whereby job candidates are more likely to be hired when their cultural profiles match those of their job evaluators. Though Rivera documents the existence and extent of cultural matching at elite professional service firms, it remains an open question the extent to which cultural matching influences other industries’ labor markets and what explains the variance of cultural matching’s intensity among industries.

First, I will discuss the relevant sociological literature pertaining to theories of hiring and the in-home childcare industry. Then I will present the reasoning behind my methods and case selection, followed by an expanded discussion of my results. I find several cases in which cultural matching processes influenced participants’ hiring decisions. Given Lauren Rivera’s findings of prevalent cultural matching in the elite professional service firms, one might expect cultural matching to be highly consequential in all industries. However, this study shows that cultural matching in the in-home childcare industry is both of a lesser extent and of a different character due to the online job search medium. Finally, I discuss theoretical implications of my study for understanding cultural matching within the context of the broader labor market and different industries.
HUMAN CAPITAL AND SKILLS SORTING

A good theoretical starting place for understanding the dynamics of job hiring is human capital theory (Tilly et al. 1998: 184). The cornerstone of human capital theory is heterogeneity of the productive capacities of workers. Different workers have different amounts of human capital, which varies based on inputs such as education, innate ability, health, and so on. The productivity and wages differs from worker to worker because of differing levels of human capital.

A basic model of the relation between human capital and wages in equilibrium is given as:

\[ W = r \times HC_i, \]

where \( W \) is wages, \( r \) is some market-determined rate, and \( HC_i \) is human capital of person \( i \) (Becker 1964). The wages of a worker is a function of the worker’s human capital and a market-determined constant. A firm should hire a particular job candidate only if their productivity equals or exceeds their wage. In turn, a worker, knowing that if his productivity is greater than his wages he can go work for another firm, should work for the firm only if his wages equal or exceed his productivity. The crucial considerations for a firm-to-candidate match, then, are what the worker will be paid and the degree to which the worker’s human capital pertains to the job construct in question.

The basic problem for an employer making a particular hiring decision is the dearth of information about exactly how productive the various job candidates would be if they were hired. Without accurate knowledge of a candidates potential productivity, job evaluators resort to a variety of proxy measurements and hiring strategies. Traditionally, evaluators use resumes and interviews to garner proxy measurements for job candidates’ human capital, such as education level, job experience, and interpersonal skills (Kelly 1918). Labor market theorists have termed this basic view of job hiring skills-sorting (Tilly et al. 1998; Alcala et al. 2006). Employers screen candidates based on how productive they will be completing the job tasks, even if the gauges they use to do so are not perfectly informed and accurate.

INTRODUCTION TO CULTURAL MATCHING

Cultural sociologists have suggested that job hiring decisions are influenced by cultural factors and are more than simply skills-sorting. Pierre Bourdieu’s theory of cultural capital suggests workers possess a stock of cultural capital from which they are able to derive returns in the labor market. A job candidate can earn more in the labor market because of his or her tastes, experiences, leisure pursuits, and self-presentation styles (Bourdieu 1986). Despite this theory’s appeal, it long begged for operationalization: by what mechanism do workers benefit from cultural capital in the labor market?

The field of cultural sociology did little to integrate cultural capital theory with skills-matching theory until Lauren Rivera’s 2012 investigation of the influence of cultural similarities between evaluators and candidates on elite professional firm hiring. Although hiring processes may not be the only site of cultural capital’s influence on the labor market, they are certainly of crucial importance. Cultural matching in the hiring process occurs at the beginning of a worker’s employment. In her attempt to bridge the gap between cultural and hiring studies, Rivera interviewed 120 employers and observed hiring committees at elite professional service firms like law firms, investment banks, and consulting firms (Rivera 2012: 1003). Before exploring some of the theoretical implications of Rivera’s study, I will first provide an overview of her case selection.

Rivera chose to investigate hiring at elite professional service firms for several reasons. Since elite professional service firms’ applicant pools are pre-screened to ensure candidates meet certain educational requirements, the
job candidates these firms interview are relatively homogenous regarding human capital indicators. The firms also recruit through universities, which minimizes social capital disparities (Rivera 2012, 1003). Thus, with social and human capital held approximately constant throughout the candidate pool, cultural similarities should be more salient in hiring outcomes. It is also important to note that the firms she observed did not employ human resources managers to handle the hiring procedure. Instead, the elite professional service firms had revenue-generating professionals with whom the job candidates will work conduct interviews and make hiring decisions, as opposed to professional human resources managers. Her goal with this case selection was not to design a highly generalizable study, but to intensively examine the role of culture in hiring.

Building on the results of her study, Rivera theorizes about the mechanisms that result in cultural matching, whereby firms hire candidates culturally similar to their job evaluators. Throughout her interviews, Rivera finds substantial evidence for organizationally driven processes, cognitively driven processes, and affectively driven processes of cultural matching. For each of the three processes, over 75 percent of interviewers displayed signs of having been influenced by cultural similarities. Considerations of the cultural characteristics of job candidates were prevalent in each industry, and similarity exhibited in the job interview stage of the hiring was the most common mechanism by which candidates were evaluated.

**MECHANISMS OF CULTURAL MATCHING**

Organizationally driven processes are mechanisms whereby firms assess job candidates’ cultural fit to the firm using formal evaluating criteria. Rivera defines cultural fit as “perceived similarity to a firm’s existing employee base in leisure pursuits, background, and self-presentation” (Rivera 2012: 1007). Importantly, Rivera’s use of “fit” differs from “strategic fit,” a term in the human resources literature referring to how an organization matches its personnel strategies to its broader competitive strategy (Paauwe et al. 2009). With cultural fit, firms seek to hire candidates who might be socially compatible with current employees not just in the office but also out of the office. Rivera distinguishes between cultural fit within the organization and communication skills. The former is traditionally theorized to be non-productive and not related to human capital, whereas the latter are used productively in, for example, interacting with clients. Rivera argues evaluators value these non-productive characteristics of job candidates because of the large amount of time employees within the firm spend together. She found that evaluators, themselves employees at the hiring firm, desire colleagues with whom it will be enjoyable to work. For the firm, utilizing cultural fit as a formal criterion in the hiring processes serves to elevate firm morale, thereby decreasing the firm’s attrition and the costs associated with it. Rivera also found, though, that among the industries she studied, those industries with more structured and technically-focused interviews tended to value cultural fit less, even though these industries also tended to have greater interpersonal office interactions. Law firms, which tend to be less social and have more open, less structured interview formats, valued cultural fit the most; while consulting firms, which tend to be more social and have interviews based on case studies of businesses, valued cultural fit the least—although it was still heavily valued. By studying multiple industries, Rivera positions herself to make causal claims about why and how cultural similarities influence hiring outcomes.

Cogitively driven processes are more informal, yet also active ways in which evaluators’ shared experiences with job candidates lead to better understanding and valuation of candidates’ human capital levels. Candidates who share experiences with evaluators benefit from this informational advantage. Rivera explains cognitively driven processes of cultural matching: “Evaluators used their personal experiences as frames through which they interpreted candidates’ intellectual, social, and moral worth” (Rivera 2012: 1012). For example, an evaluator who went to an Ivy League university will tend to favor job candidates who also went to an Ivy League school even when by other measures the job candidate is no more qualified than candidates who attended state universities; or an evaluator who had poor grades in school will tend to value job candidates’ grades less and other measures like school prestige or work experience more. Hence, job candidates who share cultural similarities and experience
with their evaluators benefit not only because they are more likely to be considered a cultural fit at the firm but also because their human capital may be more highly appreciated.

Affectively driven processes, the third and final mechanism by which Rivera theorizes cultural matching influences hiring decisions, occur when evaluators derive a positive emotional experience from job candidates “who validate their attitudes and identities” (Rivera 2012: 1014). For example, a candidate who mentions he appreciates the philosophy of Ludwig Wittgenstein in a job interview for a professional position could spark an emotional reaction such as excitement or intrigue in a job evaluator who also reads Wittgenstein, such that the evaluator passively and unconsciously associates positive feelings with the candidate. This leads to a more positive assessment of the candidate’s job-related credentials. Affectively driven processes are consistent with value homophily, whereby underlying psychological predispositions lead people to associate with individuals who share similar cultural values (McPherson et al. 2001). Despite affectively driven processes of cultural matching being the least easily identifiable—they function more passively than the other mechanisms—Rivera reports that their role is particularly salient in group deliberations. In group deliberations, a candidate benefits extensively when one member of the group advocates for him, and evaluators are disposed to advocating for a candidate if he is able to spark such an affective process.

Rivera’s theories on cultural matching are limited, because she only investigates one class of industries—elite professional service firms—hence preventing her theory’s general application to the broader labor market encompassing many different kinds of industries. Rivera calls for future research to “analyze how the types and relative importance of cultural similarities in hiring vary between occupation” (Rivera 2012: 1017). This is precisely my research aim. Understanding the variation in cultural matching’s form and significance among industries should allow hiring theorists to formulate a more general understanding of cultural matching in the broader labor market. Data on this topic can only be collected through intensive study of individual firms. Roberto Fernandez adopted this same approach when studying the role of referrals in hiring within firms in different industries (Fernandez et al. 1997; Fernandez et al. 2000). By intensively studying the labor market for childcare workers on Craigslist, I hope to contribute to a better and more general understanding of cultural matching’s role in hiring outcomes throughout the labor market.

HIRING IN THE IN-HOME CHILDCARE INDUSTRY

The in-home childcare industry is an appealing path for research for numerous reasons: It is likely growing in size and everyday relevance. It features households rather than traditional firms, though both household decision makers and workers are overwhelmingly gender homogenous—female. Unlike Rivera’s professional firms, it is a low-wage market featuring relatively little social interaction between employers and employees. What counts for human capital in the childcare industry is generally not cognitive or physical skill, but more intangible characteristics associated with quality of care. Finally, the in-home childcare industry, as opposed to out-of-home childcare businesses, offers several theoretical and practical advantages.

The economic size of the in-home childcare industry is difficult to quantify, but several indications suggest it is widespread and still growing. Statistics about the in-home childcare industry are difficult to obtain, because families generally pay their workers under the table and sometimes in kind (Macdonald 2010:12). Demand for childcare has increased over the past several decades as households have increasingly become double-income earning (Becker 1981: 54). A market-based system of childcare services is becoming increasingly prevalent, utilized not only by wealthy families but also by working- and middle-class families (Uttal 2002: 3). Deviating from traditional household mothering roles, women have increasingly hired childcare workers to profit from the increasingly high wages available to them in the labor market. In addition to reasons relating to increased female labor force participation, scholars have linked increased demand for childcare with the rise of global cities (Macdonald 2010: 7). Global cities are home to a growing class of relatively wealthy knowledge-workers who need childcare workers to help raise their children and manage household chores. Though the size of this
underground labor market likely fluctuates, the underlying economic fundamentals suggest that with increasingly large returns to female labor market participation, the in-home childcare industry will grow and become more prevalent not only for wealthy households but also for middle-class households.

Despite a sizeable literature on both childcare and firm hiring practices, this study is the first study, to my knowledge, which focuses specifically on the hiring practices for in-home childcare workers. Most labor market studies focused on hiring practices have investigated more traditional firms. The dramatic increase in human resources scholarship since the beginning of the twentieth century has sought to systematize hiring practices (Kelly 1918), and most prominent companies nowadays at least to some extent consult this literature. However, my study focuses on a non-traditional firm-type: the household. This is a particularly interesting case to study cultural matching, because parents must hire someone who will be in their home and provide care to their children. The employee is viewed both as a worker and as part of the family, and families must navigate between these two oft-opposing roles. A fine example of this tension is the question of whether the worker should eat dinner with the family; some families and employees may have reservations about such intimacy, while others may want an intimacy that never develops (Macdonald 2010: 60).

**APPROACHING CULTURAL MATCHING IN THE IN-HOME CHILDCARE INDUSTRY**

The in-home childcare industry’s low wages and lack of time-intensive interaction between employer and employee are particularly important aspects of my research design. Rivera’s study is the only to focus on cultural matching in hiring, but she studies elite professional service firms that feature robust employee compensation. Since a primary goal of this study is to identify the determinants of cultural matching’s prevalence in affecting hiring outcomes, it is important to investigate a low-wage labor market.

Among the three types of firms Rivera studies, she finds variance in cultural matching’s intensity because of two primary factors: social time spent with employees at the firm and the degree of structure in the job interview format. The childcare industry is unique insofar as employers generally, though certainly not always, have little regular social interaction during work shifts. By Rivera’s reasoning, this suggests that cultural matching will not have as dramatic of an impact on hiring outcomes as is the case at elite professional service firms. Interview formats in my sample varied widely, whereas Rivera finds generally homogenized interview formats within each particular industry she studies. Hence, the in-home childcare industry serves as a good parallel case to Rivera’s, allowing me to test the effect of time-intensity of social interaction and the degree of interview structure on cultural matching.

An advantage of studying the in-home childcare industry is that traditional notions of productivity and human capital do not hold very well, which allows room, as it were, for cultural matching’s influence. Quality of care is difficult to measure and varies widely among households (Uttal 2002: 5-6). Economic theory dating back to Adam Smith’s canonical pin factory worker example in 1776 has focused on quantifiable measures of productivity—how many pins can a worker produce in a given allotment of time (Smith 1976: 8-9). Parent-employers, often drawing only on folk accounts of and their own limited experience of hiring, must gauge intangible qualities of job candidates. This is not to claim, however, that childcare is non-productive; it is well-understood as an important investment in the early development of various aspects of the child’s human capital and psychological well-being (Donovan et al. 1990). Childcare, especially around early child development, is key to ensuring proper nutrition, health care, and psychological development, all of which are crucial aspects of the child’s developing human capital stock (Young 1995: 9; Becker 2007). For example, scientific evidence suggests that 50 percent of variance in intellectual development is established by age four (Young 1995: 3; “Credentials for the Infant/Toddler Child Care Workforce” 2008: 3). Research indicates that parent-employers utilize “ethnic logics” to form hiring decisions; parent-employers associate caregiving abilities with the ethnic backgrounds of job candidates (Macdonald 2010: 69). Oftentimes, parents rely on “gut instinct,” rendering
them especially susceptible to “cognitive shortcuts” (Macdonald 2010: 71). Cultural matching could indeed be a primary “shortcut” or “logic” employers use to screen candidates and make hiring decisions.

The in-home childcare industry, only a subset of the childcare industry as a whole, offers several theoretical and practical advantages over the rest of the childcare industry. Caregiving is obviously not restricted to within the child’s home: daycare centers and other out-of-home options constitute a major portion of childcare industry as a whole. One theoretical problem with out-of-home childcare is that such businesses tend to have more engrained hiring practices and even oversight from governments which mandate sets of credentials (“Credentials for the Infant/Toddler Child Care Workforce” 2008: 3). Studying many different parent-employers each individually employing a single worker, as opposed to studying a single out-of-home business hiring many workers, limits idiosyncrasies of preferences and allows this paper to engage with a wide variety of hiring preferences and strategies. Cameron Macdonald’s study of the in-home childcare industry suggests that there exists a special employee-employer relationship not found in the out-of-home industry (Macdonald 2010). The in-home industry also has significant practical advantages that render it preferable for this study. Because the owners of out-of-home businesses derive their income from their business, they have more at stake. They may fear academic research on their business could present a liability, or they simply may regard other work activities as more productive than facilitating researchers. Further, studying in-home childcare allows this study to draw participants from a large pool of participant candidates, rather than a smaller pool of childcare businesses.

In my sample, I observed that household decision-making is typically conducted by mothers. All the parents interviewed in my study were mothers, although this was neither my intention nor my expectation when designing the study. Only five out of twelve fathers in my sample helped with or provided consultation during the hiring process. I found this to be consistent with Macdonald: even though childcare is decreasingly considered the sole dominion of the mother, the expectation still persists that the mother is responsible for childcare, even if this only entails searching for and hiring a childcare worker (Macdonald 2010: 7). Interestingly, sometimes childcare is not counted as a household expense but as a mother’s own personal expense within the financial arrangement between parents (Macdonald 2010: 64). Childcare workers are also predominantly female; nearly all job applicants mother-employers discussed in my study were female. From a research design standpoint, this serves to control for effects of gender homophily in hiring decisions and isolate the effects of cultural matching. This, however, comes at the expense of testing for differences in cultural matching between men and women, since men are neither job candidates nor employers in this study.

HIRING USING THE ONLINE MARKETPLACE CRAIGSLIST

To the best of my knowledge, this study is the first to intensively study how many employers within one economic sector use online marketplaces to find and hire job candidates and how the idiosyncrasies associated with online hiring affect hiring decisions. Cameron Macdonald’s sample in her study of parent-employers does not include parent-employers using online marketplaces (Macdonald 2010: 69, 280). Qualitative, interview-based research of Craigslist dating has shown that unique features of the online experience can impact social and psychological outcomes in the “sexual marketplace” (Paul et al. 2010: 535). Unsurprisingly, the same is true for Craigslist labor markets.

The Internet has become an important medium for social interaction, and following this trend, Internet-based job hiring is becoming increasingly important. Because the Internet presents firms with a relatively cost-effective method of searching for and communicating with candidates, its use for recruitment and application management at large corporate firms increased 60 percent from 1999 to 2009 (Searle 2009). Using online job application websites, potential applicants are better able to determine if they are right for the job, thus deterring unsuitable candidates and strengthening the applicant pool for firms. Further, studies show that Craigslist crowds out other more traditional ways to search for job candidates, especially newspaper classified ads: not only is it free to post job ads, it is also very easy and quick to do (Kroft et al. forthcoming; Seamans et al. forthcoming). At least two
economists have argued that because of the low-cost nature of this method of job search, firms are better able to cultivate candidate pools and, as a result, are able to improve matching efficiencies (Katz et al. 1999: 31; Kroft et al. forthcoming). These results indicate that using the Internet as a job hiring medium has become prevalent. A primary aim of this study is to use interview data to investigate the special online social dynamics of this increasingly important forum through which employers and employees find each other.

3. METHODS

To develop a broader understanding of cultural matching’s influence on labor market outcomes, I researched the online labor market for in-home childcare workers on Craigslist Chicago, a website servicing Chicago and the surrounding suburbs.

Though I select a different case to study, my interview methodology is inspired by Rivera’s study. She found participants through public recruiting directories, university alumni directories, and multi-sited referral chains. In interviews, she asked participants specific questions about desired qualities in job candidates and about job candidates whom participants recently evaluated. She also asked participants to evaluate a set of mock résumés featuring candidates with similar educational attainment but varying sex, ethnicity, extracurricular activities, and other culturally-related characteristics. Rivera observed candidate evaluation committees at one elite professional service firm over a span of nine months. To analyze her data, Rivera developed codes to classify types of similarities used in evaluation, meanings employers attributed to particular similarities, and ways employers used similarities in evaluation (Rivera 2012: 1006).

This study used twelve semi-structured, in-person interviews. The length of the interviews ranged from 35 to 70 minutes and took an average of 45 minutes. I elected to conduct interviews, because they best allow for the participant to offer their own interpretation of their candidate search and hiring. The interviews were in-person, which allowed me to develop rapport with participants, such that they felt free to divulge their opinions on job applicants and previous caregivers for their children. Interviews were conducted either in the participants’ houses or at local coffeehouses, depending on the choice of the participant.

This study used a convenience sampling technique relying on the availability and willingness of participants. Throughout the summer of 2013, I emailed parents posting to Craigslist Chicago’s childcare page (http://chicago.craigslist.org/kid), asking them to participate in my study. Approximately 15 percent of those whom I emailed responded and elected to participate in the study. To qualify for the study, participants had to have recently posted a job to Craigslist and hired a worker for their position. Positions were limited to regular babysitters and both part- and full-time nannies.

The interviews were semi-structured, insofar as I always asked each applicant about similar topics but in a way that allowed time for the participants to expound upon what they felt was most important about their experience. I first asked about the participant’s family, then about the job position they were trying to fill, then about job candidates whom they were corresponding and interviewing, and finally about a set of mock emails and resumes. The mock emails and resumes varied in style, writing proficiency, and experiences presented to spur discussion of how employers evaluate the initial online responses from job applicants. All interviews were digitally recorded with the permission of the participants, transcribed manually, and coded for instances of cultural matching.

My study has several noteworthy limitations. Were I to have conducted more than twelve interviews, I could make claims about the larger population of Chicago mother-employers with more confidence. My convenience sampling technique may raise doubts that I have a true random sample from the population of Chicago mother-employers. Additionally, since I conducted my research exclusively over the summer of 2013, my participants may have been biased toward evaluating job candidates in light of typical summertime activities. For example,
mothers who attempted to evaluate how well candidates would watch their children outdoors might have been more likely to focus on indoor activities if they were hiring during the winter.

Figure 1 - Overview of Sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anna</td>
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<td>33</td>
<td>Girl</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clarabella</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>Girl</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eleanor</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>Girl</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Julia</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Boy</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lucy</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Boy</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Martha</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>Girl</td>
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<tr>
<td>Michelle</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
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<td>Boy</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pam</td>
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<td>Boy</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>40</td>
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<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rita</td>
<td>Asian American</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>Girl</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sadie</td>
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<td>40</td>
<td>Girl</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sally</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>Girl</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4. DATA AND DISCUSSION

The central findings of my research are as follows: Employers in the in-home childcare labor market exhibit evidence of affective and cognitive mechanisms of cultural matching, though with comparatively diminished frequency as has been observed in elite professional service industries. The most important qualifications for care workers are intuitively recognized traits such as being fun, loving, and warm. The online medium of the labor market for in-home childcare workers on Craigslist enhances the importance of writing skills and writing style for employers evaluating job candidates.

CARE WORK AND HUMAN CAPITAL

A central claim of this paper is that because the qualities that make a job candidate attractive for care work are humanistic and intuitively recognized, employers are prone to practicing cultural matching in forming their hiring decisions. To show this, let us first investigate the typical job description for employers in my study and then examine what sort of characteristics parent-employers in my study looked for in a good candidate. The median hourly wage offered by parent-employers I interviewed was $10, though wages ranged from bartered services to $12.50 per hour. They sought workers for an average 22 hours per week, though this ranged from 10 hours per week to 50 hours per week. All but one mother wanted childcare for when neither parent could be home to watch their children; one mother—a single mother—sought a childcare worker as a mother’s assistant with the aim of giving each of her two children more individualized attention in the evenings. Expected tasks were mostly limited to care work, although three of twelve mothers wanted the worker to help with meal preparation, two wanted the worker to drive their children to and from school or extracurricular activities, and two expected the worker to help with household chores like cleaning and laundry. Mother-employers sought candidates with several formal qualifications, such as degrees in early childhood educations, first aid and CPR training, and work experience with other families’ children, although all mother-employers were willing to consider candidates who possessed none of these formal qualifications.

INTUITIVELY RECOGNIZED QUALITIES

Figure two shows the most prevalent adjectives parents used to describe either ideal job candidates, favorable past job candidates, or favorable past in-home childcare employees. The adjectives fall into two main categories: tangible and intuitively recognized.

Tangible qualities are easier to measure than intuitively recognized qualities and relate to how well candidates can perform the job tasks related to care work: responsible, reliable, flexible, and careful. Parent-employers sought someone who could work around their schedule and properly maintain the safety and well-being of their children. Mothers wanted someone who would be available on short notice in case of a date night or an unexpected call to work. They also wanted someone who would always show up for work promptly. To gauge these qualities, employers generally looked at candidates’ job experience and contacted references, but they were also perceptive to whether or not the job candidates promptly responded to email or text messaging correspondence and whether or not the job candidates arrived on time to interviews.

Intuitively recognized qualities of job candidates were heavily desired but far less straightforward for parent-employers to gauge. They relate to the soft, intangible aspects of a job candidate which parent-employers gauged by “feel” or “gut instinct.” Employers sought childcare workers who possessed the following intuitively recognized qualities: warm, loving, fun, friendly, enthusiastic, engaged, and easy-going. Nine of twelve specifically mentioned, without my asking, that their “feel” or “gut instinct” for a candidate was crucial for them to measure these intangible qualities and thus form hiring decisions.
Anna (Caucasian, 33), a divorced mother of two daughters ages five and six, sought a candidate who is engaged, gentle, honest, kind, and warm. She described to me her process of finding such a candidate: “It’s like if you’re meeting someone you’re going to date. You either have chemistry or you don’t. It’s difficult to explain.” Eleanor (Caucasian, 55), stressed that what is most important for a childcare worker is that he or she is a “quality human being.” Parent-employers relied on their intuition to determine whether or not job candidates possessed the intangible qualities they desired in the person who would look after their children. This opens the window, as it were, for cultural matching to affect hiring outcomes, because these qualities are hard to measure except by intuitive evaluation of a candidate’s character.

Relative to other economic sectors, the in-home childcare industry features heavy employer preference for intuitively recognized qualities. The elite professional service firms Rivera studies, though they do feature more employer-employee interaction, do not have preferences for such intangible qualities as how loving or warm a candidate is. These adjectives primarily describe tangible qualities of desired workers, not intuitively recognized qualities as in the case of the in-home childcare industry. The in-home childcare industry is an especially suitable case for studying some of the under-theorized dynamics of cultural matching due to the unique, intangible skillset that counts for human capital within it.

**CULTURAL MATCHING IN THE IN-HOME CHILDCARE INDUSTRY**

Lauren Rivera identifies three kinds of cultural matching: organization-driven, cognitive, and affective. She identifies two key factors that she believes drives these cultural matching processes: high level of social interaction between job evaluators and the workers they hire and lack of formal interview structure. Let us examine the
extent of each of the three cultural matching processes and determine what factors account for their influence over hiring outcomes in the in-home childcare industry.

**ORGANIZATION DRIVEN PROCESSES**

Because of the unique nature of what constitutes a firm in the in-home childcare industry, namely a household, I found organization driven processes of cultural matching have no influence over hiring outcomes. No mother I interviewed used cultural fit as a formal evaluative criterion in making hiring decisions. This is largely because no mother I interviewed understood her family to have a special organizationally culture into which the worker they hire should culturally fit. Several mothers I interviewed did say that their family bonds over common activities, such as family nights, video games, or music. However, no parent-employer I interviewed expressed desire to incorporate the childcare worker into common family activities. Only one parent desired for the childcare worker to be present when either of the children's parents were home. Further, one parent, Lucy (Caucasian, 30) preferred that job candidates have differing interests and hobbies from the family, such that her kids would be opened to new ideas and activities.

**COGNITIVE PROCESSES**

Though I found no evidence to suggest the occurrence of organizationally driven processes of cultural matching in the in-home childcare industry, I found strong evidence that both cognitive and affective processes influence hiring outcomes. However, as figure three shows, cultural matching is far less prevalent in the in-home childcare industry than in the elite professional service industries Rivera studied.

Three of twelve mothers exhibited signs of cognitive processes affecting their hiring decisions. When discussing the candidate whom she had just enthusiastically hired, Lucy (30, Caucasian) reasoned that because the candidate attended the same elementary school as Lucy’s son, the candidate would perform better in the job tasks Lucy found most important. When asked about her image of an ideal candidate for the job, Lucy responded, “anyone who will get down and play with the kids and take them outside.” Even though the elementary school her son attends had been completely reconstructed since the candidate she hired attended it, Lucy thought that the job candidate she hired would be more playful and outdoors-oriented: “Kids in our community really like to play, and [the job candidate Lucy hired] knows what it is like to grow up here and play on playgrounds or play baseball or soccer and that kind of thing.” Largely due to her familiarity with the childhood background of the
job candidate, Lucy decided to hire the candidate. This is a strong example of cognitive processes of cultural matching’s influence over hiring decisions in the in-home childcare industry.

Two other mother-employers also exhibited signs of cognitive processes of cultural matching, though differently than that of Lucy. Eleanor (Caucasian, 55), while discussing the hiring of a past worker, mentioned that one factor that contributed to that decision was the worker having attended Purdue University. Eleanor’s sister-in-law is an administrator at Purdue, so Eleanor emphasized the value of the job candidate’s educational background. Anna (Caucasian, 33) while discussing mock email correspondence and resumes, took special note of one mock application: “They went to DePaul [University], where my fiancé went. I like that. I’d probably write them back.” Anna’s comment suggests that her familiarity with DePaul University through her fiancé augmented her perception of the candidate’s value and spurred her decision to further consider the candidate for the job after the initial screening stage of her hiring process. These findings provide evidence for the theory that if an evaluator is familiar with a job candidate’s educational experience either through their own background or through the background of someone they know, the job candidate’s human capital has a higher perceived value, and the job candidate’s application is more likely to get them past initial screenings and into interviews with employers.

**AFFECTIVE PROCESSES**

Affective processes of cultural matching, whereby a job evaluator values a candidate more highly because of a cultural similarity between the evaluator and candidate that sparks interest and excitement in the evaluator, influenced the hiring decisions of three of the twelve mothers I interviewed, as shown in figure three. Julia (Caucasian, 30), an avid player of LARP games (live action role-playing), board games, and video games, was particularly enthusiastic about one candidate who described herself as a “gamer chick.” The job candidate received this boost to her candidacy simply because of the excitement her presentation style spurred in her job evaluator. One might argue, in Julia’s case, that the candidate’s interest in gaming led to a higher valuation of the candidate’s human capital and should, hence, be considered a cognitive process. But Julia’s two children never play games with their caretakers: her eight-year-old girl does not yet enjoy competitive games and her twelve-year-old son only plays single-player video games. Julia and her fiancé are avid gamers, and the validation of their identities as gamers through the candidate’s self-description as a “gamer chick” led them to favorably evaluate the candidate’s application.

Clarabella’s (Caucasian, 33) interest in visual and folk art augmented her valuation of a job candidate whom she later hired. Clarabella received four responses to her ad on Craigslist, but one candidate’s interest in art allowed her to stand out. She was the only respondent to receive an interview, and Clarabella hired her. Clarabella, who works in marketing and sales for a vitamin company but writes and reads poetry in her free time, especially liked the candidate, because she runs a small jewelry-making business that sells items on online craft marketplaces, such as Etsy. Clarabella did not necessarily have an interest in jewelry, but she respected the candidate’s personal artistic interest. Clarabella’s interest in the job candidate’s artistic endeavors should not be considered the only reason she received the job offer, but it helped her just enough at the margin to set herself apart from the other three respondents.

Lucy (Caucasian, 30) also displayed an interesting case of cultural matching through affective processes. Notably, she was the only participant in this study to exhibit both affective and cognitive processes of cultural matching. Lucy is a piano and voice teacher, and her husband has a heavy work schedule at a landscaping business. Because Lucy often teaches her three- and five-year-old boys music, she expressed a heavy preference for someone who would take her kids to local parks to play outside. She felt she should take her kids outdoors more, but she prefers to teach them music. “I want to find someone who is especially sporty and active, because I’m not really. I know they’ll play sports with them, which is great, because I’m not going to do that with them as much.” When discussing recent candidate interviews with me, Lucy expressed excitement about a candidate, whom she
eventually hired, who is heavily involved in instrumental and vocal music groups: “I actually liked our sitter because she posted that she can play piano and sing. And I was like, oh so do I!” This is an excellent case of cultural matching operating via affective processes. The candidate’s musical ability has no relation to the task Lucy stressed most—playing games outdoors—but because the parent-employer shared a cultural background and interest with the candidate, the candidate reaped a dramatic boost to her chances of receiving the job.

**RACE AND ETHNICITY**

Although recent sociological studies have demonstrated remarkable race discrimination in job hiring (Pager et al. 2009; Stoll et al. 2004), I was surprised by how frequently mother-employers told me openly that they discriminated based on race and ethnicity. It’s also worth exploring the relationship between race discrimination and cultural matching. One mother plainly stated she would not hire African-Americans, two strongly suggested they would not hire African-Americans, and one said she has a heavy preference for Japanese-Americans. Thus, four out of twelve mother-employers, a full one-third, discriminate based on race or ethnicity. It is important to note that although racial and ethnic hiring discrimination and cultural matching are parallel practices, they are nonetheless distinct. They are parallel insofar as they are often correlated and are both used as proxy measurements of the productive skills of job candidates.

The most obvious case of racial discrimination was Eleanor (Caucasian, 55). After asking for reassurance that I would not report her to the police, Eleanor said her husband, a construction foreman, would not allow African-Americans to watch their children, telling her bluntly: “I do not want blacks around my kids.” Her justification of her husband’s bias did not seem to be an ethnic logic (Macdonald 2010), whereby ethnicity or race is used as a proxy measurement of skill for care work, but rather sheer racism on his part, based on an unwillingness to accept an African-American into his home or to allow one to be in contact with his children.

Though no other mother-employers were so strongly biased against a particular ethnicity, two mothers strongly suggested they would not hire African-Americans. Julia (Caucasian, 30), who prefaced her comments saying, “I wouldn’t say I am necessarily racist, but…,” expressed worries that certain traits associated with African-Americans would be passed on to her eight-year-old daughter. Julia was particularly concerned about language development and mannerisms frequently associated with African-Americans. She did not want her daughter to learn Ebonics, a lay term referring to African-American Vernacular English. She also expressed skepticism about whether or not an African-American care worker would fit in with her affluent, entirely Caucasian neighborhood. She reported that in the past, when apparently innocuous African-Americans were in her neighborhood, neighbors posted to the community’s Facebook website warnings to keep all children inside and to lock car and house doors.

While another mother-employer, Sally (Caucasian, 45), did not openly disapprove of African-American candidates, she strongly suggested a negative racial bias. When discussing the series of in-person interviews she conducted to fill her after school care position, she stressed that she quickly abandoned interviews with candidates wearing “inappropriate hoochie mama” clothing or supposed gang colors. Both of these are pejoratively associated with African-American culture (Collins 1998). She was concerned about the character of her employee and wanted to avoid trouble. Further, she did not want her seven- and nine-year-old daughters to dress scantily or offensively.

Clarabella (Caucasian, 33) presents the most interesting case of ethnic discrimination and the best testament for Macdonald’s ethnic logic theory. Though she is white, Clarabella expressed a heavy preference for Japanese or Japanese-American care workers. She taught English in Japan for several years before having her first child, at which point she moved back to Chicago. She thought a Japanese worker would possess better intangible skills: “The sort of community and respect that they, the feel of the community relations… it’s just a totally different ball game.” Interestingly, Clarabella’s case might be interpreted as being in tension with cultural matching theory, which is based on homophily between candidates and job evaluators. It could be argued that mother-employers are not biased toward racially or ethnically homogenous job candidates, but rather toward candidates of the
race or ethnicity with which positive skills and work-related qualities are associated, even if racially or ethnically heterogeneous. However, because Clarabella lived in Japan for several years, she likely grew to appreciate and identify with Japanese culture. Thus, despite the racial heterogeneity between Clarabella and the Japanese job candidate, cultural similarities between the two led Clarabella to more positively evaluate the qualifications of the Japanese candidate.

**WRITING SKILLS AND ONLINE LABOR MARKETS**

Throughout my interviews, I found that craigslist structured the hiring processes in ways that are not present in other labor markets. This influence has real effects on hiring outcomes and should not be overlooked. The most significant such influence pertains to overvaluation of writing skills. Figure four is a flow chart showing the steps mother-employers take while communicating with and screening job candidates. Importantly, it shows
that when using Craigslist, mother-employers and job candidates must exchange written email communication before telephone or in-person verbal communication. No employers I interviewed required their employees to do extensive writing, but nonetheless writing skills were heavily valued due to their importance in online communication between evaluators and candidates. Whereas the cultural matching processes pertain to job applicant interviews, writing skills in the Craigslist childcare labor market affected the earliest stages of the screening process as mother-employers decided whom to interview.

Though writing skills have little relevance in childcare work, parent-employers heavily discriminated against job candidates with substandard grammar and spelling. Because job applicants respond to an employer’s Craigslist advertisement via email, they make their first impression on job evaluators with their writing. Five of twelve participants reported that if they received an email containing writing errors, they would never respond. Three of twelve participants expressed hesitation about candidates with poor writing skills but ultimately attempted to overlook the mistakes. Reasons for this discrimination against candidates with poor writing skills vary. Sally (Caucasian, 45) reasoned that writing mistakes “shows lack of attention to detail.” Anna (Caucasian, 33) was concerned that candidates exhibiting poor writing skills in email responses would not be smart enough to help her five- and seven-year-old daughters with their school homework. Julia (Caucasian, 30) did not strictly discriminate against candidates with poor writing skills, but stressed the importance of candidates utilizing proper grammar and spelling in order to stand apart from other candidates replying to the Craigslist advertisement: “If there’s a grammar or spelling error, that is seen as bad. The better the typing skills, the more they’ll stand out. But that doesn’t mean they’ll be best with kids.” Aside from during the initial stages of communication as shown in figure four, writing skills were not a deciding factor for any of my participants, but the online medium of the labor market certainly influenced many of the mother-employers I interviewed.

