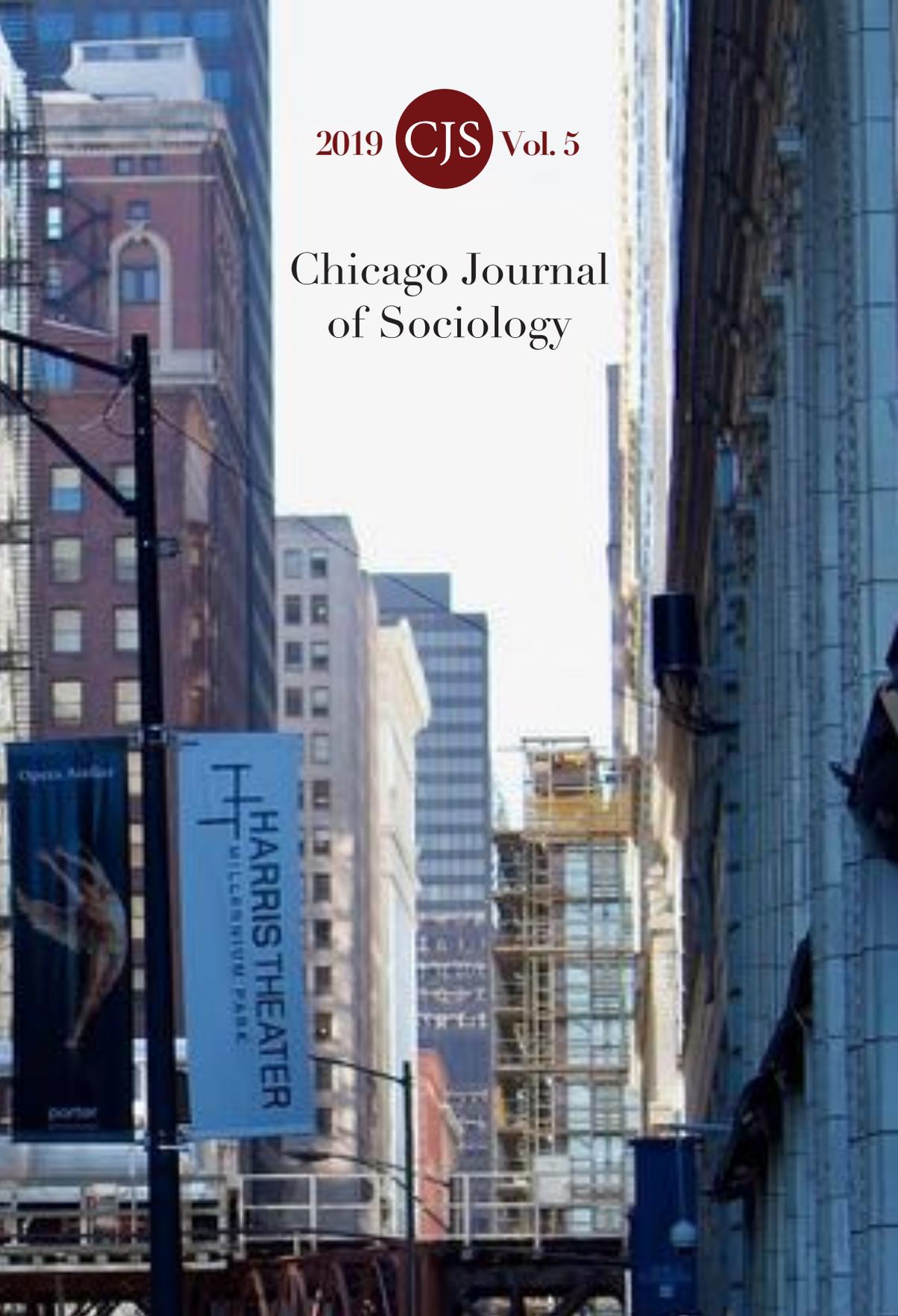


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The Chicago Journal of Sociology (CJS) publishes excellent undergraduate work in the social sciences, while giving student editors experience turning coursework into publishable academic articles. CJS is looking for papers that offer well formulated arguments about topics of sociological interest. We value clear, straightforward prose, careful citation, and a wide range of methodological approaches. For more information on submitting your paper, or on joining our staff, visit sociology.uchicago.edu/cjs or contact cjs.uchicago@gmail.com.

Editor's Note

Dear reader,

What is the value of undergraduate publishing? At CJS, we don't purport to advance the field with novel research or offer groundbreaking theories on our discipline's most cherished questions. Instead, we believe that the value of our undergraduate journal is to provide a space for young scholars to "learn the ropes" of academic sociology. We take seriously the intellectual inquiries of our contributing writers, train the curious minds of our student editors, and nurture mentoring relationships among students and staff.

Still, our practice is not merely an exercise. We have produced a journal that showcases the best undergraduate research and editing in sociology. For the first time, we feature student work from schools across Chicago. We established campus liaisons and developed lasting partnerships with departments across the city. I'm proud of the work that CJS has accomplished this past year.

I would be remiss if I did not thank our intrepid team of editors and our dedicated management team – Henry Connolly, Rebecca Julie, and Calvin Woodard. Special thanks to our faculty adviser Jenny Trinitapoli, whose thoughtful leadership was critical to the success of the journal. To Austin Kozlowski and Pat Princell for all your assistance with printing and distribution. And finally, to you reader, we hope you enjoy the work of our Chicago scholars.

All the best,
Marissa Combs

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Building Power in the Movement for Black Lives: Recognizing the Impacts of Embedded Utopian Organizations Today

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Political process theory initially arose in response to the U.S. Civil Rights movement of the 1950s and sixties, but its narrow conception of social movements excludes important aspects of activism surrounding racial justice today. This paper will expand political process theory to encompass organizations whose goals are unlikely to be achieved through direct contentious politics alone. Using the police abolitionist and anti-capitalist organization the Freedom Collective as a case study, I will bridge the concept of political opportunity as a continuously mobilizing force with theories of utopian movements, as well as with Tufekci's (2017) theory of "movement culture." I will use this composite framework to introduce a new category of social movement organization that I will term "embedded utopian organizations." Embedded utopian organizations are interconnected with traditional, confrontational social movements, but focus their efforts on manifesting these movements' more revolutionary elements outside the arena of direct contentious politics. Drawing on 20 in-depth qualitative interviews and fieldwork conducted between August 2017 and March 2018, I will demonstrate how embedded utopian organizations simultaneously offer reprieve within their own spaces from the structures they oppose, and promote the long-term resistance of these structures beyond their utopian spaces.

INTRODUCTION

This project aims to create a place in the literature on social movements for organizations whose primary work – and present impact – occurs largely outside of direct confrontation with those in power. Through analysis of the work and impacts of a police-abolitionist and anti-capitalist organization within of the Movement for Black Lives, I will introduce the term "embedded utopian organization" to describe a previously under-studied category of social movement organization. Embedded utopian organizations are interconnected with social movements seeking present societal change, but focus their own efforts on goals less likely to be achieved at the societal level in the short term, striving to manifest them internally in the present. In proposing the concept of embed-

ded utopian organizations, this paper offers a framework for understanding how organizations with revolutionary ideals can have impacts independent of the responses of the political powers they oppose. As such, it makes an argument for understanding the internally focused work of radical organizations as a pragmatic response to a sociopolitical landscape that is considered to be oppressive in fundamental and culturally embedded ways.

The Freedom Collective

In the summer of 2014, a group of Chicago-based artists and activists mobilized to deliver supplies to those protesting police violence in Ferguson, Missouri in response to the high-profile police killing of unarmed Black teenager Michael Brown. Following this initial mobilization, this group returned to

Chicago and crystallized into the organization that I will refer to as the “Freedom Collective.” At the time of this writing, the Freedom Collective identifies itself as an arts-oriented, anti-violent, anti-hierarchical, and anti-capitalist police-abolitionist organization, whose ultimate goal is the liberation of all marginalized identities. The Freedom Collective continues to identify as part of the broader Movement for Black Lives, working in close collaboration with several organizations also identified with this movement, but operates as an independent collective with its own modes of organization and action.¹ The group has no formal membership criteria; the only criterion for being a member is to self-identify as one. Because membership is self-determined, those who appear outwardly committed to the Collective do not necessarily identify as members. As such, when asked about the size of the Collective’s consistently active and committed membership, my respondents’ estimates varied, ranging from 8-10 people on the low end, to 15-21 people on the high end.

The Tent City Occupation

In the summer of 2016, the Freedom Collective led a spontaneous, 41-night, 45-day occupation (which I will refer to as the “Tent City Occupation”) in a vacant lot across the street from a Chicago Police Department facility (which I will refer to as the “West Side CPD Facility”) in response to allegations of large-scale and long-standing abuse at this site. This occupation stood as a protest not only against police mis-

conduct at this particular facility, but also against the existence of police in general. The aims of this action were to raise consciousness about perceived violence in the justice system, to offer a space to heal from trauma, and to engage participants and community members in working cooperatively to imagine and model ‘a world without police.’ The action was housed in a ‘tent city,’ with each tent representing services the organizers believed should be funded in place of the police. Following the Occupation, the Collective moved away from protesting to focus on ‘healing’ and building collective consciousness. Despite their step back from direct contentious action, they continue to pursue their ultimate goal of dismantling the sociopolitical structures they consider to be violent.

The Freedom House

In the year following the Tent City Occupation, the Freedom Collective acquired the space out of which they are now based. I will refer to this space as the “Freedom House.” Since settling into the Freedom House, the Collective has intensified its focus on building community and cultivating a space where those of marginalized identities can go to “breathe.” Since the fall of 2017, the Collective has offered regular events open to the public, including weekly gatherings aimed at providing a collaborative workspace for “manifesting” projects, weekly planning meetings with those who identify as Collective members, and publicly advertised themed events that generally occur a

¹ I will use the term “Movement for Black Lives” to refer to the loose coalition of Black-led organizations across the African diaspora mobilized in response to a series of high-profile police killings of unarmed Black people in the U.S. in the 2010s. Although this movement is often referred to as “Black Lives Matter,” this title risks becoming conflated with a particular organization of the same name.

few times per month.

Recognizing Impact

Due to the Collective's internal focus, those not directly involved with the organization may not see the impacts that it has on the lives and work of its participants. Dwayne, a community organizer who has been involved in reformist activism surrounding the West Side CPD Facility, believes that the Tent City Occupation was "undermined" by the fact that it failed to gain "pull" in the media and the general public. While he was supportive of the Occupation – and visited it to drop off donations – he expressed disappointment in its apparent lack of external traction. Similar to Dwayne's assessment of the Tent City Occupation, the sociological literature on social movements hinges movement impact on the external results of direct contentious action.

Those who were deeply involved in the Occupation, however, frame it differently. Collective members speak of it not as a failed protest, but as a springboard for launching the community they have built in the Freedom House, which they describe as 'a living continuation' of the Occupation and 'a new space for greater collective consciousness in the resistance movement.' They describe the internal focus of the Occupation – and their subsequent turn away from direct action – as intentional and strategic according to their ultimate aim of achieving liberation for structurally marginalized people. They describe this strategy as 'acting where their people are, not where the people in power are.' Rather than confront external structures directly, they strive to stand as the 'antithesis' to them. Through

their internally oriented work – what founding member Alicia describes as "building power, rather than confronting power as a tactic" – the Freedom Collective continues to work toward eventual large-scale change, while simultaneously manifesting the Collective's ideology in the present.

Project Overview

I will use a qualitative analysis of my interviews and fieldwork to outline how the Freedom Collective achieves these dual impacts in the present. In Section I, I will elaborate how the Freedom Collective transitioned away from direct contentious action while maintaining their place in the Movement for Black Lives. I will discuss their current emphasis on visioning and modeling the world they wish to see in Section II, and in Section III I will demonstrate how this work has translated into a form of utopianism, in which the Freedom Collective's spaces provide refuge from the societal structures they oppose. In Section IV, I will describe how the Freedom Collective works to make their spaces inclusive, and why this is important to the Collective's mission of liberating those who are structurally marginalized. I will show how this inclusivity aligns with the Collective's consciousness-building work in Section V, both in terms of spreading the Collective's philosophy, and of continuing to develop this philosophy in a collective manner. Finally, Section VI will show how the Collective's model translates into impacts beyond its utopian spaces, and ultimately influences the movement in which it is embedded. I will conclude by demonstrating how the concept of embedded utopianism is

not limited to the case of the Freedom Collective, but can be applied to other organizations and social movements to understand their work and impacts more holistically.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

I critique the limitations of political process theory because it remains uniquely situated within the social movements literature as a heuristic for understanding the inception and ongoing development of the Movement for Black Lives in the context of its ever-changing sociopolitical environment. I aim to address these limitations by bridging the concept of political opportunity with theories on “movement culture” (Tufekci 2017) and utopian movements. Existing literature on utopian movements offers a partial framework for considering the impacts of internally focused, non-confrontational responses to the sociopolitical landscape. Additionally, Tufekci’s (2017) theory of movement culture offers a mechanism for how participants can feel social movement impact independent of changes at the structural level. I will introduce the term “embedded utopian organizations” to encapsulate the under-studied social movement organizations that ought to be analyzed under this hybrid framework.

Political Process Theory and its Limitations

Political process theory, which centers upon the notion of “political opportunity” first proposed by political scientist Peter Eisinger (1973), and developed largely by sociologists McAdam (1982), Tarrow ([1994]1998), and Tilly (1978), has provided one of the

leading approaches to the study of collective action and social movements in recent decades. This theory examines social movements within the dynamic sociopolitical landscape of their respective societies (1982:39-40). It holds that social movements consolidate and mobilize when some change or event signals a weakened ability of those in power to maintain the status quo, and thereby opens a “political opportunity” for popular mobilization around a particular issue. Political process theorists emphasize confrontation with opponents as the hallmark of collective action, and hinge social movements’ success on the responses of those in power (McAdam 1982:36-37). Even as the pioneers of political process theory have updated and revised their approach to social movements, they’ve maintained the centrality of direct contentious politics (McAdam, Tarrow, Tilly 2001).

In their critique of political process theory, Goodwin and Jasper contend that the framework excludes “any movements that do not target the state as their main opponent” (1999:34). I add to this critique that political process theory provides a very limited analysis of movements that give rise to organizations whose modes of organizing fall outside of its narrow criteria for social movement activity. According to Tilly, collective action is generally targeted at a specific opponent with a discrete goal in mind, as “[p]eople do not ordinarily act to influence abstract structures such as polities and markets; they try to get particular other people to do particular things” ([1994]1998:5.1). However, collective action concerned with structurally embedded inequities does, in fact, seek change at an abstract lev-

el. Although the Movement for Black Lives is often associated with protests and demands for police reform, it is important to note that the underlying aim of this movement is the liberation of Black people from oppressive systems. This aim is not one that can be achieved in full by making finite demands to discrete entities. For this reason, it is necessary to consider the work and impacts of organizations like the Freedom Collective, which focus their work on these more abstract goals, in order to analyze social movements holistically.

Divorcing Impact from Political Power Structures

In her analysis of protest camps, Tufekci (2017) posits potential impacts of collective action that are not dependent on the responses of those in power. She holds that movements with an “emphasis on participation, horizontalism, institutional distrust, ad hoc organizations eschewing formal ones, and strong expressive bent” give rise to “movement cultures” that are conducive to a range of positive outcomes within protest settings (2017:83). According to Tufekci, the tendency of protests to foster a sense of community belonging and Durkheimian “collective effervescence” ([1912] 1965) “can be ends as well as means,” regardless of whether they achieve their “instrumental aims” (2017:89-90,103). Additionally, she argues that protests have the potential to offer a temporary reprieve from capitalistic systems and other systems perceived to be harmful, by allowing for interactions that are not mediated by them (2017: 87-88,90-91). Moreover, by bringing together potentially diverse people who share a common cause, protests offer a platform for

consciousness-building that can have major long-term implications for the advancement of a movement’s cause(s) (Tufekci 2017: 103, 105, 107-108).

According to Tufekci, movement culture also entails the risks of protest, including emotional and physical trauma, legal ramifications, and even death (Tufekci 2017:104-105). My data, however, suggests that this unifying “movement culture” may not be limited to protest settings, but may also develop in non-protest spaces with the radical features Tufekci outlines. Given the risks of contentious action, and the unlikelihood of achieving abstract goals in the short term through protest, it is significant that those who have engaged in events at the Freedom House have reported each of the benefits described above outside of protest settings.

‘Utopian’ Movements as Social Movements

A body of literature by anthropological and organizational theorists argues for an increased and more nuanced consideration of utopian movements in the study of social movements (Fournier 2002; Price, Nonini, and Fox Tree 2008). This work posits that leading social movement theories, including political process theory, “take for granted the modern nation-state and capitalist markets as either the objects of strategic contention by social movements or as the fields of contention within which social movements arise and develop” (Price, Nonini, and Fox Tree 2008:130). Price, Nonini, and Fox Tree’s (2008) conception of grounded utopian movements, or GUMs, provides a useful framework for understanding aspects of social movements that would be ex-

cluded by established sociological criteria.

Similar to the Freedom Collective, “grounded utopian movements,” or GUMs, are identity-based movements that organize in the face of “conditions of racist imperial oppression (e.g., slaughter, ethnocide, displacement)” (2008:128). The way GUMs respond to these grievances is ‘utopian’ in that they strive to build their own spaces and communities in order to “counteract” these conditions, focusing “on group integrity and identity instead of on instrumental action with respect to states and capitalism” (Price, Nonini, and Fox Tree 2008:128). The classification of a movement or organization as utopian does not connote that they actually model an ideal society. According to Fournier, “utopianism is not a blueprint for a ‘perfect society,’” but an ongoing process which “undermines dominant understanding of what is possible and opens up new conceptual spaces for imaging and practicing possible futures” (Fournier 2002:192-193).

Introducing Embedded Utopian Organizations

My data show that the Freedom Collective pursues a form of grounded utopia within the spaces they cultivate through their emphasis on healing, relationship-building, and minimizing contact with capitalistic and carceral systems. However, this utopian space is intrinsically embedded in the broader Movement for Black Lives, and the work that occurs within the Collective’s

utopian space is continuously informed by, and has impacts on, the contentious politics of this movement. Thus, I propose the term “embedded utopian organization” as a new category of social movement organization.

Goodwin and Jasper argue that there cannot be any “invariant and transhistorical theory” of all social movements (1999:28). I agree with this claim and contend that frameworks for understanding social movement organizations’ work and impacts must be developed according to the nature of their goals, and the contexts in which they work. I developed the term embedded utopian organization empirically to describe a particular type of social movement organization. These organizations arise as part of directly contentious social movements in response to political opportunities – and remain interconnected with these movements and their sociopolitical context – while focusing their activities on providing spaces for manifesting these movements’ ultimate goals in the present.² In doing so, embedded utopian organizations offer impacts on two levels. Internally, they provide participating individuals a sense of reprieve from the structures they oppose through the benefits of “movement culture” as Tufekci (2017) describes it, but without the risks and stresses of direct contentious action. Externally, they impact the work of activists and other community actors who visit their utopian spaces, by offering a platform for consciousness building and visioning,

² Every individual or organization in the movement need not hold these “ultimate” goals. However, in order for a utopian organization to be considered “embedded” in a broader movement, their utopian ideals must be conceptualized by this organization and its movement collaborators as aligned with the movement’s goals. For example, not all organizations associated with the Movement for Black Lives are police abolitionist or anti-capitalist, but the Collective has a number of collaborators in the movement that ascribe to these ideals, and conceptualize them in terms of the movement’s goal of Black liberation.

as well as a space for recovery from the traumas of direct contentious action.

It is especially important to acknowledge the impacts of embedded utopian organizations given that they offer relatively accessible and low-risk platforms through which people who refuse or are unable to engage in direct contentious action can contribute to social movements. In his analysis of Occupy Wall Street, Bray (2013) offers a strategy that radical movements may use to recruit individuals who do not have a previous understanding of or commitment to its work. Bray describes how Occupy Wall Street activists “translated” the movement’s revolutionary ideas into concepts that were familiar and salient to those not previously involved in radical activism. As I will show, the Freedom Collective employs this strategy in two ways: to break down academic concepts like capitalism into terms that are more clearly relevant to the lives of participants, as well as to reframe culturally normative concepts like the notion of police as protectors, in order to pitch radical goals like police abolitionism.

DATA AND METHODS

Data Collection

My data are drawn from 20 in-depth qualitative interviews, along with fieldwork, conducted between August 2017 and March 2018. All names of individuals and organizations have been changed.³ Formal interviews ranged from around 20 minutes to around 100 minutes in length, with the average interview lasting slightly over one hour.

I conducted all formal interviews one-

³ I do refer to the group Black Lives Matter by its real name, in order to clarify the distinction between this organization and the Movement for Black Lives. However, I did not collect data on this organization.

on-one, at locations chosen by my respondents. Interviews were conducted over the phone when respondents were unable to meet in-person. All formal interviews were recorded and transcribed in full. Those interviewed for this project fall into four categories: seven respondents are members of the Collective, six are close collaborators with the Collective, three are first-time visitors to the Freedom House, and four are members of organizations that collaborated on the Occupation (two of whom were present at the Occupation, and two of whom were able to speak to the way this event is discussed within their organizations.) Because the Collective does not have formal membership requirements, I defined members as anyone who both self-identifies as such and has had some organizing role in at least one of the Collective’s actions or events. I interviewed the final category of respondents to help me reconstruct the events of the Tent City Occupation, which I did not attend.

My data collection process followed Small’s (2009) method of case selection for qualitative field-based research. Small’s approach to analysis offers an appropriate methodology for this project because my aim is not to describe a representative sample of all activist groups – or even all embedded utopian groups – but rather to develop a valid analysis of the Collective’s model and impacts, based on “the internal conditions” of this organization. I began by cold-calling and cold-emailing individuals who I hoped could provide me more background and context on the Occupation, and then employed

snowball sampling to identify and secure interviews with individuals whose relevance to my evolving question was revealed to me over the course of my interviews. As Small recommends for the case selection method, I altered each new interview to include “increasingly refined” questions about different respondents’ experiences with the Freedom Collective (Small 2009: 26-27). Additionally, I recruited first-time visitors to the Freedom House through in-person conversations at events. I had not met any of my respondents prior to beginning my research.

I conducted fieldwork at events and meetings led by the Freedom Collective, as well as those involving organizations that the Collective has acknowledged as collaborators. I recorded spending 32 hours at these organized gatherings. I also spent time at the Freedom House and visiting partner organizations outside of organized gatherings. I engaged in numerous informal interviews in the field, as well as informal follow-up conversations with those I had previously interviewed. I hand-wrote most jottings in the field, but occasionally wrote them shortly after leaving, when taking notes in real time was either not possible or not appropriate. I will use single quotation marks when using quotes from jottings.

Analysis

I analyzed my interview transcripts and field notes using the analytic coding method outlined in Chapter 6 of Emerson and Fretz’s *Writing Ethnographic Field Notes* (1995), to systematically extract patterns from the written records of my data collection. Employing Emerson and Fretz’s method of

carefully reading all written records of data collection, and beginning my coding on a line-by-line basis, was crucial to grounding my analysis empirically in the data, as all codes were derived directly from the contents of the text.

RESULTS

From Political Opportunity to Non-Confrontational Activism

While the Freedom Collective’s early work in Chicago began as a continuation of its work in Ferguson, it began to shift tactics as it became more attuned to the needs of the communities in which it works, as well as to the long-term nature of its goals. The Collective remains interconnected with the Movement for Black Lives, and continues to shape its work around current events, but does not presently engage in confrontational direct action.

The political opening

A series of high-profile police killings of Black people across the United States, and the subsequent momentum of the Movement for Black Lives, served as a political opening for the Freedom Collective to consolidate and organize. These developments called into question public trust of the police and the state, and brought racial tensions in the United States to the fore (Tarrow [1994]1998:32). According to Alicia, the Collective’s birth as an organization working in Chicago arose directly from their involvement in Ferguson. Moreover, Michael notes that the action that led to the Tent City Occupation was a part of a national day of action in response to the police killings of Alton Sterling in Louisiana and Philando Castile in Minnesota.

Shifting Further Inward

While it was a national movement that gave rise to the Freedom Collective, the forms its actions in Chicago took were ultimately shaped by hyper-local factors. Initially, the Freedom Collective focused on what Alicia describes as “confrontational civil disobedience direct actions,” where the targets of these actions were political and economic elite. However, while planning a Memorial Day 2016 action in the West Side Neighborhood, the Collective began to reflect on “what it would mean to take that style of protest into [the West Side Neighborhood]” given its longstanding tensions with the police and “other traumas of social disinvestment.” The Collective shifted its target to those it ultimately aims to liberate, organizing a “service parade” through the blocks surrounding the site where an unarmed Black woman named Rekia Boyd had been killed by off-duty police officer Dante Servin, picking up trash and giving away free books. Alicia describes this action as a turning point in the Collective’s work, their “first gesture” toward “building power rather than confronting power as a tactic.”

This community-oriented focus became an organizing principle of the Tent City Occupation later that summer. Michael notes that the decision to hold an action in a lot in the West Side Neighborhood was motivated by the goal of working “more directly in concert with our communities that are most directly impacted by the carceral system and, you know, over-policing, or policing in general.” This decision was informed by organizers’ observations that platforms for confronting power directly are often divorced from the people most

impacted by the systems the Collective opposes.

The service-orientation of the Occupation developed as a response to concerns regarding appropriate action in a community facing trauma and immediate need. In their fight to dismantle systems they considered inequitable and violent, organizers of the Occupation emphasized strategies that would address the community’s needs and avoid retraumatization. Organizers did make political demands, including that the City reject a proposed ordinance to extend hate crime protections to police officers, and that the police department shut down the West Side CPD Facility. However, Michael emphasizes that they did not hinge their sense of success on having their demands met. Instead, he holds that the core intention of the Tent City was “just to be stationed there and be the antithesis” to the carceral system.

Building Power in the Freedom House

Following the events of the summer of 2016, the Freedom Collective deepened its commitment to modeling the world it wishes to see. Erika described her impression of the “trajectory” of the Collective since acquiring the Freedom House: “like in the past there was more emphasis on like action and protests. And now it’s, um, there seems to be more emphasis on kind of like bringing people into this space.” Alicia connects the Freedom Collective’s commitment to this model to the long-term and radical nature of their objectives, suggesting that their movement is presently better-served by raising consciousness than by making direct appeals to political power structures: “we’re very aware that the abolition of police and prisons is a generations-long

project. It's a horizon-based project. Um, and so you know, I think the work that we do is, uh, culture work around transforming consciousness around abolition." Toward this end of "transforming consciousness," they continue working to stand as the "antithesis" to the external structures they oppose in their permanent space.

Keeping up with Current Events

While the Freedom Collective has recently steered away from direct contentious action, they remain deeply interconnected with protest-oriented organizations associated with the Movement for Black Lives. This includes attending and promoting each other's events, and contributing to each other's dialogue. Further, the Freedom Collective continues to respond to the ever-changing sociopolitical landscape in which it is situated. For example, the Collective was a founding member of a coalition of Chicago organizations that formed in November 2016 in response to that year's presidential elections. The Freedom Collective's work within this coalition has focused on offering 'teach-ins' to raise consciousness about their philosophy. Additionally, following the president's comments disparaging immigrants from Haiti and various African Nations in January 2018 (Davis, Stolberg, and Kaplan 2018), the Collective added programming to their February Freedom House Series event intended to "uplift" these countries.

Visioning and Modeling

Members of the Collective are open about their uncertainty as to how, exactly, their ideal world would be organized. They view both the Tent City Occupation and the permanent space

they have cultivated in the Freedom House as platforms for collaborative experimentation. According to Mia: "everything at the Collective at this point is all experimental, and we're all developing in trying to – in trying to build it together." This experimentation serves the dual purpose of improving their utopian experience in the short-term, and of working toward their long-term goals of societal change.

"A laboratory of nation-building"

The Tent City Occupation had many elements of direct and contentious action. However, when Collective members speak of this action, they rarely mention their demands to the City and to the Chicago Police Department, emphasizing instead the Occupation's value as an exercise and experiment. When asked about the Tent City Occupation during our interview, Alicia's first response was, "I often like to refer to it as a laboratory of nation building, because as we are on this like one block, you know, square footage trying to imagine a world without police." Michael offered a similar response, describing it as a "social laboratory" for confronting questions that are raised when called the police is not considered an option, like, "What type of systems do we need to hold ourselves accountable and create a less violent society but also to take care of each other?"

Amani, who was present for the entirety of the Occupation and is now primarily involved in an organization that focuses on direct contentious action, describes the Collective's organizing style as: "'Yo, we have this idea and we're gonna build the plane on the way up' [laughs]." Rather than view prac-

tical challenges they faced during the Occupation as frustrations, the Freedom Collective frames them as learning experiences; members recognize the revolutionary nature of their goals and do not expect to see them accomplished in the short term. Michael holds that part of his work is ‘Being okay with the idea that the police might outlive me,’ and expresses his belief that ‘abolitionists gotta lay track’ for the long-term achievement of their goals.

The Collective used an exposé by a major international news outlet on alleged abuses at the West Side CPD facility as a political opening for laying this track. They erected seven tents symbolizing the resources that they and members of the surrounding community believed would “actually keep the community safe”: arts, food, housing, “mental health as a subset of general health,” restorative justice, education, and childcare. Within this environment, organizers found teachable moments to communicate their abolitionist vision. For example, when a visitor called the police after a car break-in, Erika engaged that person in a conversation questioning why calling the police was their first response to the situation. Meanwhile, the restorative justice tent stood as an example of a concrete alternative.

Carving Out a Utopian Space

The Freedom Collective’s work is not purely experimental; in modeling the world they wish to see, the Freedom Collective builds spaces that offer some immediate reprieve from the structures it hopes to dismantle in the long term. This work is utopian according to Price, Nonini, and Fox Tree’s definition, as it

aims to “counteract” oppressive conditions in society by envisioning and striving to manifest an “ideal place” (2008:128). This does not mean that the Collective always succeeds at creating anti-oppressive spaces. However, by rejecting dominant paradigms and supplanting them with their own, they are creating spaces that “are not sutured to the logics” they consider oppressive (Price, Nonini, and Fox Tree 2008:135). In the case of the Freedom Collective, these include a punitive justice system, capitalism, and white supremacy.

Non-punitive conflict resolution

Within the Freedom House, the Collective aims to manifest a world without police by addressing conflicts in alternative ways. I witnessed this ideal being tested during a winter Freedom House Series event, when a woman (who I will refer to as Rena) caused a number of disruptions throughout the night. Despite her erratic and often aggressive behavior, I never witnessed Rena being treated as though she were unwelcome in the space. Instead, Collective members worked to include her in the programming and de-escalated tensions each time she began to act disruptively. For example, very early in the event, Rena got into a loud argument over the phone. Michael diffused this situation by asking if he could speak with the person, and relayed messages from that person to Rena. Later, Rena interrupted the facilitator in a peace circle. When the facilitator asked her to stop, Rena lashed out at him, holding that she had not interrupted him. As the situation was escalating, Michael stepped in, speaking with Rena in a calm and quiet voice, and explained in

a non-condescending manner that peace circles have particular rules that Rena may not know about, where people are only supposed to speak when they are holding the talking object. Then, Alicia came up with a plate of food, and asked if Rena wanted to join her on the couch. Alicia sat with Rena on the couch for the remainder of the peace circle. Finally, during the ‘open mic’ portion of the evening, the Collective allowed Rena to perform. When she ran far past her allotted time, Collective members did not outright ask her to give up the microphone. Instead, they gently reminded her of their time constraints until she willingly stepped down.

