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Experiences and Perceptions of Community: The Fayetteville High School Community Photography Project

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Experiences and Perceptions of Community: The Fayetteville High School Community
Photography Project

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Masters of Arts in Sociology

By

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University of Arkansas
Bachelors of Arts in Sociology, 2013

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This thesis is approved for recommendation to the Graduate Council.

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ABSTRACT

The Fayetteville High School Community Photography Project was conducted with 10th-12th grade students in Spring 2014 as part of a participatory art project through their Sociology class. This study uses participant photographs and surveys to better understand student variation in community perceptions and connections. Participant photographs serve as a way to “see” how high school students perceive community. Survey data gathered on the same sample are used to measure individual-level characteristics such as perceived neighborhood deterioration, neighborhood satisfaction, and social capital to better understand how they impact feelings of community connectedness in youth. Results indicate that social capital plays an important role in how connected teens feel to their community. Additionally, based on qualitative analyses of the photographs, the built and social communities continue to be important perceptual features of community, while the natural environment has emerged as an additional feature of community important to youth.

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I would like to acknowledge the chair of my committee, Dr. Kevin M. Fitzpatrick for his support and guidance during the research and writing process. I would also like to thank my committee, Dr. Anna Zajicek and Dr. Patricia Herzog, for their wonderful feedback and insights. Finally, I would like to thank my friends and family for relentlessly asking me how my thesis was coming along- it was always motivating knowing how many people cared about this work.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my home of Northwest Arkansas, my daughter Alice, and to my parents, Pat and Mary.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

For over two centuries, social and behavioral scientists have documented ever-changing dynamics in human communities. Scholars investigate how communities are formed, why some are stronger than others, and the connections between *where* communities are formed and *who* its members are. The word “community” itself has been defined and redefined by sociologists and other social scientists seeking to capture the essence of something that is at the same time a place, a collection of people, and a *feeling*. Understanding the interplay between these three aspects of community is at the heart of this study. As such, the primary goal of this study is to investigate teens and their experiences of community. Specifically, we examine teens’ perceptions of community and how it relates to their perception of community connectedness. We analyze photographic evidence from teen respondents to better understand *to which* community they feel connected. In doing so, we pose the following question: How do teens perceive community? The perceptual elements we will explore are the experience of community, that is, how do teens *see* community in the literal, structural sense, and how do teens *feel* community, as in the feelings of connectedness that they have toward the community. And finally we will ask, is there any relationship between these two perceptual elements?

This study contributes a unique methodological approach by analyzing photographic data to assess youth’s community perceptions. Photographic data from high school students represent how they “see” community and are analyzed for a better understanding of community perceptions. Respondent surveys measure several individual-level characteristics, as well as youth’s assessment of their social capital, neighborhood

satisfaction, neighborhood perception, and community connectedness. We believe these diverse data sources facilitate a more nuanced analysis of teen experiences of community.

Data in this study were collected on youth ages 16-19. This is an age of community members not as often studied in terms of their community connections, but who may have a unique set of community experiences not yet adequately understood. Rudkin and Davis (2007) find that, “adolescence is a period of transition, when interactions with the larger community become more direct and less mediated by the youth’s family. At the same time, youth have not yet achieved full adult status and youth voices do not generally shape community life” (108). However, in this study, youth voices are *fully* responsible for shaping our understanding of community. The design of the study facilitates a better understanding of teen connections to community, as well as what particular place, group, or set of people they had in mind when asked to “see” community.

CHAPTER TWO

THEORY AND EVIDENCE

Understanding Communities

All communities begin with social relationships created by human will. For Tönnies (1887), this was a social fact on par with any mathematical or engineering fact that would make possible the physical structures of urban life. When humans come together to occupy a physical space, relationships are formed, and thus community is formed. Tönnies developed “social entities” to explain communities: how they are formed, the types of relationships they have, the various changes they may experience, and the existence of different types of communities relative to one another. Those social entities, *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*, were conceptualized as tools used to explain the social world and patterns of behavior. While Tönnies created these tools during a time when he himself was witness to great social change in his community, they are concepts that today give us the perspective that communities are comprised of complex sets of relationships and behaviors, occurring in time and place, and are scientifically observable (Tönnies 1887).

The community that is characterized by interpersonal relationships occurring in a succinct location is what Tönnies called *Gemeinschaft*. Familial relationships, friendships, and simple hierarchical relationships of leader, subordinate, servant, and master that make up *Gemeinschaft* are compelled by “natural will.” By contrast, Tönnies conceptualized *Gesellschaft* as relying on “rational will.” *Gesellschaft*, therefore, is characterized by contractual relationships, sometimes revolving around business and profit, tending to be more publically or politically oriented, and centering on legal processes and formalities.

Tönnies describes *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* in relation to one another, as a

historical process whereby communities are first characterized primarily by *Gemeinschaft*, then evolve into *Gesellschaft* through large-scale trade and the development of more sophisticated economies. However, Tönnies did not see the two concepts as mutually exclusive by saying, “as the town lives on within the city, elements of life in the *Gemeinschaft*, as the only real form of life, persist within the *Gesellschaft*, although lingering and decaying” (Tönnies 1887:19). The dichotomization of community life present in Tönnies work is a pattern that continues in much of the community literature.