5. EXTENSIONS AND CONCLUSION

DETERMINANTS OF CULTURAL MATCHING’S PREVALENCE WITHIN INDUSTRIES

I have argued that cultural matching occurs in care work hiring because of that industry’s emphasis on intangible, humanistic qualities that must be intuitively recognized. An overwhelmingly large portion of the parent-employers I interviewed said they relied on “feel” or “gut instinct” to make hiring decisions, because they needed to feel comfortable about leaving their children the care worker they hired. Since there exists no easy and reliable measurement of a parent’s comfort level, mother-employers rely on cultural matching to gauge some intuitively recognized skills. Affective qualities generally have little to do with relevant skills, but in light of the dearth of other options for gauging those skills, mother-employers rely on affective processes of cultural matching to form judgments.

The results of my study on the hiring of in-home childcare workers allow us to better understand how cultural matching influences hiring outcomes in the broader labor market. Certain aspects of industries account for the variance in the degree of prevalence of cultural matching. In the in-home childcare industry, I observed fewer indicators for cultural matching than Rivera found in elite professional service industries. Rivera theorized that industries vary according to level of at-work social interaction between job evaluators and the degree to which job interviews are structured. My study specifically tested the former reason for variance, insofar as the in-home childcare industry features exceptionally little social interaction between employers and employees. The lower frequency of cultural matching in the in-home childcare industry is mostly accounted for by the low level of social interaction between employer and employee.

FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research on cultural matching should continue to investigate cultural matching and refine understanding of its drivers. It would be interesting to see such a study on hiring in other care-related industries featuring
care-related work that screen candidates looking for more intangible qualities, such as hiring in education, social work, and fitness training. Highly productive employees in these industries need certain intuitively recognized qualities, but they feature more social interaction between the job evaluator and the workers he hires.

Another interesting cultural matching topic deserving investigation is the effect of a firm’s time horizon—how myopic they are—to the prevalence of cultural matching. For example, mother-employers seeking only short-term babysitters for one night would be expected to exhibit lower cultural matching, because concerns about attrition and prolonged employer-employee social interaction are diminished compared to those of mother-employers seeking long-term caregivers.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**


Perceptions of safety in urban environments vary across individuals. Some work has been conducted on perceptions of safety at the neighborhood level and on individual level characteristics (gender, etc.), but there have been few attempts to create a qualitative and quantitative examination of the personal experiences and characteristics that cause individuals to feel safe or unsafe in certain areas. Understanding these dynamics would enable policy makers to make public areas feel safer and help us understand why people choose to live in certain neighborhoods. This study examines perceptions of safety among residents of the Hyde Park neighborhood in Chicago. Semi-structured qualitative interviews were conducted with 19 respondents, which included a portion mapping areas of perceived safety and danger. 95 respondents completed a survey that asked respondents to agree or disagree with different statements about safety. Results showed that differences in perceived safety were due in large part to differences in how safety was defined. Individuals could be placed on a scale from “idealists,” who define safe neighborhoods as those without crime, and “relativists,” for whom safe neighborhoods may still have some crime. There are also multiple ways in which we can perceive crime: the “calculation of risk,” which captures how likely people think they are to be the victim of a crime, and the “fear of victimization,” which measures how fearful people are of being the victim of a crime. Within Hyde Park, familiarity was the biggest predictor of in what areas they felt safe. In terms of personal characteristics predicting perceptions of safety, attitude of social contacts towards safety was one of the most important determinants of feelings of safety, but other factors including being female and being Asian were both associated with feeling less safe. This study gives us a better idea of what factors are most important in influencing feelings of safety, and alerts future researchers to be aware of how differing definitions of safety can affect perceptions.

1. INTRODUCTION

Before I came to the University of Chicago in 2010, one of my friends took me aside and warned me that “the murder rate in Chicago is sky-rocketing.” During the orientation week of my first year, we were warned both to stay safe on the streets and to avoid being overly cautious, so as not to cause tensions by profiling people we met. Throughout my time here, I have noticed a wide spread of opinions about the safety of the neighborhood. I know people who are very fearful of moving about the streets and people who feel no fear at all.

It seemed strange to me that different individuals had such disparate reactions to living in the neighborhood, especially for an area that had relatively low rates of violent crime.¹ I wanted to know more about how people conceive of safety², how they determine what areas are safe, and how these factors interact with personal characteristics.

¹ Hyde Park has a lower crime rate than average for Chicago, and a crime rate much lower than those of the surrounding neighborhoods (see Section 1.3).
² When I say “the safety of the neighborhood” I am referring to danger related to crime. That neighborhoods can be dangerous for other reasons, e.g. heavy traffic, is an important point, but will not be the subject of this analysis. It would certainly be interesting to examine why certain threats, such as crime, are seen as more pressing than other dangers.
I aim to answer several key questions with this study:

1. How do individuals conceive of safety?
2. What physical or social cues do people use to form their notions of what areas are safe and what areas are not?
3. Why do some people think that Hyde Park is more dangerous than other people do?

To answer these questions I conducted a mixed-methods study (interviews and survey) of the residents of Hyde Park. Ultimately I found that much of the variation was due to different personal definitions of safety and familiarity with the area. I also found that there was a difference between how risky individuals calculated the neighborhood to be and how safe they felt. How social contacts talked about safety in the neighborhood and how familiar the respondent was with the area were also important forces in determining overall perceptions. Finally, on the individual level, being female, Asian, and not having lived in Hyde Park very long were all associated with thinking that the neighborhood is more dangerous.

1.1 A BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF HYDE PARK

The Hyde Park neighborhood is located on the South Side of Chicago, seven miles south of the downtown. The official boundaries are Hyde Park Boulevard (also known as 51st Street) to the north, Cottage Grove to the west, 60th Street to the south, and Lake Michigan to the east. Surrounding neighborhoods include Washington Park to the west, separated from it by a park of the same name. To the south, Hyde Park borders the neighborhood of Woodlawn, separated in part by the Midway Plaisance, a park that runs between 59th and 60th Streets. Sometimes residents consider Hyde Park and part of Kenwood, the neighborhood to the north, to be a one larger neighborhood. This analysis uses the municipal community area boundaries of Hyde Park for the consideration of crime statistics and demographics, but not all residents define the neighborhood in this manner (see Figure 1 for map). For example, many University of Chicago buildings are located between 60th and 61st Streets, and these are often considered a part of Hyde Park.

Figure 1 - The Hyde Park neighborhood (The City of Chicago 2010)

Hyde Park contains a mix of residential, commercial, and park areas. Residential areas are generally composed of single-family homes or 3-story, brick apartment buildings. In East Hyde Park, however, the landscape is dominated by residential high rises with a scattering of businesses. The University of Chicago, located in the
southwest quadrant of Hyde Park, is a strong influence on the character of the neighborhood, both in terms of the population that it brings to the neighborhood and its role as a land-owner and commercial developer. Due in large part to the University, Hyde Park is one of the few neighborhoods in Chicago that has no racial majority.

After the end of World War II, the demographics of the neighborhood began to shift away from the white and middle class. Middle class families began to leave the neighborhood for the suburbs and were replaced by increasing numbers of working-class residents. Racial demographics also began to shift as large numbers of African Americans moved into Hyde Park and surrounding areas. Worries about crime increased, some buildings began to fall into disrepair, and the University of Chicago struggled to attract students and faculty. In the 1950s the City of Chicago, in conjunction with the University of Chicago, began a program called “urban renewal.” Still controversial today, urban renewal allowed the demolition of buildings that were deemed undesirable, the clearance of land, and the creation of new commercial areas. Urban renewal displaced many lower-income African Americans and destroyed commercial areas along 55th Street and Lake Park. The physical effects of urban renewal— the most prominent example being the destruction of 55th Street as the main commercial center— are still visible in the neighborhood today and have become a common point of reference for discussions of racial tensions in the neighborhood (Davis 2013; Hirsch 2005).

These policies also affected the racial composition of the neighborhood. The University of Chicago ensured the presence of white students and faculty, leading to a middle-class, mixed-race neighborhood. In 2000 the neighborhood was 44% white (non-Hispanic), 38% black (non-Hispanic), 11% Asian, and 3% Hispanic (The City of Chicago), putting it in sharp contrast with the surrounding neighborhoods which are predominately black. Hyde Park is also more economically affluent than most of the surrounding neighborhoods. In 2000, the median household income in Hyde Park was $35,991, while it was $18,266 for Woodlawn, $15,160 for Washington Park, and $36,612 for Kenwood (Bocskay et al. 2007).

1.2 CRIME AND POLICING

In terms of both violent and non-violent crime rates, Hyde Park is safer than the average Chicago neighborhood. In 2011, Hyde Park was part of the sixth-safest police district in Chicago in terms of violent crimes per capita (out of 25) and overall crime rates are below average for the city of Chicago (The University of Chicago 2014). In the past year (since January 19, 2013) there have been 118 violent crimes. Several bordering neighborhoods have much higher rates of crime. In 2013, Woodlawn had a much higher incidence of overall crime than Hyde Park (549 vs. 158 total crimes) despite its lower population. Kenwood, part of which is often considered to be part of the same neighborhood as Hyde Park, had 163 violent crimes, and Washington Park, to the west, had 380, despite a population that is less than half the size of Hyde Park’s.

Fortunately, both Hyde Park and the surrounding neighborhoods have experienced a marked decline in the number of crimes over the past decade. In Hyde Park, much of this decline can be explained by a declining population. However, this does not explain the entire trend. One theory is that the decline in crime can be attributed to the continued expansion of the University of Chicago Police Department (UCPD) and its patrol territory. The UCPD, a private police force run by the University of Chicago, has jurisdiction from 37th Street down to 64th Street, from Cottage Grove to Lake Michigan. This is an expansion of their former territory, which ran from 61st Street to 47th Street until 2005 (Larson 2014). Though the Chicago Police Department (CPD) may take over cases from the UCPD, the UCPD is primarily responsible for this area. With 140 police officers, the UCPD is one of the largest private police departments in the world (Larson 2014).

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3 Violent crimes include robbery, battery, assault, homicide, and criminal sexual assault. Property crimes include theft, burglary, motor vehicle theft, and arson. Finally, quality-of-life crimes include criminal damage, narcotics, and prostitution.
Figure 2 - Number of crimes in Hyde Park since 2002 by type (The Chicago Tribune, a)

Figure 3 - Number of crimes in Washington Park since 2002 by type (The Chicago Tribune, b)
However, the expansion of the UCPD as an explanation of the reduction in crime seems overly simplistic, as areas that are not under the jurisdiction of the University of Chicago Police (e.g. Washington Park) experienced a larger drop in crime per capita than did Hyde Park. Figures 2 and 3 show the crime incidence in Hyde Park and Washington Park since 2002, divided into violent crimes, property crimes, and quality-of-life crimes. Washington Park has a much higher per capita crime rate for each type of crime, though the distribution is different than that of Hyde Park. Both neighborhoods have experienced drops in crime across the decade. Ultimately, it is unclear why the overall downward trend in crime exists, but it would be a mistake to attribute it solely to the UCPD.

The UCPD is supplemented by private security guards on University property, as well as a system of police phones stationed around Hyde Park near University buildings and residences. Hyde Park residents can learn about crimes in several different ways. The University of Chicago also sends out security alert emails for certain crimes. The Hyde Park Herald, a local newspaper, provides crime information to residents, as does the University of Chicago student newspaper, the Maroon. The presence of crime information in local media indicates that at least some proportion of the community is actively interested in or concerned about crime in the neighborhood.

2. THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

The question of how individuals make judgments about and interact with urban environments has been explored ethnographically in specific neighborhood settings and quantitatively over larger areas (entire cities). Broadly, there are three important issues: how the physical environment leads to a cognitive map of an area and affects individual behavior, how individuals learn to navigate social interactions on the streets, and how personal-level characteristics - such as gender, race, etc. - affect these perceptions and behaviors.

2.1 DIVIDING THE CITY PHYSICALLY AND COGNITIVELY

The physical structure of the city and how residents create and define spaces within it, e.g. neighborhoods, have been of interest to sociologists since the first Chicago School of Sociology (1920s-1930s). As the progenitors of urban sociology, members of the Chicago School tried to figure out why the city is organized the way that it is, pioneering the idea of the “ecology” of the city. They tried to discover rules by which the city would grow and change, often using concepts borrowed from biology. Particularly of use to this analysis are conceptions of space at the neighborhood level - why neighborhoods form, how they maintain their character, and how they serve their residents.

Park and Burgess attempt to explain the layout of a city through economic factors, particularly transportation and labor costs. According to this model, since the value of land was determined by continuous factors (transportation cost, etc.), land use should change gradually across space, without extreme differences in neighboring areas. However, residents of the city do not behave in ways predicted by this theory. For example, in ethnic neighborhoods, groups recognize sharp differences between themselves and the groups in closely neighboring areas. If land use were only determined by its economic value, then we would not expect to see such sharp boundaries. Park and Burgess attribute the formation of these ethnic neighborhoods to immigrants attempting to re-create the village communities that they had left behind. Creating sharp mental barriers allowed them to maintain their communities despite the chaos and pressures of the big city. More generally for Park and Burgess, areas can be defined ecologically (economically), culturally, and politically. For any particular neighborhood, these sets of boundaries may not align, e.g., a neighborhood may be used primarily by people of the same ethnicity, but have higher and lower income areas within it. Burgess gives Hyde Park as an example of

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4 Per capita rates were created by extrapolating between 2000 population and 2010 population estimates.
5 Generally, crimes committed on University property, or those that were serious and involved individuals affiliated with the University of Chicago.
a neighborhood where the ecologic, cultural, and political boundaries are the same. When this alignment occurs, the neighborhood may have a stronger identity, whereas if some of the boundaries are different, the identity may be less strong (Park and Burgess 1925, 147).

Gerald Suttles, writing decades later, argues that this explanation of sharp neighborhood boundaries is lacking: many of the neighborhoods that Park and Burgess portrayed as being ethnically homogeneous were not. Often neighborhoods maintained their distinctive nature over the course of major ethnic shifts. He argues that there is a difference between how people characterize a neighborhood, e.g. as a Hispanic neighborhood or a high-crime neighborhood, and the demographic or physical reality. To address this gap, Suttles reintroduces the idea of the defended neighborhood, a “residential group which seals itself off through the efforts of delinquent gangs, by restrictive covenants, by sharp boundaries, or by a forbidding reputation” (Suttles 1972, 21). Essentially, a defended neighborhood acts to stop outsiders from harming those within the neighborhood. Suttles argues that defended neighborhoods are an example of cognitive creations that are different from, if not independent of, physical reality: they don’t necessarily correspond perfectly with racial, socio-economic, or physical bounds. These neighborhoods serve as structures that promote social control by breaking large cities down into areas that are more manageable for individuals to navigate and communities to regulate. At base, they are a “set of rules governing and restricting spatial movement” that “segregates groups that are otherwise likely to come into conflict; it restricts the range of association and decreases anonymity; it thrusts people into a common network of social relations that overlap rather than diverge from one another” (Suttles 1972, 31–32). For Suttles, the neighborhood is functional. That is, the creation of defended neighborhoods promotes stability and helps individuals control which people they interact with.

The work of Park, Burgess, and Suttles lends itself easily to the current discussion of perceived safety. If we follow Suttles, being fearful of surrounding neighborhoods acts to keep individuals from straying outside of safe social bounds. What is less clear from Suttles’ analysis is how these cognitive maps are formed. Suttles does discuss the formation of what he calls “artificial neighborhoods” that are deliberately set apart from their surroundings, but he does not delve into how such distinctions would naturally arise. How cognitive maps arise and are reinforced is an important concept that I will discuss in my analysis.

The physical environment is an important determinant of both safety and perceptions of safety. Jane Jacobs’ seminal work, The Death and Life of Great American Cities, is influential in our understanding of how the physical environment affects behavior and perceptions (Jacobs 1961). She famously argued that having “eyes on the street,” or people who can see what is going on and feel responsible for reporting any criminal activity, is vital to ensuring safety. When there are not enough eyes on the street, a negative feedback loop may be created: people do not feel safe walking on the street, and so choose to stay off it as much as possible, further reducing the number of people on the street. Jacobs observes that this can lead to both a perceived and a real lack of safety (an increase in crime), as fewer people on the street leads to a greater opportunity for crime.

Jacobs also includes an analysis of the situation in Hyde Park specifically. Writing around the time of urban renewal in Hyde Park, Jacobs is dismissive of the steps taken to make the neighborhood safer and more desirable. For her, the changes made during urban renewal, namely the destruction of “undesirable” businesses such as bars and creation of large swaths of parks, created more problems than it solved. She writes:

> The barriers formed by new projects at the edges of Hyde Park-Kenwood, plus extraordinary policing, may indeed keep out extraneous people with sufficient effectiveness. If so, the price will be hostility from the surrounding city and an ever more beleaguered feeling within the fort. And who can be sure, either, that all those thousands rightfully within the fort are trustworthy in the dark? (Jacobs 1961, 45).

---

6 Remember that Burgess was writing before Hyde Park was a mixed-race neighborhood.
Fifty years later, this statement seems almost prophetic: Hyde Park has indeed managed to control population flow through the use of policing and physical boundaries. In general, Jacobs argued that the creation of physical boundaries, including large streets, parks, walls, and fences, that were increasingly popular among urban planners, are part of a “Turf system,” where sections of the city are essentially cordoned off to stop outsiders from crossing into them. While the Turf system was originally the territory of gangs, Jacobs points out that upscale neighborhoods or developments, eager to form “islands in the city,” are guilty of propagating the same kinds of barriers (Jacobs 1961, 47). This concept is very similar to the idea of the defended neighborhood, as discussed above, though the Turf system as Jacob describes it is more formalized, in this case by the intentional creation of physical barriers and intervention by the police.

2.2 INTERACTION ON THE STREET

Elijah Anderson is also well-known for looking at clashes between neighborhoods and the resulting behavior on the street. In *Streetwise: Race, Class, and Change in an Urban Community*, he studied the “Village-Norton” in Philadelphia, an area comprised of two communities, one of which was poor and predominantly black, the other of which was racially mixed, but becoming more white and more affluent (Anderson 1990). In many ways, his case study is similar to that of Hyde Park and its surrounding neighborhoods: Hyde Park is a racially mixed, affluent neighborhood surrounded by poor, predominately black neighborhoods. As a result of the neighborhood situation, race, class, and their confluence play a large part in his analysis. Of most interest to this study is Anderson’s discussion of “street etiquette,” the rules that people learn for how to behave and interact with others in the streets and other public areas, and “street wisdom,” a more in-depth knowledge of the street that allows people to make nuanced judgments. To a certain extent, level of comfort on the street hinges upon how well residents have developed street wisdom. Those who have mastered only street etiquette are more likely to be fearful, though both those who have street etiquette and those who have street wisdom pay attention to what is going on around them.

Race is an overarching theme in Anderson’s work. He observes that there is a “we-they” dichotomy between whites and blacks, that is at base a tension between different social classes (Anderson 1990, 208). Wealthy people in the neighborhood are afraid that the poor will turn to crime. Because the lower-class people in the area are almost all black, blackness and criminality become associated, even by middle-class blacks. Thus, race becomes one of the many factors that is used to judge situations on the street. Anderson notes how this becomes a source of internal struggle for white, liberal residents who do not want to think of themselves as racist, yet are extremely conscious of race.

Anderson provides examples of many different strategies that individuals use to evaluate the street. Newcomers are taught by neighbors and friends what areas are safe and what areas are not, what times of day they should be out and what times of day they should avoid being out. Interactions between strangers on the street vary based upon the age, gender, race, and general demeanor of the individuals involved.

2.3 PERSONAL-LEVEL FACTORS AND JUDGMENTS BASED ON DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

Non-ethnographic studies of perceptions of safety tend to examine particular individual characteristics to see whether they might increase or decrease the probability of thinking that an area is safe. They may also examine what specific factors individuals use to determine the safety or danger of a particular area. In a 2010 paper, Jordan and Gabbidon found that African Americans and Hispanics were less likely to be satisfied with their safety than whites, even after controlling for educational status, income, and whether respondents lived in an urban area (Jordan and Gabbidon 2010). They also found that women were less likely to be satisfied with their safety than men. However, the results of this study regarding race are limited for several reasons. The Gallup question that they used did not distinguish between safety in the respondents’ personal lives and safety out on the street. They also could not control for neighborhood, and blacks and Hispanics disproportionately live in dangerous neighborhoods, and are disproportionately likely to be the victims of a crime.
Fear can also be broken down into several distinct concepts that are not equivalent. LaGrange and Ferraro discuss the difference between “fear of crime” and “perceived risk,” where fear of crime is more emotional, and “perceived risk” is more of a logical evaluation. These two concepts are not the same, and need to be accessed with different questions. This is conceptually important for my analysis, where I create both a model for fear of crime and a model for perceived risk (see Methods). LaGrange and Ferraro also found that women had a higher fear of crime than did men. However, more importantly, they found that age is less of a predictor for fear than previously thought (LaGrange and Ferraro 1989). The elderly were only likely to be more fearful using certain definitions of fear.

Some perceptions may also be based upon where the individual lived previously. Kennedy and Krahn found in a study of Canadian cities that the larger the city of origin of a newcomer, the safer he or she felt. This effect disappeared after the individual had been living in the city for several years. This indicates that some aspects of perceptions of safety were based upon familiarity with an urban environment. Once individuals have lived in the city for more time, they become adjusted to living in the city. Kennedy and Krahn also found that women were more likely to be afraid than men (Kennedy and Krahn 1984).

Personal characteristics of a neighborhood’s inhabitants may also affect how safe people feel there. Quillian and Pager investigated the role that the presence of minorities plays in assessing danger (Quillian and Pager 2001). Using data from Chicago, Seattle, and Baltimore, they found that people were more likely to think that there were high crime rates in areas with many young black men than in other areas, adjusting for actual crime rate. Overall, they found that this effect was stronger for white respondents than for black respondents, though it was present in both. They point out that though there is a positive correlation between the percentage of blacks in a neighborhood and crime rates, this relationship is “systematically overestimated.” They refute the notion that stereotypes just serve as a heuristic to measure probability, stating that “Instead, stereotypes appear to be leading to a systematic distortion in the perception of a neighborhood’s crime rate, even among persons with easy access to more complete information” (Quillian and Pager 2001, 749).

3. HYPOTHESES

Based upon the literature concerning perceptions of safety and my own observations in the neighborhood, I decided upon a set of hypotheses. These hypotheses can be broken down into how individuals form perceptions of safety and how certain personal characteristics may make them more or less likely to think Hyde Park is safe. Primarily, I hypothesized that how safe respondents judged the neighborhood to be would be due to differences in their perception of the crime rate, and that their views were in turn informed by both the opinions of others and their perceptions of minorities. For hypotheses about individual-level characteristics, see Table 1.8

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7 In Chicago, however, the effect was the same for both races.
8 In my analysis, I tried to test whether where the respondent had lived before mattered in his or her perception of safety, but the responses proved too difficult to classify. Instead, I looked at whether or not the respondent had previously lived on the South Side of Chicago or not.
4. METHODS

4.1 JUSTIFICATION OF METHODS

The aim for this study is to describe the distribution of perceptions of safety in Hyde Park, identify what areas in the neighborhood and surrounding areas are seen as safe or unsafe, find personal characteristics that predict perceptions of safety, and shed light on potential causal mechanisms. To achieve this, I elected to do a mixed methods study that had interview, mental map (which identified where respondents felt safe and where they did not), and survey components. The survey was intended to allow regression analysis of potential characteristics associated with increased or decreased feelings of safety. I wanted to give a general sense of how many people hold particular opinions (e.g. X% of respondents felt comfortable walking alone at night). The interviews were intended to give an idea of why we see these trends and provide insight into how respondents thought about safety. A study with only a survey would have been limited to only the ideas that I thought were relevant at the time of writing it. Finally I included the map portion to nail down respondents’ geographic experiences of the neighborhood and see whether there were areas that were consistently labeled as being more dangerous than others. I also hoped that their creation would provide an opportunity to access the process by which individuals designate areas as safe and unsafe.

4.2 SURVEYS

The survey consisted of 40 questions that were broken into three types: personal characteristics and experiences, statements about the neighborhood that were rated on a Likert scale, and free response questions. To measure how safe respondents perceived Hyde Park to be, they were asked to rate how much they agreed with the statement “Hyde Park is not a safe neighborhood” and “I feel safe walking alone in Hyde Park at night.” These two questions were intended to address “perception of risk” and “fear of crime,” respectively. The free response questions asked respondents, “What does it mean for a neighborhood to be safe?” and “Is there anything else you feel is relevant to your feelings of safety/danger in Hyde Park?” Finally, the last question asked whether the respondent would be interested in being interviewed, and if so, to give his or her contact information. For the full survey, see Appendix A.

Survey respondents were recruited in commercial areas along 53rd Street (including near Kimbark Plaza, inside Hyde Park Produce, and outside of Valois). Commercial areas, especially those that contained grocery stores or drug stores, were chosen as recruitment sites in order to maximize the randomness of the sample. I could not obtain permission to distribute surveys in the Hyde Park Plaza (where Treasure Island is located), and attempts to distribute on 57th Street resulted in extremely low response rates (1 person in 20 minutes). Limitations of this sampling method are discussed in the Limitations section. Individuals passing by were approached and asked whether they were interested in filling out a survey about safety in Hyde Park. I explained the nature of
the project, and information slips were given that contained my contact information in case the subjects had questions or wished to withdraw their response. This slip also contained the link to an on-line version of the survey, and was handed out to some individuals who did not have time to fill out the survey on the street. See Table 2 for demographics information for the survey respondents and Figure 4 for where they lived in the neighborhood.

Table 2 - Summary statistics for the survey sample compared with 2000 census data for the overall population⁹ (The City of Chicago).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Sample Population (%)</th>
<th>Overall Population (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>n = 94</strong></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Min</td>
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<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median</td>
<td>29.5</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>36.7</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Max</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>55 (59)</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>36 (38)</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NA</td>
<td>3 (3)</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Race</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>16 (17)</td>
<td>3372 (11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>29 (31)</td>
<td>11413 (38)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>40 (43)</td>
<td>13020 (44)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>9 (10)</td>
<td>2115 (7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Born in US?</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>64 (68)</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>28 (30)</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NA</td>
<td>2 (2)</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Education</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than High School</td>
<td>2 (2)</td>
<td>1472 (7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School or GED</td>
<td>15 (16)</td>
<td>4861 (24)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate's</td>
<td>11 (12)</td>
<td>692 (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor's</td>
<td>29 (31)</td>
<td>4393 (22)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate</td>
<td>34 (36)</td>
<td>8678 (43)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>UChicago Affiliation</strong></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>42 (45)</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>49 (52)</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NA</td>
<td>3 (3)</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Victim of Crime?</strong></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>21 (22)</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>71 (76)</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NA</td>
<td>2 (2)</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

⁹ Because the survey failed to specify how current students should classify themselves in terms of education, some may have classified themselves by current completed degree and others may have classified themselves by the degree they were currently trying to obtain. Education in the census data also only referred to those 25 and above.
At the end of the recruitment period, 93 individuals had filled out the survey on the street, and four had filled out the survey on-line. Three surveys were not used in the final analysis because the respondents did not answer the questions that asked about the respondent’s feelings of safety in the neighborhood (Questions 21 and 22). Surveys that had other missing information were included to preserve the sample size.

The surveys were analyzed using a multiple linear regression model. This type of model allowed for different levels of agreement or disagreement, instead of a binary. Results were calculated in STATA version 12.0 (StataCorp 2011).

### 4.3 INTERVIEWS

Interview subjects were recruited both through a snowball sample and through a question on the surveys that asked respondents to provide contact information if they would be interested in being interviewed. I sought to include both University-affiliated and non-University-affiliated interviewees. A total of 19 interviews were

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10 The demographics of the on-line survey were different than those distributed on the street. Online respondents were all relatively young and white. However, because there were so few who responded online, this difference probably does not affect the validity of the study.
conducted, lasting from half an hour to an hour and fifteen minutes. Eight respondents were recruited from the pool of survey respondents. See Table 3 for the demographic information of interview respondents.

Table 3
Summary Statistics for the Interview Sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>n=19</th>
<th>Value (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Min</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Max</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>7 (37)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>12 (63)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>2 (11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>5 (26)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>12 (63)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University Affiliated</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>11 (58)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>8 (42)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Interviewees were asked to sign a consent form for the interview and were asked on record to give permission for audio recording. No subjects withdrew from the study or rejected audio recording. Recordings were made for all interviews. 10 of the 19 interviews were fully transcribed, while only significant sections of the others were transcribed. Qualitative coding was conducted using Dedoose (Dedoose 2014).

Semi-structured interviews were conducted over the course of 45 minutes to an hour. They included both a question and answer section, and a section where respondents indicated on a map how comfortable they felt walking in different parts of the greater Hyde Park area during the day and the night. The interview questions asked respondents to discuss their background, perceptions of safety in Hyde Park, what cues they used to determine the safety of an area, their views on policing in the neighborhood, and the role of the University in Hyde Park (see Appendix B for the interview outline).

In the map portion, respondents were asked to complete several tasks on pre-printed maps. Each respondent used two maps, one designated “Day” and the other “Night.” On the day map, respondents were asked to mark an “X” where they lived on the map and then outline the area that they considered to be their neighborhood. They were then asked to mark in green highlighter the areas that they would feel safe walking by themselves during the day, in yellow marker the areas that they might feel uncomfortable walking but would still do so, and in orange the areas that they would not walk. On the night map, respondents were asked to mark green, yellow, and orange areas for night instead of day. See Figure 5 for an example of a day and night map from the same individual. In addition to the physical maps, the explanations of the participants for why they colored the maps the way they did were also useful data. In total 34 maps were collected (one respondent could not physically draw on a map, and another never walked in Hyde Park). This data was intended to discover where in the neighborhood respondents felt safe, and whether there were detectable patterns.
4.4 LIMITATIONS

This study is subject to several limitations. In terms of sampling, neither the survey sample nor the interview sample completely represents the population of Hyde Park, but the survey sample is the more accurate of the two. Overall, Asians were over-represented in the survey sample and African Americans were under-represented in both samples. The interview sample also contained a disproportionate number of individuals affiliated with the University. Both samples had a younger age distribution than that of Hyde Park overall, probably because older people are less likely to be walking around the street. There may also have been bias in the individuals who decided to answer the survey versus those who did not, independent of the population of people who were approached. Finally, because of where respondents were recruited, people who lived in some parts of the neighborhood, namely the northern and western parts, were more likely to be recruited (see Figure 4). These differences in demographics mean that the sample is not entirely representative of the population of Hyde Park. As a result, it is unclear to what extent the trends and mechanisms discussed here are present in the overall population. In addition, this research did not adequately capture viewpoints from some groups: the homeless, those who do not shop on 53rd Street, and children and young adults, just to name a few.

Sample size was also a significant limitation for interpretation of the survey results. Because only 94 responses were used in the data analysis, there may be factors important in determining perceptions of safety that could not be detected. A larger sample would also have been helpful in disentangling some effects, especially between those of race and experience, e.g. being Asian and having been born outside of the United States. Because of the frequent co-occurrence of such variables, it was difficult to establish which determinants were causally important.

There may also be bias due to the sensitive nature of some of the questions, both for survey and interview respondents. Questions about safety may hinge upon on the individual’s feelings about race or values, or his or
her personal experience with crime. Subjects may have feared being perceived as racist or biased in other ways and so answered differently than they felt. In addition, since I could only access what people thought they would do in a particular situation, I could not examine how people actually behave.

Finally, as a resident of Hyde Park myself, I bring with me certain biases about what kind of questions should be asked and what leads should be followed. I have my own perceptions of how safe certain areas are, my own appraisal of what is appropriate behavior on the street, and my own strategies for staying safe. As I discovered in this study, approaching the question of safety in Hyde Park from the point of view of a student who has been warned of danger is very different from approaching the same question from the point of view of someone who moved to the neighborhood because he or she thinks it is safe. For example, the University of Chicago plays a much larger role in my safety framework than it did for many of my respondents.

5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

One of the questions that this study sought to answer was the distribution of various opinions about safety within Hyde Park. For most of the metrics to gauge perceptions of safety, I found that the majority of respondents felt safe. 64% of respondents disagreed at least somewhat with the statement, “Hyde Park is not a safe neighborhood.” Those who agreed were skewed towards agreeing only slightly (Figure 6). Results were similar for the statement “I feel safe walking in Hyde Park alone at night,” with 67% agreeing at least somewhat (Figure 7). It is interesting to note, however, that the distribution of responses was not the same for each question.

Figure 8 shows that respondents were clustered towards the middle- and low-frequency end of the scale in how often they worried about being the victim of a crime. The most common answer given was that the respondent worried about being the victim of a crime “Sometimes,” with the response “Rarely” as the second most common answer. Very few people never worried about being the victim of a crime, and even fewer were concerned almost all the time.

The range of answers given for the number of violent crimes per month in Hyde Park was quite large, with a minimum of 0 and a maximum of 50. The mean was 12.8 crimes per month, with a standard deviation of 10. In actuality, in Hyde Park-South Kenwood in 2012, there were an average of 14.7 violent crimes per month (The University of Chicago 2014). Thus we have both individuals who significantly overestimate and individuals who significantly underestimate the violent crime rate in Hyde Park. Based upon the distribution of results for this question, I decided not to use it as a response variable in the regression analysis because it is difficult to tell what variation is meaningful and not the result of individuals’ poor estimation.

5.2 REGRESSION RESULTS

Regression analysis was performed using the answers to the statements “Hyde Park is not a safe neighborhood” and “I feel safe walking alone in Hyde Park at night” as response variables, with a Likert scale from 1=Agree Strongly to 6=Disagree Strongly. Responses to the first statement were reverse-coded for the sake of comparison, so that a higher value in each indicated a higher level of discomfort or fear. For both regressions, positive coefficients indicate that a variable increases fear, while negative coefficients indicate that that variable decreases

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11 Respondents were asked: Please estimate how many violent crimes are committed in Hyde Park per month. A violent crime is defined as robbery, battery, assault, homicide, or sexual assault. For reference, if Hyde Park had the same violent crime rate as Chicago overall, it would have an average of 19 violent crimes per month (this does not include South Kenwood).