Despite obvious disruptions in programming, each of my respondents who spoke about this Rena’s behavior expressed understanding rather than annoyance. For example, Gabe, who had not previously been in a police abolitionist space, spoke positively about the Collective’s treatment of Rena: “people were being patient and respectful which I really liked instead of someone getting in their face and telling them to, you know, get away from them or something like that, you know?” He went on to indicate that this occurrence left him with this impression of the Freedom House as a loving space: “Um, yeah, I really like the love that was there and I can’t really say I didn’t like anything because even that person that was causing that distraction or disturbance, um, I understood.” Moreover, Elliot, who is involved in a different police abolitionist organization, but who had not previously been to the Freedom House, noted how the Collective’s response to the situation differed from what he would expect to see in the outside world: “But I

found that interesting, um, just because that’s like a thing where if she was at my work – my work’s protocol was like you need to leave, or like something like that, which is, um, I would say like shitty.” He also reflected on how the Collective’s treatment of Rena ties into his own understanding of police abolitionism:

I think the like main thing is like having it be this place where we’re practicing a non-disposability, so it’s like a big part of like abolition work is, um – yeah, like nobody is disposable, and everybody has a place. Um, and if like conflicts arise we can deal with them.

A “spirit of abundance”

Tufekci (2017:92) notes that anti-capitalist protest camps often embody their ideals by conducting non-monetary exchanges of goods and services. She holds that this practice counteracts perceived harms of capitalistic systems by centering mutual caring, rather than accumulation, in these transactions (Tufekci 2017:92). My data show that the Freedom Collective promoted such symbolic transactions at the Tent City Occupation and at the Freedom House.

Alicia grounds the Collective’s anti-capitalist ideals in “a fundamental belief in universal abundance...and that the scarcity that we experience is engineered scarcity for the benefit of a few people.” Accordingly, she holds that the Tent City Occupation was “organized through that lens in a way to embody the spirit of abundance.” One way they accomplished this “spirit of abundance” was through offering free meals to anyone who entered the space. They continue this practice in the Free-

dom House by offering free food at all their events. Additionally, they have devoted a whole room next to the main entrance of the Freedom House to their Free Store, and they encourage people to use the building's facilities to pursue creative projects free of charge.

Similar to Tufekci's assessment of free amenities and non-monetary transactions in protest camps (2017:87,91), Alicia describes the primary intention of these practices as cognitive, rather than need-based: "even if you can afford the clothes or whatever, like it is so disconcerting to people when they enter a space and everything is free. Um, it immediately changes how they interact with the space and how they feel in the space," adding that "that kind of like cognitive intervention is part of why we organize the way we do." Alicia hopes that the Free Store will counteract "all of the internalized scarcity and all of the ways that like humans behave violently with each other because we've internalized this false narrative of scarcity."

It seems the Collective does not just purport a "spirit" of abundance; it also offers tangible experiences of abundance. Similar to Tufekci's assessment that the "movement culture" of "non-monetized" interaction heightens generosity (2017:91-92), my data indicates that the Collective's spirit of abundance has a self-perpetuating quality. Robin notes that the Tent City Occupation received more donations than could be stored onsite. Further, Erika holds that the Collective has developed the Freedom House largely outside of the traditional market, with people donating labor and resources: "Um, I, I personally haven't like had to do anything like go through yellow pages to

source out what we need." She holds that this seems to have followed easily from the work they are doing: "all types of people that come out, and, and then once they figure out what we're doing they kind of come to us like, 'Oh, well let me know. Like I know – I know this person that can.'"

Experience of Abundance Within a Capitalist System

Of course, the Freedom House remains embedded in a capitalist system. Mia acknowledges that, so long as this is the case, "at the end of the day we know it really takes money..." and describes the Collective's short-term goal as: "So we're really just trying how to figure out how to do that without the – without the evilness of it jumping in." In cultivating a movement culture of abundance within the Freedom House, the Freedom Collective provides a space where the perceived burdens of capitalism are felt less strongly.

Jeremiah indicates how transactions within the Collective differ from those outside of it. He describes his life in the outside world: "Like I live in a capitalist society... it's like I actually do wake up in the morning and like might go to a store and buy a coffee and actually do pay my bills with money," whereas he notes that the Collective works to "exchange resources instead of like exchanging money." He notes that another organization with which he is involved exchanges labor with the Freedom Collective in setting up for events.

Erika describes how the experience of non-monetary exchange has affected her on a personal level: "coming from that space where – where I always

have to feel like I was fighting for – to get to the top to just being – now being in the Collective it was like everybody is involved, everybody – there’s – you see the value in everybody.” She believes that this sense of existing in an environment where everyone is valued and considered a part of the community “no matter what it is that they do, or what they can contribute,” cuts to the core of anti-capitalism.

A Black space

While the Collective prioritizes intersectionality, and welcomes people of all identities, it places a particular emphasis on providing a ‘Black space’ that can offer a sense of liberation from the white supremacist structures of the outside world. For example, Brandon notes that throughout the Tent City Occupation, participants held nightly meetings around a fire that were “purely Black spaces,” while white allies performed supportive functions like doing dishes. In the Freedom House, the Collective demonstrates intentional efforts to supplant white supremacist perspectives with the lens of Black liberation. For example, at one Freedom House Series event, Michael invited attendees to contribute to a timeline of the history of the ‘Black resistance project.’ He introduced this activity with the caveat that if participants were to research events online, they should be careful not to replicate ‘the language of our European oppressors’ on the timeline.

One person who I often saw in the Freedom House described his motivations for being there: ‘I like to come to this space because there is music, and it’s open, and they don’t hate black people in this space.’ Additionally, Mia

notes the impact she believes the Freedom House can have on the lives of Black people:

There’s not a lot of places where [Black people] go where we can openly be ourselves, and be our authentic selves. We don’t even know what our authentic selves are. So first we have to create a space where we can teach you what being your authentic self is, and then give you the space to practice it somewhere.

Derrick expresses his belief that a lot of people who come to the Freedom House come to “heal” because “it’s just really hard being a Black person like in the world.” He holds that the Freedom House provides “a place where Black people have power and agency and are not, um, and are humanized and not dehumanized or, um, exploited for their labor.” He describes how he feels this fits into a movement for Black liberation: “I think this healing can be a form of dismantling that and working to, um, produce something new that is liberatory, that is free, and that is safe for people to be themselves.” He also adds that the very existence of the Freedom House as a Black-led space that emphasizes healing and community subverts “this message in media and this message in like the world that Black people aren’t organized and we don’t have power and that like we have to be in a state of like constant fighting or constant pain.”

Utopian space as a refuge

While the Collective is embedded in the Movement for Black Lives, members have expressed a feeling of insularity within the Collective’s spaces, which offers a sense of safety independent of

what happens in the broader movement. For example, Erika describes her experience of the Tent City Occupation as a break from the external structures the encampment was protesting:

Because like technically the police were still there, but they – it was like our little utopia on that block for a good 40 days. And it did not feel like we were – some, some days it did not feel like we were being like harassed by any type of person or system.

Additionally, while Mia expresses doubts about societal-level change in the short term because “the evil is too deep,” she emphasizes her hope about the idea of “making bubbles and buffers” encircling “places for people to go that are about that life,” and “building your world inside the world that it – that exists, and trying to keep whatever else out.” Similarly, Erika describes the Freedom House as a “fort”: “like we have an actual safe space. It’s like a fort...We have a fort in here. Like who getting in here? Nobody.”

Radical Inclusivity

Inclusion of marginalized individuals is central to the Collective’s intersectional mission on two levels. First, those who are most negatively impacted by structures like capitalism, the carceral system, and white supremacy are those who are most in need of the reprieve that the Collective strives to offer. Second, the Collective holds that those most impacted by these systems should have the loudest voices in shaping the resistance against them. These are individuals who may not have had access to activist spaces previously, due to lack of familiarity with activist terminology and concepts, the stress of other urgent needs, or their inability to commit to the demands of membership to an organization.

nology and concepts, the stress of other urgent needs, or their inability to commit to the demands of membership to an organization.

The Collective promotes inclusivity by making their programming accessible and attractive to non-activist audiences through translation techniques (Bray 2013), as well as by incorporating entertainment and free amenities into their programming. Moreover, they maintain a low-commitment membership model, only asking that people ‘show up.’ In doing so, they allow individuals to access the benefits of their utopian work and movement culture without putting themselves on the front lines in direct contentious action (Tufekci 2017).

Expanding their reach

In order to work ‘more directly in concert’ with communities most impacted by the systems the Freedom Collective opposes, the Collective needed to reach beyond its activist and artist networks. Alicia describes taking intentional steps to do so after realizing that their first few events were mainly attended by those who were already connected with the activist world: “so we really pulled back then on our social media marketing and, you know, did more of our, you know, traditional Chicago-style hitting the streets,” using strategies like bringing a “wagon of Free Store things outside and using that as an access point, um, to talk to people.” They also began to set up their Free Store outside a transit stop near their space and handed out chocolate and donuts on trains.

Darrell “stumbled” upon the Freedom House in the early fall of 2017 on

his way to a pawnshop. He described being drawn in by the artwork and the Free Store they had set up on the sidewalk. When Alicia noticed him, she took him on a tour of the space and involved him in a conversation with members: “And, um, they was talking about the [upcoming event], but it was like, like free shops, free like this. I come and mingle.” Darrell returned for the event and has been a committed member ever since. He says that although this is his first experience ever being involved in an activist space, he felt included immediately: “they include everybody. You feel me? They make everybody feel as if, you know, you’ve been there for like 10,000 years,” adding, “there’s none of that alienation shit. No. Come, enjoy. Come breath. You feel me? And it feels good.”

The Collective is also intentional about developing programming that is widely engaging, even for those not yet aware of the Collective’s specific causes. At each Freedom House event, the Collective interweaves explicitly political programming with free amenities, social services, and creative and healing activities such as writing workshops, guided meditations, and massages. As Alicia describes: “you could see a teach-in on tax increment financing next to a hip-hop performance or someone singing with their ukulele or whatever.” She also notes that all public events offer free childcare, a free meal, and access to the Free Store.

Alicia holds that attempts at consciousness-raising that do not also address people’s immediate needs tend to be inaccessible to the people the Collective aims to reach: “Like if you are struggling with housing or if you’re

struggling just to eat, then like being in somebody’s meeting is not necessarily like how you wanna be spending your time, right?” Derrick echoes this sentiment. When asked what he thinks is needed to mobilize people into a long-term movement, he emphasized the need “to just meet people where they are and like be realistic about, you know, the intersections that they come in with.” He believes that building an organization that manifests its own ideals requires “being real about providing for folks and like strengthening them and making sure that they’re mentally and emotionally and physically and all that taken care of.”

Translating revolutionary concepts

Additionally, Alicia notes that although the founders of the Collective are people of color, they have privileges as activists that many other marginalized people do not share:

...being artists and therefore having this cultural capital, having elite educations, and therefore being able to have institutional access, um, that that is a position of privilege that like the folks that, um, are most directly impacted by police violence and mass incarceration may not, um, find movement work as accessible.

Deja emphasizes that when developing programming, certain Collective members need to be cognizant of the privileged opportunities they have had to learn about sociopolitical concepts in academic terms: “if you ask people like, ‘How are you affected by capitalism?’ and they haven’t spent a whole lot of time in that conversation or in that school of thought, they might

look at you and be like, ‘I don’t think I am affected by capitalism.’” Similar to Bray’s (2013) account of “translating” revolutionary concepts to the public during the Occupy Wall Street Movement, Deja notes the need for translation of these academic concepts into something recognizable, explaining, “these are people who might be hugely affected by capitalism,” but that they may not make this connection “until you translate that into a language and into a modality or a medium in which they receive information and consume regularly.”

Alicia also calls for the translation of culturally normalized concepts into more radical terms. For example, she compares police to “slave-catchers” as recognizable figures of racist oppression, and the media that propagates positive images of police to “propaganda” as a recognizable hallmark of state corruption. She describes her own process of adopting an abolitionist philosophy as “purging” conceptions of police as protectors, until she reached the point where she reflected on whether she had ever personally had a positive interaction with police, and realized she hadn’t.

Building Collective Consciousness

The Collective’s emphasis on inclusivity allows them to build radical political consciousness beyond existing activist networks. My data show that messaging presented and dialogue fostered in the Freedom House has left an impression on newcomers to the space, including those who did not identify as activists at the time of our interview. The Collective uses call-and-response tactics as a way of conveying their phi-

losophy and building unity, and open dialogue as a way of further developing their priorities in collaboration with their diverse participant base.

Call-and-response

Tufekci notes that protest movements use call-and-response techniques called “human microphones” and “mic checks” to create a sense of unity – and thereby promote movement culture – among participants who represent diverse experiences and affiliations (2017:99-100). She posits that call-and-response “creates a counterbalance to this heightened individual participation by providing a moment where everyone collectively repeats someone else’s point of view in unison,” and that this moment has a cognitive impact on participants: “Psychically, it makes the assembly, a place where strangers gather, into a unified voice – at least for a moment” (2017:99-100). Rather than using this unified voice as a tool for confrontational action, the Freedom Collective employs this tactic as a tool for consciousness-raising.

Each of the Freedom Collective events that I attended included several instances of call-and-response. At some point during these events, organizers encouraged attendees to gather in the main room, and Michael sung the following lines, which are commonly included in protest chant sheets, in a calm, slow voice, encouraging the room to repeat each line after him:

Let my people go (let my people go)

Set my people free (set my people free)

I’m letting my people know (I’m letting my people know)

I love you like you were me (I love you like you were me) (repeated 3 times)

Similar to the translation work described in Section IV, this chant connects the mission of the Freedom Collective to an existing framework for understanding liberation, as the phrase “let my people go” references Biblical slavery. Moreover, by calling on all attendees to recite this chant together, the Collective attempts to unify all those who enter the space around the Collective’s overarching goal of liberation.

Additionally, the Collective posts and reads through their “Brave Space Agreement” at all public events, asking attendees to repeat each line. When they reach a line that reads “I agree to handle conflict with LOVE and respect, without calling police,” the leader of the call-and-response prompts attendees to repeat multiple times: “I will not call the police, I will not call the police, I will not call the police.” As a first-time visitor to the space who did not identify as an activist at the time of our interview and who was not previously familiar with the concept of police abolitionism, Gabe found this statement to be “empowering”: “It was just empowering, you know, because it just, it tells me that I can – that whoever walks in there like you can trust them.” Although he expressed personal reservations about the concept of police abolitionism, he added, “I understand their agenda and why they choose to do this, and I respect it and I guess I don’t bash it in any way.” Gabe did not believe that his reluctance to commit to this aspect of the Brave Space Agreement would pose problems for his acceptance into

the space. He described his impression of the Collective’s mission: “they wanna let people know that that’s a place to not fear, and it’s a place that allows you to express yourself.”

Karina, another first-time visitor to the space who did not identify as an activist at the time of our interview, described her initial impression of this aspect of the Brave Space Agreement: “like hearing it at first it does sound kind of like, um, shocking ‘cause it’s kind of like you’re imagining a world without police and without prisons and it’s like not to say that that’s a bad – it’s not a good or a bad thing, it’s just like what does that mean?” Karina notes that she had heard of police abolitionism previously, but had not thought about it much until visiting the Freedom House. She said she “processed” this concept following the event she attended, and has grown more interested in it since. Karina also described her impression of the unifying quality of other participatory activities in the Freedom House: “they have the drums like kind of start everyone, enter everyone, um, having the breathing exercises just like to get everyone on the same page. Those are all things that really do affect people.”

Open dialogue

In addition to raising consciousness about their current philosophy, the Freedom Collective uses the Freedom House as a platform to further develop this philosophy in collaboration with those who visit. Erika notes that the Collective aims to make their work “participatory” in a way that encourages people to express their ideas about how they hope to “re-envision their world.” One example of this occurred during

their Martin Luther King Jr. Day event in January 2018. In recognition of the holiday, the Collective placed an emphasis on ‘community partnership,’ and many people I did not recognize from other events were in attendance. At this time, the Collective was working with several Chicago organizations to develop a “Liberation Academy” with programming aimed at communicating the local impacts of incarceration, as well as collectively reimagining notions of justice. The Collective distributed worksheets prompting attendees to offer their own definitions of terms that would be included in the Liberation Academy curriculum, as well as ideas for ways to teach these terms, such as muraling, storytelling, and hip-hop poetics.⁴ The worksheets also prompted attendees to suggest any other terms or art forms they would like to see included, as well as to nominate people to be “teaching artists” for the Liberation Academy.

Following a period of time in which people worked independently and in small groups on the worksheet, Collective members opened a dialogue, asking people to share their definitions. They recorded responses on posters, which were displayed in the space during subsequent events. When the group reached the term “Black queer feminism,” a participant who identified herself as a transgender woman took issue with the term, expressing her own reluctance to identify with queerness as a trans person. This comment sparked an extended discussion on the term “queer,” in which many other people expressed questions and uncertainties

about the term. For example, a woman who appeared to be in her fifties and identified herself as a youth pastor commented that the youth she works with use complex terminology around gender and sexuality, and that she didn’t understand why it was important. She wanted to emphasize ‘common humanity’ instead.

Having spent time in other activist spaces where I have witnessed people being dismissed or met with anger when they do not easily accept this terminology, I was surprised when several individuals patiently elaborated on what these terms meant to them. At times participants disagreed and debated amongst each other, but they continued to respond to numerous follow-up questions from the youth pastor. Collective members used translation techniques to communicate their definitions of the phrase “Black queer feminism.” Derrick describes his reaction to this dialogue: “I think it’s great that like people of all identities are in this space where they’re having to interrogate where people are and what things mean and hearing the things they don’t know about.” He adds that this process does not necessarily happen in other activist spaces: “So it’s a great space to challenge people, where in the organizing space they may already not be challenged.”

Power in consciousness-building

Members, collaborators, and visitors to the space expressed a range of reasons that they found engaging in inclusive consciousness-building to be important in liberation work. Deja holds that “acknowledgement that these

⁴ The terms included: abolition, Afro-futurism, surrealism, self-governance, Black queer feminism, anti-capitalism, and afro-indigeneity.

issues really exist” is a necessary first step toward “healing” the harms of systemic forces that “we turn a blind eye to.” She also adds that dialogue within radical activist spaces is important for understanding the nuances of, and subtle differences between, individuals’ beliefs. Jeremiah holds that the Freedom Collective fills a gap by providing a space for these sorts of conversations: “there’s not that many spaces that you can go to and talk about the abolition of police, um, and [the Freedom Collective] provides those spaces.” Darrell adds that for him, the Freedom House is one of the few spaces he feels welcome to discuss and develop his views on the Movement for Black Lives.

Impacts Beyond the Freedom House

Finally, the utopian work of the Freedom Collective contributes to resistance efforts against oppressive systems beyond its own spaces. Although the Collective does not engage in direct contentious action itself, it supports those who do by offering a platform for consciousness-raising, dialogue, and recruitment, as well as by collaborating on projects, and offering a space for recovery from the traumas of confrontational action. Additionally, by influencing the personal philosophies of individuals who participate in their utopian space, the Collective impacts the work these individuals do in other settings. The influence the Freedom Collective demonstrates points to a more inclusive perspective on social movement participation, in which those who are unable or unwilling to face the stress and risks of protest work can still be recognized as activists.

“A cross-pollination tool”

Tufekci holds that the community building that occurs in protest settings fosters “the creation of a network of people who can become the anchors of longer-term movement activities” (2017:103). My data show that this sort of activist networking also occurs in the Freedom House, resulting in an ongoing interconnectedness with the Movement for Black Lives.

Alicia notes that the Collective strives to use the Freedom House “as a cross-pollination tool.” The Collective has provided space for the operations of a number of other organizations associated with the Movement for Black Lives, such as a grassroots collective of volunteer ‘urban emergency’ first-responders. They also host lunches with volunteers and formerly incarcerated beneficiaries of a local organization that provides bond money to structurally marginalized individuals who have been charged with crimes. The Collective hopes to supplement the work of this organization by building a community for those who are released from jails and prisons. Additionally, the Collective explicitly aligned the programming it developed for the Liberation Academy with an ongoing local campaign to stop the construction of a multi-million-dollar police facility in a predominantly Black neighborhood of Chicago.

The Freedom House also provides a platform for people to share the liberation work they do outside of the Collective, allowing them to build consciousness, receive feedback, and recruit others to join in their work. For example, a person who worked on a successful campaign for reparations from the

City for those tortured by a notoriously abusive police officer gave a presentation at an event. The presentation led into a discussion on how this campaign provides a model for ‘how reparations can be won’ in the ‘mainstream political sphere’ for issues of policing. Attendees also offered feedback on what could have been done better in the campaign. Another attendee presented his ongoing work on a campaign demanding reparations from a local university with alleged financial ties to slavery, and put out a call to Black attendees to join the campaign. He described the project of demanding reparations that are not centered upon ‘a state, and a check’ as ‘a bigger conceptual way to reimagine what our justice movements can look like.’ Robin noted that the dialogue around reparations ‘helped [her] think about how reparations could be possible,’ whereas she is ‘usually cynical.’

Impact on external community work

The experience of being in the Freedom Collective’s utopian spaces impacts the work that visitors do in communities outside the Collective. For example, Erika told the story of a woman who was impacted by the experience of the Free Store: “When she came in and she saw our Free Store she was just like so inspired by it, and she immediately went back to her church and started a free store.” Additionally, Karina notes that after attending her first event at the Freedom House, she resolved to incorporate their practices into her day job at an arts-based nonprofit organization that does community engagement work in the West Side Neighborhood:

I went back to my boss the next day and I was like, ‘We need to do

lunch and learns. We need to do dinner dialogues. We need to do like the intimate concert thing’... Just like bringing back all the ideas of the [Freedom House] and implementing them on the West Side.

She also notes that she plans to “follow up” with the Freedom Collective, and other organizations that were represented at the event she attended, to explore the possibility of direct collaboration between the organization she works for and these activist groups.

Additionally, according to Angela, the Freedom Collective has had an impact on the Catholic Worker Movement at a regional level. She and several other Chicago-based Catholic Workers collaborated with the Freedom Collective to design and lead a three-day retreat for Midwestern Catholic Workers to educate them on police abolitionism. She notes that this retreat was the first event held in the Freedom House, and that the Collective included in the programming their frustrations about “how problematic that was that the first event in a Black-led space was our retreat for white people about whiteness.” According to Angela, this experience sparked reflection among attendees about their role as allies as they began to engage in more contentious action within the Movement for Black Lives.

Moreover, Jeremiah cites his dual involvements with the Black Futures Network and the Freedom Collective as transformative influences on his personal beliefs and priorities: “transforming my politics on like who we should be thinking about when we’re organizing a space. Like how do we help folks who are most marginalized?” He adds

that he tries to bring this intersectional philosophy into his community organizing work within his neighborhood. He also expressed intentions of incorporating this philosophy into the cultural enrichment program he teaches in public high schools. Additionally, Erika holds her involvement with the Collective to be the main influence on her personal philosophy regarding activism and liberation, stating, “Um, everything was new to me when I got here.” Erika went on to become the Freedom House’s first full-time resident. When asked about her long-term goals for her activist work, she responded that she intends to bring the Collective’s model back to her hometown in Texas, which she notes has very few Black-led spaces, and limited opportunities for engaging in activism.

Promoting sustainable activism

Finally, the Freedom Collective plays an important role in the justice work of its participants by providing a space for people to heal from the stress and trauma of this work. Jeremiah, who engages in protests through his work with the Black Futures Network, describes the difficulty of direct contentious action: “being like, you know, dragged by police officers and seeing people you know get hurt...you don’t feel too good about it.” He holds that it is necessary to take time to address the harms of these actions, and to recover, so as to avoid burnout within activist organizations. Mia, who has always avoided the “frontline” because she holds that it “disrupts her spirit,” describes her role in the movement as “the healing aspect of things” and “the mental work”:

I do the when you come back and you’re done getting beat up, and you need your brow wiped, and you need some lemon water, and you need your shoulders rubbed from holding the sign...When you’re done and you need somebody to talk to about what you just went through.

By performing this role within the Freedom Collective, Mia addresses the needs of the frontline activists Jeremiah describes.

Additionally, Erika holds that there are a lot people who engage in direct action who “plug in to the Collective,” and that the Freedom House serves as a resource for them. For example, she notes that a group of activists that had come to their Monday night events asked if the Collective could provide food for a demonstration they were doing, since they weren’t able to focus their resources on providing this for themselves. Erika holds that the Collective was easily able to fill this request: “here we are getting like food donations for our [surplus food distribution program] and we have refrigerators full of stuff that we can give out.”

Further, Karina describes how visiting the Freedom House impacted her on a personal level, at a time when she was feeling frustrated with her low-paying nonprofit job:

I think the biggest thing I can take away is that there is power, um, there is power in the work that we’re doing...seeing that interaction, that collaborative interaction, really inspires me to like stay in my role and keep going and just not, um, see everything to be negative.

Mia shared a similar experience, noting that after a long career of “community service” work, she was feeling “dismayed” and “over it,” and had been considering leaving Chicago altogether. She holds that connecting with the Freedom Collective encouraged her to keep going in her justice work: “I was just like, ‘Oh, there’s people out here that do exist that think like I do,’ so actually running into the [Freedom House], um, got my passion for activism reignited.” At the time of our interview, Mia was considering moving into the neighborhood where the Freedom House is located so that she could be more committed to the Collective.

Building the movement behind the scenes

Recognizing the impacts that embedded utopian organizations have on their respective movements and communities allows us to acknowledge the existence of social movement participants who do not put their bodies on the front lines in direct confrontational action. This perspective allows for a conceptualization of social movements in more inclusive terms, in which those who face physical, mental, emotional, or other barriers to protest participation can be recognized as valuable contributors to social movements. This conception of social movement participation is particularly salient in the case of the Movement for Black Lives, given that those the movement aims to liberate are often especially vulnerable to police brutality and retraumatization in direct confrontational action.

DISCUSSION

Through qualitative analysis of

in-depth interviews and fieldwork, I identify the present impacts of the Freedom Collective’s revolutionary work. I find that in cultivating utopian spaces within a broader social movement, the Freedom Collective offers refuges where marginalized identities are protected and uplifted regardless of the work potential participants do. In doing so, the Collective simultaneously contributes to the larger resistance against systems they hold to be the source of this marginalization. I introduce the term “embedded utopian organization” to describe this model, and to offer a framework for understanding how radical organizations can have present impacts outside of direct contentious action.

Limitations

My study of the Freedom Collective has a variety of limitations. My data collection occurred over a relatively short period of time, especially given that the Freedom Collective is a young organization whose model and membership continues to evolve. Additionally, I only conducted one formal interview with each respondent, and only interviewed a small sample of collaborators and first-time visitors. There is also likely a selection bias in those I interviewed, for example, favoring those who are more outgoing, or more accustomed to speaking with the press or other interviewers. Moreover, it is important to note my positioning as a white, straight, cis-gendered individual researching under an elite institution with a historically (and presently) tense relationship to Black communities in Chicago. My privileged identity and background likely affected the interac-

tions I had with respondents, as well as who was willing to be interviewed and what information they were willing to share with me.

Generalizability

Despite these limitations, the concept of embedded utopianism offers a heuristic for understanding the work and impacts of other organizations and social movements in a more holistic and inclusive manner. While I focused my analysis on a single organization embedded in the Movement for Black Lives, I observed embedded utopian elements in other organizations associated with this movement in the course of my research. These include more prominent organizations that are better known for their direct contentious action. For example, the Black Futures Network, a national organization that has facilitated both local and national direct action campaigns against proposed policies, describes its ultimate aim on its website as “Black liberation,” and the dismantlement of current systems of policing, incarceration, and punitive conflict resolution. Respondents affiliated with the Chicago chapter of the Black Futures Network described manifesting these ideals in their space by using restorative justice practices as an exercise in alternative conflict resolution, and through the cultivation of Black spaces that aim to bring “the margins to the front” in their work.

Additionally, in my fieldwork I observed that the organization leading the campaign (noted in Section VI) to stop the construction of a new police facility frames this campaign explicit-

⁵ The term “neurodivergent” describes “having a brain that functions in ways that diverge significantly from the dominant standards of ‘normal’” (Walker 2014). The term was originally introduced by the multiply neurodivergent neurodiversity activist Kassiane Asasumasu.

ly in police abolitionist terms within its own spaces. This organization, which I will call “Intergeneration,” has ties with nationally prominent activists in the Movement for Black Lives, and is known for its direct confrontations with those in power, such as its campaign against the re-election of a local official involved in a policing scandal. However, it also runs a gardening program for youth in Chicago, which a movement spokesperson framed in terms of promoting ‘self-sustainability’ as ‘a tool of resistance.’

Moreover, embedded utopianism is not limited to the Movement for Black Lives. The concept of embedded utopian work provides an important lens for understanding other social movements, their constituent components, and their impacts more inclusively and holistically. For example, this concept offers a framework for studying the work and impacts of groups within the disability rights movement that focus on the rights of neurodivergent individuals.⁵ Under Scotch’s (1989) analysis of politics and policy in the U.S. disability rights movement, its emergence aligns with the political process model. According to Scotch, people with disabilities used the traction of other social movements including the U.S. Civil Rights Movement, the women’s rights movement, and the movement against the Vietnam War to mobilize. He holds that these contentious political movements provided disability rights activists “examples of political action and ideological frameworks” and a “culture of protest,” which shaped the way they organized

themselves (Scotch 1989:386).

This view of the disability rights movement as a contentious political movement leaves out the work of many embedded activists who focus on the rights of neurodivergent individuals. For example, although direct contentious actions may be made accessible for wheelchair users and other individuals with physical disabilities, the often loud, unpredictable, and highly stimulating environments of protests are inaccessible to many neurodivergent individuals, such as those with autism. Moreover, the diversity of neurodivergent individuals' accessibility needs makes it difficult to meet the full range of these needs through finite, concrete demands to policymakers; instead, achieving a broadly accessible neurodiverse society will require that individuals and institutions be willing to acknowledge and address accessibility needs as they arise. While the 1990 Americans with Disabilities Act has set accessibility and non-discrimination standards for spaces open to the general public (ADA National Network), it does not account for the fact that certain spaces may be uniquely inaccessible to particular neurodivergent individuals. For example, individuals with autism or other sensory disabilities may find a space inaccessible due to loud talking, brightly colored walls, or strong norms for neurotypical social behavior such as eye contact.

It appears that neurodivergent activists whose work is interconnected with that of the broader disability rights movement carve out utopian spaces that are more accessible to them than the outside world. These spaces serve the dual function of providing

neurodivergent individuals platforms for movement building, while also offering social spaces where they feel comfortable and accepted in the present. For example, Sinclair (2018) describes the rationale behind the Autreat, a "retreat-style conference run by and for autistic people," as being about creating a comfortable, autistic-led space as much as it was about advocacy and consciousness-raising. He describes a previous gathering that inspired the retreat: "The time autistic people got to spend together was precious to many of us. We began to realize how much autistic people have to offer to ourselves and our peers" (Sinclair 2018). Additionally, Hughes holds that social media sites offer community-building and consciousness-raising spaces for neurodiverse activists that "ultimately make space for different ways of seeing and being in the world" (2013:4). She also notes that self-advocacy on these platforms has led to public advocacy campaigns that have impacted public policy (Hughes 2013:4).