Durkheim’s (1893) mechanical and organic solidarity is just one example in a long line of sociological theories that focus on the dual nature of the social world, and we see this continue today with basic methodological traditions of researching the built and social community or the individual and structural influences and their impact on community.

The Built and Social Community

Community has become synonymous with neighborhood both as a site for community to occur and as a measurable place. The *ecological framework* developed by Park and Burgess (1925), suggests that humans are interacting with their physical environment. Shaw and McKay (1931) applied ecological principles to crime with their theory of *social disorganization*. Noticing patterns in the spatial distribution of crime, Shaw and McKay concluded that these areas were characterized by deteriorating neighborhoods, poverty, crowding, population diversity, and residential mobility (Shaw and McKay, 1931). Social disorganization revealed deleterious effects of neighborhoods: they were massively unequal, often suffering from crippling poverty and unemployment, riddled with crime and fear, and systemically unable to support community members (Wilson, 2012; Massey and Denton, 1993). Additionally, youth were found to be particularly at risk in socially

disorganized neighborhoods (Shaw and McKay, 1942, 1969; Osgood and Chambers, 2000; Elliott et al, 1992).

As the study of neighborhood social disorganization continued, researchers began to recognize that, even within an ecological framework, communities still operated as a series of interlocking networks (Burisk and Grasmick, 1999). Wellman's (1979) work on community took networks even further, suggesting that old paradigms of place were becoming less important as technological and communication advances continued. Not ignoring the importance of place in community formation, Wellman (1979) suggested that communities had become "liberated" from the constraints of place. This stood in opposition to many other scholars who, often using ideal types of community developed by Tönnies, were sounding the alarm on communities and warning that they were losing valuable sources of social capital, experiencing a dwindling sense of community, and enormously constrained (Wirth, 1938).

Community Ties

Durkheim (1897/1966) famously studied group-level influences on the individual when he looked at suicide rates to understand how the forces of society may influence such an individualistic act. He concluded that, despite suicide rates remaining relatively stable over time, areas with the highest rates of suicide had the lowest overall social cohesion among communities (Durkheim, 1897/1966). *Social cohesion* is the "extent of connectedness and solidarity among groups in society" (Kawachi and Berkman, 2000: 175).

Through the concept of social cohesion, *sense of community* has emerged as an entity of study that combines the principles of an ecological framework with individual feelings of community attachment and sentiment (Perkins, Hughey, and Speer, 2002). Sense of

community, therefore, operates at both the individual level and the community level (Long and Perkins, 2003). Indeed, almost all of the literature on “sense of community” is interested in analyzing the individual and group level influences on sense of community, and pays particular attention to social and place-based communities.

Individual place attachments, defined as the bonds that individuals have with their physical and social settings, were found to be associated with high levels of neighborhood deterioration and low levels of social cohesion (Brown, Perkins, and Brown, 2003). Likewise, neighborhood structural characteristics of social disorganization were found to be barriers to individuals’ ability to form social ties, leading to a decline in neighborhood connectedness (Lenzi et al, 2012).

Sense of community seeks to understand the emotional connection that individuals have with their communities (Manzo and Perkins, 2006). As Talen (1999) points out, these emotions are embedded in place, but physical structures alone can merely facilitate, not create, the social ties upon which community is built; the physical reality of place is only part of the story.

Perceptions of place can be thought of as the subjective experience of place. Research focusing on this idea has determined that the perception of neighborhood deterioration and social disorganization plays a role in influencing sense of community, regardless of the actual complexities of the physical conditions (Perkins, Meeks, and Taylor, 1992; Brodsky, O’Campo, and Aronson, 1999).

Perceptions of Community

Perceptions provide further insights into how the built and social communities operate. We turn now our attention to how these perceptual constructs have been studied

among teens. This study is most closely related to the research of Nykiforuk, Villianatanos, and Nieuwendyk (2011) and Rudkin and Davis (2007). Both of these studies fall under the category of “photovoice,” or a “process by which people can identify, represent, and enhance their community through a specific photographic technique” (Wang and Burris, 1997: 369). Nykiforuk, Villianatanos, and Nieuwendyk (2011), use photographs and interviews to reveal community perceptions of the built and social environment. They found that using photography as a method of inquiry was more successful than using interviews alone in determining participants’ community perceptions.

Rudkin and Davis (2007) used photographs and follow-up surveys to understand youth’s connections to their neighborhood. They found that community connectedness as measured through photographs correlated modestly with existing questionnaire-based measurements of sense of community (Rudkin and Davis, 2007). Another finding of their study was the importance of the natural environment in the conceptualization of community for teenagers. This had a profound impact on their study, as they were able to determine that students’ who took photos primarily of the natural environment lived in potentially deteriorating neighborhoods, which is consistent with other research on the connection between the natural environment and community (Aitken and Wingate, 1993; McIntyre, 2000). Rudkin and Davis (2007) suggest that the natural environment is often overlooked by many survey-based assessments of community, but that the presence of the natural environment in their community study is evidence that researcher-based conceptualizations are not always commensurate with respondents’ perceptions of community.

Together, these studies provide support to justify the use of photographs and surveys to better understand teen perceptions of and connections to community. However, beyond these two studies, there is little research that uses photographs collected in photovoice projects as primary data for the purpose of understanding the content of the photos as they relate to personal notions of community. Additionally, the use of a psychological measure such as community connectedness in understanding sociological definitions of community sets this research further apart from previous studies.