12 The correlation between this measurement and the other response variables was not very high. In addition, when used as a response variable, it did not produce a very predictive model.
Figure 6

![Bar chart showing responses to the question 'Do you feel safe in your neighborhood?'](image)

- Disagree Strongly: 15%
- Disagree: 33%
- Somewhat Disagree: 16%
- Somewhat Agree: 28%
- Agree: 9%
- Agree Strongly: 2%

Number of Respondents

Figure 7

![Bar chart showing responses to the question 'Do you feel safe walking alone at night?'](image)

- Disagree Strongly: 3%
- Disagree: 13%
- Somewhat Disagree: 15%
- Somewhat Agree: 21%
- Agree: 36%
- Agree Strongly: 10%
Table 4 - Variables used in the regression analysis and their codes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Coding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not a Safe Neighborhood</td>
<td>1 - Strongly Disagree, 2 - Disagree, 3 - Somewhat Disagree, 4 Somewhat Agree, 5 - Agree, 6 - Strongly Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safe Walking Alone</td>
<td>1 - Agree Strongly, 2 - Agree, 3 - Somewhat Agree, 4 Somewhat Disagree, 5 - Disagree, 6 - Strongly Disagree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>continuous numerical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>0 - Female, 1 - Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>0 - Not Asian, 1 - Asian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>0 - Not Black, 1 - Black</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0 - Not Other, 1 - Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>1 - Less than High School, 2 - High School/GED, 3 - Associate’s, 4 - Bachelor’s, 5 - Graduate Degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victim of Crime?</td>
<td>0 - Not the victim of a crime, 1 - Victim of a crime</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crime Years Live in Hyde Park</td>
<td>continuous numerical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Used to live on South Side</td>
<td>0 - Lived somewhere else, 1 - Lived on the South Side or in Hyde</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Born in US?</td>
<td>0 - No, 1 - Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affiliated with U of C?</td>
<td>0 - No, 1 - Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contacts say HP safe</td>
<td>1 - Almost all the time, 2 - Frequently, 3 - Sometimes, 4 - Rarely, 5 - Never</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contacts say HP unsafe</td>
<td>1 - Never, 2 - Rarely, 3 - Sometimes, 4 - Frequently, 5 - Almost all the time</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5 - Regression Analysis Results using responses to the statement “Hyde Park is not a safe neighborhood” as the response variable

| Not a Safe Neighborhood       | Coef. | Std. Err. | t     | P>|t| | 95% Conf. Interval |
|-------------------------------|-------|-----------|-------|-------|-------------------|
| Age                           | 0.008 | 0.013     | 0.63  | 0.532 | -0.018 - 0.034    |
| Female                        | 0.434 | 0.283     | 1.53  | 0.13  | -0.131 0.999     |
| Asian                         | 1.061 | 0.440     | 2.41  | 0.019*| 0.182 1.940     |
| Black                         | 0.511 | 0.394     | 1.3   | 0.199 | -0.275 1.297    |
| Other                         | 0.881 | 0.505     | 1.74  | 0.086 | -0.127 1.888    |
| Education                     | -0.0772 | 0.131 | -0.59 | 0.557 | -0.338 0.184 |
| Victim of Crime?              | 0.008 | 0.384     | 0.02  | 0.984 | -0.759 0.774    |
| Years Lived in HP             | -0.002 | 0.016 | -0.14 | 0.886 | -0.0339 0.0293 |
| Used to Live on South Side?   | -0.227 | 0.430 | -0.53 | 0.599 | -1.086 0.631    |
| Born in US?                   | 0.212 | 0.396     | 0.53  | 0.594 | -0.579 1.003    |
| Affiliated with U of C?       | 0.198 | 0.321     | 0.62  | 0.54  | -0.444 0.839    |
| Contacts say HP safe          | -0.193 | 0.141 | -1.37 | 0.176 | -0.476 0.089    |
| Contacts say HP unsafe        | 0.475 | 0.174     | 2.74  | 0.008**| 0.129 0.822 |
| _cons                         | 1.206 | 1.095     | 1.1   | 0.275 | -0.981 3.392    |

R² = 0.3546

* P < .05 & ** P < .01 & *** P < .001
Table 6 - Regression Analysis Results using responses to the statement “I feel safe walking in Hyde Park alone at night,” as the response variable.

| Safewalking | Coef. | Std. Err. | t | P>|t| | 95% Conf. Interval |
|-------------|-------|-----------|---|---|------------------|
| Age         | 0.020 | 0.012     | 1.71 | 0.091 | -0.003 to 0.043  |
| Female      | 0.841 | 0.253     | 3.32 | 0.001** | 0.336 to 1.347   |
| Asian       | 1.102 | 0.391     | 2.82 | 0.006** | 0.322 to 1.882   |
| Black       | -0.028 | 0.350 | -0.08 | 0.936 | -0.727 to 0.670  |
| Other       | -0.024 | 0.450 | -0.05 | 0.957 | -0.923 to 0.874  |
| Education   | 0.094 | 0.117     | 0.81 | 0.423 | -0.140 to 0.328  |
| Victim of Crime? | 0.544 | 0.340 | 1.6 | 0.114 | -0.135 to 1.223  |
| Years in HP | -0.035 | 0.014 | -2.5 | 0.015* | -0.063 to -0.007 |
| Used to Live on South Side? | 0.222 | 0.381 | 0.58 | 0.562 | -0.538 to 0.982  |
| Born in US? | 0.368 | 0.352     | 1.05 | 0.3 | -0.334 to 1.070  |
| U of C?      | 0.202 | 0.287     | 0.7 | 0.484 | -0.371 to 0.775  |
| Contacts say HP safe | -0.474 | 0.126 | -3.76 | 0.001*** | -0.726 to -0.222 |
| Contacts say HP unsafe | 0.118 | 0.154 | 0.77 | 0.445 | -0.189 to 0.426  |
| _cons       | 2.135 | 0.972     | 2.2 | 0.032 | 0.194 to 4.076   |

\[ R^2 = 0.5237 \]

For the model that used answers to “Hyde Park is not a safe neighborhood” as the response variable, very few factors were significant in predicting responses. The overall model had an \( R^2 \) value of .35, meaning that only 35% of the variation in responses could be attributed to variation in the predictor variables. Asians were statistically more likely than whites to say that the neighborhood is dangerous, with a coefficient of .96. This large beta value indicates that being Asian has quite a large effect (though this variable stops being significant with a Bonferroni correction\(^{13}\)). Unlike in the findings of Jordan and Gabbidon, being black seemed, if anything, to be associated with feeling safer (though it was not significant). This may indicate that the effect Jordan and Gabbidon saw was a result of black respondents being more likely to live in a dangerous neighborhood.

The other significant variable was social contacts saying that Hyde Park is unsafe.\(^{14}\) Those who often heard their contacts say that Hyde Park is unsafe were more likely to say that it was unsafe themselves. This could be due to social contacts influencing opinions, homophily (associating with people who are similar), or respondents perceiving their contacts to have opinions similar to their own. Notably, having been the victim of a crime appears to have almost no effect on the perceived safety of the neighborhood. This is possibly because the question includes non-violent crimes, but exploratory regressions using violent crime as a variable did not indicate an effect either.

\(^{13}\) A Bonferroni correction accounts for the number of variables being tested by making the p-value necessary for significance smaller if there are more variables.

\(^{14}\) I chose to include both contacts saying Hyde Park is unsafe and contacts saying Hyde Park is safe despite the fact that including both may have adjusted the effect away. They have a correlation of -0.52, which is relatively high. However, including both increased the \( R^2 \) of the model significantly, giving the model more explanatory power.
The second model, which used responses to “I feel safe walking in Hyde Park alone at night” as the response variable, was more predictive than the first model ($R^2 = .52$). It also produced many more statistically significant variables. As in the first model, being Asian and having contacts who said Hyde Park is safe were associated with feeling unsafe. This time, the relationships were of a higher significance level ($P=.006$ and $P< .001$). Interestingly, gender and the number of years lived in Hyde Park also became significant (females were more likely to be afraid, and those who had lived in Hyde Park longer were less afraid). Similar to the results of Jordan and Gabbidon, LaGrange and Ferraro found that women were more likely to feel unsafe. However, the effect was only significant when we look at how they felt as opposed to how safe they judge the neighborhood to be. This indicates that gender has a bigger effect on how safe people feel on the street than on how risky they perceive it to be. Also of note, being the victim of a crime was still not significant, but had a much smaller $p$-value than in the first regression. Finally, having contacts who say Hyde Park is safe was significantly negatively associated with feeling unsafe.

5.3 DEFINING SAFETY

5.3.1 Perceived Risk and Fear of Crime

In the survey responses, many individuals used the metric of feeling safe walking in public spaces, especially at night, as what constitutes a safe neighborhood:

- “A safe neighborhood is somewhere where a woman, a child, or an elderly person can walk alone at night without fearing that they will be victimized”
- “Should feel safe to walk in evening/night, should feel safe allowing my kids to walk anywhere”
- “A neighborhood is safe to me when you can walk the neighborhood and feel safe & not have to bolt every lock to worry about burglary”

However, looking at the regression model results, it becomes clear that this may not be the only relevant definition that individuals use if they are asked to rate a neighborhood in terms of safety. The correlation between how safe respondents judged the neighborhood to be and how safe they felt walking at night was only .62, indicating only a moderate, positive correlation between them. In addition, the regressions using the two questions had different results. The model that uses how safe respondents said the neighborhood was accounted for much less of the variation in crime than the model that used how safe people felt, indicating that these two concepts are actually very different. We can more accurately predict how safe a given individual will feel walking on the street at night than we can how safe he or she will say the neighborhood is.

Because these two concepts appear to be distinct, I will refer to them as “calculation of risk,” a logical calculation of the risk of being the victim of a crime and the “fear of victimization,” an emotional judgment that concerns how an individual feels when he or she is out on the streets. Each individual has both of these types of perception of safety. I started with the terminology of LaGrange and Ferraro, but changed their “perception of risk” to “calculation of risk” to more explicitly show the logical aspect of that type of perception. They write that “[s]imply because people think they are unlikely to be crime victims does not mean they are unafraid of crime, nor does a heightened sense of calculated risk automatically translate into heightened feelings of fear” (LaGrange and Ferraro 1989, 698–699). Echoing this statement, throughout my time in Hyde Park, I have spoken with individuals whose calculated risk is greater than their fear of victimization (e.g. I know it’s a stupid thing to do but I walk around at night without worrying about crime) and individuals whose fear of victimization is greater than their calculated risk (e.g. I know that there aren’t very many violent crimes, but I still feel really nervous walking at night).
Interestingly, many answers about what made a safe neighborhood included this gut reaction sense of safety. A large number of survey respondents wrote of the importance of “not having to worry” in a safe neighborhood:

- “Freedom to move about the neighborhood without worry or fear”
- “A ‘sense’ of safety - nonthreatening situations walking around the neighborhood, relatively low crime activity, welcoming individuals and businesses”
- “To have below the city avg [sic] in crime incidence and for residents, subjectively speaking, to not feel as if they live in an unsafe neighborhood”

No matter how few crimes there are, for many people, the neighborhood cannot be a safe neighborhood if they do not feel safe. This also comes back to Jacobs, who argues that feelings of fear will actually produce a more dangerous environment. If people do not feel safe walking on the streets, then fewer people will be on the streets, which makes crime more possible. This relationship may or may not be what respondents had in mind when they wrote their answers, but the overall message is clear. For quality of life, living in a neighborhood that you feel to be unsafe can be just as stressful and unpleasant as living in a neighborhood that has an objectively high crime rate.

5.3.2 Relativists and Idealists

At the beginning of the study, I hypothesized that most of the difference in perceived levels of danger was due to a difference in perceptions of the crime rate. However, the correlation between estimated number of violent crimes and how respondents rated the safety of the neighborhood was only .36. Though estimation of crime rate is probably an important component in determining perceptions of safety, there are clearly other things at play. Both interview and survey results showed that there are major differences in how individuals define what a safe neighborhood is. Roughly, these definitions fall on a spectrum between what I will here call the relativists and the idealists.

For idealists, the existence of any kind of crime indicates that a neighborhood is not safe. This type of answer was particularly visible in survey responses to “What does it mean for a neighborhood to be safe?”:

- “1) No crime, 2) police presence”
- “No crimes, you can walk outside at night”
- “crime free, feeling safe, police protection”

People who come from areas with extremely little crime, e.g. some rural and suburban areas, may be more likely to hold this view, though this was not a consistent finding in the data (some people from rural areas felt very comfortable). In a relativist view of safety, certain crimes or crime rates have become normalized and are no longer viewed as markers of particular danger. Relativists view the existence of such crime as inevitable, especially in urban areas, and thus do not think that a non-zero crime rate means that a neighborhood is unsafe. One relativist respondent said that in order for a neighborhood to be safe, there must be a combination of low crime and feelings of safety among residents:

I suspect two things [about what makes a safe neighborhood]. One of course is that it objectively has a relatively low crime rate. Two, the people who live there feel relatively safe. They feel relatively safe to barbecue on the weekends in their backyard. They feel relatively safe from drive-by shootings. They feel relatively safe from most petty crime. Now nobody’s going to be safe from crimes of opportunity. I think that’s built into urban life. You’re going to have crimes of opportunity and increasingly we’re having crimes of opportunity in the inner suburbs. So, you
know, unless you live in a small town in a rural area in the hills, you’re going to have somebody walking by, and periodically that somebody might want to take advantage of the situation.

In his view, there is no way to stop crime entirely, but crime should be rare enough that residents can go about their normal activities relatively unimpeded. The difference between relativist and idealist views of crime may also be responsible for the fact that being the victim of a crime has very little impact on views of safety. I speculate that individuals who are the victims of crimes simply interpret their experiences in the framework of their prior conceptions of safety. If they are idealists, then being the victim of a crime will simply reinforce the notion that the area is unsafe. If they are relativists, then they simply drew a bad hand. However, this effect could also be due to the small sample size, and indeed we see that in the second model the p-value is much smaller. We may also see definitions of crime that fall in between these two categories, where some kinds of crime are considered to be “acceptable” and others are not. For example, some survey respondents specified what types of crimes would be acceptable in a safe neighborhood:

• “No robbery”
• “No violent crimes with guns”
• “For the risk of assault to be quite low”

A respondent who had previously lived in a large city in China found theft to be acceptable in safe places, but rejected any level of violent crime:

First, [to be a safe neighborhood] there’s no violent crime. You don’t have to, the average person should not worry about being attacked or being robbed. So thefts are very rare. Thefts are common and normal of the city, but robberies are not normal of the city, because this was not characteristic even of France and China. So first no violent crimes and the neighborhood doesn’t have to be well-patrolled or with the safety columns, the lights. It doesn’t have to have the lights. Theft is preventable. But violent crime is not that preventable. There is no way to stop it if you are attacked.

His definition seemed in large part to be based upon what he was used to in his home city, what he refers to as “normal” crimes. If individuals grow up surrounded by certain kinds of crimes, they are less likely to think that those crimes make a neighborhood too dangerous to live in. They may develop strategies for dealing with and preventing those crimes or simply not view them as overly traumatic events. Note that he mentions that violent crimes are not preventable, but that theft is. He developed strategies for dealing with theft, but was unable to do so for more violent crimes. Thus, the presence of violent crimes signals danger in a way that theft does not. As an analogy, for someone navigating a mine-field with an incomplete map, it is the unmarked mines that are the most terrifying. Caution must be taken to avoid accidentally stepping on a marked landmine, but doing so is avoidable. However, the possibility of stepping on an unmarked mine is always present. The more knowledge someone has about an area, the more aware he or she is of potentially dangerous areas or situations and how to avoid them, though no set of knowledge is perfect.

Feeling like one has strategies for dealing with or preventing violent crimes is one of the key differences between those who think of the neighborhood as safe and those who do not. A respondent who grew up in Hyde Park and then returned to live there as an adult compared living in Pilsen and living in Hyde Park:

Yeah. I think that you feel comfortable walking outside of your house and oh, oh, and so the difference between Pilsen, for example, and Hyde Park, I think someone who had never lived in Hyde Park might have the sense that this isn’t safe, I can’t walk out of my building and go from Point A to Point B without feeling unsafe, but again because I’m so familiar with it and have grown up in it and know exactly what all the streets are like, and I would know which path to
For this respondent, much of her sense of safety came from feeling that she had a complete picture of the risks and resources laid out in front of her. She knew which streets are well-trafficked, and which are not. She knew to whom she should turn if she were to run into a problem. In this manner, the safety of the neighborhood is conditional upon her knowledge. Not only did she feel safer in a more familiar neighborhood, but she may in fact be safer because she knows what to expect. So contrary to what one might expect, there is no necessary contradiction between thinking that a neighborhood is safe and feeling that one should take precautions when there. Part of a neighborhood being safe is the confluence of the environment and the individual’s behavior within it, so being cautious may be part of what allows the neighborhood to seem safe.

Knowing how to deal with crime may be an important reason why people who come from urban environments feel safer than those who do not (refer to Kennedy and Krahn). One respondent who was originally from a part of the South Side that had a much higher crime rate remarked:

Yeah, I pretty much feel comfortable everywhere I go. Based off my background and things that I know, I feel like I can go anywhere and be safe. I mean where I’m from, where I explained the things that happened, I feel like nothing can be worse.

She had seen much more violence and lived in a much more dangerous area than the typical resident of Hyde Park. As a result, she knew what kinds of situations she was able to deal with and felt like she could handle anything that might occur in Hyde Park. Fundamentally, Hyde Park feels safe to her because her reference point is somewhere much more dangerous.

Besides familiarity with the neighborhood, neighborhood safety may also be based on other personal characteristics. Certain characteristics may make individuals feel more at risk compared to other people. A white female respondent married to a black man told me that she and her husband had been the target of harassment when they had lived in another part of Chicago.

Because safe is, I guess, a lot of levels. I mean safe for my particular family, which is a chosen interracial family and now we have a kid who’s bi-racial, who I feel like being in Hyde Park there are a lot of families who look like our family, so I feel there’s a ‘safety’ there inherent in that. Safe in quotes because obviously I know that there’s crime that exists, but I feel that there’s crime everywhere.

This could be applicable to any person who is in the racial or ethnic minority in the neighborhood that they live in. Being visibly different and identifiable may make those individuals more likely to be the victims of crime, or at least perceive that they are more likely to be the victim of crimes.

5.4 SAFETY STRATEGIES AND NAVIGATING THE STREET

In Streetwise, Anderson (1990) has a long discussion of how people behave on the street in order to protect themselves from crime. They must become aware of “street etiquette,” and hopefully eventually develop a more nuanced understanding of “street wisdom.” Strategies for staying safe on the street were mentioned frequently during the interviews that I conducted, even when not solicited. Almost every respondent had certain places that they walked that they thought were less dangerous, certain actions that they thought made someone look more or less vulnerable, and finally, ways of evaluating the environment around them to determine whether it
was dangerous. A respondent in Hyde Park described how one should conduct oneself on the street and the mistakes that he sees others make:

I think what it requires is a kind of a sensibility. You have to look behind you. You have to look in front of you. You have to walk briskly. You have to not attract attention, you have to have your hands in your pockets. You have to always be on the lookout for other people in front of you. The thing is, one policy I have is it doesn’t matter who’s in front of me for the most part, if there’s anyone, and it’s really late at night, I’m talking like 2 or 3, I just cross the road. I don’t care who it is. You know, like, you just don’t want to be in such close quarters with someone where there’s no supervision in a place like Hyde Park. Again I believe because people are afraid of crime. You have to have a little bit of a defensive posture, I think. I mean, I don’t know that I’d be able to fight anyone, once a fight broke out [laughs], but you can’t look naïve. One thing I’ve noticed, and this isn’t based on scientific observation at all, but one thing I’ve noticed is that a lot of U of C students at least if they’re from outside, they might look a little fearful, they might kind of tense up and they might kind of look down and they might walk really briskly. I think that attracts more attention, the more scared they look.

Being able to navigate the street is associated with being experienced in the urban environment. Those who have yet to learn how to navigate correctly are highly visible. They have not yet learned how to do the “emotion work” of mastering their fear, of knowing that even if they are fearful it is not appropriate to show it. Urbanites may be dismissive of those who have not learned how to behave on the street. The rules seem like common sense to them because they have been learning and refining them throughout their lives. A native Hyde Parker noted that it’s still kind of ironic that you hear about all these crimes happening against people, often students, and I have to be honest and say that my first thought is that, like ‘What is the student doing wrong to put him or herself at risk?’ Which is a shame. That’s like blaming the victim, right? But again, growing up here my whole life, having a sense of safety, personal safety, street smarts, just knowing what to do and what not to do, don’t walk around with your money and your stuff out visible, you know, and always try to be with somebody, you know those kinds of safety things, those are things I’ve always done and known and never have been violated, which is good. So when you hear about all these crimes it makes me wonder what’s really going on.

People attribute many crimes to the victim having broken the rules of street wisdom. But however clueless the uninitiated may seem to a life-long city dweller, navigating the street is not something innate. It must be learned. A respondent who came from a large European city told me how, after she learned more about living in an American city, her earlier demeanor must have been a red flag:

And you just have to adapt, I think, because I used to, when I first came people could tell that I was new because I would just look around and you don’t do that, you’re supposed to look on the street and just go your way. So I must have really stood out in the environment.

This respondent went from not knowing that certain behavior was expected, to evaluating the mistakes that she had made in the past. The University of Chicago also attempts to teach its students about expected behavior in the neighborhood. They write on their safety website that, “Being aware of your surroundings and being prepared for unexpected situations go hand-in-hand with city life. The University of Chicago encourages you to make safety practices a part of all your daily routines.”

The main message is that most crime is preventable, if you take the proper precautions.

Some respondents also thought about how their behavior could negatively affect others on the street. An older African-American man mentioned that he is always very conscious that women walking near him on the street at night might feel threatened by his presence:
Oh, yeah. Oh yeah. I have a habit, if I’m walking behind a woman of any race, I will speed up so that I’m ahead of her, so that she won’t be concerned that a man’s walking behind her. Now that’s not necessarily a function of race, but I do think race plays a factor, and since I have sisters and my mother, I would not want them to be scared walking down the street, because somebody’s walking behind them. They don’t want to turn around and look, but they know it’s male. So, I suspect an awareness of crime probably motivates them.

Others worried that people they met on the street would be hurt or offended if they took protective measures. One woman said that “I think if I were to feel that someone was a little bit suspicious I would maybe cross the street, but would do it early enough that the person didn’t think that I was doing it to avoid them or something, and in that way irritate them.” This fear was especially common among individuals who were concerned about enacting racial stereotypes. They did not want to insult an innocent individual by reacting as if he was a criminal because of the way he looked, but still felt uneasy when they saw young, African-American men walking towards them at night. They then had to perform the emotion work of making themselves less fearful, or the theatrical work of pretending that they were crossing the street for a different reason.

5.5 THE ROLE OF RACE

There is no doubt that race plays a large role in perceptions of safety within Hyde Park, but it is difficult to discern how it operates. This is especially true since some respondents, fearful of appearing racist, were reluctant to talk explicitly about race. This tricky dynamic is especially apparent in the interview I had with a white, female college student who grew up near a university with a similar racial dynamic in its surrounding areas. I had asked her how living there had informed her view of safety in Hyde Park.

Respondent: I think that the only thing that it’s really informed, and that was, like, because of this summer, they would give you, like a crime alert, and they would describe the suspect, and I think that that just, every single time the suspect was the same kind of person. They never had, like it was always this specific demographic, and it was always a specific age and gender, and so I think that it definitely informed my views on, I guess, what to watch out for (laughs). Both here and there. So I guess that’s the biggest way that it’s informed my views here.

Me: What were those specific...?

Respondent: It was early to mid-twenties, African-American male, tall, generally, and often armed.

Me: And that was for here?

Respondent: That was at [the other university]. The ones I got for UChicago were similar. So, there was not, there was never a discrepancy between the two.

The respondent did not immediately feel comfortable saying that the crime alerts she read had usually featured young, African-American males. Instead, she used the euphemistic phrasing, saying that the perpetrators were of “a specific demographic.” At the same time, we can also see the way in which young, African-American men

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15 More ominous, and perhaps more telling is the footer of security alert emails, “Be alert and aware of your surroundings at all times. Don’t resist an armed robbery unless absolutely necessary. Avoid using cell phones or other electronics while on the street. When walking, try to walk with a group or have a friend walk with you. There is safety in numbers. Familiarize yourself with the location of University emergency phones. If you see suspicious activity, please report it immediately to the police by activating an emergency phone or by calling UCPD when you get to a safe location.” In contrast to the text above, this one makes violent crime seem like more of an active threat instead of an occasional danger.
have become linked with crime in her mind. She observes that there were never any perpetrators who did not fit those characteristics, and that now she knows “what to watch out for.” It is interesting to note, however, that most security alerts do not contain the race of the perpetrator. So in fact, the subject projected her previous experience onto the security alerts from the University of Chicago. In this way, young African-American men, and perhaps African Americans in general, become the only perpetrators of crime. This reinforces the “us vs. them” attitude that can be found in Hyde Park.

The Chinese student whose quote was shared above also noted that

Chicago is very famous for its black community, and violence and guns and black gun crime...And, so the impression that we get from, because most of the criminals in US, at least I get the impression of, are black. So that becomes the issue, this becomes a racial problem...So within the campus you don’t see black people that often. And when you see them, most of the time, it’s from the outside. There are certain, like, professors, and students, but you can identify them directly by their manners. So whenever I see the black people it’s maybe not from the University community, so that creates a problem, the impression as the University, my impression is that the University and everyone affiliated with the University, will be safe, and everyone not affiliated with the University can be troublesome. And outside Hyde Park is dangerous. And because outside Hyde Park and Hyde Park locals is all black, so that’s why I also avoid black people outside of the University.

The negative stereotypes of African Americans that he learned in China were only reinforced by the divide that he encountered once he came to school in Hyde Park. Because the percentage of African Americans within the University is small, he came to see them further as outsiders. Anderson noted a very similar phenomenon: a “we-they” dichotomy developed between blacks and whites.

A European respondent was more wary because she did not know how to read racial tensions in the same way that someone growing up in the United States, or at least in urban areas, would know how to do. As a result she found certain situations in public spaces stressful because she did not know what behavior was expected of her.

W: Well actually not too long ago—I go to Aldi on 78 and Stony Island, I’m a big fan of Aldi’s— and [my daughter] and I were the only white ones there and there was someone who was—they have these carts where you have to put in a quarter. I had just brought back the cart, and I wanted to—this guy came up, no the guy was bringing up the cart and I needed a cart. And I thought, you know I thought I had a quarter and wanted to give the quarter to him, and I said, ‘Well sir, here’s the quarter.’ And he dismissed me, or just...And as he was walking out, meanwhile I was getting another cart, he started screaming and yelling at me. And I thought ‘What did I do wrong? It’s really nothing I think.’ A situation can become instantly volatile without any apparent causes. I’m not sure that being a foreigner, maybe I shouldn’t have gone up to him and just let him be and get my own cart or something. But it seemed easier to give him the quarter and get his cart than putting in that cart than put in the quarter and get another cart. But anyway, that made me uncomfortable, it did. At the same time it’s interesting. When we first came my daughter was [young]. She was worried about, you know, big black guys in hoodies, you know, and especially when it got so dark, and she felt very uncomfortable. And I told her all the time, all the time I said ‘Don’t be racist, these are just regular guys, don’t be racist.’ So you know, I think she’s much more at ease now, but there were just scenes on the street that we were not used to. So it’s a combination of a foreign situation, or strange situation, being unfamiliar with it, then how to make the right judgment.
We do not know whether the man thought that her behavior was offensive or annoying, or whether the problem was racially based. However, she certainly perceived it in a racial light: she framed the incident as having happened because she did not understand the role that she, as a white person, was supposed to play. Interesting too is her description of her daughter's fears in the neighborhood and her reaction. Learning to avoid potential danger is not the only learned behavior for interacting on the street: learning to interact in a non-offensive manner with strangers, especially if their race or clothing triggers fear, is also non-intuitive and can lead to tensions.

But it is not only students or those affiliated with the University of Chicago who may make explicit judgments based on race. Based upon my interviews, most people do this, and most do so consciously, if guiltily. One older African-American man stated that he would be more concerned if he encountered someone who was African-American than if he encountered someone who was white. When I asked him why, he replied:

Because African Americans in Chicago commit a disproportionate number of crimes. And that's simply a fact. I would not like to see somebody who is innocently along their way accosted because of their race. That's committing one crime to try to prevent another one. But, yeah. If I’m walk, let’s say I’m walking, I’m cutting through an alley. I, if I saw a black person in the alley, I probably viscerally and only for a moment, and hopefully I wouldn't convey anything, would be more concerned about his presence in that alley than if he were a white person. But if he were a white teenager, I certainly would be more afraid of him than if he were an older black. And certainly would be more afraid of him than if he was a black woman. So gender plays a role.

Many respondents were also quick to mention that it was not race that was truly at the basis of their judgments, but class. A graduate student in economics told me that:

I don’t think that people are criminals because they’re black, I think people are criminals because they’re poor. It’s just it's a correlation. Sadly, black people are poorer than white people because history, because of discrimination back then, and that just, I mean it’s statistics. There’s just a big correlation. I’m pretty sure a poor white person is as likely to commit crimes as a poor black person.

Both this respondent and the older African-American man above invoked the rate of African-American men committing crimes as the reason that race matters on the street. The graduate student used an economics-based approach: poor people commit crimes, the majority of poor people in this area are black, therefore the majority of people who are going to be committing crimes will be black. In this frame, race is only a stand-in for class.

But we have reason to distrust views that try to account for race in a purely statistical or probabilistic way. Recall that Matei et al. and Quillian et al. found that people systematically overestimated danger in areas with large minority populations. While respondents may feel that they are only reacting to statistical truth, in fact something about race separate from actual crime rate is at play: racial demographics induce people to feel safe or unsafe in ways that are not proportional to crime. It is unclear why people overestimate the relationship between race and crime, but the result is clear. For them, race becomes a sign of disorder similar to broken windows or trash in the street. When discussing what signals he would use to discuss the safety of a neighborhood, a life-long Hyde Parker said:

16 Race also interacts with other factors. The respondent noted that it was the combination of age and race that made him feel more confident. In a quote used above, another respondent noted that he could identify whether African-Americans he met on the street were students or professors “directly by their manners.”
And dilapidated properties, really. Lack of developed commerce. And if you go into the stores too, just the lack of goods, I mean you go into a convenience store and not only was there barely any food, like real food, but they only had Newport cigarettes...you’ll also notice in a lot of those places, you know, it’s not diverse. It’s highly segregated. It’s either completely Hispanic, completely black, the only it seems people, white people going in are contracted workers from the city, you know, but primarily empty lots.

As we also see in the work of Quillian et al. and Matei et al., race comes to be viewed in the same light as the presence of dilapidated buildings and other physical decay.

5.6 MAP RESULTS: CREATING BOUNDARIES OF SAFETY

The map portion of the interview provided insight into how people decide both the boundaries of safety and the boundaries of neighborhood. Boundaries were primarily based upon physical or municipal geographic boundaries, familiarity with the area, the opinions of others, and specific events that were broadcast in the media. I had originally expected to find very similar patterns across respondents. I thought that there would be prevailing ideas about which areas were safe and which were unsafe that extended across the population. Though the maps were relatively consistent for areas outside of Hyde Park, within Hyde Park they were very diverse. Some respondents felt safe practically everywhere, and some felt safe in very few places, especially at night. Even within Hyde Park itself, patterns tended to differ across respondents. However, there were certain elements that remained consistent across many respondents, such as Cottage Grove being a sharp boundary.

In order to look at the aggregate results, I created two composite maps across the maps of 16 respondents (see Figures 10 and 11). To do this I broke the map into a grid and then coded each grid square for each respondent as either “comfortable,” “uncomfortable,” or “would not go,” based upon the colors that they drew. I then averaged the values for each square and scaled the colors accordingly, where green is “comfortable,” yellow is “uncomfortable,” and red is “would not go.” I hesitate to say that this is the “average” map in the sense that this is the map that an average citizen of Hyde Park would draw, but it is useful in seeing trends across the maps of different respondents.

The most obvious result is the extreme difference between day and night. During the day, all of Hyde Park is green. The green extends down to 63rd Street, into the park of Washington Park, and north to 47th Street. Besides the park, everything west of Cottage is a light orange. This boundary is quite sharp. At night, much more of the map is red. The green area, or the area that was deemed comfortable on average, shrinks down, and no longer covers all of Hyde Park. To the west, Cottage Grove marks the boundary between red and orange, and Ellis marks the boundary between orange and green. The area perceived as safe also shrinks to the north and south. To the north, the green extended to 51st Street, and the orange to 47th Street. To the south, the green extends to 59th Street and then the yellow extends to 60th Street, a very quick drop-off in perceived safety.

The most common dividing lines were the municipal boundaries of Hyde Park. Some of these boundaries also correspond with built environment boundaries. Both Washington Park and the Midway Plaisance act as such natural boundaries. Other natural boundaries are large roads with commercial districts, such as 47th Street. The strongest boundaries were those that were both municipal and Starkly physical, most notably Cottage Grove, which runs alongside the park Washington Park, dividing Hyde Park from the neighborhood of Washington Park.

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17 I did not include the respondent who could not draw a map, the respondent who said that she had no idea how safe she would feel walking because she did not walk, and the respondent that I interviewed first, whose maps did not cover the entire area.

18 Note that the park of Washington Park is no longer deemed safer than the surrounding area.
Figure 10 - Aggregate Day Map
Figure 11 - Aggregate Night Map
If respondents perceive their “turf” in the sense that Jacobs used it, in terms of neighborhood boundaries, then it makes sense that these lines become major mental and behavioral barriers. At the same time, the physical environment acts as a real physical boundary, stopping people from crossing either way. Washington Park (the neighborhood) is separated from Hyde Park by Washington Park itself, and Woodlawn is separated from Hyde Park by the Midway Plaisance. Kenwood has never been physically separated from Hyde Park in this way, and thus the perceived boundary is much less clear, as can be seen in the aggregate maps. In Hyde Park, the physical boundaries mean that the “bad guys” are being held at bay, and thus the areas inside the neighborhood are safe. This is even reflected in the architecture of the University of Chicago campus, whose quads are separated from the Midway by a stretch of monolithic buildings.

Similar to the perceptions of neighborhoods as a whole, the perception of a particular location may also be colored by associations with certain events or through hearsay from social contacts. Figure 12 shows a day and a night map drawn by the same respondent. These maps are especially notable for their minute detailing of safety. In both the day and the night maps, the neighborhood is divided into small chunks, with areas of safety interspersed with areas of danger. When the respondent described why she had assigned each area its level of danger, she usually referenced a contact that lived or spent time nearby. These people were points of reference for her in determining the safety of the areas that they lived in. Visiting them also gave her points of reference, allowing her to have a feel for the area.

While most respondents had less fine-grained maps of safety and danger, many used a similar set of characteristics in their judgments. Not crossing the Midway was a common rule of thumb, especially as it was associated with the most recent murder of a University student, in 2007. One respondent mentioned how this affected her view of living south of the Midway:

**Respondent:** Of course, I think it was my first winter here, in '07, that a student from the University, who had just done his PhD in Chemistry, an African student, was killed. And I remember that vividly...we were all worried, because you didn't think that would happen. Then you'd dismiss it to some extent because it was 1:30 at night, it was south of the Midway, so you think “well it won't happen here”. But there are these clues that make you wake up in a way and alert you to that it isn't quite safe. I know also when I came that [a superior] suggested I would live maybe south of the Midway or something, and not going to do that, not with kids, not by myself, really not going to do that.

**Me:** How did you know that that was a more dangerous area?

**Respondent:** It's a good point. I don't know how I knew. I think I just knew. Maybe from before? But I just knew that was sort of the boundary that, and I know the University is trying to develop it, and I'm all for it, and in a way I wish, you know, would've had the guts to live there, but at the same time I thought realistically for me without a man in the house, I'm not sure it's wise to do it.

She said that she “just knew” that it was a bad area. Obviously this impression must have come from somewhere, so we can surmise that it came from some external source. Another respondent had a similar sentiment:

**Well,** it's not perceived of as a University of Chicago area, and people who live at the University of Chicago are always talking about not crossing the Midway. I mean, I would never have known, were I not repeatedly told by people who, at the University of Chicago, that you simply didn't cross the Midway.

The death of the student in 2007 only reinforced the existing cultural perception that being south of the Midway was unsafe. The respondent above said that he “would never have known” to fear going south of the Midway.
if he had not been taught to do so. Even within the neighborhood, perception is deeply shaped by the opinions of others.

These social instructions also contribute to the creation of mental maps in another way: they determine which areas people are likely to go to, and thus what areas they are likely to be familiar with. Familiarity with an area was a very important determinant of feelings of safety. This seems a plausible explanation for why there was so much more variation in the maps than I had expected: different respondents were familiar with different parts of Hyde Park and the surrounding areas. This was especially true for areas around respondents’ homes. Recall Figure 12 and note how small the area of safety is, centered around where the respondent lives. Respondents generally felt safe around where they lived and areas in which they conducted commercial activities. There are probably two reasons that this is the case. One reason is that people are probably more likely to choose areas that they think are safe to live in. The second reason is that they see the area around the home every day. If we return to Anderson’s idea of street wisdom, individuals are better able to read the street around where they live. They feel as if they know how much crime occurs and that they could tell if something were amiss. Even if a crime does occur, they have experienced a large number of instances in which no crime occurred, creating the impression that crime is infrequent.

Figure 12 - Day and Night Map from the same respondent showing the importance of familiarity in determining feelings of safety

A lack of familiarity was often given as a reason that surrounding areas were marked as dangerous. Many respondents mentioned that the only reason they marked areas of Washington Park as dangerous was because they were unfamiliar with these areas. When I asked whether their reaction would be the same for somewhere on the North side, most respondents said that it would. I distrust this claim to a certain extent, given the racial dynamics that were previously discussed and the extent to which hearsay was important in forming impressions.
about Hyde Park. It seems more likely to me that respondents would react differently to different unknown neighborhoods based upon what others tell them. In some respect, actually visiting an area may mitigate the effect of others’ statements as to its safety. If you were to go somewhere famed for its danger and nothing happened, you might be less wary the next time. However, if individuals have no pressing reason to spend time in an area, there is nothing to counteract their previous perceptions. This is an especially important point in regards to Hyde Park and the surrounding areas, as many people do not venture outside of Hyde Park for their commercial or leisure needs.

Familiarity also becomes important because it influences how much individuals feel a part of their local communities. When someone knows many people in the neighborhood, he or she has a better idea of whether someone would help them in the event of a crime. Many respondents cited community involvement as being central to their idea of a safe neighborhood:

- “networks of residents who recognize each other and help each other”
- “People keeping watch among each others [sic] area and inform if see anything suspicious”
- “That the people care about the neighborhood + [sic] are a community”

This is thus an important argument for why people feel more comfortable in areas where they know people. People feel safer if they know the community and feel that someone has their back. In an unknown community, it is difficult to tell if someone would intervene to help. The idea of “collective efficacy” is very relevant here. Essentially, collective efficacy can be defined as how willing people in an area are to help other people in their neighborhoods (Sampson 2012). The level of collective efficacy in a neighborhood can thus be directly tied to ideas like “eyes on the street,” where community members prevent crimes by being watchful and attentive. For an individual in an unfamiliar neighborhood, it may be difficult to tell how much collective efficacy there is, or whether it would be applied to an outside. This is especially true if the people in the unknown community are not “like you” in terms of demographic characteristics (race, socio-economic status). Thus, not knowing anyone in an area makes it more of a risk to go there.