Similar to the case of marginalized activists in the Movement for Black Lives, neurodivergent individuals impacted by ableist systems in society may face barriers to participation in the sorts of confrontational actions political process theorists emphasize. The contributions of neurodivergent individuals who form online self-advocacy communities, but who may not have access to the campaigns that spring from them, would be missed by existing theory on social movements. In introducing the concept of embedded utopian organizations, I hope to nudge social movement theory toward a more inclusive direction.

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Rethinking the Digital Hood: Disadvantaged Youth, Social Media, and Networked Privacy Management

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Recent scholarship on social media use among disadvantaged youth claims that social media amplifies or mirrors the social problems and conflicts of youth's offline worlds. Scholars have also paid notable attention to how social media have served as vectors for local gang violence, allowing gang-affiliated individuals to engage in "cyber-banging." However, little scholarship has focused on how the proliferation of social media has impacted nongang marginalized youth looking to avoid neighborhood violence. In addition, the few empirical studies on disadvantaged youth and social media have failed to provide a conceptual tool that clearly demonstrates how and for whom social media actually intensify social problems or conditions of structural disadvantage. To address these two problems, I conducted interviews with 23 black and Latino youth from various disadvantaged neighborhoods in Chicago, coding for problems among their general social media use as well as one specific use of social media: how they grieved online following the death of a loved one to gun violence. I found that some participants encountered problems to achieving two underlying goals of their social media use: staying safe and successfully grieving. These specific participants had to manage their privacy both on- and offline in order to achieve these goals. The results indicate that social media may amplify or mirror offline social problems, but only for certain disadvantaged youth. I put forth the concept of networked privacy management—managing privacy both on- and offline—as a means of identifying who is adversely affected by social media and how they are affected. I conclude by offering networked privacy management as a starting point for further research on the effects of social media in the everyday lives and individual life outcomes of disadvantaged youth.

INTRODUCTION

Social network sites (henceforth referred to as SNSs) have achieved remarkable popularity among contemporary youth and have profoundly changed how youth communicate and socialize in their everyday lives.¹ Social media's rise to ubiquity has prompted sociologists to devote considerable attention to the methodological affordances and challenges of studying the social world with Big Data and other digital data (Golder and Macy 2014, Lazer and Radford 2017). However, sociologists

have devoted scant empirical attention to the ways in which SNSs have actually impacted the daily lives of youth, particularly among low-income black and Latino youth who frequently and extensively use social media (see Lane 2016 for an exception to this). Instead, scholars in related fields who study disadvantaged populations have begun to take on this task, employing a qualitative approach to studying social media use among gang-affiliated youth and youth living in disadvantaged neighborhoods (see Patton et al. 2015, Patton et

1 Social network sites and social media will be used interchangeably throughout this paper. Social network sites refer to any sites allowing users to create a public or quasi-public profile along with some type of list of other users with whom the user normally already has some familiarity (boyd and Ellison 2007; see article for further disambiguation).

al. 2017, Stevens et al. 2016). Because sociologists continue to neglect social media in empirical work on social inequality and marginalized groups, existing qualitative studies rarely attempt to interpret findings within a sociological framework.

There are two main negative consequences to the prevailing non-sociological approaches to studying social media and disadvantaged youth.² First, these empirical studies produce low-quality analyses of social media's effects on the social fabric of youth's daily lives. Stevens et al. (2016), for instance, describe disadvantaged youth as having their offline problems amplified by the online world, thus creating a "digital hood" wherein youth are frequently exposed to interpersonal drama, sexual-bullying, and videos of physical violence. However, participants of the study were merely witnesses to these problems, as none of them were implicated or reported creating these problems. (958). Though the authors conclude that "Facebook primarily operates as a digital community where social problems are magnified" (964), the results do not suggest that youth actually experience equal challenges and struggles with the 'digital hood.' As a result, scholars still know very little about how and which disadvantaged youth are implicated in the adverse effects of SNSs.

Second, the existing empirical literature provides little to no conceptual tools that other researchers can use to highlight the specific consequences and behaviors that the proliferation of social media have influenced. Conceptual

tools are crucial to quality research on social media not only because they illuminate who is affected by SNSs and how they are affected by SNSs, but they also provide a tool for other researchers to incorporate social media into existing frameworks. Jeffrey Lane exemplifies this point by merging the concept of networked publics (boyd 2014, Varnelis 2008) with theoretical frameworks from urban ethnography, the code of the street (Anderson 1999), to develop the concept of a "digital street" (2016). This concept describes how the online and offline social world interact and "coevolve" with one other (50), providing a conceptual framework for thinking about the contemporary social processes and interactions that facilitate and prevent urban violence.

This concept is incredibly useful to establish the heavy involvement of social media in the daily processes of urban violence, but for those studying neighborhood disadvantage or social inequality, the proper conceptual tool is still needed to delineate exactly how social media impact specific disadvantaged youth. The proper conceptual tool would have the ability to help identify why certain marginalized youth seem to be impacted by social media more so than others. Without this conceptual tool, sociologists may continue to overlook how social media affect the lives and life outcomes of all disadvantaged youth, leaving sociologists at risk of being "passed up by the developments of their empirical field" (Lane 2016, 55).

To address these two major issues, I revise an existing conceptual tool in

² In this study, the terms "disadvantaged youth" and "marginalized youth" are interchangeable and refer either to a) existing studies on disadvantaged youth or b) participants of this study who have lived for at least ten years in neighborhoods that they self-report as having high rates of violent crime, gun violence, and/or gang activity.

media scholarship and use it to identify how social media has adversely affected disadvantaged youth, particularly those who do not identify as “gang-affiliated.” I further use this conceptual tool to elucidate the ways in which disadvantaged youth are affected heterogeneously by the advent of social media, meaning SNSs do not automatically amplify disadvantaged social conditions. In 23 interviews with disadvantaged black and Latino youth, I asked youth about challenges and problems they faced in their general, everyday social media use as well as one specific use of social media: grieving the death of a loved one to gun violence on social media. I identify two underlying goals of their general and specific social media use: staying safe and grieving, respectively.

I find that only certain youth encountered problems to achieving these underlying goals and that these particular youth try to manage both their on- and offline privacy, or networked privacy, to mitigate or prevent these problems. By contrasting why youth were or were not concerned with managing their networked privacy, I emphasize how individual differences among participants led to differences in how they were affected by and responded to the proliferation of SNSs. I conclude by offering networked privacy management as a starting point for further research on how the advent of SNSs may affect the everyday lives and individual life outcomes of disadvantaged youth.

Prior to my analyses, I first elaborate on the current empirical studies on social media and disadvantaged populations, underscoring the lack of consideration for youth not “gang-affiliated” or primarily “street-oriented”

youth (Anderson 1999). I also interrogate the findings of two qualitative studies that motivate the empirical aims of the study. I then review literature on how disadvantaged youth deal with the problems of gangs and gun violence in their everyday lives. I show how strategies youth deploy to avoid or cope with offline problems frequently involve managing privacy, such as limiting others’ access to themselves. Since Marwick and boyd’s concept of networked privacy (2014) delineates the increased difficulties and stakes associated with managing one’s privacy in the era of social media, I put forth networked privacy management to conceptualize how youth deal with the novel or intensified challenges that their online environments may produce or facilitate.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Social Media and Disadvantaged Youth: The Problems of Gangs and Gun Violence

To address the aforementioned problems of how scholars have studied the effects of social media among marginalized populations, I propose a qualitative study that investigates problems youth encounter to their everyday uses of social media as well as a specific use of social media: grieving the death of a loved one to gun violence online. The rationale behind this approach is my attempt to interrogate the findings of two existing qualitative studies on marginalized youth and social media. Primarily, the claim of a ‘digital hood’ (Stevens et al. 2016) that amplifies offline social problems necessitates a more nuanced exploration. Second, that claim SNSs provide a space in which marginalized youth can successfully grieve the death

of a loved one and make meaning of a loved one's homicide (Patton et al. 2015) requires a "bottom-up" interrogation in order to confirm the validity of its claims. These next two subsections provide justification of the empirical approaches that this study will employ.

Problems in marginalized youth's general social media use

Regarding the effects of social media on marginalized populations, much of the available scholarly work focuses on social media's emerging role in urban violence (see Lane 2016, Patton et al. 2013, Patton et al. 2015, Pyrooz et al. 2013). Though studies on social media and gangs have been successful in motivating further scholarly inquiry, little attention has been paid to the potential consequences of gang members' use of social media on local "nongang" users of social media. It is reasonable to assume that gang members may be affecting nongang youth's behavior in their online environments, as countless urban ethnographies and qualitative studies have shed light on how street gangs leverage social control over nongang residents in their offline environments (Anderson 1999, Garot 2010, Patillo 1999, Vargas 2016).

Despite this reasonable assumption, virtually no empirical studies have explored how specific social actors like gang members affect the offline and online environments of nongang, marginalized youth. Stevens et al. (2016) suggest offline problems of disadvantaged neighborhoods may be amplified by SNSs, yet the authors do not outline how existing social actors and social problems interact with SNSs. To identify a possible source of these online

problems, such as 'expose pages' or other forms of online drama (2016), this study will interrogate potential problems that local gang members cause on- and offline. While the study attempts to elucidate any and all problems youth encounter in their everyday lives as a result of social media, it also asks questions regarding if gang members' online or offline presence ever presents nongang members with additional problems.

Obstacles to grieving the death of a loved one to gun violence

Patton et al. (2015) utilize a content-analysis approach to revealing the potential benefits that SNSs provide to gang members coping with the death of a loved one to gun violence. The authors claim Twitter provides "a space to cope" (235) in which marginalized individuals can successfully grieve the death of a loved one. They further conclude that Twitter can facilitate "collective mourning...[and prevent] maladaptive coping strategies" (236).

Though there are certainly benefits to grieving online, the study has a weak methodological approach and particularly confusing results. For example, Patton et. al. (2017) later examine how men of color determine the authenticity of threats of violence made by gang members on SNSs. In the paper's findings, gang-involved men report that opposition gang members (known as 'opps') disrespect recently deceased individuals in rival territories. When 'opps' taunt and disrespect the deceased, both directly and indirectly, it appears to interfere with a healthy coping process, causing anger and increasing the likelihood of violent retaliation

(7-8). Together, these two papers seem to at least partially contradict each other; is it safe and healthy to cope online, or are gang-involved individuals likely to be hurt and angered by disrespectful comments? In addition, are these disrespectful actions only directed towards rival gang members, or do youth not affiliated with gangs also deal with this problem? Since Patton et al. (2015) do not supplement their conclusions with ethnographic or interview-based data, the social ramifications of grieving online are largely left unexplored.

Patton et al. (2015) are certainly successful in addressing an understudied yet significant topic. Indeed, black and Latino youth are disproportionately affected by gun violence on a national scale (Fowler et al. 2015). In Chicago, gun violence and firearm homicide have been shown to disproportionately impact black and Latino youth in the West Side and South Side regions of the city that often struggle with concentrated poverty (Walker et al. 2016). Scholars know very little about how youth may be using social media as a means to cope with, grieve, and make sense of the loss of a loved one to gun violence. Like Patton et al. (2015), a number of studies have used content analyses to understand both the benefits (Carroll and Landry 2012) and downsides (Rossetto et al. 2014) of using social media to cope with the loss of a loved one.

These studies make the same mistake of lacking verification of their conclusions with real-world, qualitative data. Further, these studies primarily center around non-homicidal grief. Considering that the manner of death influences the social meaning of the death (Michalowski 1976), one should

expect that grieving homicidal death online will have a distinct character and include the offline social issues associated with the homicide. Thus, this study carries out one of the first qualitative explorations of how marginalized youth use SNSs to grieve the loss of a loved one to gun violence, interpreting both the reported benefits and challenges to grieving online.

Now that I have explained and justified the motivations underlying this study, I move toward the essential task of elucidating the proper conceptual tool that I will use to frame my analyses.

Strategies of Resistance, Marginalized Youth, and Networked Privacy Management

The social actors who perpetrate offline problems such as gun violence or bullying often require access to the population or individuals they wish to influence or control. Because privacy on a basic level is defined by “the access of one actor (individual, group or organization) to another” (Anthony et al. 2017: 251), the concept of managing privacy is a useful tool for considering how youth avoid the actors responsible for creating social conflicts, including those who instigate fights or encourage online conflict.

Garot’s (2010) study on marginalized youth who must regularly interact with gang members on the street shows the role that limiting access, thereby managing one’s privacy, can play in avoiding victimization. He explicates how gang members often “hit up” unrecognized youth who walk down their blocks to establish a precursor for protecting their territory through physical

force—in other words, to prepare for a fight. This is a process by which a gang member “marginalizes young men who do not claim a gang in such an environment” (73). In response to the possibility of an unwanted case of violent victimization, youth develop strategies to either deal with or avoid being “hit up” altogether. For instance, in order to walk to school and back safely, youth develop a mental map of their neighborhood that accounts for where they are likely to be “hit up” and identifies a safe route to take (74). These strategies, which Dill and Ozer (2016) classify as “violence management” strategies, are fundamentally means of managing privacy; youth do not remove the problem of violence, but rather they attempt to remove the ability of potentially violent social actors to physically access and affect them.

The ways in which disadvantaged youth manage their privacy can highlight which social problems are most salient in youths’ daily lives, as well as how or to what extent they are affected. Duck (2015) shows how some higher-income families in poor neighborhoods make use of financial resources to provide their children with various forms of privacy from the social problems of disadvantaged neighborhoods. Duck finds that the only four families who successfully kept their children from interacting with the local drug scene on the street had the financial resources to do so; the children received rides everywhere, never played in the neighborhood, and went to school in a different municipality (34). These parents provided their children privacy from negative social influences that existed in the neighborhood. Privacy

management illuminates the way that certain demographic features and individuals interact, such as those who have the financial resources for daily car rides to school; signifying privacy management’s ability to provide explanation of how youth experience their neighborhoods in different ways. Using privacy management as a conceptual lens elucidates how specific variables such as SNSs affect youth living in disadvantaged communities heterogeneously.

Because privacy management is an appropriate conceptual lens for identifying who is affected by structural and social conditions of disadvantage as well as how they are affected—the underlying aims of this study—I draw from recent media scholarship that provides a framework for considering the novel challenges of managing privacy in the age of social media: networked privacy.

Networked privacy

The proliferation of social media and information and communication technologies (ICTs) has brought about a wealth of theoretical scholarship in the study of media and communications that informs our understanding of social media. boyd (2010) provides one of the most comprehensive theoretical frameworks for SNSs by describing them as networked publics. She contends that the advent of SNSs and its changes to social life and communication has ushered in the networked era (2010); that is, the architectural nature of SNSs allows for online content to be easily shared outside of its original context, producing what she calls “collapsed contexts” (34). The ease in which networked

publics can blur the initial context of an offline or online action has made managing one's privacy more difficult. Youth must have substantial knowledge of how to utilize privacy settings on SNSs in addition to having substantial influence over what others do with their personal information online (Marwick and boyd 2014: 1062).

Since individuals cannot always influence what others do with their personal information offline or online, individualistic paradigms of privacy must be reconciled with the proliferation of networked publics to account for the new obstacles to achieving privacy. Marwick and boyd (2014) employ the term networked privacy to describe how privacy can no longer be accomplished by "simply providing or denying information" (1063) or by configuring one's privacy settings on sites like Facebook. Instead, networked privacy mandates that individuals rely on "shared social norms or social ties" (1064), find creative strategies of disclosing information on SNSs, and concede that privacy will sometimes be impossible to control individually.

Networked privacy management

I offer a slight reworking of Marwick and boyd's (2014) networked privacy that focuses on privacy management. Privacy management "involves a range of strategies for regulating access to the self and others that intersect with social norms and actors' preferences and structural positions" (Anthony et al. 2017: 252). As such, I put forth networked privacy management as a conceptual tool to identify the strategies that youth employ to navigate privacy in both their on- and offline environ-

ments.

Networked privacy management refers to a range of online and offline behaviors that youth adopt to mediate the access others have to them, their actions, and their personal information. Youth attempt to manage networked privacy as a means of influencing their social visibility and how other actors perceive them. Youth cultivate these strategies as a way of navigating the novel challenges of privacy management in the networked era. Nonetheless, these strategies only increase the likelihood of managing privacy rather than fully ensuring it.

As a conceptual tool, managing networked privacy allows me to identify which marginalized youth encounter challenges to using social media. When individuals develop strategies or rules of self-conduct as a consequence of real or potential problems in their online environments, it indicates that SNSs have affected those individuals in some manner. Moreover, whether youth can successfully manage their networked privacy to mitigate or prevent an undesirable online outcome determines the extent to which these challenges might actually intensify the disadvantaged conditions of these youth. I aim to demonstrate this conceptual tool's versatility and value in guiding further research on how social media interact with neighborhood effects to influence individuals' everyday lives and future life outcomes.

DATA AND METHODS

To thoroughly understand how disadvantaged youth use social media and grieve online following the death of a loved one to gun violence, I interviewed

23 men and women of color from ages 18-26. 21 of the 23 interviewed identified as black, and the remaining two were males who identified as Latino. Fourteen male youths and nine female youths were interviewed, and the median age of all participants was 19 years old.

Participants were recruited overwhelmingly from South Side, West Side, and South West neighborhoods in Chicago, Illinois; only one participant resided on a neighborhood on the North Side. The only requirements for participation were that individuals regularly use social media and that they had lost a loved one to gun violence within the past five years. Interviews lasted approximately one hour. The first participant was recruited from a local non-profit organization in a West Side neighborhood that struggles with gang violence. Participants were also recruited from my personal network formed at my institution as well as a local recreational center. Three participants came directly from my personal network while the remaining participants were recruited indirectly or were the result of snowball sampling. While a significant minority of participants reported having once been 'gang-affiliated' or still having some ties to a local gang, none reported active membership within a gang.

Participants were first asked questions about their experiences with and perceptions of the neighborhoods in which they were raised. I also asked them about how safe they felt in their neighborhood as well as social problems they encountered. I then moved to questions about their social media use, asking questions about which SNSs they

use, how often they use social media, and reasons for using these sites. I also asked them questions about their perceptions of their online environments as well as what problems they encountered online, if any. I asked questions about their knowledge of local gang members' social media use and any experiences or interacting with them. Finally, I asked questions about their online activity following the passing of their loved one. I asked about what kinds of posts they made, how they felt about these posts, the responses they received to them, and finally challenges they encountered to having positive experiences grieving online.

I then coded these interviews for challenges that youth faced as well as specific privacy practices, such as declining friend requests from certain people. I identified two underlying goals of a significant amount of participating youth that more or less corresponded with either general or specific uses of social media. For general use, safety was identified as a goal, while successfully grieving was a goal of the specific use of social media. I then analyzed these results using the conceptual framework of networked privacy management and specifically examined the lives of two contrasting participants using networked privacy management to reveal possible explanations as to why marginalized youth are heterogeneously impacted by SNSs.

A limitation to the generalizability of this study is its rather small sample size ($n = 23$). Additionally, I interviewed youth from a variety of disadvantaged neighborhoods; limiting each participant to the neighborhood in which they resided for the longest pe-

riod of time, I interviewed youth from at least twelve different neighborhoods in Chicago. As such, participants were from neighborhoods with varying levels and characteristics of “disadvantage,” meaning some neighborhoods struggled more than others regarding concentrated poverty, gang violence, and violent crime. This meant that the label of living in a “disadvantaged” or “marginalized” neighborhood was not consistent among participants; as a result, I relied upon self-reported measures of factors like gun violence in labelling participants as living in a disadvantaged neighborhood, lacking the precision that quantitative measures of disadvantage can offer.

Moreover, accounts from in-depth interviews are inherently limited if not verified through ethnographic observation or other forms of fact-checking. As such, I tried to focus my analysis on concrete anecdotes and perceptions that youth espoused. Finally, the method of snowball sampling inherently biases the study with the characteristics of the social networks of those who referred me to other participants. One consequence of this was that I could not achieve my desired balance of Latino and black participants, nor could I achieve equal representation of male and female youth. Despite these limitations, this study provides fruitful accounts of how SNS affect youth living in disadvantaged communities. These accounts provide valuable insight into an empirically understudied topic and research population: disadvantaged youth and social media.

RESULTS

My analyses are organized into three sections. First, I analyze safety concerns through the lens of networked privacy management. Second, I show the psychological and social benefits that grieving online afforded some participants, followed by successful and unsuccessful accounts of networked privacy management. Finally, I offer two contrasting on- and offline experiences from two participants that suggest reasons as to why some youth seemed to require or care about networked privacy management more than others did.

Managing Networked Privacy as a Means to Safety

A significant minority of male participants reported having to engage in various behaviors online for the purposes of staying safe from physical violence and gun violence. They also reported utilizing specific offline behaviors to avoid misrepresentation online or avoid online conflicts that could be continued offline. Contrasting the narrative of other participants, these youth were not able to talk to or accept friend requests from just anyone online. At times, this prevented the potential accumulation of social capital or prevented flirting with others whom they did not know well. These youth found ways to minimize the likelihood of negative interactions offline and online by employing strategies to manage their networked privacy.

While the female youth in this study were not immune to physical violence in their offline worlds, none of the female participants reported safety as a real concern in their everyday online lives. Although they reported engaging

in argumentative conflicts on social media, these conflicts were not reported as specific fears they had in their everyday use of social media. Although female youth did report fighting with other female youth as a result of a conflict on social media, those youth did not report engaging in specific behaviors that would help to ensure their safety from physical violence. This is not to say that female youth do not experience threats or take action to minimize potential incidents of violence, but rather to say that this was not reported by the female participants in this study. As such, this section will focus on the fears and concerns of specific male participants as they pertain to safety.

The importance of associations: mistaken identity

Julio, an 18-year-old black male from a South Side neighborhood, described multiple situations offline that influenced his online behavior, including this interaction with a girl with whom he had a romantic interest:

“She wanted me to come to her neighborhood, but I ain’t really know anybody from over there. But then she pulled up [to pick me up at my house]...and her brothers were in the car. And her brothers didn’t look familiar, so I just took off. Just ran...She was trynna get to me ‘cause she was the one to text me first.”

What appeared to be a romantic meeting was actually a local rival gang ‘setting up’ Julio to be beaten, stabbed, or killed. Julio told me that it was a case of mistaken identity—he was not the gang-involved individual which they sought—and that the girl later apolo-

gized to him. The presence of multiple gangs in his neighborhood and in the adjacent neighborhoods taught Julio to be very careful of whom he chose to trust, especially with girls. He reported having special concern regarding girls because gang members often worked with them to ‘set up’ boys from other neighborhoods. As a result, youth like Julio reported having to be cognizant at all times of whom he was talking to at school and online; he is cautious and suspicious of unknown girls sending him messages or friend requests.

Julio’s friend Jeffrey, another 18-year-old from the same South Side neighborhood, reported similar sentiments. He watches what he says to his gang-involved peers and friends, and when he does spend time with his gang-involved friends, he told me about a personal rule of his: “make sure you don’t take no pictures with them.” According to Jeffrey, those pictures can easily end up on the social media accounts of his gang-affiliated friends, leaving him vulnerable to being mistaken for having an association with a gang or certain gang members. Having heard frequently of cases where young men are mistaken by gang members as a rival gang member or having an association with a rival gang, he establishes rules of self-conduct such as “watch[ing] what you say” and “watch[ing] who you talking to if you don’t know them.”

Networked privacy (Marwick and boyd 2014) elucidates how individuals require trust in those they share information in order to effectively manage their privacy. When individuals inevitably share personal information, they cannot use the technical features of SNSs to control what others do with that per-

sonal information. Privacy, then, “must be negotiated socially” (1061), and Julio and Jeffrey have come to understand this. They lack the means of controlling how they would be perceived online by certain users if they were pictured in a photo with their gang-affiliated friends. As a consequence, they strategically avoid taking photos with gang-involved friends because they also lack control over what their friends will do with the photo. They may have developed these behaviors because of stories they’ve heard about a fatal case of mistaken gang identity, or they might have past negative experiences from a case of mistaken gang identity. Regardless of the exact way in which they acquire these beliefs, the perception that they may be beaten, shot, or killed because of a photo posted on social media means they won’t take the risk. Thus, the pitfalls of privacy management in the networked age can further restrict the acceptable range of behaviors—however innocuous they seem—for some disadvantaged youth.

Screening the audience: friend requests

In addition to self-monitoring and restricting one’s behavior, some youth expressed concern over whom they accepted as ‘friends’ online and to whom they gave access to their private or semi-private social media profiles. For some male youth, accepting friend requests of unknown individuals runs the risk of giving increased access to the ‘wrong’ people, leaving open the possibility that others will infer a certain identity or infer an association to a particular individual or group. For instance, an individual may have family members who are actively involved with or

hold membership in a local faction of a street gang. Those family members might display those gang associations on their public social media profiles. Even though the individual is not involved in a gang, they may be implicated in said gang through their online ties to gang-involved family members. The importance of associations in neighborhoods with a significant presence of street gangs was made clear to me while interviewing Chase, a 23-year-old black male from a West Side neighborhood:

“If someone was after me right now, and I don’t be on bullshit like that, especially not out here [in this neighborhood]...but if somebody was really lookin’ for me, and they saw us sitting here, both of us are getting killed! ‘Cause you with me, so you must have some type of affiliation with me. And on top of that, you’re a witness.”

Chase affirms not just the potential stakes of an association, but that associations are easily and often mistakenly formed in neighborhoods with a significant presence of street gangs. Regardless of the intentionality or authenticity of an association, Chase knows that the wrong individual perceiving a particular association leaves him vulnerable to physical harm. In Chase’s life, the block on which he lives is considered the territory of a local faction of a West Side gang. If Chase accepts any and all friend requests, he leaves himself and his online information accessible to gang members from the rival territory. Thus, Chase keeps much of his Facebook profile private and proceeds cautiously when deciding which friend requests he approves on Facebook:

“I’m kind of careful and screen who I accept friend requests from...I only do it with people I actually know [or] if the mutual friends are the people I really fuck with. Like I got an uncle who’s a ZP [gang affiliation] out in [a non-adjacent neighborhood] and it was a guy from his clique that had sent me a friend request. At first, I ain’t know who the fuck he was, but then I saw pictures of him with my uncle, so I accepted his friend request.”

Chase, Jeffrey, and Julio all utilize the technical features of Facebook as well as various offline strategies to keep them safe from potentially harmful individuals and actions. However, just as Marwick and boyd (2014) contend, privacy is never guaranteed by practicing these techniques. Individuals’ gang affiliations vary temporally, by types of ties, and by levels of involvement in the everyday activities of a gang (Garot 2010). Individuals who were once not affiliated with any gang may become affiliated, making it difficult to simply ensure all online friends do not pose a risk to one’s safety. An unwanted individual may be overlooked and unintentionally accepted as a friend or follower online.

The privacy settings required to maintain full privacy may be too difficult to implement, whether it be technically or socially. As such, individuals may take to extreme cases by deleting certain social media accounts and creating new ones, or they may simply refrain from posting content on platforms where they know it can cause controversy or potential harm. Whatever the strategy the individual

may employ, it involves both expertise of the social rules and realities of their neighborhoods, as well as technical knowledge of privacy features on SNSs. Expertise still does not guarantee safety, but managing networked privacy affords individuals their best strategy for staying safe.

Networked Privacy as a Means to Successfully Grieving

In this section, ‘successfully grieving’ refers to the ability to grieve in offline and online spaces as well as having meaningful protection from emotional hindrances to their grieving process. I use the term ‘successfully grieving’ to encompass four possible benefits of grieving online: emotional expression, receiving social support, strengthening the quality of social ties, and limiting exposure to social actors that are likely to cause adverse emotional reactions.

This section will focus on describing the motivations, reasonings, and consequences associated with youth posting about their deceased loved ones on SNSs. It will also underscore how participants managed their privacy in order to grieve on- and offline and mitigate any obstacles to accomplishing this. Before doing this, it is important to establish that participants need not feel as though they would receive some benefit in order to grieve on social media. Some participants did not always consciously understand why they took to social media to post and grieve, saying they felt a desire to post rather than reporting that posting significantly helped with the process of coping.

Though the study only required that participants use social media reg-

ularly and that they had experienced the loss of a loved one to gun violence within the past five years, all participating youth reported creating or sharing content on social media pertaining to their loved one in the days following the passing of their loved one. At the very least, posting online seemed to some an instinctual process or desire that all participants experienced in some form. As such, these results will operate under the assumption that these participants voluntarily created or posted about the death of a loved one because they simply wanted to post or found some relief in doing so. They need not believe that it would present some benefit to their mental or physical well-being in order to create a post or benefit from a post. A benefit could be the social response to the post, or a benefit could just be the act of posting as an end in itself.

Posts were made on a variety of platforms, the most popular of which were Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat. For some youth, posts were made for only a few days afterwards, but posts were more often made weeks or even months following the deaths of their loved one. Posts consisted of both direct and indirect references to the deceased. Direct posts memorialized the loved one with messages such as “RIP” or “LONG LIVE” preceding the deceased’s name or nickname. These posts often contained pictures of the individual with the deceased, captioned with small paragraphs that expressed condolences and other emotions typical to the grieving process.

Indirect posts did not directly address the deceased as the subject of the post, but their contents were still in reference to the deceased. Referencing

can mean unnamed, implicit references along the lines of “Why did you have to go so soon?” or more indirect references to the feelings and actions that are a result of losing a loved one, such as “Still can’t sleep.” Questions concerning the directness of posts frequently allowed me to comprehend the privacy management that indirect posts often involved.

Social support and “knowing that they care”

A number of participants had close friends and family ‘check-in’ on them and offer emotional support in response to posts about the deceased. These posts provided a chance for youth to benefit from the “supportive relationships... that people need to stay healthy or to adapt to stress” (House et al. 1988: 302) with or without intending to do so. Participants often mentioned that posting online offered them a distinct method of sharing information that a phone call, text, or face-to-face conversation could not offer. Denise, a 21-year-old black female from a South Side neighborhood, describes how she purposely took to social media to let her family know she was grieving her friend’s death:

“[I posted a picture] online for [my family members] that don’t live with me, where we’re apart most of the time, to give them a chance to see who I was talking about, and to maybe spark an interest, like, ‘Okay well, this is something that’s really serious to her that she would post it on Facebook.’ Because as compared to offline, where I just called them and told them [about the death]...they’ll listen to me and understand where I’m coming

from, but they wouldn't understand that it's really important to me."

For Denise, posting pictures on her Facebook about a particular topic indicates it's something of importance. Because it's not addressed to anyone in particular, the post can let multiple family members know that her friend's death was important to her without her having to explicitly say so and directly address her family members as the intended audience. When a family member contacts her as a result of the post, she confirms that that family member is "gonna be there" for her. This was the case when she received a call from her grandmother in response to the post that helped her to "look at the positives" of the situation.

For many participants, the calls, texts, or comments they received as a result of their posts weren't necessarily about receiving comforting advice. For some, being called or contacted by loved ones is the end in itself. Youth usually don't have an expectation that friends have to check in on them if they make a post, either, saying that it just shows "they truly do care for you." Cole, a 19-year-old black male from a South Side neighborhood, reflected on how he would have felt if his close friends hadn't checked in on him after he made a post about his late friend:

"I still would have considered them my close friend even if they didn't because you know at the end of the day we been through a lot, you know four years of high school, some of them I knew from grammar school because of basketball, so about six years altogether. So you know, they're still my close

friends 'till this day. I wasn't gonna complain about that or anything. And then we spent a lot of time after his death, you know.