We begin by posing the question: How do teens perceive community? The qualitative analysis of participant photographs begins by exploring the main features of participant photographs, followed by a coding process of some of the more obvious elements of the photographs, as well as the overall “environmental” focus of the photographs. We have certain expectations of what the photographs might include based on Tonnies descriptions of *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*. Photographs illustrating *Gemeinschaft*-like communities are expected to include family and close friends, be taken at home or within the participants’ neighborhood, and focus on the more familial and natural elements of community life. In contrast, we expect photographs illustrating *Gesellschaft*-like communities to focus on urban life and institutional relationships. Additionally, we will use a grounded theory approach in order to let emergent themes develop within and between the two main ideal types of community that we explore.

In order to assess participants overall feeling of connection to their community, we propose the following hypotheses to be tested using survey responses:

H1: Higher neighborhood satisfaction is positively correlated with higher community connectedness.

H2: Higher perception of neighborhood deterioration is negatively correlated with community connectedness.

H3: Higher individual social capital is positively correlated with higher community connectedness.

Finally, we will conduct an Analysis of Variance test in order to determine the relationship between visual perception and feelings of community connectedness.

CHAPTER THREE

DATA AND METHODS

This study is based on data collected in spring 2014. The purpose was to assess teens' community connectedness, social capital, and perceptions of neighborhood and community. The following section describes the process used to collect data, the sample characteristics, and a detailed description of the key variables used in the study.

As part of a graded class assignment, students were asked to take photographs that represented some image of community through their eyes. Students were given very little instruction on what the subject of the photographs should be, other than they had to be able to relate into words how and/or why the photograph represented community to them. Students took photographs on their cell phones; all but 6 students participating in the study had access to a cell phone and those that did not have a smart phone were able to borrow a digital camera provided by their school. Students were encouraged to take multiple photographs throughout the assignment period, but were asked to choose *one* photograph to be submitted to both their teacher for grading purposes, as well as the research team to be coded and analyzed.

Along with their photograph, students were also required to provide a title and 2 to 3 sentence description of their photograph including how and/or why their photograph represented community. The descriptions include a wide range of information that allowed coding the photographs more specifically. Students also provided the location where the photograph was taken and were asked to indicate if it was taken in their own neighborhood.

Contextualizing the Photographs

In trying to understand the perceptions of community by teenagers, we have employed a rather unorthodox method by choosing to use photographs that the participants took of their own community. We provide a brief description of the Northwest Arkansas region because the setting is particularly important to the methodology. By doing this, we hope to show that participants had a variety of options to choose from in terms of visual representations of both *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*. That is to say, Northwest Arkansas is not heavily urban nor is it heavily rural, yet it contains both of these elements making it an ideal location for such a study.

The Northwest Arkansas Metropolitan area consists of four cities of similar size, numerous adjacent towns, and lies within three counties. Northwest Arkansas had a population of 491,966 in 2013. Fayetteville is located in Washington County in Northwest Arkansas. In 2010, Fayetteville had a population of 78,960, making it the third largest city in Arkansas. Despite its size relative to other cities and towns in Arkansas, Washington County and Fayetteville are still quite rural, with a population density of 1,366 per square mile, making it the 129th largest urban area in the United States. Farming and agriculture are major industries in Washington County, yet the corporate headquarters of such multi-billion dollar companies as Tyson and Walmart are located in Northwest Arkansas. Fayetteville is also the home to the University of Arkansas- the state's largest university- and features a robust downtown area with a major arts and entertainment presence.

In terms of city-like places in Arkansas, Northwest Arkansas is one of the more urban areas. This notwithstanding, Arkansas as a whole remains a rural place. This gives Northwest Arkansas a unique duality when trying to classify its urbanicity. This duality is

not unlike the concepts of *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*, which is why Fayetteville is an ideal setting for this study.

Photograph Variables

The categorization of photographs is essential when looking for evidence of *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* qualities. They provide quantifiable elements to the photographs, but also allow us to organize and group photographs according to certain elements. Using photography as a form of sociological data provides the researcher social contexts in which respondent experiences are shaped and distributed (Wagner, 2004; Warren and Karner, 2010). Becker (1986) has suggested that photographs are reflexive in how they convey a message while creating a reality, and Wagner's (2004) interpretation of this suggests that, "the credibility and utility of photographs within empirical social inquiry rests not so much on whether they accurately reflect or arbitrarily invent the real world, but on how those aspects of the real world they invent or reflect are related to questions we care about" (1481). With this in mind, integrating the photographs into the study was important not only to enhance the survey findings, but also because they provide some insight into the perceptions of the teens in a way that survey questions could not measure.

Photographs were initially examined and three variables were created. The participants provided descriptions that allowed coding decisions regarding the location of the photo, the people present in the photo, and the overall focus or intent to capture a particular environment in the photo.

Place of photograph measures where the photo was taken and was coded into three general categories. The first category is 'personal space' and includes photos that were taken primarily in the student's home or a friend's home. The second category is

'institutional space' and includes photos that were taken, for example, at the student's school or church. The third category is 'public space' and includes photos that were taken at places like: museums, parks, concerts, sporting events, street corners, and street intersections. All of the photos have a physical location that marks a specific place where the picture was taken; therefore all of the photographs can be coded into one of the three categories.