5.6.1 The Distribution of Crime in Hyde Park

In order to compare perceived areas of safety and danger with actual crime, I created spot maps based upon City of Chicago data from 2012 (The City of Chicago 2013) (see Figure 13). Because the distributions of different types of crime may not be the same, I have included maps for robberies, non-domestic assaults and batteries, and thefts (homicides were not included in the data set, but there were no homicides within the municipal bounds of Hyde Park in 2012), crimes that seemed to be the most relevant as metrics by which individuals might think about safety. These maps must be taken with a grain of salt for several reasons. First, spot maps do not account for the number of people frequenting an area and thus do not measure the risk of victimization for an individual. Second, it is possible that people take more precautions in dangerous areas and thus reduce the number of muggings from what it would be if they behaved in the same manner in all areas. Third, there may be a difference in reporting for different areas.

Despite these limitations, we could expect that if there are areas that are significantly more dangerous than others, this would be apparent on the spot maps. In general, robberies were evenly distributed across the neighborhood, with slightly more occurring in the northern half and slightly fewer occurring on the university campus. This could either be because the southern half of the neighborhood is less densely populated or because there is a greater security presence there (campus security guards, emergency phones). Non-domestic assaults and batteries had a more marked non-even distribution, with more occurring in the northern half of the neighborhood and clustering occurring around several intersections e.g. 55th and Lake Park, perhaps because they are highly trafficked. However, it is difficult to know from the information in the dataset whether these assaults and batteries happened between strangers or people who knew each other. If they occurred between
Figure 13
The Geographic Distribution of Different Types of Crimes in Hyde Park (2012)

(a) Robberies

(b) Thefts

(c) Assaults and Batteries (excludes domestic)
people who knew each other, then they are not “random” in the sense that they could happen to any individual, though it may be possible to become involved as an innocent bystander. If they did occur randomly, we would have reason to believe that the northern half of the neighborhood is indeed more dangerous.

Overall, we can conclude that feelings of safety and danger within Hyde Park are not simple representations of the frequency of crime in those areas. Many respondents had strong feelings about particular streets or sections of Hyde Park (for an example, see Figure 12) that are not borne out by the data. There is a much greater variation in feelings of safety and danger than variation in actual crime. Thus, at least a major component of these mental maps must be due to factors other than the likelihood of being the victim of a crime. Suttles argues that one such factor is enforced social control: neighborhoods are sharply defined to help individuals not stray into dangerous territory and stop unwanted people from entering. This argument makes sense within the Hyde Park context. Historically, efforts to isolate Hyde Park from the rest of the South Side were blatant. Today, the University of Chicago has a vested interest in keeping its affiliates as safe as possible, both by controlling where they go and by controlling who can come into Hyde Park. Whether or not safety concerns are consciously used as a method of social control, social control is the result of actions taken in response to safety concerns. Residents of Hyde Park neighborhood, who are of a different racial and economic mix than those of surrounding neighborhoods, stay within narrow physical boundaries, unwilling to venture outside the island.

6. CONCLUSION

Ultimately I found that much of the variation in perceptions and feelings of safety was due to different definitions of safety and the contrast between individuals’ logical evaluations of safety in an area and how safe they felt on the street. Respondents fell on a continuum between “relativist” and “idealist” views of safety. Relativists are able to accept some level of crime in neighborhoods that they identify as safe, while idealists are not. The type of crime that was acceptable to respondents was generally crime that they had grown up with or had lived with for an extended period of time. Respondents were able to find strategies for dealing with such crime, allowing them to view the neighborhood as safe. There were also two frames in which each respondent evaluated safety, their “calculation of risk” and “fear of victimization.” The fear of victimization corresponds to the individual’s feelings of safety, while the calculation of risk corresponds to judgments about crime rates or the likelihood of being the victim of a crime. Often, these two frames did not agree for any particular individual.

In terms of personal characteristics, those who had many friends who said the neighborhood was safe were much more likely to think it was safe as well. In general, much of the information about safety in particular places came from friends and family. Residents were more likely to think that an area was unsafe if they associated it with a specific incidence of crime. Females were more likely than males to think that Hyde Park was unsafe, consistent with existing literature, though the effect was only significant in regards to fears of victimization as opposed to calculation of risk. Race was also important: Asians were much more likely to think that the neighborhood was unsafe than those of other races, though whether this was due to differing cultural perception or tight-knit social groups was unclear. Finally, general familiarity with an area was important in determining how safe people felt in an area, resulting in most people feeling relatively safe in areas that they used on a regular basis.

These results lead to several large-scale conclusions that relate to the original questions of interest for the study. One, the way that individuals conceive of safety is not entirely tied to statistical reality and is not the same from person to person. Often their cognitive safety maps are more minutely detailed than the actual incidence of crime would suggest. Two, because social contacts’ perceptions of safety were so predictive of respondents’ perceptions of safety, we can surmise that hearing what friends and family have to say about different areas is very important in the creation of these cognitive maps. Municipal boundaries and physical boundaries also become important because they control where individuals choose to go. Finally, familiarity (or lack thereof) acts in tandem with these other forces. Spending a lot of time in an area means that one will feel more comfortable there. If people are told not to cross certain boundaries (e.g. the Midway) or go to certain areas, they will tend
to avoid those areas. This results in a cyclical process in which those who have reason to walk to an area will feel safer there, while those who avoid going out because they are afraid never become familiar with the area, and thus stay afraid.

To what extent do these results generalize to thinking about urban space and perceptions of safety in other areas? Hyde Park may at first seem unusual: a relatively low-crime, mixed-race, affluent neighborhood dominated by a university, surrounded by high-crime, poor, mostly black areas. However, many features of this situation are actually common. Residential segregation by both race and income are pervasive all over the United States. One need only look at a map of race in any major city in America to see that this is the case. And where there are sharp divides, sharp boundaries exist, boundaries similar to those found in Hyde Park. The rise of the private, fortified neighborhoods, as described by those of the Los Angeles school of sociology, e.g. Mike Davis, tells a similar story. The affluent build walls to physically separate themselves from any unwanted individuals, reminiscent of what Jane Jacobs observed in Hyde Park 50 years ago. It would be reasonable for these common features to produce similar ways of perceiving safety.

There are also several avenues of inquiry that deserve further attention. One would be to monitor, in real-time, how people feel about a given area, allowing researchers to track what events change their opinions and emotions. The question of how racial demographics affect perceptions of safety is also worth investigating further. The influence of race in feelings of safety is also quite troubling. It leads to policies such as stop-and-frisk, discrimination against young African-American and Hispanic males, and housing segregation. Housing remains the most segregated area of modern life, and fear may help to explain why this is the case. What might mitigate this fear? How can we help people to feel safe in environments with low crime rates? Another interesting research question to pursue is that of gentrification: why do people feel safe gentrifying some areas and not others? What factors must be present in order for gentrification to occur?

These issues are all salient in the modern city. How people form their perceptions of safety is a complex and interesting topic. Every time I look at my own data, new patterns emerge. Understanding these patterns will help us to build communities that live with an appropriate level of caution. Jane Jacobs demonstrated the problems that arise from a community living in fear: there is a toll on real safety that must be paid. Fewer people out means fewer of the “eyes on the street” that Jacobs sees as essential for safety and social control. If not many people are willing to go to a neighborhood, its businesses suffer, leading to less activity and further fear. There are certainly problems with crime in Chicago and across the country, but being overly fearful creates a feedback loop that weakens our urban areas, reinforces segregation, and creates more opportunity for crime. If we are to solve these problems, finding out how to reduce fears is the key.
7. APPENDICES

A. SURVEY FORM

Please answer the following questions. If you do not want to answer a question, leave it blank.

1. Year of Birth: _______________

2. Gender: Male or Female

3. Race:
   - □ Asian
   - □ Black
   - □ White
   - □ Native American or Pacific Islander
   - □ Mixed (specify _____________________ )
   - □ Other (specify _____________________ )

4. Do you identify as Hispanic?
   - □ Yes
   - □ No

5. Were you born in the United States? Yes or No

6. How long have you lived in Hyde Park?
   _____________________ years

7. Before you lived in Hyde Park, where did you live? (if you don’t know, give your best guess)
   - □ Another part of the Southside
   - □ Another part of Chicago (not the Southside)
   - □ A suburb of Chicago
   - □ A suburb of another city
   - □ A large city (>500,000 people)
   - □ A medium city (100,000-500,000 people)
   - □ A small city (20,000-100,000)
   - □ A town (<20,000 people)
   - □ I have always lived in Hyde Park.
   - □ Other: _____________________________________________________

8. If you have not always lived in Hyde Park, why did you move there?
   ________________________________________________________________

9. What is the closest street intersection to where you live?
   _______________________________ and _______________________________
10. What is the highest level of education that you have completed?

☐ Less than high school  
☐ High School or GED  
☐ Associates Degree  
☐ Bachelors Degree  
☐ Graduate Degree (e.g. Masters, JD, MD, PhD)

11. Are you affiliated with the University of Chicago?

☐ No  
Yes, I am a:  

☐ Faculty member  
☐ Staff member  
☐ Graduate student  
☐ Undergraduate student  
☐ Other (specify __________________________ )

12. If you are a University of Chicago student, do you live in student housing?

☐ Yes  
☐ No  
☐ I am not a student

13. Have you ever been the victim of a crime in Hyde Park?  Yes or  No

14. If yes, please specify (e.g. burglary) :  _________________________________________________

15. Do you know anyone who has been the victim of a violent crime in Hyde Park (e.g. armed robbery, assault)?

☐ Yes  
☐ No

16. Do you know anyone who has been the victim of a non-violent crime (e.g. theft, vandalism)?

☐ Yes  
☐ No

17. Do you work in Hyde Park?

☐ Yes  
☐ No

18. Is most of your social/leisure time spent in Hyde Park?

☐ Yes  
☐ No
Please indicate your response to the following statements:

19. Please estimate how many violent crimes are committed in Hyde Park per month.

A violent crime is defined as robbery, battery, assault, homicide, or sexual assault. For reference, if Hyde Park had the same violent crime rate as Chicago overall, it would have an average of 19 violent crimes per month (this does not include South Kenwood).

______________ violent crimes in Hyde Park/month

20. Hyde Park is not a safe neighborhood.

Agree Strongly Agree Somewhat Agree Somewhat Disagree Disagree Disagree Strongly

21. I feel safe walking alone in Hyde Park at night.

Agree Strongly Agree Somewhat Agree Somewhat Disagree Disagree Disagree Strongly

22. I worry that I will be the victim of a crime…

Almost all the time Frequently Occasionally Rarely Never

23. I feel safe using public transportation to leave Hyde Park.

Agree Strongly Agree Somewhat Agree Somewhat Disagree Disagree Disagree Strongly

24. I frequently see police when I am around the neighborhood.

Agree Strongly Agree Somewhat Agree Somewhat Disagree Disagree Disagree Strongly

25. The police presence in Hyde Park makes the neighborhood safer.

Agree Strongly Agree Somewhat Agree Somewhat Disagree Disagree Disagree Strongly

26. Hyde Park is not well lit.

Agree Strongly Agree Somewhat Agree Somewhat Disagree Disagree Disagree Strongly


Agree Strongly Agree Somewhat Agree Somewhat Disagree Disagree Disagree Strongly

28. I have heard my friends or family say that they think Hyde Park is safe…

Almost all the time Frequently Sometimes Rarely Never
29. I have heard my friends or family say that they think Hyde Park is unsafe…

Almost all the time  Frequently  Sometimes  Rarely  Never

30. The media portrayal of Hyde Park is:

Generally positive  Mixed  Generally negative  I don’t see Hyde Park in the media

31. I know my neighbors and interact with them on a regular basis.

Agree Strongly  Agree  Somewhat Agree  Somewhat Disagree  Disagree  Disagree Strongly

32. I feel comfortable talking with:

☐ All people I meet on the street in Hyde Park.
☐ Most of the people I meet on the street in Hyde Park.
☐ Some of the people I meet on the street in Hyde Park.
☐ None of the people I meet on the street in Hyde Park.

33. I want to continue to live in Hyde Park in the future.

Agree Strongly  Agree  Somewhat Agree  Somewhat Disagree  Disagree  Disagree Strongly

34. Are you a member of any of the following groups or organizations in Hyde Park, Woodlawn, Kenwood, or Washington Park? Check all that apply.

☐ community activism groups
☐ churches
☐ programs working with youths
☐ local government
☐ neighborhood watch
☐ block group
☐ other group (specify ____________________________ )

35. Do you get emergency alerts from the University of Chicago?

☐ Yes
☐ No

36. How well informed are you about what goes on in the neighborhood?

Very well-informed  Well-informed  Somewhat informed  Not informed
37. How often do you read police reports about crime in the area?
Frequently  Sometimes  Rarely  Never

38. What does it mean for a neighborhood to be safe?

39. Is there anything else you feel is relevant to your feelings of safety/danger in Hyde Park?

40. Would you be interested in being interviewed about this subject? If so, please provide contact information:

Name: __________________________________________________________

Email or Phone number: ___________________________________________
B. INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

**General Information**
General Demographic information:
  Age:
  Race:
  University Affiliation:
  Occupation:
  Sex:
Can you tell me a little bit about yourself?

**General Reaction to the Neighborhood:**
Where is the respondent from originally? Urban/rural? Is Hyde Park different from where he/she is from?
How long have they lived in the neighborhood?
Why did he or she come to the neighborhood?
If respondent is not from Hyde Park, what was his or her initial impression? Have respondent describe his or her first experience in the neighborhood.

**Navigating the Neighborhood:**
Where does respondent live in the neighborhood?
Where has the respondent been in the neighborhood and surrounding areas?
What does it mean for a neighborhood to be safe?
How do they perceive the safety of this area as opposed to others? (As opposed to Woodlawn, Kenwood, Washington Park? As opposed to downtown or the northside?)
Have your views of crime changed over time?
How do other people view safety in the area?

**Experience with Crime:**
Has the respondent had a crime committed against him or her?
What about people that the individual knows?
How does that affect his or her perception of how dangerous Hyde Park is?

**Scenario:**
You are at a friends’ apartment until after dark. How do you get home?

You are walking alone at night and you see a person down the street from you. You can’t tell their sex, age, or race. What goes through your head? What do you do?

**The University:**
How does the University view crime in the neighborhood?
Do you get security alerts?
Does police presence make you feel safer or in more danger? How does it make you feel when you see police on the street? What do you think the role of the police should be?
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Networks and Narcissism:
Small Town Gossip and Egocentric Content Production

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This paper uses a multi-method approach to study social interaction on a large online social network. The key question is whether or not interactions are communally centered or ego centered in networked society. This is studied through the mode of interaction and content of interaction on a major online social network. I find that both of these are egocentric both – that is, focused on the individual rather than other people or a community. Egocentric communication is compared to other modes of communicating about individuals within communities. I argue that through the structural transformation to a more sparsely tied or networked society, the communal tendency towards gossip gave way to a tendency towards rewarding expression individuals make about themselves.

II. INTRODUCTION

Many have argued throughout the last century that our society has become “networked” – which is to say, the ties that hold people together have become sparser. Groupings of people have become less dense and more dispersed. Over the last decade, social networking websites, where individuals can keep track of their friends, have proliferated. These networks provide a glimpse into what modern networked life is like. Every day, users collectively share billions of pieces of information, and react to the information shared by others. Most interestingly, all of this content is social.

Important for the social science researcher, many online interactions are “permanent.” Unlike words that are spoken and disappear, interactions that occur on the Internet are stored in databases and could exist forever. Information about human social interactions can be “mined” from the large amount of data that exists on online platforms. The set of an individual’s friends and acquaintances is suddenly made public and can be analyzed with network analysis techniques that social scientists have advanced over the last few decades. Researchers can, for the first time through network analysis, parse out the very structure of large systems of human interactions. We can answer the question of who is talking to whom, and how these interactions indicate group structure. Our analysis does not have to be purely quantitative, either. We can still take these data and apply traditional qualitative analysis techniques to them. In sum, the modern social researcher faces an abundance of data about social interactions and an ever-larger toolbox of techniques to analyze this information. In this essay, I attempt to answer a classic sociological question: whether social encounters in a new social structure (in this case, our increasingly dispersed and networked society) are individualistic or community driven. In order to do so I leverage Facebook social data and analyze them using quantitative and qualitative techniques.

Facebook data is used because it has the largest user base of any social networking site. There are 1.2 billion users on Facebook, and that number continues to grow. The average Facebook user has the website window open for six hours a day. From the abundance of data on this platform, I derive two datasets to gain insight about public life in a networked society. The first dataset contains the content published by a user directed at their entire network of friends. This network-oriented content is referred to as a “status update.” Individuals in a user’s network can respond to status updates by “liking” or commenting on them. Status updates are considered here an ego-driven mode of interaction, as they derive from the individual alone. They do not represent a direct person-to-person interaction, but rather are a broadcast of a given user’s thoughts. This first dataset will help us
understand the degree to which individuals use ego-driven modes of interaction. I will also qualitatively analyze this dataset in order to examine whether the content, or the discourse that makes up those interactions, is also ego-driven or community oriented.

The second dataset contains user-to-user content sharing. On Facebook, users can publish on what are referred to as each other’s “timelines.” A timeline post is available for anyone to see and indicates that a user knows someone well enough to publicly interact with him or her. A timeline post is, in this way, a meaningful public indicator of closeness. This dataset is used to parse out the degree to which user interaction is publicly communal: to what extent individuals present their social relations in a public space.

These datasets are mined from my personal social network. I use quantitative methods to answer the basic question of the mode of interaction that typically occurs on Facebook. They examine whether or not users interact through ego-centered interactions (users post a status and receive a response), or through community-centered interactions (users post on each other’s timelines). I also use social network analysis to determine whether or not either of these interactions indicates the formation of smaller subgroups that communicate with each other online. I then analyze status update posts in order to understand their content. Theoretically, a status update’s content could focus on a community of which a poster is a part. Thus, even if the mode of interaction is ego-centered, the content of the interaction might not be. Qualitative analysis will help us to understand whether these posts, despite their egocentric structure, have content that is community-oriented.

I find that the majority of social interactions on Facebook occur through status updates and consist of individually centered content. In contrast, only a minimal amount of social interaction occurs through timeline posts. More interestingly, content that tends to be self-centered is actually liked more than other content. While this could indicate the decline of community altogether, I will instead argue that it represents an extension of the communal tendency towards gossip. In a networked society, individuals seek information about people with whom they associate in the same way that members of a small town would gossip about other members of their community. On Facebook, this desire for information leads to a public social reward in the form of likes when individuals present information about themselves. Egocentric content plays the same role in networks that was previously played by gossip, and provides individuals with pertinent information about the broad group of individuals with whom they associate. Thus, the structural change towards a networked society drives individuals to act in a newly narcissistic fashion.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. COMMUNITY VS. INDIVIDUAL: A CLASSIC DEBATE

Social theorists who studied modern life over the last century often contrasted an individualized urban life to the close-knit communities of small town life. Early theorists, such as Georg Simmel in his paper “The Metropolis and Mental Life,” focused on the way in which urban life isolates the individual from those around him and makes the urban dweller feel insignificant and replaceable. The individual, in this state, develops a strong sense of self in order to feel differentiated and noticed (1903: 19). Foundational thinkers on the urban argued that strong group ties result in a breakdown of primary relations, such as those in the family. In contrast to the dense relations of the small town, in the urban one tends towards a series of many different and separate secondary relationships that arise from the individual’s utilitarian needs. Individuals suddenly had to interact with people symbolically through the jobs and positions they held in society, or within a wider array of business or personal contexts (Wirth 1938: 12; Park 1925: 24; Simmel 1903: 17). Later in the 20th century, social commentators, such as Claude Fischer in *To Dwell Among Friends*, pushed back against earlier theorists of the urban and argue that a strong communal life is present in urban settings. Fischer focuses on networked relationships in the urban and argues that intensive communal subcultures come to exist (1982: 10-11). For example, in a small town, one may be the only Jewish person, but in a dense metropolitan area, there are likely many more Jews with whom one
could connect. Consequently, it is possible to form a subculture around one’s Jewish identity. This conception extends past identity and can also focus on particular interests that one might share with others (1982: 194-197). He concludes that these subgroups lead to individuals who have “deeper, not shallower, involvement in social worlds – at least for people with specialized backgrounds and interests… they should therefore benefit most from the density of potential associates available in cities” (1982:197). At around the same time, Christopher Lasch puts forward the argument in *The Culture of Narcissism* that individuals have become increasingly individualistic to the point of narcissism in modern society.

The 21st-century version of this debate has focused on structured social networks. The essential question remains whether or not new social structures prompt increased community or individualism. In the book *Networked* Lee Rainie and Barry Wellman put forth the concept of a “Networked Society.” They argue that while our involvement with community organizations has certainly declined, and communal life looks more and more dissimilar from that of the small town, individuals exert more effort to reach out to one another and build social relationships (2012: 393). While modern social life requires more effort to communicate, individuals come to rely on ties that are both socially and geographically distant (i.e. their network) for social support. From this perspective they develop a positive view of social media. To them, individuals enjoy social media because they love to connect with each other. They conceptualize this form of interaction as essentially one of sharing, of meaningful social interaction. A recent and highly publicized paper by Ethan Kross titled “Facebook Use Predicts Declines in Subjective Well-Being in Young Adults” argues the opposite – that social media makes individuals feel isolated and alienated from the individuals that they interact with on the platform. In this way, the debate about whether contemporary social life is communal or deeply individualizing continues into spaces for networked social interaction.

This paper positions itself within the modern iteration of this debate. I, like many of the scholars who have written on the topic, compare a new social structure, networked society, to that of the small town, which here represents an intensely communal culture. I hope to use social media data in order to parse out the nature of the interactions that occur within a geographically disparate, networked structure. Given a dataset ripe for quantitative analysis, surprisingly, a large amount of analysis of Facebook still uses methods such as ethnography to understand how users interact with the platform. While Facebook’s data scientists have produced a number of papers featuring intensive quantitative analysis, deeply theoretical sociological questions such as how the individual relates to a networked society remain unanswered.

**B. COMMUNITY**

In this section I will explore three ethnographic examples of community formation both offline and online. The first is from the book *Small Town Stuff* by Albert Blumenthal. *Small Town Stuff* was written during the time of the early Chicago School of Sociology and demonstrates how individuals lived and gossiped within small towns. I will then draw upon Daniel Miller’s *Tales from Facebook* in order to show how Facebook facilitates the same sort of gossip about individuals common to tight-knit offline communities. I will then consider “Friend or Freund” by Jordan Kraemer, which discusses how “daily stuff” comes to be transferred through even broader transnational networks. Through these pieces it becomes apparent that gossip is a critical social function, and one that Facebook can perform in a networked society.

In *Small Town Stuff* gossip plays an important social function in localized communities. Blumenthal argues that long-lived gossip can become social understandings of the truth about others in small towns. He explains “in the long run the ‘truth’ is acknowledged by the people as a whole, if an item of gossip is sufficiently alive to keep it before them long enough” (1932: 137). The center of this process is key physical locations where individuals come to gossip. One example of this is Sid’s shop, where he hears all the gossip and attempts to synthesize it into a consistent and truthful narrative, which he then shares back with the local community (1932: 134). Sid is highly respected for this role that he performs, and trusted for his ability to discern truth. Not everyone is
trusted in this way. This is because residents are sophisticated in their understanding of the motives of various individuals within the community, so that if a piece of gossip originates from someone with a grudge, or from someone who has a particularly negative reputation, it is re-evaluated or thrown out altogether (1932: 138). Through key, trustworthy figures, then, the community manages to synthesize gossip into something almost nearing truth for individual events. The “old guard” of the community normally only come to accept newcomers as true members of the community after they have engaged in community activities for many months or even years (1932: 121). In this way, gossip becomes an important social process by which individuals are understood by the community to be one of its members. However, once the process of truth acknowledgment is complete it is unlikely the town’s evaluation of an individual will change much. Often, Blumenthal explains, “people are pigeonholed into the part they play in the community” (1932: 144). Consequently, gossip comes to define the roles that individuals play within the small town. Similarly, in Improvised News by Totsu Shibutani, he argues that gossip defines interpersonal and status relations within small groups (1966: 42). Individuals come to understand their relationship to each other through the news that they learn by gossiping. However, broad networks of individuals lack the key meeting places, trusted individuals who distill gossip, deep knowledge of motives, and the old guard that enable gossip to serve its function in small towns. The lack of these features should make it more difficult for individuals to use gossip to structure their interpersonal relations and to develop informed and socially significant understandings of individuals with whom they associate.

The book Tales From Facebook argues that despite networked life lacking these features, individuals still come to understand each other's private lives through online interactions, albeit in a more mediated fashion. Like Blumenthal, Daniel Miller performs an ethnography of a small town. However, whereas Blumenthal studies the small town as individuals began to move into major urban centers, Miller studies small town life as individuals move onto an online platform. In Miller’s account, Facebook plays an important role in localized communities: it allows for gossip but a less intense version of it. Miller interviews Alana, who lives in a small town in Trinidad called Santa Ana. Miller describes Santa Ana as the “kind of place one imagines to approximate that romantic idyll of community.” Miller uses Alana’s narrative as an example of a person who exists deeply within a traditional tight-knit community and can help us to understand how community interaction on Facebook relates to that experience (2011: 23).

Just like Blumenthal, Miller quickly centers in on gossip as an important part of the small town experience. He explains that “if we stand around the village... it’s not going to be long before there are whispers about who slept with who and really, really shouldn’t have” (2011: 18). A common criticism of Facebook in Trinidad at the time is its tendency to incite public gossip. In particular, individuals could post information on each other’s timelines to shame their friends. However, Alana regards Facebook’s ability to propagate drama as not even close to the degree to which “ill-informed gossip” can spread quickly in a close-knit community. Rather, information transferred on Facebook is more polite than information transferred through the “whispers” of individuals in a small town (2011: 26). Facebook becomes a space where one can remove oneself from and thus tame the intensity of offline interactions.

Reflecting on gossip in the small town and its continuity on Facebook, Miller raises gossip to the level of an important social function. He argues that “you simply cannot have closeness and privacy,” and that at its root community is about closeness (2011: 27). The idea that violations of privacy lead to communal connectedness can be taken as another social function of gossip. This function is separate from but not competitive with the role of gossip in social ordering that Shibutani puts forth in Improvised News (1966: 42). Taken together, Miller and Shibutani indicate that both communal unity and structure depend on gossip, or personal information, about individuals transmitted to others.

The paper “Friend or Freund: Social Media and Transnational Connections in Berlin” moves beyond localized communities, and shows how the transfer of personal information persists even amongst geographically dispersed users on Facebook. Kraemer argues that Facebook enables people to localize their non-local friendships through
everyday interaction on the platform. Kraemer gives the example of individuals who first connect at real-life social events and then form friendships through everyday interactions online. She describes her experience forming connections at an Electronic Dance Music (EDM) concert and its relation to Facebook:

This spate included not only Friend requests but also a stream of comments on my Facebook profile and on those of my new acquaintances. Another musician tagged me and others in a video of his performance, and suddenly all the comments on the video were arriving… A lone acquaintance followed up via e-mail, but the majority of the activity was taking place on Facebook. Over the next few days, attendees began uploading digital photos from the event, “tagging” other users (linking images of them to their name and profile), and commenting back and forth. Facebook, it became clear, was where the action was following the festival, extending friendships and social connections established at the event into the everyday activities of a geographically dispersed network of music fans. (2013: 62)

The social event in this case came to be the basis for an initial interaction. Individuals then affirmed a relationship with one another through the tagging of photos. Users commented on photos and thus established a public tie. Kraemer argues that these post-concert interactions moved the event “into the everyday activities of a geographically dispersed network of music fans” (2013: 62). Thus, while friendships formed around the event of the concert, they matured through the tame, everyday Facebook interaction.

Kraemer demonstrates this movement into everyday interaction in more detail. She explains how her roommates stay connected to their friend circle through constant communication throughout the day (2013: 63). With the spread of smartphones, users no longer need to be in the midst of a browsing session in order to communicate with their friends. In other words, Facebook has become an active part of users’ offline lives. A Facebook user can communicate with anyone in his or her extended network of friends. Users manage these relationships online during their regular offline activities. Facebook becomes a space for discussing “daily stuff” with the different communities of which the Facebook user is a part (2013: 66). Users can, in effect, chat about “daily stuff” while going about “daily stuff,” and maintain their relationships in the same manner that users maintain them locally, despite geographic differentiation. Thus, the fact that Facebook is a platform for communicating daily mundane information enables users to feel a deeper bond with each other. This daily interaction mirrors the way in which knowledge of an individual’s life (“gossip”) allows for closeness in offline communities in the case of Miller.

While Blumenthal demonstrates the complex structures that are developed in the small town in order to manage information transfer about their members, Miller and Kraemer both demonstrate Facebook’s role in community formation through information dispersal. In the Miller piece, Facebook is a space for gossip that operates similarly to how gossip is transferred offline in these communities, but in a less extreme fashion. Kraemer shows that Facebook can facilitate the exchange of “daily stuff,” the little pieces of information that unite a community. The quantitative analysis of Facebook performed in this essay adds to the understanding that Facebook can perform the role of gossip by describing a particular mechanism by which information is transferred on Facebook: namely, an ego-centered call and response where the individual presents information about himself that his network responds to in the form of likes.

C. NARCISSISM

Narcissism in social media has been more the focus of pop culture than that of social science inquiry. Many news outlets called 2013 the “Year of the Selfie.” However, discourse on narcissism in social media is not entirely devoid of academic discussion. In The Virtual Sphere 2.0 Zizi Papacharissi develops some thoughts on narcissism

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1 A selfie is when one takes a picture of oneself by orienting one’s camera in one’s own direction. It has recently become very popular.
and its relation to online political activism. She explains narcissism as a way of engaging in politics. In order to get to this understanding, she starts from a communal conception of the public sphere put forth by Jurgen Habermas. The public sphere in Papacharissi’s conception “presents a domain of social life in which public opinion is expressed by means of rational public discourse and debate” (2009: 232). Papacharissi advocates understanding the public sphere “as a metaphor that suggests a mode and ideal for civic participation and interaction” (2009: 234). The public sphere is thus a space for communal discussion about social and political ideas. The idea that the public sphere has moved online suggests that the Internet is a space for communal engagement through political discussion.

According to Papacharissi, virtual narcissism is the facet of online interaction with the most democratizing potential. Papacharissi draws her conception of narcissism from The Culture of Narcissism by Christopher Lasch. In Papacharissi’s conception, narcissism is not defined in the pathological sense. Rather, Papacharissi explains “narcissism is defined as a preoccupation with the self that is self-directed, but not selfishly motivated” (2009: 237). Narcissistic behavior is “motivated by the desire to connect the self to society.” Individuals use society as a mirror for self-reflection, calculating a performance with the other in mind (2009: 238). This self-reflection can be political, and people can enact social change through identity politics that occur online.

Papacharissi’s explanation of Lasch is informative because she recognizes Laschian narcissistic tendencies online. She emphasizes that the Internet is a place where the individual looks to society to define the self. However, in Lasch’s conception – in contrast to Papacharissi – the tendency for individuals to look to society for a definition of self is tied to the pathological condition of narcissism. This focus on the link between the pathological condition of narcissism and its social root separates Lasch’s analysis from other sociologists of his era:

> The refusal of recent critics of narcissism to discuss the etiology of narcissism or to pay much attention to the growing body of clinical writing on the subject probably represents a deliberate decision...This decision, however, has proved to be a mistake. In ignoring the psychological dimension, these authors also miss the social. They fail to explore any of the character traits associated with pathological narcissism, which in less extreme form appear in such profusion in the everyday life of our age... (1978: 32)

Lasch thus agrees that narcissism is pathological, but deviates from psychoanalysis in one significant way. He believes that psychological tendencies come to exist as a result of social pressures. He argues that Freud’s “clinical investigations constitute a storehouse of indispensable ideas, once it is understood that the unconscious mind represents the modification of nature by culture, the imposition of civilization on instinct” (1978: 34). Thus, when one recognizes the existence of narcissism – like any psychological condition – one must also understand that narcissism has come to exist as a result of a particular social mechanism.

In the section titled “Social Influences on Narcissism,” Lasch identifies a number of social forces that lead to narcissistic behavior. Most relevant to discussions of Facebook is his argument that the cause of narcissism is the proliferation of the camera:

> Another such influence is mechanical reproduction of culture... cameras and recording machines not only transcribe experience but alter its quality, giving to much of modern life the character of an enormous echo chamber, a hall of mirrors... the intrusion into everyday life of this all-seeing eye no longer takes us by surprise or catches us with our defenses down. We need no reminder to smile. A smile is permanently graven on our features, and we already know from which of several angles it photographs to best advantage (1978: 47).

The description of the “intrusion into everyday life” reflects the language of Kraemer and Miller in describing how “daily stuff” is communicated on Facebook. In my research, I find that pictures are the most common content that users posted about themselves. According to Lasch, individuals constantly take photographs, constantly
present their best moments to the camera, and constantly seek validation. In the case of pictures, Facebook most clearly becomes the “hall of mirrors” against which the individual compares him or herself. Pictures, posed to maximize the attractiveness of those photographed, also most clearly demonstrate an individual’s ability to control exactly how they present themselves on a social platform.

Finally, the mirror symbolism, already evoked earlier in Papacharissi’s summary of Lasch’s text, becomes our basic working definition of narcissism. Lasch differentiates modern narcissism from other understandings of selfishness by describing it in the context of narcissistic modern writers:

The writer no longer sees life reflected in his own mind. Just the opposite: he sees the world, even in its emptiness, as a mirror of himself. In recording his “inner” experiences, he seeks not to provide an objective account of a representative piece of reality but to seduce others into giving him their attention, acclaim, or sympathy and thus to shore up his faltering sense of self (1978: 20).

To Lasch then, narcissism ultimately becomes an externalized form of introspection. This externalized form also manifests in a tendency towards exhibition of inner experience where individuals seek social recognition of the quality of their internal exploration. The self is propped up by one’s ability to effectively express this inner self to the communities, or we can extrapolate to networks, of which one is a part. In a sense, these inner experiences are posed and aimed towards eliciting a positive response in much the same way as a photograph.

D. GOING FORWARD

From the literature, Facebook is conceptualized as a place where communities engage with content production that consists of the day-to-day happenings of its members. Communities, particularly small town communities such as those in the Miller and Blumenthal accounts, tend towards gossip and seek to learn more about the events in an individual’s life. Knowledge about the happenings of individuals in a community enables those communities to structure status and social relationships. Gossip thus plays a critical social role in defining an individual’s position in society. Narcissism in social media functions similarly. I will attempt to show that Facebook epitomizes a sort of “call and response” that is akin to the externalized self-reflection in Lasch. In this call and response, individuals represent themselves publicly and wait for acclaim in the form of liking. A member of the networks in which an individual finds him or herself responds to egocentric information positively because it enables him or her to find out information about other people and thus better understand his or her own social position.

III. METHODOLOGY

A. DATA COLLECTION

The data were collected from my personal Facebook network. My network consists of a fairly large sample, although small relative to the number of users and posts on Facebook as a platform. I had information on over 1,200 Facebook users’ activity and over 4,500 posts during the period that I collected data. However, it is still important to keep in mind that these data are located within my network. Most of my network is college aged, mostly consisting of individuals who go to an elite private university, the University of Michigan, and colleges around the Ann Arbor area.

I used Python scripting to collect data. I hosted a Python script that ran every ten minutes for two weeks that gathered every status update and timeline post in the last 24 hours and the number of likes on that post. This meant that for every post I had over 100 “post instances.” Each instance consisted of information about a post at a particular time. For each of those post instances I also gathered the number of likes on that post and the
IDs of those who had liked it. For example, I could have first recorded a post at 3:10 PM, October 1st as it was posted and it would have zero likes. I would then record the post again at 3:20 PM and it would have one like. I would gather information about likes at 10-minute intervals for 24 hours. Each of the times I pulled updated data about a post would be considered a “post instance.” The redundancy built into this system was used to mitigate possible issues with mining data from Facebook. First, sometimes Facebook’s Graph does not present every piece of data that one requests from their server. Second, sometimes users delete posts, and redundancy enabled me to still gather like data on those posts before deletion. Consequently, while I collected data on 4,500 posts, I also collected data on hundreds of thousands of post instances, and millions of likes that related to all of those instances. For the purpose of this essay, I looked at the information on likes of only the last post instance recorded.