Here, Cole explains the little downsides he sees in making the post; if nobody checks in on him, it's not going to disappoint or bother him. In this sense, posting on social media allows for individuals to receive support from their friends and family without expecting it or asking for it. These results are in partial agreement with Patton et al. (2015) in that SNSs have the potential to "facilitate interpersonal relationships between users at a time when being socially connected with peers can help adolescents cope with loss" (236). However, further investigation reveals that this task is not as straightforward as it appears, at times requiring individuals to disclose information in particular ways.

Can't look soft: masculine ideals

"You can't really get into [your emotions] 'cause people are gonna see you as one wave, and once you show them that one wave, they'll use it against you...so I just keep it to myself...for example, say you're in a relationship with a girl and she see you cryin' or something like that, she gonna go tell her little friends or something like that...It hasn't happened to me personally, but I see that all the time on Facebook. You'll see a bunch of people getting put on blast for bein' soft and stuff...I'm just gonna avoid that situation."

- Victor, an 18-year-old Latino from a westside neighborhood

As Victor explains, being ‘soft’ carries significant consequences for men of color in communities affected by concentrated poverty and violence. Consistent with Elijah Anderson’s concept of decency and having a “nice” attitude (1999: 100), showing this type of weakness in inner-city neighborhoods of concentrated disadvantage, runs the risk of picking up the reputation of being a “sissy.” (100). In the networked era, displays of weakness have the potential to stray from their original more private context into an online environment of hundreds of possible local audience members.

In this way, networked publics (boyd 2010) have indeed raised the stakes of failing to perform masculinity for some marginalized youth. He could be screenshotted or ‘exposed’ online by anybody with either physical or testimonial evidence of his ‘softness.’ Victor fears the embarrassment and consequences of losing face—in this case, failure to perform hegemonic masculinity—so much so that he refuses to delve too deep into his emotions about the death, even with a close partner or friend. With this in mind, Victor must balance the need to avoid looking ‘soft’ with his desire to open up about how he’s feeling:

“I don’t go to nobody and be like, ‘I need to talk about this,’ you know. I’ll start thinkin’ about it in my head and be like, damn, I wanna talk to somebody, but at the same time I just wanna keep it to myself, have that Chicago mindset or whatever. But at the same time, I’ll just be on my phone, like, I’ll be on my phone all day, I’ll be on social media scrollin’ through, feelin’ these

thoughts, and I’ll be like, let me put this ‘Damn’ [on my Twitter]... Like I could literally say, like, ‘Damn, I’m hurting right now, like, I miss my homie’ or whatever, but I’m not putting that. I’m just putting ‘Damn’ so people just look at it and not really know what I’m doin’. I want them to see that. At the same time, [I want them to think] what is he—what’s goin’ on?”

Victor’s “Damn” is a form of networked privacy management similar to what Marwick and boyd (2014) refer to as “subtweeting” (1059) or creating a controversial post that is purposely vague in order to maintain plausible deniability of the meaning and intention of the post. In this case, the post isn’t about creating conflict or controversy. Victor strategically discloses information in a certain way; the post is not an explicit showing of weakness, and thus, it cannot be used against him. At the same time, the post communicates to his close friends online that he’s hurting or experiencing some emotional pain. Having the ‘Chicago mindset’ means getting through emotionally-taxing and stressful situations on one’s own, as he described earlier, but having this mindset isn’t always conducive to emotional and psychological well-being, nor does it reduce the desire to want to express extremely difficult feelings.

Victor manages this dissonance by creating a message in a certain way that briefly hints at some emotional pain. Some participants also reported the existence of seemingly implicit guidelines of performing weakness online following the death of a loved one:

“I mean, if it’s just ‘Damn, they

took my brother,' that's cool, but if you put a whole paragraph...I've been around people where it be like, somebody will read a paragraph that a dude done wrote, and he'll say, 'He really doin' too much. He in his feelings... He soft as hell.'"

-David, a 19-year-old black male from a southside neighborhood

These masculine ideals that embarrass men who show too much weakness encourage Victor to keep his grief short and vague in his online posts. By just Tweeting "Damn," he retains the option of claiming that the post was about something else, and he remains in line with acceptable social norms of showing weakness and vulnerable emotions. In this way, he can grieve and receive social support without appearing too 'soft' and without explicitly asking his friends to check in on him and provide him support. Although Victor mentions that this post was mostly just a means of "putting [the feelings] out there" and venting, this post now allows his close friends a notice of his emotional pain and an opportunity to check in on him: "If I post something like 'Damn' on Twitter, then someone will pull up on me. 'Cause they know how I'm feelin'."

Victor describes how his friends often "pulled up on him" or showed up to his house and took him out to do something. The pervasiveness of gun violence in neighborhoods of concentrated disadvantage means it is not uncommon for individuals in his friend group to have also experienced the loss of a loved one to gun violence. Regardless of whether Victor and his friends have a conversation about his actual feelings,

his friends provide him valuable social support and a positive experience, such as going out to eat together. Victor successfully performs his 'soft' emotions and thereby successfully grieves by managing his networked privacy. That is, he creatively and selectively discloses information to avoid the embarrassment that comes with failing to perform socially acceptable forms of masculinity.

Managing networked privacy helps disadvantaged youth with the problems of hegemonic masculinity and the high stakes that failing to perform masculinity entails in poorer, more violent neighborhoods. As Gunn (2008) notes about disadvantaged communities, "young boys must learn to survive this hostile environment on their own... the most common [strategy] is to simply toughen up, to perform masculinity in ways that are recognized by other residents of that community" (32). There are no privacy controls on SNSs to combat the problems that arise when certain youth fail to perform masculinity. Instead, privacy must be achieved by "hiding content in plain sight" (Marwick and boyd 2014: 1058) to which only trusted individuals have access. As the model of networked privacy makes clear, youth must find creative means of achieving privacy on public or semi-public forums. Social media have allowed youth unique benefits that may help to alleviate some of the problems of disadvantaged neighborhoods if they find a socially acceptable means of doing so.

Furthermore, the tendency of some disadvantaged youth to value strength over weakness, even in grieving the passing of a loved one, is not

limited to boys and men. Indeed, as Nikki Jean (2010) contends, many girls in disadvantaged neighborhoods do not meet or do not have access to the gendered standards of a “good girl” (79). These girls also contend with Anderson’s “code of the street” (1999) and demonstrate their ability to fight in order to cope with threats to their safety and reputation. In essence, many female youth and young women must perform strength as well, and I found these conclusions to be consistent with ideals of some female participants in this study.

June, a 20-year-old black female from a West Side neighborhood, recounted an experience growing up wherein her trusted friend became an enemy of hers; that friend took to social media to ‘expose’ a piece of June’s personal information, resulting in a great deal of embarrassment for June. She didn’t hang out outside her house in the several days following the incident, and she came to be more cautious as to whom she entrusted with personal information. Though she feels comfortable going to certain people like close family members to talk about sensitive information, she still prefers not to delve too deep into the emotions she feels during the grieving process:

“I’m the type of person who’ll try and help everybody else. I don’t like nobody to see me cryin’, like I’ll do that on my own time...I don’t like people to see me weak ‘cause I feel like people pray on the weak. People’ll use your weak and your weakness against you. Like if you sittin’ here tellin’ them a personal situation, and then y’all get into it, and then they flip and they’ll throw it in your face. I don’t

like it.”

June explains her reticence in opening up to specific friends stems from the possibility that they will one day use the information against her. The information wouldn’t necessarily cause her physical harm, but it does leave her vulnerable to being embarrassed or teased online. She therefore tries to limit ‘personal information’ that she puts online, as she claims that not everyone needs to know certain things. Similar to the case of Victor, however, June is on her phone a lot. She mentions that there will be occasional moments where her emotions, typically anger or sadness, are so strong that she’ll feel compelled to post something:

“June: I’ll probably post something online [about how I’m feeling]... it’ll build up, then I’ll probably post it. But then, after a while, I’ll probably delete it.

Diego: Why would you delete it?

June: ‘Cause I don’t want nobody to be like, ‘She said [this],’ because people like when people be down. Like they get off on seeing people down to make themselves feel better. But I’ll still post it to let people know how I feel.”

June realizes that if she leaves certain moments of vulnerability or even anger on her profile, people have greater and longer access to these posts. As long as they stay on her profile, others can possibly use them against her in the future or use them to misrepresent her. As a result, June utilizes another facet of networked privacy: creatively manipulating the technical features of the website (Marwick and boyd 2014). Because posts normally stay up on one’s

profile until deleted, June will stay conscious of what she's posted and limit specific posts temporally. This does not completely eliminate the possibility that another viewer might see the post, but it does help to minimize the possibility that someone will one day use the post against her. By limiting access to her thoughts temporally, June finds that she can occasionally talk about how she's feeling online.

June and Victor are both quintessential examples of how the ideals of hegemonic masculinity functions in neighborhoods afflicted by high levels of violence. Although other neighborhoods certainly are impacted by hegemonic masculinity, the high levels of trauma that pervasive gun violence inflicts upon disadvantaged communities suggests that many disadvantaged youth have to put forth more emotional effort to perform strength. For some youth, the consequences of showing weakness are steep enough to warrant careful approaches to posting on SNSs. These youth make frequent attempts to manage networked privacy as a means of being able to cope online without the ramifications of public displays of weakness. Thus, the benefits of SNSs, like grieving online, are not available to all youth in disadvantaged neighborhoods without the awareness and skills to manage their privacy.

"We smokin' on to' dead homie": blocking antagonism and disrespect

A small number of youth, both female and male, reported having antagonistic or disrespectful responses to grieving online. Following a "RIP" post, for example, a participant might have received a direct message from a

gang member that said something along the lines of "Fuck yo' dead homie" or "We smokin' on him tonight." "Smoking on" someone is an expression of disrespect among gang members that intends to taunt a recently deceased rival gang member. This type of consequence to grieving online seemed to be one of the hardest obstacles to avoid because blocking access to all strangers requires that one make their SNS accounts fully private. Even if one sacrifices the social benefits of a public or semi-public profile, there is no guarantee that a disrespectful individual won't make it on to one's friend or follower list.

This was the case with Destiny, a 20-year-old black female from a West Side neighborhood. Though Destiny has had multiple loved ones die as a result of gun violence, it was during her brother's death that she was antagonized online. Following the loss of her gang-affiliated brother in a car accident, an unknown gang-affiliated individual sent her a message on Facebook:

"Destiny: Some boy inboxed me like 'I hope he get up' with a laughing emoji... 'cause he was hospitalized [at the time]... I didn't know who [the boy] was. I don't even think he was my friend. He just inboxed me.

Diego: How did you react to that?

Destiny: At first I told my brother, and he told me to ignore it. I ignored it at first, but then he sent me another message, like a GIF of [a famous actor] dancing and laughing, to get me to argue with him... I told him 'What was his purpose?' and he didn't answer me, he just kept saying, 'I hope he get up.' So I just left

him on ‘seen.’ I didn’t think he was gonna message me again ‘cause I left him on ‘seen.’ But then he in-boxed me one more time, and that’s when I blocked him.”

Since Destiny’s privacy settings allowed non-friends to send her a direct message, this left her vulnerable to unwanted harassment in a time of great difficulty. The ability to block specific users, preventing them from contacting you or viewing your profile, cannot be utilized unless one knows exactly whom one needs to block. In Destiny’s case, she couldn’t have known this stranger would be a future problem. This kind of harassment was also present in her offline life, as she recalled being harassed by her rival gang members when taking a certain route home from school.

In contrast to her offline life, wherein she merely took a different route to school or home, Destiny’s mere online presence left her vulnerable to this type of harassment. In addition, Destiny’s understanding of online social norms was inaccurate here. She believed that the stranger wouldn’t send her another message if she left him ‘on seen,’ a feature of SNSs where users are notified when the recipient has opened their private direct message. Leaving someone ‘on seen’ should have signaled that she didn’t want to respond and that she would no longer respond, but the boy nonetheless messaged her a third time before being blocked. As a result, Destiny was harassed and her loved one was disrespected on three different occasions.

Managing networked privacy, though often successful, cannot protect individuals against all privacy viola-

tions. If Destiny had blocked him after the first message, she would still be left to deal with the emotional reaction to the first message. Even if her privacy settings were set to fully private, Facebook still allows others to send individuals ‘message requests’ that allow the user to be contacted. In accordance with Marwick and boyd (2014), youth cannot be expected to successfully manage their privacy in an online environment that does not allow them to exert full control over whom is allowed access to them. The increased challenges to individuals’ ability to manage their own privacy has increased the ease and the likelihood that disadvantaged individuals can be accessed and affected by the actors who carry out these forms of antagonism in disadvantaged neighborhoods. In this way, SNSs can further intensify the conditions of disadvantage for specific youth.

The consequences of failing to manage networked privacy carry different implications for different youth. I could not measure the stakes of this failure to manage privacy for Destiny beyond the fact that she was bothered and hurt by this message. For others, however, these instances of disrespect may lead to physical retaliation (Patton et al. 2017), or they may be a catalyst that sinks one further into feelings of sadness and pain. Regardless of the type of consequence, failing to manage one’s networked privacy can carry serious ramifications for certain youth. The last section of my analyses conveys the potential consequences that an inability to manage one’s networked privacy can entail.

Contrasting Hector and Jasmine: A Tale of Two Online Worlds *Hector*

Stevens et al. (2016) make the mistake of treating disadvantaged youth as a homogenous population; that is, that the ‘digital hood’ or amplification of offline problems can affect all marginalized youth in the same way. In reality, research on how neighborhood characteristics affect individual life outcomes of marginalized youth suggest the exact opposite: youth vary considerably by a multitude of variables, including social networks, family resources, and educational inputs, to name a few (Harding et al. 2011, Small and Feldman 2012). As such, we should expect that there is considerable variation in how disadvantaged youth are affected by the advent of social media even among youth living in neighborhoods affected by similar conditions of disadvantage.

In this section, I compare the experiences of two youth: Hector, a 22-year-old Latino male from a West Side neighborhood, and Jasmine, a 20-year-old black female from a South Side neighborhood. Although they both currently attend private colleges and no longer live in their original neighborhoods, both reported the presence of gangs and gun violence as a significant problem affecting the neighborhoods in which they spent 18 years of their lives. I intend to show how differences in their networked privacy concerns are a result of the heterogeneity among their individual characteristics. I also show how Victor’s ability to manage networked privacy helped preserve his safety, albeit sometimes at the cost of his emotional well-being.

Hector grew up living on a block that was contentious territory for the rival factions of two gangs in his neighborhood. Having grown up close to his cousins who were involved in a local street gang, he began to identify with the gang by association—much less of a commitment than membership. At this same period in his childhood, he began using MySpace, a formerly popular SNS similar to Facebook. Most of his MySpace friends were gang members and gang-affiliated family members.

As he was kicked out of his elementary school in sixth grade when school administrators discovered photos of him ‘throwing up’ gang signs, he began to re-evaluate his life. After the homicide of one of his gang-involved cousins, he realized that he was on the path toward full-membership in the gang, a membership that carried the risk of an early death. He decided to move away from the gang lifestyle, yet he was frequently reminded of the difficulty in successfully and safely separating oneself from the gang. As he entered high school, Facebook was becoming increasingly popular. As a rule, he became very mindful about not adding specific individuals that he knew were gang members as friends despite having known them in his prior time with the gang.

For Hector, high school posed real risks to his safety and educational attainment, as his high school was located in the rival gang territory. Hector had to walk to school and cross local boundaries of the two gang territories. This meant he frequently encountered the possibility of an interaction with a rival gang member hanging out on the street.

As a result of potential safety risks and harassment from gang members who might have been able to recognize him from his past gang ties, Hector employed creative strategies to avoid victimization, similar to those described by Garot (2010). He lied about where he lived when he was “hit up,” claiming he lived on a block that wasn’t in rival territory. He also made use of his social networks and managed to get his local pastor to walk with him to school throughout his freshman year. These two strategies mitigated harassment and potential victimization. As he got older, the gang members who might’ve recognized him from his past gang ties had either graduated or dropped out, and his route to school was made safer.

Jasmine

Jasmine, in contrast to Hector, did not report growing up on a block particularly known for violence or having a strong gang presence. She also did not report having too many gang-involved friends and family members in her social networks. Throughout her childhood, Jasmine seemed to be particularly insulated from some of the social problems of her neighborhood. For instance, Jasmine affirmed that she wasn’t really involved in much of the social conflicts and drama that took place after school at her neighborhood grammar school. This was because she usually received rides to and from school. She recalled how the occasional instances that she had to walk home increased the likelihood that her school laptop could be stolen from her.

Since other youth from nearby schools knew that every youth who attended Jasmine’s school, includ-

ing Jasmine, received a school laptop, some youth would attempt to steal laptops after school. On days where she would walk home, Jasmine would try to disguise her laptop behind her purse or under her arms to make the appearance of the laptop less visible. This is a strategy similar to those described by Anderson (1990) as “street wisdom,” or the pragmatic strategies individuals develop to decrease the chances of being robbed. Ultimately, Jasmine reported that these occasional walks to school never caused her much trouble. When she entered high school, she always received rides to and from her school. Her school was a small school located outside of her neighborhood that had a strict no-gang-activity policy. Jasmine would rarely have the chance to explore the neighborhood after school because of various extracurricular responsibilities as well as the car rides that would pick her up afterwards directly from the school.

Hector and Jasmine’s two different “doses” (Sharkey and Faber 2014) of their neighborhoods as well as their individual differences meant that Hector and Jasmine also had differences in the online experiences during their high school years and beyond. These differences led to varying levels of concerns over managing networked privacy.

Contrasting networked privacy concerns

Hector reported having lost loved ones in high school and during his first years at an out-of-state college. When he first lost his cousin, he was still in grammar school and still partially affiliated with the local gang. With sound privacy settings and mostly gang-involved

individuals on his MySpace friends list, he was able to grieve and post photos of his cousin on his MySpace page. In response to these posts, other gang members and family provided him support as well as advice for dealing with his cousin's death. Years later, when he was no longer involved in the gang, he describes the death of one friend as particularly polarizing moment on his Facebook timeline:

“This dude named Skittles got killed [by Hector's former gang]. And all these people on social media, I have people on both sides [of the territorial boundary], right? People over here were saying ‘rot in hell,’ and then I had people from high school who were saying ‘rest in peace’ and stuff like that. For me, I played football with this dude, I established a relationship with him, but I couldn't be vocal about it and show my...appreciation that I had for my friendship with him because I knew that some of the people who were saying ‘rot in hell’ were probably gonna call me out and say some shit... so that was a reason why I was kind of silent [on social media] when things happened, because I knew other people were watching, like some of my cousins would have said something.”

Hector went on to describe that posts like ‘rot in hell’ weren't necessarily coming from the gang members that he managed to keep off his friends list on Facebook. Rather, these messages often came from ‘gang-associated’ girls and boys who were associated with the local gang by virtue of their family members' gang ties. Even with

control over his friends list, there was always the possibility that someone else might share or talk about Hector's post if he were to have made one for his late friend Skittles. Here, both Hector's past involvement in the local gang and his high school's location in rival gang territory meant he was in a situation where he couldn't grieve online as he had wanted. He told me he remembers the ‘rot in hell’ posts as particularly hurtful, but because of the predicament he was in, he had to internalize the pain and grief he felt over his friend's death.

Hector's experiences online and grieving online stand in stark contrast with Jasmine's experiences. Jasmine described her online Facebook environment as being under surveillance of her high school principal who frequently monitored the students' accounts for any social media “drama.” The small student body congregated daily at the high school, so if any social media drama or conflicts were to occur, the students implicated in the conflicts would be “put on blast” in front of everyone and instructed to apologize. As such, incidents or drama were either decreased or moved to Twitter, a SNS that afforded students more privacy because users need not provide their real names. This allows for a certain buffer between the user and those who do not have knowledge of the individual's username. However, Jasmine also describes there being someone who occasionally “snitched” or told the principal about instances of social conflict on Twitter. The student body eventually started to figure out who was “snitching” and became more mindful of this individual on Twitter.

Aside from some administrative

surveillance, Jasmine didn't report having any real privacy concerns. Moving to Twitter was enough privacy for her. She says that she was never really involved in any of the school's "drama," and that nothing she said online would have ever caused trouble for her because she "minded [her] business." Having attended a small high school with little tolerance for online conflict and having no gang affiliations and ties to gangs, Jasmine reported feeling free to grieve and express her feelings online when her friend passed away in high school.

Hector and Jasmine's concerns in managing their networked privacy tell different stories with different implications. Despite the fact that both individuals had lost a friend to gun violence in high school. Hector's need to manage networked privacy, such as preventing gang members from joining his friends list and withholding online displays of grief, show how his individual circumstances and exposure to gang violence in his neighborhood produced obstacles in both his offline and online environment. In contrast, Jasmine's general lack of concern for managing her networked privacy illustrate how factors such as her lack of familial ties to local gangs, her involvement in extracurriculars, her rides to school, and perhaps even her gender meant for little social conflict on her offline and online environments.

Hector and Jasmine's stories respectively underscore the usefulness in using networked privacy management as a tool to identify for whom and how social media have intensified or adversely affected the social problems of disadvantaged neighborhoods. Indeed, Hector's privacy management was cru-

cial to his academic success and ability to attend a top-tier private college. Had Hector lacked the ability to keep gang members off his social media, he may have encountered further obstacles to educational achievement. The ability to manage networked privacy offers some marginalized youth invaluable tools for resisting the offline and online social problems of their neighborhood. Networked privacy management is a useful tool for thinking about how social media may interact with conditions of disadvantage to affect the daily lives of disadvantaged youth and their individual life outcomes.

DISCUSSION

This study shows that marginalized youth are everything but homogenous in how they are affected by and how they respond to the emerging problems of their online environments. Some youth approach social media with great care, as they perceive fatal risks in saying the wrong thing to the wrong person online. Others view social media as having significantly lower stakes, reporting few privacy concerns and problems in their online environments. As exemplified by this study, further research on social media should take a bottom-up approach to parse through such intricate and complex empirical data.

Conclusions that paint the online world as a 'digital hood' (Stevens et al. 2016) for all marginalized youth produce far too simple depictions of youths' online worlds. Aside from variation in online experiences, youth constantly make use of their agency to keep offline problems from entering their online environments. They block po-

tential sources of trouble when needed, they creatively disclose their emotions online to perform gendered versions of weakness and grief, and they find ways to tap into systems of social support without explicitly requesting them. Just as they do in their physical neighborhoods, marginalized youth strategically avoid and prevent the social problems most salient in their everyday lives.

Mere content analyses of social media data do not capture the complexity of youth's contemporary social environments, either. For some youth, even nongang involved youth, SNSs can be everything but safe and healthy spaces in which youth can make sense of their loss. Unfortunately, interviews cannot fully measure the emotional toll of seeing a deceased loved one disrespected by strangers online. Nonetheless, the fact that participants spoke up about these instances in interviews implies these actions carry real consequences for some youth. As for the youth who did not report challenges to grieving online, Patton et al. (2015) still fail to capture the myriad of ways that online expressions of grief were able to facilitate social processes like social support. In order to further understand the impacts, affordances, and challenges that social media present to marginalized youth, scholars need to carry out ethnographic explorations of social processes that do not focus solely on urban violence and gang members' social media use.

Moreover, the conceptual tool proposed in this study proved extremely useful in highlighting how participants were heterogeneously affected by SNSs. Although I could not provide an exhaustive account of all the factors that might have predicted whether

youth were adversely impacted by the advent of SNSs, Hector and Jasmine's stories should motivate scholars of neighborhood effects to take social media seriously. Scholars could examine, for instance, the effects of attending high school in a rival gang's territory on youth's perceptions of their online environments.

Neighborhood scholars could even employ quantitative approaches to social media and use survey methods to tease out a relationship between online behaviors and certain neighborhood characteristics. Whatever the approach may entail, this study has shown how important some online behaviors are to the well-being and safety of some marginalized youth. Neighborhood scholars should look to understand these processes if they wish to present an accurate picture of the contemporary social world and social processes of marginalized communities.

Finally, this study adds to a small yet increasing amount of scholarship making the case for deeper, more fruitful sociological explorations of social media; Lane (2016) perfectly illustrates the sociological value in studying social media, as he finds social media were used not only in the micro-sociological processes of urban violence, but also in neighborhood processes of collective efficacy and violence prevention. In this study, gang members' influence in both offline and online processes had significant effects on shaping some youths' offline and online behaviors. Future research should explore the implications of these novel online challenges for individual life outcomes. I close this study with a quote from Victor, who remains an avid social media user to this

day, on his perception of how social media changed his life:

“I started looking at rappers [on social media], that’s who I started watching... I wasn’t looking up to Michael Jordan or [Derrick] Rose, I’m looking at all the drug dealers and stuff, that’s where I’m looking at, on Facebook and stuff like that ‘cause these guys got money and they’re just flexin’ it, you know, stupid chillin’, driving nice ass cars with nice ass girls, and that’s who I was looking at, so I was like damn that’s who I’m trying to be like. So that’s when I started smoking weed and stuff, thinking you could do that and be rich and be famous and make everybody around you happy... and that’s just social media. ‘Cause I woulda never seen all that if social media weren’t around. It just changes who you’re looking at.”

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My Hijab, My Choice: The Perceptions of the Hijab within an American Context

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At a time when Islamophobia is rampant, Muslim Americans find it necessary to amplify what it means to be Muslim within the American context. Muslim women who wear the hijab struggle to liberate their own identities against those presented by the larger society as the hijab becomes stripped of much of its religious, social, and personal significance. Perceiving the hijab as merely a symbol of oppression or of modesty ignores the spiritual, personal, and ordinary aspects of the hijab. Further, these perceptions focus more on the hijab rather than on the individual women choosing, wearing, and shaping their connection with the religious covering. This research will provide a more holistic understanding of how both Muslim and non-Muslim American women view the hijab in an American context in order to recognize how the perceptions of each group shape the role of the hijab for Muslim American women as well as the larger Muslim American identity. Through interviews with eight women, I show that there exists a diversity of connections between women's religious and personal ideologies and her hijab. In understanding the dynamism of the hijab, we can begin to reform our perceptions of both this religious symbol as well as the women who wear it. By representing themselves and their own religious and personal connections to the hijab, Muslim women will no longer be defined by their hijab but by their choices, their individuality, and their identities.

INTRODUCTION

Muslim women across the world wear the hijab, a religious headscarf, not only to get closer to God but as a means to finding community through region, language, and culture. In the American context, however, the hijab is often deemed as a symbol of oppression and terror contradictory to the American ideals. But despite the widespread animosity towards Muslims, millions of Muslim women continue to wear the hijab motivated by religious and personal beliefs. By perpetuating the harmful stereotypes against Muslims and the hijab, Muslim women are burdened with the pressure to break down these stereotypes, act as representatives of Islam, and often face more discrimination.

By understanding the influences and perceptions of the hijab by both

Muslim and non-Muslim women, we may delve into a deeper sense of how the hijab functions in American society. While much research has focused on Muslim women and their motivations for wearing the hijab, little has been researched on how non-Muslim Americans understand the hijab. This research, exploring the view of both groups, will fill a void in sociological literature on the hijab, and it will provide both Muslims and non-Muslims deeper meaning to the hijab, the lived experience of the hijab, and the position of Muslims in the larger American context.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The hijab is no longer merely a piece of religious clothing, rather it embodies distinct meanings in relation to

Muslim identity within the American context. The following section explores literature on the hijab within the Muslim and Muslim American narrative. These texts differ in terms of operationalization: some focused on qualitative interviews and participant observation while others conducted surveys or analyzed existing quantitative data. The multifaceted nature of the literature mirrors that of the concept of hijab in the context of Muslim American identity.

Islamic Context of the Hijab

At the core of Islamic tradition is an understanding that God has commanded both men and women to embrace modesty in physical, mental, and spiritual ways. The physical hijab for Muslim women is a headscarf that covers the hair and neck; in addition, Muslim women cover the rest of the body. While puberty often marks when women begin wearing the hijab, there is a wide range of timeframes when women choose to cover. Ideally, women who starts wearing the hijab always wear their scarf when in public and in front of men, excluding their relatives. While there are differences across cultures in terms of how much skin is shown or how scarves are worn, the basic understanding is to dress modestly for the sake of God (Mohibullah & Kramer, 2016). The differences between how an Arab, Indonesian, Spanish, or American Muslim may wear hijab are varied, thus there is room to understand various motivations for wearing the hijab.

Muslims in the United States

Due to the transatlantic slave trade, Muslims have been in the U.S. since the creation of the nation. Many slaves came from Muslim majority na-

tions in West Africa (Karaim, 2017). Immigrants from the Middle East started immigrating in the 19th century and continue to arrive, many of whom are refugees escaping war and persecution (Karaim, 2017). Today, Muslims make up 1% of the American population, and Islam continues to be the fastest growing religion in the world. While the September 11 attacks, the War on Terror, and the election of President Trump have exacerbated Islamophobic sentiments, Muslims continue to live ordinary American lives.

For some Muslim women, these growing tensions have fostered both fear and increased motivation to wear the hijab (Haddad, 2007). This history presents a burden among American Muslims to defend Islam, their faith, and their rights, but also to constantly live in a country that projects an “us vs. them” mentality (Khan, 1998). The pressure to represent a Muslim identity in line with American values often falls heavily among Muslim women who wear the hijab. Not only has research regarding Muslims and Muslim women focused on this tumultuous history, but it has also fostered a narrative of Muslims breaking down stereotypes and reclaiming their identity. While this active response to hate and bigotry is important, it limits the more nuanced identities and experiences of American Muslims.

Religious Identity Negotiation

Much research has exposed the difficulty of negotiating the identity of women who veil when faced with social, familial, and personal constraints. Through a series of qualitative interviews conducted with second-genera-

tion Muslim Americans after 9/11, Peek (2005) explored the process of religious identity negotiation and formation. Across 106 interviews, she identified three stages of religious identity formation: religion as ascribed, religion as chosen, and religion as declared (Peek, 2005). As these children grew older, being Muslim was no longer just an identity ascribed by their parents, but a defined characteristic of themselves as they engaged more with the religion (Peek, 2007, pg. 223). Peek's research was grounded in post-9/11 America and highlighted the influence of Islam, American culture, current events, and lifestyle as integral to how these young Muslim Americans formed their identities. Keeping Peek's study in mind, we can better understand the hijab's place within this process of identity formation for Muslim Americans.

Instead, Westfall et al. (2016) present the hijab from solely a religious framework, which narrowly focuses on religious lifestyle, religious abstinence, and religious socialization as motivators for wearing the hijab. They conducted a survey with 1,847 Muslim American women, and found that women are more likely to wear hijab if they engaged in acts of worship in everyday life (Westfall et al., 2016). While the authors hint at this everyday performance of religion as integral to the hijab, we cannot fully extrapolate how these women process their values, habits, and environments into their experience with the hijab.

Thus, it is important to understand the hijab through its place within the process of identity formation. Through qualitative interviews with American Muslim women, Williams & Vashi

(2007) recognize that the "hijab is a symbol that condenses a number of issues for young Muslims who are in the process of constructing the practical dimensions of an American Islam" (2007, pg. 271). By grounding ourselves in this idea of an "American Islam," we can better understand the American Muslim identity, Muslim women, and their experiences with the hijab from a space that unites both Islamic and American values, culture, and lifestyle.