People in photograph measures the people that are depicted in the photographs, if any. Student descriptions were especially important in determining whether or not the people in the photos were 'friends' or 'family.' Photographs that displayed a large group of people, such as at a sporting event, were categorized as 'strangers or random people.' Some photographs included people at the students' school, church, or workplace. These people were often categorized as 'acquaintances' because we believe it is reasonable to assume that the student may know, at some level, who these people are; however it may not be the case that the student is a close friend with or related to the people in the photograph. Additionally, the photographs coded as including 'strangers or random people' and 'acquaintances' lacked descriptions that would otherwise indicate that the people depicted in the photograph were of importance to the participant. We found it to be the case that photographs including 'friends' and 'family' generally included descriptions indicating the relationship between the person photographed and the participant. Finally, not all of the photographs have people in them, and for that reason 'no people' was also included as a category for this variable.

Focus of photograph takes into account the previous two photograph variables, the student description of the photograph, and the researchers' subjective assessment of the

photographs. The purpose of this measurement was to determine what the focus of the photograph is, despite what might be depicted in the photograph. The variable was categorized into three general environmental focus areas: social environment, natural environment, and built environment. These three focus areas were chosen because the body of literature on the social and built environments is vast. While the inclusion of the natural environment as an element of community is supported by the literature, its inclusion here is mainly a result of using a grounded theory approach when coding the photographs; it is an emergent focus area.

Photographs that focus on the social environment not only include people in the photograph, but also include a description that includes information on the people or references the social aspect of the photograph. Photographs that focus on the natural environment often depict nature- sky, trees, and landscapes- and have descriptions which tend to be very abstract, often not mentioning people or places as relevant to the photographs relationship to community. Photographs that focus on the built environment tend to focus on the place in which the photo was taken, regardless of any people or natural elements that may also be present in the photograph.

These codes help us to determine some of the key features illustrated in participants' photographs. But because *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* are ideal types of communities rather than categories of classification, no direct coding of photographs into categories of *Gemeinschaft* or *Gesellschaft* is necessary. Rather, the codes used here function as a way to discuss the relationships and places illustrated in the content of the photographs as they relate to one or more ideal types of community.

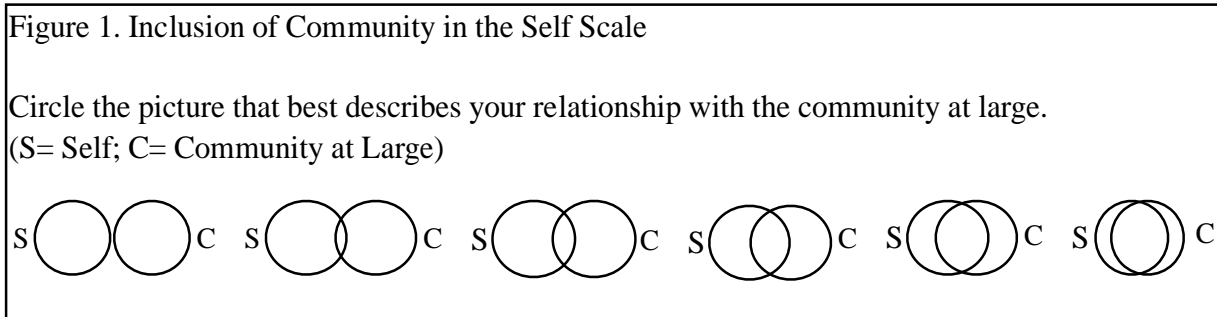
Survey Methodology

The convenience sample for this study included all students attending Fayetteville High School who were also enrolled in the 5 Sociology classes during the 2013-2014 school year. The sample (n=96) included 11th and 12th grade students. Informed consent was required of students and parents for the survey, but not for the photography project. University of Arkansas IRB approved consent and the protocol for this study. Three students did not turn in photographs for the photo project but those three students did take the online survey. Thus, there are 93 complete cases used in the primary analysis of photographs and surveys.

The Fayetteville High School Community Survey is a 26-item survey that measures several key variables, including student sociodemographics, social capital, neighborhood perception, and community connectedness.

Community Connectedness is the primary dependent variable for this study. Drawing from the Psychological Sense of Community measure (McMillan and Chavis 1986) and the Inclusion of Others in the Self Scale (Aron and Aron 1986), the Inclusion of Community in Self Scale is a single item pictorial scale. This scale represents the dependent variable for this study and was created to provide a way to tap multiple dimensions of both community and inclusion simultaneously with the conceptualization that “community connectedness is the inclusion of community within the self” (Mashek, Cannaday, and Tangney, 2007: 259). As Figure 1 shows, the variable contains a series of 6 sets of circles, each with varying degrees of overlap. The items with the least overlap represent a low sense of inclusion within the community, while the items with the most overlap represent a high sense of inclusion within the community. Students were shown the Inclusion of

Community in the Self Scale and asked to choose the picture that best represented their relationship with the community at large.



Individual-level Variables

Student Sociodemographics collected include age, sex, race, and ethnicity. These help us to better understand the sample composition.