**B. NETWORK DATA**

Each dataset was used to make weighted, undirected network graphs. In the case of the timeline posts (from here on referred to as the “timeline network”), this was straightforward. A post from one person to another represented a link between two individuals. For each additional post, a point of weight was added to the link. For the “like” data (from here on referred to as the “like network”), a relationship was formed between two nodes where person A liked the post of person B or vice-versa.

**C. QUANTITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS**

In order to analyze the network data, I utilize a method known as agglomerative hierarchical clustering. Cluster analysis, simply put, enables one to find subgroups in a network graph. The process of agglomerative clustering involves taking n initial clusters, where n is the number of nodes in the graph. From there, the clustering algorithm iteratively merges each cluster in stages until there is only one cluster. From there, one analyzes the clusters that occur at each step of clustering in order to discover definitive groupings. Nodes are grouped based on their structural similarity. Structural similarity means that node A has similar relationships to other nodes as node B. For example, if A and B are both friends with C, then they are structurally similar, since they have similar friendships. One could broaden this example to a large group of friends, A, B, C, D, and E, who all like each other’s Facebook statuses or post on each other’s timelines. These friends would appear as a subgroup under hierarchical clustering.

Normally clustering does not play out this simply, and we need to use comparable measures to see how similar nodes are to each other structurally. Their similarity is referred to as how “distant” they are from each other. There is a number of ways of measuring the distance (or similarity) between two nodes. For my analysis I use a Euclidean distance measure. In *Social Network Analysis*, Wasserman and Faust advise that “if one desires a measure of the identity of ties, then Euclidean distance may be preferred…” (1994: 374). This means that if the ties have some property, in this case, the number of likes shared on the same content or the number of posts made to each other’s walls, then it is better to use Euclidean distance. Given that the data here is weighted, with each additional like or post representing an additional point on the tie between two given users, Euclidean distance is appropriate. Nodes are then clustered through a method referred to as “complete linkage clustering,” which finds the two nodes with the furthest Euclidean distance and merges them based on that relationship.

**D. QUALITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS**

In addition to network analysis I selected three overlapping samples from the set of posts in order to more deeply understand the content of posts. Given that the bulk of Facebook interaction, as we will see, occurred through status updates, I sampled from the status updates that I collected. First was a random sample of 200 posts, the next was the top 200 liked posts, and the final was the top 40 from the top 200 posts. I was not able to categorize all the random posts, as some of them were incoherent or impossible to understand without context.
that I lacked. The top liked posts were consistently of a higher quality, so I restricted the results to the number of random posts I was able to categorize. Consequently, there are 174 random posts and 174 top posts analyzed below. I sorted these into six categories:

1) “Picture posted,” which is to say the user added a picture to his or her Facebook timeline for others to see.

2) “Personal accomplishment” posts involved the user congratulating him or herself or informing his or her network about some important event in their lives. For example, “I was just accepted to University of Chicago!”

3) “Life Commentary (Personal)” posts strongly reference an occurrence in the user’s life or their own personal experience. For example, “I have been so happy recently. I feel like everything is looking up for me.” A more ambiguous case might be one such as “Easy tiger. Not on a first date.” This has some social commentary, but is clearly also a reference to an experience the poster had.

4) “Commentary (General)” involved posts along the lines of “interesting article” and commentary that directly involves others, such as a link to a song by a band that the user likes.

5) “Community oriented” posts directly reference a social group for example, “go greek!” or “go team!”

6) “Social and political” posts. These were posts that were pure political or social commentary and lacked a large amount of individualistic self-reference. For example a post that a user made in response to the federal government failing to pass a budget that simply said, “whatever – USA.”

E. DATA LIMITATIONS

The network that I sampled from was my own network. The reason is simply that it is very difficult to find random users’ Facebook data. Storing more network data would have also required quite a bit of space. Furthermore, network analysis is computationally expensive. Analysis of even 100 individuals’ full networks might take days on my personal computer.

The fact that I sampled only from my own network could create a few issues. First, my network could be uniquely narcissistic or community oriented. Second, the network taken is egocentric, this means that I could in fact be in the center of my own subgroup, and thus it would be difficult for me to parse out communities with hierarchical clustering. Third, individuals at the edge of my network likely are likely in subgroups I do not have information on. Clearly, a similar dataset collected from multiple users would be more effective. However, the size of the dataset (1,200 users), geographic diversity and looseness of ties on Facebook help to justify its generalizability.

IV. RESULTS – QUANTITATIVE

A. WHAT MIGHT BE FOUND

This section explains the tests that I performed to investigate whether interactions on Facebook are communal. I look to three different cases to see if interaction is communal. First, one might expect to see subgroups that tend to like content from each other. The timeline network consists of individuals and the linkages between

2 For example: “Carpe Diem Vita brevis,” “Just Me & My Pikachu” or “YOLO”
two nodes indicate that one of the two individuals liked the status of the other. Consequently, a subgroup would exist if a set of individuals consistently liked each other’s content. If these subgroups are discernable, then the content individuals produce could be considered directed towards a particular community and thus not narcissistic. Subgroups are discernable through dendrograms that can be taken from hierarchical clustering. A dendrogram that consists of subgroups might look like this:

The subgroups in this dendrogram would be 1, 3, 6 and 2, 4, 5 as there are large jumps from them to the next level of clustering. Alternatively, a dendrogram with no complete subgroups would feature a chained appearance. Mark S. Aldenderfer and Roger K. Blashfield discuss how to recognize a chaining pattern in dendrograms in their book *Cluster Analysis*: “toward the end of the clustering process, one large cluster has been formed, and the remaining cases are added, one by one, to the larger cluster” (1984: 39-40).

The other two indicators that the mode of interaction on Facebook is communal would be if subgroups were discernable through network linkages based on timeline posts and raw frequency of timeline posts. Both of these indicators point to users’ willingness to publicly demonstrate that they are a part of a certain community or connected with certain people. Hierarchical clustering and dendrograms are again used in order to find subgroups in the timeline network. Frequency of timeline interaction can also be viewed through the lens of network analysis. Since linkages in the timeline network are formed when an individual posts on the wall of another user, the number of linkages between nodes shows the frequency of timeline interactions. Additionally, each node represents a person who posted on an individual’s timeline or who had their timeline posted on. Thus, the number of nodes in the timeline graph is the same as the quantity of people who engaged in timeline interactions during the sample period.

**B. LIKE NETWORK**

The like network consisted of 640 nodes with 2158 edges between them. Once again, nodes indicate people, and edges between nodes indicate that one of those people liked the status of the other. This is not a particularly

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dense graph. It contains just .5% of the total number of edges possible between nodes. However, there still exist more edges than nodes, with an average of 3.37 edges per node.

The dendrogram (Figure 1) indicates a chained effect, as it does not break down into distinctive groupings. After performing a hierarchical clustering, the average size of one of these clusters is 2.31 nodes. Thus, we cannot establish that communities interact around liking posts. Rather, it seems as if individuals post content and any given user might respond to it. Individuals thus post content to their entire network, uncertain of who will respond. The lack of strong subgroupings around liking posts indicates that when users post content, they receive a response from their network at large.

Simply put, no subgroups formed around the liking of posts. Consequently, likes could come from anyone in one’s network: friends, acquaintances or near strangers. The content posted in the form of a “status update” does not elicit a response from, and it is unlikely to be oriented towards, a particular set of users.

![Figure 1 - Dendrogram of like network including components.](image)

C. TWO-WEEK TIMELINE NETWORK

The timeline network is characterized by incredibly sparse interactions. There are only 242 nodes and between those nodes there are only 225 edges. Nodes represent people, and edges indicate that a person posted on the other person’s timeline. There is an average of .93 edges per node. It is clear that very little interaction occurs through posts on timelines.

The dendrogram (Figure 2) shows that clustering is also chained in the case of the two-week timeline network. Individual nodes merge into a bigger cluster one at a time in a chaining pattern. This sort of linkage suggests a lack of cohesive clustering. A simple quantitative measure also points to this: the average size of a timeline cluster is 1.49 nodes. We can thus discredit the idea that subgroups form through individuals posting on each other’s timelines.
D. SIX-WEEK TIMELINE NETWORK

Given the discrepancy in the number of timeline interactions in the two-week sample compared to the like network, I decided to extend the timeline interaction sample over a six-week period. This six-week timeline graph contains 436 nodes, and 485 edges. Six weeks of timeline interactions represented less interaction than occurred during just two weeks in the like network. This difference points to the dominance of status updates and liking as a mode of communication on Facebook.

The size of clusters remained fairly consistent across the two-week and six-week timeline network (Figure 3). The average cluster consists of 1.5 nodes. Furthermore, the network seemed to feature a chained linkage appearance similar to the two-week timeline network. Once again, this confirms the results from the two-week network that there are no strong subgroups in the timeline network.
E. SUMMARY: EGOCENTRIC COMMUNICATION

The above analysis fails the cases put forth in the beginning of this section that would indicate communal interaction. First, no subgroups are formed around the liking of content. Instead, dendrograms show a chaining pattern. Consequently, particular groupings of individuals do not actively target content at each other. Second, individuals did not frequently reach out to other individuals in the form of public timeline posts. This indicates that individuals do not tend to publicly demonstrate social relations on Facebook. Third, no subgroups form around posting on timelines. Once again there is a strong chaining pattern. The lack of subgroups indicates that individuals fail to reify a community of friends publicly through sharing content with each other.

Furthermore, in the majority of cases, users interacted by posting content or liking the content posted by others. This mode of interaction points to users who post content broadly to their network. We can, from this analysis, tentatively conclude that we have a mode of interaction focused on non-directed individually produced content. The ineffectiveness of cluster analysis indicates that individuals post content to their networks at large and these posts are divorced from a discernable structured social context. Given that networks respond to these posts by liking, and that people spend quite a bit of time on Facebook, it seems that people are primarily interested in content that is self-oriented. This information returns us to the concept of gossip in small town communities. People in a networked society seem to remain interested in what individuals in their network are doing, even if they are not tied to those individuals in a cohesive community or subgroup. This is the impersonal call and response: individuals present information about themselves and receive a response in the form of likes from across their network, detached from social groupings. In a Laschian interpretation, society, in the form of our network, becomes the impersonal mirror that reflects either positively or negatively on the internal contemplations of individuals made public.

Another question still exists as to whether or not these posts have a social orientation in terms of their content. It would be difficult to categorize status updates as narcissistic if they were consistently aimed at particular communities or society at large. Consequently, in order to support claims that interactions on Facebook are driven by narcissism and gossip, I will examine whether or not the content produced is itself ego-centered.

V. RESULTS – QUALITATIVE

A. CONTENT CATEGORIZATION

As mentioned previously, I gathered a sample of 174 random posts and 174 top posts. The first row of Table 1 consists of 174 random posts, the second row consists of 174 top liked posts, and the third row is the top 40 posts. Each column represents a different category of content, and each cell indicates the number of posts that fit into that category of content. The latter top 40 posts will be analyzed in more detail below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Ego Content</th>
<th>Community Oriented Content</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Picture</td>
<td>Life Commentary (Personal)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Random 174</td>
<td>87 (50.0%)</td>
<td>25 (14.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Top 174</td>
<td>85 (48.8%)</td>
<td>49 (28.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Top 40</td>
<td>19 (47.5%)</td>
<td>8 (20%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Some initial observations come from the data that relate to the theories of narcissism and community examined thus far. First, pictures were the most prevalent form of content during the period of observation. Recall that Lasch tied the proliferation of the camera with increasingly narcissistic behavior. Second, the number of likes a post receives is correlated with how individually oriented the post is, indicating that individuals like ego-centric content more than community oriented content or general commentary. This shift is seen primarily in the movement from posts that are general commentary and thus not self-oriented (an article about the different ways one can cook shrimp, or an update like “I h8 essays!” said the English major, with a pout on her face”) to individually driven or narcissistic (“I had the most beautiful day”, “this funny event occurred outside of my home”) as we look from the random sample to the top liked posts. The proportion of community oriented content decreases between the random sample and the top posts. The number of political and social posts (for example, a post of a link about how our generation has failed to live up to political challenges) is very low in both the random sample and the top posts. It is simply not an addressed topic. Finally, personal accomplishments make up 1.1% of the random sample, but 15% of the top forty liked posts. This perhaps points to the fact that personal accomplishments are rare, but when they do happen, they are very appreciated.

The tendency for egocentric posts to garner larger numbers of likes reflects the ethnographic findings that people seek to engage individuals about their day-to-day lives. A community, whether online or offline, tends to invade the privacy of members of the community. This can be invasive and negative, but it can also lead to a deeper degree of closeness and is how individuals structure their relationships to each other. As a result of this social tendency, an individual’s network does not reward them for their thoughts on a given topic, but rather for intimate knowledge about what is happening in their life. Facebook facilitates this interaction by enabling individuals to post information and by enabling a network to collectively respond through the mechanism of liking.

B. QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

As mentioned previously, the goal of this analysis is to see if the content (as opposed to the mode) of social interactions is self-oriented. Compared to the overall sample, the top forty liked posts included much more ego-centered content than the overall sample did. There were many more likes than comments on all of these posts. The basic interaction put forth here is a sort of call from the individual and response from the networks of which the individual is a part. Individuals engage their networks through posting ego-driven content, and their networks respond through the mechanism of liking that content, with individuals who had a particularly strong relationship to the poster commenting. Posts that lacked personalized content also failed to receive many comments.

There may be, though, possible exceptions to this simply ego-driven call and response. One might, for example, point to the community-oriented posts as a counterargument to the idea that Facebook consists of primarily ego-driven content. Yet, even these sometimes took the framing of an ego driven post even as they also related to a community. One person posted “not that anyone at our school cares, but UChicago volleyball team kicked butt and didn’t bother to take names at the UAA round robin this weekend.” This post was particularly interesting in that it garnered a large amount of comments on top of the likes that it attracted. A number of those comments were along the lines of “I care!” The personalization of the post (“my network does not care about an important thing to me”) prompted some users to more strongly indicate their caring beyond a simple like.

Even more interesting, after it received a number of likes the person posted the comment: “people are now liking this to spite me.” This response indicates a specific relationship between the poster and those who liked the post. In the poster’s conception, they liked the post to spite her, not the volleyball team. The significance to them was not that the volleyball team was neglected, but rather that their friend who was engaged with the volleyball community felt that part of her life was neglected. The success of the otherwise neglected volleyball team was in this way personalized, and thus made relevant to people outside the poster’s volleyball network. By
publicly addressing her relationship to the volleyball network as an individual, she was able to garner support from networks outside of volleyball that otherwise supported her, even if they were actually apathetic on the topic of volleyball itself.

Also featured in the top liked posts was almost the entirety of posts relating to personal accomplishments. They were, primarily, major life milestones and ranged from getting married to business and academic accomplishments such as getting a job and completing the LSATs. Certain users, in addition to liking the post, would respond by saying an additional “congratulations!” or by making jokes, such as asking if the person would buy them drinks when they went out next. This sort of interaction seemed to be used to signify a deeper relationship between the commenter and the poster. The person who commented wanted to indicate that not only did they like the post along with the broader community, but that they also had a real life connection with the individual. The user posted the content for all of their networks to digest, but the commenters went beyond the simple pressing of a “like” button and much more publicly demonstrated a meaningful relationship with the poster. Thus perhaps if likes indicate a general sort of support, and the mass of likes indicate a strong community support, then a comment indicates an even deeper relationship that sometimes need to be expressed.

This sort of personalized commenting also often occurred on top-liked pictures and particularly pictures individuals took of themselves. As these pictures accrued a mass of likes, they also accrued comments. The most common comments were simply “beautiful!,” “you’re so pretty!”, or “hot!” In the case of males, people would also post jokes that referenced their looks or analogized the poster to a famous actor. This behavior was similar to how people responded to accomplishments through making jokes. Most of these comments, similar to the comments about accomplishments, seemed to indicate a stronger relationship between the commenter and the poster. As in the case of accomplishments these comments were often simple, and were even, in the case of jokes, expressed in only a few lines.

While many of these personalized posts received comments in addition to likes, posts that lacked personalization, even when those that received a large number of likes, received few comments. The only political post to be in the top forty liked posts consisted of only two words: “‘whatever’ – USA.” It was in the top ten liked posts overall, with 125 likes, but only received two comments. Thus, while it garnered a large amount of community support, indicating broad discontent with the government shutdown that had occurred at the time of the post, it failed to spur any discussion about the shutdown itself. Consistent with the hypothesis that individuals need to post from their own frame of reference, because the post lacked an individualized lens, it failed to garner more engagement in the form of comments.

Posts about interesting day-to-day occurrences were able to prompt political and social discussion, however, since they would address these issues through an individualistic lens. In the right contexts, these posts even prompted social and political comments. One post took on a particular social tinge even as it relayed the individual’s personal experience:

I tutor an 8 year old girl in Beijing. After I’m done with her lesson her Mom invites me to eat with them. Her Mom makes every effort while I’m at their house to show how Western she is, with their iPads, using all the English she knows and telling me about where she’s been in America. Last time I ate with them she pulled out forks and insisted we all use them instead of chop sticks. However, not being used to forks she spilled food everywhere while eating and was super embarrassed at her mistake. Watching this makes me so sad. She is so ready to embrace everything Western while I’m around, I just want to scream how special Chinese culture is.

This post consists of social commentary about Western cultural hegemony, but is presented in the context of an observation that the individual had while going about her day. The event was not exceptional, yet still profound. The post not only received an incredibly large number of likes (134) but also prompted a 15-comment discussion.
where individuals related similar experiences in multi-paragraph posts. Thus, by addressing the political through a personalized lens, the poster was able to engage people around the social topic that was also embedded in their post.

**VI. CONCLUSION**

While it is tempting to say that Facebook “causes” narcissistic behavior, I urge the reader to instead view Facebook as a pool of sociological data that we could use to study modern networked society, and a lens through which we can garner some sense of how social life currently operates. *The Culture of Narcissism* was written well before Facebook ever existed but considered a similar context - a modern society characterized by weakened ties - and analyzed the formation of similar narcissistic trends. These trends are present in much of human interaction, and clearly persist today. The primary finding of this paper is the isolation of a particular social mechanism that prompted narcissistic behavior as a result of a change in social structure. This mechanism is the call and response of the individual and his or her network described in the quantitative results section.

This mechanism is a cycle of positive feedback through which narcissistic behavior is encouraged. When a user’s network responds to the narcissistic sentiments expressed by him or her, it may encourage that person to be more narcissistic. Individuals post narcissistic content, and they receive positive responses. Individuals then post more narcissistic content as they have received a social reward for this content. Part of the pathological narcissistic state is the constant search for social adoration. As others see this social reward, they too could begin to post narcissistic content, and it becomes a more strongly engrained social convention. Thus, we can begin to see how the mechanism of narcissistic interaction is a *self-perpetuating* social state.

Yet, the conception of narcissism resulting from a modern mechanism seems difficult to reconcile with Blumenthal’s understanding of localized community as gossip-prone. If individuals have always received some sort of recognition for their actions, then this sort of narcissistic cycle would always occur. Lasch could not argue that we are uniquely narcissistic. However, it is important to recognize that gossip is not always in response to the actions that individuals wanted others to talk about. In fact, in Miller’s account, Facebook is a place where one could more easily mediate social interactions and gain reprieve from the overbearing social existence of the small town. This distance from social inspection would be even larger in a social life, such as an urban or broadly geographic and networked one, that is even less close-knit than the small town.

Perhaps this ability for individuals to mediate their small-town social interactions on Facebook has less to do with traits unique to Facebook as a platform, but rather results from the fact that Facebook makes local communities take on a more networked social structure. Much of modern sociological literature talks about how we have moved from being a community-based society to a networked society. In *Networked*, Lee Rainie and Barry Wellman argue that we have become “increasingly networked as individuals, rather than embedded in groups. In the world of networked individuals, it is the person who is the focus: not the family, not the work unit, not the neighborhood, and not the social group” (2014: 330). Social networks like Facebook could also bring this sort of networked individualism to otherwise geographically proximate, tight-knit communities like Santa Ana. Social networking sites shift the very mode of social interaction, and give individuals the ability to mediate their social interactions on their own terms.

Based on the mechanism observed here, we can develop a broader theory of how modern social life initially came to be so narcissistic. An increasingly networked society gave individuals the space to take back control over their own self-image. This control enabled narcissistic behavior that was before oppressed by the extreme gossip of the small town. At the same time, the social benefits that one derives from information about individuals with whom one is associated, such as the sense of closeness and the ability to perform social comparison, persist past the social structure of the small town. These social benefits make it still important to learn more about others and thus drive individuals to seek information about each other. Over time, individuals embedded in...
contemporary networked social structures have found themselves with an entire network of people seemingly interested in their behavior, and a great amount of control over how that behavior appears. Consequently, individuals attempt to reap the social reward of interaction, in this case, through the attempt to garner likes in the form of narcissistic content.

Narcissism plays the same social role as gossip plays in the small town. It gives individuals pertinent information about those with whom they associate. Rather than sharing information about individuals in the community (gossip), individuals now present information about themselves (narcissism). This new mechanism for gathering information about others ultimately leads to a change in psychological state represented by an excess of narcissistic behavior.

In the end, just as Lasch and many other social scientists have suggested, the social world in which we find ourselves affects the ways in which we act and our psychological state. The interplay between social structure, human behavior, and the human psyche continues to develop in exciting new ways as social structures evolve over time. The emergence of abundant new social data means that the social scientist can parse out new mechanisms that exist in this interplay, and continue to attempt to answer the century-old question of how different social forms structure the psyches and actions of the individuals who make them up.

**VII. BIBLIOGRAPHY**


The Trustful Renter: How Relations of Dependency Nurture Trust in Singapore

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Sociology AB '14

Generalized interpersonal trust plays an important role in collective efficacy and democratization. Previous theoretical and empirical research finds that socio-economic factors are important predictors of an individual’s trustfulness, but these studies are conducted in a uniquely Western context. Applying multiple logistic regression analysis to data on Singapore taken from the 2004 AsiaBarometer Survey, I find that renters and frequent travelers are more trusting than homeowners and infrequent travelers respectively, and that these variables are better predictors of an individual’s trustfulness than classic measures of socio-economic status. Taking into account these empirical findings, I develop a theoretical model that explores how dependency may in fact foster trust, and that highlights the need for more comparative studies.

INTRODUCTION

Trust, which is crucial to cooperation, is the cornerstone of community life. Yet, despite its relevance to both personal and societal well-being, the origins of trust are little understood. Academics broadly agree that having a higher socio-economic status is associated with being a more trustful individual. However, the exact mechanism by which income works to create trust or distrust remains the subject of some debate. Moreover, the almost exclusive focus of extant research on the West casts doubt on the extent to which these theories can be generalized. Using data from the 2004 AsiaBarometer Survey (ABS), I find that in Singapore, renters and frequent travelers are more trusting of others than homeowners or infrequent travelers. Although both factors correlate with income, the predictive power of homeownership status on frequency of travel abroad on generalized interpersonal trust in Singapore eclipses that of socio-economic factors, suggesting that other variables may be at play. These data suggest that, at least in Singapore, the experience of having been dependent on others—which can occur when individuals rent or travel—plays a crucial role in creating a history of experiences that encourages an individual to trust or distrust others.

The remainder of the paper proceeds as follows. I briefly review of the literature on interpersonal trust. I then explain why Singapore is an interesting case to use in the study of trust. The data and methods section which follows describes the AsiaBarometer survey and provides an overview of the variables of interest, the metrics used, and the statistical methods employed in the analysis. I then present my empirical findings, and conclude with a discussion of their implications and possible directions for future research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Existing literature on trust identifies two kinds of interpersonal trust—particularized trust and generalized trust. In this review I describe the different types of trust and explain why generalized interpersonal trust is of particular interest. After discussing the theorized benefits of generalized trust, I review different theoretical accounts of the origins of trust. Given the shortcomings of these theories, I introduce my empirical analysis as means to further the literature by exploring specific income-related mechanisms of trust-formation.
GENERALIZED INTERPERSONAL TRUST AND ITS VIRTUES

Trust refers to “the expectation that others will contribute to the well-being of a person or a group, or at least will refrain from harmful actions” (Freitag and Traunmiller, 2009: 782-83), in cases in which there is uncertainty as to how the person will act (Yamagishi, 1998). Theorists generally distinguish between particularized trust, or the trust between people who interact regularly, and generalized trust, which refers to the trustee’s trust in those who he encounters, including strangers, or people with whom he is not familiar. Both types of trust are recognized as being theoretically and empirically distinct from each other (Uslaner, 2002; Freitag and Traunmiller, 2009; Ikeda, 2012).

However, Hardin (2006) highlights the fact that in relations with people familiar to us, the predictability of the other party’s behavior that is acquired over the course of the relationship diminishes the need for trust. This predictability can easily be confused with particularized trust. As trust is most meaningfully applied in cases in which there is uncertainty as to how the other party will act (Yamagishi, 1998), to avoid ambiguity, this paper will focus on generalized interpersonal trust.

The existing literature on collective action and social capital has extensively theorized the many benefits accruing to a society rich in generalized trust. This interest arises chiefly because generalized trust—the willingness to trust other members of society, regardless of whether or not one is directly beholden to them—is crucial to surmounting the problem of collective efficacy. For example, the threat of the free rider explains the difficulty that large groups face in providing public goods, since no individual finds it worthwhile to assume the costs of organizing and producing the good, when any other member can benefit without contributing (Olson, 1956). Similarly, cooperation is needed to manage common pool resources, such as forests and fisheries (Ostrom, 1990). Therefore, the willingness of individuals to cooperate to the benefit of all often rests on a trust in others, since individuals must assume that other members will also pay their dues rather than taking advantage of the efforts of contributing members (Dietz et al., 2003).

As such, the development of interpersonal trust has been linked to the development of strong institutions and mature democracy in society, which generally comprises groups with differing interests but a shared fate. Democracy, which demands the active participation of each citizen, is seen as a key means of peacefully and respectfully resolving the “coordination dilemmas” that such societies face (Weingast, 1997). By reducing the costs of communication and coordination, trust facilitates the cooperation necessary to secure collective action (Putnam, 1995). Specifically, it enables people to consider others as friends and allies, rather than strangers and competitors, and hence allows them to move beyond considering their selfish, individual needs, to considering the general good of the community—a necessary step in a working democracy (Newton, 2001).

The benefits of trust are not limited to the societal level; the advantages of living in a trustful society can accrue to individuals as well. Interpersonal trust that inheres within a society can serve individual ends and be used as a means of acquiring private goods, as in the case of trade relations (Fukuyama, 2001). Trustful individuals may be at a particular advantage in such situations, as they may be more inclined to take risks that can lead to greater personal gain (or personal loss) than would otherwise be unachievable (Cook et al., 2009). Thus, not only does the expectation of trustworthiness smooth the negotiation process and its outcomes, but it also may open up more and richer opportunities to individuals.

THEORIES OF THE ORIGINS OF TRUST

Given the benefits of interpersonal trust that accrue to both societies and individuals, it is surprising how little understood its origins are. Here, I outline three different—if not incompatible—accounts of the origins of generalized trust: first, the psychological view; second, the argument that particularized trust generalizes; third, the socio-psychological account.
The psychological view posits that the individual’s personal predisposition determines how trustworthy he sees others as being (Freitag and Traunmuller, 2009). Specifically, Uslaner (2003) describes the trustful individual as being predisposed to have “a sense of optimism and control,” which is driven by four factors: trust that the future will be better than the past, a belief that we have the agency to affect this change, a positive sense about one’s well-being, and a supportive community. However, beyond pointing a finger in the direction of parenting, these theories fundamentally provide little explanation of how these predispositions are developed in the first place.

This question may be partially answered by the claim that particularized trust scales to a more generalized trust in a two-step process: first, particularized trust must be formed; subsequently, this particularized trust is generalized to other unfamiliar members of society. This account has its roots in exchange theory, which emphasizes the norms of reciprocity that exist between individuals. Trust arises in the gap between the moment when debt is incurred and its repayment, since reciprocity is not immediate and obligations must therefore endure over time (Uehara, 1999). This set of repeated interactions with dependable outcomes encourages the build-up of trust in specific others, as people collect empirical experiences of trustworthiness that shape their future attitudes (Coleman, 1990).

Many theorists have further extended this theory, arguing that the generalization of past empirical experiences occurs not only with respect to future interactions with a specific individual, but also with respect to those with strangers. In other words, a history of particularized trust that is not betrayed may engender generalized trust. Drawing on contact theory, Fukuyama (2000) argues that the radius of interaction, which is defined by the reach of the individual’s social circle, affects generalized expectations of others. Specifically, the larger the radius of the individual’s social circle, which he associates with greater heterogeneity, the more likely the individual is to generalize his expectations of those within his social circle to the people he encounters at large. In his theory on social capital, Putnam (1993) borrows the same concept to argue for the importance of associational life in achieving civic outcomes. However, the evidence on this subject is divided: Uslaner (2002) argues that the effects of generalized trust are less pronounced than particularized trust, and hence that it has distinct origins; in contrast, research focusing on Germany (Freitag and Traunmuller, 2009) as well as China and Southeast Asia (Ikeda, 2012) finds evidence to support the claim that particularized trust scales up to generalized trust.

Finally, socio-psychological theories that focus on a combination of social circumstances and personal psychology offer a more comprehensive account of the origins of generalized trust. Such theories take factors such as class background into account, while still allowing for empirical experiences to shape the psychology of the individual. They permit the individual’s social background to structure the radius of his social circle, and hence the nature of the interactions which occur, thus influencing his character development. Some of the most important social factors in influencing trustfulness are equality, perceptions of political corruption, education and race (Uslaner, 2003). For example, education is arguably the means by which individuals are exposed to others who are unlike themselves, and hence acquire experiences that encourage them to be trustful of the general other. Similarly, in America, race is almost uniformly found to be an important predictor of trust, with African Americans being significantly less trustful than white Americans (Uslaner, 2012).

Nonetheless, the effect of other social factors on an individual’s trustfulness has been the subject of some debate: in particular, academics disagree over the role of income in structuring an individual’s history of interactions with others. Uslaner (2002) finds that income has no effect on trustfulness. In contrast, Patterson (1999) and Putnam (2000) suggest that distrust tends to reside in those pockets of the population who lack education or money. In what I will call the resource-based explanation of income’s effect on trust, they argue that those who are better-off can better afford to take the risk of trusting others than those who are poor, and hence are more likely to be trustful of others. This would suggest that individuals who are more independent, or have less need to rely on others (such as those who are have high incomes), will trust other more, while more dependent lower-income individuals should shy from trusting outside of familiar relationships.
Besides the lack of consensus regarding the socio-economic origins of interpersonal trust, another major shortcoming extant empirical research is its almost exclusive focus on the West, which has more recently been extended to include the post-Cold War democracies. There is a severe lack of data and empirical research on the Asian world (Inoguchi, 2013), despite the fact that Asia is the world’s most populous continent, forming 60.31% of the world’s population. This paucity of research is largely due to the fact that data from the Western Hemisphere are much more available. The few studies that do focus on Asia tend to look at the larger and more developed nations of Japan, Korea and China, whose histories and cultures are distinct from those of other regions in Asia, such as South Asia and Southeast Asia. This gap in knowledge is likely to be significant: given that even those within the Western sphere do not necessarily have homogeneous behavior (Uslaner, 2003; Inoguchi, 2013), it seems worth investigating the relevance of these theories in an Asian contest. The shortage of data and empirical research on the Asian world means that many of the established theories may be limited in their application.

In light of this discussion, the aim of this project is twofold. First, it seeks to contribute to our empirical understanding of the less-studied countries in Asia. Second, it aims to contribute to the theoretical debate around the origins of trust. To these ends, I test some of the theories surrounding the origins of trust using data from Singapore. Specifically, I examine the means by which income is related to trustfulness by controlling for income and education while introducing variables representing mechanisms through which dependency could potentially operate—namely, the experience of renting or traveling. By asking how the experience of being a renter or frequent traveler is associated with trustfulness, my models will test whether there is empirical support for the resource-based mechanism suggested by Patterson (1999) and Putnam (2000), or the more experiential mechanism favored by other socio-psychological theorists.

DATA AND METHODS

My research uses data from the 2004 AsiaBarometer Survey (ABS), with an exclusive focus on Singapore. The first part of this section will explain my choice of Singapore as a case, and my use of the 2004 ABS respectively. In subsequent sections, I will examine the variables of interest and the metrics used, before finally detailing the statistical methods which will be employed in the analysis.

SINGAPORE AND THE ASIABAROMETER SURVEY (ABS)

Singapore, a recently-independent Southeast Asian semi-democracy, provides a good counterpoint to the overwhelming academic focus on the West and may hence contribute to comparative research. Culturally, Singapore prides itself as a multiracial society with four main ethnicites: Chinese (74.3%), Malay (13.3%), Indian (9.1%), and others (3.3%) (Department of Statistics Singapore, 2014). While its city-state nature and sustained economic success distinguish it from the surrounding countries, it is in many ways typical of the successful urban financial centers that many large cities are today. However, unlike the West, it shares a colonial past and semi-democratic political regime that is more similar to the other authoritarian states or young democracies in the region.

Singapore is characterized by a reliable system of data collection but also a lack of publicly available information. Although Singapore has the infrastructure to support reliable data collection present in society, existing surveys are almost exclusively initiated by the government, and hence tend to be topically motivated. Data in its raw form is rarely made public, and where it is available tends to be limited in its scope. The 2004 ABS is not only the most recent publicly-available survey conducted on a large sample, but it is also part of the “largest ever, comparative survey in Asia, covering East, Southeast, South, and Central Asia” (Inoguchi, 2013: 7). Moreover, it is independently run by non-governmental organization and motivated by the research interests of academics, thus avoiding certain biases. It focuses on achieving a deep, people-centric understanding of ordinary life. However, as data are not longitudinal, we are limited in our ability to track change over time.
In the following analysis, all values that were coded as “don’t know” were treated as missing, since no surmises could be made as to their nature, and there was no reason to suspect that they were distributed in a non-random fashion across the population. As different respondents have missing data for different questions that were of interest to this study, the effective sample size n=627 (reduced from 800), which is the number of respondents who provided a valid answer to all the variables of interest.

OUTCOME AND INDEPENDENT VARIABLES

The outcome variable of interest is generalized trust, which was assessed using the question, “Generally, do you think people can be trusted or do you think that you can’t be too careful in dealing with people (that it pays to be wary of people)?” The possible responses to this question, as well as the coding of the outcome variable and the frequency of each response, are reported in Table 1. On average, the data suggest that Singaporeans are more often cautious than trustful of others.

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</tbody>
</table>

As an instrument, the question assessing the individual’s level of generalized trustfulness is effective in that it deals directly with outcome of interest. The terms are unlikely to be misinterpreted by respondents. However, it is worth noting that academics have leveled several criticisms at this question. First, the lack of any contextualization may make it difficult for a respondent to give a ‘true’ answer (Hardin, 2006). Moreover, the question poses a dichotomy not between trust and distrust, but between trust and caution, although being both trusting and cautious are not necessarily mutually exclusive (Miller & Mitamura, 2003). Finally, previous research has noted that trust levels tend to be overstated in countries where there is a lack of freedom (Inoguchi, 2009); as Singapore is only a semi-democracy, the full weight of the criticism does not come to bear on the case, but the results should be treated with some caution. It is clear, then, that this instrument lacks precision, and may be biased. While attention should certainly be devoted to fine-tuning this instrument, it is worth noting that this question is asked in many of the large social surveys, making any problems caused by the phrasing of this instrument endemic to the industry, but also permitting results across different studies to be comparable.

The two independent variables in this study are the respondent’s residence ownership status, and the frequency with which he traveled abroad. The former was assessed by the question, “Which category does your current residence fall into?” The latter asked the respondents if the following statement applied: “I have traveled abroad at least three times in the past three years, on holiday or for business purposes.” The possible responses, as well as the coding of these independent variables and the frequency of each response, are reported in Table 2.

The measure of the frequency with which one travels abroad is a dummy variable that merely indicates whether or not the statement applies to the respondent. Approximately half of the sample (56.1%) travels frequently, where ‘frequently’ is defined by having gone abroad at least 3 times in the last three years.

The measure of homeownership status is an ordinal variable, in which the categories are arranged according to the amount of resource needed to sustain a particular living arrangement: the lowest-scoring statuses involve living with others as a dependent or renter, while the highest-scoring arrangements consist of owning expensive property. Home-owners (n=559) outnumber renters by quite a large margin (n=68); this is not surprising as
Singapore’s government is very active in encouraging home ownership, heavily subsidizing the cost of public housing.