Empowerment through the Hijab

Across the literature regarding the hijab, Muslim women are often asked to describe their journey, reasons, and motivations for wearing the hijab. A common narrative is based on a sense of modesty, liberation, control, and resistance. These narrative elements stem from Islamic principles of modesty but also from social ostracism, societal expectations, interpersonal issues, and patriarchal norms (Droogsma, 2007; Williams & Vashi, 2007). The women interviewed by Williams & Vashi (2007) project elements expressed by Droogsma (2007) in that they experience the hijab as a means to nurture solidarity, equality, and control within a male-dominant society.

Muslim women are often portrayed as oppressed, without power and confidence in their own identities. By conveying the hijab as a source of resistance and empowerment, Muslim women undermine this narrative. In this way, the hijab is more than a symbol but a functional instrument towards self-control, independence, and resistance to the gender norms leveraged against women within American Islam.

While the discussion and experi-

ence of the hijab as a form of empowerment is salient for many Muslim women, I want to avoid romanticizing and generalizing this narrative as consistent across all American Muslim women. My research offers an understanding of the active role Muslim women play in contextualizing and changing their identity and image within an American context. This aspect of resistance and control stems from a history of discrimination and prejudice, thus exemplifying a reaction and response to one's environment through a process of active meaning-making.

Role of the Hijab in Everyday Life

Across the literature there is an overwhelming number of reasons why Muslim women wear the hijab and the distinct meanings applied to them. Mohibullah & Kramer's (2016) research holistically reviews both the everyday battles as well as everyday routine of wearing the hijab. Though a small sample of six interviews, this recent research provides a more current understanding of the socio-political and traditional influences for veiling. These influences spanned from religious adherence, to political motivations, to familial pressure, to a response to 9/11 (Mohibullah & Kramer, 2016). But, this text stands out because of the notion of both the "religio-cultural ideals and everyday pragmatics" associated with the hijab (Mohibullah & Kramer, 2016, pg. 103). It is important to understand not only that women cover differently and for different reasons, but how this heterogeneous understanding of the hijab functions in a wider context.

Mohibullah & Kramer explore the intersection of Islam and secular every-

day life to emphasize how Islam influences dictate the lives of most American Muslims (2016). In this way, emphasizing the hijab as an "unfixed aspect of the everyday" provides a space where Muslim women are more than just their hijab and are valued for their multifaceted lives. Mohibullah & Kramer emphasize that women are "first and foremost, 'acting, reacting, thinking, feeling humans'" (2016, pg. 110). This leaves room for not only better research of Muslim women and the hijab but also recognizes the ordinary and dynamic underpinnings of how identities and experiences color the practice of covering.

Moving Forward

The literature presents numerous themes regarding the hijab, including identity negotiations, empowerment through the hijab, and the role of hijab in ordinary life. Because these works specifically examine American Muslims within a post-9/11 American context, they often frame their findings in opposition to generally negative American perceptions of Muslims. However, there is limited research regarding the perceptions of Muslims or the hijab from a non-Muslim American perspective. Thus, the present research will rely on empirically-based perceptions by non-Muslim Americans in order to contrast the experiences of Muslim women with real rather than generalized attitudes towards Muslims and the hijab.

While the motivations for wearing the hijab center on reactions to a negative portrayal of Muslims in a post-9/11 America, this research will focus on current experiences and struggles of American Muslim women. Not

Interview	Pseudonym	Muslim or Non-Muslim	Wear Hijab
1	Ala	Muslim	Yes
2	Alex	Muslim	Yes
3	Sarah	Muslim	Yes
4	Maha	Muslim	Yes
5	Michelle	Non-Muslim	No
6	Giselle	Non-Muslim	No
7	Lara	Non-Muslim	No
8	Abby	Non-Muslim	No

Figure 1. Interviewees by pseudonym, religious affiliation, and hijab wearing status.

only will this research be grounded in a framework of identity formation, but it will advance Mohibullah & Kramer’s focus on an everyday lived experience of the hijab. The present research thus hopes to focus on how American Muslim women experience the hijab and to place those narratives in relation to perceptions of the hijab by non-Muslim American women.

RESEARCH DESIGN

My research explores the Muslim American identity through the perception and interaction with the hijab. My results expand the work of Mohibullah & Kramer and their ideas concerning how the hijab fits into the ordinary lives of Muslim American women. The research provides new knowledge not only for other sociologists, primarily sociologists of religion, but also for ordinary Muslims. By understanding the role of the hijab, Muslims can better reflect upon their own ideas about hijab, about their religious identity, and their role in the larger American society. Further, this research can elucidate

for non-Muslims the narrative of Muslim Americans from a more authentic voice rather than what is often presented about Muslims in American society. The primary goal of this research is not to break stereotypes but to foster a deeper understanding of Muslims and the identities they embrace. By comparing the views of Muslims and non-Muslims on the hijab, I hope to reveal more nuanced meanings attributed to this religious symbol.

The design of this research will be a *contrast of cases*; that is, comparing the perceptions of the hijab by Muslims, specifically Muslim women who wear the hijab, and the perceptions of the hijab by non-Muslim women. Exploring both Muslim and non-Muslim women will yield insight into how the two groups perceive and interact with the hijab. Both the Muslim and non-Muslim women I interviewed live in America, attend a Jesuit university, and are currently developing their identities as emerging adults.

DATA AND METHODS

The study population are eight self-identified American undergraduate women; four are non-Muslim women and four are Muslim women who wear the hijab. All participants were recruited through snowball sampling from the university's campus. Other factors such as race/ethnicity or age were not as important as the primary goal was simply comparing individuals who identify as either Muslim and non-Muslim American women.

The four Muslim women are referred to as Ala, Alex, Sarah, and Maha. All the Muslim women wear the hijab and started wearing it at different ages. The four non-Muslim women are referred to as Michelle, Giselle, Lara, and Abby. All of the non-Muslims women were raised Catholic. It is also worth noting that the non-Muslim women first interacted with Muslim Americans at their university and had a superficial understanding of Islam overall. While these characteristics are reflected in certain beliefs held by these women, they also present certain biases that I will flesh out in the limitations section.

The Jesuit university, located in the Midwest prides itself for its diverse student population of which there is a substantial Muslim population on campus. The campus provides a prayer space as well as a Muslim chaplain for its Muslim students. The campus has aided in creating a safe environment for Muslims by setting a norm for Muslims and non-Muslims to engage with one another.

Because the study relied on qualitative data and analysis, these eight participants are not meant to be representative of the entire American population

nor are their perceptions meant to be generalized. They do not reflect the demographic makeup of the Muslim community nor the American population, thus this study cannot be representative of the larger community. I will delve into the qualitative methods below, but it is worth recognizing the strength of qualitative data for conveying a depth of experience that cannot be grasped from quantitative data (Weiss, 1995). Hence, while I am not projecting a representation of all Muslims or non-Muslims, the experiences and thoughts of these eight individuals reflect larger processes of meaning-making (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011).

Methods

This study relied on qualitative methods and analysis through the use of in-depth interviews with eight participants. While qualitative methodology is often critiqued for not rigorously producing generalizable information, it provides an immersive means to understand theoretical concepts by immersing oneself in the lives of individuals experiencing these processes (Ragin & Amoroso, 2011). Additionally, qualitative methods provide underrepresented groups, like Muslims, an opportunity to express their values, lives, and identities that quantitative data could not capture in the same detail (Ragain & Amoroso, 2011).

As discussed in the literature review, scholars have presented numerous reasons for why Muslims decide to wear the hijab as well as its place within the process of identity formation. Although the motivation for this research is informed by past literature, the present research relies on inductive

analysis. In this way, I analyze themes as they arise from the data. As noted in the literature, there is so much variability when it comes to perceptions of the hijab that it would be reductive to limit these experiences to a single theory. For this reason, I kept my interview questions broad. While there was variability across interviews, patterns emerged directly from the data that both reflected and differed from past research.

This study relied on snowball sampling to recruit participants, approved by the Institutional Review Board at Loyola University Chicago. Recruitment depended on approval from the Muslim Student Association as well as having the Muslim chaplain and other professors to share information via email and social media. I also shared announcements about the research to classes and provided flyers. These procedures allowed me to garner a total of eight participants.

All participants reached out to me via email or phone and we conducted the interviews in-person in semi-private rooms at the campus library. Each interview began with the participants reading and signing a statement of consent and protection of confidentiality. Their confidentiality was further protected by replacing their names with pseudonyms. The interviews ranged from twenty to forty-five minutes and all participants allowed me to record audio and take notes during the interview. Interviews were then transcribed, coded, and analyzed.

RESULTS

Preliminary Perceptions of the Hijab

After identifying the extent to which the non-Muslim women under-

stood the hijab, I delved deeper into their perceptions of the hijab and those who wear it. When asked why they believe women wear the hijab, there was a common understanding that women wear it for a religious connection with God, modesty, as well as familial expectations. Lara explained it as a “devotion to religion that I’ll never understand.” This is very telling of how these women view those who decide to wear hijab. This does not only indicate the hijab as a form of devotion and religiosity; it exemplifies the individualized aspect of the hijab. Their perceptions of the hijab are not too different from how Muslims themselves view the hijab.

Many of the non-Muslims emphasized the notion of choice in relation to the hijab. Abby explained that deciding to wear the hijab “depends on the state of our mind...if you feel a certain way about [it].” For Giselle, Muslim women “choose to put it on and continue to make that choice” every single day. Both women recognize that the hijab depends on each woman’s personal desires. By appreciating the individuality of the hijab, we start to see how meaning is attached to the hijab by both the women who wear them and the non-Muslims. When these non-Muslim women explain that they may not know exactly why women choose to wear the hijab, that creates a space for Muslim women to provide their own personal experience and motivations for covering.

Portrayal of the Hijab and Islam

When asked how the hijab and Islam are typically portrayed in the media and American society, the non-Muslim participants recognized the negativi-

ty surrounding these depictions. They recognized that it is problematic to see this connection of adverse events with Islam and the hijab. For example, Lara explained, "I think if you see someone wearing a hijab in the news, you automatically assume something bad happened. While it shouldn't be like that, it is." Acknowledging that these stereotypes are both harmful and continuously perpetuated amplifies the very reality Muslims endure on a daily basis.

Abby similarly reflects how Muslim women must deal with these representations while still portraying their individual selves. She said, "It frustrates me and I can't even imagine how it would be like to be someone who actually wears the hijab." Seeing non-Muslims make these realizations about media presentation of Muslims and empathize with women who wear the hijab fosters hope to challenging some of these prevalent stereotypes.

I asked the non-Muslim women if they believed there was a difference in how the hijab is portrayed in the media as opposed to how ordinary Muslim women experience wearing the hijab. Giselle pointed out that there seems to be a shift in the media and how millennials are presenting Muslims and hijabs as "commonplace" and "neutral." Even more, she recognized that most of the "portrayals aren't from the people who are wearing them." A need arises for both neutral portrayals of Muslims and for Muslims themselves to take control of those portrayals. Thus, this gap in representation exposes the discrepancy between the media portrayal and the lived experience of the hijab. These women focused on Muslim women as ordinary human beings.

Michelle recognized that many wear the hijab for an "everyday reason as opposed to actually thinking about, well, I'm going to be super radical and make a big statement." Understanding this difference and highlighting the regularity of the hijab normalizes it and allows Muslim women who wear the hijab to focus on themselves rather than on how others may perceive them or their hijab. Abby tied this back to interacting and knowing Muslim women who cover as a way to fully understand the normalcy of this religious symbol. We must remember the individual motivations for why Muslim women decide to wear the hijab and affirm their identity rather than the superficial and distorted portrayals. Seeing this shift in perception from these non-Muslims and advocating for an the idea of normalcy can create new representations of Muslim women who cover.

9/11

In interviewing both Muslim and non-Muslim women, I could not disregard the role of 9/11, Islamophobia, and discrimination on Muslims and the hijab. It was clear that the non-Muslims recognized the negative impacts on Muslims due to the heightened prejudice exhibited within American society. Michelle, being a bit older and more cognizant of 9/11, explained how Islam was perceived as "anti-everything [Americans] believed." She recognized the clash between America and Islam as it was amplified directly after the attacks. Giselle and Lara were quite young when 9/11 happened, so it was harder for them to verbalize the ramifications of 9/11. Nonetheless, Giselle explained that it "made things harder

[for] Muslims...and Americans felt justified in their discrimination because they thought they were protecting or defending their nation.”

Younger generations of both Muslims and non-Muslims are disconnected from 9/11's direct impact, but that does not diminish their understanding that 9/11, Islamophobia, and discrimination were weaponized against Muslims. Lara explained that society “has gotten more accepting, but I don't know if the stigma will go away.” The reality is that 9/11 occurred more than a decade ago, but the consequences remain embedded within American society.

When I asked Muslims about 9/11, there was an overwhelming consensus that the attacks created a dangerous backlash against the Muslim community here and abroad. Ala and Alex, who are older and are more aware of 9/11, recognize that these events propagated war. Alex emphasized the political implications of 9/11 rather than the consequences on the Muslim community. It is important not only to understand the history behind 9/11 but also to acknowledge that wars were justified using this attack. Ala, whose family is from Afghanistan, emphasized both the repercussions felt in the Muslim community in America as well as in the Muslim world.

It was difficult to discuss this event because, as Ala described, “9/11 shook the world, but it shook the Muslim world a lot harder.” Like with the non-Muslims, many of these women were too young to directly understand the effects of 9/11. All the participants acknowledged a sense of collective suffering and hurt brought to the Muslim community. The fear and normaliza-

tion of that fear was actualized in war, heightened national security, racial profiling, etc. As 9/11 becomes more of a distant past, its direct impact becomes less drastic. Many of these women, specifically Sarah and Maha, recognized that their parents and older mentors expressed a vivid fear that the younger generation cannot directly relate to. Peek (2005), Mohibullah & Kramer (2016), and to some extent Droogsma (2007) found women donning the hijab as a response to 9/11 and as a source of resistance, but that sentiment was not expressed by these women. This does not undermine the impacts of 9/11, but it signals a shift in how younger Muslims have internalized 9/11 as “normal” and part of this new era of Islamophobia.

Islamophobia

All the women were aware of the term Islamophobia and associated it with misconceptions, discrimination, judgment, terrorist attacks, ignorance, etc. At its core is the fear of the supposed danger of Islam. While there was consensus that this should not be the reality, all participants revealed the social internalization of these beliefs. To exemplify its pervasiveness among Americans, Michelle explained how “it can be easy [for individuals] to give into Islamophobia” when it is colored by irrationality and fear. Similarly, Abby explained how her parents can often be Islamophobic without recognizing their prejudiced statements. They recognize the danger of Islamophobia in how quickly and unconsciously people adhere to these beliefs. As many of the participants revealed, it is the sheer ignorance that obstructs the path towards

a more open understanding of others.

We see a more empathetic perception towards Muslims, especially towards women who cover and the harsh realities they often face. For Lara, women who wear the hijab face daily challenges, but they should also “know what comes with it.” That is, they should, and probably do, recognize that their hijab will occasionally draw negative attention. Abby observed among women she met that “they’ve all had to deal with someone being rude to them because of the hijab that they wear.” What she is noticing is not only Islamophobia, but how ingrained its toxicity is within the women themselves. In a way, Muslim women who wear hijab are placing themselves within public spaces knowing that they may endure Islamophobia, discrimination, etc. By acknowledging the destructiveness of Islamophobia and the challenges faced by women who cover, it becomes even more important to understand why women continue to don their hijab.

Both the non-Muslim and Muslim women believe Islamophobia is a discriminatory form of ignorance, fear, and injustice. But the Muslim women understood Islamophobia in terms of experience rather than as a distant idea. For Sarah, Islamophobia was synonymous with discrimination. She recalled instances of Islamophobia when her father was out of work because of Islamophobic bosses or her mother’s hijab being torn off as reminders of how real Islamophobia is. Sarah’s parents did not want her to wear the hijab because of the rampant Islamophobia in their neighborhood; while she wore it regardless, her persistence did not erase the fact that this fear was inher-

ent in her environment, her parents, as well as herself. Maha explained that her interaction with an Islamophobic woman opened her eyes to the real consequences of this fear. She explained how “you hear about it on the news, but experiencing it for the first time, really experiencing that,” exposed the reality of Islamophobia. The experience of Islamophobia for these Muslim women is importantly different than the mere recognition expressed by the non-Muslims.

Unlike the rest of the participants, Alex frankly described herself as being Islamophobic prior to converting to Islam. Her environment and family fostered a sense of hatred towards Muslims and ignorance. She explained that Islamophobes “remain ignorant because their ignorance empowers them.” For her, meeting a Muslim provided a space away from her Islamophobic beliefs. She “internalized the fact that this Muslim was not at all what I expected, this Muslim was a normal human being.” In fact, this began her journey towards Islam and her conversion. This highlights not only the power of Islamophobic thoughts, but also its fragility. From merely meeting a Muslim, Alex relinquished her own ignorance. This is not to say that this was an immediate occurrence, but that Islamophobia and the fears against Muslims are feeble. They remain weak when faced by Muslims, including these women, who remain strong in their faith and in their hijabs.

Discrimination

As many of the Muslim women recalled the discrimination they often faced, I cannot undermine the fear,

paranoia, and internalization of these acts of intolerance caused. From being stared at on public transportation, asked if they have a bomb, having their scarves pulled off, having friends stop talking to them after donning the hijab, or being yelled at for wearing the hijab, these women have endured incredible abuse. Rather than defining themselves by these instances, it is more important to recognize how the women respond to and handle these prejudiced incidences.

Whether it is Maha's shock after being yelled at, Ala's anxiety when she gets on a bus, or Sarah being shaken up by subtle Islamophobic statements, the emotional exhaustion and consequences of discrimination are worth recognizing. Sarah explained that she grew up with Islamophobia. It is difficult but necessary to recognize how normal these instances are for some Muslims. Sarah frankly explained that "it's sort of a hit in the face with sad reality" that these instances will continue to happen and may get worse. There is a fine line between normalization of the discrimination and resisting its internalization.

Similarly, Ala expressed the anxiety and discomfort she often feels from the stares she receives on public transportation. While she often forgets she is wearing the hijab, the stares remind her that there is "this thing on my head and people do see me for that." Ala recognizes the harsh reality of discrimination created around the hijab, but she also tries to give people the benefit of the doubt. She explained, "I think you'd go crazy if you [thought about] every single person who stared at you and what's going through their head." While we have to recognize the psychological exhaustion that comes with

discrimination, these women often have to balance both handling and undermining the stares, confrontations, or subtle microaggressions. Creating a space for themselves that negates the discrimination becomes a challenge many Muslim women who cover must acknowledge.

There is strength in recognizing the reality they must face and remaining resilient in covering themselves. Acknowledging the struggle, exhaustion, and perseverance of these women who choose to cover. To understand these nuances is to recognize the dynamism of wearing the hijab. Some days may be painful and difficult while others are filled with an unrelenting pride, but their personal desire to continue wearing their hijab underlies everything else.

"Being Religious"

To better understand the role of hijab for these Muslim women, I asked about their religiosity and what it means to be religious. They considered "being religious" as something they all wanted to abide by to become better Muslims. In terms of specific acts, the Muslims focused on the Five Pillars (creed, prayer, fasting, charity, and pilgrimage), going to the mosque, wearing modest clothing, etc. It is interesting that prayer was the strongest element of religiosity because they also explained that religiosity was deeper than just physical actions. Sarah explained that "the term religious is thrown around" as a way to judge other Muslims on how physically religious they appear. In this sense, the term "religious" is often a superficial indicator of how connected one is with God and how genuine those prayers are. Maha said that while the 5 pillars are

important, “if you don’t feel connected to God inside, it’s not worth as much.” Both personal and societal expectations shape these women’s view of religiosity. In a sense, there is a desire to be more invested in their personal spiritual growth rather than to physically appear “religious.”

Many of these women brought up the hijab as something other Muslims and non-Muslims associated with religiosity. In deciding to wear their hijab, many of the women were questioned about their religious adherence and if they were “religious enough” to wear the hijab. Others were assumed to be more religious than other Muslims because of their hijab. Thus, the hijab is often associated with religiosity on a scale that not all Muslim women agree is accurate. Maha clearly explained, “I don’t feel like [hijab] is a good indicator of your religiosity.”

We begin to see that the hijab is not simply defined by how it appears, but rather as a fluid representation of the personal and spiritual journey that cannot be confined to a single piece of clothing. What we see is a more critical understanding of how the hijab fits with religion and religious practice. Unlike in Westfall et al.’s (2016) study regarding hijab and religiosity, it is reductive to associate the hijab with strong religious adherence. In this way, these in-depth experiences reveal that the hijab is not necessarily conducive to a certain level of religious faith or practice, but that the hijab is merely one aspect of how that religiosity can shift across one’s lifetime.

Role of Islam

Although only three of four Mus-

lim women I interviewed were born and raised Muslim, all explained that religion was an important aspect of their upbringing. There were differences in how religion played out during their childhoods, but overall, they found Islam as fluid in their everyday lives. For Ala, religion was “always there” in the sense that she knew simple acts like dressing modestly, not wasting food, or acting honestly and compassionately were rooted in Islam even if her parents never explicitly stated the connection. Her recognition of how Islam intertwined with these simple acts highlights the unconscious role of religion. Maha explained Islam as “the first thing [she] ever knew,” signaling the foundation of religion in her upbringing. Similar to Ala, Maha realized that once she moved out of her parents’ home, she continued the habits her parents taught her that were grounded in the Islamic tradition.

For Alex, religion was an integral aspect of her upbringing. She was raised fundamentalist Christian, attended Bible study, Youth Group, and went to Church every Sunday. However, her upbringing ultimately led to her disillusionment with religion. Both in her Christian upbringing and now as a Muslim, she explained that Islam affected her “behavior, treatment of others, [her] everyday, [her] studies, everything.” While this signals a more conscious navigation of religion, it is grounded in her understanding that Islam is not merely a religion, but a way of life. By understanding the role of Islam in the lives of these women, one can begin to recognize the lifestyle and values Islam creates. This fluidity and presence of Islam in all their actions foreshadows how they view the function of the hijab.

Hijab as Personal Reminder

Many of the Muslim women discussed the habitualization of wearing their hijab, as a reminder of their intentions and motivations for covering. Many of them felt an increased sense of being Muslim when wearing the hijab. It is more than a physical symbol reminding these women that they are in fact Muslim, but it reminds them of the meaning they have attached to “being Muslim.” These observations are in line with Droogsma (2007) and Mohibullah & Kramer (2016) where the hijab represents both a sense of religious adherence but also a means to define oneself as Muslims. It is not merely understanding that you are Muslim but how one lives as a Muslim through speech, actions, and interactions with others. This can mean dressing modestly through long, flowing clothing, acting with humility, being motivated in everything you do, etc. The hijab becomes a tangible reminder of these values ingrained within the Islamic faith.

This goes back to understanding how many of these women viewed religion as something intertwined with everyday life. The hijab amplifies the desire to incorporate Islam in every aspect of their lives. As Alex explained, “it’s something that starts my days with a great sense of, in the very least, duty, and on some days, peace.” This highlights the religious commandment in wearing the hijab for God and fulfilling this promise for the sake of God. At the same time, the hijab reminds these women of the choice they made for themselves.

Whether to connect spiritually with God, to build character, or to maintain a sense of humility, none of these

women explained the hijab as a reminder for others to know they are Muslim. They are not declaring their religious faith for others but for themselves. Much of the hijab and Islam for these women is tied to their motivations and deep connection with themselves and how the hijab leads them towards religious and personal betterment. This is not to say that they are always enlightened by their decision to wear hijab. By understanding the personal effects of the hijab, the focus shifts to the meaning women attach to their own hijab and their own selves.

Choice

A common stereotype against women who wear the hijab is that they were forced to cover. Every Muslim woman I interviewed recalled a difficult moment with family members. Unlike the common stereotype, many of these women were discouraged by their family members to wear the hijab. The reasons for this negativity differed for each woman. For some, their parents assumed they were wearing the hijab to appear more religious, while others were ideologically against the hijab; some did not want them to face discrimination, and some merely believed their daughters were too young. It is worth recognizing that much of the discouragement exhibited a genuine concern for how the world would react to their decision.

The women all remained firm in their decision to wear the hijab based solely on how they perceived the hijab. While Williams & Vashi (2007) and Droogsma (2007) emphasized the collective empowerment and resistance of Muslim women, women like Ala reco-

gnized choice and control from a individualistic approach. There was a sense of certainty that overpowered external forces in the way that these women decided to wear the hijab. As Ala explained, the opposition by her family did affect her decision. She “waited for those [negative] sounds to go away” because she wanted to ensure that her final decision would be one of her own volition. By understanding these familial expectations, we can appreciate the deeply personal attachment to the hijab.

In understanding how these women decided to wear their hijab, there were clear assertions of choice by these women: “That was my choice and I want to do it,” “My hijab, my choice,” “I want to wear the hijab,” etc. Many of these proclamations are expressive of the inner decision for these women to definitively choose the hijab. However, many of these women made these statements in response to those who challenged their decision. This exposes both the opposition still faced by women who cover as well as the need for hijabi women to prove the independence of their choice.

As personal as the decision to wear the hijab is, these instances exemplify the role the hijab plays in the public sphere. The hijab will continue to be associated with different meanings across distinct contexts, often separate from the woman wearing it. Oftentimes the hijab is portrayed merely as a religious object rather than an object chosen and worn by women. This defense of their decision then reinforces their personal and human connection to the hijab separate from the hijab as merely an object. Thus, it becomes a challenge for these women to balance the individual and

public presentations of themselves and their hijab.

Self-Evaluation of the Hijab

The decision to wear the hijab is important, but many do not recognize that Muslim women constantly evaluate and reevaluate their choice to cover. Many of the women explored their own mental breakdown of the questions they ask themselves to remain consistent with their intentions and connection with the hijab. A common question these women ask themselves is if they are still wearing the hijab for the same reason they put it on? The struggle with wearing hijab consistently is that it naturally becomes habit. And with many habits, over time you forget the reasoning behind them. Ala’s expression of this self-questioning showcased the complex and reflexive aspects of the hijab. She would ask herself, “Why am I wearing it? What am I getting out of this? Am I being myself?” These are only a few of the myriad of questions she had, but this process of evaluation provides an internal assurance of their decision.

While many of these women did choose to wear the hijab, the experience is dynamic. But this type of questioning also reveals the pressure connected with the hijab. It is understanding their personal intention to wear the hijab, the religious duty to wear the hijab, as well as wondering if they are staying true to their personal meaning of the hijab. Thus, reforming their intentions for wearing the hijab is a complex cycle. As they change and develop their values, the meaning behind their hijab is also in flux. While wearing the hijab is routine for most of these women,

their interaction with their hijab is ever changing and developing.

Hijab in the Public Sphere

Every Muslim woman I interviewed expressed times they forgot they were wearing the hijab. However, there were moments when people stared at them or they were the only one wearing a hijab, and they were bluntly reminded that they wear the hijab, they are Muslim, and they are different. Unlike the pride connected with their hijab, these instances are more demeaning and isolating. Thus, the hijab acts as a performer in the public sphere, which the women must then navigate.

While we have discussed the personal and religious connections women place on their hijab, others may only perceive them in terms of the religious symbol rather than as individuals. Alex explained, "I understand that a person's initial perception of me has no effect on me, whereas it does influence them: it conveys more about them than it does about me." In this way, these women realize that in American society, the hijab is odd and becomes an easy way to categorize people superficially. As Alex points out, the hijab invites and challenges the public's perception of the hijab. If people are staring, making comments, etc., does this mean that the public has not yet acclimated to the hijab or that the hijab is still not accepted in society?

While these questions are difficult to answer, we can still see the disconnect between how these women choose to view themselves and how the public perceives the hijab. As we saw with the non-Muslims, there was consensus that the media portrayal and general under-

standing of the hijab are inaccurate, to say the least. Thus, how do we bridge the divide between public perception and how the hijab is experienced by individual women? It therefore becomes necessary to amplify the experiences of these women before assigning them a fixed perception of the hijab.

Daily Interactions and Decisions

Implicit in wearing the hijab is the expectation to be modest in how one acts, dresses, and thinks as well as having physical boundaries with men. Oftentimes women are expected to manage their interactions to the point where every action and decision is carefully calculated. While many of the women I interviewed recognized these religious and social expectations, there was still room for flexibility and individual interpretation of those norms.

However, an inner conflict of having to decide what you can or cannot do takes shape. Sarah explained that "you can do some things, but you have to find your way around, it's sorta like a maze." Both Sarah and Alex used a party to explain this conflict. Parties are an interesting example because they are a typical social gathering that is enjoyable, but they also consist of problematic behaviors like drinking alcohol, wearing revealing clothing, dancing, etc. For Muslims like Sarah and Alex, the hijab became a protector from these behaviors. These moments of negotiation reflect Mohibullah & Kramer's (2016) assessment of how women who wear the hijab are both policing and embracing their actions as visible Muslim women.

This kind of environment amplifies the hijab as a moral compass for

how the women should act in this setting. It is important to note that these women do not find this constricting but rather helpful to align them with their own moral values. Alex points out the difference between not being able to engage in certain acts and not wanting to. Maha emulated a similar sentiment; the hijab had stopped her from acting a certain way if it contradicted her own beliefs. At the same time, she still had the choice to decide which behaviors she finds acceptable for herself. While there are clear acts a Muslim woman should or should not do, these women still have the agency to retain their own values and follow them as they see fit. The hijab merely becomes a means to protect their own values as they interpret them without the pressure to be a “perfect hijabi”.

Representing Islam

Because it is such a clear indicator of being Muslim, women who wear the hijab are often confronted by people to speak on the behalf of the faith. When asked about being representatives of Islam, many of the women felt pressured to represent Islam. Ala expressed feeling tokenized in many settings for being Muslim and was often asked about aspects of the faith or world events that she felt unqualified to explain. In this sense, she felt objectified because of her hijab; she felt unable to live up to certain expectations. Sarah explained it’s “as if I’m putting 1.3 billion people on the line.” In this regard, she recognizes that she may have a different interpretation of the religion that would not represent the entire faith. Given this pressure, we see these women trying to emphasize their individuality within the

religion rather than acting as a spokesperson for all Muslims.

Unlike the other participants, Alex was the only one who felt appreciative of being a representative of Islam. She emphasized that she does not have to but wants to be a representative. She finds it a privilege to present to others what Islam is to her: “compassion, mercy, patience, love, companionship, peace, beauty!” The other women, reacted drastically different to the idea of representation. It is inevitable that the pressure to be representatives becomes burdensome. Alex’s perspective reveals a more optimistic approach that creates an opportunity to portray the religion positively. At the same time, we cannot ignore the need to prove the beauty of the faith as a means to offset the negativity attached to the image of Islam.

Act of Proving: Americanness

There is a sense of needing to prove to other Americans the beauty of Islam. Many of these women, especially if they are women of color, often must prove that they are also American. Ala has been asked where she’s really from and what she’s doing here. For someone raised in the United States, these questions invalidate this inherent aspect of themselves solely because of their hijab or their skin color. Maha, the only woman who covers in her high school, explained that even her non-Muslim friends “expected that [her] life would be totally different” solely because of her religion.

The misconceptions, assumptions, and accusatory statements these women face by non-Muslims can put an added strain on how these women navigate their lives in America. For many of

these women, it is not necessary nor fair to have to prove if they are “American enough.” It becomes important for these women to present their most authentic selves to quell the misconceptions and instill a more genuine perception of Muslim American women.