Neighborhood satisfaction was measured using one Likert-scale question. Students were asked, "How satisfied are you with your neighborhood?" Responses included 'very satisfied', 'satisfied', 'undecided', 'dissatisfied', and 'very dissatisfied.' The variable was recoded into three categories: 1= satisfied, 2= undecided, 3= dissatisfied.

Neighborhood deterioration was created using a five-item Likert scale question. Students were asked to report how often they experienced in the neighborhood they live in: vacant homes or buildings, suspected drug dealing, burglarized houses, street violence or gangs, and graffiti or other vandalism. Possible responses included 'very often,' 'somewhat often,' 'somewhat rarely,' 'very rarely,' and 'never.' The index ranges from 1 to 20 and is reliable with a Cronbach's Alpha of .826

Social capital was assessed using a series of questions that allow us to determine various levels of social capital creating a social capital index similar to other studies that have assessed youth's social capital (Fitzpatrick et al 2014). There are four variables

included in the index. The first variable in the social capital index is the open-ended question "How many friends do you have?" The variable was recoded into categories, where 0= no close friends, 1= 1-4 close friends, 2= 5-10 close friends, and 3= 11+ close friends. The next variable asked, "Do you have a best friend?" The variable was originally coded as 1= yes and 2=no. However, because some students also reported that they had no close friends in the previous question, we felt it was necessary to recode this variable as 0= no friends, 1= no best friend, and 2= best friend. This recoding reflects the possibility that a respondent may have no close friends and therefore he or she necessarily has no best friend, while also accounting for those who may have many close friends, but no best friend. The next variable asked, "How often do you see your best friend?" The variable was recoded into 4 categories that reflect the previous social capital variables: 0= no best friend, 1= once a week or less, 2= several times a week, 3= every day. The final social capital variable asked "How often do you have other types of contact with your best friend either by telephone, e-mail, text message, or Facebook?" The variable was recoded as 0= no best friend, 1= once a week or less, 2= several times a week, 3= every day. The four social capital questions were merged into a single social capital index ranging from 1 to 10 and is reliable with a Cronbach's Alpha of .735.

Analytical Framework

Analysis began with a qualitative analysis of participant photographs. After photographs were coded for basic features and focus, they were assessed to determine if they contained characteristics of Gemeinschaft or Gesellschaft. Next, bivariate correlations were conducted on the dependent and independent variables to determine if any relationship exists between community connectedness and neighborhood deterioration,

neighborhood satisfaction, and social capital. Finally, a one way ANOVA test was conducted between community connectedness and modified versions of the photographic variables. Photograph variables were recoded into dichotomous variables to account for overlap in photograph categories.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

Photograph Descriptive Statistics

Table 1 includes all the variables included in the initial analysis of participant photographs. Sixteen percent of photographs were taken in the students' neighborhoods. The majority of photographs were taken in public spaces (62.5%), while only 14 percent of the photographs were taken in private spaces, which included the students' home.

Just under half of all the photographs show people. The majority of photographs with people in them show students' friends (23.7%). Surprisingly, just over three percent of the photographs show family members. There were three photographs that included a person or persons for which a relationship could not be established.

There is an equal distribution of photographs depicting either the built or social environments. Each focus category included almost forty-one percent of all photographs, meaning that over eighty percent of the photographs fit into existing community categories. The emergent category, photographs depicting the physical or natural environment, represented over eighteen percent of photographs.

Table 1. Photograph Variable Statistics

	%
<i>Photograph Place</i>	
- Private Space	15.1%
- Institutional Space	20.4%
- Public Space	64.5%
<i>Photograph People</i>	
- No People	52.7%
- Family	3.2%
- Friends	23.7%
- Strangers or Random People	17.2%
- Don't Know Relationship	3.2%
<i>Photograph Focus</i>	
- Built Environment	40.9%
- Social Environment	40.9%
- Physical Environment	18.3%

Photograph Analysis

Gesellschaft being characterized by modern, urban society suggests that photographs of this nature should focus heavily on the built environment with social relationships being less focused on family and friends. Figure 1 is an example where we see the facade of a building located in downtown Fayetteville. There is no emotional connection to this building from the participant, other than some Fayetteville residents might gather here for an event.

Institutional settings are particularly well represented in the participants' photographs. In Figure 2 we see the local hospital as the main focus of the photograph with a caption supporting the claim that institutional settings are an important feature of communities. Similarly, we see in Figure 4. the outside of the Big Brothers and Big Sisters building, with a caption that talks about the importance of this institution to the participants' community.



Figure 1. "Georges is a very popular and historic landmark in the Fayetteville community."
-Photograph and caption used with participant permission



Figure 2. "Time is the best doctor' for healing in a hurt community (Yiddish Proverb)."
-Photograph and caption used with participant permission

Another institution of particular importance for this specific sample is the high school that they attend. Fayetteville High school- the physical building itself- shows up in participants' photographs several times. Figure 3 is one example where we see the outside front of the building with a caption that suggests this institution is important not just for this community but for all communities as a way to learn social norms and regulate behavior. By contrast, Figure 4 focuses on a more social aspect of a *Gesellschaft*-like community. Here, we see a large group of people in an institutional setting. The participant chooses not to focus on the people in the crowd that he or she may know- instead, everyone in is considered a member of the community because of their presence in this institutional setting.