Table 2
Coding and frequencies of the independent variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency of travel abroad</th>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Freq.</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Travels abroad frequently</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>352</td>
<td>56.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does not travel abroad frequently</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>275</td>
<td>43.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type of residence</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (e.g. room in relative’s home)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rented terraced house</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>8.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rented detached house</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Owner-occupied terraced house</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>525</td>
<td>83.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Owner-occupied detached house</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>5.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The two independent variables were chosen for two reasons. First, both have a clear association with income: it is reasonable to expect that homeowners and frequent travelers will be better-off than renters and infrequent travelers. Second, both these variables are associated with another experiential trait: dependency. Travelers to foreign lands often make themselves (at least partially) dependent on locals; similarly, renters are dependent to some degree on the benevolence of their landlord. Moreover, the direction of the correlation between these two variables – income and exposure to situations of dependency – varies. On the one hand, people who are more likely to travel are also more likely to have higher income and more likely to have more exposure to situations of dependency. On the other hand, people who are more likely to own a home are also more likely to have higher income, but are less likely to have been exposure to situations of dependency. As the two variables homeownership status and frequency of travel share the same relationship to income, but a different relationship to dependency, a study of both these variables will hopefully enable us to parse between the separate mechanisms by which income may affect trustfulness, as posited by the resource-based approach, and a more general social-psychological approach.

CONTROL VARIABLES

Control variables can be divided into three categories: controls for demographic variables, controls for socio-economic factors, and controls for friendship quality. All of the variables listed here were selected based on considerations of their theoretical import in other empirical studies. Important demographic controls include age and gender (Uslaner, 2002). The respondents are divided fairly evenly by gender, with 45.3% (284 respondents) being female, and the remaining 54.7% (343) being male. The minimum age of a respondent is 20 years old, and the maximum age is 59. The median age is 39 years, with an interquartile range between 31 and 47 years, suggesting a relatively even distribution.

Education and income are the two socio-economic controls. The variable assessing the maximum level of education attained is an ordinal variable, assessed by the following question: “What is the highest level of education you have completed?” The possible responses to, as well as the coding of, the education variable, and the frequency of each response, are reported in Table 3. Responses seem fairly evenly distributed across levels of schooling.

---

1 Public housing is sold to Singaporeans on a 99-year lease, after which the property will revert to government ownership.
The variable assessing household income was an ordinal variable. The question asked, “What was the total gross annual income of your household last year?” Answers were divided into 12 possible categories, where each category was an income bracket that successively increased by S$1000; the possible level of income ranged from “no income” (coded as 0) to “over S$10,001” (coded as 11). The summary statistics, given in terms of the income bracket in which they lie, are reported in Table 4. The mean income lay in the S$4000-5000 bracket. Although these answers lack precision, it is likely that the ordinal nature of the question increased the response rate to what is typically a sensitive question.

Finally, we include a last variable of theoretical import—satisfaction with one’s friendships—to control for the support provided by one’s own social circle, since particularized trust may scale to generalized trust. This question asked the respondent to rank “how satisfied or dissatisfied you are with the following aspects of your life” on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being “very dissatisfied” with 5 being “very satisfied”. Respondents overwhelmingly professed satisfaction with their friendships, with only 60 respondents (9.6%) giving a score of 3 (“Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied”) or less.

METHOD

I first conduct a preliminary analysis to determine the bivariate odds ratios, correlating the independent variable of interest with the outcome variable, trust. Subsequently, I perform multiple logistic regression, controlling for possible confounders, to determine if an effect remains. Logistic regression was used in the analysis due to the binary nature of the dummy variable assessing generalized trust, the response variable, and the ordinal nature of all other variables except for age. Under these circumstances, the logistic model is a more appropriate model to use than linear regression.

ANALYSIS

Moving from left to right, Table 5 presents the results of the bivariate and multivariate logistic regressions of the independent and control variables on the outcome variable, generalized trust. For simplicity of interpretation, the coefficients have been presented in terms of their odds and odds ratios. Constant terms presented in the table above are the baseline odds of trusting others, or the relative likelihood of professing generalized trust in others over the likelihood of not professing such trust. All other terms given in the table are odds ratios, which
indicate the adjustment to the baseline odds resulting from a change in the level of the independent or control variables.

**BIVARIATE ANALYSIS OF CONTROL VARIABLES**

The bivariate logistic regressions, given in the first column of Table 5, can be used to perform a preliminary assessment of the direction of the relationship between a given independent or control variable, and the probability of an individual having generalized trust in others. Looking at the demographic variables of age and gender, we see that the odds ratio for age is near 1, indicating that being older does not affect the odds of being trustful of others. In contrast, the odds ratio for gender is 0.760, which would seem to indicate that males are 24% less likely to profess generalized trust than females. However, neither the odds ratios associated with being male nor those associated with being older are statistically significant; thus, contrary to what Uslaner (2002) suggests, the data do not provide evidence for an effect of age or gender on being trustful.

As the socio-psychological theorists predicted, variables related to socio-economic status appear to be related to trust: under the bivariate analysis, both education and income have a significant relationship with an individual’s trustfulness (p<0.05). For example, the bivariate odds ratio of trusting others associated with education is 1.131, indicating that the odds of an individual trusting others increase by 13.1% for every increase in education level. The bivariate odds of a S$1000 increase in income can be similarly interpreted as indicating a 7.8% increase in the odds of an individual expressing generalized trust. Thus, at the bivariate level, while the data suggest that Uslaner (2002) may be incorrect in claiming that income has no relationship with an individual’s trustfulness, they do support his basic hypothesis that education may have a larger and more important relationship with trust than income.

These data also suggest that the relationship between generalized trust and the respondent’s level of satisfaction with his friendships, which controls for the trustworthiness of their experiences in their everyday interactions,
is not only sizeable, but also significant, with a bivariate odds of 1.353 (p<0.05). This indicates that the more satisfied an individual is with his/her friendships, the more he is likely to trust others rather than be cautious of others. Each increase in level of satisfaction (on a 5-point scale) is associated with a 35.3% increase in the odds of stating that “most people can be trusted.” Since it is natural to assume that trust is an important metric when determining one’s level of satisfaction with one’s friendships, the data provide some support for the thesis that particularized trust may scale to generalized trust. It suggests that an individual’s interactions with people familiar to him may be related to his expectations of unfamiliar others, thus lending credence to Putnam’s (1995) and Uehara’s (1999) argument, though it cannot dismiss the possibility of confounding variables that are prior to both kinds of trust.

BIVARIATE ANALYSIS OF INDEPENDENT VARIABLES

Our study has two independent variables of interest: the respondent’s residence type, and the frequency with which he travels. Here, we seek to explore the mechanism by which income may affect trust—if it does indeed affect trust at all. Thus, before analyzing the bivariate relationship of the independent variables with generalized trustfulness, we should consider their relationship with income, as these variables are being used to more closely examine the means by which income might affect trustfulness. Table 6 details the breakdown of income by homeownership status and frequency of travel abroad.

| Table 6 |
|---|---|
| Breakdown of income by the independent variables of homeownership status and frequency of travel abroad |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of residence</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Mean score (income)</th>
<th>Income bracket</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Other (e.g. room in relative’s home)</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3.15</td>
<td>S$2000-3000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rented terraced house</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>3.62</td>
<td>S$3000-4000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rented detached house</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>S$4000-5000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Owner-occupied terraced house</td>
<td>525</td>
<td>3.91</td>
<td>S$3000-4000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Owner-occupied detached house</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>S$6000-7000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency of travel abroad</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Mean score (income)</th>
<th>Income bracket</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Travels abroad frequently</td>
<td>275</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>S$4000-5000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does not travel abroad frequently</td>
<td>352</td>
<td>3.30</td>
<td>S$2000-3000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The data suggest that, in general, both renters and infrequent travelers are likely to have lower incomes than homeowners or frequent travelers respectively, with the exception of renters of detached houses (n=2). The positive correlation of income and frequency of travel is particularly, and the explanation is simple: at 60.2%, leisure travel comprises the bulk of travel in Singapore, with visiting friends/relatives and work-related travel accounting for an additional 19.5% and 15.9% respectively (Department of Statistics Singapore, 2005). Naturally, traveling for leisure requires individuals to have the excess income to spend on leisure items, and traveling for work is generally associated with higher-income jobs.

However, the relationship between homeownership and higher incomes, although present, is not as strong, and requires more explanation. As Singapore is land-scarce, property prices in both the rental and purchase markets are high. As a result, it is almost always more cost-efficient to own rather than rent a home, and those who can afford to own their own house will find it clearly in their interests to do so. There are only two occasions for which cost-based incentives to rent exist: if the individual has plans to emigrate, or if the individual is waiting for a (purchased) lodging to be renovated or built. However, cognizant of the costliness of property in
Singapore, the government has heavily subsidized public housing, targeting the less well-off in Singapore. Thus, while renters in Singapore are broadly associated with having a lower income, the income gap between richer renters and poorer homeowners may not be as sizeable as one might expect.

Theory holds that having a higher socio-economic status should be positively correlated with being more trusting. According to the resource-based explanation of the relationship between income and trust, we should also expect homeowners and travelers to be more trusting. The bivariate odds ratios associated with homeownership and travel (Table 5) support this hypothesis, and can be interpreted in the following manner. Without controlling for any of the other variables, a Singaporean who frequently travels abroad has odds of trusting others that are a sizeable 1.618 (p<0.01) times those of a Singaporean who travels infrequently. In other words, ceteris paribus, those who travel frequently are 61.8% more likely to trust others than to be cautious of them.

However, the expected relationship between homeownership status and trustfulness does not hold. Instead, as one becomes more independent of others—as indicated by the transition from being a renter to the homeownership of progressively more expensive homes—the odds of trusting others in fact decrease by an estimated 18.4%. While the evidence in support of this estimate is not significant at the traditional 5% significance level, the p=0.061 of the t-test provides moderate evidence in support of this conclusion. Thus, a bivariate analysis of both these variables provides conflicting evidence for and against the resource-based explanation of the relationship between income and trust.

**MULTIVARIATE ANALYSIS**

The inconsistency in the predicted relationship of the two independent variables with trustfulness, based on existing theories around income, can be further investigated by an analysis of the multivariate regressions. Model I (presented in Table 5) contains all the controls: the controls for demographic variables (age and gender), socio-economic variables (income and education), and the quality of particularized interactions (satisfaction with one’s friendship). We note that the variables that directly assess socio-economic status lose their significance, while the role of the individual’s satisfaction with his friendships remains significant, and demographic variables remain negligible. This suggests that satisfaction with friendships is important in predicting the probability of generalized trust, providing support for the theory that links particularized trust to generalized trust. However, no claims can be made about causal direction. While an individual’s set of experiences could lead him to generalize and trust others more, an individual’s predisposition to trust others could equally result in him both reporting high levels of satisfaction with his friendships, and professing to have a generalized trust in others.

I add controls to the binary logistic regression model for each of the independent variables (Models II and III), and finally to a model containing both independent variables (Model IV). In all three cases, none of the odds ratios for the control variables concerning demographic information or socio-economic status are significantly different from perfectly even odds (odds of 1). This implies that, conditional on satisfaction with friendship, people who are older, richer, or more educated are no more likely to be trusting than those who are younger, poorer, or less educated.

In contrast, in all the models, the odds ratios for both independent variables and the variable controlling for the quality of friendship remain significantly different from 1. In the full model (Model IV), the odds ratio of 0.767 for the variable “residence” indicates that, holding all other variables constant, the odds of a Singaporean being trustful decrease by 23.3% as individuals acquire increasingly capital-intensive residences, or greater independence. Similarly, the odds ratio of 1.449 in the same model (Model IV) for the variable indicating frequency of travel abroad indicates that, holding all other variables constant, the odds of an individual being trustful increase by 44.9% if the person frequently travels. The reduction in the effect size of income and education in Model IV, as well as the loss of significance, suggests that the two variables residence and travel experience capture some information which is more predictive of the individual’s trustfulness than income or education, despite the fact that both variables are positively related to income. This stands contrary to the suggestions of some of the
socio-psychological theorists, particularly those who take a resource-based approach, and suggests the need to look at variables other than income in predicting trustfulness.

the former causal pathway in two ways. First, the psychological account of an ‘inherent predisposition’ fails to provide an explanation of how this predisposition was acquired in the first place. To the extent that we accept that an individual’s character evolves in tandem with his experience, we must be prepared to admit the formative role of situations of dependency as plausible, especially if they are recurring, and no other account is forthcoming. Secondly, we should also consider the fact that the decision to rent or own a house tends to be a resource-driven rather than affect-driven decision. Being largely governed by the exigencies of the individual’s situation, it is less likely to fall prey to the vagaries of affect and any ‘predisposition’. As such, the experience of renting seems more likely to shape an outlook on the world, than an outlook on the world would be able to shape a decision to rent.

DISCUSSION

The results concerning the two independent variables—homeownership status and the frequency of travel abroad—are interesting for two reasons. First, once added to the model, they diminish the effect size of the socio-economic variables of education and income, and cause them to lose their significance. Second, it is puzzling that although both homeownership and frequent travel are associated with higher incomes, the fact of being a homeowner and frequent traveler does not influence the odds ratio in the same way. How is it that in the case of travel, socio-economic status increases trustfulness, as predicted, while in the case of homeownership, greater wealth in fact seems to decrease generalized interpersonal trust, while poorer people—those who live as dependents in a house owned by another—are more trustful? Thus, the data suggest that the relationship between income and trustfulness is more complicated than Patterson (1999) and Putnam (2000) would suggest in their resource-based account, at least in Singapore.

This apparent contradiction can be explained only by considering what both experiences have in common that are separate from an income effect. Firstly, as I suggested in the data section, both the experience of traveling abroad, and the act of renting, arguably place individuals in situations of recurring dependency. As a renter, the individual is obliged to depend on the landlord for his habitation. Similarly, the experience of traveling often brings one to unfamiliar environments, and places one in contact with strangers. This is particularly the case when traveling in countries whose language one is not fluent in: while 32.3% of Singaporeans speak English at home, and an additional 35.6% speak Mandarin at home (Department of Statistics Singapore, 2013), Malaysia, Thailand and Indonesia rank among the top 5 destinations of Singaporean leisure travelers (Department of Statistics Singapore, 2005). Secondly, in both cases, the outcomes of being dependent are rarely bad. Rental regulations in Singapore are quite tight, and most landlords are of a dependable character as a result. Similarly, most locals of the surrounding countries are fairly friendly to Singaporean tourists, if only because tourism forms a significant portion of their economies in many cases. Thus, I argue that the positive correlation between being a renter or foreign traveler and expressing a generalized trust in others may arise from the consistently positive outcomes derived from both these experiences of dependency. In doing so, I draw on the argument made by contact theorists, who suggest that having a heterogeneous social circle not only makes one’s expectations of others more generous and less prejudiced, but also results in these expectations being extended beyond one’s immediate circle of interaction more easily (Fukuyama, 2000). This view stands in opposition to Patterson (1999) and Putnam (2000), who argue that it is the security and independence provided by income that permit and encourage trust in others.

Specifically, I argue that the individual’s trustfulness is shaped by extent to which the individual’s financial well-being exposes the individual to situations in which he is dependent on others, but is not abused of his trust. I do not, however, entirely downplay the importance of socio-economic background. While the mechanisms put forth by Putnam (2000) and Patterson (1999) may have been shown to be incorrect, or at least be geographically
specific to certain regions of the world, it is nonetheless undeniable that socio-economic factors still structure the range of opportunities open to the individual. For example, socio-economic factors still structure the extent to which an individual is able to travel. Thus, my model of the relationship between dependency and trust still holds that socio-economic circumstances may matter—they just may not matter in quite the manner we might expect, and not in as monotonic a fashion as we might predict.

Nonetheless, the question of causal direction remains. Do the positive returns to the situation of dependency lead to trust, as I argue, or is there some inherent ‘trusting predisposition’ that is prior to both professing generalized trust and permitting oneself to enter into situations of dependency? No correlational analysis can conclusively prove causality. However, I believe that the evidence presented in this study is indicative of the former causal pathway in two ways. First, the psychological account of an ‘inherent predisposition’ fails to provide an explanation of how this predisposition was acquired in the first place. To the extent that we accept that an individual’s character evolves in tandem with his experience, we must be prepared to admit the formative role of situations of dependency as plausible, especially if they are recurring, and no other account is forthcoming. Secondly, we should also consider the fact that the decision to rent or own a house tends to be a resource-driven rather than affect-driven decision. Being largely governed by the exigencies of the individual’s situation, it is less likely to fall prey to the vagaries of affect and any ‘predisposition’. As such, the experience of renting seems more likely to shape an outlook on the world, than an outlook on the world would be able to shape a decision to rent.

CONCLUSION

Although generalized trust is a valuable common good that encourages cooperation and is a means of overcoming the problems of collective action in large societies, there is little research and no consensus on its origins. This paper finds that in Singapore, renters and frequent travelers are more likely to profess a generalized trust in others than homeowners and infrequent travelers. Classic socio-economic variables such as education and income appear to take a back seat to this relationship. This study raises the possibility that, in Singapore, it is partaking in situations of dependency, rather than the possession of resources, that enables individuals to generalize trust. By placing the individual in situations of dependency in which he must rely on others, but generally suffers no ill, such situations open Singaporeans up to opportunities and lessons that they might not otherwise consider.

The results of this study complicate the relationship that socio-economic status was previously posited to have with trust. Specifically, as income is not a major direct determinant of an individual’s level of generalized intrapersonal trustfulness, the data contradict Putnam’s (2000) and Patterson’s (1999) resource-based account of the mechanism driving the relationship. They argued that higher levels of income lead individuals to be more independent of others, making them better able to afford the risks associated with trusting others, and hence more likely to trust a stranger. These data suggest that relationships of dependency in which the individual’s trust is not abused—as in the case of renting and frequent travel abroad—may actually foster trust. Its logic favors a more experientially-driven approach, in which past experiences are used as the empirical basis for generalization.

If we believe in the concomitant benefits of widespread generalized trust that accrue to the individual and society at large, then the means of generating such trust within society become increasingly important, particularly as societies get larger and more impersonal, and segregation and intergroup mistrust increase (Uslaner, 2002; Hardin, 2006). One implication of these findings is that raising socio-economic standards—a means of bettering prospects—may in itself be insufficient for the generation of a trust that inheres in society. Instead, it seems more important to stress interactions with others, and to create opportunities whereby individuals will have the occasion to interact with and depend on others. Governmental institutions are one of the means of enacting change throughout society and may have a role to play in generating such opportunities (Freitag & Traumuller,
2009). These opportunities can form the bedrock of experiences which can then be generalized to most of society.

The fact that renters in Singapore were found to be more trusting than homeowners, contrary to the expectations from theories originating in the West, should serve to underline the fact that no hasty conclusion regarding a singular origin of trust can be reached without an eye to cultural differences. In this vein, it would certainly be a mistake to reach any definitive conclusion based on a static study of a country as small as Singapore. Moreover, no one-country study can adequately account for the effects of national attributes such as culture, economic prospects at the national level, and government structure. Rather, future research should seek to continue this comparative project, focusing on achieving not just a breadth of cultures, but also depth within a culture via longitudinal studies, so as to render the effect of trends and exogenous shocks discernible. In this way, we can perhaps hope to achieve more comprehensive and universal theories of trust.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**


Empty Schoolyards: The Impact of Elementary School Closures on Chicago Communities

Abigail Drew Pershing
Sociology and Public Policy AB ’14

The board of the Chicago Public Schools closed 49 neighborhood elementary schools in the city for the 2013-2014 academic school year. There has been very little research on the effects of school closings, and the work that exists has primarily focused on the effects of closings on children; little to no work has investigated what happens to communities when they lose an institution as important as a school. In order to study the effects of school closings on communities, I conducted qualitative research, interviewing community stakeholders in four Chicago neighborhoods in which the local elementary school closed between 2002 and 2012. Relying on Simmel’s sociology of space, Granovetter’s theory of strong and weak ties, and Sampson’s theory of collective efficacy, I argue that because schools promote increased community interactions and formation of social bonds, and because schools act as symbols and central hubs of the community, closing neighborhood schools leads to significant short- and long-term problems on the community level. After exploring the outcomes of school closures, I end with a discussion of some possible policy changes that could help mitigate the negative consequences associated with school closures.

INTRODUCTION

Price Elementary, closed June 2011. Empty playground, locked front doors, chipped graffiti sprayed on the brick walls—“S.O.S.” for “Save Our School”—all this and more is captured in colorful pixels:

I walk around to the side of the building, gazing in on abandoned classrooms. A few desks and chairs here, an old globe there, a dusty American flag still hanging on a wall. This vacant building is a ghost of its former self. Suddenly, I see shadows move inside the building. Someone, maybe more than one someone, is inside this locked up structure. Recalling stories residents have told me of drug rings and prostitutes taking over abandoned
schools elsewhere in Chicago, I shiver, and take a few steps away from the windows. This school, once such a vibrant part of the community, is now a dark menace that looms large over the surrounding neighborhood against the backdrop of the Chicago sky.

Many other vacant school buildings like Price Elementary dot Chicago’s urban landscape. Since 2002, almost 150 elementary and high schools have closed. During the 2013-2014 school year alone, the Chicago Public School Board voted to shutter 49 elementary schools. When schools close, media images tend to focus on children forced to readjust to new faces and expectations, or on parent groups marching in protest. But what happens to the local community when a school closes? This study is an exploration of the less discussed, but no less important, aspect of this issue: the story of life in a community after school closures.

I use a qualitative interview methodology to test the hypothesis that because elementary schools serve a crucial role in developing community cohesion, neighborhoods will experience negative outcomes when their local elementary schools are closed. I argue that schools contribute to community formation through their capacities as both institutions and physical spaces, and that the interpersonal ties created as a result of these capacities are beneficial to a community. As an important corollary, I argue that when a school is closed, interpersonal ties are severed, collective efficacy is minimized, and abandoned schools begin to act as a negative space.

My paper is divided into five main sections. First, I examine the background relevant to school closures in greater detail, orienting the reader to the specific Chicago context and history. I then explore available literature that discusses both some of the concrete changes that occur when schools close, as well as literature that focuses on the theoretical foundations of community formation around specific spaces and the role of institutions in neighborhood cohesion. Next, I provide the reader with a detailed methodology section. I then present the results of my research, and analyze the outcomes of my work from a sociological perspective. Finally, I engage in a policy discussion, in which I propose how this information can best be used moving forward, and suggest potential policy changes that Chicago Public Schools and the City of Chicago should implement in the event of future closures.

I. BACKGROUND ON CHICAGO SCHOOLS

The Chicago Public Schools system is the third largest in the continental United States after those in the cities of New York and Los Angeles. During the 2012-2013 academic year, Chicago Public Schools (CPS) operated 681 public schools,1 serving over 404,000 students. 472 of these schools were elementary schools educating 236,452 students in grades 1-8. It takes nearly 41,500 employees (including teachers, principals, other building staff, and administrators) to keep this educational system up and running (CPS Stats and Facts, 2014).

All this comes with a hefty price tag. The operating budget for the 2012 fiscal year reached $5.11 billion (CPS FY12 Final Budget Book, 2012), and during the 2013 fiscal year CPS experienced a $1 billion budget shortfall (CPS August 28 2013 Press Release). CPS has struggled to find ways to manage these increasingly overwhelming costs. From fiscal year 2011 through fiscal year 2013, CPS cut $700 million in expenses (FY14 BPO). A substantial portion of these savings came from closing 47 elementary schools for the 2013-2014 academic school year and phasing out two more—the single largest rash of school closings in American history.

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1 This figure includes traditional neighborhood public, charter, magnet, classical, career academy, contract, military academy, selective enrollment, regional gifted center, small, and special education schools. On the elementary education level, CPS includes 344 neighborhood schools, 54 charter schools, 36 magnet schools, and 37 schools that are classified as another type.
HISTORY OF CHICAGO SCHOOL CLOSURES AND THE IMPACT OF THE RENAISSANCE 2010 PROGRAM

Large-scale school closings are not unprecedented in Chicago. CPS began aggressively closing underperforming schools beginning in 2002, under then-CEO Arne Duncan’s Renaissance 2010 Program (Ren10), with the avid support of Mayor Richard M. Daley. The goal of the program was “to turn around Chicago’s most troubled elementary and high schools by creating 100 new schools in neighborhoods across the city […] providing new educational options to underserved communities” (Mayor Daley, 24 June 2004).

Whether charter schools are successful is a subject ripe with contention and academic debate and is too broad to cover here. For the purposes of this paper, the implementation of the Ren10 Program is significant because, combined with a decline in Chicago’s population in recent years, it created too many schools for the number of children living in the city. As a result, CPS was faced with problems of under-enrollment and resource scarcities in public neighborhood schools, which now had to compete with charters for a fixed number of students and CPS resources. In response, CPS began closing neighborhood schools. Not including the most recent school closures, 104 public neighborhood schools have been closed since 2002 (Vevea and Lutton, 2013). These schools are mapped below:

BACKGROUND ON 2012-2013 CLOSINGS

This brings us to the most recent round of closures, in which 47 elementary schools were closed beginning in the 2013-2014 academic school year, and two more were voted to be phased out. Following historical precedent, CPS has claimed budgetary issues and underutilization as the reasons for these recent closings. According to CPS, “the District will save $43 million annually in operating spending for a total of $430 million over 10 years.
By avoiding needed capital spending on underutilized schools proposed for closure CPS will save $437 million over the next ten years” (CPS Fact Check on Closing Underutilized Schools, 2013).

With nearly 50 fewer buildings to heat in the winter, cool in the summer, and consistently maintain, CPS can anticipate major reductions in operating expenses. Another source of budget reductions arises from the decreased personnel costs associated with closing schools. Nearly 3,000 employees, including 1,100 teachers, were laid off during the closings (Harris, 2013). Although some were able to follow their students to receiving schools (nearby neighborhood schools that children attend when their original neighborhood school is closed), many were not offered new jobs.

CPS administrators also considered underutilization rates when deciding which schools to close. According to CPS, schools have the capacity to accommodate “511,000 children, but only 403,000 are enrolled” (CPS Fact Check on Closing Underutilized Schools, 2013). The need to save money and the underutilization of school spaces led to the closure or phase-out of 49 elementary schools for the 2013-2014 school year. These 49 schools are mapped below:
Closing schools was not a decision CPS took lightly. There were compelling reasons to close schools, but comprehension and consideration of the full spectrum effects of closing schools is crucial when making these decisions—and CPS did not have access to complete information.

II. WHAT WE (DON’T) KNOW ABOUT IMPACTS OF SCHOOL CLOSURES ON COMMUNITIES

Unfortunately, there is a glaring knowledge gap regarding the effects that school closings have on communities, making it nearly impossible to adequately gauge the full impacts of school closures. The little academic and policy research that exists has largely focused on the impact closings have had on students’ academic success. But these findings largely neglect to address another aspect of the issue: the effects on communities and neighborhoods when their local elementary schools close. Some publications that focus on school closures do lightly touch upon the impact of the closures on surrounding communities, but tend to have little or no concrete evidence to support their claims. For instance, a 2011 study published by the Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD) suggests “shuttering a school can... have widespread and lingering consequences for a neighbourhood, often falling disproportionately on poorer communities” (3), but fails to cite any sources supporting this generalization. A Pew Trust study (2013) also mentions negative neighborhood consequences, but again fails to provide support for these claims. In June 2014, the Collaboration for Equity and Justice in Education published a report that included a section focusing on the impact closing a school has on a neighborhood, yet even this was just two and a half pages in length—hardly a full study.

There are likely several reasons for this gap in the literature. First, the primary purpose of schools is to educate children, from which it follows that researchers would initially be interested in discovering the impact of closing schools on this main duty. Second, children’s success is consistently a political hot-button issue, making it potentially more likely that researchers will secure funding for projects related to children’s welfare and educational outcomes. Third, it is in many ways easier to study the impacts of school closures on children rather than on a community. Examining the impacts on children is a relatively well-defined problem: a child is either directly affected by school closings—they themselves change schools, or they are members of the student body at a receiving school—or they are not. Asking about the impact on the neighborhood or community is hazier, as there are no strictly defined limits either geographically or socially. Finding ways to measure the impact on the community is thus a difficult endeavor. Although there are likely other reasons that limited research exists surrounding the issue of the impact of school closures on communities, the three presented above demonstrate some of the barriers that have thus far prevented further studies.

III. CONCEPTUALIZING SCHOOL CLOSURES: A THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

Some clarification for the likely effects of school closures on their surrounding communities can be found by turning to more classical sociological theory. Specifically, in conceptualizing potential outcomes, three theories emerge as particularly relevant: Georg Simmel’s theory of the symbolic power of space (1908), Mark Granovetter’s theory of interpersonal ties (1973), and Sampson’s theory of collective efficacy (1997).

Using Simmel’s concept of the significance of space, I argue that physical school buildings are important in creating and maintaining a sense of community. Simmel defines his conception of space as “a pivot that maintains a system of elements at a particular distance, in a social interaction, in mutual dependence...The importance of a sociological relationship as pivot attaches to the fixed locality especially where the contact or assembly can occur only at a particular place for elements otherwise independent of one another” (559). Applying this logic to schools, these spaces matter because they bring disparate social groups together around children’s education,
and therefore function as “pivots” in the community. Simmel also acknowledges the importance of space in producing a communal shared memory:

For memory, the place, because it is perceptibly more graphic, usually develops a stronger associative power than the time, so that for memory, especially where it is a matter of a single and strongly emotional social interaction, the interaction tends to bind insolubly immediately with place, and thus, since this occurs reciprocally, the place thereafter remains the pivot around which memory then spins the individuals… (561)

Theoretically, schools should be important in their communities because of the memories individuals attach to the physical space of the school. Even those individuals who are not longer directly bound to the school institution (such as childless community members, or community members whose children no longer attend the school) are still tied to the school building because of a shared communal memory and understanding of the space, as are other community members who visit the school for various community functions, such as attending a free health clinic or going to vote. A shuttered school provides many fewer opportunities for the creation of new space-centered memories, and maintaining a collective memory therefore becomes increasingly difficult.

Granovetter’s work helps support my claim that schools are sociologically important as physical spaces because of the social ties they facilitate. Granovetter argues that people have both strong and weak ties to others around them. Strong ties are made with people one interacts with frequently and for extended periods of time (such as family or co-workers), and weak ties are established with people one sees more rarely or with whom one has more casual acquaintances. Granovetter’s thesis should apply in the case of the development of community cohesion given his belief in “the cohesive power of weak ties” (1360) and his idea that casual relationships give “some ‘sense of community’” (1373). Schools provide a physical location in which such ties are formed, bringing together people who might never have crossed paths. For instance, parents who would not otherwise have spoken may interact when picking up their children after school, creating weak ties that in turn give rise to a stronger sense of community. By increasing the number of weak ties within a group of people who live in a similar geographic location—as would occur given the contiguous geographic attendance boundaries of neighborhood schools—it is reasonable to hypothesize that this might in turn produce greater social cohesion in the neighborhood as a whole, not just around the school.

Finally, I apply Sampson’s theory of collective efficacy to argue for the importance of a school as a physical space and as an institution that fosters the development of social ties. Sampson defines collective efficacy as “social cohesion among neighbors combined with their willingness to intervene on behalf of the common good” (918). He sees this as the best way to improve neighborhood conditions, particularly to decrease crime and increase trust and support. In the case of schools, Sampson’s conception of “neighbors” can be construed more broadly as the parents, teachers, and administrators who make up the responsible adult strata of a school. Schools act as both institutions and physical spaces in which these various groups interact on a regular basis, thereby setting the stage for the emergence of collective efficacy. A school with a strong social fabric and support system would have a stabilizing effect on a neighborhood, and help improve overall neighborhood conditions. However, Sampson also notes that a “high rate of residential mobility” can hinder individuals’ ability to work together to form the social cohesion required for collective efficacy because it lessens the incentive for a person to become committed to a place or community. This understanding informs the second half of my theory, that neighborhoods will experience a decline when schools close. When this occurs, individuals are uprooted from the school community they previously belonged to and must re-build these ties at a new school. Until new ties can be established, this change of schools necessarily means at least a temporary lapse in collective efficacy, and consequently negative effects for communities.

To make informed decisions about future school closings and the appropriate course of action in communities that have already experienced a school closure, we need to understand the role schools play in communities,
and the effects of their closing on neighborhoods. The rest of this paper is dedicated to testing this hypothesis empirically in order to establish whether the theoretical sociological underpinnings apply under these circumstances. In so doing, I hope to deepen the current understanding of tie formation in communities, and the role of institutions and symbolic spaces in the formation of these ties.

IV. METHODOLOGY

To explore both the short-term and long-term consequences of closing neighborhood schools, I chose to study Chicago neighborhoods that experienced the closure of a local elementary school from 2002-2012. Although one of the main instigating factors for this study is the closure of nearly 50 elementary schools for the 2013-2014 school year, these closures are too recent for long-term results to have emerged, and consequently were not considered in this study. Schools closed before 2002 were also not considered because these schools were not part of the Ren10 Program, and because the study requires finding and speaking with residents who lived in the neighborhood both before and after the school closure. By limiting the study to the past 12 years, it is easier to find appropriate subjects to interview. Using these time parameters, this yields a population of 104 neighborhood schools that were closed between 2002 and 2012.

However, of these 104 schools, all but 12 were later converted into charter schools. This presents an issue, because CPS CEO Barbara Byrd-Bennett has promised to disallow the most recently closed schools to be converted into charters (Ahmed-Ullah, 2013). Again, given that one of the primary objectives of this study is to understand the likely effects on the 49 neighborhoods that recently experienced a school closure, I chose to limit my research to only those 12 neighborhoods with schools that were not eventually converted into charters. Information about these schools is presented in Table 1.

While quantitative measures (such as crime rates and real estate prices) are useful for presenting a particular angle on the question at hand, they alone are not enough to generate a holistic picture of the impacts of school closings on a community. In order to understand community members’ opinions and feelings regarding school closures and their perceptions of the effects school closings have on their communities, I chose to pursue a qualitative study. I elected to conduct research in the areas around four previously closed CPS neighborhood schools with characteristics that most closely matched the characteristics of the neighborhoods that recently experienced school closures. Matching criteria included median income, race composition, and percent of single-mother families in the neighborhood; all quantitative data was taken from the 2010 Census. For the purpose of this study, each “neighborhood” was defined as the census tract in which the closed school was located. If a school was located on the border of two census tracts, both tracts were used, and quantitative measures were averaged across the two. Using this definition, the matching standard across the 49 closed schools from 2014 were a median income of $30,126.61, 90.65% African American, and 26.84% single-mother families. The demographic results by neighborhood for the 12 potential matching schools are presented in Table 2.

Using these criteria, four elementary schools matched relatively well: Richard Wright Elementary (closed 2004), Crispus Attucks Elementary (building closed 2005), Guggenheim Elementary (closed 2011), and Price Elementary (closed 2011). Highlighted matching information is presented in Table 3.

I conducted a total of 25 interviews with individuals from these communities, representing a range of perspectives on the school closures. In each community, I conducted interviews with community “leaders” (heads of nonprofits, government officials, and religious figureheads) and with other community members. I found community leaders through both direct contact and snowball sampling, while community members were interviewed based on convenience sampling.