Act of Proving: Muslimness

For every Muslim participant, there were moments where they felt they had to prove their Muslimness. Whether to their parents, to family overseas, or to other Muslims, there have been moments of proving their adherence to the faith. Other Muslims have asked Ala, “How do you not know this?” in terms of Islamic knowledge. She explained that it “really hurts when I hear it.” To have both her Islamic knowledge and the validity of her faith in God questioned is hurtful and harmful. Sarah explained that it is not about being Muslim but how Muslim you are in terms of religiosity, spirituality, or knowledge of the religion.

As a convert, Alex has been asked if she is “truly” Muslim. She often responds with “I hope so. I try to be.” Alex explains that “I am as American or Muslim as those whom I associate with.” She understands this as a communal concern to help her and others “enhance their adherence to the faith.” There is a communal responsibility within the Muslim community to help each other connect with God, yet, this is often abused to judge others on their level of faith, which can harm both individual Muslims and the entire community. To confront judgement both within and outside the Muslim community not only solidifies the expectations connected with the hijab, but it limits the

agency of each woman.

Muslim American Identity

Towards the end of my interviews, I asked all the non-Muslim women what it meant for them to be American and if Muslim fit into their definition. I intended to get an overall sense of their values and how they did or did not align with Muslims values. There was overwhelming agreement that America provides a space for diversity that allows anyone to feel “American.” Lara explained that we are all “puzzle pieces” that can fit into what it means to be American. Others explained that whoever you are, Muslim or not, everyone can decide whether they want to be American or not. Again, we see the power of choice. It becomes difficult to understand identity when more than one typical “identity” is interacting.

For Muslim Americans, the label makes clear that these two identities are in play. Finding the balance between the self-chosen identities and those imposed on you by external factors is difficult. Sarah was distraught when asked about being Muslim American, as she very much internalizes the struggle of living out both identities. While Maha emphasized creating a balance between the two as a means to navigating those identities in a way that is empowering. This tension does not undermine the struggle that these women often face. Ala explained, “I’ve been brought up Afghan, I’ve been brought up French, brought up Muslim, but everybody wants to tell me that I’m not American.” We see that she is juggling numerous identities, so when others impose limitations on her self-identification, they do so as a challenge. Because

of her skin color, because of her hijab, because of how she is portrayed publicly, her self-conception is hindered by a sense of not belonging.

Every one of these women has their distinct ways of managing these identities, as reflected in Peek's (2005) research, but their firm desire to remain strong in how they identify themselves is at the core of these strategies. We must appreciate the clash, the imbalance, and the messiness of identity to enhance their sense of individuality and choice.

In connecting this with the hijab, the web continuously expands. Many of these women are juggling being Muslim, being American, and wearing the hijab. Whether to connect them with a community, with God, or with their own selves, the hijab both eases and challenges their understanding of themselves. While it can act as a personal reminder of who they are and their values, it is undeniably a mark of difference in the public sphere. Whether combating public forms of discrimination, familial expectations, or internal struggles with the hijab, many of these women represent the multifaceted nature of the lived experience of wearing the hijab within an American context.

There is an element of individuality connected with the hijab in a way that these women can separate it from external factors to fully embrace their personal desire to don this symbol of their faith, of their identity, of themselves. There is both fluidity and consistency within the hijab. For some women, it remains consistent in how often they wear the scarf, but as we observed with their personal, familial, public, and religious environments, the function of the scarf

can change as quickly as they do.

DISCUSSION

Unlike much of the literature, understanding the perception of non-Muslims provided a distinct perspective of how Muslims and the hijab are viewed in American society. It was clear that they recognized the negative portrayals, the hardships connected to wearing the hijab, as well as the individual choice inherent in these women who cover. Although their understanding of the hijab was superficial, they appreciated being on a campus that allowed them to interact with Muslims. In a way, their exposure to the hijab has normalized it and caused them to accept these women.

My research provided a platform for the Muslim women to express the more nuanced aspects of experiencing the hijab themselves and how it fits in their ordinary lives. Their conception of religion itself as inherent in their lifestyle foreshadowed how intertwined and normalized the hijab was for many of these women. Unlike the focus on liberation and self-control that Williams and Vashi identified, this research expanded Mohibullah and Kramer's emphasis on the hijab as part of ordinary life. These women expressed the challenges they often face with their families, when faced with discrimination, or with themselves, yet they retain a sense of resolve in choosing to wear the hijab.

This resolve challenges the stereotypes associated with the hijab. Instead we can focus on how these women shape the hijab in a way that highlights their values and their own identities. The women even expressed the different ways in which they navigate their

identities as reflected by Peek. When contrasted with the portrayals of the non-Muslim women, their experiences amplify the diversity and flexibility of the hijab. All the women were able to illustrate that there was a place for the hijab, for Muslim Americans in American society, that is often threatened by the media or stringent stereotypes.

Limitations

One of the main limitations of this study was including non-Muslims to discuss the hijab. While I do not regret the perspectives that they brought, in a way, their thoughts pulled away from the direct experiences of the Muslim women in this study. As Catholic women at a Jesuit university, they brought a bias that left many of their responses superficial. Many of these women expressed that they avoided discussing the hijab with Muslims they knew to avoid being rude. While this sentiment elevates these Muslim women as more than their hijab, it also limits the ability for the non-Muslims to engage with Muslims and the experience of wearing the hijab in a more critical manner. Further, by offsetting the perspective of the Muslims with non-Muslims, it inherently undermines the power of a Muslim voice. Conducting this comparative study brought to light reasons why it was not part of the existing literature. This limitation further recognizes the importance of elevating underrepresented experiences and identities.

While comparing Muslims and non-Muslims may be limiting, the method reveals a larger discussion to be had within the larger American Muslim community regarding the hijab. Further study could focus on Muslim women

who do not cover or who have removed their hijab or how Muslim men view and interact with the hijab, as they understand it for themselves and for women. As in any comparative study, one must be cautious of whose experience is meant to be heard and avoid undermining an already suppressed identity.

Another limitation is keeping this study only to the university community. It was clear that for many of the non-Muslims coming to this university was one of the first times they were able to interact with Muslim women who wear hijab. Thus, their interpretations of the hijab may be different than before attending college and therefore not reflect the perceptions of ordinary Americans. At the same time, being in the city of Chicago and being on a liberal campus encourages a bias towards open-mindedness that many Americans do not share. Thus, future studies could focus on smaller cities or a variety of cities across the country to garner a more holistic perception of the hijab within the American context.

Conclusion

In exploring the perceptions of both non-Muslim and Muslim American women, we are able to shift how we think about the hijab. Although the non-Muslims recognized the stereotypes targeted at Muslim women who wear hijab, their impassioned opposition to these portrayals provide a sense of hope for the future. We can create a space where individual women can express their genuine reasons and desires for wearing the hijab in a way that both strengthens their sense of individuality and identity but also recognizes how ordinary they really are. This inclusivity

does not negate the fact that as a society, we need to have an honest conversation about discrimination, Islamophobia, and the judgement Muslims and Muslim women face daily. This research is more than an appreciation of the hijab and the experiences of these women, but an effort to strengthen the representation of the hijab and the Muslim American identity as one of diversity and pride.

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Research Chemical Subreddit: An Exploration of a Virtual Scene

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This project explores the Research Chemicals subreddit as a scene, extending the literature on online scenes and shedding light on a relatively understudied group. Reddit is a website that consists of user generated and curated content that is organized into subreddits. The Research Chemicals subreddit acts as a forum for users to discuss a variety of topics related to Research Chemicals and the wider scene of Research Chemical users, drug users more generally, as well as society at large and the dominant narratives surrounding Research Chemical and drug use. The classical sociological concepts: deviance, stigma, moral panic, and boundary work, are utilized to interpret high engagement posts and subsequent discussions on the subreddit. Two qualities of importance to the scene participants emerge from posts: legality/illegality and functional/nonfunctional users. It is primarily along these lines that the scene participants engage in regulation of the scene and become moral entrepreneurs working to further and preserve the scene against stigmatization even as what constitutes the scene itself is contested.

INTRODUCTION

The goal of this project is to explore the Research Chemicals subreddit as a case of scene in order to extend the literature on online scenes and shed light on a relatively understudied group. Classical sociological concepts—deviance, stigma, moral panic, and boundary work—will guide an interpretation of the Research Chemicals subreddit as a scene. I will then make an argument for the understanding of scene participants as moral entrepreneurs working to further and preserve the scene against stigmatization even as what constitutes the scene itself is contested.

First I will begin by giving a general background on what types of substances constitute Research Chemicals and give a general characterization of the scene as well as the War on Drugs. I will then give an overview of the theoretical framework from which I am approaching my exploration of the Re-

search Chemical Scene. Following the recent trends in the literature away from individualization and pathologization towards drug use as a social practice, I look at Research Chemical and drug use more generally from a perspective informed by symbolic interactionism. I then apply concepts from the sociology of deviant behavior, particularly stigma and moral panic, to explain the moral regulation and boundary work that is ongoing on the scene. From there, I establish the criteria I use to constitute the idea of scene as well as look at useful concepts from other studies of online drug scenes. Using this theoretical framework we can then begin the exploration of the substance of the Research Chemicals subreddit.

BACKGROUND

What are Research Chemicals?

Research Chemicals can be best understood as a category of psycho-

active substances rather than a class of drugs as Research Chemical status is not determined by similar chemical structure or effects of the substance. In fact, there are Research Chemicals across the spectrum of drug classifications including stimulants, benzodiazepines, dissociatives, opiates, cannabinoids, psychedelics, etc. The substances that fall under the Research Chemical umbrella are characterized instead by their relative newness compared to more “traditional” drugs like marijuana, cocaine, heroin, or ecstasy, as well as the increased risk that comes with this novelty; by their reliance on Internet vendors rather than traditional dealers for supply; and by their grey-area status in terms of legality in most countries. All three of these characteristics come together to produce a shared understanding of what constitutes Research Chemicals and the Research Chemical scene amongst scene participants.

The driving force behind the production of novel Research Chemicals is twofold. Firstly, by creating slightly altered analogues of already popular drugs, vendors are able to create an unscheduled product that can be sold on “clearnet” websites accessible to the general public rather than having to use more inaccessible and niche “darknet” sites. If the country where the substance is being produced has no analogue laws in place – meaning that laws controlling a particular substance also apply to substances that are substantially similar to it – then producers can stay ahead of regulations fairly easily by continually making slight changes to the product in response to changes in the legal landscape.

Even when analogue laws are in

place, like in the United States, in practice these laws only manage to thrust these substances into a grey-area. Since each substance must be proved to be substantially similar to a scheduled substance on a case-by-case basis, prosecution becomes burdensome and these laws are rarely invoked to prosecute individual drug users. Furthermore, by labeling the substance as “not for human consumption,” vendors add another layer of protection from prosecution enabling them to continue selling product in more accessible markets online.

The second force is the pursuit of new and novel highs in and of itself. Beyond simply getting around the inconvenience of illegality and government regulation, a spirit of discovery is an essential part of the ethos of the Research Chemical scene. While some subscribe more than others, an interest in being on the cutting edge is prevalent amongst Research Chemical users. Research Chemical users often refer to their drug use as “research” or “researching” both as a tongue in cheek reference to the fact that these substances are ostensibly for research purposes rather than human consumption; and also because in a sense they are researching these substances, volunteering themselves as human guinea pigs. Users often provide detailed “trip reports” on novel substances that read like a scientific research paper, carefully documenting their experience for other potential users.

But beyond this careful documentation of effects and experiences by users, the lack of history of use for these substances means the risk involved in taking Research Chemicals is in many ways different from and greater than

taking other more established drugs. The long-term physical effects of these substances are largely unknown, even in the case of analogues it is unclear what long term effects the slight alterations of structure could cause. This increased potential for risk is something that Research Chemical users are cognizant of when approaching these substances yet undertake in the name of furthering the scene and seeking new highs.

War on Drugs

The emergence and proliferation of the Research Chemical scene exists on the backdrop of the global War on Drugs. While this term is primarily used in the context of the United States, it refers to a wider moral logic rooted in a “paternalistic assumption of wrongness in drug use,” that utilizes law enforcement to alleviate the harmfulness of drugs on society by criminalizing drug users (Polomarkakis 2017). Following the UN conventions of 1961, 1971, and 1988, and subsequent reaffirmation of these values, many countries that may have otherwise taken a more medical approach to the “drug problem” have made movement towards the law enforcement approach enacting legal sanctions against drug users (Polomarkakis 2017). The goal of this approach is to reduce the demand for and supply of drugs through legal sanctions. This widespread effort on the part of law enforcement to curb drug use can make Research Chemicals and the online drug markets they operate on enticing for many drug users.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Drug use as Social Practice

There are two general approach-

es taken to explain drug use in the literature. The first and more commonly invoked approach in the media and popular culture “individualizes” and problematizes drug use. Here individual failings or moral weakness exacerbated by the specific pharmacological effects of a drug are given as explanations for drug use. However, works strongly in this biological/medical camp are becoming less common as researchers move more towards symbolic and social constructivist theories (Gootenberg 2005).

Using this second pathway, researchers like Manning (2007) draw on symbolic interactionist theory and approaches (Blumer 1969, Becker 1963), as well as anthropological studies on differing effects of drugs across multiple cultures to critique and expand these individualizing approaches. They highlight the importance of the symbolic and social contexts in which drugs are consumed allowing us to look beyond the seemingly objective pharmacological effects of drugs and instead view drug use as an inherently social practice.

The consumption of a psychoactive substance, even when done in solitude, is not done in isolation free from the symbolic contexts of one’s social group. “Different patterns of drug consumption are powerfully shaped by social context: the time, place and particular moment in history in which certain patterns of drug consumption are located; the social identities of those involved in consumption are located; the social identities of those involved in consumption including their social class, gender and ethnicity, and the particular drugs paraphernalia or methods

of ingestion” (Manning 2007). Rather than simply being a function of individual pathology, the usage of Research Chemicals is informed by current social contexts such as globalization, the War on Drugs, the Internet age, and the movement towards normalization of some types of drug use.

Furthering the view of drug use as a social practice is the functionalist tradition following Durkheim. Deviance is seen as a necessary part of society that allows solidarity and “collective conscience” to form through the creation of norms and boundary work (Erkison 1966). These boundaries are not exactly the same for every individual within a society and are subject to change over time. Deviance and the formation of deviant groups act as boundary work for societal norms by reinforcing the norm in the act of deviating from it. Individuals in these deviant groups or subcultures may then engage in deviant behavior, like drug use, that is embedded within shared cultural practices that are set apart from the values and practices of mainstream society (Cloward and Ohlin 1960).

Contemporary studies tend to move away from subcultural theory as used in classical literature on deviance because it overemphasizes difference between the deviant subculture and the “normal” (Manning 2007). Instead they take a more fluid and complex approach using “scene” to describe groups based on consumption practices. It is from this perspective that we can understand the consumption of licit and illicit drugs as being essentially the same as other patterns of consumption, merely another cultural practice, inscribed with meaning and understood within symbolic

frameworks, the consumption does not lie solely in individualized pharmacological effects (Manning 2007). This allows drug users to develop particular drug repertoires or styles and engage with a Research Chemical scene.

Stigma

Following Goffman’s seminal work, Stigma (1963), a large body of work in the discipline of sociology has been created exploring the concept of stigma and the way it is experienced by deviant groups such as Research Chemical users. Stigma refers to a devalued social identity, one that exists at the boundaries of what is considered “normal” by a society in general (Erkison 1996). Drawing on Goffman and the extensive body of literature on the subject, Pescosolido (2015) asserts that stigma requires distinguishing and labeling of differences; associating these differences with negative attributes; a separation of “us” and “them;” followed by an experience of status loss and discrimination.

Many studies have been done surrounding the process of socialization into deviant groups (Dupont 2014, Vail 1999, Becker 1953). This is based on the premise that deviant characteristics and behaviors do not necessarily exist in individuals before they become a part of the group. While a natural affinity for the group may “suggest but hardly compel a direction of movement” for an individual (Matza 1969), one learns how to be a member of a group through social interactions within the group. Socialization into the group provides a social buffer as well as techniques to manage potential stigma for entering into the group. This includes neutral-

ization techniques, which allow people to define a situation in such a way that their violation of a norm can be excused (Kooistra & Mahoney 2016). Neutralization as a way to deal with stigma is an ongoing process that takes place both before and after the action that must be neutralized; furthermore, neutralizations are not foolproof and may be ineffective and fail leading to “negative experiences” (Goffman 1963).

Social Problem/Moral Panic

The concept of moral panic was first coined by Stanley Cohen (1972) and describes a situation where “a condition, episode, person or group of persons emerges and becomes defined as a threat to societal values, and interests.” The instigators of this panic, who generate the concern and engage in rule creation and enforcement against the perceived problem, are known as moral entrepreneurs (Becker 1963). Generally, these moral entrepreneurs are groups and individuals that hold power in the given society. Drug use and addiction has been conceptualized as a moral panic globally for many years.

Research Chemicals are less well known than other substances and drug subcultures that have incited moral panics over the years, but still, it is not difficult to find headlines warning against “designer drugs” or “legal highs” or “bath salts” regarding substances that fall under the Research Chemical umbrella. Furthermore, we live in a time where conversations about legalizing “softer” drugs like marijuana and movement towards acceptance of recreational drug use is becoming more normalized and the positioning of many types of drug users as firmly deviant is

waning. However, Research Chemicals, with their unknown effects and potential dangers that lead even other drug users to view them with suspicion and their easy availability through the Internet are in a prime position to become the next target of widespread moral panic.

According to Goode and Ben-Yehuda (1994), moral panics display the following characteristics: Concern, Hostility, Consensus, Disproportionality, and Volatility. Concern and Hostility certainly exist against Research Chemicals and Research Chemical users. They are almost exclusively depicted as dangerous by the media and even by other drug users. Erowid, a widely respected source of information among drug users, cautions against their use and warns potential users to proceed at their own risk as these chemicals are “experimental” in nature and may have unknown effects. Regarding the Consensus characteristic, Research Chemicals are interesting because the consensus against them exists not only in mainstream society but they also elicit concern from the wider drug scene, even from users on the “harder” end of the drug spectrum. The last two characteristics of Disproportionality and Volatility remain to be seen. Not all moral entrepreneurs are equally successful at creating moral panics. However, given the conflicts and discussion within the Research Chemical scene, it seems as though they are cognizant of the potential threat to the group a full-blown moral panic may pose.

A Concept of Scene

Within the sociological tradition there are several concepts available

through which we can analyze Research Chemical users as a group or network. “Subculture” is a concept that grew out of the study of deviant groups and views subcultures as subsets of societies. However, in more recent literature it has been criticized for overstating internal coherence, boundedness and permanence as well as overly concentrating on the ways the subculture differs from the mythical norm (Hesmonhalgh 2007). Another traditional alternative is the concept of “community.” However, the use of this term has also been criticized, as it is “entrenched within conceptual baggage” obscuring diversity within a group as well as power relations, implies nonwestern pre-modernity, and maintains an overly dualistic in group/out group logic (Maher 2009).

The concept of “scene” has been proposed as an alternative and improvement to these concepts and has been primarily utilized by researchers studying music and queer scenes (Taylor 2010, Bennet 2006) but can be applied to a wide variety of groups and social contexts. However, it also runs the risk of becoming vague and muddled as it is invoked by researchers for a variety of purposes.

For the purposes of this project I will utilize Maher’s (2009) definition of scene to examine the Research Chemical scene, as it exists on the Research Chemicals subreddit. This conceptualization of scene builds off of Irwin’s (1977) original concept of scene and is informed by community studies and Cultural Geography. In this definition there are three core aspects of scene: space, identity, and participation. Scenes occur in space, which can be physical spaces or abstract spaces exist-

ing in the minds of scene participants. Commonality among scene participants is created through shared activities organized around a collective identity as individuals on a scene interact not only with each other but with this idea of collective identity on the scene. Being on a scene is best conceptualized not as a binary membership/non-membership status but rather as a spectrum of levels of participation. The types and amount of acts that constitute scene participation is constructed on the scene itself. These boundaries, while fairly loose, are a constant site of contestation and change over time.

Drug Scenes on the Internet

Previous research on online drug scenes has found a focus within the scenes themselves on what it means to “do drugs well” (Boothroyd and Lewis 2016). Identity is formed within these scenes as a binary of “responsible” and “irresponsible” drug users (Ravn 2012). However, the content of these categories is scene specific and negotiated through horizontal exchanges by scene participants based on internal distinctions, hierarchies, and practices. This ethos of responsibility and “harm reduction” within drug scenes, while informed by the mainstream culture and power structures, rejects a top down imposition. Instead, the scenes rely on a culture of communicative sharing based on collective experience that tends to reject moralistic devaluing of drug use and is instead based on a desire to create a set of best practices with regards to doing drugs well (Boothroyd and Lewis 2016).

Furthermore the negotiation of this concept of “responsibility” is in

flux and contextually specific. While various sites may be considered to be part of the same wider scene, individual online spaces must be looked at in their own right. Rather than simply existing as windows into offline practices, online spaces develop their own individual and site specific norms regarding responsible drug use and what types of information and experience are valued (Barlev 2008, Lewis 2014). The online nature of these scenes allow for a shift in power distribution towards a system that is more “peer generated and user led” rather than “top-down and professionalized” (Boothroyd and Lewis 2016). However, in the process of negotiation scene boundaries and creating the idealized image of “responsible” drug user power structures emerge on the scene surrounding scene specific ideas about drug use and what constitutes acceptable and unacceptable behavior on the scene.

Through this theoretical framework I will make observations and analyze the postings on Research Chemicals Subreddit. Understanding drug use as a social practice rather than an individual failing is important for understanding how these specific drug scenes emerge and the choices made by scene participants regarding their participation and interaction with the scene. The desire to avoid and neutralize the negative effects that come from stigma and threat of being the targets of a moral panic are important to consider when analyzing the scene regulation occurring on the subreddit. We can see the core aspects of scene, space, identity, and participation, at play in this subreddit, through which we can see the subreddit as a social group worth study-

ing. Utilizing these concepts we can see the interactions on the subreddit as a negotiation of scene boundaries and how power structures that been created around scene specific ideas about drug use, particularly responsible drug use.

DATA AND METHODS

Data Selection Methods

The data analyzed for this project is taken from public posts on the Research Chemicals Subreddit, reddit.com/r/researchchemicals. Reddit is a website that consists of user generated and curated content that is organized into subreddits. Users post to and follow individual subreddits pertaining to their interests as well as discuss posts within a subreddit through commenting threads. They also have the ability to “upvote” and “downvote” posts and comments within a subreddit to indicate support or distaste which helps dictate what content gets to the “top” of a particular subreddit. This allows for the creation of different scenes within the website as each subreddit develops its own norms and rules for engagement. The Research Chemicals subreddit acts as a forum for users to discuss a variety of topics related to Research Chemicals and the wider scene of Research Chemical users, drug users more generally, as well as society at large and the dominant narratives surrounding Research Chemical and drug use. This particular subreddit has a no sourcing rule meaning that requesting, mentioning, or giving sources for drugs whether legal or illegal is prohibited. This rule has allowed the Research Chemicals subreddit to exist more as a discussion space where members actively engage with the idea of and create the Research

Chemical scene rather than simply devolving into a forum for drug sourcing.

For this project I explored the content available in the Research Chemicals subreddit and will specifically discuss the content of 20 of the top posts on the page along with their subsequent discussion threads. The fact that these posts were under the top header indicates that they received a high number of “upvotes” from subreddit participants indicating approval of the post. Of the top posts listed on the Research Chemicals subreddit on November 19th 2017, I chose to look more closely at the top 20 posts that in addition to having a large number of “upvotes” also had a high degree of engagement in the discussion section. This allowed for analysis not just of the original posts made by users, but also of the interactions between users within the scene.

Engagement with posts in this subreddit varied greatly leaving some posts essentially ignored, receiving few “upvotes” or “downvotes” and few responses in the comments. Rather than spend time discussing these largely ignored posts, the posts discussed in the following sections all have a high degree of engagement both in terms of “upvotes” and in terms of discussion threads that revealed areas of interest and conflict within the scene. From my position as an observer on this subreddit I was unable to gain any more information on the members of this subreddit, other than what they have shared publicly in their posts. For most posters the only identifying information collected was their username. I will therefore refer to posters by their usernames, eliminating trailing numbers in the interest of clarity and readability.

Data Analysis Methods

Utilizing grounded coding methods, five general post types emerged with each type generating a similar conversation and discussion among posts of that type. The types are as follows: Addiction/Warning, Scene Regulation, Legal Information, Safety Information, Substance Recommendation. Although the topics discussed within each type bleed into each other somewhat and there are some common themes throughout all the posts, these categories are still useful for organizing the information within the subreddit conceptually and highlight some general trends within the subreddit.

While the category of Research Chemicals spans the spectrum of drug types, and most Research Chemical Users are polysubstance users, using substances from multiple classes of drugs at least to some extent, factions of a sort emerge within the scene based on preferred drug types and personal identification with a faction. In most cases in the text, the class of drug the user is talking about is either all that is needed for understanding the context, or is even more important than the specific substance itself when conflict emerges between factions. Psychedelic and dissociative users form the first faction; Stimulant users form a second; and Benzodiazepine and opioid users form a third.

RESULTS

Substance Recommendation

Several of the top posts were centered on recommending and promoting a particular substance, or requesting a recommendation for a particular sub-

stance based on desired effects. Most of the posts promoting a substance were proselytizing the values of Dissociatives. One poster MikeBane went as far as to create a “Dissos Manifesto” written entirely mimicking the style of Marx’s Communist Manifesto about the “spectre of Dissoism.” In this manifesto he describes dissociation as “already acknowledged by all serious psychonauts to be itself a worthy pursuit” elevating dissociatives particularly in opposition to Stimulants and Benzodiazepines. He, and others in the group express frustration at the lack of availability of unscheduled dissociatives, which they view as a superior pursuit compared to Stimulants and Benzodiazepines.

The perceived safety of dissociative compounds is often invoked in their defense as stimulant and benzodiazepine addiction is described as comparatively easier to fall into and difficult to climb out of. Dissociatives can be more “functional” according to users, meaning that one is unlikely to get into trouble while on them and they can even be considered therapeutic for users, the term also usually implies that the substance can be taken frequently or daily without significant repercussions. For example, the user Deschloroketamine describes their experience with a new dissociative as “the most euphoric most groundbreaking and enlightening experience of my entire life... I strongly believe this could be a new form of psychotherapy if it was researched enough.” This supposed therapeutic or medical use for the substance is often invoked as justification for a particular substance or category to be elevated in comparison to the other categories. From this elevated position,

other groups of users within the scene can be blamed for the negative depictions of the scene in the wider public and media as will be expanded further in the Scene Regulation section. They can also be blamed for the lack of availability of other “better” substances, like quality dissociatives, by accepting lower quality and driving up demand for other types of substances.

Another important aspect of this type of post is the way in which they serve to initiate and inform new members of the scene. Sipofsoma describes feeling a “civic duty to foster along their [dissociatives] proliferation” such that the vendors “shall hear the cries of the disso guinea pigs en masse!” While this post is in a response in the thread discussing the “Dissos Manifesto,” and the elevated language and spirit is likely mostly said in jest and in response to the style of the original post, it still speaks to important attitudes present throughout the discussions.

Firstly, the conception of RC Dissociative users as guinea pigs is important as it reminds us of the ever present undercurrent in these discussions regarding the potential hazards these substances present to users. Casual comments along the lines of ‘I love X substance! I hope it doesn’t give me cancer’ can be found sprinkled throughout most if not all of the posts observed. Researchers, as they often call themselves, are extremely cognizant of the dangerous nature of Research Chemicals and do their best to help each other mitigate these risks and create accurate knowledge untainted by anti-drug government propaganda; to guide other users in the pursuit of novel highs. Within these posts, questions about

specific substances regarding both practical aspects for their use (dosing, route of administration, etc) as well as more subjective merits in terms of personal responses to pharmacological effects are frequently found. Passing on experience and expertise to not only teach people how to be Research Chemical users but also how to be “good” Research Chemical users is an important aspect to this scene as will be expanded on further in the discussion of Scene Regulation posts.

Through these processes of socialization and promotion of specific drugs scene participants engage in boundary work and define the parameters of Research Chemical Scene participation and what it means to be a responsible drug user within this context. Functionality, ability to take frequently with no obvious physical safety issues, and, perhaps most importantly, the quality of the high all factor in to whether other scene participants will designate this type of scene participation as valid and within the bounds of responsibility. They also guide new participants to continue the already established norms related to safety and responsibility, which reinforces the divide between the factions as Dissociative users attempt to teach new members the benefits of Dissociatives as compared to the Stimulant/Benzodiazepine faction.

Legal Information

Two posts in this sample were made explicitly to share information regarding law and law enforcement as it pertained to Research Chemicals. Tonally, the discussion in these posts was fairly aggressive, especially when compared to the language in the Rec-

ommendation Posts, which was much more excited and positive in nature. In these posts commenters expressed feelings of anger and distrust towards the government and law enforcement agencies and the ongoing global War On Drugs, which they view to be disingenuous. While the extent to which psychoactive substances should be controlled by governments is a largely contested subject within the scene, an aggressive anti-War On Drugs sentiment is shared essentially unanimously. One user M_G accuses “this [the scheduling of all Fentanyl Analogues] is easier than combatting the social problems that led to the [opioid] epidemic – which is the SYMPTOM not that cause.” There is a general feeling of discontent towards the government for blaming the substances themselves and legislating against them rather than addressing the systemic issues that lead to drug abuse and addiction.

Even users like Wildbird who do see value in the legal restriction of particularly dangerous substances like fentanyl, which can be deadly in very small amounts, push back against new legal sanctions scheduling all fentanyl analogues in the United States.

“I don’t like the precedent this is setting for banning other drugs, but I am glad something is being done for the opioid epidemic, I have no problems with psychedelics and such but opioids don’t really have any major benefits.”

This precedent is worrying to Research Chemical users in terms of availability and accessibility to substances through the “clearnet.” While more dedicated users express that they would

continue to seek out novel substances through the “darknet” continuing the quest for novel highs, many worry that reduced demand for vendors to continue creating novel substances will have negative repercussions for the growth of the scene.

“I think we’ve always wanted to say that [schedule] I/II analogues are legal because it makes us feel safe, and because it is kind of true. But people have definitely gotten into serious trouble with them.”

This assessment by user Hypnagoggle illustrates the practical meaning of “grey area substance.” Once users have a substance they know that the risk of trouble with law enforcement is only marginally improved by the grey area nature of the substance. Doubt that law enforcement officers would have enough knowledge to know that the substance was technically legal was common. Furthermore, doubt that Law Enforcement would care even if they had appropriate the knowledge was a common sentiment. It is generally believed that police would do “whatever they want” in order to look good in the media in terms of arrest numbers and fighting the War on Drugs.

“Thank you oh wise and powerful government! What on earth would we do without?!!! If it wasn’t for you oh powerful government I wouldn’t be able to get prescribed my methamphetamine. Without that prescription who knows what crazy drugs I would resort to! I might be forced to consume high amount of a schedule I drug like marijuana!!” (XxCherrypinkxX)

This post points to the perceived

illogical nature of government scheduling. Research Chemical users firmly believe that the government does not have their best interests at heart and that the War on Drugs is waged in the name of profit and power rather than public health and safety as the actual pharmacological effects of a substance don’t seem to align with their legal status. For this reason the general sentiment towards increased legal regulation, even when users agree that the substance is dangerous, is anger and frustration. Increased legal sanctions only affect behavior in that it makes acquisition of substances more difficult rather than any sort of moral alignment to the law making them less likely to use a newly scheduled drug since in practice all “harder” drugs are viewed as unacceptable by both law enforcement and wider society.