If we look strictly at the descriptive statistics of participant photographs, it appears as if there is a general lack of *Gemeinschaft*, given that only fifteen percent of photographs were taken in private space and under thirty percent included family or friends, both of which are fundamental features of *Gemeinschaft*. Figure 5 represents one photograph, which depicts a strong *Gemeinschaft* image, showing a group of family and friends at the participant's home. Figure 6 is a similar example where we see the participants' family in a relaxed setting in their home. What these photographs have in common is that they focus on the social environment, specifically the family, and were taken at a private space.

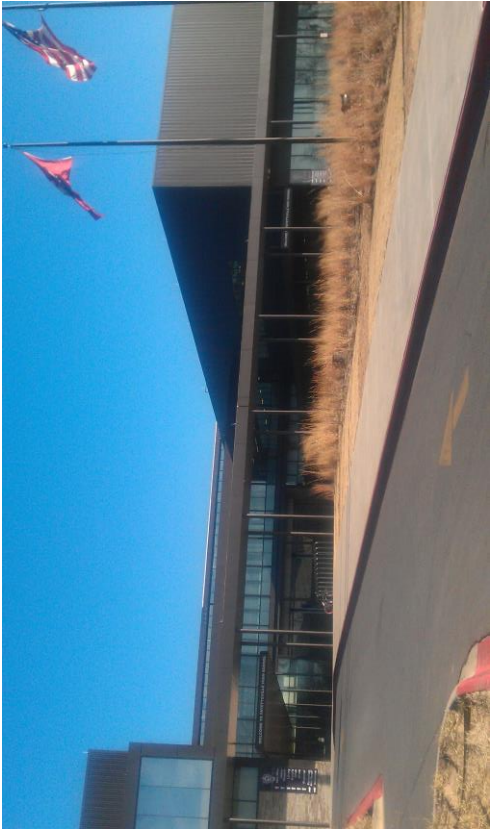


Figure 3. “What would society be without education? All over the world, people learn something new everyday. Without some conformism, how do we come together to form societies?”
-Photograph and caption used with participant permission



Figure 4. “Community needs team work to achieve greatness with the help of many dedicated supporters.”
-Photograph and caption used with participant permission



Figure 6. "Community is about the feeling of safety and the sense of belonging. Nothing makes me feel like I belong as much as you do."
-Photograph and caption used with participant permission



Figure 5. "This photo means community to be because when I'm at bible study, I am together with my friends and we are discussing a topic we all relate to."
-Photograph and caption used with participant permission

Even more than their physical setting and presence of other beings, these photographs also hint at an emotional attachment to community. The smiles on the faces tell us that this is a joyous event and the captions included with the photographs tell us that loving others and being close to them is a defining feature of community. This expression of sentiment is a key feature of the “natural will” that is central to Gemeinschaft.

Two emergent themes in the photographs are the presence of the physical or natural environment as a community focus and the presence of Gemeinschaft social relationships in Gesellschaft settings. The natural landscape is what frames all communities. Yet it is not often thought of as part of the community itself. Still, youth in this sample provided many examples of the natural landscape playing an important role in their experience of community.

In Figure 7 we see one such example with a photograph of the setting sun and a snow covered landscape. The caption gives us the sense that the participant has an emotional connection to this landscape and it is a pivotal setting in which the participant has engaged with friends and family. In Figure 8 we again see an image of the natural environment illustrated through the setting sun, this time behind tree branches. The caption for this photograph is much more abstract than the previous photograph, yet it still evokes the same kind of emotional sentiment.

These photographs represent a very primitive state of Gemeinschaft that Tonnies described- the idea behind Gemeinschaft being that rural living brings us closer to our family and to the landscape that surrounds us. Yet even in areas that are more urban this idea persists with the sampled participants. Figure 9 for example shows both the natural environment and an urban setting, this time an apartment building. Yet the focus remains

not on the urban landscape but on the connection the participant has with nature.

Similar to natural landscapes persisting with urban environments, we see that close relationships of a *Gemeinschaft* nature are also persistent within a setting characterized by *Gesellschaft*-like qualities. In Figure 10 we see the contrast between the participants mother within the trappings of modernity- cars, highways, traffic. This image typifies Tonnie's theory that *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* do not exist as mutually exclusive community types, but overlap in a way that allows familial relationships to persist despite modernity. Despite this, we still get a sense of alienation from the photograph- all the cars of individuals, all headed in a similar direction, but not interacting with one another or forming relationships.

Figure 11 provides another example where we see the contrast between the individual and the greater community. The caption is particularly important to the meaning of the photograph because we get the sense that the participant is looking out into this urban setting and acknowledging the effects that modernity- or *Gesellschaft*- has on social relationships.

These results support the original expectation that photographs illustrating *Gemeinschaft* will include images of family, friends, and neighborhood, while photographs illustrating *Gesellschaft* will depict more urban, less familial relationships. But more than that, the results support Tonnie's original thesis that *Gemeinschaft* can and does live on with *Gesellschaft*, despite all the changes it might bring to a rural way of life.



Figure 7. "I took this photo in my neighborhood during one of the many snow storms we had this year. This picture represents community to me because this is my community where I grew up in where we had barbecues, pool parties, and neighborhood get togethers. It's my home and it always will be."