To interview community leaders, I compiled complete lists of community leaders for each neighborhood and emailed all of these individuals. I then followed up with a phone call. If the community leader agreed to an
Table 1 - Schools Closed between 2002-2012 Not Converted into Charters

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Closed School</th>
<th>Address</th>
<th>Neighborhood</th>
<th>Year Closed</th>
<th>Reason for Closure</th>
<th>General Status</th>
<th>Specific Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Zenos Colman Elementary School</td>
<td>4655 S Dearborn St Chicago, IL 60609</td>
<td>Grand Boulevard</td>
<td>2002-2003</td>
<td>Under-utilization</td>
<td>Transformed</td>
<td>Area 10 Cluster 4, Chief Area Office.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Arts of Living Alternative School</td>
<td>1855 N Sheffield Ave Chicago, IL 60614</td>
<td>Lincoln Park</td>
<td>2002-2003</td>
<td>Under-utilization</td>
<td>Transformed</td>
<td>Sold to Svigos Development Inc. for $4 million in late August 2013 for conversion into 24 apartments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simmye G. Anderson Community Academy</td>
<td>6315 S Claremont Ave Chicago, IL 60636</td>
<td>Chicago Lawn</td>
<td>2003-2004</td>
<td>Under-utilization</td>
<td>Demolished</td>
<td>Demolished, vacant lot for sale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richard Wright Elementary School</td>
<td>627 N Harding Ave Chicago, IL 60624</td>
<td>Humboldt Park</td>
<td>2003-2004</td>
<td>Facility issues</td>
<td>Demolished</td>
<td>Fire, demolished, vacant lot for sale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crispus Attucks Elementary School</td>
<td>3813 S. Dearborn Ave Chicago, IL 60609</td>
<td>Grand Boulevard</td>
<td>2005-2006</td>
<td>Moving</td>
<td>Vacant</td>
<td>Building remains vacant, for sale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>De La Cruz Middle School</td>
<td>2317 W 23rd Pl Chicago, IL 60608</td>
<td>Lower West Side</td>
<td>2007-2008</td>
<td>Under-utilization</td>
<td>Vacant</td>
<td>Vacant, for sale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Davis Developmental</td>
<td>9101 S Jeffrey Blvd Chicago, IL 60617</td>
<td>Calumet Heights</td>
<td>2008-2009</td>
<td>Under-utilization</td>
<td>Transformed</td>
<td>Replaced by Urban ComUniversity Center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Princeton Elementary</td>
<td>5125 S Princeton Ave Chicago, IL 60609</td>
<td>Fuller Park</td>
<td>2008-2009</td>
<td>Under-utilization</td>
<td>Transformed</td>
<td>Illinois Eye Institute Vision Program (serving CPS students)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bartholome de las Casas Occupational HS</td>
<td>8401 S Saginaw Ave Chicago, IL 60617</td>
<td>South Chicago</td>
<td>2009-2010</td>
<td>Cost and facilities issues</td>
<td>Vacant</td>
<td>Vacant, for sale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The High Schools of Entrepreneurship, Technology, and the Arts at South Shore</td>
<td>7527 S Constance Ave Chicago, IL 60649</td>
<td>South Shore</td>
<td>2010-2011</td>
<td>Poor performance; change of educational purpose</td>
<td>Demolished</td>
<td>Demolished</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guggenheim Elementary</td>
<td>7141 S Morgan St Chicago, IL 60621</td>
<td>Englewood</td>
<td>2011-2012</td>
<td>Poor performance</td>
<td>Transformed</td>
<td>Night adult education program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Price Elementary</td>
<td>4351 S Drexel Blvd Chicago, IL 60653</td>
<td>Kenwood</td>
<td>2011-2012</td>
<td>Poor performance</td>
<td>Transformed</td>
<td>Used to train police dogs, church group meetings on weekends; now vacant</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2 - Basic Neighborhood Demographic Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Closed School</th>
<th>Neighborhood</th>
<th>Year of Closure</th>
<th>Median Income ($)</th>
<th>% Black</th>
<th>% Hispanic</th>
<th>% White</th>
<th>% Single-Parent Families</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Zenos Colman Elementary School</td>
<td>Grand Boulevard</td>
<td>2002-2003</td>
<td>8261</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>&lt;1</td>
<td>&lt;1</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Arts of Living Alternative School</td>
<td>Lincoln Park</td>
<td>2002-2003</td>
<td>85037</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simmye G. Anderson Community Academy</td>
<td>Chicago Lawn</td>
<td>2003-2004</td>
<td>47062</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richard Wright Elementary School</td>
<td>Humboldt Park</td>
<td>2003-2004</td>
<td>27592</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>&lt;1</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crispus Attucks Elementary School</td>
<td>Grand Boulevard</td>
<td>2005-2006</td>
<td>32678</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>De La Cruz Middle School</td>
<td>Lower West Side</td>
<td>2007-2008</td>
<td>33927</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Davis Developmental</td>
<td>Calumet Heights</td>
<td>2008-2009</td>
<td>28336</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Princeton Elementary</td>
<td>Fuller Park</td>
<td>2008-2009</td>
<td>13194</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>&lt;1</td>
<td>&lt;1</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bartholome de las Casas Occupational HS</td>
<td>South Chicago</td>
<td>2009-2010</td>
<td>20474</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The High Schools of Entrepreneurship, Technology, and the Arts at South Shore</td>
<td>South Shore</td>
<td>2010-2011</td>
<td>24855</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>&lt;1</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guggenheim Elementary</td>
<td>Englewood</td>
<td>2011-2012</td>
<td>30514</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>&lt;1</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Price Elementary</td>
<td>Kenwood</td>
<td>2011-2012</td>
<td>20851</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3 - Matching Schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Elementary School</th>
<th>Median Income ($)</th>
<th>% African American</th>
<th>% Single-Mother Families</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Matching Standard</td>
<td>30,126.61</td>
<td>90.65</td>
<td>26.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crispus Attucks</td>
<td>32,677.50</td>
<td>95.39</td>
<td>20.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guggenheim</td>
<td>30,514.00</td>
<td>97.21</td>
<td>31.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Price</td>
<td>20,851.00</td>
<td>93.36</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richard Wright</td>
<td>27,591.98</td>
<td>98.32</td>
<td>21.47</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
An interview, a meeting time was set up, either in the community leader’s office or over the phone, for a one-hour to one-and-a-half-hour interview. Interviews were recorded and transcribed. At the conclusion of these interviews, I asked for the names and contact information of other community leaders who could provide additional insight, thereby using the snowball method to generate other interviews with community leaders who did not originally respond to my outreach. In total, I was able to conduct interviews with eleven community leaders, as presented in Table 4.

Table 4 - Summary of Interviews with Community Leaders

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Neighborhood</th>
<th>Community Leader</th>
<th>Affiliation/Organization</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kenwood</td>
<td>Iona Calhoun-Baptiste</td>
<td>Quad Communities Development Corporation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Scott Witherspoon</td>
<td>Quad Communities Development Corporation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jimmy Guzman</td>
<td>Quad Communities Development Corporation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Christyn Henson</td>
<td>SSA #47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bernita Johnson</td>
<td>Advisory Committee for School Repurposing and Community Development (Rahm Emanuel’s hand-selected board)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Englewood</td>
<td>Wanda Carter</td>
<td>Imagine Englewood If</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Stanley Anderson</td>
<td>Salvation Army</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humboldt Park</td>
<td>Dana Jones*</td>
<td>Women, Infants &amp; Children of Humboldt Park</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Deborah Moore</td>
<td>Neighborhood Housing Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grand Boulevard</td>
<td>Alison Smith*</td>
<td>Ounce of Prevention Fund</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>John Woods*</td>
<td>Greater Harvest Baptist Church</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Indicates a name change. All other individuals gave express permission for the use of their names in this paper.

I also interviewed 14 neighborhood residents whom I approached in laundromats, after church services, or walking their dogs and picking up their children from school. Conversations with community residents tended to be shorter than conversations with community leaders, averaging around 20 minutes. A summary of these interviewees is presented in Table 5.

Table 5 - Summary of Interviews with Community Members

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Community Member Name</th>
<th>Neighborhood</th>
<th>Parent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Andrew</td>
<td>Kenwood</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michaela</td>
<td>Kenwood</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amy</td>
<td>Grand Boulevard</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joyce</td>
<td>Kenwood</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xavier</td>
<td>Kenwood</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benny</td>
<td>Humboldt Park</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tyrone</td>
<td>Englewood</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lana</td>
<td>Kenwood</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>De’Sean</td>
<td>Kenwood</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linda</td>
<td>Humboldt Park</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keisha</td>
<td>Englewood</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elena</td>
<td>Grand Boulevard</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Felicia</td>
<td>Englewood</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chrissa</td>
<td>Englewood</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
All the interviews were semi-structured. I asked interview subjects to describe their position in the community, to talk about the closure of their neighborhood school, to discuss other residents’ perspectives on the closure, to discuss the short- and long-term impacts of the school closure, and to propose possible solutions to any problems they brought up with regard to school closings. The combined total of the 25 interviews yielded a rich dataset from which to draw, and allowed me to eventually form a working understanding of the community-level perceptions of school closures’ impacts.

V. RESULTS: THE REALITIES OF SCHOOL CLOSURES

My findings generally support my hypothesis: schools help create and maintain social ties in a community through their functions as both institutions and physical spaces, and closing schools breaks these ties and renders these functions moot, resulting in negative outcomes for communities. In the short term, beginning with the announcement that a school will close (even before the actual closure occurs), communities suffer as a result of a disruption in community social ties and the loss of a central hub for communication and shared memory. This in turn leads to increased day-to-day difficulties and a stronger sense of anger and powerlessness among community members. In the long term, the negative impact of having a vacant building sitting in the middle of a neighborhood, especially one as large and cumbersome as a school, begins to take its toll. Unlike the other, more immediate problems with school closures, which generally present a one-time negative shock to the communities as social ties are severed, the negative impact on a community of having an empty school building increases the longer it is allowed to remain vacant.

SHORT-TERM CONSEQUENCES OF SCHOOL CLOSURES: BREAKS IN SOCIAL TIES

Neighborhood schools are important in creating and maintaining the social fabric of a neighborhood. The school institution brings people together for the purpose of educating children, and the physical space encourages the development of social ties as people come into contact with one another. Schools also create ties that reach not only those individuals directly involved with the school, but to the community beyond. Deborah Moore, a leader of the Neighborhood Housing Services (NHS), explains how a school can create this type of community and draw in even those individuals who are not directly connected to the school, and help forge new connections, such as between parents and social service organizations:

[There were] all these school-based events, when other community partners or other organizations would all come to the school... [O]ne big one was report card pickup. On the days when parents have to come to schools to get their child’s report card, they would stand out in the hallways. All kinds of services and businesses that provide services [would show up], so you could have people there like the Girl Scouts, family support stuff, other things like that. NHS, we would set up a table there. You can have all kinds of social service and NGOs in the schools, and that was a way to do the outreach, to get people connected.

Schools are also important in their neighborhoods because of the shared memory they represent. Many long-time residents have some memory or other associated specifically with their local school, either because they themselves went there, their children went there, or their parents or grandparents went there. Christyn Henson, who works for Special Service Area (SSA) #43, explains that many of the conversations she has had with community members involve a similar theme: “Some of the arguments are ‘My grandparents went to this school.’ So the idea is it should stay open because of historic reasons, because we have always gone here.” A Quad Communities Development Corporation (QCDC) leader told me: “There’s a lot of pushback, you know parents, that’s where their kid went to school, whether it was good or bad, that’s where they went.” This argument, brought up by many residents, ties directly to Simmel’s conceptions of the symbolic importance of space, particularly as it relates to memory. Residents from each school closure area gave answers that supported this perspective. From Grand Boulevard: “My great-great-grandparents went here, so I have a base. I have a
sense of community” (Amy). From Kenwood: “It seems to me that people [were] worried about closing Price for sentimental values, and for a historic tie” (Xavier). From Humboldt Park: “I went here... so I’m like, why can’t my kids go there too?” (Benny). From Englewood, “I remember walking through the front doors as a… five-year-old. It’s always been there, so why they got to close it?” (Tyrone). Clearly, people feel a historical and personal connection to their neighborhood school.

Given the important social role schools play in communities, it is perhaps unsurprising that many of the problems that communities face when schools close revolve around issues of broken social ties and the lack of a common space. Community leaders and members mentioned a variety of issues that arise quickly when schools close, including increased difficulties in day-to-day activities and a general sense of anger at the City of Chicago for its perceived disinvestment in poorer communities.

**Increased Day-to-Day Difficulties**

One of the main problems associated with closing schools is the severing of social ties between parents, increasing day-to-day difficulties. These inter-parental ties are particularly crucial given that most of the closed schools are located in areas where the general demographic characteristics include high levels of poverty, low levels of education, and a large minority population—conditions in which individuals tend to rely more heavily on social ties, often turning to their neighbors, family, and friends for support in daily living (Desmond, 2012; Kissane, 2012; Stack, 1974; Venkatesh 2002). In disrupting the social support structures that schools help create and maintain, many families suffer day-to-day consequences, including difficulties transporting children to and from school, and problems ensuring adequate adult supervision during after-school hours.

Christyn Henson of SSA #47 explains the connection between the break in social ties and increased day-to-day difficulties for families of children who changed schools:

> Some of the intangible benefits, like if I have an arrangement with you to pick up my kids Monday Wednesday Friday, and now you are going to another school and I have to go to another school, that structure of support has been broken and there isn’t a replacement for it. Safe Passage isn’t going to fix that. Those aren’t tangible benefits, but they are real benefits to a parent community.
Although no other interviewees directly referenced this “parent community,” the general concept permeated many of my interviews. Community members discussed the negative impacts of school closures on inter-parent relationships, and problems they encountered on a day-to-day basis as a result of breaks in the parent support network. Especially if receiving schools are far away, community members are more likely to feel the strain of the lack of social ties. Assuring that children reach their schools on time and are picked up again at the end of the school day is a task that causes increased stress among community members that I interviewed, as closing schools severs social ties that parents previously relied on to overcome this daily obstacle. Lana, a cheerful young woman from Kenwood, became more somber as she spoke about this issue: “It’s been hard trying to transport my kids in the morning, and then trying to get to work, things, you know, like that.” De’Sean, father of one-year-old Natalia, expressed his relief that he would not have to worry about transportation issues for several more years:

I’m just glad she doesn’t have to start yet, ’cause the students from when [the old school] was closed… had to be bused [to the receiving school]…. the parents can’t get to the school as easily, and there’s no way the kids can walk to school or to home by themselves, so if they miss the bus, that’s it, you know?

But even those parents of families that live within walking distance of a new school are hesitant to allow their children to walk alone, and often choose to drive them. This at first presents a puzzle: why would parents assume this extra burden? Wanda Carter of Imagine Englewood If, a non-profit that strives to teach local youth and their families about healthy living, environmental awareness, and positive communication skills, explains:

While it may not be a gang thing per se, [safety concerns are] a very real thing, where if they walk through this crowd, there will be fighting. Those are the sorts of things that are still conversations. Now that the schools are closing, that’s a concern for those groups of people, who now have to walk through those areas.

Despite the presence of Safe Passage workers, whose job it is to protect students on their way to and from school, many community residents do not feel comfortable allowing their children to walk unattended in areas that parents do not know well. Whereas before school closures parents might have allowed their child to walk unattended because of a sense of community trust, new schools are often located in areas that parents do not feel as socially connected to, and thus do not feel comfortable allowing their children to walk in alone. A community member from Englewood, Keisha, had this to say:

I’m concerned about the CPS people, the Safe Passage workers. They don’t look too legit. How are you going to make sure my kid is straight, you aren’t even paying attention! So when I drive through the neighborhood, that’s my concern, I watched the guy on the news when they first talked about it, they’re like ‘Yeah, we have a cell phone.’ So if something were to happen, because your whole purpose is to keep the kids safe. Your whole thing is you have a cell phone. I remember watching him, and being like, ‘What the hell! You’re not equipped. You’re not trained. You’re hiring people off the street. And now you want me to say the passage is safe? Screw you people!’ That’s the concern I have, as a parent.

Parents lack social ties in many of the receiving school neighborhoods, which can lead to extensive fears among the parent community that having their child walk to school is unsafe. This provides an explanation as to why parents take up the extra burden of transporting their child to and from school each day. As one parent repeated throughout my interview with her: “It’s a hardship, it’s a hardship.”
Community Anger

Closing a community hub and breaking social ties creates a good deal of anger among community stakeholders. Residents in these neighborhoods feel slighted by CPS’s decision to close their school, and see the closures as signifying a continuation of disinvestment in their community. Although community leaders sometimes agreed that the closings “might be warranted” (WIC employee) because “some schools had been underutilized for years” (Alison Smith), community leaders criticized the abrupt way in which closures were implemented, giving communities little time to adjust. Seven community leaders addressed this directly, including Jimmy Guzman of QCDC:

The process was not done in an open and meaningful way, we made recommendations, those recommendations were not heeded… The Bronzeville Community Action Council was formed by CPS for the purpose of planning and making recommendations, and that didn’t happen.

Iona Calhoun-Baptiste (also of QCDC) had a similar perspective. Rather than anger at CPS or the city for school closures in general, she placed much more emphasis on the problems with the way CPS implemented the closures: “You really wonder if there were other alternative ways that they could have looked to do this, and there could have been a better roll out of it all.”

Community leaders felt that the lack of clarity in the decision-making process and the clunky way in which the closures were implemented added to the anger and discouragement community members felt. Stanley Anderson of the Englewood Salvation Army gave this interpretation:

…the overwhelming feeling was kind of a sense of helplessness…. Kind of a fait accompli. That it doesn’t matter what we’re going to say anymore, CPS has it in their mind what they’re going to do, and this is just, for lack of a better term, just the formality of going through the process. Just putting on a show. But it really doesn’t matter, because they’ve already got this kind of set.

Chrissa, a community member from Englewood, discussed “questions about a larger conspiracy. What does this mean, what is the city trying to do with closing these schools? …. And I feel like that’s more the sentiment—what is this really about?” Across the board, both community members and community leaders experienced anger and disappointment as a result of school closures.

All of the problems mentioned above that arise when schools close (ruptured social ties, increased child-care burdens, a sense of anger and frustration) are detrimental to communities in their own right. Combined, the bigger picture that emerges is even more worrisome: closing schools seems to threaten the very fabric holding the community together.

LONG-TERM CONSEQUENCES OF SCHOOL CLOSURES: EMERGENCE OF NEGATIVE SPACE

Despite the fact that closing local elementary schools generates such a negative impact in communities, these initial problems seemingly begin to subside after a few years. This is not to say, however, that the immediate problems should be ignored. It is detrimental to a community to suffer through several years of setbacks, particularly in areas that struggle as much as most of the affected areas discussed above do. Indeed, short-term concerns subside in part not because they disappear, but rather because their impacts are felt with less and less acuity as a neighborhood adjusts to new conditions, even though the short-term concerns present a net negative.

Even as time eases some of the most acute concerns that arise with school closures, one long-term concern emerges. The presence of a vacant building or lot can haunt a neighborhood long after memories of children in classrooms fade into the past. In this regard, schools go from being positive spaces that help create social ties to negative spaces that actively harm communities. The presence of a large, empty school building or vacant
lot is something that many community residents and leaders I spoke to brought up as a problem. It is “another decrepit structure in an already struggling community,” (Wanda Carter, Imagine Englewood If), “yet another empty building among empty buildings” (Amy, community member from Grand Boulevard), an “eyesore” in the community that detracts from property value (Deborah Moore, NHS), and “a beckon and call for more crime and violence” (Linda, community member from Humboldt Park). In all my interviews, the general perception was that not only is closing a school detrimental because of its consequences for community cohesion, but leaving a school vacant can actively begin to create problems as the building or lot becomes a negative space that attracts crime or otherwise harmfully influences the surrounding area.

Some of the biggest concerns residents have regarding the way in which a vacant school building can become a negative space is the opportunity for illicit activities that a closed schoolhouse or an empty lot presents. Community member Andrew describes his perception of the transition from elementary school to gang battlefield:

> It’s this big building sitting there empty, and you know the neighborhood kids, the older ones, you know they’re not going to just let an abandoned building sit there. That’s why you see the graffiti. I think they [CPS] still maintain the school or something, because it’s new graffiti all the time but then it’s always washed off. Like if you drove by right now, you’d see some gang banger’s sign. On an elementary school! But it’s not used any more, you know? … I just hope they [CPS] do something with it [the empty building] soon.

CPS spends an average of $198,405 per year to maintain an empty school (attributable to the costs of hiring security guards to patrol the premises, repairing broken windows, and maintaining the landscape around the school, among others) for a total carrying cost of over $4 million per year for all closed schools (School Closings and Repurposing report, 2014:21). However, the security that CPS provides is not enough to eliminate crime in and around the building. Deborah Moore of NHS explains her concerns regarding safety:

> The schools [are] already being vandalized. Even now, the schools aren’t maintained… they’re going in and taking out copper, whatever they can get out and resell. Or going in, being mischievous, going in, tearing the place up… It’s a bad impact on the neighborhood, all around.

Lana, a Kenwood community member, had fears that the vacant school buildings and lots are “just prime for crime and violence. Illegal drugs, illegal sex, you know all that stuff going on.” Closing schools turns physical spaces that used to bring communities together into negative spaces that attract crime and reduce community cohesion.

A closed school is a burden on its community in other ways as well. Iona Calhoun-Baptiste of QCDC worries that “the closing of the schools just adds to the downward cycle of a community that was trying to thrive and do something, and now you have this whole humongous big building that is not being utilized.” She compares the communities she works with to richer areas, noting that in Lincoln Park, for example,

> …you don’t see too many vacant things, it’s densely packed! If something is vacant, it doesn’t stay vacant too long. Unfortunately, you drive up and down some of these communities, you’re like, that’s empty, that’s vacant. House, boarded up house, house, boarded up, boarded up, boarded up, house.

Deborah Moore of the Neighborhood Housing Services, whose mission it is to help individuals find affordable housing and to work to minimize the extent of vacant properties in neighborhoods, also addressed this issue:

> The impact [of the school closures] was… devastating. Having these big old buildings, where you already have a lot of vacant housing and foreclosures crisis on your blocks, and now you have a
huge elementary school that took up a block... and you can't put the vacant buildings back into productive use. We help homeowners, but who wants to live down the street or across from a big old vacant building?

Clearly, community leaders and residents alike perceive vacant school buildings as negative spaces that are detrimental to their neighborhoods.

Image 5: Crispus Attucks Elementary School, boarded up and abandoned, acting as a “negative space” in the community. Local residents expressed concern about the crime the building attracts.
Image 6: Front doors of Crispus Attucks Elementary School. Surrounded by worn-down gates and trash, residents consider it an “eyesore.”

Image 7: Side-view of Crispus Attucks, yet more visual evidence of how run-down school buildings can become when they are abandoned, and how a once-thriving central hub of a community can turn into negative space.
In response to the issues community members and leaders perceive regarding the continued vacancy of the old school site, it would seem to be the logical conclusion to repurpose the property, and especially useful to repurpose vacant buildings as a social space that could play some of the same roles in creating social ties that the school used to play in the community. This is what local residents want, and what community leaders propose:

If there is to be a school closing, in any community… outside of just the fiscal responsibility of closing a facility, building, or structure, looking at the long-term impact, looking at a non-vacancy plan, looking at how that structure can best be utilized. If it’s not for educational purposes, then for what? … Can it be transformed into a vocation school, community center, can it be something that community can continue to utilize, continue to buy into, and continue to support? (Stanley Anderson, Englewood Salvation Army)

Particularly given that most of the closures occur in neighborhoods that are characterized by high rates of poverty and health problems, transforming the old school into a community resource that could provide both material and social benefits is something that many community members and community leaders proposed. Mrs. Norwood, a community member from Grand Boulevard, insisted that a mental health clinic would be the key to helping her neighborhood recover. An Englewood community member proposed a child-care establishment. Wanda Carter, of Imagine Englewood If, proposed:

Identifying gaps in resources within a community would be key. It’s relative to that specific community’s needs. A community center, trade school, shelter, vocational center, office space, really just looking at what is key, what will flourish in that community. What you don’t want is a duplication of resources in that you have competing resources that both aren’t adequately funded,
staffed, or attended, and then you have two failing structures, and one or both goes down. So really identifying gaps in services, and making practical use of the buildings while indentifying and addressing community needs.

So why does this not happen more often? Why, instead of giving struggling communities access to much-needed resources, do these old school buildings remain largely vacant, and empty lots go unused? To answer this question, I spoke with Bernita Johnson, one of 13 committee members Rahm Emanuel hand-selected to help solve this problem for the 49 recently closed schools. The answer she gave was simple: it all comes down to money.

It all depends on who has the financing and who has, who really wants these buildings. There will be some hot properties depending on the community, but some of them will not be so hot, and it might take a minute for somebody to step up and want to do something with it…. I hear all the time, ‘Why don’t you give the building to a community group and let them run programs?’ Yeah, but … you got to have money, somebody has to have money from somewhere. There are a lot of great organizations doing great things that could use that space, but it has to be financially feasible. You have to pay if you want the space.

Thus, because CPS owns the vacant buildings, if communities want to re-purpose them, the first step is to buy the building from CPS. Of course, given that the buildings are located in some of Chicago’s poorest neighborhoods, this can present a significant challenge for the community. Although she seemed sympathetic to this issue, when I pursued this line of questioning, Ms. Johnson replied, “You can’t buy a house without a job.” It is also currently not possible for an organization or business to buy just one part of the building. Instead, the community will have to “pull together something that purchases the entire building. Whether you do that by yourself or you have to form a joint venture to make the finances work, two, three organizations together, to do that, you can’t have just a piece of it” (Ms. Johnson).

On top of the expense involved with buying the property, many of the schools were shut down in part because of the lack of maintenance the school experienced while it was open. Deborah Moore of the Neighborhood Housing Services explains:

The problem is that part of the reason that those particular schools were closed… is because of… the conditions of the schools. So, you have a very poorly maintained building without a heating system and an inoperable air conditioning system, windows are leaking, you may have insulation issues, and you want to have a community center there?

Neither CPS nor the City of Chicago has any program in place to help communities be able to afford either initial expenses in buying the property, or secondary expenses in rehabilitating it. According to Ms. Johnson, this is in part because both CPS and the city itself are struggling with budget issues (the main reason for many school closures in the first place), so this is not feasible.

This leads to the current situation, in which unused CPS properties sit on the market for years, sometimes decades or more, while communities remain unable to afford the costs of buying these structures. This can be very detrimental to the neighborhood, leading to increased instances of crime, and decreased feelings of safety among residents. Thus, these empty schools and lots function as negative spaces in that not only are they no longer helping to form social ties and improve the social fabric of the community, but they are actually a detriment to the community by serving as a site for negative activities. It is a no-win situation.
KEY TAKEAWAYS

Overall, my research suggests that the effects of school closings reach throughout communities in ways that more narrow research on the effects of school closures on children do not suggest. Schools function as a social space for the development of strong and weak ties, out of which a sense of community and collective efficacy arises. When schools are closed, this space is no longer present, and the ties upon which the community was once built begin to dissolve. This dissolution manifests itself most directly as increased stress for community members in daily activities, which has a particularly negative impact on individuals in poorer areas who more often rely on social ties to meet their basic needs. Given that most school closures have occurred in poorer areas, this presents a particular cause for concern. Closing schools also has ripple effects in the community, as mentorship ties between children and teachers are broken, economic uncertainties increase, and communities as a whole suffer from a sense of helplessness and disinvestment on the part of the City of Chicago. Moreover, school closings do not merely strip communities of a social space in which social ties and community can form, but also create a “negative space” which actively furthers the dissolution of social ties and community by creating a space that community residents perceive as promoting crime and contributing to a downwards spiral in many already-struggling neighborhoods.

VI. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Closing elementary schools has many detrimental effects and therefore should be avoided if possible. However, there are times when school closures are inevitable. But policy changes can help communities overcome some of the challenges school closures present. To help with the short-term ramifications of school closures, CPS should host more Welcome Parties, where parents of children who previously attended a closed school are able to meet the staff and parent community of the new school. This would not cost CPS much, but could go a long way towards creating new social ties. Then, budget permitting, CPS should hire extra counselors at receiving schools to help parents and students from both the closing and welcoming schools deal with the changes in their social world. Lapan et al. (1997) report that students who have access to counseling are more positive and have greater feelings of belonging in their schools, and Verduyn et al. (1990) suggest that school counselors are effective in teaching social skills, necessary for the formation of social ties.

To help with long-term consequences, policies should work to avoid any gap in occupancy of the school building to avoid the development of a negative space, and if possible replace the school with another institution that can act as a central community hub. The Advisory Committee for School Repurposing and Community Development has issued a report (2014) that creates a set of “guiding principles and a proposed process for repurposing the schools recently closed by the Chicago Board of Education in ways that maximize community benefit” (3). The overall effect of implementing these recommendations would theoretically be to reclaim school buildings within three to five years of a school closure. This in turn would help communities avoid the development of a negative space, and would hopefully ensure the development of a new community hub that could help replace the school’s social functions in the community.

On two points, however, I believe the Advisory Committee’s recommendations should be amended. First, the Committee suggests that all proposals “must be financially viable and sustainable” to buy the property from CPS. While this at first seems logical—it does not make sense to repurpose a school building if its new owners will go bankrupt and leave it abandoned again within a few years—it nonetheless presents a significant issue, namely a high cost of entry. It is entirely possible that a non-profit or business could remain financially viable once established in the space, but could not afford to make the initial transition. Although the Advisory Committee’s current plan might work if there were enough money in the fund to help organizations and companies make this initial investment, as it stands the funds from the proceeds from the sale of other CPS properties will likely not be enough to overcome this initial barrier. Furthermore, the Committee proposed no option for renting rather than buying the properties from CPS in the long-term, which might be a viable alternative that would allow for
lower startup costs, and therefore an increase in the number of revitalized properties. I therefore suggest that, as long as proposals for the reuse of buildings can evidence financial viability given a renting scenario in a manner suitable to CPS, these proposals should be considered. By broadening the scope of viable proposals to include long-term renting options, CPS can expect to revitalize more of its vacated properties.

Secondly, I suggest that the committee amend the recommendation that “structures on the properties that remain after the full repurposing process [three to five years after a school closure] may need to be demolished” (7). Although demolishing the building may relieve CPS of some carrying costs, the presence of a vacant lot still presents a problem for communities that continue to suffer from the presence of a negative space in their community. I propose that if CPS reaches the end of the repurposing process, including the amendment suggested above to allow renting, and still finds itself with vacant properties on its hands, these properties should be transformed into parks until such time as another use can be found for them. Given that the average acreage for an elementary school in Chicago is less than 3 acres (School Closings and Repurposing report, 2014:21), and given that Chicago spends, as an upper-end high estimate, an average of $50,732 per acre of parkland per year, this plan would cost $152,196 per lot per year, a savings of $46,209 over carrying costs of maintaining a vacant school building. There are other benefits to establishing parks as well, including health, environmental, and property value improvements (Blanck et al. 2012; National Recreation and Park Association, 2009), making this option even more attractive.

As the City of Chicago implements the Advisory Committee’s suggestions, the gridlock that currently keeps closed school buildings vacant should relax. Adding my proposed amendments to the Committee’s recommendations would further improve the eventual outcome. If this is done, communities will receive much-needed resources and a new central space to act as a community hub to form social ties; CPS will be freed of most upkeep costs; and the City of Chicago as a whole will benefit from increased services and businesses in its poorest areas. By appropriately repurposing the buildings in a timely manner, it will also avoid many of the negative externalities community members experience as a result of having a badly kept vacant building in their midst.

CONCLUSION

Schools function as an integral space and institution within their communities. Collective social memory becomes intertwined with the school, and simple brick and mortar can take on a much deeper significance. Because a neighborhood school can become deeply enmeshed in a community’s conception of itself, closing these schools is often a daunting and painful process. By applying the theories of Simmel, Granovetter, and Sampson to this case, it is evident that schools are sociologically important and beneficial to a community in their capacities as both institutions and physical spaces. They promote the formation of interpersonal ties, represent a common history, and promote collective efficacy—all functions that are beneficial to a community. When a school is closed, interpersonal ties are severed, collective efficacy is reduced, communities lose a symbolic memory, and the community as a whole suffers. Community residents experience increased day-to-day difficulties and intense anger with the city and a sense of powerlessness. In the long term, if closures are not handled properly, schools can turn from being positive spaces that help create social ties to negative spaces that actively harm communities. Focusing only on children’s academic outcomes when schools close is too narrow in scope. My work has shown that the effects of school closings seep into the broader community in ways far beyond what current research has highlighted, with deep-reaching negative impacts that can last decades.

\(^2\) $410,929,101 spent in FY 2013 by the Chicago Park District (Chicago Park District Budget FY13, 2014:7)/8,100 acres of park land in Chicago (from the “About Us” section of the Chicago Park District website) = $50,732/acre/year. This is likely an overestimation, considering that the types of parks suggested here would receive much less funding per acre than Millenium Park or other major parks in the Chicagoland area.
Like most research of this nature, my study has some methodological flaws and limitations. For instance, I was only able to conduct substantive qualitative research surrounding four elementary schools. Ideally, all 12 of the elementary schools closed between 2002 and 2012 would receive close study. My study also examines four schools in depth, from which I draw conclusions about the differences in short- and long-term effects of school closures. This method is fallible, however, because it does not account for potential underlying differences between schools. An ideal new study would follow the sociological and policy implications of the most recent batch of 49 closures, ideally for at least 10 years to form a better understanding of the long-term consequences.

Despite these methodological problems, the results of my work remain robust and should not be taken lightly: my research clearly indicates that while school closures may sometimes be inevitable, they are rarely painless. Fortunately, my research also suggests that the long-term outlook for a community that loses a school is not necessarily bleak. The City of Chicago should work with its constituent communities to support neighborhoods during school transitions by instituting Welcome Parties and hiring counselors to help alleviate some of the worst effects of broken social ties, and find alternate, positive ways to utilize empty school buildings. If this happens, neighborhoods across Chicago can trade in under-performing, under-utilized schools for access to new

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Chameleons and Closet Partisans:
Using Political Communication Networks to Examine Voting Behaviors of Independents in the 2008 Presidential Election

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Individuals who identify as political independents have long posed a challenge to political sociologists and campaign operatives alike. In the absence of a partisan label, voting behavior is more difficult to predict than for those who identify as Democrats or Republicans. The study of political communication networks offers a new lens through which to examine the social conditions under which individuals choose to identify as independents and make decisions about voting. Using data from the 2008 American National Election Studies, this study finds that the subset of self-identified pure independents with majority-Republican discussion networks are more likely to vote for John McCain and are closer to Republicans on policy issues than their counterparts with non-Republican networks. The tendency of individuals with Republican networks to vote for McCain even while living in areas dominated by Democratic voters suggests the existence of “closet partisans” who may be utilizing the independent label in order to avoid social conflict. Conversely, those independents with Republican networks living in Republican-dominated environments may be “chameleons” who better match the traditional image of the apathetic or centrist independent. These findings indicate a heterogeneity of partisanship among pure independents not previously recognized by political theorists.

INTRODUCTION

When it comes to American voters, there are Republicans, there are Democrats, and then there are all the rest. In an atmosphere of heightened political polarization, identifying as a member of one of the two major parties can send a clear signal about one’s political beliefs, and serves as an exceptionally strong predictor of vote choice in national elections. The same cannot be said of those who choose not to identify as either Democrats or Republicans, and instead call themselves “independent.” The term has many connotations, and has long served as something of a catchall for the free-spirited, the apathetic, the stubbornly contrarian, and the ill-informed.

The ambiguity inherent in the independent label has long been a source of consternation for social scientists and political operatives alike. Party labels make it easy to predict individual vote choices, with the vast majority of Republicans voting for Republican candidates and Democrats doing the same for Democratic candidates. When voters chose not to identify with a party, interested observers lose a valuable tool for predicting how they will vote. In presidential elections the majority of independents typically vote for the winning candidate (Magleby et al. 2011, 249) – but of course, before the election, nobody knows who that will be. In years when the electorate is closely split between Democrats and Republicans, being able to predict, and perhaps even sway, how each individual independent will vote can mean the difference between running a winning and losing campaign.

Identifying as an independent may be an appealing option for individuals who find themselves in the political minority in their social environment. Because the term is not attached to any defined set of ideological positions, an individual identifying as an independent does not risk presenting himself as an ideological opponent to his social contacts. It might therefore be expected that among the roughly ten percent of American adults who self-identify as political independents, some are, in reality, ideologically partisan, and using the independent label
as a means to avoid partisan conflict. The question then becomes how to distinguish which independents have underlying ideological preferences that favor one party or the other, and in turn, which way they are likely to vote.

One way to find out how an independent might vote would be to find out who they talk to about politics. The relatively new study of political communication networks provides a framework that relates one’s political choices to the people with whom one discusses politics. Previous studies have shown that political networks can influence both party identification (Sinclair 2012) and vote choice (Huckfeldt et al. 2004a) in presidential elections. How those effects play out among independent voters is, for the most part, unknown.

This study uses data from the 2008 American National Election Studies (ANES) to examine the relationship between the vote choices of self-identified independents and the partisanship of their political communication networks. First, the personal political network of each respondent is considered using the network battery included in the ANES, in which respondents were asked to name and described individuals with whom they had discussed politics in the last six months. Second, the broader political environments of respondents are considered using congressional district voting data for the 2008 presidential election as a proxy measure of partisanship in their surroundings. These two measures, separately and in combination, are compared against whether or not the individual chose to vote for John McCain, and to their positions on a limited set of policy issues. The aim is to elucidate the varying set of social influences under which individuals with no declared party affiliation make political choices, and to contribute to a more nuanced and specified understanding of the people comprising the group of political independents.

LITERATURE REVIEW

POLITICAL POLARIZATION

What do we mean by “political polarization?” The term has been used to describe multiple, disparate phenomena, but for this study is defined as the increasingly clear differentiation of the two major political parties. As described by Fischer and Mattson in their 2009 review of social stratification in America, this concept of polarization describes the phenomenon in which two parties “each became more internally coherent, that partisans lined up more consistently with their parties on issues, and that those alignments increasingly paralleled the religious-secular divide…” (Fischer and Mattson 2009, 438). In short, those who adopt a given party label are expected to be more ideologically similar to each other now than was historically the case.