Legitimate Information

Safety information and speculation regarding the risk of various Research Chemicals is embedded in discussions throughout the subreddit. However, in addition to these, there are also posts dedicated specifically to litigating the safety of specific novel substances. As discussed earlier, members of this subreddit treat government sources and the mainstream media as suspect and potential propaganda. Instead, users look to new scientific research being done on specific substances and similar substances as well as user experience reports, interpreted by scene participants themselves. In this sample there are two such posts, one links to a scientific article titled “Separating the agony from ecstasy: R-MDMA has prosocial and therapeutic like effects

without signs of neurotoxicity in mice” the other post is titled “Ettoxadrol and Dexoxadrol – a new class of unscheduled dissociatives?” and links to the Wikipedia pages for these chemicals. These posts and the ensuing comments lend insight as to what sources of safety information, as well as whose interpretations of these sources, are considered legitimate.

In the first post discussing the potential for a new ecstasy analogue, posters argue about what the findings from this paper could mean in terms of safety for users of the substance. Typically, a waiting period ranging from 2 weeks to 3 months is recommended between ecstasy uses in order to avoid neurotoxic effects and allow for serotonin levels to return to normal. Some posters were hoping that these results meant that the waiting period could be reduced or even eliminated entirely with this new substance, R-MDMA. However, to even engage with this initial discussion and consensus building, a certain degree of scientific literacy and knowledge is necessary. Additionally, reliable and private Internet access as well as access to a location where you feel comfortable receiving questionable deliveries are required. If you lack the scientific literacy necessary to form a stance from the article itself then you are forced to entrust your personal safety on the assessment of other scene participants given the novelty of the substance.

The second post engages in a similar sort of discussion and argument regarding what the scientific literature means for users and what the potential pharmacological effects will mean for user experience. Here the first round of researchers, excited for the potential for

a novel high, attempt to balance this desire with a calculated physical risk assessment.

Although categories such as class, race, and gender, are largely invisible in online scenes they are not sites where power is distributed equally among all group members. While peer to peer horizontal exchange of information is important to the scene, members with regular access to a computer and internet connection as well as members with higher degrees of scientific literacy and education are better positioned to influence the norms and boundaries of responsible drug use on the scene. They can post more often and have a greater ability to decipher the scientific literature being produced around Research Chemicals and thus their recommendations tend to carry more weight on the scene.

Scene Regulation

Scene Regulation is the category in which the idea of factions among Research Chemical users becomes most relevant as users negotiate the boundaries of the scene and who should be included. User serotonin soup created a post with the heading “Benzos and Fent are killing this scene;” another post admonishes users for treating vendors poorly; and several others are created concerning chemicals and behaviors to stay away from, particularly for beginners. One of these posts is quite extensive and well cited, linking to multiple types of sources throughout its argument. All of these posts are attempting to engage in norm building and boundary work within the scene in the pursuit of, if not positive media attention, then no media attention, meaning less legal

regulation and alleviating the threat posed by a widespread moral panic.

To varying degrees of success, some users attempt to act as moral entrepreneurs for the scene, prescribing how to be “good” Research Chemical users and attempting to distance the scene from “bad” drug users. “Why do we let etizolam bartards cause ruckus and stupidity in this scene and equate them the same because they are researchers” continues serotonin_soup, alleging that benzodiazepine and opioid users are the “idiots” who are endangering the scene for everyone else. Despite being a polysubstance user and admitting to occasionally using etizolam, he distinguishes himself from “bastards” and wants to restructure the boundaries of the research scene to exclude these users who are perceived by many as the “real problem.”

Although this post was upvoted by a fairly large number of people indicating agreement with the general sentiment at least, this is far from an uncontested stance. Other group members push back on this sentiment in one of two ways. Firstly, by expressing solidarity

“At the end of the day the RC scene is a scene of recreational drug users and such drug addicts are an inextricable element of it. Good for you for not falling into the horrors of benzo opiate addiction.”

This approach takes a more compassionate stance towards the supposed problematic irresponsible group members. Acknowledging that addiction is a risk of casual drug use and while an acceptable risk, those that succumb are nonetheless members of the group. The

second response, like the original poster wants to exclude people who cause problems from the scene and engage in social distancing from these problematic users. The disagreement for this faction lies in what the source of the bad behavior is. These users are if not more abundant then often more vocal in expressing their views

“It’s not the drugs tho, it’s the people. I can use etilozam for anxiety, and not act like a total dumbas. Even when I use recreationally. There’s a group of people who have no respect for drugs. Those are the people who aren’t responsible enough to use them. Why ban driving for everyone?” (Tuncerpetua)

These members push back on the creation of factions based on preferred class of drugs instead embracing Research Chemical users from all classes as the same group. They take exception to placing any sort of blame on the substances themselves instead constantly blaming “idiots” who didn’t do their “due diligence” in gaining information regarding a drug before taking it.

Addiction

This common assertion that it is “idiots” who are becoming addicts, behaving poorly, and ruining or endangering the scene conflicts with the fact that Addiction is the category with the most posts in the subreddit. These posts are often made by users who have been participants on the scene for many years and have high levels of knowledge about Research Chemicals. Darwinsdayoff writes “I’ve read how compulsive redosing is. I thought I mentally prepared myself for it. I wasn’t...” which

is followed by comment after comment expressing sympathy for others struggling with addiction and relaying past struggles with addiction of their own. The fact that these knowledgeable and responsible users still fell into the trap of addiction conflicts with the dismissal of all addicts as “idiots” who used the chemical wrong and didn’t know what they were doing.

These posts generally take on a more somber and empathetic tone as users seek support from the same scene that created their problem and made them into RC users. Even in posts seeking to aid addicts in recovery, the group’s identity as recreational drug and Research Chemical users informs the paths taken to sobriety. Users suggest more “functional” substances to curb addiction, often using weed as a crutch to manage addiction. It is in these posts that the scene attempts to engage seriously with what the cost of personal autonomy and freedom costs.

“As much as I believe in the freedom of substances, the freedom of people, and any combination of the two, there is a real danger here. There is a real dark side. Maximum caution is always warranted.”

There is a strong sentiment throughout the group, it can even be somewhat militant at times, that people should be allowed to put whatever it is they want into their bodies, even if it leads to harm. It is up to the individual to negotiate what risk is acceptable to them, to determine what levels of drug use are acceptable to them and what constitutes non-functional addiction. There is a tension between wanting the group to look good in order to protect the legality and freedom of substances

scene participants want access to, but also knowing that there will always be a human cost to this freedom.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The contradictions and conflict that exist on Research Chemical scene on this subreddit support the idea of scenes as sites of contestation. In an attempt to preserve and enrich the scene, and neutralize stigma by potential moral panics which pose a danger to the scene, participants attempt to act as moral entrepreneurs. However, this entrepreneurship does not go uncontested and the norms and standards of the scene are very much in flux.

The moral logic of the War on Drugs that views drugs that views drugs as inherently bad and individualizes drug use is simultaneously upheld and rejected by scene participants as they navigate a collective idea of what it means to be a responsible or functional drug user. It is explicitly rejected during discussions of the legal landscape surrounding Research Chemicals with users expressing dissatisfaction with governments for ignoring the real social issues that lead to addiction and crime and instead punishing individuals for drug use. Yet they seem to buy into in other facets of discussion, for example when recommending substances or engaging in scene regulation.

Instead of rejecting the premise that drugs are morally bad they instead attempt to battle stigmatization by making a case for the shifting of the boundaries of scene participation, pushing types of users deemed irresponsible out of the scene as a way to make the Research Chemical scene more legitimate and less policed. Yet at the same

time, by recommending certain substances and discussing safety information participants make the claim that some kinds of drug use, drug use that is deemed functional or therapeutic, is in fact a worthy pursuit in of itself. This also offers insight into how power works on the scene and what types of characteristics – experience and scientific literacy - are valued.

Posts regarding addiction in some senses, throw a wrench into the entire underlying logic of the scene. The claim that responsible drug use is possible and irresponsible drug use is due to a lack of information and “idiots” who don’t know what their doing is called into question by amount of scene participants struggling with their own addiction. Many of these users are experienced and knowledgeable Research Chemical users who have been scene participants for many years. They have been immersed in the knowledge and norms being produced on the scene yet they still fall victim to irresponsible drug use and its consequences. It is difficult for the scene to simply dismiss these users as idiots separate from the scene giving it a bad name, to some extent calling into question how much we can dismiss individualizing models for the explanation of drug use and abuse.

While the scope of this project is limited, conclusions can still be drawn regarding scene trends and character. While I have referred to the Research Chemical Scene throughout the paper, this project can only really speak to the specific iteration of the scene as it existed on this particular site at the time the data was gathered. Furthermore the high volume of content produced and posted to the Research Chemicals subreddit

was examined manually, thus limiting the amount of content that could be examined more closely. The project also largely ignores content that was not engaged with on the subreddit which has the potential to provide insight to the scene by looking at what was ignored in addition to what was upvoted and engaged with heavily.

That being said, two methods of categorization can be identified that emerge on the scene, a legal/illegal distinction and a functional/nonfunctional distinction. In practice, these categories are not strict binaries but rather bleed into each other forming a spectrum. Most Research Chemicals fall into a legal grey area where they could technically be controlled by the Federal Analogue Act in the United States (several other countries have similar laws) if they are “substantially similar” to a controlled substance. However, in practice, this Act is cumbersome to use and when it is invoked it is usually in the prosecution of vendors rather than individual users. Further complicating the legal status of Research Chemicals is the fact that they are marked as “not for human consumption” by sellers despite the end goal of human consumption assumed by both the vendors and the users. While some Research Chemicals exist in the light grey legal area and can be purchased online from easily accessible websites, as the legality becomes more suspect they become more difficult to procure.

Changes to the legal landscape and increased policing spurred by moral panic are viewed as a threat to the scene. For many users the relative ease of procurement due to the relative legality of Research Chemicals is

the reason they are drawn to Research Chemicals. Without the demand from these users, users invested in the spirit of research and discovery ethos of the scene are worried that production of new Research Chemicals will slow or even cease completely. Furthermore discussions regarding the changing legal landscape around Research Chemicals reveal that although legality may draw users to the scene, it is not due to a moral alignment with the law in opposition to illegal drugs or a strong attempt to avoid legal sanctions. Scene participants have little faith in Law Enforcement to treat them fairly or know the difference between various substances. Instead, the preference for legality is centered on accessibility and potential growth of the scene.

That is not to say that moral regulation does not exist within this scene. Rather than being tied to any particular legal system or the moral logic behind the War on Drugs, it is based on a users ability to remain “functional” and be “responsible.” Research Chemical users in this scene regularly attempt to act as moral entrepreneurs and engage in rule making by devaluing other factions of Research Chemical users. The basis for this stigmatization is usually that this other type of drug and faction of drug users are “nonfunctional” and thus contributing to the stigmatization of the Research Chemical scene.

This nonfunctional designation also acts as the criteria for diagnosing addiction among group members. When users reach a point of non-functionality they then become categorized by themselves and others as addicts. This also works in the opposite direction, rather than being an indicator of sobriety,

within this scene users are considered to have beaten addiction once they have reached the point of functionality again. In many of the discussions about addiction this point of functionality could be achieved while still using various substances, in some cases daily, as long as one could remain functional in daily life. Functionality becomes a prerequisite to being fully included in the scene as users who are nonfunctional are viewed as a threat to the scene’s image, its safety, and sustainability.

This concern with functionality and “responsible” Research Chemical users can be seen as a response to the stigmatized position of Research Chemical users both by other drug users and by mainstream society. Scene boundaries are constantly contested on the subreddit as participants invoke factions of other types of users as the problem on the scene in an attempt to neutralize criticism against the scene as a whole. These factions are dependent on identification rather than actual usage patterns as those who invoke the idea of factions often admit within the post to using drugs belonging to the class they are attempting to regulate.

In these cases their stronger identification with a different faction outweighs the act of using a particular drug. As a form of neutralization this is not particularly effective. There is often pushback within the scene at the imposition of these new boundaries. Attempts at regulating what kinds of participation constitute good Research Chemical Scene participation end up re-individualizing and problematizing drug use mirroring the War on Drugs mentality that the scene is attempting to counteract.

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Just Like Grandma Used to Make and More: Markets of Authenticity in Ethnic Restaurants

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Customers who search for “good” restaurants use various metrics to decide where to eat and spend their money, one of which tends to be “authenticity.” If a restaurant gives off an air of what they presume to be authenticity and invokes a certain culture, customers will often claim that the restaurant is worth the visit. Yet, sociologists posit that authenticity does not come naturally; it is actively overseen and produced by restaurant owners. This approach tends to focus on the following paradox: through the process of producing authenticity in ethnic restaurants, restaurant owners seemingly undermine precisely the “authenticity” they are striving to achieve. In this paper, I research how restaurant owners and customers navigate this paradox by producing and consuming different types of “authenticity.” Through interviews and ethnographic observation in seven Polish restaurants in Chicago, I search for how different people define authenticity and how their concepts of authenticity produce different theoretical and material imaginings of culture. My research reveals that customers and restaurant owners fall into three different “markets of authenticity,” each governed by one of the following sentiments: the desire for economic profit, nostalgia, and apathy. I argue that the economic and cultural conditions of possibility in Chicago allow for and produce multiple markets of authenticity, each catering to a different audience by emphasizing different cultural aspects. In an ever-globalizing world, these flourishing markets of authenticity reveal possibilities of coexistence among seemingly contradictory ambitions and social affiliations.

INTRODUCTION

For many, authenticity is a metric by which eating spaces can and should be judged, allegedly referring to some single truth or original ethnic experience embodied by food, ambience, location, and staff members. Restaurant owners will commonly claim symbolic ownership over “the most authentic Mexican food in the city” or “genuine Indian food” in marketing their establishment. Customers also make these informal claims through word of mouth and via online platforms.

However, every restaurant that claims to serve authentic ethnic food is not the same. The functions that authenticity serves and the meanings that authenticity takes vary from place to place and from group to group. For

example, producers and consumers assume different roles in restaurant spaces and have unique lived experiences informing their executions of these roles, thereby causing them to imagine authenticity differently. Moreover, some groups of producers imagine authenticity differently from others; the same applies for consumers. Whether authentic restaurants provide a sense of belonging, nostalgia, or cultural accomplishment from finding an unknown niche spot, customers voluntarily go out of their way to find a specific restaurant that meets their individual expectations.

Day-to-day validations by means of claims of authenticity suggest that authenticity is a socially constructed scale that means something to people and reflects on the quality of the food

and the experiences surrounding it. From Millennial foodies following food trends to immigrants who miss the taste of home, customers are players who value authenticity as a merit of quality and worthiness, in that they choose where to spend money and thereby approve of and govern definitions and ideas about a culture and region. On the other hand, producers make decisions on what to serve and how to construct the food and space surrounding it. The socially constructed category of authenticity is deeply informed by cultural and historical circumstances and seems to serve multiple functions for different people. As I show in this paper, the intersections between different affiliations and sentiments that drive a person to open a restaurant actually create the possibility for multiple, what I will call in this project, markets of authenticity.

In Chicago specifically, a city known for its diverse food options, plethora of neighborhoods, and slew of immigrant communities, restaurants play a large role in sustaining a neighborhood's culture and public identity. Both outsiders and insiders venture to specific neighborhoods not only in search of a certain type of cuisine, but for an authentic cultural experience. In this paper, I research the different conceptualizations and performances of authenticity in ethnic restaurants, focusing specifically on Polish restaurants.

Chicago's Polish population, established in 1837, is the largest European-American ethnic group in the city and the largest Polish community outside of Poland. The Polish-American community was originally concentrated in neighborhoods on the west side of Chicago and has over time moved and

dispersed due to gentrification, desires to move to the suburbs, and other circumstances. One outcome of this demographic change is the presence of Polish restaurants in ethnically heterogeneous neighborhoods.

The questions I have pursued in this research are what kind(s) of authenticity does the market allow for? Specifically, how and why do restaurant owners and workers in Polish neighborhoods work to present authenticity in their food and restaurant space, and what kinds of authenticity or experiences do customers seek? What strategies of economic survival do Polish restaurant owners employ when the area in which they reside is no longer ethnically homogenous? What kinds of sentiments or social feelings, such as "belonging," are involved, and do these sentiments represent harmony between the local and the global? What are the various functions of authenticity and whom does each serve?

In this paper, I explore the ways in which authenticity operates and the motivations that create markets of authenticity for different types of audiences. As I show in my research, it is not one authenticity that restaurant owners perform or embody in their restaurants but multiple visions of authenticity, each with its own properties and audience. My findings suggest that three types of affiliations serve as bases for markets of authenticity.

Based on ethnographic and interview data, I present six ideal types of players in three different markets of authenticity in which restaurant owners and customers fall. The Capitalist producer and the Foodie consumer both partake in an economic market of au-

thenticity, while the Historian producer and the Community Seeker consumer both contribute to a market of authenticity founded on nostalgic ties to cultural heritage. Finally, the Happenstance Entrepreneur and the Local consumer both participate in a market of authenticity perpetuated by apathy and convenience.

Thus, contrary to what contemporary sociological literature commonly claims, I argue that the market does allow for multiple markets of authenticity rather than a single homogenous, insincere authenticity that merely plays off of customers' expectations. My findings suggest that the drives to be authentic and to make money, while seemingly in conflict with one another (Grazian 2003), actually produce conditions of possibility for the simultaneous existence of multiple markets of authenticity. In the following sections, I will first review relevant literature and my methodology. I will then outline my findings and conclude with an analysis of the set of ideal types I present and a discussion of their implications.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Authenticity

Most contemporary research on the production of authenticity presents a cynical view on the possibility for sincere performance of singular authenticity. Sociologists that study authenticity often treat it not as an objective term used to describe an inherent quality, but as a socially constructed metric that is highly subjective and produced through conscious efforts to appear a certain way (Grazian 2003, Weiss 2011). This perspective, somewhat hypocritically, approaches authenticity normatively, arguing that true authenticity is incom-

patible with and cannot exist within a capitalist society (Grazian 2003). This sociological perspective thus denies the idea that variations of authenticity exist within a single social setting (Weiss 2011, Grazian 2003, Comaroff 2009, Wilcox and Busse 2016).

My project argues that the drive to make money promoted in capitalism is not the only motive for restaurant owners to try and perform authenticity, rather, multiple markets of authenticity flourish simultaneously to illustrate that authenticity takes on more than a single definition or standard form. This approach defines authenticity as "the ability of a place or event to conform to an idealized representation of reality," which does not inherently deny the idea of there being multiple ideals of authenticity within a setting, as well as speaking to how authenticity can be idealized and glamorized while simultaneously reducing an ethnicity or community (Grazian 2003: 10). Sociological definitions have traditionally viewed authenticity as something that is constructed and, just like other aspects of social life, "performed" (Grazian 2003: 11). However, past assumptions of only one kind of authenticity neglect the possibility of rich categories of authenticities dependent on nuanced social context and differing definitions.

Food is an expression of culture that undoubtedly has the capacity to explain other areas of life, such as communication, social class, morality, and world-making, and my project specifically concerns itself with the way food creates and showcases markets of authenticity (Barthes 1997, Bourdieu 1984, Richards 1939, Rozin 1999, Josee et al 2011). By examining the practices

of the restaurant owners who partake in a tradition of cultural production, the origins of productions, and the consumers who govern them, my own research hopes to contribute to existing scholarly work in the fields of cultural sociology and anthropology.

Whereas Polish restaurant owners directly govern cultural production by deciding what to produce and how to produce it, consumers also exercise a type of “mundane governance” in deciding to return to a certain restaurant and where to spend their money (Woolgar and Neyland 2013). Moreover, authenticity draws out specific affiliations of customers, including identities associated with Polish culture, migration, history, geography, generation, production, and consumerism. If authenticity attracts people into an establishment, it does so because it capitalizes on appeals to certain identities that may yearn for a community of Polish immigrants or for an environment of fellow foodies.

Ethnicity

There is a branch of sociological literature that approaches the ways through which ethnicity is expressed, notably through consumption and other visible, external gestures and interactions (Gans 1979, Riesman 1950, Alba 1990). These theorists primarily attempt to explain resurgence in visible ethnic interest during the 1970s in the United States (Gans 1979, Sandberg 1974, Gordon 1964). Gans (1979), for example, introduces the term “symbolic ethnicity” as “a nostalgic allegiance to the culture of the immigrant generations [...] a love for and a pride in a tradition that can be felt without having to be incorporated in everyday behavior

(ibid 9). Symbolic ethnicity thus emphasizes the visibility of ethnic groups and emerges as a type of ethnic expression when people work to maintain an ethnic social identity rather than a personal relation with their ethnic groups (Gans 1979: 7).

While symbolic ethnicity is certainly a dominant and evident characteristic of many second and third generation immigrants and their descendants, the explanations of ethnic identification and expression that stem from this approach do not adequately account for everyone seeking ethnic establishments and neighborhoods. Symbolic ethnicity is useful for explaining consumption patterns tied to certain patrons of ethnic restaurants, although not totally accounting for those with high levels of cultural knowledge and regional lived experiences.

Ethnicity as something marketable and attractive to consumers has recently received more scholarly attention. However, relevant literature often looks at overt “cultural tourism,” neglecting the nuanced, more informal levels at which identity is marketed (Butcher 2005, Dietler 2010, Comaroff 2009). Anthropological studies on the commodification of ethnicity with respect to economic conditions of possibility look at cultural tourism as a more popular and extreme vehicle of othering and purchasing the other. Comaroff and Comaroff (2009) analyze the unique moment of commodifying identity as penetrating societies all over the world, citing many examples of self-branding grounded in ethnicity and claims of origin. Tourists’ fascination stems from a reduction of humans’ identities to their ethnicity and the capitalist motivation to consume the

other; in the United States, for example, tourists “commodify descent” of Native Americans (Comaroff 2009: 60).

Theories of commodified ethnicity through cultural tourism would suggest that customers of Polish restaurants in Chicago reduce the people in the restaurants to their Polish descent and that restaurant owners willingly take part in their own commodification. However given the large Polish population in Chicago and the differences between Polish restaurants, this lens would not explain the popularity and the diverse customer-base of different restaurants. This approach neglects the range of motivations and affiliations for restaurant owners and customers that influence decisions as informal as choosing where to eat. The level to which consumers idealize and glamorize not only the food that restaurants serve, but also the people with whom they interact and the space they are in (Puczko 2005, Brown-Saracino 2010) is a delicate balance between complete objectification and cultural proficiency (Butcher 2005).

Consumption

Economic sociologists and sociologists of culture have long sought to develop understandings of consumer choices that go beyond economic models of utility maximization by incorporating cultural considerations. There now exists an abundance of literature on consumption as a social practice that constructs relationships, cultures of taste, and homology (Bourdieu 1984, Goody 1982, Schouten 2005). According to this line of thought, social relations are founded and reinforced by class position and notions of exchange

(Marx 1887, Paxson 2013, Bourdieu 1984). Bourdieu (1984), for example, argues that tastes and preferences are informed by social class. He posits that these socialized tastes are polarizing and further reify class boundaries. Moreover, Bourdieu’s concept of “homology” seeks to explain a type of social correspondence that exists between producers and consumers. According to Bourdieu (1993), the concept of homology suggests that if certain players are similarly located in a social space, they also have similar views and tastes, and, thus, they share an affinity that cuts across different fields.

In a field of cultural production, such as a restaurant, there is a homology between producers and consumers, which prompts producers or restaurant owners to cater towards a specific audience in deciding both what to produce and how to market it. Economic models and analyses of taste that depend on social class provide no insight into the cultural factors that make one product more appealing to consumers. Several other scholars also explore taste and its formation in the context of culinary tourism and ethnic food production. Dietler (2010) and similar consumption theorists, like Bourdieu (1984) and Goody (1982), focus on food specifically, analyze how taste is shaped not only by income level, but also by globalization, social position, histories of colonialism, and nationalist and religious sentiments (Paxson 2013, Errington et al 2012).

However, these studies that diligently take into account the socially informed tastes of the customer do not simultaneously address the interests and actions of the producer who both needs

to please the consumer and may wish to work ethically and create something more than a device of profit. Moreover, social theorists explain customers' interests and actions by analyzing macro-trends in history and in fad diets, neglecting individual agency and diverse interests of customers.

Although the existing literature concerning authenticity, ethnic identity construction of immigrants, and capitalist production and consumption are robust and plentiful, the theories combining these social realms are scarce. My research project regarding tension between authenticity and profit for immigrants in the United States will bring these social factors together into conversation.

DATA AND METHODS

For this article, I draw on 11 interviews with 5 owners and 6 customers, 45 hours of ethnographic observation, and online reviews to research the production of culture and employment of authenticity in seven ethnically Polish restaurants. I conducted interviews at five of these restaurants because they had the most and highest ratings on Yelp, the Chicago Eater, Google, and Thrillist, and, after some preliminary ethnographic interviews, I learned that those five were the most popular within the Polish community (Weiss 1995). As such, the data I have collected has allowed me to conduct qualitative analysis of definitions, sentiment, and cultural processes occurring in the flagships of commercial Polish cuisine.

I focused on restaurants in Avondale and the "Polish Corridor" because there is a high concentration of Polish

restaurants and residents in that area. I selected this site because a series of displacements has made historical Polish neighborhoods much more heterogeneous (Pacyga 1991). As such, the scattered and relatively scarce existence of concentrated Poles and Polish-Americans in Chicago presents a case indicative of social processes of authenticity construction. By being scattered, the constructions of authentically Polish is executed through physical and mental work rather than mere reputation. That is, the ethnically heterogeneous nature of neighborhoods in Chicago where we find Polish restaurants today (e.g. Wicker Park, Avondale) requires that restaurant owners consciously employ marketing and branding tactics in order to bring in a diverse array of customers. Seeing as the employment of authenticity as a marketing tactic in different ways is what interests me, I turn to Polish restaurants for the purposes of this paper.

Coding the Data

In order to analyze the data I collected, I conducted qualitative coding. I searched for typologies of thinking about authenticity, types of Polish restaurants, and types of customers while coding (Van Maanen 1988). By constructing typologies around these topics, I was able to make connections between typologies and identify key ideologies and players in the production of culture. Using my data, I investigated not only authenticity in the restaurants, but also what it means to be Polish in Chicago or ethnic in America. Moreover, while focusing on the customer point of view, I examine how and why customers choose to visit a restaurant

for its type of authenticity. In the results that follow, I identify types of restaurant owners and customers, identifying how they conceptualize authenticity and connecting them to Polish history and collective consciousness in Chicago.

Limitations of the Study

While this data may possess factors allowing it to represent a larger social pattern concerning authenticity and cultural production, it is by no means without limitations. Because of the small number of Polish restaurants in Chicago, my research, while refined, is not necessarily representative of the rest of the American population. In addition, historically Polish neighborhoods in Chicago have undergone vast transformations over the years due to gentrification, so my research may not apply to ethnic enclaves in urban areas whose demographic compositions have remained static over time.

RESULTS

Authenticity as a concept takes on different empirical definitions and social functions for different people. In the setting of Polish restaurants, authenticity brings certain types of restaurant owners and customers together, who then exist within unique homologies or, what I call in this project, markets of authenticity. The following analysis seeks to explain how restaurants present authenticity within the context of an ethnically changing neighborhood. In order to fully understand these ways of thinking about authenticity, I identify the six types of people found in Polish restaurants and address how they conceptualize authenticity within the three

markets of authenticity.

There are three types of restaurant owners in Polish restaurants in Chicago who are directly responsible for producing something “authentic.” First, in the Economic Market, Capitalists view authenticity as something they can use to bring in more customers. Secondly, the Historian, who belongs to the Nostalgic Market, holds romanticized ideas about authenticity and wants to create an environment of physically embodied cultural imaginings and sentiments. Thirdly, the Happenstance Entrepreneur of the Apathetic Market exerts little to no conscious effort in fostering authenticity.

Moreover, there are generally three types of customers who come in to these Polish restaurants, each with a different motivation. First, the Foodie marvels at authenticity as something to be consumed as a commodity, thereby affording the Foodie more cultural capital. Secondly, the Community Seeker is someone who possesses knowledge about Polish culture in some capacity and wishes to use authentic food to revisit cultural affiliations. Lastly, the Locals really do not concern themselves with authenticity, but rather with convenience and routine.

These six typologies may overlap, but, nevertheless, each draws upon unique values and feelings, originating from one central, defining motivation that founds their market of authenticity (Figure 1). In the following analysis, I will explain the properties of each market of authenticity by describing the ideal types of restaurant owners and customers in each market. I then argue that the market allows for multiple visions of authenticity that cater to dif-

	Restaurant Owner	Customer
Economic Market	Capitalist	Foodie
Nostalgic Market	Historian	Community Seeker
Apathetic Market	Happenstance Entrepreneur	Local

Figure 1. Analytic framework: The relationship of markets of authenticity and restaurant role.

ferent niches, as evidenced by the three different motivations that push customers and restaurant owners to partake in the market.

The Economic Market

The Foodie Customer

Foodies are generally younger Americans, often with no connection to Poland. Their goal when eating out is to consume the most “authentic” food because, in doing so, they increase their cultural capital (Bourdieu 1972). Authenticity grants Foodies social credit, which they reap from social media posts and online reviews claiming a Capitalist’s restaurant offers a new and genuine experience. For example, reviewer Sarah writes about a Capitalist’s restaurant on Yelp:

“I’ve heard about this restaurant a lot from my Polish friends and finally decided to go. This place is a gem. The décor makes me feel like I’m in a fancy Polish lodge in Warsaw and the waitresses’ Polish accents make the experience so much more authentic. I haven’t eaten Polish food before, well, not knowingly at least.”

Although Sarah does have Polish friends who told her about this restaurant, she herself had not had Polish food before. And yet, she still claims that this restaurant features an authenticity that somehow reminds her of Poland, a

place she has never visited. Foodies not only visit these restaurants out of a tourist inclination, but they also go further to write reviews and spread the word. In doing so, Foodies are validated in their choice and assume some authority over people who have not visited the restaurant at hand.

Further, like reviewer Jessica, Foodies may praise the service, “Wonderful staff and so pleasant.” They seek to offer reviews that will initiate a new trend or fad over which they will eventually be able to take partial ownership. Thus, they analyze not just food, but also the holistic identity of the restaurant, “Beautifully decorated by the owner herself. Definitely a five star restaurant,” as reviewer Pat claims.

What is important to the Foodie is the experience, the appearance of the restaurant, and how the restaurant ranks against others. Foodies strive to be the person others go to when they want restaurant recommendations, which Foodies make known through Instagram and blog posts. However, Foodies still tend to write positive reviews of restaurants when they cite authenticity, either because their perception of what is authentically Polish is rather open due to a lack of Polish experience or because they still want to reap any cultural capital that comes from a restaurant’s success.

As ethical eating is most on the

minds of white Millennials, it makes sense that this same population is often the most conscious of what restaurants they are supporting (Johnston et al 2011). They consume authenticity as a commodity and are most often seen at Capitalists' restaurants because Capitalists work the hardest to display and commodify authenticity in their large restaurants built to house large quantities of Foodies.

KoPo, for example, is a Korean-Polish fusion restaurant in Chicago owned by a Korean and Polish couple who aligns with the Capitalist ideal type. The raving reviews and glowing reputation as a "funky and unique fusion" precede KoPo, whose customers recommend their "crazy good pierogis" and praise the "great quality and fusion of Polish and Korean" several times over, both online and in person. The customer base at KoPo is composed of Foodies who are eager to have an "interesting and unique experience" while simultaneously experiencing, as one of their employees explains, "really Polish, authentic sausage."