-Photograph and caption used with participant permission



Figure 8. "This represents community because of the universality of the sky; no matter where we are, everyone shares the same sky."

-Photograph and caption used with participant permission

These results support the original expectation that photographs illustrating Gemeinschaft-like communities will include images of family, friends, and neighborhood, while photographs illustrating Gesellschaft-like communities will depict more urban, less familial relationships. But more than that, the results support Tonnies original thesis that Gemeinschaft can and does live on with Gesellschaft, despite all the changes it might bring to a rural way of life.

Youth perceive their communities in very different ways and that is evident from the above results. However, the way they perceive community is often in keeping with traditional conceptualizations of the built and social communities. We see that the built community is still an important feature of community for youth as a place for community to occur- both in institutional settings like school and in community landmarks. Yet friendships remain the foundation of community for youth and we see this repeatedly in their photographs of community.



Figure 9. "This image describes our community because everyday people wake up to a fresh new day hoping to succeed in their goals for the day."
-Photograph and caption used with participant permission



Figure 10. "My mother is a working member of her community, working side-by-side with others from the community, a contributing member of society"
-Photograph and citation used with participant permission



Figure 11. "Community is a fragile entity and one that is constantly shifting and changing. It has recently adopted a media foundation but that has not yet prevented us from losing sight of what we hold true."
-Photograph and caption used with participant permission

Survey Results

Having explored some of the ways that youth perceive and view community, we turn our attention to how connected they feel to their community. As shown in Table 2, the average level of community connectedness was 3.11 on a scale of 1 to 6 with a standard deviation of 1.13. Ages ranged between 16 and 19. Almost 60 percent of the sample is Female and 80 percent of the sample is white. Non-white students were slightly underrepresented in the sample at just 20 percent. Students who were Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin represented 11.5 percent of the sample.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics

	%	Mean	S.D.
<i>Dependent Variable</i>			
ICS Scale (1-6)	--	3.11	1.13
<i>Demographics</i>			
Age	--	17.42	.691
Sex (1= Female)	59.4%	--	--
Race (1= Non-white)	19.8%	--	--
Ethnicity (1= Hispanic)	11.5%	--	--
<i>Neighborhood Satisfaction</i>			
- Satisfied	83.3%	--	--
- Undecided	6.3%	--	--
- Dissatisfied	10.4%	--	--
<i>Neighborhood Deterioration Index (0-20)</i>	--	3.26	3.99
<i>Social Capital Index (1-10)</i>	--	7.39	2.51

The sample shows relatively high levels of neighborhood satisfaction. Eighty-three percent of students said they were satisfied with their neighborhood. Similarly, the majority of students reported low levels of perceived neighborhood deterioration. The average score on the Neighborhood Deterioration Index is 3.26 with a standard deviation

of 3.99. The sample also scored high on the Social Capital Index with an average score of 7.39 and a standard deviation of 2.51.

The correlations between variables included and sample demographics can be seen in Table 3. The results indicate that there is a significant, positive relationship between the dependent variable community connectedness and one of the independent variables, social capital. This suggests that those with higher levels of social capital do in fact have a stronger connection to their community.

The other two independent variables, neighborhood satisfaction and perceived neighborhood deterioration, are not significantly associated with community connectedness. However, these two independent variables are highly correlated with one another, suggesting that those experiencing low levels of neighborhood deterioration have higher neighborhood satisfaction.

These bivariate results support hypothesis 3, but do not support hypotheses 1 or 2. It appears as though social capital is correlated with community connectedness, indicating that strong and numerous social relationships are an important factor in determining youths' feelings of inclusion within the community at large. Moreover, the results also seem to suggest that teens' relationship with their physical environment, including their neighborhood, does not impact their feelings of inclusion within the community.

Table 3. Correlations			
	1	2	3
1. ICS Scale			
2. Neighborhood Satisfaction	-.029		
3. Neighborhood Deterioration	-.149	.433**	
4. Social Capital	.253*	-.100	-.026

P<.05*; p<.01** (One-tail t-test)

Finally, let us now look at the relationship between perception and connection. To do this, we have re-categorized the photograph variables into dichotomous groupings to account for some overlap. When we look at our Analysis of Variance table, I would just like to point out that the photograph variables were recoded into dichotomous variables to account for some overlap in categories. First, picplace was recoded into private and non-private space to account for public and institutional space having several similarities. Next, picpeople was recoded into people and no people for similar reasons. Next picfocus was recoded into traditional and non-traditional focus areas. The traditional category includes the built and social focus areas from the original variable. Because the natural environment was our emergent category, we decided to let it stand alone so that we could determine if it was holding up to more established conceptualizations of community.

What we have found here is that respondents who took photographs in non-private space or included people or focused on traditional elements of community were more connected than their counterparts.

Table 4. ANOVA

	Mean	F
1. Picplace		
Private Space	2.64	
Non-private Space	3.23	3.217*
2. Picpeople		
People	3.41	4.872*
No People	2.90	
3. Picfocus		
Traditional	3.24	3.092*
Non-Traditional	2.71	

P<.05* (Two-tail test)

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Discussion

Our results indicate that there is much variation in how teens experience and perceive community, from primitive states of *Gemeinschaft*, very heavy institutional states of *Gesellschaft*, and combinations therein. We found that the sample remained connected despite finding that community connectedness was not correlated with either of the place-based variables from participant surveys. Also, we found that there is a connection between perception of community and connection to community. The evidence overwhelmingly supports the idea that *Gesellschaft* is transitioning communities characterized by *Gemeinschaft*, and through that transition we are seeing communities characterized by non-private spaces being occupied by close relationships and friendships. Especially for our sample of teenagers, the non-private community spaces were critical to their feelings of community connectedness.