Since party identity serves as a colored lens through which individuals view events and issues, this polarization manifests in both the policy positions and candidate choice of self-identified partisans. A study of voting in the 2008 presidential election found that while voters typically choose the candidates to which they are ideologically closer, “partisans show strong biases toward their party’s nominee above and beyond what would be predicted by their ideological position…” (Jessee 2010, 327). Similarly, Brooks and Manza found that changes in support of government intervention to resolve the 2008 economic crisis differed dramatically between Republicans and Democrats (Brooks and Manza 2008, 737). While Democrats typically favor government action more than Republicans, during times of economic hardship both parties usually show an uptick in support for interventions. However, between 2008 and 2010, support for government action among Republicans actually plummeted, while increasing slightly among Democrats and decreasing slightly among independents. The widening gap in support for government intervention is a result of “population layers defined by their partisan biases respond[ing] heterogeneously when exposed to the same conditions,” meaning that party identity matters in predicting the policy positions of members of the American public as well as their voting behavior (Brooks and Manza 2008, 741).
PARTY IDENTIFICATION AND POLITICAL INDEPENDENTS

Given the polarization of the two major political parties, what does it mean to be a political independent? Historically, the political-sociological literature has considered independents to be the leftovers of the two-party system. Independents are broadly assumed to fit into one of several categories: unengaged and apathetic, ideologically centrist, or in agreement with one party on some issues and the opposing party on others (Keith et al. 1992). Individuals may also be ideologically close to one party but identify as independent because they are opposed to the two-party system itself; however, this subset is generally thought to self-identify as “leaning” toward one party or the other, leaving only the unengaged and the centrist as “pure” independents (Lewis-Beck et al. 2008, 113). Whether those who lean should be counted as independents or as partisans is a topic of ongoing debate. Although they reliably vote with the party toward which they lean, they do not self-identify as belonging to that party (Lewis-Beck et al. 2008, 130).

The status of independents at the time of the 2008 presidential election was reviewed by Magleby et al. in a 2011 article using data from the American National Election Studies. As compared to both partisans and those who “leaned” toward a party, pure independents were found to be less educated, less interested in politics, less informed about political matters, and less likely to vote. Pure independents on average also rated both parties neutrally on a thermometer scale of favorability, while leaners and partisans alike rated their own party favorably and the opposing party unfavorably (Magleby et al. 2011). All of these data points suggest that pure independents are substantively different from those who are independent but lean toward a party. Therefore this study will focus only on pure independents, and consider leaners as part of the party toward which they lean.

As a practical matter, party identification is important because it is a strong predictor of vote choice. On average, since 1992 more than 90% of strong partisans and over 75% of weak partisans and leaners have voted for the candidate of their party in presidential elections, while 42% of pure independents have voted Democrat. In 2008, exactly 50% of pure independents voted for Barack Obama (Magleby et al. 2011, 248). Pure independents are therefore of great interest to political campaigns, because they “have demonstrated no loyalty to either party” and “have typically voted for the winner in two-party races” (Magleby et al. 2011, 249). For these same reasons, pure independents remain something of a mystery. Without party identification, alternative variables must be used to predict how any individual independent will vote.

POLITICAL COMMUNICATION NETWORKS

One possible alternative predictor of vote choice is network. The study of political communication networks has emerged over the last thirty years as a means to examine the social context in which individuals make decisions regarding political behaviors and identities. These studies stem from theories of political interdependence and “social citizenship”: citizens discuss politics and “rely on one another for political information, expertise, and guidance,” (Huckfeldt et al. 2004a, 24). These interactions impact political opinions and behaviors such as voting (Sinclair 2012, xii). Political communication networks are defined as including the people with whom an individual discusses politics, and can be studied either holistically (considering all members of a closed network and all interactions between those members) or egocentrically (considering only the discussants named by a selected group of respondents). For the sake of practicality, the majority of studies of political communication networks are egocentric, although a small number of geographically-constrained holistic studies have also been conducted (i.e. Huckfeldt and Sprague 1995).

What can political communication network studies tell us about the role of party identification and political independents? In her 2012 work *The Social Citizen*, Sinclair finds that networks can influence party identification. Using data from a national survey of Internet users, Sinclair tests the influence of the party identification of discussants on the identification of respondents using a matched pairs method. By comparing the party identification of pairs of respondents who are otherwise similar, she finds that a respondent is more likely to be a Democrat if he has at least one Democratic discussant in his network (Sinclair 2012, 129).
the probability of a respondent having each of the seven possible party identifications (ranging from “Strong Democrat” to “Strong Republican”), the study further finds that those who have at least one Democratic discussant are slightly less likely to identify as pure independents than those who have none (Sinclair 2012, 129).

A separate study by Huckfeldt and colleagues finds that networks also play a role in determining vote choice among independents. Using data from the 2000 American National Election Studies, the authors examine the impact of the presence of George W. Bush supporters and Al Gore supporters in the political networks of respondents on vote choice. Among independents whose networks include both Gore and Bush supporters, just 23% voted for Gore, and 17% for Bush (with the remainder either voting for a third candidate or not voting) (Huckfeldt et al. 2004a, 42). Those independents whose networks uniformly supported Gore were much more likely to vote for Gore (44%), while those whose networks uniformly supported Bush were more likely to vote for Bush (41%).

This study seeks to build on this previous work by further investigating the relationships between the partisan composition of the political networks of independents and their vote choices. While both Sinclair and Huckfeldt et al. focused primarily on the binary presence or absence of partisans in a network, this study examines in greater detail whether vote choice among independents changes with the relative proportion of partisans in the respondent’s network, as well as how these patterns change across congressional districts whose populations have varying partisan compositions.

NETWORK HOMOPHILY AND HETEROGENEITY

Measuring the partisan mixture of political networks is a means to consider the relative presence of homophily and heterogeneity. Networks of all shapes and sizes tend to display “homophily,” the phenomenon that people are more likely to be in contact with people to whom they are similar than with people from whom they are different (McPherson et al. 2001, 416). This can occur because similar people find each other intentionally, because people are influenced by a common environment, or because members of a network influence each other – and through any combination of the above. These interoperating pathways to similarity often complicate questions of causality in networks, making it difficult to deduce the direction of influence without longitudinal data.

This tendency towards similarity does not mean that people within a network must always be the same. Huckfeldt et al. find that in political networks, some degree of ideological disagreement is both widely present and sustainable. The authors go on to suggest that such heterogeneity is essential to the maintenance of a healthy democracy (Huckfeldt et al. 2004a, 43). The presence of network heterogeneity has been found to correlate with an increased ability to analyze relationships between disparate political issues (Eveland and Hively 2009), as well as decreased polarization of attitudes towards political candidates (Huckfeldt et al. 2004b, 83). On the whole, the composition of a respondent’s political network, and the degree to which that network is mixed or uniform, plays an important role in that individual’s ability to learn about and form opinions on political matters.

Homophily occurs along a myriad of different traits, including what Lazarsfeld and Merton dubbed “status” traits and “values” traits (Lazarsfeld and Merton 1954, 24). Status homophily occurs when people share a common identity within a social group. Status can include such common demographic characteristics as age, race, or gender, as well as membership in a religious or political group. By contrast, values homophily reflects the sharing of common attitudes or beliefs – for example, not just belonging to a Christian church (which is a status), but a shared belief in the Bible. As pointed out by McPherson et al., values traits “often prove to be derivative of social positions themselves,” but the two are not always perfectly correlated (McPherson et al. 2001).
For the purposes of this study, it is important to keep in mind the difference between status traits and values traits: party identification is a status trait, while political beliefs and ideologies are values traits. Although the two are often intimately linked, it is precisely the fact that the status of being a political independent does not consistently predict a set of ideological values that is of interest here. This study leverages the possibility that the political communications networks of independents display values homophily – that is, that despite differing from partisans in their party identity (status), by associating with members of one party or the other, independents may reveal information about their political ideology (values). Although independents, like partisans, are expected to have heterogeneity within their networks, overrepresentation of one party or the other within the network of a pure independent may be a signal of underlying ideological preferences.

**DATA**

This study will examine the networks of independents using the 2008-2009 American National Election Survey Panel Study (ANES), a nationally representative sample of voting-age adults selected by random-digit dial (including cell phone and land-line numbers) (American National Election Studies 2010a). Wave 9 of this study, conducted in September 2008, includes a network battery asking respondents to name individuals with whom they discuss politics or political issues. This wave had 2,568 respondents, of which 2,119 named at least one political discussant. The subjects of this study are the 191 respondents who self-identify as pure independents. Respondents could name up to eight discussants, but were only asked to provide further information about the first three, putting an artificial cap on the size of the political communication networks under consideration.

Given the stated goal of examining the relationship between an independent's political communication network and his voting preferences, several variables were selected or calculated in order to assess the partisan makeup of the respondent's network, his broader political environment, and his political preferences. Each of these variables is described in detail below.

**DEMOGRAPHICS**

As a group, pure independents fall along the average of the demographic characteristics of the full sample ANES panel study sample. Of the 191 self-identified pure independents, 56% are female, 81% are white, and the average age is 51 years old. By comparison, for the full sample of 2,140 individuals, 56% are female, 85% are white, and the mean age is just shy of 52 years. This demographic mediocrity actually sets pure independents apart from both Republicans and Democrats. The Republicans in the sample are slightly older on average, with higher proportions of men and whites, while the Democrats include more women, fewer whites, and are on average about the same age as pure independents (Table 1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-White</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democrats</td>
<td>21.4%</td>
<td>77.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pure Independents</td>
<td>18.9%</td>
<td>81.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Republicans</td>
<td>4.7%</td>
<td>94.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>13.9%</td>
<td>85.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**RESPONDENT PARTY IDENTIFICATION**

Survey respondents are asked to give their party identification through a pair of linked questions. First they are asked, “Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a Republican, a Democrat, an independent, or what?” (American National Election Studies 2010b, 188). Those who answer Republican or Democrat are then asked, “Would you call yourself a strong [Democrat/Republican] or a not very strong [Democrat/Republican]?”
Those who answer independent or “something else” are asked “Do you think of yourself as closer to the Republican Party or to the Democratic Party?” and have the option to respond “neither.” From these answers, each respondent can be assigned a label on a seven-point party identification scale: “Strong Democrat,” “Weak Democrat,” “Lean Democrat,” “Independent,” “Lean Republican,” “Weak Republican,” or “Strong Republican.”

This study focuses solely on those respondents who said they were “independent” or “something else” and then said they did not lean toward either party – what in the literature are commonly referred to as “pure independents” (Lewis-Beck et al. 2008). Previous studies have repeatedly found that those who “lean” toward one of the two major parties can be expected to reliably vote for that party’s candidates, and are thus categorically different from those who have no declared lean (Sides and Vavreck 2013). The interest here is in voters who have no explicit partisan markers whatsoever. For the same reason, in considering the partisan composition of each respondent’s network, discussants who are labeled as leaning toward a party are categorized with that party, rather than as independents.

PARTISAN COMPOSITION OF POLITICAL COMMUNICATION NETWORKS

The key independent variable in this study is the partisan composition of the respondent’s political communication network. Each respondent was asked to identify up to three individuals (“discussants”) with whom he had discussed politics in the previous six months, and was later asked to provide the party identification of each discussant. Party identification of discussants was rated on the same seven-point scale as for respondents, ranging from “Strong Democrat” to “Strong Republican.”

These data on the party identification of each discussant were then used to calculate a binary variable indicating the partisan composition of each respondent’s network. This study considers only networks with three discussants, so that the party identity of each individual discussant has equal weight across all networks.

A network is categorized as being “majority Republican” if either two or three discussants are identified as “strong,” “weak,” or “leaning” Republicans, and categorized as “non-majority Republican” otherwise. It should be kept in mind that a network that is non-majority Republican is not automatically majority Democrat – it may also be majority independent, or include one member of each party and one independent.

ENVIRONMENT

A second independent variable considered is the respondent’s sociopolitical environment. Environment partisanship is measured using the voting outcome of the 2008 presidential election in the congressional district where the respondent resides. Congressional districts, while imperfect units of measure because they vary widely in size, have been used in earlier studies as a way to explore the impact of the partisan composition of an individual’s environment on his networks and political identification (Sinclair 2012).

For this study, the congressional district for each ANES respondent is matched with voting data from the 2008 presidential election, compiled by the Swing State Project from publically available election records (Nir 2008). The data give the percentage of the vote from each district that went to Obama, McCain, or a third party candidate. Vote outcomes in the presidential race are used because they are the only uniform measure available across all districts. Different states have different rules for declaring partisan affiliation, including many where voters do not have to declare any affiliation.

The use of presidential election outcomes is less than ideal because it includes the votes of independents who voted for a major-party candidate. Given that a plurality of independents voted for the Democratic candidate in 2008 (Magleby et al. 2011, 248), presidential vote choice may overestimate the proportion of Democrats in a district. However, because pure independents are only about 10% of the U.S. population, and only voted for Obama over McCain by a slim margin, this effect is expected to be small. At the same time, using presidential
voting results is advantageous in that they provide a snapshot of partisan leanings in the district in November 2008, within two months of the time of the ANES survey.

**VOTE CHOICE**

The first dependent variable considered is vote choice. In 2008, ANES respondents were asked whether they planned to vote for John McCain, Barack Obama, or someone else. Responses are converted to a binary variable indicating a vote for John McCain (1) or for another candidate (0). In the same way as political networks are assessed to be majority-Republican or not, vote choice is thus assessed as being pro-Republican or not.

Because the survey was conducted in September, two months before the election, the responses may not be a perfect match for the actual vote cast by each respondent (and not all respondents will actually have voted). However, it is important that the vote choice and network are being captured simultaneously, and previous election studies have found that vote choice remains stable as much as a year prior to a presidential election (Sides and Vavreck 2013). Asking about voting intentions prior to the election may also be an advantage of sorts, because once the election has been decided there is a well-documented effect of survey respondents lying about or misreporting their vote, with a higher percentage of people saying they voted for the election winner than are known to have actually done so (Clausen 1968). For the sake of simplicity, the intended candidate choice reported by respondents in the ANES will be referred to as their vote choice, with an implicit understanding that this could have changed at the time of the election.

**ISSUE POSITIONS**

Because both party identification and candidate preference are often intimately connected with views on policy issues (Carsey and Layman, 2006), no analysis of the relationship between political networks and vote choice would be complete without giving some consideration to the role of issue positions. Unfortunately, this wave of the ANES only asked a small number of issue questions, all of which were related either to the war in Iraq or policies centered on race. This limited set of variables is included as a first-look analysis of the relationships between policy issues, political networks, and vote choice. However, any relationships between network partisanship and policy positions found in this study should not be assumed to apply to every policy point on which Democrats and Republicans disagree.

Altogether, four policy-related questions were taken into consideration in various steps of this analysis. The two questions related to the war in Iraq were “Do you favor, oppose, or neither favor nor oppose setting a deadline for withdrawing all U.S. troops from Iraq?” and “Do you think the United States should or should not have sent troops to fight the war in Iraq in 2003?” The remaining two questions related to issues of race policy: “Do you favor, oppose, or neither favor nor oppose allowing universities to increase the number of black students studying at their schools by considering race along with other factors when choosing students?” and “Do you favor, oppose, or neither favor nor oppose the federal government in Washington seeing to it that blacks get fair treatment in jobs?”

Of these four questions, three had three possible answers: “favor,” “oppose,” and “neither favor nor oppose.” The question regarding sending troops to Iraq in 2003 had only two possible answers: “should” and “should not.” For each question, the most ideologically conservative response was coded as 1, the ambivalent response as 0, and the most ideologically liberal response as -1, in order to make individual scores on each question easily comparable. For example, in the question regarding affirmative action, “oppose” was scored as 1, while in the question regarding sending troops to Iraq in 2003 the score of 1 was assigned to “should.”
METHODS

CROSS-TABULATIONS

Several cross-tabulations were performed in order to consider the relationships between each pairing of the three central variables: vote choice, network composition, and environment. Chi-squared testing was performed on each cross-tabulation table to find whether distributions among categories were significantly different from random.

First, the respondent’s environment is compared against their network. Congressional districts are categorized by the percentage of the vote that went to Obama: less than 35%, between 35% and 45%, between 45% and 55%, between 55% and 65%, between 65% and 75%, between 75% and 85%, and 85% or more. District categories are compared against whether or not the majority of discussants in the respondent’s network were Republicans (Table 2). Second, the same district categories are compared against the respondent’s vote choice in order to consider the relationship between environment and vote (Table 4). Third, the partisanship of the respondent’s political network is compared against vote choice (Table 5). Lastly, all three variables of environment, network, and vote choice are considered together. In this calculation, congressional districts are divided simply between those where Obama won a majority of the vote and those where he did not, and the distribution of vote choice is compared across the four combinations of network (majority Republican or not) and environment (majority Obama voters or not) (Table 6).

LINEAR REGRESSION OF VOTE CHOICE

Respondents’ choice to vote for McCain is predicted using a linear regression model, with network composition and environment as the primary predictive variables. The full model also includes control variables for the respondent’s age, race, gender, and income, as well as the four policy issue variables (Table 7). A more robust analysis would also have included a variable controlling for education, however too few independent respondents provided information on their education status to include that question in the model.

MODELING ISSUE POSITIONS

Finally, in order to examine whether independent respondents with majority-Republican networks were similar to Republicans on a limited set of issue positions, linear regression modeling was used to develop a “Republican score.” First, using only partisan respondents (excluding pure independents and including lean, weak, and strong members of both parties), the four issue questions were used to predict the likelihood that the respondent was a Republican, producing coefficients for each variable (Table 8). The score was then generated for every respondent by multiplying their answer to each question by the corresponding coefficient and summing across the four questions. Because the issue variables were coded so that answers increased from least conservative to most conservative, a higher positive score indicates being closer to Republicans on this set of issues. Among pure independents, the scores of those with majority-Republican networks were compared against those with non-majority Republican networks using a t-test.

RESULTS

ENVIRONMENT, NETWORK, AND VOTE CHOICE

First, we compare network composition with sociopolitical environment. The proportion of pure independents who have majority-Republican networks is not statistically independent of the percentage of votes in the respondent’s congressional district that went to Obama (Table 2; \( X^2 = 12.97, p = .043 \)). The proportion of
respondents with majority-Republican networks appears to increase as the percentage of the district’s vote for Obama increases from less than 35% to between 55% and 65%. However, the relationship across districts is non-linear. The small sample size of pure independent respondents living in the most extreme districts makes it difficult to interpret whether this reflects a true relationship. Overall, a higher proportion of independents living in districts where Obama won a majority of the vote had majority-Republican networks than in those districts where he did not (Table 3; t-test p = .036).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>% of District Vote for Obama</th>
<th>Network Majority Republican</th>
<th>n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&lt;35%</td>
<td>8.33%</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35-45%</td>
<td>19.44%</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45-55%</td>
<td>26.67%</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55-65%</td>
<td>41.38%</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65-75%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75-85%</td>
<td>50.00%</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;85%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Overall</strong></td>
<td><strong>24.82%</strong></td>
<td><strong>141</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Next we consider the relationship of vote choice and environment. The choice of a pure independent to vote for McCain is also not randomly distributed across the categories of districts (Table 4, X² = 11.99, p = .062). The relationship is again non-linear, with a large spike in voting for McCain among respondents in districts where between 55% and 65% of votes went to Obama. Again, interpretation of this relationship is limited by the small sample size, especially in districts at the extreme ends of the voting spectrum.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District Majority Obama</th>
<th>Network Majority Republican</th>
<th>n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>17.91%</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>31.08%</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Overall</strong></td>
<td><strong>24.82%</strong></td>
<td><strong>141</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Lastly, we consider how vote choice relates to network composition. Overall, those pure independent respondents with majority-Republican networks were clearly more likely to vote for McCain, with 57% doing so as compared to just 37% of those whose networks were non-majority Republican (Table 5, t-test p = .020). This pattern holds true even within the subset of districts where Obama received at least half of the vote; in these districts, 52% of pure independents with majority-Republican networks voted for McCain, significantly higher than those with non-majority Republican networks (Table 6; t-test p = .054).
PREDICTING VOTE CHOICE

The first linear regression model of vote choice among pure independents considers only the partisan composition of the respondent’s network. Having a majority-Republican network is found to be a weak but significant positive predictor of voting for McCain (Table 7). The second model includes both network partisanship and a binary indicator of whether the majority of votes in the respondent’s district went to Obama. In the second model network partisanship remains significant, while a majority of district votes for Obama is a negative but non-significant predictor.

The third model considers a set of demographic control variables that account for the age, race, gender, and income of the respondent. Age is taken as an integer, while race is considered using a binary indicator for whether the respondent is white or not, and gender is similarly indicated as being male or not. The income variable is categorical, beginning with income of less than $5,000 and increasing in increments of $2,500 up to an income of $175,000 or more. When these four variables are considered alone, only age is significant and is a weakly negative predictor of a vote for McCain.

The fourth model includes both the demographic variables and the indicators for majority-Republican network and district voting. When all six variables are included, only network partisanship remains significant and continues to be a positive predictor for voting for McCain.

The fifth and final model adds in a group of four issue variables considering, respectively, the respondent’s position on setting a deadline for withdrawing troops from Iraq, whether the U.S. should have sent troops to Iraq in 2003, whether affirmative action should be permitted in college admissions, and whether the federal government should “see to it” that blacks are treated fairly at work. Among these, opposition to a withdrawal deadline and opposition to affirmative action are both significantly positive predictors for voting for McCain. When these issue variables are included, network partisanship is no longer a significant predictor of vote choice.

ISSUE-BASED SCORES

Finally, pure independents were assigned “Republican scores” based on their issue positions in order to assess how closely they matched the positions of self-identified Republicans. As expected, pure independents had lower average scores than self-identified Republicans, and higher scores than self-identified Democrats (Table 9). Among all pure independents, those with majority-Republican networks have higher scores than do those with non-majority-Republican networks, significant with a p-value less than .1 (Table 10, t-test p = .075). Interestingly, this pattern of significantly higher scores among those with majority-Republican networks remains...
true within the subset of respondents in districts where Obama won the majority of votes (t-test p = .031), but not in the subset living in districts where Obama won less than fifty percent of the vote. In the latter subset of respondents, the average scores were not significantly different between those with majority-Republican networks and those whose networks were non-majority Republican (Table 11, t-test p = .341).

Table 7 - Regression Model Predicting Vote for McCain Among Pure Independents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Model 1 (Network)</th>
<th>Model 2 (Network, District)</th>
<th>Model 3 (Controls Only)</th>
<th>Model 4 (Network, District, Controls)</th>
<th>Model 5 (Network, District, Controls, Issues)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Network Majority Republican (binary)</td>
<td>.208 (.040)</td>
<td>.231 (.025)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>.216 (.039)</td>
<td>.118 (.252)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District Majority Obama Voters (binary)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-.119 (.193)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-.128 (.171)</td>
<td>-.095 (.292)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age (integer)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-.004 (.003)</td>
<td>.004 (.255)</td>
<td>.001 (.705)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White (yes/no)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>.083 (.500)</td>
<td>.064 (.601)</td>
<td>.019 (.870)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male (yes/no)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>.018 (.849)</td>
<td>.024 (.795)</td>
<td>-.059 (.513)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income (brackets)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-.001 (.959)</td>
<td>-.001 (.949)</td>
<td>-.011 (.328)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase Troops in Iraq over 3 Months</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>.138 (.137)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opposition to Deadline for Iraq Withdrawal</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>.143 (.014)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opposition to Affirmative Action</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>.146 (.042)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opposition to Government Support for Black Jobs</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-.017 (.795)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( R^2 )</td>
<td>.035</td>
<td>.049</td>
<td>.018</td>
<td>.064</td>
<td>.190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( n )</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Boldface indicates a significance of p <= .05
Evidence of interacting relationships among network characteristics, district characteristics, vote choices and issue positions challenges the assumption that independent voters are truly free of partisan biases. Political scientists have long believed that independents who are “closet partisans,” those who agree ideologically with a party but choose not to identify as a member, self-identify as “leaning” towards their party of choice, leaving only the apathetic and truly unaffiliated as pure independents (Keith 1992; Lewis-Beck 2008). For political campaigns, this meant pure independents were assumed to be persuadable, easily swung toward one side or the other. However, the fact that voting among independents in the 2008 presidential election was related to the partisan composition of their networks suggests that, for some independents, their political leanings may be less ambivalent than their lack of party identification would suggest.

Political communication networks may offer a new way to subcategorize self-identified pure independents in order to better predict their political leanings and voting choices. Among pure independent respondents in the 2008 ANES, having a majority-Republican network is clearly associated with an increased likelihood to vote for McCain. This relationship remains true among the subset of respondents living in congressional districts where Obama received the majority of votes in the 2008 presidential election. Furthermore, those independents with majority-Republican networks were on average closer to Republicans in their issue positions than were those whose networks were non-majority-Republican. Taken together, these data suggest that one segment of the population of pure independents, those with majority-Republican networks, may in fact be reliably Republican voters.
The direction of causality between majority-Republican networks and vote choice among independents is unknown. It is possible that the independent respondent is truly unattached to either party but is persuaded by his Republican discussants to vote McCain. The partisanship of political discussants is known to influence both party identification (Sinclair 2012) and vote choice (Huckfeldt et al. 2004), so it is easy to imagine such influence being the mechanism at work among pure independents discussing politics with Republicans. Further studies, perhaps modeled on Sinclair’s matching study, would be needed to identify whether this was the case. If so, the implications for political campaigns are clear: getting members of a given party to talk politics with independents in their social networks could mean winning more votes.

An alternative scenario is that the independent respondents who vote for McCain, agree more with Republicans on policy issues, and have majority-Republican networks are themselves “closet Republicans.” In theoretical terms, these individuals would be members of networks that are homophilous in terms of their values, despite being heterogeneous in terms of status. To qualify as a “closet partisan,” such individuals would have to favor the ideology of the Republican Party and, importantly, be aware that they do so, and yet choose not to identify as Republicans. In this case, the respondent could either have self-selected into a network of like-minded individuals, or could have joined this network for other reasons and later been persuaded to agree with their political views – the key question is why he does not choose to identify as even leaning towards the party which matches his ideology.

Remaining a closet partisan by self-identifying as a pure independent may be a strategy for individuals who are in the political minority within their social environment to avoid social conflict. Consider for example the unusual spike in the proportion of pure independents with majority-Republican networks in districts where Obama received between 55% and 65% of the vote (Table 2). More than 40% of pure independents in those districts had majority-Republican networks as compared to less than thirty percent in districts where Obama received between 45% and 55% of the vote. On the whole, more pure independents living in districts where Obama won a majority of votes had majority-Republican networks (31%) than did those living in districts where he did not (18%) (Table 3).

The picture that emerges from these data is one of ideological Republicans ensconced in Republican political discussion networks, but surrounded by Democrats and identifying as independents. It seems reasonable to posit that among the individuals whose situations fit that description, adopting the label of “independent” could serve as a means to avoid conflict with members of the local majority party, whom the respondent is likely to encounter in the course of their daily activities. Particularly in today’s environment of heightened political polarization, it may be useful to position oneself not as belonging to either of the two opposing factions, but as undeclared. If laypersons make the same assumptions about independents as social scientists traditionally have – that they are simply undecided, apathetic, or neutral – then “closet partisans” may avoid being the object of more actively negative stereotypes attached by members of their community to the minority party. A self-proclaimed independent may be seen as uninformed, lazy, or even strange, but he will not likely be seen as an enemy.

Having considered the potential motivations of Republican-thinking individuals in Democratic districts self-identifying as independents, we are left with the question of why a Republican-thinking individual living in a Republican district would do so. After all, an individual showing Republican-like issue positions and voting preferences with a majority-Republican network and living in a Republican environment should have no reason to fear social reprisal for identifying as a member of the Republican Party.

One possibility is that these individuals are “chameleons:” people with few strong political positions or preferences who are easily influenced by their networks to vote one way or the other, as has been found to occur among independents (Huckfeldt et al. 2004a). In other words, these respondents fit the profile of independents typically
described in the political-sociological literature, in that they don’t care about politics, are not particularly well informed, or are ideologically moderate.

This dichotomy between closet partisans who fear social conflict and chameleons who are shaped by their network fits with the pattern of increasing percentages of independents with majority-Republican networks as the percentage of the vote for Obama in a district increases (Table 2). Consider a case of an individual independent with a Republican network moving from a Democratic district to a Republican district. If the individual were a chameleon, he would likely maintain his identity as an independent, because his motivation for being an independent is not related to his environment, but rather to his apathy or moderate ideology. On the other hand, if the individual were in fact a closet partisan, we would expect him to switch his identification to Republican upon moving to a Republican district, because he would no longer fear social conflict. Thus, the proportion of independents with Republican networks and Republican-like ideologies in Democratic districts might be expected to be larger, because it would include both chameleons and closet partisans, whereas in Republican districts only chameleons would remain as independents.

Further research is needed in order to better understand the mechanisms behind the relationship of network partisanship and vote choice among independents. A longitudinal study tracking the networks, districts, and political preferences of individual independents over time would help illuminate the direction of influence between network and vote choice: if an independent’s network switches from majority-Republican to majority-Democrat, does his vote choice change? Or, would we see changes in his ideology followed by a change in the people with whom he discusses politics? In tracking people as they moved between districts, we might also capture changes in party identification, as closet partisans adjust their party status to match their political values.

LIMITATIONS

The greatest limitation faced by this study is the small sample size of independent respondents it has to work with. Because pure independents comprise only about ten percent of the American population (Magleby et al. 2011), the fact that a representative sample of about 2,000 Americans included only 191 pure independents is within expectations. However, this makes it very difficult too consider the interacting influences of multiple variables, because sub-groups rapidly become much too small to provide reliable results. Resolving this problem requires conducting a large-scale, national study with the express purpose of studying independents, which would necessarily involve calling approximately ten times as many potential respondents in order to capture a sufficiently large sample of pure independents.

A second major limitation of this study is the artificial cap on network size imposed by the ANES. The survey allows respondents to name up to eight individuals with whom they have discussed politics, but only asks for further details about the first three discussants named. For reasons of maintaining respondent confidentiality, the names listed are blocked in the public dataset, and it is impossible to know how many discussants were actually named by each respondent. However, among the 191 independent respondents, 141 named at least three discussants, making it likely that some proportion of these would have named more than three individuals given the opportunity.

This cap creates uncertainty in two ways. First, for those who named more than three discussants, it means we are only looking at part of the network – a part that might represent less than half of the full network named. This means we are overestimating the expected effect of a change in the party identification of one of the three discussants considered for analysis – one of three could really be one of four, or one of seven, and therefore in reality play a smaller proportional role in the respondent’s network than is apparent in the study. The effect is that the true relationships between network characteristics and voting choices are likely blurred, because it is impossible to know which networks truly only include three discussants (and are therefore directly comparable to each other) and which are only partial networks.
Second, there is likely some bias in the order in which respondents name their political discussants, such that the first three individuals named are not strictly representative of the full network. Respondents could plausibly be more likely to first name those with whom they agree, those with whom they discuss politics more frequently, or those with whom they spoke most recently. Any of these biases could create misleading results – an independent who appears to speak to one Republican and two Democrats could in fact be speaking with one Republican and five Democrats, or just as easily, four Republicans and two Democrats. To resolve this problem, a survey would have to be designed to allow respondents to name and provide information for an unlimited number of discussants.

A third limitation of this study is that it only considers the effects of majority-Republican networks on the choice to vote for a Republican candidate. It therefore remains uncertain whether the patterns found here would hold true for independents in majority-Democrat networks choosing to vote for a Democrat. That choice was made because Republicans were the losing side in the 2008 election, and because half of independents did vote for Obama (Magleby et al. 2011). In this context, a vote for McCain is a deviant choice requiring some explanation. However, previous studies specifically addressing the influence of Democrats in political networks suggest that relationships between network partisanship and vote choice likely exist regardless of which party is under consideration (Sinclair 2012).

Finally, the voting patterns found in this study may have limited generalizability because of the historic nature of the 2008 presidential election. Barack Obama’s status as the first African-American nominee for either major party made race a salient factor in the election, with varying effects. Some moderates and even conservatives were swayed by the phenomenon of his candidacy to vote for Obama even though they might normally have voted for the Republican candidate. On the other hand, some moderates and liberals with conscious or subconscious racial biases voted for McCain when they typically would have voted for a Democrat. These effects may have been particularly strong among those who had no party affiliation and no strong ideological leanings – the very individuals under consideration in this study. Thus, analysis of the political networks of independents should be repeated in future election years in order to determine whether similar patterns play out.

Despite these limitations, the results of this study clearly show a relationship between political communication networks and vote choice among independents. These results fit well with the findings of previous work on the relationship between networks and political preferences, including studies by Sinclair (2012) on the influence of networks on party identification and those by Huckfeldt et al. showing the relationship of network support for a candidate and vote choice of independents in the 2000 presidential election (2004a). The fact that this association is demonstrable even within such a limited dataset provides motivation for future studies to continue investigation of the mechanisms of interaction between networks, vote choice, and ideology among independents.

CONCLUSION

The study of political communication networks provides an opportunity to further examine the characteristics of self-declared political independents. Examination of data from the 2008 American National Election Studies has shown that the partisan makeup of the political communication networks of self-identified independent respondents varies greatly both within and across districts of differing partisan composition, and has important implications for whether an independent is likely to vote for a Republican.

Across all congressional districts, having a political network composed mostly of Republicans is a key indicator for the likelihood that an independent planned to vote for McCain in the 2008 presidential election. The relatively high likelihood that a respondent will have a majority-Republican network when he lives in a congressional district that voted for Obama suggests that some independents may in fact be “closet partisans,” making use of the independent label to avoid conflict in their broader social environment while their immediate network provides a buffer behind which they may develop or maintain partisan beliefs and preferences. On the other
hand, those who persist in self-identifying as pure independents even when their vote preferences and issue positions align with both their network and the majority party in their broader political environment are likely to be “chameleons,” those who do not hold strong preferences either way and simply reflect the ideologies of those with whom they discuss politics.

The existence of both closet partisans and chameleons within the group of pure independents has ramifications for political theorists and campaign operatives alike. From a theoretical perspective, these results stand in clear contradiction of the consensus position among political scientists that pure independents are uniformly uncommitted to any partisan ideologies. The historical assumption that any independents with partisan ideologies will self-identify as “leaning” towards that party is negated by the findings that independents with Republican networks appear to vote and think very much like Republicans, particularly in districts where Republicans are the minority party. This raises the possibility that the label of “pure independent” is being utilized as a tool to avoid social conflict in the current atmosphere of heightened partisan polarization, so that the population of pure independents includes many who have true ideological preferences for one party or the other.

From the very practical perspective of a political campaign trying to secure votes for a candidate, the lesson of these results is that not all pure independents should be treated alike. Independents are traditionally treated as uncommitted voters who may be persuaded to vote either way, and are therefore a major focus of campaigns in elections where the electorate is evenly split between Democrats and Republicans. However, it seems likely that chameleons and closet partisans will differ significantly in the degree to which they may be persuadable. Closet partisans are likely to hold established ideological beliefs that may not be easily changed, making them poor targets for campaigning. On the other hand, political chameleons who are simply reflecting the preferences of their networks may be open to changing their vote if provided with new information. In fact, the fact that the network appears to be the deciding factor in how chameleons cast their vote may mean campaigns have an opportunity to change that vote by changing the individual’s network. By targeting chameleons in particular for conversations with a campaign representative, or by operationalizing existing social relationships with campaign supporters into specifically political communications, a campaign may be able to persuade the chameleon independent to vote their way. Thus, being able to distinguish between chameleons and closet partisans may be a critical factor in determining the outcomes of close elections.

Because of the limited sample size and cross-sectional nature of the data used in this study, much further work is needed to confirm and expand on these findings. Future studies should consider using a matching technique to consider the influence of political networks above and beyond demographic characteristics, and find innovative techniques to separate out the directionality of relationships between party identification, political networks, and vote choice. A longitudinal study conducted on a large sample, and without limitations on network size, would also enable tracking of individuals as they move between different environments and networks.

While the findings of this study are not definitive, they do hint at a more diverse population of pure independents than previously acknowledged in studies of independent voters. The pertinent question is shifted from “what mechanisms influence independent vote choice?” to “which mechanisms influence the vote choice of which independents?” While the typology of closet partisans and chameleons suggested here may be proven inaccurate by future studies, the findings remain that vote choice is different among pure independents in different sociopolitical circumstances.

Whatever the mechanism behind the association of independents having majority-Republican networks, voting Republican, and being closer to Republicans on issue positions, it is clear that pure independents are not a monolithic group. Measures of who independents talk to, how they vote, and where they stand on policy issues all vary greatly across individuals, but are clearly not independent of each other. The results of this study demonstrate that network partisanship is a key indicator for how an independent will vote, and suggests that individuals who have differing combinations of network partisanship and political environment likely have
different motivations for self-identifying as independents. The existence of both chameleons and closet partisans under the umbrella of pure independents fundamentally challenges the current understanding of what it means to be a political independent, such that further study of these questions may prove essential to advancing the work of political theorists and operatives alike.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