The Foodies that come to KoPo are not only searching for "tasty food," but, more importantly, they come to KoPo for the cultural capital that comes from eating at a niche, exciting, unique restaurant. The customers of KoPo and Zywnosc, which I describe in the following subsection, go out of their way to come to Capitalists' restaurants they read about online and are generally in their 20s and 30s. They visit KoPo in small groups and are more likely to post pictures on Instagram than write a formal review as a form of expression of cultural capital rather than a form of ethnic admiration or affiliation. During

my time spent in KoPo and Zywnosc, I would commonly see women in their 20s and 30s come into the restaurant and, upon the arrival of their food to their table, take pictures with their smart phones of the food from two to three different angles. Sometimes, these Foodies would take pictures of their food with flash and filter edits, and they would often show one another the pictures to consult the quality of the picture before posting to social media sites, like Instagram. On these Instagram photos, captions commonly use hashtags like "#Polish," "#pierogi," "#foodporn," and "#yummy."

KoPo and the Foodies that frequent the fusion restaurant demonstrate a type of authenticity motivated by economic motives to accumulate cultural capital and monetarily validate an authentic restaurant. In restaurants owned by Capitalists, Foodies create and perpetuate a market of authenticity that is based on the opportunity to increase one's cultural capital.

The authenticity that Foodies seek in the Economic market of authenticity is often something that is novel to them. Instead of returning to the same authentic restaurant regularly like many Community Seekers, Foodies are likely to visit a Capitalist's restaurant once or twice before moving on to another restaurant. When visiting Zywnosc, it was common to hear customers say things like, "This food is so good!" "I love the décor here," and "I can't believe this is my first time having Polish food in Chicago." One table of two white women in their 20s, one wearing a Loyola t-shirt, spent about 10 minutes with their waitress asking questions about Polish food and the waitress's

personal background. The waitress told them that she grew up in Krakow and came to Chicago when she was 17 and started working in Zywnosc. After the waitress left to put in their order, one of the Foodies said, “Wow, I can’t believe she’s actually from Poland. I feel like I heard that there’s a big Polish population in Chicago,” to which the other Foodie replied, “Yeah, no, it’s wild. There are a ton of Polish people here. That’s why I wanted to go here.”

These Foodies had never eaten Polish food and wanted to experience an authentic Polish experience, which, in the case of many Foodies, is something new that they know little to nothing about. As I will explain in my description of Community Seekers, this definition of authenticity contrasts greatly with the definition of authenticity that guides the Nostalgic market of authenticity. Although both Foodies and Community Seekers seek an authentic experience when they visit these restaurants, one searches for something new and the other for something familiar.

The Capitalist Restaurant Owner

The Capitalist is a restaurant owner who views authenticity purely as a functional tool. What Capitalists decide to offer and how they decide to curate their restaurant depends on what will get customers, specifically Foodies, in the door. They generally cater toward the American customer and the Foodies who actively search online for an authentic experience, but they also do profit from the Locals and, very rarely, the Community Seeker. Thus, the origins of the décor and the recipes are not as important to the Capitalists as the ap-

pearance of authenticity is. That is, the Capitalists’ focus is more on how the Polishness of the restaurant seems to outsiders. In terms of initially attracting customers, they rely on the Internet, especially websites like Yelp and Google where they aim for good ratings and reviews. The Capitalist may have a large quantity of knowledge about Polish food in Poland, but they choose to serve what Americans and outsiders most commonly think of when they think of Polish food, which often tends to be food that would be classified as peasant food in Poland.

Julia, for example, is the owner of the most and highly rated Polish restaurant in Chicago, Zywnosc. Their most popular dish is the “Polish Plate,” which is a “sample of Polish food. It comes with pierogi, stuffed cabbage, potato pancakes, and sausage with sauerkraut.” According to Julia, “this is very Polish, old Polish food.... People like to try it.” From Poland herself, Julia carefully curates her restaurant to appear authentic. When asked what authenticity means for her, Julia replied: It’s a Polish restaurant so it’s, for us, it’s good business because I know people [are] coming to eat Polish food, to see Polish decoration, so for sure. If it’s Polish, it’s Polish. It’s, for us, good business.

From food to décor, Julia aims to present something that customers view as “VERY authentic” with “authentic Polish food,” as several Google and Yelp reviewers claim. Moreover, Julia even hires Polish waitresses because she “likes them to speak Polish.” And in the kitchen, Julia staffs “some Polish people because they know how Polish food tastes” and “some Spanish guys

for help in the kitchen.” For Zywnosc, it is important to give customers the impression that they are in a truly authentic Polish environment, from the initial greeting by a Polish waitress to the Polish Plate comprised of commonly known Polish foods.

On the other hand, as I mentioned in the Foodie description, a Capitalist couple owns KoPo. Behind the restaurant, a trendy bar and seating area sits and houses Foodies. Upon entering KoPo, it is difficult to discern what type of food is served. Customers are greeted with a small entry space before moving through to the bar to sit and eat. According to a manager at KoPo, “Uhhh, yeah, I guess we’re getting a few Polish people making the trip out here.” Foodies who come for the experience of Polish and Korean fare are more likely to visit KoPo than Locals or Community Seekers. KoPo, through claims of Polish affiliations, demonstrates participation in a market of economic authenticity that does not rely on Polish lived experiences, but, rather, on rhetoric and cultural capital.

The Nostalgic Market

The Community Seeker Customer

The Community Seeker is often Polish, Polish-American, or has family with Polish affiliations. They are generally older first- or second-generation immigrants but can also be younger people born in America who want to revisit a part of their ethnic identity or learn more about an ancestor’s heritage through authentic food and décor often displayed in Historians’ restaurants. Restaurants, to Community Seekers, are not just places to eat, but spaces where they find like-minded individuals

and can use food as a mode of transportation to a country or time of origin, and they identify authenticity as a major necessity for this community. Community Seekers are often regulars, like Locals (whom I will discuss later), but they cherish authentic tradition and history. As follows, Community Seekers mostly frequent Historians’ restaurants where they are greeted warmly by Polish food and traditional recipes.

Helena, for example, has been coming to Historian Anna’s Polish restaurant, Pozywienie, for over ten years because, although she has “been to other Polish restaurants, this one to [her] is the best.” According to Helena, Pozywiene is the best, and she cites, “I think the freshness of everything, the food variety is good, and the food, really. This is more pleasant.” Helena’s “grandfather came from Poland when he was 14 years old. But I wasn’t raised speaking Polish or anything.” As she comes alone generally, Helena uses Polish food to relate to her father’s side of her family.

The kinds of social relations Community Seekers desire are not necessarily personal ones established through communication and audible social interaction, but rather through the sense of belonging and nostalgia that food provides for Community Seekers. Authenticity, for Community Seekers, is a feeling and a nostalgia that should be appreciated, in that it preserves cultural memories and communities.

Whereas Community Seekers are often older and less likely to post reviews or social media posts praising restaurants than are Foodies, when they do, their reviews depict the authenticity created in the Historian’s restaurant

as something that reminds them of an experience in Poland or with a Polish relative. For example:

“Best European restaurants in Chicago! Here I always find my favorite Polish and Ukrainian dishes. Pierogi, stuffed cabbage, potato pancakes, pork chops, goulash, pancakes, beef, salads – like my grandmother’s dishes: very tasty, delicious and always fresh!”

Community Seekers visit Historians’ restaurants because, there, they are able to revisit an ethnic affiliation. By frequenting Historians’ restaurants, they validate a sort of authenticity based on insider knowledge, consuming food and cultural feeling geared specifically toward them.

Frانيا, a Historian restaurant owner, has owned Pokarm in Wicker Park for over 31 years and has lived in Chicago for almost 40 years. Online reviews of Pokarm feature comments from Community Seekers like:

“OK, so I love this place. I’m of Polish decent, and so this place really reminds me of my grandma’s cooking. The owner is awesome. And I’m very happy to see now a larger percentage of regular American folks eating here. If you really want to have authentic food, this place is it.”

Community Seekers who write online reviews demonstrate Gans’ (1979) concept of symbolic ethnicity, in that they visit restaurants like Pokarm and Pozywienie in order to maintain their ethnic identity and practice ethnic visibility through interactions and strategic validations of restaurants that exhibit a nostalgic authenticity. Further, after 108

spending time in Pokarm, there are also Community Seekers who exercise day-to-day cultural and ethnic affiliations who are generally older and considered to be “regulars.”

For example, Sylwester is a regular at Pokarm of about 70 years of age who sits at the same seat at the bar near the cash register every time he comes. Sylwester orders the Soup of the Day and either a plate of pierogis or a meat dish for an early dinner around 5pm on weekdays. He sits alone and will speak quietly with Frانيا every now and then. Sylwester and other Community Seekers may feel some symbolic ownership over the Historian’s restaurant, sizing up newcomers who come to the Polish restaurant (Deener 2007). Sylwester is just one example of regular Community Seekers who frequent Historians’ restaurants and demand a Nostalgic authenticity in the form of food, atmosphere, and people.

In this Nostalgic market of authenticity, Community Seekers visit certain restaurants they deem authentic because these places remind them of their home and heritage. Community Seekers’ definition of authenticity is synonymous with familiarity. This is why Community Seekers are often regulars, like Sylwester or the people who come to Pozywienie every Wednesday for borscht. My first time at Pokarm, Lucy and Sam who are brother and sister came in quickly that Tuesday evening as if they had been there before and sat down at the bar. They said hello to Frانيا who immediately went behind the bar to take their order. Frانيا told them what soups they were serving, and Sam said, “Give us two cabbage soups.” Frانيا then asked Lucy some questions, including

“How are you? How old are you now?” Lucy responded that she was 24 years old and was going to school in Arizona, and Sam was older and living in Chicago.

Frانيا, Lucy, and Sam continued talking like they had all known each other for years, discussing the recent death of Lucy’s and Sam’s mother, their current stepfather of whom they were not too fond, school, and the possibility of marriage for Lucy. Community Seekers like Lucy and Sam come to Historians’ restaurants like Pokarm to experience something known and familiar to them, which, in this case, is not only some “homemade cabbage soup” as Frانيا refers to it, but also conversation with Frانيا and the other staff. The authenticity they seek is something familiar and homey. This authenticity differs vastly from the Economic authenticity Foodies seek. In contrast to the authenticity that Community Seekers associate with familiarity, Economic authenticity refers to something novel, niche, and new for Foodies.

The Historian Restaurant Owner

The Historian takes it on as their duty to create a long-lasting, personally and historically-based performance of Polish culture and traditions. Historians identify with Polish culture so much that it is their master status (Becker 1963). Authenticity, according to the Historian, should come easily without effort. However, in order to produce a curated environment imbued with Polish culture, Historians must actually choose carefully when deciding what food and decorations are really representative of Polish culture.

While Historians do see them-

selves as “moral entrepreneurs” providing the public with a Polish community or cultural knowledge, it is important for them to stay as true as possible to what one would see at a Polish restaurant in Poland (Best 1987). So, unlike the Capitalist who often displays an abundance of ornate decorations that appear to be Polish and invoke stereotypes and common conceptions of Polish identity, the Historian tends to keep a clean and simple restaurant with completely Polish staff, focusing more on food as a device to transport Polish culture to customers.

Anna is the manager at a restaurant well known among the Polish community in Chicago, *Pozywienie*. Like many Historians, she is saddened by the shrinking of the Polish community in Chicago since she immigrated twenty years ago and misses the large number of Polish customers *Pozywienie* used to see. When asked how customers hear about *Pozywienie*, Anna replied:

“We have this thing, like a little interview, every week with the owner of the Polish radio, so there’s like more flow from the older people. They listen to Polish radio, so they come and say, “Oh, I heard your boss on the radio,” and, you know. We really try to bring everybody here.”

Historians also have “regulars” who are often older, Polish customers. They hold romanticized conceptions of authenticity, like Anna who believes authenticity is “keeping true to yourself and always, you know, it’s in who you are. You are like, if you’re everything, you’re actually like nothing, you know. You need to keep it like it is.” *Pozywienie* and Historians are nostalgic for a

time when there were more Polish people in the area and the Polish community had a gathering space to perform their cultural identities through food, language, and other commonalities.

Frانيا, the Historian owner of Pokarm, has lived in Chicago for almost 40 years. She is from Krakow, which she describes reminiscently as a “big, beautiful city,” and came to Chicago for school and to open her restaurant. When describing why she decided to open Pokarm, Frانيا said:

“I like it, this job, because I like people, I like cooking, I like serving. And, I know Polish kitchen. And [when I came,] this is the year 1986, [there were] a lot of Polish people living here in this area. Lot of Polish people, and for lunchtime, almost it’s full of Polish people. There is a little bit of change because generations sold houses. Very change, very change. And then now, I have young American people, and tourists, and Polish people come from other places.”

While Frانيا’s motive to open a restaurant may have initially aligned more closely with motives of convenience or apathy, she remarks that, now that much of the Polish population has left the area, Frانيا wishes to create a space for Polish people, in addition to others who come and visit, to enjoy her “everyday soups homemade, [...] pierogi, four kinds: potato and cheese, cabbage and mushroom, meat, and sweet cheese, [...] and] homemade stuffed cabbage.”

The menu at Pokarm is printed in both English and Polish, but neither portion of the menu features much de-

scription of the food items because they are meant to be understood by the Polish customer base she aims to serve. Frانيا also told me that the restaurant has not changed much since she opened it. “Still old style because this building is old and everybody [likes] it. This is authentic, everything Polish,” she says, referring to the Polish flags, dolls, postcards, art, and couches in her restaurant. By including these Polish items in her décor and catering her food and overall restaurant to the Polish people who used to live in this area, Frانيا aims to succeed in a Nostalgic market of authenticity.

Historians, by aiming to create a space for Community Seekers to explicitly mobilize Polish ethnic identities through interactions, food, and atmosphere, partake in the market of authenticity founded on nostalgic motives.

The Apathetic Market

The Local Customer

The Local eats at Polish restaurants because they are convenient. They most often live in the same neighborhood as the Polish restaurant and frequent restaurants owned by Happenstance Entrepreneurs that are affordable, filling, and clean, usually ignoring origins of people, recipes, and trinkets found in the restaurant. Authenticity is of little or no importance to Locals because they view the food as something that will fill their stomach and taste good. Locals are generally white males and females and between the ages of 35 and 60.

Sarah and Jack, for example, come to Jacob’s restaurant, Jedzenie, rather randomly because they “live close by.” They “had a search about [their] neighborhood, so that’s why [they] just

wanted to come to this place.” They are not Polish and had never eaten Polish food before. Locals often have not visited Poland and do not know or care whether or not the food can be deemed authentic. Rather, they enjoy the convenient location and the food offered.

Pierogi Place, for example, is a small restaurant in the Loop whose customer base is comprised mostly of Locals. The Locals who visit do not live in the area but, rather, work nearby. Around noon, the small, simple restaurant fills with people who work in the nearby businesses. Locals are often considered regulars by dint of visiting the conveniently located restaurant.

Locals will order what seems filling, tasty, and popular, but often do not have any Polish affiliations. Online reviews from Locals appreciate that Pierogi Place is “super convenient” and claim, “Pierogis [are] served quickly and quite good tasting. Not bad on seating if you arrive a little before the lunch rush. Nice spot to grab lunch.” When I asked a customer at Pierogi Place who was there on his lunch break if he liked any other Polish restaurants in Chicago, he responded, “Is this place Polish? [...] I just like the dumplings. They’re cheap and filling and like five minutes from my office.” This Local customer not only does not care about the décor and experience offered by the restaurant, but he is not even aware of the embodied ethnicity he experiences or the market of authenticity he partakes in at Pierogi Place.

For Locals who frequent restaurants like Pierogi Place and Jedzenie, convenience and taste are more important than cultural feelings invoked or cultural capital to gain, which is what

sets them apart from Community Seekers and Foodies. Nevertheless, Locals unknowingly participate in the production of an authenticity created out of a lack of conscious strategy by Happenstance Entrepreneurs.

The Happenstance Entrepreneur Restaurant Owner

The Happenstance Entrepreneur, unlike the Capitalist and the Historian, does not try very hard to produce any sort of aesthetic in their restaurant. While Capitalists and Historians perform explicitly their ethnicity for the audiences within their respective markets, Happenstance Entrepreneurs do not perform Polish identity, and, rather, their restaurants merely embody Polish identity. That is, Happenstance Entrepreneurs’ restaurants are classified as Polish restaurants because they serve Polish food and are owned by a Polish owner.

While they may feature certain décor and trinkets, these restaurants do not put in the effort to perform a Polish experience recognizable by a certain audience or customer base. Unlike at Historians’ restaurants, it is rare to see Happenstance Entrepreneurs talking with the customers for longer periods of time. At the restaurant Zamek, there was very little conversation between customers, and I never saw the manager or owner once during my time there. Wait staff and bartenders would only speak with the customers to take their orders. While they spoke with Polish accents, they would not speak Polish most likely because the majority of their customers were English-speaking Americans. The restaurant is rather bare and the staff are there to serve Polish food rather than

provide some strategic performance for its customers.

Further, Happenstance Entrepreneurs do not think about why they opened up a restaurant because they did it merely out of convenience. Happenstance Entrepreneurs' restaurants are usually located in smaller buildings near their homes, both of which are often in historically Polish neighborhoods. At these restaurants, the majority of the customers also live in the neighborhood and either fall in the Local and Community Seeker categories. Jacob has co-owned *Jedzenie*, a small Polish restaurant northwest of Avondale, for almost 15 years. When asked why he decided to open up a Polish restaurant, Jacob replied, "I don't know, just an idea. Hard to know why. We had to do something, so, you know, we're thinking, 'What to do?'"

Jacob and other Happenstance Entrepreneurs do not really pay attention to what kinds of customers they serve, in that they treat regulars, Poles, Americans, young, and old all the same. Owning a Polish restaurant is just a job for Happenstance Entrepreneurs, but they still put up Polish decorations from home in their restaurant. *Jedzenie* uses both Polish and English on its menus and signage because Jacob and his co-owners recognize the mix of customers they will serve, yet they do the minimum in describing what meals are or what they should be eaten with.

While all of the ideal types I have listed are likely to overlap, it is common for restaurant owners to begin their careers in the food industry as Happenstance Entrepreneurs and later become either Capitalists or Historians. This is because it is not uncommon for im-

migrants to enter the restaurant industry when moving to America (Bailey 1985). However, when the neighborhood they work in changes to be more ethnically heterogeneous and they see fewer Polish customers and more Foodies and Locals, Happenstance Entrepreneurs may transform their vision of their restaurant to foster a space for more Community Seekers, or they may wish to take advantage of the opportunity to profit from the increased number of tourists and Foodies coming and begin to align with the characteristics of Capitalists.

Frانيا is an example of a Happenstance Entrepreneur who opened *Pokarm* out of convenience but now resembles more closely a Historian. Frانيا said, "I had school in Poland for business for restaurants. I finished and came to Chicago. I [went] to a special class for management class for business, and I opened the restaurant." After the "neighborhood changed very much," she felt even more that "it's important to keep it authentic in the restaurant." Her consciousness surrounding the mobilization of Polish affiliations changed from being nonexistent or in the back of her mind to being a main motivation for serving the food that she does in the way that she does.

What is central to her and others' transformations from Happenstance Entrepreneurs to Capitalists or Historians is the aspect of performance of ethnicity. Happenstance Entrepreneurs do not explicitly perform Polish identity but, rather, embody it through ethnic affiliations and cultural knowledges. This distinction between performance and embodiment setting the Economic and Nostalgic markets apart from the

Apathetic market is central to common definitions of authenticity. The performance of ethnicity seen in the other markets of authenticity employ a type of fabrication that can commonly be interpreted as inauthentic, whereas the embodiment of ethnicity, in its purest form, produces a type of organic Polish authenticity. Seeing as all of these types of authenticity are real to the restaurant owners and customers regardless of embodiment or performance, these markets of authenticity are still able to coexist despite their radical differences.

Fluidity of Ideal Types

The typologies I have listed here are ideal types, and, while the people I observed and interviewed fall into these categories, they are by no means rigid or holistic. People, especially customers, move between these typologies or identify with multiple descriptors. Or, their traits might manifest themselves in different ways depending on the space and time they occupy. For example, Community Seekers may be very vocal and outgoing in the Polish restaurant because of how they view community and social interactions, or, as seen in many Historians' restaurants, they may sit alone, quietly to eat in a place they feel comfortable in.

Julia, the owner of *Zywnosc*, describes the reasons she opened her restaurant:

"I always liked cooking and to do things, like, with the restaurants. I had to do something. I didn't go to college here. I [went] to college in Poland. So it was a good choice to open a restaurant. And I like to work with the kitchen and with the restaurant."

Julia came to Chicago because her family lived here and began her career in the restaurant industry out of convenience and apathy, but, now, more of her customers are American than Polish, and she says, "we prefer them." After noticing the increase in Foodies coming to her restaurant, Julia describes:

"We did decorations, [...] did building, front, everything, we changed everything. So we remodeled everything. We changed food a little bit. We try to change food little bit every two years to put something new. But still, like, Polish food. Has to be Polish food. Because people come to eat Polish food."

While Julia began as a Happenstance Entrepreneur, embodying the Polish ethnicity and partaking in the Apathetic market of authenticity, she changed with the neighborhood to cater to more Foodies as many Capitalists do. The restaurant owners and customers who exist within the markets of authenticity I have described fall in multiple categories and exhibit traits of different ideal types at the same time. Nevertheless, these ideal types do represent the motivations and identities of many of the people I interviewed and conversed with.

While each type of restaurant owner is motivated by a different type of necessity and goal when curating their restaurants, they, interestingly enough, all have emigrated from Poland. Within Chicago, Polish people own Polish restaurants, suggesting that tradition and insider knowledge are fundamentally necessary for Polish food production. Historically, Polish immigrants

in Chicago have predominantly come from peasant classes in Poland, and, so, opening a restaurant is a common occupational path for Polish immigrants (Pacyga 1991).

Every restaurant owner I interviewed came to Chicago from Poland no less than 20 years ago, often because their “family lived here” or they met a significant other in the states on a visit. They also unanimously cite the “big Polish community” as a reason to either come to or stay in Chicago specifically. While they all also lament the shrinking of the Polish community in Chicago on a sentimental level, different types of restaurant owners view the changes in customer demographics differently. For example, Historians like Anna, the manager of *Pozywienie*, claim that, since she came to Chicago, the Polish community here:

“It’s shrunk. Kind of sad. It’s changed a lot. It used to be like... just Polish people come to this restaurant..., but now it’s mostly Americans, Latinos, Chinese people. All, everybody, different nations.”

On the other hand, Capitalists like Julia, the owner of *Zywnosc*, are glad that more Americans come to her restaurant:

“The people are moving. The Polish people all already moved. It’s only maybe some of the old people live here, young people moving I think to suburbs of Chicago.... But we got so many nice American people coming from downtown from Logan Square. So the business is going better. Yeah, we love American customers. Better than

Polish.... We prefer them. They are very nice people. They like everything, they are very polite.... Young people, they are very nice.”

Although both types of restaurant owners recognize the changes in the neighborhood composition in terms of Polish affiliations, they interpret this Polish migration and dispersion quite differently. Historians aim to serve Community Seekers, who, because they tend to be Polish and out in the suburbs, are no longer coming to their restaurant as much. The neighborhood transformations thus amplify the nostalgic properties of their identities, and they react by catering more toward Polish customers. Capitalists, on the other hand, find that Foodies and other Americans spend their money and look for an authentic experience. Given Capitalists’ motives to maximize profit by selling an authentic experience, they are ambivalent, if not satisfied, with the decaying Polish identity of Avondale and the surrounding area.

A comparison between customer ideal types would show a main difference between customers of the Economic and Nostalgic markets. As customers are the players expressly looking for some neat experience, tasty food, or basic necessity, an analysis of the sentiments driving customers sheds light on the appealing aspects of authenticities and the types of benefits they provide to the consumer base. First, Community Seekers and Foodies both actively seek out something they can call authentic when they venture to Polish restaurants. Community Seekers engage with their ethnic affiliations, whereas Foodies aim to accumulate cultural capital through

claims of authenticity. What sets them apart is the temporal nature of the authenticity they wish to experience. That is, while Community Seekers search for something familiar and reminding them of their past, Foodies seek something new and unfamiliar to them. Anna, the Historian manager of Pozywienie, notes that they have regulars who come to Pozywienie to eat the same dish regularly. She says:

“We do have regulars. When they come, we know what they eat, what they drink, when they [come]. Every Thursday or Friday, you know. Like people sometimes come for a specific thing, like for Ukrainian borscht because it’s Wednesday. And you know them when you talk to them, and it’s like a little family.”

These Community Seekers come to Pozywienie on Wednesdays for the same borscht or come on Thursdays and Fridays because they wish to eat familiar Polish food. On the other hand, Foodies visit restaurants like KoPo because it is like nothing they’ve ever tried. The novelty of the restaurant is actually what makes the place more authentic to these Foodies. This main difference revolves around their level of knowledge. While the Foodie looks for some new experience, the Community Seekers searches for mutual understanding and shared lived experiences.

While the markets of authenticity I have described assume fundamentally different visions of authenticity, there can still be movement between the markets themselves. As restaurant owners and customers change by learning more about Polish culture, business

strategies, and other social contexts, so, too, do the restaurant spaces they visit. These ideal markets of authenticity constitute a framework explaining different manifestations of authenticity in urban areas. Although the restaurants that reside in these markets often remain in their specific market with their respective restaurant owner and customer typologies, it is still possible for them to move from one market to another as people and places transform.

DISCUSSION

My investigation of authenticity in Polish restaurants allowed me to derive these six social typologies of people in Polish restaurants. As follows, each market of authenticity employs different conceptions of authenticity, its functions, and its implications. Each conception of authenticity is founded on a different motive for opening or visiting a certain restaurant. Thus, people who share these motives are likely to be in similar spaces and mobilize these markets of authenticity.

Foodies appreciate the environment provided by Capitalists more often, Community Seekers find the authenticity offered by Historians the most warm and traditional, and Happenstance Entrepreneurs’ restaurants are most convenient for Locals. While the Capitalists work the hardest to provide a seemingly authentic experience for their customers, the Historians are more concerned with what is actually found in Poland and put in effort to curate a simple yet traditional eating space. Further, the Happenstance Entrepreneurs’ restaurants, while they use no strategy in the hopes of appearing authentic to a certain customer base, they

produce something closest to their lived experiences in Poland. Instead of acting in the aim of producing something that seems authentic, they act through their Polish identities and Polish experiences when creating something they know. As they are not concerned with how their restaurant appears to its customers, Happenstance Entrepreneurs produce restaurants that are informed by only informal Polish knowledge and lived experiences, whereas the Historians and Capitalists use American ideals or affiliations with “otherness” and immigrant identities to inform their restaurant curations.

My research questions the seemingly inharmonious relationship between authenticity and capitalism in the United States propagated by many sociological scholars. For Polish restaurant owners in Chicago, several motivations for food and atmosphere production interact and influence the reputation of the restaurant. Based on the literature I have read and the research I have conducted, my findings suggest that the drives to be authentic and to make money, while seemingly in conflict with one another (Grazian 2003), actually produce conditions of possibility for the simultaneous existence of multiple markets of authenticity.

By drawing from the work of sociologists who have positioned authenticity against the drives to make money and appeal to tourists, I have shown that, on the contrary, authenticity works with these drives to create different markets of authenticity. I have challenged specifically the work of scholars like Grazian (2003) who simplifies the expression of authenticity to merely meeting the expectations of customers.

Because different markets of authenticity emerge out of disparities between ethnic expression and consumption, the synthesis of concepts like symbolic ethnicity and cultural tourism that seek to explain ethnic expression in public and private spaces have been crucial to my research (Gans 1979, Butcher 2005, Dietler 2010, Comaroff 2009). These markets of authenticity not only implicate cultural truth and economic happenings, but they also illuminate differences in ethnic identities in a transforming urban setting.

Based on existing theories and the data I have collected, I argue that different restaurant owners and consumers have varying definitions of authenticity. While some restaurant owners work to produce something that seems authentic to people who are not familiar with Polish ethnicity, others attempt to recreate something that other Polish people will identify with and remember. Further, another type of restaurant owner puts no conscious effort whatsoever into the authentic experience of their restaurant, but, rather, embodies ethnicity. The main axes of performance versus embodiment distinguish Capitalists and Historians from Happenstance Entrepreneurs, in addition to the motives that guide their respective market of authenticity.

On the other hand, customers consume these three different authenticities and thereby validate a certain type of restaurant’s projection of ethnicity. While Foodies seek a novel performance of Polish ethnicity that differs from something they have already experienced, which they deem authenticity, Community Seekers search for an authenticity that reminds them of their

own Polish affiliations and fosters a feeling of familiarity.

The result of these different markets of authenticity is a social fission in cultural definitions and implications of ethnic identities. That is, the atmosphere that restaurant owners curate as authentic allows customers to consume images and tastes of a culture or country as truth that may not actually resonate with citizens of that nation. Although sociologists commonly conceptualize authenticity as a homogenous commodification of insincerity promulgated by the desire to profit, I argue that the market allows for multiple visions of authenticity that cater to different niches, as evidenced by the three different motivations that push customers and restaurant owners to partake in the market. Because there is a homology of authenticity between certain customers and certain restaurant owners, customers in one market of authenticity are wont to stay in that market and, thus, consume only one view of authenticity and one type of performance of ethnicity. This creates a disparity between what different customers believe about Polish identity in Chicago and in the world.

In my research, the restaurant, including both the food and the environment in which it is served, is the vehicle transporting and absorbing measurements of authenticity claimed by customers both on restaurant rating websites like Yelp and through informal face-to-face interactions. I find that there are actually three different motivations for producing or seeking out something resembling cultural authenticity: capital, nostalgia, and apathy. The search for food unites these three

typologies of customers and producers. Restaurant owners motivated by capital put in the most effort in deciding what will look authentic and bring in the most paying customers.

On the other hand, those motivated by nostalgia and cultural or ethnic ties aim to produce a space fostering familiarity for those who identify with Polishness, featuring sentimental paraphernalia from Poland. Finally, there are apathetic restaurant owners who open up restaurants because it seems like the next logical step in their life. They decide what dishes to serve based on what recipes they already know. Different ways of thinking about authenticity produce these typologies of restaurant owners and bring in specific types of customers. Restaurant owners, thus, possess great power in the production of culture because of how customers consume authenticity as something reflecting an entire culture.

Further research regarding the use of authenticity as economic and social devices, the various markets of authenticity, and the players within these markets could continue to explore more thoroughly the reasons for which restaurant owners and customers who fall in these ideal types are pushed into one ideal type instead of another. While my research has parsed the differences between the restaurants and the different players' outlooks on authenticity, it also prompts deeper sociological inquiry into how the same neighborhood circumstances brought on by displacement and ethnic migration to the suburbs can produce different outcomes.

My research also shines light on how people and establishments change and respond to neighborhood changes

and to the dispersion of ethnic enclaves in urban settings. This theoretical model of authenticity presents an optimistic view of the coexistence of seemingly contradictory ambitions and drives under a capitalist market. With respect to forces of gentrification, urban growth, and technological advances in the United States, this model thereby imagines an urban capacity for an even more diverse and rich cultural array of restaurants and niche establishments than currently in existence, contrary to existent beliefs commonly held by contemporary sociologists.

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