The emergence of the natural environment as a major perceptual focus for our sample is another way that *Gemeinschaft* remains within the context of communities increasingly characterized by *Gesellschaft*. But our finding that the natural environment is not related to our sense of community connectedness suggests that traditional conceptualizations found within existing research of the built and social communities remain the pillars of community for researchers and citizens alike.

We can affirm our own research through this finding because we now better understand that the built and social communities continue to be practical for the study of community in general. Nonetheless, let us not overlook the possibility that the natural environment as a community element will continue to grow in importance as our sample of

teenagers mature into community leaders. Likewise, we have seen the natural environment become a national and global concern as the effects of urbanization have become more apparent. As Gemeinschaft continues its push, so too will it effect our natural environment, just as it has done through all of human history and especially as technological advances produce byproducts detrimental to our natural environment. From a research standpoint, we would not be able to make these claims about the importance of the natural environment to community members, were it not for the richness of this photographic data.

The findings of this research add to the complexity of the community story. Our study has shown that place remains an important perceptual feature of community, while social elements dominate our connections to the community as a whole. Yet now, we can add to this the elements of the natural environment and the phenomenon of close friendships existing outside of neighborhood boundaries and persisting despite technological advances and changes.

While we believe this study includes a number of important preliminary conclusions regarding youth's perception of and connection to their community, there are some limitations to the study that need to be noted. One important limitation includes the extent to which we can infer information from participant photographs and captions without student input. Rudkin and Davis (2007) found it particularly important to include a component in their photovoice project on how teens perceive community that allowed participants to rank their photograph based on how positive or negative the image was to them. This allowed the researchers to take several images and compare them to one another; comparing and contrasting images that were meant to represent negative

elements of community to positive elements of community allowed them to tap into the emotional experiences that teens have with their community. This study, not having a ranking component, relied mostly on researchers making decisions about the photographs based on their content and captions alone. It is possible that the results of the photograph analysis might have shifted somewhat had participants had more of a voice in the coding process of their photographs.

Another limitation to this study is the sample size. For the qualitative analysis of photographs, the sample size is sufficient for analysis and provides much variation for coding purposes. For the survey results, however, a larger sample size could have provided more variation in the sample. Especially for the place-based dependent variables neighborhood satisfaction and neighborhood deterioration, more variation in the sample could have led to a significant correlation between these variables and the independent variable. Because the relationship between these two dependent variables and the independent variable is in the right direction, we believe that a larger sample size would have helped these variables to be significantly correlated with the independent variable.

Through our data, we have been given the opportunity to not just analyze how this particular group perceives and experiences community, but to actually see what their perceptions and experiences are. Rare is it to find this combination of data that is so nuanced and yet can yield such profound results. This data tells us something about community that is important especially to the next generation of community leaders. Despite teenagers having lower community standing than adults, they are often the propagators of culture and can shape the direction of communities in ways that adults cannot. The concept of community as perceived by teens is in many ways a look into the

future. It is vital that we understand how youth perceive and experience community because it will inform research for decades to come.

The results of this study stand alone in community literature in terms of the clarity with which community concepts can be literally “seen.” The richness of the photographic data is second to none in terms of what it can tell us about how teens perceive community. What we take away from this is that innovative research that engages teens can yield data the likes of which traditional surveys simply cannot measure alone.

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June 24, 2015

MEMORANDUM

TO: Stephanie Collier
Kevin Fitzpatrick

FROM: Ro Windwalker
IRB Coordinator

RE: New Protocol Approval

IRB Protocol #: 15-05-756

Protocol Title: *Assessing Community Perceptions and Connections: The Fayetteville High School Photography Project*

Review Type: EXEMPT EXPEDITED FULL IRB

Approved Project Period: Start Date: 06/23/2015 Expiration Date: 06/22/2016

Your protocol has been approved by the IRB. Protocols are approved for a maximum period of one year. If you wish to continue the project past the approved project period (see above), you must submit a request, using the form *Continuing Review for IRB Approved Projects*, prior to the expiration date. This form is available from the IRB Coordinator or on the Research Compliance website (<https://vpred.uark.edu/units/rscp/index.php>). As a courtesy, you will be sent a reminder two months in advance of that date. However, failure to receive a reminder does not negate your obligation to make the request in sufficient time for review and approval. Federal regulations prohibit retroactive approval of continuation. Failure to receive approval to continue the project prior to the expiration date will result in Termination of the protocol approval. The IRB Coordinator can give you guidance on submission times.

This protocol has been approved for 96 participants. If you wish to make any modifications in the approved protocol, including enrolling more than this number, you must seek approval *prior to* implementing those changes. All modifications should be requested in writing (email is acceptable) and must provide sufficient detail to assess the impact of the change.

If you have questions or need any assistance from the IRB, please contact me at 109 MLKG Building, 5-2208, or irb@uark.edu.